

CORNERSTONE

The Magazine of
WITNEY CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH



Christ Jesus is the chief cornerstone.

In Him the whole fabric is bound together, as it grows into a temple,
dedicated to the Lord (Ephesians 2:21)

AUTUMN 2021



Doesn't time fly; another 3 months have passed by since the last edition, and as I write this on 1st September, we are now officially into Autumn and you will have to change your clocks on 31st October and I have put a reminder picture adjacent to my column

It has been good to see, in person, the people who have attended our Church services since we re-opened on 23rd May, and thank you again to those of our membership, and others outside of the church, who are leading services whilst we are in the process of finding a new Minister

Since Covid, which is a virus we must learn to live with, life hasn't been easy, and as the children go back to school once again it is imperative to reduce the disruption as much as possible. I hope this edition of the magazine will remind you that you are not forgotten; so, may God bless you and keep you in the months ahead. He alone is our refuge and strength when times get tough.

So, on that note, I now turn to some of this month's contents: Lesley Barter, once again, gives us the Deacon's Letter & Beryl Cartwright the Prayer Letter; there is the continuation of Ken Lee's Bible Study and Pip Cartwright's history of WCC; Pat Brent has given us an update on Starfish Malawi & some articles have been extracted from Parish Pump, to which we subscribe, to name but a few

Many thanks for those who have contributed for this edition, but would encourage anyone to consider submitting article(s) for the next edition by either:

E-mail: terrypowlesland@uwclub.net
jacquipowlesland@uwclub.net

or, just plainly written on paper, which can be typed up

The next 2-monthly edition, covering December & January 2022, is due on **Sunday 5th December**

Your Editor

Just a Heads Up That Daylight Saving Time is Ending...Be Sure To Set Your Clocks Back!



31st October



Contents

1. Editorial
2. Diary
5. Deacon's Letter
6. Prayer Letter No 199
7. Climate Sunday and Christians & Security
8. WCC Quiz
9. Growth of WCC
10. Christians in India
11. Parable of the Sower & Let Jesus find you
12. Christian Aid
13. Time to reclaim the Sabbath
14. Ride & Stride and CLAPA
15. Church Magazine & Bible Sunday
16. Reading the Bible
17. Starfish Malawi
18. Bible Study



Reflections during COVID-19 pandemic

The weekly services will start at 10.30 am but you will be able to join at 10.15

Sep			
5 th	am	Rev Richard Donoghue	
	pm	Nanna Blackman	Communion
12 th	am	Robert Kinchin	
19 th	am	Rev Judi Holloway	Communion
26 th	am	Rev Elaine Kinchin	followed by AGM
Oct			
3 rd	am	Rev Judi Holloway	Harvest
	pm	Rev Elaine Kinchin	Communion
10 th	am	tba	
17 th	am	tba	
24 th	am	Rev Elaine Kinchin	Communion
31 st	am	tba	
Nov			
7 th	am	Gillian Warson	
	pm	tba	Communion
14 th	am	David Kinchin	Remembrance
21 st	am	Rev Judi Holloway	Communion
28 th	am	tba	Advent 1
Dec			
5 th	am	tba	Advent 2
	pm	tba	Communion

Rotas

WELCOMING TEAM

Sept	05	Lesley Barter
	12	Pat Smith & Judi Holloway
	19	Jacqui Powlesland
	26	Joan Currie & Lesley Barter
Oct	03	Beryl Cartwright
	10	Janet Hayes & Lesley Barter
	17	Jacqui Powlesland
	24	Judi Holloway
	31	Pat Brent & Lesley Barter
Nov	07	Pat Smith
	14	Joan Currie & Lesley Barter
	21	Jacqui Powlesland
	28	Beryl Cartwright
Dec	05	Lesley Barter



FLOWERS

Sept	05	Jacqui Powlesland
	12	Judi Holloway
	19	Beryl Cartwright
	26	Rita Hayes
Oct	03	Harvest
	10	Pat Brent
	17	Joan Currie
	24	Janet Hayes
Nov	31	Jacqui Powlesland
	07	Judi Holloway
	14	Remembrance
	21	Beryl Cartwright
Dec	28	Rita Hayes
	05	Pat Brent



SUNDAY COFFEE

Sept	05	Jacqui & Terry Powlesland
	12	Jacqui & Terry Powlesland
	19	Elaine Kinchin & Clare Ellis
	26	Pat Smith & Pat Brent
Oct	03	Sue Birdseye & Claire Woodward
	10	Elaine Kinchin & Clare Ellis
	17	Pat Smith & Pat Brent
	24	Sue Birdseye & Claire Woodward
Nov	31	Elaine Kinchin & Clare Ellis
	07	Pat Smith & Pat Brent
	14	Jacqui & Terry Powlesland
	21	Sue Birdseye & Claire Woodward
Dec	28	Elaine Kinchin & Clare Ellis
	05	Pat Smith & Pat Brent



THURSDAY COFFEE

Sept	16	Beryl Cartwright
	23	Pat Smith
	30	Judi Holloway
Oct	07	Beryl Cartwright
	14	Pat Smith
	21	Judi Holloway
Nov	28	Beryl Cartwright
	04	Pat Smith
	11	Judi Holloway
Dec	18	Beryl Cartwright
	25	Pat Smith
	02	Judi Holloway

We would be extremely grateful for other people to join



SOUND SYSTEM

Sept	05	Terry Powlesland
	12	Nanna Blackman
	19	Terry Powlesland
	26	Nanna Blackman



Oct	03	Terry Powlesland
	10	Nanna Blackman
	17	Terry Powlesland
	24	Nanna Blackman
Nov	31	Terry Powlesland
	07	Nanna Blackman
	14	Terry Powlesland
	21	Terry Powlesland
Dec	28	Nanna Blackman
	05	Nanna Blackman



For ALL the Rotas, every effort has been made to meet individual circumstances.
However, if the dates are not convenient for you, please change with someone else

Sep	09	Judith Bungey
	23	Clare Ellis
	28	John Garrett



Oct	08	Rita Hayes
	10	Susan Wass
	13	Luke Lau
	15	Chris Esapa
	17	Anthony Hathaway

Nov	19	Nanna Blackman
	26	Ellie Rose Esapa
		Elaine Kinchin
		Hilary Pratley
	29	Marian Bowerman

Thank you!

