



the magazine



Park united reformed church

November 2021

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The views expressed in this magazine are those of the individual contributors, and do not necessarily represent the views of Park United Reformed Church, nor those of the editor.

The Minister's Letter

Dear Family,

Grace and Peace to you!

Do you find that at times, *hope* can feel quite intimidating to do and what we *hope* for goes beyond our own strength to control or manage? We need something more...

For me the difference between hope and optimism is that in spite of challenging times - our hope is rooted in the fact that God is with us! Pope Francis in 2016 asked this question: *"am I walking with hope or is my interior life static, closed? Is my heart a locked drawer or a drawer open to hope which enables me to walk not alone but with Jesus?"*



Hope is a journey!!!

One of my favourite artists in the world is the very gifted **Helen Yousaf**. She was recently invited to a school and was asking the children what hope looks like and just look at their insight in the art piece above: **A journey of Hope!**

We have a hope in Christ, we are not abandoned or alone in fact God journeys with us and gifts us with life in abundance.

I am reminded that hope being a journey is nothing new in scripture, God is the author and completer of our hope and faithful to his promises.

Deuteronomy 7:9 NIV

"Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments."

Jeremiah 29:11 NIV

"For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you **hope** and a future"

Ephesians 1:18-20

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the **hope** to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, (19) and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength (20) he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms,

What does hope mean to you?

I'd really like to know what *hope* looks like for you?

How do you live with *hope*?

Where do you find *hope* in your own life?

Every Blessing in the **Hope** of Christ,

Stephen



Image: A Journey of Hope by Helen Yousaf

Family News

We thank God for the Light Party that was held at Park on 31st October. We give thanks for those who led the event and we pray that all who came may sense something of the love of Jesus as the Light of the World.

We congratulate Hilary Campbell on the birth of her second great grandchild. Hilary is looking forward to meeting him soon and we send our love to all the family.

We are pleased to report that Michael Jackson, our former minister, is now out of hospital and receiving care at home. Liz has been unwell with a cardiac problem, but both are in good spirits and send their love to everyone at Park.

We pray for all those affected by the tragic incident in Leigh-on-Sea last month, and in particular for the family and friends of the late Sir David Amess. We pray too for all politicians, both local and national, as they seek to carry out their role of public service in what are often difficult and dangerous circumstances.

We have heard that Peter Pay, one of the Moderators of the URC General Assembly, and well-known in the Wessex Synod, is unwell with a brain tumour. We pray for Peter and his family.

We pray for Maureen Plummer, Ruth Clark and Judith Engang, who are all recovering from medical procedures.

We pray for those who mourn. We were saddened to hear of the death of Shaun Keywood, who was well-known to many of us as he spent much time sitting on our memorial bench. We remember all who knew and loved Shaun and ask for God's blessing on them.

We pray for Janet Howes as she recovers from hip replacement surgery following a fall a few weeks ago. Janet is now home with a care package in place and is feeling much better.

We pray too for Daisy Smith, who has had surgery to remove her tonsils; Daisy has been in hospital again recently for close monitoring, but is now home, although still in considerable pain.

We pray for all others known to us who are affected by ill-health, recovering from, or receiving treatment, remembering in particular any in our congregations who are suffering from Covid-19; also Michael and Elizabeth Jackson; Rose Byatt's daughter Chris; Renne and Bert Ewen; James O'Neill; Linda Adkins; Steven Ballard; and Thelma Butler.

From Hungerford we pray for Fiona and all her family, including her daughter Hannah; Yolande Hadden; Katherine Bossom, following her operation; Rose; Peter; Jim Bracey; and Chris Cragg, who is waiting for an MRI scan.

Lord, in your mercy Hear our Prayer

Carrie

Church Flowers

Thank you to everyone who has provided flowers for the services this year. I have contacted the faithful regular contributors about next year's dates, and many weeks have been filled.

However, around half of the weeks are still not taken. There are various reasons for this, for instance many people are still joining the service remotely and others do not feel able to commit to providing flowers this year.

So this is a plea - if you could offer to provide flowers for one Sunday next year it would be much appreciated. The flowers not only brighten the church but are also given to those within the congregation who may be having a difficult time.

