

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)



2022

4 Welch Way Witney Oxon OX28 6JF
Tel: 01993 709992

www.witneycongregational.org.uk
Office: witneyconoffice@gmail.com



As I write this, 2nd June, the Queen became the first British Monarch to celebrate a Platinum Jubilee marking 70 years of service to the people of the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth.

Celebrations will include **The Queen's Birthday Parade (Trooping the Colour)** when more than 1,400 parading soldiers, 200 horses and 400 musicians will come together; and are joined by Members of the Royal Family on horseback and in carriages. The Parade will close with the traditional RAF fly-past, watched by The Queen and Members of the Royal Family from the Buckingham Palace balcony, and of which personally, as I was part of the Red Arrows team and flying in the back of the No 6 aircraft; I took this picture for her Silver Jubilee in 1977



I now turn to some of this month's contents: along with the standard contributions, Pat Brent gives an update from Starfish Malawi; Lesley Barter, once again, gives us the Deacon's Letter; there is the continuation of Ken Lee's Bible Study; Pip Cartwright gives us the history of WCC and some articles have

been extracted from Parish Pump, 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 3-monthly Winter edition, covering September, October & November is due on **Sunday 4th September**

Your Editor



Contents

1. Editorial
2. Diary
5. Deacon's Letter
6. Prayer Letter No 203
7. Bible Study
10. The U in JesUs
11. History of WCC: 1973-1974
12. Christian Persecution
13. Starving in the shadow of Ukraine & China bans the word 'Christ'
14. Little Silver & Queens Platinum Jubilee
15. Beginning of Islam
16. Starfish Malawi

June, July & August Diary

June

5 th	am	Rev Judi Holloway	
	pm	Rev Elaine Kinchin	Communion
12 th	am	Dr Dave Adams	
19 th	am	Rev Judi Holloway	Communion
26 th	am	Gillian Warson	

July

3 rd	am	Rev Elaine Kinchin	
	pm	Nanna Blackman	Communion
10 th	am	tba	
17 th	am	Rev Judi Holloway	Communion
24 th	am	Rev Judi Holloway	
31 st	am	David Kinchin	

August

7 th	am	Rev Elaine Kinchin	
	pm	Robert Kinchin	Communion
14 th	am	Nanna Blackman	
21 st	am	tba	Communion
28 th	am	Rev Judi Holloway	

September

4 th	am	Rev Elaine Kinchin	
	pm	David Kinchin	
11 th	am	tba	

The following events are given for your particular attention:

June

6 th	Noah's Ark re-starting	10.00am	Every Monday
7 th	Lite Bite piece of the Word	12.15pm	
25 th	Witney Book Circle	10.30am	
26 th	Extraordinary Church meeting		

July

5 th	Lite Bite piece of the Word	12.15pm	
24 th	Church meeting		
30 th	Witney Book Circle	10.30am	

Aug

2 nd	Lite Bite piece of the Word	12.15pm	
27 th	Witney Book Circle	10.30am	

Sept

6 th	Lite Bite piece of the Word	12.15pm	
-----------------	-----------------------------	---------	--

Rotas

WELCOMING TEAM

June	05	Jacqui Powlesland
	12	Beryl Cartwright
	19	Janet Hayes
	26	Pat Brent
July	03	Pat Smith
	10	Joan Currie
	17	Lesley Barter
	24	Beryl Cartwright
	31	Janet Hayes



August 07 Jacqui Powlesland
 14 Pat Brent
 21 Pat Smith
 28 Joan Currie



September 04 Beryl Cartwright

FLOWERS

June 05 Rita Hayes
 12 Pat Brent
 19 Joan Currie
 26 Janet Hayes

July 03 Jacqui Powlesland
 10 Judi Holloway
 17 Beryl Cartwright
 24 Rita Hayes
 31 Pat Brent



August 07 Joan Currie
 14 Janet Hayes
 21 Jacqui Powlesland
 28 Judi Holloway

September 04 Beryl Cartwright
 11 Rita Hayes

SUNDAY COFFEE

June 05 Elaine Kinchin & Clare Ellis
 12 Jacqui & Terry Powlesland
 19 Sue Birdseye & Claire Woodward
 26 Pat Smith & Pat Brent

July 03 Jacqui & Terry Powlesland
 10 Elaine Kinchin & Clare Ellis
 17 Sue Birdseye & Claire Woodward
 24 Pat Smith & Pat Brent
 31 Elaine Kinchin & Clare Ellis



August 07 Jacqui & Terry Powlesland
 14 Sue Birdseye & Claire Woodward
 21 Pat Smith & Pat Brent
 28 Elaine Kinchin & Clare Ellis

September 04 Jacqui & Terry Powlesland
 11 Sue Birdseye & Claire Woodward

THURSDAY COFFEE

June 02 Jubilee Bank Holiday
 09 Beryl Cartwright
 16 Judi Holloway
 23 Jean Hodgson
 30 Pat Smith