Ann, Sue's Sister-in-Law, would like to send a special thank you to everyone who has been supporting her with their prayers and for asking after her as she recovers from her illness and operation. She is very grateful for this support and hopes one day to be able to come to the Church to see you all in person.

Fitting God in

A little girl said to her mother: "The minister's sermon this morning confused me." Her mother was surprised, so the little girl continued: "He said that God is bigger than we are. Is that true?"

"Yes, that's true," the mother replied.

"He also said that God lives within us. Is that true, too?" Again, the mother agreed.

"Well," said the girl. "If God is bigger than us and He lives in us, wouldn't He show through?"

What you need

A Sunday School teacher had just concluded her lesson and wanted to make sure she had made her point. She said, "Can anyone tell me what you must do before you can obtain forgiveness of sin?"

There was a short pause and then, from the back of the room, a small boy spoke up. "Sin?"

- If you can smile when things go wrong, you probably have someone in mind to blame.
- The easiest way to find something lost around the house is to buy a replacement

Deacon's Letter

Dear All

'Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness....' It is now time to stop regretting the disappointing non-summer and look around us at the rich colours and abundance of the autumn countryside. For many of us this is the best time of all and this year in particular we have much to be grateful for.

The events of this last week or so have also reminded us how lucky we are that we do not live in fear of our lives, we live in a country where we have free speech and the unimpeachable right to education, no matter what gender or cultural group we count ourselves part of. It is impossible to imagine how difficult life in Afghanistan has become in a matter of a few short weeks. Despite feeling helpless in the face of such traumatic events, we can at least pray constantly that the new regime will not completely undo the progress that has been made there and that it will treat its citizens with humanity. God has the power to make a difference.

At home it really is beginning to feel as if life is getting back on its feet. We are all praying that the winter doesn't bring overwhelming Covid cases and that we are really learning to control the spread. We are also valuing many things that we previously took for granted and treasuring the small moments of pleasure. We can begin to build a future in our church, as we actively renew our search for a new Minister. However, in our anxiety to fill this gap we must not be tempted to make rash compromises. Just as the Old Testament teaches us, God does not always make the obvious choice, but He

always makes the right one. As the AGM approaches, He is preparing us for a new phase in our church life, so let us resolve to play our part by contributing whatever talents and skills we have. Let us not be afraid to offer ideas and may we be open to change even if it takes us outside our comfort zone.

I will finish with a prayer by Elizabeth Gould that sums up God's many blessings for us to remember as Summer turns to Autumn:

We thank thee Lord for quiet upland lawns,

For misty loveliness of autumn dawns,

For gold and russet of the ripened fruit,

For yet another year's fulfilment, Lord

We thank Thee now

For joy of glowing colour, flash of wings,

We thank Thee Lord; for all the little things that make the love and laughter of our days,

For home and happiness and friends, we praise and thank Thee now

God bless you all





PRAYER LETTER

No 199

Belonging

Belonging, what does this word mean to you? The word belonging raises many questions and statements; eg, who belongs to your family, which race do you belong to, which organisation, club, group, church do you belong to. Why do you belong to that particular organisation? What does 'Belonging' mean to you?

Why did you join a Church, club, organisation etc? Were you invited? Did you respond to an invitation? Were you interested in the subject/s the organisations focus on? There may be other reasons why you were willing to join such a group. For such organisations to function successfully there must be commitment from their members to support its aims.

I recollect a line of a chorus which was sung many years ago but unfortunately cannot remember other lines or in which book it can be found. However, the line from the chorus was, **'I belong to Jesus'**

When Jesus chose His disciples, they were a 'motley crew', a mixed bunch of individuals. They formed a distinctive group all with characters and talents and were committed to Jesus' teachings. From that early 'club' of 'belonging' to Jesus his disciples after Jesus resurrection responded to His Commission 'To go and make disciples of all nations as a sign of their union with each other and their commitment to Christ' by spreading the Good News of Jesus not only to the Jews but to Gentiles too in the countries around the Mediterranean Sea. Believers, preachers and Evangelists have throughout the centuries since have continued this commission. The result is the World-Wide Church of Christians made up of numerous subgroups of Denominations with small and large Congregations, all groups of Believers Belonging to Christ and Worshipping God.

Some verses from the Bible to reflect upon:

John 8:47 'He who belongs to God hears what God says'

Romans 12:5,6 'So in Christ we who are many form one body and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts according to the grace given us.'

We as a small group of Believers' belong to and support the Witney Council of Churches, The Congregational Federation and the Council of World Mission.

May God give us courage and strength as we witness individually and as a Church Fellowship in the coming months ahead.

Every Blessing,

Beryl

Please note that for up-to-date prayer requests contact Beryl (703717)

The following two articles have been extracted from Parish Pump, and in the first one Canon Paul Hardingham considers an urgent problem of climate change, and secondly, Dr Ziya Meral, considers Christians and defence

Climate Sunday is this month

Sunday 5th September is being designated Climate Sunday, ahead of the UN's climate change conference, COP26, in Glasgow during November. How should we approach the challenge of climate change?