I am happy to chat to anyone who may be willing to get involved in this ministry.

Cerys

An update from the Treasurer

Dear friends,

As the year is drawing to a close, I thought I would write to let you know how the year has been going and what we have managed to achieve during what has turned out to be another challenging year.

The first few months of 2021 were spent in lock down and therefore we did not see much activity, but once restrictions were lifted we slowly began to resume activities, as always with safety in mind. Since the summer we have seen most of our groups returning to use the halls, which is a joy.

With regard to the building your faithful team of volunteers have been keeping the garden tidy and we have also made great progress in clearing the flat at the top of the building. The new organ will be moved to its permanent home soon and we will begin thinking about what to do with the space left behind the wood panelling.

Repairs and maintenance never stops but we are planning to install hand dryers in the ladies and gents toilets. This will ultimately make us more environmentally friendly as the paper towels we currently use cannot be recycled. We are also upgrading our Broadband facility.

As many of you will know we have had a huge problem with our Car Park since Residents' parking has been introduced. We are now in negotiation with a Car Park management Company who will manage the Car Park. More details of the scheme will be forthcoming but we are hopeful that this will enable church members and hall users to park near the building again!

We owe a huge debt of gratitude to Roger Clark for trying to control the situation thus far, but we recognise that a more sustainable solution is required.

The finances of the church have been steady, although we obviously have reduced income due to the closure of the building at the beginning of the year.

We are grateful to the Wessex Synod Trust who agreed to convert the remaining balance of our loan (for the kitchen and hall improvements 2015). This means we are now debt free.

As always, I am grateful to all who regularly contribute financially to keeping us afloat. Your support is never taken for granted. Thank You.

I am looking forward to 2022 when we may, at last, be able to press ahead with more plans to extend our outreach work in this part of Reading, to share the good news of the Gospel and welcome new people.

We pray that we are over the worst of the pandemic and we can gradually get back to 'normal' when we can all be together as the Park Fellowship.

God Bless

Yvette Gayford

The Park Church Buddy Scheme

We are excited to introduce a new scheme to Park Church members and friends.

As you know we now regularly Zoom our Sunday morning Service and we would like to offer people who join us online to share the Service with a church friend/buddy.

The idea is that from time to time those of you who are remaining at home could be joined by one of us. We can bring our own laptops so that all we need is internet connection and we will be all set.

In offering this scheme we hope to be able to improve our pastoral care during this difficult time which has caused some of our church family to be more isolated.

If you would like to receive a Zoom buddy or would like to volunteer to be a buddy, please contact Yvette Gayford 0118 9889477, or Stephen Ansa-Addo 07835 810424.

A Special, Not to be Repeated, Bargain!

After nearly 100 years of service, our Church Meeting has voted to retire our old pews.

However, we felt that in today's environmentally aware spirit of upcycling, recycling and repurposing, we would aim to make them available for many further years of service around the church, but in a more flexible and usable form.

So what were long, unwieldy, and very heavy, banks of six seats, have now been reduced to more manageable banks of two seats.

These have been installed on our entrance hall, with more, potentially, to be repurposed for future use in the church garden.

But now in a special, not to be repeated, bargain offer we do have a few spare benches which we are able to make available for the bargain price of £100.



Just let Roger or Rod know if you are interested, and we would be delighted to make you the proud possessor of a solid oak, unique part of Park Church history.

Rod

How can Christian Aid help?



...and how can you help Christian Aid?

Climate change brings fears for our personal future in the global North; but what is the outlook for children in parts of Africa? For a mother to watch her child playing with friends knowing what she knows about the likelihood for the future must carry with it exquisite pain. What will the climate do to them over the coming decades?

There is that terrible relationship between what their lives should look like and what they probably will look like. What a horrible dissonance to live with; one where parents try to reconcile the should, the maybe and the likely of their children's lives.

It is to alleviate such a pain that Christian Aid supports mothers such as Abuk Ayat Ajing in South Sudan, who lost her business and any hope of an education or brighter future for her children through climate change. Working with partners in the area, they have helped establish a community savings project that helps people start their own businesses so they can move away from the daily grind between the choice of essentials for their children today or putting building blocks in place, such as an education, for a better future.