July 07 Beryl Cartwright
 14 Judi Holloway
 21 Jean Hodgson
 28 Pat Smith



August 04 Beryl Cartwright
 11 Judi Holloway
 18 Jean Hodgson
 25 Pat Smith

September 01 Beryl Cartwright
 08 Judi Holloway

We would be extremely grateful for other people to join

SOUND SYSTEM

June	05	Terry Powlesland
	12	Nanna Blackman
	19	Terry Powlesland
	26	Nanna Blackman
July	03	Terry Powlesland
	10	Nanna Blackman
	17	Terry Powlesland
	24	Nanna Blackman
August	31	Nanna Blackman
	07	Terry Powlesland
	14	Terry Powlesland
	21	Nanna Blackman
September	28	Terry Powlesland
	04	Terry Powlesland
	11	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

June	14	Norline La Fortune
	16	Sandi Franklin
	20	Carol Jones
	24	Janet Park-Pratley
	26	Barbara MacLarty
	30	Jacqui Powlesland



July	05	Bob Blackman
		Lynn Swift
	25	Oscar Stanley
	26	Jennie Garrett
		John Brent
	28	Michael Pratley
30	Irene St Clair	

Aug	02	Janet Hayes
------------	----	-------------

Sep	01	Theo Howells
	02	Gail King
		Claire Woodward



Queen's Platinum Jubilee

Queen	Jubilee	Kingdom
Parade	Buckingham	Realms
First	Seventy	Trooping
British	Years	Commonwealth
Palace	Balcony	Celebrations
Monarch	Soldiers	Platinum
Beacons	Colour	Service
United	Horses	Birthday
Majesty		

Deacon's Letter

Dear Friends

As I write this we are all awaiting the weekend visit of our Pastoral candidate with eager anticipation. We are longing for the motivation and leadership that our new Minister will need to take us into the future. Post Covid we feel the need for new beginnings, notwithstanding the extraordinary efforts of those who have been leading our worship for well over two years now. We owe them a huge debt of gratitude. Will this be the one that God has chosen to shepherd our little flock?

In our eagerness to make it so we must try to discern God's purpose and not just our own. We must be realistic about what is possible for a part-time Minister without compromising on the things that are really important. In short, we need a clear picture of what Witney Congregational Church needs.

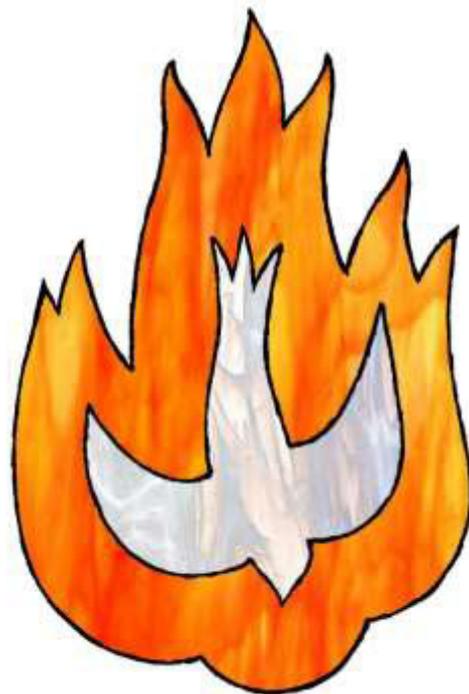
And what about us? What do we need personally? If we are to be proper Christians we have not chosen an easy path. Our commitments are heavy. We are seeking to emulate the perfect example of Jesus Christ and in that we are doomed to failure. So why do we do it? For the lucky few it is because we find true joy and peace in the God's love. For others it is because we can't help it – our faith just won't go away, however inconvenient at times. For still others it is habit and upbringing. The good news is that all of that is OK. God knows us and loves us. He asks only one thing – that we believe in Jesus Christ and that we love others as he loved us. We don't always succeed, but we must try.

In these challenging times love is more necessary than ever. I read these headlines as I sat in Oxford enjoying rejuvenating tea after a day buying things that I don't really need, just because I can.

More than two million people in Britain are going at least a day without food. Inflation is rising at 9%. Last year at least twenty-eight and a half thousand people crossed the channel illegally in precarious craft, desperate for a new life. As Christians we badly need to spread the love, in whatever way we are able. By our actions, by our words and by our attitude to others. Jesus gave us a new commandment: ***By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another (John 13 v35)***

Putting that into practice will be a good way to begin our bright new future, whoever is leading us.

God bless you all





PRAYER LETTER No 203

Wait, Listen & Obey

Waiting for the time or an event to come.

The phrase 'the time will come' is often expressed but what does it mean?

It could be positive or negative but it is a waiting time.

Do we notice what is happening during this 'waiting time'?

Is there a build up to be counted in days, weeks, years, eons?

In the Old Testament many prophets prophesied over God's promise of a Messiah or the coming of the Messiah, but this didn't happen for hundreds of years. Some listened to the prophets and believed, others listened and dismissed God's message. When Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, Mary listened and obeyed yet it was thirty years later when God's purpose was revealed. It was during Jesus' 3 years of Ministry, talking, watching, listening to ordinary people and hearing their problems that Jesus' disciples eventually recognised that He was the promised Messiah the Jews had been waiting hundreds of years for.

Jesus told his disciples to wait for the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is part of the Trinity: God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit.