We have damaged God's creation: God delights in His creation: *'God saw all that He had made, and it was very good.'* (Genesis 1:31). However, we have damaged this world and impacted people, created in His image. The burning of oil or gas and cutting down forests is increasing the concentration of greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide that trap heat in the Earth's atmosphere. The global average temperature could increase by 1.5°C in 2030, resulting in significant damage to our planet. Already, increasing temperatures are melting ice caps, raising sea-levels, changing rainfall patterns and creating extreme climate events. It's the 70% of the world's poorest population who are being impacted most!

Hope is found in Jesus: He has an intimate knowledge of the workings of creation. *'For in Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.'* (Colossians 1:16,17). Our hope for the future lies in what Jesus has done and continues to do in the world. He is the one who sustains creation and will bring everything to completion.

An invitation to respond: Simple everyday actions can help to sustain our planet, including recycling of waste, energy saving and changes in our lifestyle and diet to help the planet. We can fix our eyes on Jesus, as we pray for our world for our world leaders, gathering in Glasgow, asking that they may reach a good agreement for the future of our world.

Why Christians need to rethink defence and security issues

The world is changing. It's on an accelerated path towards some worrying possibilities.

Ten years ago, our focus was primarily on combatting extremist terrorists. But for many in defence and foreign policy circles, our assumption was that the world was becoming more peaceful, conflicts less deadly, arms control more effective, and a major war between sovereign states unlikely.

Fast forward to 2021: the terror threat hasn't disappeared, and new forms of terrorism have been added to threat lists. A new global geopolitical competition among powerful countries has emerged, along with competition among regional medium powers often brutally seeking to advance their own interests beyond their borders.

There is already a new nuclear arms race unfolding. International law and platforms are undermined, side-lined, and often judged incapable of meeting the current challenges. These are all accelerated by the new industrial revolution we are going through, from drones to artificial intelligence to information flows.

Today's world is precarious, full of misinformation, and risks of

miscalculation that could easily escalate a crisis between countries.

As a Christian working on foreign policy, defence, and security issues, I often find myself asking: what do these factors mean for Christians? But, most importantly: does the gospel have anything to offer a world that is seemingly spinning out of control?

Sadly, there are no easy answers here, and no space for platitudes. Revamping old debates or rhetoric, from 'just war' to pacifism, are not of much help; neither are uncritical sentiments towards past wars or today's militaries. We need new voices and perspectives on global challenges based up on Christian ideals, to discern new personal responsibilities and new frameworks for national and international accountability.

Yet, what is new is most likely to look like what was always a given: appreciation of a good world intended for peace, not war; a fallen world, full of danger; a way forward centred on crucifixion and resurrection that offers an alternative basis for being human; but also a hopeful vision of the future that refuses to give darkness and pain the last words.

Every generation is called to grapple with what God's salvation story means for the particular challenges they face, and every generation faces the temptation to walk away from the implications of such questions. May our generation take up this mantle, and choose well.

Witney Congregational Church
is holding a Quiz Night in aid of:

Witney Food Bank

Friday 29th October at 6.30pm

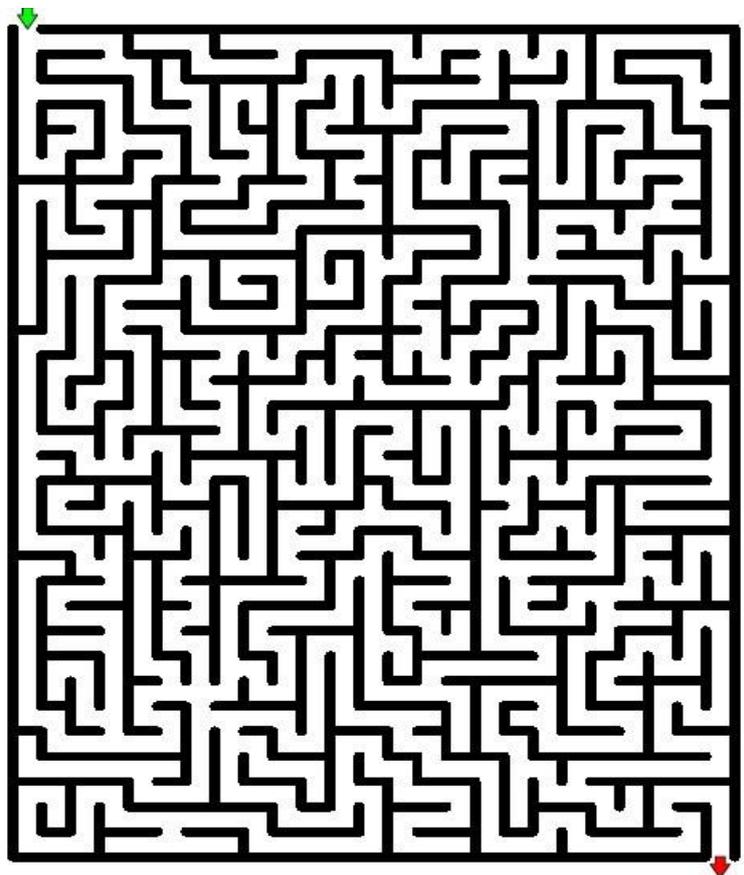


The entrance fee is just £2 per person & people can enter in teams of up to six

To book your team in please contact:

Sue on (01993) 709992 or email:

witneycongooffice@gmail.com



The following article, written & submitted by Pip Cartwright, was correct when first published in July 2006, and is a continuation from the last edition, and is entitled:

The Growth of WCC: 1962-1963

1962 was a very special year for the Congregational Union of England and Wales because they celebrated their Tri-centenary (1662-1962). Witney Congregational Church also celebrated its Tri-centenary as it was one of the 'founder' churches following the 'Ejectment' of the vicar and many of his congregation from St Mary's Church, Witney (on the Green) on Bartholomew's Day, 24th August 1662. The Act of Conformity (April 1662) compelled the clergy to accept everything in the Book of Common Prayer by St Bartholomew's Day or be ejected from their living. 32 clergy were ejected from their Churches in Oxfordshire. In this way 'non-conformists' left the established Church. (For further details of the Ejectment see 'History' article in our Cornerstone Newsletter for October 2006).