Challenge and choice one of the great themes of Christmas is choice. That perennial favourite, Charles Dickens', *A Christmas Carol*, revolves around the subject. As the night ends, Scrooge is left with that sense of challenge: who will you serve this day? What choice will you make? Will you engage with life with generosity and compassion or with a miserly spirit and a cold heart?

The passage in Luke telling of Jesus' birth and Mary's battle with poverty and prophetic promise, living with confusion and sometimes despair for tomorrow.

This Advent Christmas Christian Aid are focussing on women and children in countries where days are filled with the most appalling choices. Choices brought about as much by climate chaos as anything else. They, too, look at their infants with one eye on the possible sudden ending of their lives.

Choices in places where the heat and drought are life-threatening; yet when water does come, it announces itself by floods washing away everything not tied down. It is, perhaps, the most heart-wrenching choice of all: the choice between unimaginable thirst or drinking water that is likely to contain dangerous contaminants.

We may wince when we think of the pain of the mother whose children rely on her to make that decision. As one mum, Adut Mariu, says, 'We were in desperate need...to look after my children, they had to drink the dirty river water. The water contains many diseases. There is cows' dung, there is donkeys' dung... People also wash in there.'

But today because Christian Aid has provided a hand pump she can say, 'Now we get water from the pump. We don't send our children into the river anymore. The water from the pump is very good. It's disease free. We drink it with peace of mind.'

The good news is that with your help Christian Aid has an opportunity to save many more mothers from that terrible dilemma and to experience that fresh sense of security. It is for these people, and others like them, that we ask you to donate this Christmas.

I know that at this time of year especially there are great demands on your money but please join us and support those who see their life choices dried up or washed away entirely. Let us stand with them as they build a poverty-free life, improve their present situation and find hope for their tomorrows. So this can become a 'good news story'.

If you want to know more don't hesitate to ask me, Chris Gayford email candy411@btinternet.com or speak to me in Church.

NB on the Christian Aid website it is easy to find the site for donations on line

Chris Gayford

Park's 'Light Party'

I really enjoyed the Light party because we made amazing things.

The doughnut eating game was my favourite and I loved singing "I'm going to let my little light shine."

The food was really tasty. There were lots of children and everyone enjoyed it.

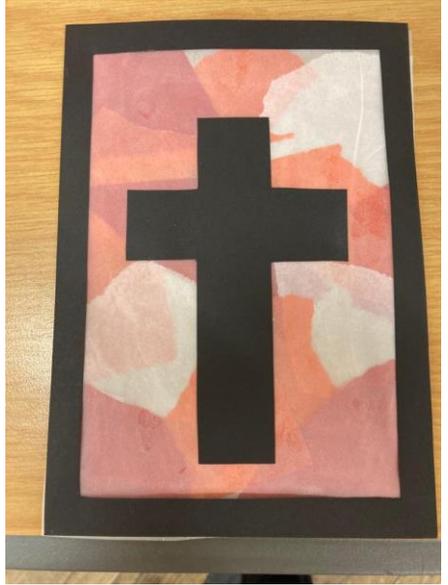
We learnt that Jesus is the brightest light of the world and we (humans) can shine as well through our actions and personality.



Bethany Alderslade

Park's 'Light Party' in pictures...





Reverse Advent 2021 – Items for ReadiFood

The idea of Reverse Advent means that instead of receiving a chocolate every day from your Advent Calendar you give something every day to the people who are really in need.

If you are able and willing to contribute something (however small) then why not decorate a box, or get your children to do this, to collect the items in and it reminds us all of the importance of giving, not just receiving. The decorated box is also a nice focal point for the run up to Christmas.

You may remember that for the last few years (apart from last year) during Advent, we brought our items for ReadiFood, some in decorated boxes, to Park and they were all displayed on the platform in front of the Advent Ring.