After the crucifixion when His Disciples were devastated and frightened Jesus appeared to them in a locked room and told them to wait in the city of Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit to come upon them. They were fearful and frightened but they listened and obeyed. The extraordinary experience that the Disciples received at what we call 'Pentecost' testified they had listened to Jesus, obeyed Jesus, and waited. Their waiting time had finished now their Ministry was to begin.

As Christians we believe in the Trinity and that God works through the Holy Spirit in ordinary people if only they will listen and obey.

How do we know when God is speaking to us? Noises, voices, sounds are all around us. Did you hear that? What was that noise? What was that sound? How do we differentiate whether sound is good or harmful; or which affects us corporately or individually? During the lockdown we were able to hear more birdsong as there was minimal traffic around on the roads or aircraft in the skies. We got used to hearing sounds more clearly.

The important thing for us is that we must listen and leave space in our lives to hear God's Call. God can hear us call him but do we hear Him through the noises of our lives?

A Prayer

Gracious God, through your Holy Spirit help us in this 'waiting time' to listen, recognise your voice and discern what you would have us do, in our lives, not only as a Church Fellowship but as individuals too.

Amen.

Every Blessing,

Beryl

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

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.

23. Mark 9:2-13

"Six days later", with these words Mark continues his Gospel story. The interval of time is far more precisely specified than is Mark's custom. Peter, if it indeed was he who told Mark this story concerning Jesus, may have emphasised the precise timing of the event; Mark however does not seem to attach any particular significance to this time interval, he simply records it. The suggestion has been made that six days was a customary preparation period of waiting to appear before God similar to that experienced by Moses when he was so called (Ex. 24:16). Alternatively, if the translation is taken as "After six days" and the days are counted from Peter's confession "You are the Messiah", then the event which Mark is now to record occurs on the "Seventh Day", reinforcing the need of a seventh day as a Holy Day, a day to be set apart. Certainly this day of which Mark now tells is a day "set apart", set apart both by place and by those involved. Jesus takes

just three of his disciples, Peter, James and John with him to a high mountain. Mark does not use the term "high mountain" elsewhere in his Gospel. This place is special and what is to happen there is special, requiring witnesses, but only such witnesses as will keep silent as to what they see, until the right time to make their witness. The same three disciples are granted the privilege and given the responsibility as at the raising of Jairus' daughter (5:37-43).

They come to the high mountain and there Jesus is "transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white." The word used is "metamorphose" which bears the meaning of a complete change in form. It is the word used by the Apostle Paul in Romans 12:2 to describe the change in Christians needful for them to discern the perfect will of God, and again in II Corinthians 3:18 as that which happens when a person truly sees, even if only in a mirror, the glory of the Lord. The word is used in the passive form, the change is not brought about by the person himself or herself, it is of God, God who reveals his glory in and through the transfigured. Here on the "high mountain" the disciples are given a glimpse of Jesus as he was and as he is to be - all glorious! The picture of his clothes becoming "dazzling white" is in conformity with the expectations of the period, that such would be the raiment of those close to the glory of God. Here is recorded the visual confirmation of the words from heaven which Mark had previously recorded as being spoken at Jesus' baptism (1:11), words which are shortly after repeated to the three disciples with a command to them, "Listen to him!"

The vision is not limited to that of seeing Jesus in his glory and hearing the voice; "there appeared to them Elijah with

Moses who were talking with Jesus". Here it would seem legitimate to ask the question as to how the disciples knew that the figures who appeared with Jesus were indeed Elijah and Moses as a strict interpretation of the Second Commandment (Ex. 20:4) would rule out there being any extant pictures or statues of these two persons. Maybe it was what they said or their mode of speech which identified them to those present, or perchance they laid claim to being these people; Mark gives no details but simply reports what he believes to be the significant fact - that Moses and Elijah are present talking with Jesus. The symbolism of this is tremendous: Moses is the great liberator and law giver; Elijah is the first (and greatest?) of the prophets who were not court servants, not part of the power establishment and who called for a relationship with God which was more than just keeping the Law. The appearance of these two worthies with Jesus, sets Jesus on at least an equal footing of importance with them in the life of the people of God.

The three disciples are almost overwhelmed with the experience. It is a wonderful experience for them but it is also terrifying. It is an experience of holiness such as they have never known before. They just don't know what it all means - but they don't want to let go of it, they want it to go on and on, to be permanent for them. So, as usual, it is Peter who blurts out their desire, the desire to keep what they there experience for themselves by erecting three dwellings, be they tents or something more permanent; the exact nature of the dwelling places is not clear from Mark's wording. Peter's intention and understanding is however quite clear. He desires to keep the vision of glory as a privilege for those present and in so doing

to escape from the challenges of life off the "high mountain". Moreover, his speaking of three dwellings shows him accepting Jesus as being as important as Elijah and Moses - but no more important. Peter had acknowledged Jesus as "The Messiah" but he, and all the disciples, had much still to learn as to what that meant. One suspects that deep down Peter was only too aware of his own lack of understanding since Mark records, "He did not know what to say." Faced with true glory, how many of us would be as those disciples on the high mountain, amazed, bewildered and afraid, conscious of our own inadequacies?

