



# *the* magazine



**Park** united reformed church

**Autumn 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**

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Dear Family,

The Peace of God be with you!

The autumn is upon us: a new school year has started for many, university students are returning to campus and our church is once again a community hub for a range of activities during the week. Hallelujah!

Can you believe a whole year has passed since being ordained and inducted to Park and Hungerford URCs? What a year it has been! The last few months have been extremely busy. You'll find a few snapshots in the magazine of a few things we have done together more recently. Time certainly flies when you're having fun! Heartfelt thanks once again for the warmth and depth of the welcome you have shown Tolu and I, it really is much appreciated.

We welcomed ourselves back to in-person/hybrid worship and what a joy it has been to welcome more people into our fellowship, both as regular worshippers and as church members. It was a very special delight to welcome Cerys and Justyn Slatter into membership on the 5th September. We continue to give thanks to God for growth in our fellowship.

I share a recent thought that Christian comedian/evangelist Mark Ritchie shared recently: "Worry can do a lot of things TO you, prayer can do a lot of things IN you"

Let's keep praying!

*"Trust in the lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths."* Proverbs 3: 5-6 NRSV

Lord, it is not always easy to surrender everything to You. But this is what you call us to do. Help us to trust You and acknowledge You in all our lives. Lead us, and direct us, Lord. Amen!



**Stephen**

## Family News

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We give thanks for the summer holidays, and we pray for all our young people who have returned to school or to further education. In particular, we remember Rowan and Timothy from our SALT Group as they begin their secondary school adventure, and also Megan Thomas, who commences an art course at Central St Martin's College in London.

We ask for God's blessing on Justin and Cerys Slatter, together with Bronwen and Gethin, as they formally joined our church family, and we thank them for all that they have done and continue to do in the life of the church.

We also give thanks for the first year of Stephen's ministry and congratulate him on the first anniversary of his ordination, asking that God will bless Stephen and Tolu as they continue their work among us.

We send love and congratulations to Heather King, who celebrated her 30th birthday on Friday September 17th, and to Liz Jackson who celebrated her 80th birthday earlier in September. We send love and congratulations to Richard and Jill Brighton, who celebrated their Diamond Wedding Anniversary on Thursday September 23<sup>rd</sup>.

We remember Beryl Levett, who moved into her new home in Henley earlier in September. We pray for Beryl and thank her for her contribution to our church life over many years.

Embarking on the next stage of their life journeys are Rebecca Bullard, who took up a new post at Trinity College, Oxford; and Alice Gilbert, who moved to Blackburn for a two-year placement as part of her continued Church Related Community Work training. We pray for them both, that God will bless them in all that they do.

We pray for all who are affected by ill-health, recovering from, or receiving treatment. Daisy Smith has spent time in hospital, suffering from a recurrence of a painful throat condition. We pray that Daisy is now on the road to recovery as she waits for the removal of her tonsils.

We give thanks that Alistair and Elizabeth Knox have recovered from the coronavirus.

Charlotte Blackburn attended hospital a few weeks ago for a minor procedure. We thank God that all went smoothly and pray for Charlotte's continued recovery.

We ask for God's blessing on Bev Warden's father, who has had a nasty fall and is poorly in hospital. We pray for him and for Bev and all the family at this time.

David Wong has asked us to pray for the people of his hometown in Sabah on the island of Borneo, who have been affected by flash flooding there, with hundreds of people losing their homes and livelihoods. We pray for recovery for the affected families and also for new opportunities for the gospel as churches respond by providing emergency supplies and help to those in need.

We pray for all others known to us who are affected by ill-health, recovering from, or receiving treatment, remembering in particular Rose Byatt's daughter Chris; our former minister Rev. Michael Jackson; Ruth Clark, who is thankfully recovering well after a fall; Renne and Bert Ewen; James O'Neill; Linda Adkins; Janet Howes; Steven Ballard; and Thelma Butler.

From Hungerford, we give thanks that Evelyn Lavers is no longer in pain, and we pray for Fiona and all her family, including her daughter Hannah, also Barbara and Henry Barr, who have both been unwell recently; Dennis and Sally Cryer; Nelish Gohil and his mother; Daphne Priestley; Jim Bracey; and Chris Cragg.

**Carrie**

## **Ways to Help our Community**

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Whilst we supported **Readifood** for Harvest which was good, they are in need of additional food items due to many more requiring food help especially now furlough is coming to an end.

We should also not forget **Christians in Reading Drop in Centre (Cirdic)** who are still providing food on Mondays, Tuesdays and Fridays in the centre of Reading for the homeless or those without means, currently in the form of packed lunches.

They require: bread, milk, crisps, bananas, chocolate and good items that can be used for packed lunches for the guests. Please contact Mabel at enquiries@cirdic.org.uk or text 07817 373773 to arrange delivery first.

In church meeting we discussed about collecting items for the **Christian Community Action (CCA)** support centre which I do for churches who periodically meet in our car park to pass me the goods. These are household items such cutlery, as basic crockery, mugs, kitchen utensils and clean bedding both single and double including quilts and sleeping bags.