We will be able to do this in the same way this year if you would like to bring your items to Park or you may prefer to take them directly to ReadiFood yourself. There are also other options, e.g. by putting items in food bank collection bins at supermarkets or by donating online at

ReadiFood: <https://readifood.org.uk/ways-to-donate/>

If you would like/are able to help at all, then please go to the ReadiFood website to see their page on Reverse Advent Calendar at <https://readifood.org.uk/2020/11/30/the-2021-readifood-reverse-advent-collection/> It gives a list of 24 items that could be put in a food parcel for one person, which we think is quite a nice idea. It doesn't list any specific Christmas foods or treats, but those could be substituted or in addition.

Please make sure all use by dates are after Christmas.

If you wish to take part in this, we suggest starting the collection on 21st November and finishing around 12th December to ensure that people in need receive their food for Christmas.

Thank you.

Carrie & Julia

URC's Black History Monthly

The next session of the URC's Black History Monthly takes place on Monday 15th November, 7.30-8.30pm, when we will be reflecting on the topic:

The War on Woke?! Freedom and the Fine Print
[Language and Empire]

You are warmly invited to join us for an hour of stimulating conversations.

The Zoom link is as follows:

<https://zoom.us/j/99060809545?pwd=YIFOR2k2TUozbmJiWVZPSkxMQjNXUT09>

Meeting ID: 990 6080 9545 Passcode: 264326

Enala Bhebhe

Local link

Did you know that many international students will be staying in Reading this Christmas?

Local link is about local people hosting international students. This could be for a coffee, a Sunday lunch, a whole day or even to go for a walk!

If you would be willing to host a student over the Christmas period, do email, text or call David Hubbard on: 07306371202 david.hubbard@friendsinternational.uk

Advent Group: The Art at the Heart of Christmas

"Advent Group: The Art at the Heart of Christmas. Once again Richard Miller will lead us through some images of the Christmas story in art, with a time to pray and reflect at the end as we prepare to celebrate the good news of Christ's birth.

Downstairs in Earley St Peter's Church Hall RG6 1EY on Mondays 6th and 13th December - 10.45am coffee, session 11am-12.15pm. All very welcome."

The Wildlife of Park Church Gardens.

From the scream of swifts overhead in summer to the distant "seep" of thrushes migrating on winter evenings , for a town centre site, we have some wildlife if you look out for it. Considering we have no pond, for example three species of damselfly (small dragonflies) have been seen.



Peacock butterfly



The spectacular Hornet mimic hoverfly *Volucella zonaria* is happy to be thought of as dangerous and left in peace.

Red Kites of course are common. One has to remember they were introduced and not so long-ago rarities.



In early May one might see pairs of Hairy Footed Petal bees going about their business.



Our Red Mason Bees are so far ignoring our bee hotel...

The very smart Ashy Mining Bee distracts from the green Alkanet, an invasive weed.



The "Batman" hoverfly, when fresh, looks like a cute teddy bear on the roses of the memorial garden.

For a brief period in June one might catch sight of the beautiful Scarlet Tiger moth



Alan Holmes

Help for the RBH

I will be collecting the toilet bags for RBH during Advent or indeed after if anyone wants to continue giving them to me. They need plenty for overnight patients who may only be there for 1 or 2 nights but come in with nothing.

If you can put them into clear zip up bags so staff can see immediately what is in them and whether for a man or woman. They require, 1 flannel, little soap, toothbrush, toothpaste, comb and anything else you might wish to put in like shampoo. For men a razor would be appreciated.

If you do this as a group or with a friend you will find costs are very reasonable. Most supermarkets sell toothbrushes at 4 for £1 which can be split and made into 4 bags. Little soaps people often have put away from when they stayed at a hotel. Combs again can be bought in packets of 4 as can flannels. Remember in this case it has to be functional and does not have to be the best quality.

If anyone has trouble sourcing items please let me know.

I will collect these bags during Advent and they can be placed near the food donations. I will place a box there for the 28th November clearly marked.

One pack or many will be gratefully received.

Gaye

Stepwise is making a difference!

What is Stepwise?

Stepwise is an integral part of Walking the Way – living the life of Jesus today, the United Reformed Church's focus on whole-life discipleship and mission.



Wessex Synod is delighted that Stepwise is now part of the life of the Synod with people having completed the first stream, while others are just about to start. A Synod Stepwise Advocacy Group has been formed and they have been working hard to make sure that all the procedures are put in place to ensure that Stepwise has been able to happen through the last 18 months.