All is brightness and light and then, suddenly, darkness. "A cloud overshadowed them." The picture is dramatic. It might be rendered "a cloud fell upon them" or even that it "embraced them". If the disciples were terrified before, now they must have been almost beside themselves in awe. In Jewish thought the sudden coming of a cloud on a high mountain could only mean one thing, the imminent presence of Almighty God. And then they hear the voice, the voice that can be for them no other than the voice of God, uttering the words which Jesus heard uttered at his baptism affirming the reality of the person of Jesus. At his baptism, only Jesus heard the words (1:11), but now they are addressed to the disciples: "This is my Son, the Beloved." Any thought that the disciples may have had that Jesus is merely on a par with Elijah and Moses is swept away; the Person whom they are faced with is "The Son of God". What that might mean they have yet to learn, but they must immediately have begun to realise that all that was revealed through the Law (Moses) and the prophets (Elijah) was pointing to its fulfilment in this Messiah, the Son of God. He was and is

the One who is to be listened to for all direction in living. The voice from heaven proclaims: "Listen to him." And immediately, there is no one there with them except Jesus! From henceforth, although the Law and the prophets would still remain important, these were to be seen through the revelation which came and was to come through listening to Jesus

So Jesus and the three disciples start to come down the mountain and Jesus gives to those disciples the first words to which they are to listen, listen with new ears, with a new understanding. And what difficult words they must have been, for they were no less than a command to tell no one of what had happened on the mountain. The most tremendous experience of their lives to date, and they could not even share it with their fellow disciples. Not share, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead! How difficult that must have been for them and yet it appears from the rest of Mark's story that they succeeded in keeping quiet for there is no record of any reaction by either the other disciples or of any one else to this transfiguration event. It must indeed have remained a secret until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead. Meanwhile, coming down the mountain, the three disciples were bewildered as to what this "rising from the dead" might mean. We can picture them in a turmoil of bewilderment and uncertainty. Perchance they had already forgotten what Jesus has told them all following their acknowledgement of him as the Messiah at Caesarea Philippi. The glory of the vision on the mountain had wiped it out - but now - painfully it came back to them. One of the widely held beliefs among the Jews was of a general resurrection of the dead at the end of the world, but the words of Jesus seemed to

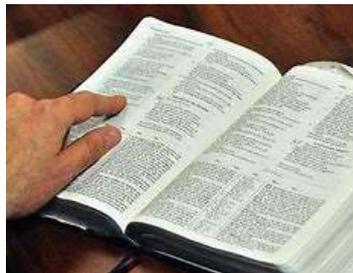
imply that the Son of Man would rise before the general resurrection. What did he mean? It certainly meant that he, Jesus, was to die! They were full of questions, questions which they did not really know how to put into words.

So they began with reference to that teaching with which they had been brought up. "Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" Before the "Day of the Lord", the end of the world, Elijah was to come (Mal. 4:5-6). Elijah, who had never died but been taken up into heaven (II Kings 2:11), was to return to set the hearts of people right with one another. The prophecy in Malachi sees this as righting relationships within the family. However, the Septuagint Greek version of the prophecy had added the words "and a man to his neighbour" thus extending Elijah's task of reconciliation. By the time of Jesus the expectation was that Elijah would restore all things to that state which God intended in readiness of the Messiah, and for the judgement to come. No doubt there were different schools of thought as to the exact task and method of Elijah, but there was a common expectation that he must come before any of the events that could lead to the resurrection of the dead. The disciples ask their question. The reply of Jesus which Mark records is far from clear.

Verse 12 is a statement and a question. In the statement Jesus confirms the popular expectation that Elijah is indeed to come before the Messiah and that the task of Elijah is "to restore all things". Then comes the question: "How then is it written about the Son of Man that he is to go through many sufferings and be treated with contempt?" If Elijah had indeed restored all things, how then can there still be a situation in which the Son of Man is rejected in any way? It would appear that Jesus is questioning the

traditional expectation of the task of the returned Elijah, or perhaps not the task, but the actual success of Elijah's mission. Was it possible that Elijah could fail? Would he be rejected as so many of the prophets since his time had been rejected? Jesus then, according to Mark, continues by saying that Elijah has already come and "they did to him whatever they pleased, as is written about him." To what writing Jesus is referring, we do not know. There is no extant known document that contains any prophecy concerning the returned Elijah having to suffer. However it appears that Jesus knew of such writing which has since been lost. "Elijah has come" said Jesus. As so often, the disciples are left to answer their own questions, to think through for themselves what it all means. Did they then realise that the person and treatment of John the Baptist fitted what was apparently the expectation of Jesus concerning the returned Elijah? What were they now to expect concerning the future for Jesus? They now knew whom Jesus truly was; they had seen his glory and yet he still told them that he, the Son of Man, was to go through many sufferings and be treated with contempt. Only by living with him and listening to him in his words and his deeds would they find the answers which they sought, answers given, not on the top of the "high mountain" but down in the valley of ordinary life to which they now returned with Jesus. Was the "Good News" for the valley, or just for the mountain top? Mark gives his answer as he continues with his account of

"Jesus Christ, the Son of God"(1:1).



The following article, author unknown, has been extracted from Parish Pump, with Pentecost, the birthday of the Church, in mind, and all that that means, and is entitled:

The U in JesUs

Before U were thought of or time had begun,
God even stuck U in the name of His Son.