The 1962 Newsletter, over a number of months, had articles explaining the 'Cause of the Ejectment', 'The Puritan Tradition' and our Church history up to 1962. There were seven Churches in Oxfordshire also claiming their foundation in 1662 and so the County Union celebrated with a combined service on St Bartholomew's Day and a Garden Party. In July some Mansfield College students visited the Witney Church 'Singing Psalms', and later in December the Chairman of the Congregational Union the Rev. John Huxtable visited and presided over our Tri-centenary Service and Social.

Other activities during the year included a New Year Supper and the opening of a Crèche in January, the Sunday School visit to the Pantomime, a party, and with the

development of the Family Church, children were encouraged to sit with their parents. In the Summer the Family Church made a 'traditional' visit to Wicksteed Park and the Church enjoyed a Garden Party. There were working parties arranged for Church and garden maintenance, in May a Jumble Sale and in October a Rummage Sale.

During the year the deaths were reported of Susan Collis, Mrs Lea (84) and Mrs Owen and on a more happier note the births of Ian Hayes (yes, our Ian!) and Duncan Sellman.

The West Oxon Technical College was given permission to use the Schoolrooms and the Church Secretary reported that the Trustees of our Church were to be transferred from New College to the County Union. As promised earlier the Witney U.D.C. offered a site along Welch Way for a new Church and the details were forwarded to Mr Foster Taylor. Mr Foster Taylor from London was often used by the Congregational Union to oversee and negotiate the development of Church Premises. In September Mr Foster Taylor visited to inspect and assess a valuation.

In January 1963 there was a Special Church Meeting to discuss the future of the Church. When the Rev. John Huxtable visited the Church in December, he said moving Church was a challenge and an opportunity. It was raised that planning permission had been given for a Church on the new Burwell Farm Housing Estate. There followed a debate as to whether a centrally located Church was preferable to 'replanting' to Welch Way or even onto a new Housing Estate such as Burwell Farm. No final decision was recorded!!

As in 1962, the 1963 winter brought snow and severe weather. During Family Worship a corner of the Church Roof slid off and demolished the toilets (was God telling us something?). As a consequence

of this and severe weather, services were held in the Schoolroom and activities were curtailed. For those who remember 'ship' ½d collections and the London Missionary Society (LMS) the Junior Church made a visit to the L.M.S. Ship (John Williams VII) after the New Year.

It was at this time that a possible change in hymn book from Congregational Hymns to Congregational Praise was discussed. In May the Minister's Stipend was raised to £570 a year. In August an Extraordinary Meeting was held to discuss finance and the Minister's Stipend. The Deacons recommended that the Church apply for a grant from the Congregational Maintenance of the Ministry Fund towards increasing the stipend.

At the AGM the Church's future was raised again and the Church was asked to consider whether it was possible to unite with another Free Church in Witney if circumstances required the Church to move.

Circumstances were changing and pressure for a radical rethinking of the future of the Church was growing, especially as the ministry of the Rev. Dews was to come to an end!!

The following article has been extracted from Parish Pump, and is entitled:

Growing number of attacks on Christians in India

Release International is calling on India to intervene to prevent the growing attacks against Christians accused of fraudulently converting Hindus.

In the latest attack, a Hindu mob set about a 23-year-old Christian woman with bamboo clubs and steel rods, threatening

to kill her for sharing her faith with a Hindu.

Attacks against Christians are rising as the radical nationalist movement Hindutva grows in influence.

Adherents to Hindutva believe that to be Indian is to be Hindu – and nothing else will be tolerated. Under their influence, some eight states have so far passed anti-conversion laws and there are moves to push through a national law to prevent so-called forced conversions.

Christians make up less than five per cent of a country which is overwhelmingly Hindu. Religious nationalism is on the rise, and Christians and Muslims alike have been attacked by Hindu militants.

Meanwhile, Christians have suffered particularly in India during the Covid pandemic. Many have been bypassed for food aid. They believe religious nationalism is behind this, which maintains that Christians and Muslims are not true Indians.

This comes as more Dalits, the so-called untouchables outside the caste system, are coming to Christ. There are upwards of 200 million Dalits in India. The name means literally 'broken' or 'scattered'. Release International partner Kumar Swamy is a Dalit by birth. He is the National General Secretary of the All-India Christian Council.

As a Dalit, Kumar Swamy was brought up to believe that he was less than human. "I constantly used to hear my mother saying we were untouchables – subhuman was the word she used - that we were not human beings.

"Hinduism says there are 330 million gods, but none of these died for a sinner like me. It was only Jesus. It is He who gives me hope. I was told I was created to be less than an animal, but it is Jesus who says,

'No, I created you in My image.' That's why I love Jesus.

"Christianity gives value to human beings. There is a dignity in the gospel, and that's what every Dalit longs to hear. He wants to be treated as a human being."

And that, Swamy believes, is why many of India's underclass are turning to Christ. "Every week, two or three new churches are born. And it's primarily because the Dalits are coming to Jesus Christ in large numbers."

But as more Dalits embrace Christianity, the backlash from Hindu nationalists has increased. Says Kumar Swamy: "There is an accelerated, escalating violence against the Christian community because of the numbers of Dalits coming to the Christian faith."

The following two articles, the first written by Canon Paul Hardingham considers how various people respond to God, and the second article written by the Ven John Barton considers God's search for us, and have been extracted from Parish Pump:

The Parable of the Sower

This month we are looking at the Parable of the Sower (Mark 4:1-20). It's the story of a farmer who sowed his seed in different type of soils. These represent the different responses of the heart to God's Word (v15-20):

1) *The hard heart: 'like seed along the path...as soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them.'* (15). Some people, when they hear the message, get distracted eg social media, work or relationships. Personal priorities prevent them from hearing God.