Stepwise is a programme of learning and discipleship development for everyone – including you! – whether you are exploring and enriching your personal faith life, discerning where God's call on your life may be leading, preparing for a new direction, or developing a specific role within your community or church.

One key aspect is that, as a Stepwise participant, your group will have a facilitator and you will also have a mentor who will be with you throughout your Stepwise stream. The Synod Advocacy Group is ensuring safe recruitment and orientation of voluntary facilitators and mentors.

What is a Stepwise Stream? Stepwise has five streams: Faith Filled Life, Faith Filled Worship, Faith Fuelled Leadership, Faith Filled Confidence and Faith Filled Community. Everyone starts with Faith Filled Life, and then after that depends on you! You don't have to follow any set path through it.

Stepwise is open to anyone who is keen to reflect on and develop their Christian faith. If you're ready to be stimulated and challenged – and want to make a difference in your own life and the lives of others – then Stepwise could be just what you're looking for.

Stepwise is learner orientated and designed to draw on the strengths and to address the needs of individual learners, in the context of their communities and churches. The programme emphasises the vital importance of people learning from their daily lives, wherever and whoever God calls them to be.

There are different start times, so there should be a group that is convenient for you – either online or in person.

This is what you need to know:

- All participants wanting to engage in the Stepwise programme will have to begin with completing Faith Filled Life
- If you want to participate in Faith Filled Life, go to our Synod website and fill in an application form, and send this to Ruth Heine, development@urcwessex.org.uk
- You will then be contacted by a member of the Synod Advocacy Group.
- Synod will identify where the learning Hubs will be located within the Synod, and what online offering there may be.
- Groups will be formed logically for participants and will be registered with Synod. This will connect you for your login for your online learning.
- You will have a mentor throughout Stepwise, and if you are unable to identify one from your church, you will be given help to find one.

If you want to know any more about this, please contact

Mary Thomas dso-s@urcwessex.org.uk or

Ray Stanyon dso-n@urcwessex.org.uk

Pray4URC

**Thursday evenings
at 8.15pm from 28
October**

The Group for Evangelism and Renewal (GEAR) within the URC is

hosting another short series of live online prayer meetings in the run up to Assembly Executive (the new name for Mission Council) which is taking place at High Leigh Conference Centre, Hoddesdon, from 22-24 November.

Pray4URC will run on Thursday evenings at 8.15pm for four weeks, starting on 28 October.

Please mark these dates in your diary and tune in [here](#) to listen in and to pray along with the team.

Guests:

28 Oct Revd Dr John Bradbury, General Secretary

4 Nov Simon Peters, Walking the Way Project Manager

11 Nov Andy Jackson, Head of Communications

18 Nov Revd Clare Downing and Peter Pay, Moderators of General Assembly

You don't have to be a Facebook user to access the page - but if you do you can interact by posting messages and prayers as the meeting progresses. The meetings are recorded and stay on the page if you can't join in live.

Short encouraging prayer videos continue to be posted by GEAR each Thursday at 8.15pm to help maintain some consistent united prayer for our church.



The graphic features a blue background with a white, torn-paper-like border at the bottom. The text 'Thursdays 8:15 pm' is prominently displayed in white, with the tagline '...facilitating prayer for our denomination' underneath. On the left, there is a logo for 'The United Reformed Church' consisting of a black cross with a blue eye-like shape at its base. On the right, there is a logo for 'Group for Evangelism And Renewal' featuring a white dove and an open book, with the text 'within the United Reformed Church' below it. The words 'Hosted by' are placed between the two logos.

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IN LOVING MEMORY
OF
LESLIE E. BEARD.
VICTOR R. W. JOHNSON.
CHARLES J. D. MARTIN.
WILFRED R. SMITH.
JOHN V. THICK.
HARRY TILLEN.
WHO GAVE THEIR LIVES

IN
THE GREAT WAR
1914-1919

SIXTY EIGHT ENLISTED FROM
THIS CHURCH AND INSTITUTE.

PRO PATRIA.