And each time U pray, you'll see it's true
You can't spell out JesUs and not include U

You're a pretty big part of His wonderful name,
For U, He was born; that's why He came.

And His great love for U is the reason He died.
It even takes U to spell crUcified.

Isn't it thrilling and splendidly grand
He rose from the dead, with U in His plan?

The stones split away, the gold trUmpet blew,
and this word resUrrection is spelled with a U.

When JesUs left earth at His upward ascension,
He felt there was one thing He just had to mention.

"Now go into the world and tell them it's true
That the love I have shown is not just for U."

So many great people are spelled with a U,
Don't they have a right to know JesUs too?

It all depends now on what U will do,
He'd like them to know,
But it all starts with U

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

History of WCC: 1973 - 1974

The last time I wrote an article on the history of the Witney Congregational Church, it was printed in the April 2008 Cornerstone. I apologise for the gap of over two years, however my biggest source of information came from the Minutes of the Deacons and Church Meetings. Somehow the Minutes of the Deacon and Church Meetings for most of the 1970's-1980's have gone missing and I had hoped that they would re-emerge. Sadly they have not. If anybody knows of their whereabouts we are desperately keen to be reunited with them. We have all the Church Minutes from 1806 to 1973 safely deposited in the County Archives in Oxford and it is tragic that such more recent historical documents have been mislaid or lost.

I have been asked to continue this research despite the lack of these important documents. So I will try to piece together our history since 1973 using information from the Newsletters of that time (thanks mainly to copies collected by the late Kathleen Collis) and personal memories of Church Members from those times. I was a Deacon at that time so hopefully, despite being so long ago (37 years ago) I can piece together the events that have shaped our present Church.

To set the scene: In 1973 we were worshipping in the large Dining Room at St Mary's Close, the home of our Minister, the Rev. Clementine M. Gordon. Previously in April 1970 we had moved from our old church building in the High Street (where Somerfields Supermarket is

today) to worship at St Mary's Close. Our Church Secretary was Mr Bob Richardson, a farmer, living near Ducklington and our Treasurer was Mr David Pearson (who still worships with us).

In October 1968 Miss Gordon agreed to undertake a part-time ministry at Witney Congregational Church for four years whilst she did research at Oxford. As part of the agreement she was able to take a long summer vacation to sail her catamaran. During these periods we had theology students from Oxford filling in for Miss Gordon as our Pastor. Interestingly we welcomed a student, Mr Richard Cleaves, for the summer of 1973. As many of you know he is now Rev. Dr. Richard Cleaves, Minister at our neighbouring Congregational Church at Highbury Church Cheltenham.

In July 1973 the Diaconate called an urgent Church Meeting as Miss Gordon had intimated that she would be giving up the pastorate in November 1973. This created a mini crisis in that we needed to find a new place to worship, appoint a new Minister and thus we needed to purchase a new Manse. The Diaconate was asked to explore the possibility of purchasing a Manse-Church. At the same time a Mr and Mrs M Hamblett of Manchester came to discuss the possibility of the pastorate, but eventually decided not to take up the offer. Miss Gordon generously offered the continued use of St Mary's for worship "until the right man and the right property was found".

A Housing Committee consisting of Mrs L Wheeler, Mr Gerald Hayes, Rev. Raymond Moody and Mr Philip Turner was set up to find a suitable property for a Manse or Manse-Church.

At the AGM in October Mr David Pearson stepped down. Mr Gerald Hayes became our Treasurer.

By December 1973 the Housing Committee had found a suitable property, Staple Hall, which was a historic 17th Century building (1668) situated on the corner of Bridge Street and Newland and opposite West End. By February 1974 we had purchased the property and rewiring of the electricity and decorating was planned. We moved in on March 18th 1974 and the first Service at Staple Hall was held on Sunday March 21st 1974.

For those who have followed our history since 1662, research revealed that after the ejection from St Mary's in 1662 our Church worshipped 'underground' until 1672. In 1672 Frances Hubert M.A. obtained a licence to preach at the house, Staple Hall. The self-same house where our Church was born in 1672. Witney Independent (Congregational) Church, we started anew in 1974.

The following article has been extracted from Parish Pump, and will help remind us of the price that many Christian brothers and sisters worldwide are paying, in order to follow Jesus Christ, and is entitled:

Christian persecution growing in Nigeria, India and Afghanistan, warns US Commission

A leading US Commission is calling for India, Nigeria and Afghanistan to be designated countries of particular concern, because of the growing threat to religious freedom in those nations.

The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has recently published its 2022 Annual Report. Its findings are in line with the recent Persecution Trends report published by UK-based Release International, which supports persecuted

Christians around the world.

The bipartisan USCIRF, which advises the President of the United States and US State Department, is calling for 15 nations to be included on the US list of countries of particular concern because of rising persecution and religious intolerance.

The most notable additions are Nigeria, India and Afghanistan.

Other countries on the list as the world's worst violators of religious freedom are: China, Eritrea, Iran, North Korea, Pakistan, Russia, Myanmar (Burma), Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, Syria and Vietnam.