2) *The shallow heart: 'like seed sown on rocky places...since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away.'* (16,17). These are the people whose heart isn't open to the message. When things become uncomfortable or discouraging, they are ready to quit.

3) *The crowded heart: 'like seed sown among thorns...but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful.'* (18,19). This soil is most relevant for us today. People crave status, comfort, security and personal desires alongside the things of God. It's a heart that is worried about life getting out of control!

4) *The open heart: 'like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop – some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times what was sown.'* (20). This represents the open heart that listens and accepts Jesus's word, and is ready to follow Him however difficult things become.

What kind of soil is our heart? Are we hard, shallow, crowded or open? Do we have a heart of faith to follow Jesus in every aspect of our lives?

Let Jesus Christ find you

Jesus said, 'Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling-places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.' John 14:1-6

We come to church regularly to meet God. But actually, God comes to meet us. He comes to us personally through His Word; and in Holy Communion, Jesus arrives under cover of bread and wine, saying 'this is My body; this is My blood'.

The whole Bible is the story of God searching for us, not the other way round. It begins with Adam and Eve running away and hiding, and that's how it continues to this day. But it ends with a dramatic vision of reunion.

In the meantime, humanity is invited to stop, turn round, and face God who is in pursuit. 'Turning round' is what 'repentance' means.

Becoming a Christian is letting Christ find us; being a Christian is becoming an apprentice in His workforce.

Not long before His crucifixion, Jesus taught His apprentices about His death - and theirs. "I'm going to prepare a place for you, and I will come again and take you to myself, so that where I am you may be also."

When we contemplate dying, it may seem like a journey into the dark. But we will not go alone. Never alone. As we reach out into the darkness, Christ is reaching out to us. Just as He has been reaching out to us throughout our lives, so He is there to grasp us as we breathe our last. "I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also."

For the disciple, death is a union - a reunion with Christ. It's the most natural thing in the world. So, we pray that at our end, we may reach out into the darkness, to find we are grasped by the One who has already prepared a place for us.

New Chair for Christian Aid

The Rt Revd & Rt Hon Dr John Sentamu, the former Archbishop of York, will be the next Chair of the board of international development agency Christian Aid.

Dr Sentamu – who has been outspoken on issues of poverty and justice in the UK and globally for many years - served as the Archbishop of York from 2005 until 2020. He was created by Her Majesty the Queen, Baron of Lindisfarne in the County of Northumberland and Masooli in the Republic of Uganda. He is a member of the UK Parliament, in the House of Lords.

Born in Kampala, Uganda, Dr Sentamu will be the first person of African descent to take up the position of Chair in Christian Aid's 75-year history.

Dr Rowan Williams, former Archbishop of Canterbury and current Chair, will stand down at Christian Aid's Annual General Meeting (AGM) in November, having served two full terms of office.

Announcing the appointment today, Christian Aid's CEO Amanda Khozi Mukwashi said: "This is wonderful news for Christian Aid. Dr Sentamu brings with him a passion and energy for global justice, a deep love of the Church and a profound theological understanding that will be able to speak into the crises of climate change, Covid, conflict and debt that are affecting the world's poorest communities. We look forward to welcoming him to the Christian Aid family."



The following article written by the Revd Peter Crumpler, a Church of England priest in St Albans, Herts, has been extracted from Parish Pump, and considers an issue facing most of us every day of the week, and is entitled:

Time to reclaim the sabbath

Home working, zero hours contracts, the switch to home deliveries and online retailing, and an 'always on' culture - the world of work is changing fast and massively, and the Covid pandemic has accelerated the upheaval.

Now faith-based think tank Theos has come up with key proposals aimed at helping modern-day workers survive and thrive despite both the current changes – and the major challenges coming down the track. One proposal suggests 'recovering the sabbath.'

In a new report, 'Just Work: humanising the labour market in a changing world', Theos identifies three 'great disruptions' facing the world of work. They highlight: the technological - Artificial Intelligence, machine learning, and automation; the ecological - climate change and loss of biodiversity; and human vulnerability, as seen through the pandemic, mass migration and declining birth rates.

Paul Bickley, one of the report's authors, explains: "The issue is not work itself, but rather what happens when we make *work*, rather than *the people who do it*, our focus. We are disconnected from a healthy sense of work, and severing the needed boundaries between work and rest has set us adrift. The biblical idea of Sabbath is an ancient answer to modern anxieties. It's time to rediscover it."

During the pandemic, increasing numbers of people have shifted to working from home, from in-person shopping to ordering online, having take-aways delivered, and watching

streaming services instead of going to the cinema.

But people working from home or in the 'gig economy' delivering food or online orders, have discovered they are being watched - and watched closely. Software fitted to home computers or installed in vehicles is monitoring when and how people are working. The move to home working has meant an increased erosion of defined working hours, with 'the boss' able to make demands round-the-clock.

In response, Theos makes three key proposals:

1. First, a focus on a full work, rather than full employment economy.

Paid employment is the main – but not the only – form of work, and unpaid labour, such as caring responsibilities and volunteer work, need greater esteem and focus from a policy perspective.

2. Recognition of the human person as central to any healthy understanding of work.

Investors, and first and foremost church investors, have achieved tangible changes through activism in areas such as climate change and governance. They should add clear requirements on the fair handling of wages, benefits, agency work, outsourcing and employee surveillance to the social criteria they look at within environmental, social and governance investing.

3. Recovery of shared practices of rest to counter our culture of overwork.

Dissolving boundaries between our employment and our leisure – exacerbated during the pandemic – have negatively affected many workers. Overwork is literally killing people. For many, a combination of technology and the pandemic have broken the link between work and particular places and times – leading to an expectation, even if it is only an expectation of ourselves, that we will always be available.

OHCT RIDE AND STRIDE 2021

SATURDAY 11th SEPTEMBER 2021

10.00am-6.00pm

Ride + Stride is the single largest source of income for many Historic Churches Trusts enabling them to make Grants to places of Christian worship. Taking place on the 2nd Saturday of September the funds raised can be split between the nominated Trust and the participants chosen church or chapel.

You can either take part in this event by cycling or walking around the Witney area, Oxford area or wherever you wish visiting different Churches and having your sponsor forms signed or Witney Congregational Church will be acting as a manning station to sign people's sponsor sheets as they arrive at the Church.

If you would like to welcome the people taking part and to sign their sheets please write your name on the Ride and Stride sheet in the Foyer against a time slot that is suitable for you. Thank you.



SPONSORED 5K WALK IN AID OF THE CHARITY CLAPA

On Monday 7th June we left Marriotts Walk precinct at 2pm to do a sponsored walk in aid of the Cleft Lip and Palate Association (CLAPA). This was organized by Claire Woodward who has a personal connection to this charity. Her nephew was born with this ailment and she wanted to show her appreciation and support for their work. She was joined by Beryl Cartwright, Pat Smith and Sue Birdseye. We walked along through the meadow and then along the river coming out by New Mill on the Crawley Road. We then went up and round the Foxburrow Meadow where we met a friend of Claire's, Christina, who joined us for the rest of the walk. Claire raised £400 (including Gift Aid) which she has sent off to CLAPA. Thank you to everyone who supported her.



The following article written by David Pickup, a solicitor, has been extracted from Parish Pump, and is a keen supporter of church magazines. Here's why!

Good reasons to have a church magazine

After a year of lockdown, should we still bother with church magazines now that church life is picking up again? *Yes!*

It is read by lots of people. If each issue is read on average by two people, then more people see it than ever go to church. So, it is a very good way of putting Christian values and ideas into people's hands, whether they come to church or not.

It is a service to the community.

Communities need local networks to thrive. Magazines are a great way of binding the people who live in one place together. Just delivering the church magazine is a way to get to know the area and the people.

It helps build bridges with other Christian churches in the area. We can share some details of their meetings and events.

It can make money. Well, enough to cover the costs of production! Let's aim for a revenue balanced on paid subscriptions and advertising.

It is seen by those outside the church family. Think of the people just moving into our area, or those who live here already and want to get married or to baptise their child. Our magazine can help them see the sort of community we are, and that we would welcome them to join us.

It is read by people who do not go to church, but who know someone who does. This is a major way of how groups, including churches, grow. Not many people walk into a church off their own bat. Most people are invited, or already have a connection.

It supports local businesses. Local businesses who advertise locally, can thrive.

It helps people develop skills. The editorial team will learn about design, marketing, GDPR, editing, copyright, writing, selling, artwork - and apologising.

It can help inform our community about itself – especially if we include a local history or local natural history section!

So, don't believe it if someone tells you that print is dead. It is not. Many people still prefer to read something they can hold in their hands. The future is not EITHER print OR digital, but BOTH AND. People will flick through a magazine that arrives through the door, even though they may never dream of visiting their local church's website.

Bible Sunday – 24th October

This special Sunday in the church's calendar is an opportunity to stop and consider the enormous blessing that the Bible has brought to people down the centuries. Without it, we would know nothing about God our Father, Jesus Christ, or the Holy Spirit. It is God-breathed – full of His love and guidance to us. World history would have been radically different without it.

Whether or not you are able to get to church on 24th October, Bible Society has some excellent resources on Bible Sunday at:

<https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/get-involved/bible-sunday/>

How to read the Bible

Reading the Bible is much easier if you follow some simple steps and get prepared. And, as you delve into it, you might find that you are more familiar with the Bible than you expected: it crops up in everything from Shakespeare to Hollywood movies; it's inspired musicians, historical figures down the centuries, and campaigners.

The Bible is complex. It's not one book but a collection of 66 books, split into two sections: the Old Testament and the New Testament. Each one of these books are divided into chapters and verses. People often find it easier to begin at the opening of the New Testament, which starts about three-quarters of the way through.

The New Testament begins with four accounts of the life of Jesus Christ, the founder of Christianity, known as the Son of God. These accounts are known as the gospels. They include eye-witness reports of what happened. Matthew and John were among Jesus' 12 closest followers. Here you can read about what Jesus did and said – His profound teaching, how He healed people of sickness and how He challenged the authorities. The Gospels also tell us about His death by crucifixion and how He came back to life and then returned to heaven.

The first Gospel, Matthew, opens with the story of Jesus' birth (the event which is celebrated at Christmas) and then jumps forward 30 years to when Jesus began travelling around what is now Israel and the Palestinian territories telling people about God. Starting with a Gospel introduces you to the person of Jesus and the basics of Christian belief.

Early Christian teaching

A good next step is to read some of the teaching given to the early Christian Church. Much of the New Testament is a series of letters written by early Christian leaders such as Paul. He travelled around the lands of the eastern Mediterranean, telling people about Jesus. He then wrote to the various newly-established churches and individuals to encourage them in their beliefs. Letters such as Philippians or Colossians are short, bite-sized letters full of advice about how to live a Christian life.

Getting to grips with the whole Bible takes some time, but it is worth the effort. In his

second letter to a young leader called Timothy, Paul says the Bible is *"inspired by God and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness"*.

How reading notes can help

Many people find it helpful to find a quiet and comfortable place to sit and read the Bible and make sure that they read it every day. Take time to digest what it says. You could say a quick prayer – asking God to help you understand what you are reading and its relevance to you.

Second way to read the Bible?