The USCIRF's 2022 Report warns: "Afghans who do not adhere to the Taliban's harsh and strict interpretation of Sunni Islam and adherents of other faiths or beliefs are at risk of grave danger."

Afghans who converted to Christianity from Islam over the past 20 years are considered 'apostates', a crime punishable by death. Converts, who already faced ostracisation and the threat of honour killings by family and village members, are at heightened risk following the Taliban takeover.

According to the latest USCIRF report, religious persecution in India has also taken a significant turn for the worse. The BJP government's Hindu nationalist agenda has been impacting Christians and Dalits – growing numbers of whom have converted to Christianity – as well as other religious minorities. The report noted around one-third of India's 28 states now limit or prohibit religious conversion.

In Uttar Pradesh, one of the worst offending states for religious persecution, the USCIRF 'received documented reports of at least 50 incidents between June and October 2021 targeting the Christian community'.

The following two articles have been extracted from Parish Pump, and reflects on the Ukraine and Chinese scenarios:

Starving in the shadow of Ukraine

The huge outpouring of support for Ukraine is now eclipsing other crises around the world, which in turn is threatening millions with starvation.

So warns a number of charities and other humanitarian organisations. The UN reports that the situation in Somalia, where 4.5million people are at risk of starvation owing to the worst drought in a decade, is deteriorating quickly. Somalia urgently needs some £1.1billion in aid, of which only three per cent has been secured.

As one spokesman at the UN explains, “The outlook for Somalia was already grim prior to the outbreak of the Ukraine crisis, but we were then overshadowed by the crisis in Tigray, Yemen, and then Afghanistan. Now, Ukraine seems to suck all the oxygen that is in the room.”

The international director of Tearfund, Veena O’Sullivan, said: “While the eyes of the world have been fixed on Ukraine, other horrors have been taking place.”

These range from a “hunger crisis of massive proportions” in the Horn of Africa, which includes Somalia, and the ongoing violence and famine in the Tigray region of Ethiopia, as well as humanitarian crises in Afghanistan, Yemen and Syria.

The director of CAFOD, Christine Allen, said: “It is right that we support a response to the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine, in whatever way we can, but this cannot be at the expense of vital funds meant for tackling the root causes of global poverty.”

Meanwhile, church leaders in Africa have warned that the war is already affecting their food security, as 40 per cent of

Ukraine’s wheat and maize is exported to the Middle East and Africa. The poorest are the most affected, as market prices rise.

Now China bans mentioning ‘Christ’ on the internet

The Chinese authorities have recently banned a church from using the word Christ on the Internet.

In the latest crackdown on religious freedom in China, the authorities picked up on the use of the word Christ in a WeChat post published by the Early Rain Covenant Church – a regular target for the Chinese authorities.

The church’s WeChat account ran a book review group where members recommended book titles and voted on their favourites. The latest posting included the Christian classics *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis and *Exposition of the Christian Faith* by Saint Ambrose.

But WeChat’s censorship team, prompted by new government regulations, fired back the following:

Chr*st. ‘The word “Christ” you are trying to publish violates regulations on Internet Information Services, including, but not limited to the following categories: pornography, gambling, drug abuse, incitement.’

So, in today’s China, it seems that Jesus Christ is lumped in with porn, drugs and rabble-rousing. So says Paul Robinson, the CEO of Release International, which supports persecuted Christians worldwide.

The tough new regulations intended to clampdown on churches using the Internet came into effect on 1st March,

2022. The ban prevents any organisation or individual from posting religious information on the Internet without first obtaining the permission of their provincial government. It bans religious groups, schools and organisations without valid permits from conducting online sermons.

The rules effectively ban any live streaming, publication of sermons, reposting of religious content or any form of online religious education without government permission – and thereby government control.

The following article, written by Rev Richard Higginbottom, looks at the meaning of 'platinum', and is entitled:

'Little Silver'

If you have ever had chemotherapy, or a heart pacemaker installed, you will be particularly grateful for the properties of platinum.

Platinum compounds disrupt the multiplication of cancerous cells, and the properties of platinum itself (its resistance to corrosion and tarnishing) make it particularly suitable for electrical contacts in pacemakers.

But platinum has other properties which make it a topical subject.

The word 'Platinum' comes from the Spanish for 'little silver' ('plata' meaning silver, as in the River Plate in Argentina.) Platinum is very rare. It is much rarer than gold. It is therefore very precious and has generally been more expensive than gold.

Platinum is used to make the International Standard Weights and Measures. The International Standard Kilogram is made from platinum alloys which can be relied

upon not to vary over time. Platinum is a very dense metal. It is denser than pure gold. It carries a great deal of 'gravitas.'

Platinum is what scientists call a 'Noble Metal' – because it can withstand almost any chemical attack. It is the least reactive of all metals.

All these characteristics apply well to our much-loved Queen. She is 'petite and silver', she has 'gravitas', and she has remained untarnished over a very long period of time, despite having been in constant contact with all manner of people.

The Queen is a very rare person indeed, and very precious to our nation, setting the highest reliable standards of public service and carrying with her immense gravitas and unquestionable nobility. The Queen's Imperial State Crown is made of gold, silver and, appropriately enough, platinum, and decorated with many precious stones. As the first British monarch to celebrate a Platinum Jubilee, she wears it well.

We thank God for her, and for her qualities that have made her so special. God Save our Noble Queen!

Continuing from the previous article, the following article is entitled:

The Queen's Platinum Jubilee

This month we celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee. She is the longest reigning monarch in British history. Up until recently she attended church every week and still did a full week's work at the age of 96!

It is her commitment to serving God and the nation which stands out in her life. Even before she became Queen, she made

a promise, which she has kept for over 75 years: *'I declare before you all that my whole life, whether it be long or short, shall be devoted to your service'* (21st birthday broadcast, 21 April 1947).

What is the secret of the Queen's consistency of character and service? In 2002 she said this: *"I know just how much I rely on my faith to guide me through the good times and the bad. Each day is a new beginning. I know that the only way to live my life is to try to do what is right, to take the long view, to give of my best in all that the day brings, and to put my trust in God."* These are wise words from somebody who draws her strength from the Christian Faith and can inspire all of us who want to make our lives count!

The Queen has been an example of joyful, wise, and generous service on behalf of others all her life. Six months before her coronation she asked the nation and Commonwealth to pray *'that God may give me wisdom and strength to carry out the solemn promises I shall be making, and that I may faithfully serve Him and you, all the days of my life.'* Paul urges us



to pray for all in authority, *"that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness."* (1 Timothy 2:2).

The following article by Tim Lenton, considers this may be of interest if you have a Muslim community in your area, as we do, and is entitled:

The beginning of Islam

Some 1400 years ago, on 16th July 622, the Islamic calendar began, when Muhammad

and his followers migrated from Mecca to Medina to escape religious persecution (an event known as the Hejira) and established the first Muslim community.

The new religion spread quickly: Muhammad's men attacked trading caravans and in 630 an army of 10,000 forced Mecca itself to surrender. Though Islam, like Christianity, also looks back to Abraham, its military method of expansion was in marked contrast to the initial spread of Christianity.

Years in the Islamic (Hijri) calendar are designated either H or AH, which stands for the Latin term Anno Hegirae. It is a lunar calendar tied to the phases of the moon and based on astronomical observation, usually by an authorised person: the new month can only begin after a waxing crescent moon is observed shortly after sunset. For this reason, a month can begin on different days in different countries.

This lunar calendar should not be confused with the solar Hijri calendar used in Iran and Afghanistan. Turkish Muslims use an Islamic calendar which is calculated several years in advance by the Turkish Presidency of Religious Affairs.

The current Islamic year, 1443 AH, ends this July. Islamic years are not in sync with the Gregorian calendar because they fall about 11 days short of the solar year. The Hijri calendar cannot therefore be used for seasonal activities like agriculture, and most Muslim countries use the Gregorian calendar for non-religious purposes.

The Hijri calendar was established in 638 by Caliph Umar in Basrah, who complained because documents he received contained no date, which made it hard for him to know which were most recent. He decided the Muslim calendar should start when Muhammad arrived in Medina.



May Edition

from the Starfish UK & Malawi Teams.

This is a special issue of our newsletter, as it has been written in Malawi during Chris and Peter's trip. We trust that this will bring you right up to date with our work in and around Ngolowindo.