There are three things to bear in mind when you pick up your Bible:

First, approach it expectantly. The Bible is not just another book – it is the Word of God, given to us by God to help us and instruct us. The Psalmist declared, 'Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path' (Psalm 119:105). Therefore, as you open your Bible, pray that the Holy Spirit (who inspired the writers of the Bible) will illumine its meaning to you. Read it carefully, not just hurrying through it as you would a novel.

Secondly, read your Bible systematically. Aim to read about three chapters a day: begin at Genesis and work through the Old Testament. Begin in Matthew and work through the New Testament; begin in Psalms and work through Psalms and Proverbs. Simply continue these three cycles, and it will ensure that your diet of Bible reading each day will be varied and include a bit of everything!

Finally, read your Bible obediently. Be ready to obey the truth that God has for you in its pages. God gave the Bible to us 'for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness' (2 Timothy 3:16), and the Bible can change our lives as we read it and obey its teachings every day.

The following article has been submitted by Pat Brent, and is entitled:

Starfish Malawi

Back in 2003, I was given the call to “build the Kingdom of God in the lives of children” and Starfish Malawi was born.

We sincerely thank God for His great provision over the last 17 years (I cannot believe it is so long!). During this time we have been involved in so much, from building and linking schools, helping children through secondary school, pastors libraries, Gateway sanitary kits, children’s clubs, healthcare, Hope Clinic, support for orphans, nursery teaching, COVID -19 response and vaccine roll out, shipping containers and so much more.

The work has been truly blessed by God as He has provided enough financial resources to do all of this and more. Can I please ask you now to pray for the future. We all know that we “must be born again”, to see the Kingdom of God.

It has been placed on my heart to consider development of a programme called Cherish (for girls) and Courage (for boys), whereby young people are taught from the Word of God about who they are and how they should behave to honour God and each other. This is done at local village level in small groups for boys and girls, to encourage lives to be led as people created in the image of God.

We plan to involve local churches with this so that they can be the catalyst for the courses. Ultimately, as you know, it is all about our hearts and my prayer is that you will pray for God’s revival work in the changed lives of these young people. Also please pray as we look for leaders for these groups, who will be men and women of integrity, love and wisdom. Finally, I would ask you to pray for the power of the Holy Spirit to be present in all that we do.

The take-up of the Covid vaccine has been patchy, some areas have already had one jab others haven't taken up the opportunity. About 3.8% of the population have been vaccinated and 1.3 million doses arrived at the end of July.

The Malawi Government have funded two new assistants for the Hope clinic, who will be living on the site. 3,700 outpatients were seen last year as well as in-patients in the Clinic.

Three other members of staff are, Mr Emmanuel Chumia who is the schools linking officer, his job is to make sure all the schools follow the correct programme and he also links with schools in the UK.

Mr Bornwell Yona who looks after the library for the students and the pastors.

Miss Tiogno Silima who runs the Bible Explorer Teams and liaises with the staff in the schools.

All this work can only be done with our support and prayers.

God Bless, Chris Knott, CEO & Founder of Starfish Malawi



Though the Lord is out of sight, we are not out of His

The gospel is good news. But Jesus never said it was easy news

The average person works themselves to death so that they can live

From a church notice sheet: PLEASE NOTE: 'From this Sunday the evening service will begin at 8pm. This will continue until October

Bible Study

In this edition, and with permission from Ken & Marjorie Lee's family, and in memoriam to Rev Ken Lee, a series of Bible Studies, written by Ken and first submitted back in 1999, will be re-produced and is entitled:

MEANDERING IN MARK

"Meander" means "To wander deviously or aimlessly". Perchance this is not too accurate a description of these studies; it is hoped that they are not too devious nor totally aimless. However, the term "meander" is used to indicate an approach which takes its time, stops as needful to let a thought, an idea, an insight develop - all with the purpose of seeing what the Lord has to say to his people. May He speak, and to Him be the glory.

19. Mark 7: 1-23

The crowd around Jesus once again attracts the attention of the self-appointed guardians of religious correctness, the Pharisees. Some of them gather around Jesus, accompanied by "some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem". Whether these are some of the same people concerning whom Mark had written at 3:22, who having delivered a report concerning Jesus's activities to Jerusalem had been sent back to find out more, or whether only some of the previous group had returned to Jerusalem while others, those now gathering round Jesus, had remained in Galilee for a considerable period of time, Mark does not record. It matters little; what does matter is that they, with the Pharisees, were seeking to find fault with Jesus. They find that fault by accusing him of allowing his disciples to eat bread with defiled hands. The concern of these objectors was not a matter of hygiene but of ceremonial cleanliness. Mark puts in an explanatory aside for the benefit of his readers who were not familiar with Jewish ceremonial practices. Says Mark, "The Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they thoroughly wash their hands." While

this might have indeed been true for the Pharisees it was certainly not true for all the Jews at this period in Jewish history, nor was it required by the Law of Moses except in certain specific circumstances relating to bodily discharges (Lev. 22) where it appears to apply only to the priests. It maybe that Mark, in his desire to show that Christians do not need to be bound by Jewish traditions, has gone somewhat beyond the bounds of accuracy. Perhaps Mark was influenced by his personal experience of the practices of the Jews of the Diaspora who, living among Gentiles, tended to be more particular about ceremonial cleanliness than the Jews of Judaea and Galilee.

However, such details are not primary to the purpose of this passage in Mark's account of Jesus. What is central is the difference between Jesus and his critics in attitude to Law and to Tradition. Although the Pharisees and the Scribes are making a point concerning eating, their real question is "Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders." "The tradition of the elders" was the whole body of oral explanation of the Law which was becoming codified into a set form so that every action in life was regulated. Keep to the tradition of the elders and you were sure of being, as we might say today, "politically correct", although for the Pharisees and Scribes it was "religiously correct". Tradition was becoming more important than even the letter of the Law, let alone the spirit of the Law. Yet there was little or no heart in it, no real feeling towards and for God; tradition was ceasing to be a good guide and becoming a tyrannical master.