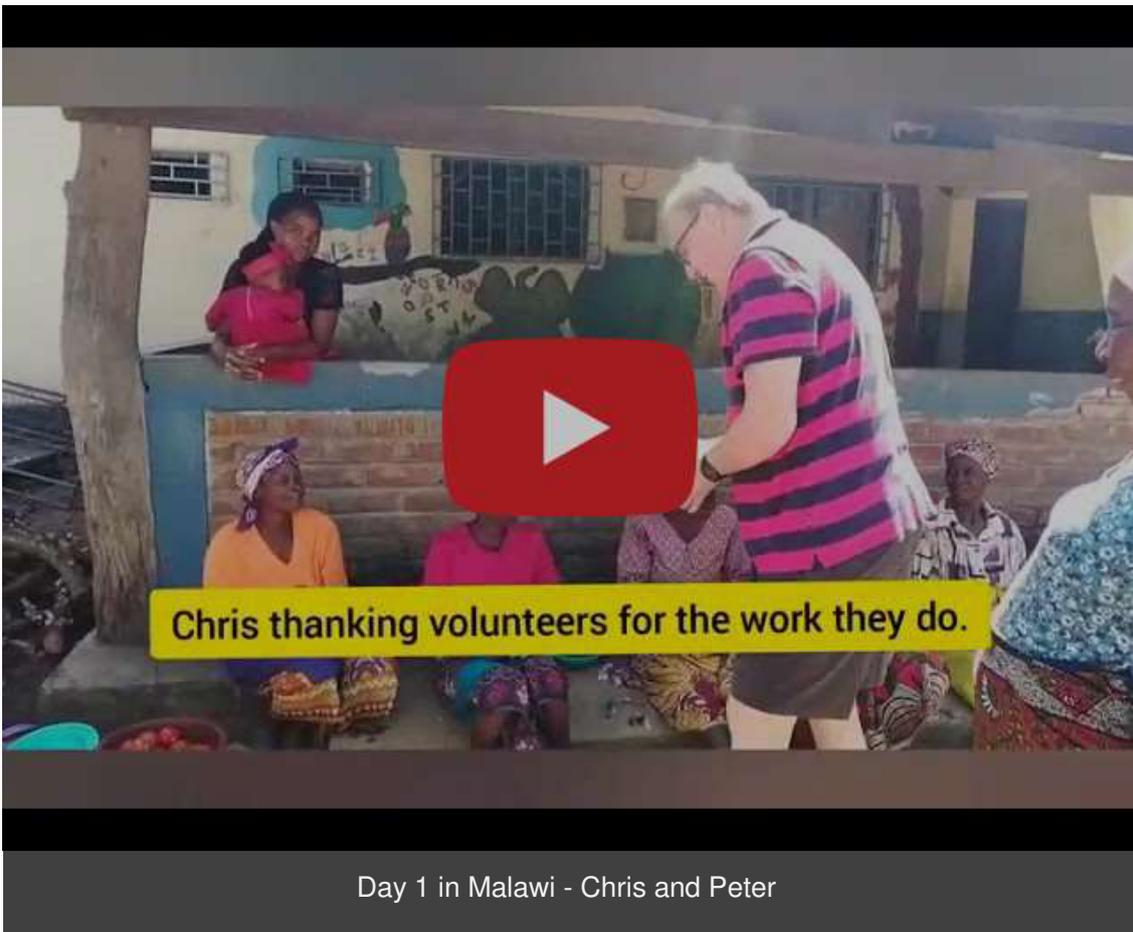


This is a great time for the children from the villages to engage in some Bible teaching and worship, then to play some games and afterwards to have a lunch made by a team of ladies from the villages. Chris and Peter took part in the games and helped to stir the nsima being cooked.





Have a look at the video to give you a taste of what we did.



First School's Live Link

During our trip to Malawi we had the very first live link between Chikiluti School in Malawi and Aldro School in UK. This enabled students from both schools to see and speak to each other and to ask questions about their respective schools and about themselves.

We also conducted live links between Mikute and East Hoathly School, Thundu and Waverley Abbey, Chipili and St Joseph's and Chisiyo and St Joseph's(Thame).

The aim of these live links, as the project develops, will be for live discussions on various topics such as ecology, equality, global awareness to name but a few. We hope that through these regular live links, the children will be able to know more about each other's schools and how their counterparts in both countries live and that both will benefit through such communication.





Chikiluti School in Malawi and Aldro School in UK.

Everland Special Needs Centre

Chris and Peter were overjoyed to be able to visit the centre and to see the children being cared for and educated. There are presently 16 children registered at the centre but more will be joining in due course. Many of the children have epilepsy in addition to mental and/or physical disabilities. One of the teachers was so appreciative of the provision of the centre and said that it is making such a difference to the children's education. They thanked Michael Jackson's Legacy for funding the facility and for the teaching resources.

Chris and Peter were also able to distribute shoes that had been donated by MJL which can expand as the children's feet grow.



Everland Special Needs Centre

Hope Clinic Official Opening

We were so pleased that after more than a year of the clinic being in full operation that the official opening was able to be conducted on 5th May 2022. The occasion was amazing with dancing, drama, drumming and singing as well as speeches from local dignitaries, the local MP and Hon. Halima Daudi, MP Malawi Deputy Health Minister and Chris and Peter.

There were approx. 1000 people attending with many children. Following the arrival of the guests of honour, they were shown around the clinic and the ribbon was cut by Chris and the Deputy Health Minister.

This was a joyful celebration with the community of the impact that clinic is having on the Ngolowindo area. The MP said how much he appreciated what Starfish were doing and the Halima Daudi said that this was a unique public/private partnership and she was very thankful that Starfish were fulfilling their responsibilities both in funding and resources for the clinic.

Peter announced to the gathering that the maternity wing construction was starting very soon, which received a huge response of clapping and drumming. The event was much larger than expected and Chris and Peter were privileged to be interviewed by local radio and press about the clinic and work of Starfish.





Hope Clinic Opening

Bewl Water - Saturday 11th June 2022



BEWL WATER WALK

Saturday 11th June 2022

**10:30am
start**



We are really looking forward to our Bewl Water walk this year. It is always a special time for our supporters to meet up with each other and walk in the beautiful Kent countryside.

We are again raising funds for the work at Glad Tidings Orphan Care. This project is helping 520 children with education, a feeding programme and being a hub for them to play safely in the playground and to interact in the Saturday Children's corner.

We would love to have over 100 walkers this year.

To register please follow the information on the following webpage.

[Click here](#)

Mr Chris Knott, the founder of Starfish Malawi, is coming to Witney on 9th June from 10am-12noon to collect the blankets we have made.

Anyone interested in the project will be welcome.

Any keen walkers amongst you could walk 7 or 13 miles around Bewl Water (in Kent) to raise money for Starfish. The walking can be done around your local area and a web site has been set up to record your efforts. Anyone interested can see Pat.

A vibrant background of purple and white fireworks exploding against a dark blue night sky. The fireworks are in various stages of bloom, creating a dense, celebratory pattern.

PLATINUM
70
JUBILEE