Mark pictures Jesus as responding by calling his questioners, "Hypocrites". The accusation by Jesus is that they are only play-acting at serving God. Jesus is recorded as quoting words from the prophet Isaiah (Isa. 29:13) to make his point. However, the quotation, as given by Mark, is taken from the Greek Septuagint version, not from the

original Hebrew with which Jesus would have been familiar. The Hebrew differs somewhat from the Greek and does not make the point in quite the same manner. It may be that Mark here records, as being said by Jesus, something which was actually used by the early church teachers to illustrate the teaching of Jesus. It does however seem highly likely that the next words which Mark records: "You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition", were spoken by Jesus. These words are one of the more devastating accusations which Jesus brings against his detractors. They are words which still raise questions for us as to when we let time honoured traditions, or even new developing traditions, become more important than the will of God.

Jesus now moves on to tackle not just the conflict of Law and tradition, but also the way one part of the Law was being used to get out of the responsibilities with which another part of the Law charged people. He refers to a person's responsibility towards their parents by quoting both Exodus 20:12 and 21:17. The command is to honour one's parents, a command which must surely require a care for them in their times of need. However there is also a law concerning oaths to which Jesus refers. Apparently some people were taking an oath to give some, a large part, or maybe all of their possessions or income for the service of God. This was described under the Hebrew term "Corban" which Mark translates as "an offering to God." They were then saying to their parents that they were unable to provide for the needs of those parents in their old age because they could not break their oath without breaking the law (Num.30:2; Deut. 23:21). Jesus says that such action is the making of a tradition which contradicts the basic intention of God and his Law. Abstract law, such as that concerning oath, must give way to personal Law concerning people and relationships. The letter of the law must always give way to the

spirit of the law; a religion that becomes simply adherence to a legal code, ceases to give glory to God. How the law is to be interpreted and used must always be decided by seeking to discover the basic will of God for his creation which is behind a particular law. Say Jesus, "You make void the word of God through your tradition which you have handed on. And you do many things like this." We may wonder what the "many things" were for them but still more we should consider what the "many things" may be for us by which we make void the word of God.

As though to encourage such thinking, Mark now pictures Jesus turning again to the crowd, seeking to help them to understand. His statement is far more radical than anything which has come up in the previous exchange with the Pharisees and scribes. "There is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile." Taken by itself this statement emancipates people from a large area of the written Law such as the laws concerning clean and unclean foods and the laws concerning ritual cleanliness. Such a sweeping abrogation of vast areas of the Law seems to come strangely following on the criticism of the Pharisees in vv. 8-9 for abandoning the commandment of God. Nor does it fit well with Jesus's style of teaching elsewhere, where he deals in specific instances rather than in great generalisations. Possibly Mark has collected this saying of Jesus from another source, set in another context as a response to some specific question which had arisen such as whether a Gentile who ate unclean foods could do good deeds. The statement would have been a very difficult one with which to come to terms for both the crowd and for many of the early Christians. Perchance this is why some manuscripts add the words, "Let anyone with ears to hear, listen!", words which have been used before in Mark's record at 4:9,23 to conclude a parable,

something which needs thinking about in order to work out the fullness and depth of its meaning.

Certainly the disciples were puzzled. Mark pictures Jesus withdrawing from the crowd and entering the house with them. Presumably this house was at Capernaum where Jesus appears to have based his Galilean ministry. Mark does not provide any information as to how Jesus and his disciples may have arrived there beyond that given at 6:56, that after leaving Gennesaret he went into villages, cities and farms. In the house the disciples question Jesus as to just what the parable means. Jesus expresses surprise that they fail to understand. He reminds them of what happens to food when it is eaten - and of the fact that the stomach and the heart are not the same. The stomach is to do with the process of maintaining physical life, but the heart controls thoughts and actions. Such was the understanding of the period; the heart was that which controlled a persons actions, the way they thought and behaved. "Food" Jesus is saying, "does not affect behaviour." Modern science would question this with its knowledge of toxins and allergies but the basic truth remains that human beings make there own decisions as to how to think and to behave. We cannot blame our diet for our sins, nor yet give it credit for our good behaviour. Food is morally neutral. "Thus he declared all foods clean." This comment, inserted into the text, expresses that thought. Whether it originated with Mark or was added by a later scribe or copyist is not known.

This section of Mark's Gospel concludes with a final list of things which defile a person, things which come from within, from the human heart. Such lists of vices are fairly common in New Testament times and are given elsewhere in the New Testament (Rom.1:29-31; Gal.5:19-21.) Mark attributes this list to Jesus and it may well have come from his lips although there is nothing

particularly original or controversial about it; it would have gained ready assent from Jewish rabbis and the best of pagan philosophers. Fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride and folly were liable to feature on any list of undesirable behaviour and attributes, then as now. The first six listed in Mark's record are written in the plural form implying "acts of fornication etc." while the remaining six are in the singular, implying more an attitude of heart and mind. Few of these things need any comment upon them, they remain with us to this day defiling the lives of people. "Wickedness" could well be translated as "malice" - the acting towards another person with evil intent, while "folly" is not the foolishness of ignorance, but the deliberate turning away from the knowledge and wisdom that has been received, adopting an attitude of "I know best". Many attempts have been made to express the meaning of "folly"; James Moffatt translated it as "recklessness" while Alan Dale, some 50 years after Moffatt, paraphrases the word as "not knowing what God wants you to do because you never tried to find out." Perchance it is "folly" to try to express a more exact meaning; maybe we need to turn from these negative things which defile a person and move on to positive action to show forth whom Jesus is. It is to such positive action that Mark now turns his attention as he moves the scene of Jesus's ministry once more out into Gentile territory where faith will be shown to be not just an attribute of the Jews, but also of Gentiles.