This is not for the charity shop but to give to people who may come with nothing to the area or who have no money to buy anything. Park could take an active interest in this?

**Cow Shed** based in Hurst is another charity formed only 3 years ago which gets referrals from social services, churches and other organisations for nearly new clothing, bedding. They have a unit near Sainsbury's in Winnersh whereby they accept goods and wash and iron and prepare for those in need. These are then distributed in a hand sewn large bag as a gift to the recipients.

Sewers are needed to make these bags plus with craft works as they can sell items to gain funds. They told me that the SA do not give out clothing now but come to them to assist.

They may support more the Wokingham area but certainly get referrals from Reading too.

Some churches are looking at providing more assistance for mental health sufferers. CTEER looked at this important items in quite a lot of depth a while ago. Because mental health issues are so wide with many different types it was thought a mental health professional was needed at any meetings or coffee mornings to support. However those churches who are embarking on this now maybe would be glad of assistance and volunteers.

Other suggestions to help our community:

- Help with toddlers I am sure would be appreciated by Judith.
- Volunteer to teach English to the Nepalese in Reading
- Help teachers and children by joining ABC and volunteering time
- Many churches have started things e.g. St Nicolas and their dementia cafe who might like to have a few more volunteers to assist?
- Support other churches by attending their events!

**Gaye**

I think that **WhatsApp Groups** are a good way of supporting the local community. I joined the Eastern Avenue WhatsApp Group at the beginning of the Pandemic and it has proved to be quite a lifeline. We have found out about each other's skills and connections with the community and, most importantly, people's kindness and eagerness to help.

From emergency plumbers to collecting items and carriers bags for Food Banks to sharing spare garden produce and much more.

As Stephen mentioned, there is also the Church WhatsApp Group, which I have found very beneficial, and it adds the important spiritual side as well. We also share humour which is a real tonic!

**Julia**

## **Park Holiday Club 2021**

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After months of hard work by a wonderful group of people, the day finally arrived for the start of Park's Holiday Club 2021. The resources were allocated, the room was organised, the food was bought, and everything had been planned.

And the first day did not disappoint! Lots of excited children arrived and were soon in their groups making placemats for the meal, and decorating bags for their crafts. Throughout the day we heard about Ruth – an amazing story of faithfulness and loyalty.

The children decided what characteristics she displayed and prayed thanking God for those characteristics and asking him to help them develop those characteristics in order to become good disciples.

The little ones made tractors with Rod and had a wonderful time in the church with Judith. Simon led some energetic singing time, and Stephen helped us with the memory verse. Ruth (Clarke) and her team put together a fantastic lunch, which included a Jewish sweet fruit bread called Rugelach which the children had made.

Other volunteers made and served drinks and snacks, led small group work, and had contributed to planning, resourcing and the smooth running of the day.

A great time was had by all – thank you so much everyone. Here's to the next one!

**Carrie**



# Our Summer at Park – in pictures

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## Our Holiday Club:



**Our Church Barbecue:**





**Our Messy Church:**



**Our Harvest Festival:**



**Our Friendship Club 70th Anniversary Celebration:**



## **Park Christmas Fair 2021**

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It's good news! The Christmas Fair is back!

After an enforced break in 2020, we are keeping our fingers crossed that our famous Park Christmas Fair can go ahead on Saturday November 27th, 2021.

It may be scaled down a bit, but the plan is to have a few stalls, games and other attractions, and of course our amazing Café!

So, please start thinking about items for the Hamper Raffle; have a look for what you might be able to contribute to the stalls; and just spread the word to family and friends.

Further details will follow! Watch this space!

## **Black Lives Matter**

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May 25th marks the anniversary of George Floyd's death. George Floyd was a black American man murdered by policemen.

Once again, we get reminded about God's creations.

If we can take care of the environment, if we can take care of our pets and care about birds, fish, animals surely we should care about black, yellow or white people. We are all God's creation.

"LORD, you have made so many things! How wisely you made them all! The earth is filled with your creatures."  
Psalms 104:24

Creatures small and large, humans black and white. Grass grows for animals and plants for human beings to use. We all depend on you for survival. God, You are worthy to be praised.



I would like to share with you a poem by Karen Campbell entitled: "Black"

If the night sky wasn't inky  
Could the stars shine so bright?  
And if there wasn't darkness,  
Tell me, how could light be light?  
No dark depths of earth -  
How would the flora grow?  
Black is essential, don't you know.

You tell me black is no good -  
The shade of evil, shade of sin;  
How do I then make sense  
Of the blackness of my skin?  
The skin I didn't choose  
No more than you could choose your own;  
The skin that I was gifted -  
Only skin I've ever known.

Black is what I am; it's who I am;  
It is my pride.  
It's the strength on which I stand -  
Where I refuse to be denied.  
Black speaks of where I'm going -  
How the world relates to me;  
Black speaks of where I've come from -  
Heritage and history.

But it's hard not to internalise  
The message all around -  
Before a word is spoken  
That in Black offence is found;  
Explicit or implied.  
Yet from your view you cannot see  
The shackles to be broken  
Until Black lives full and free.

**Enala Bhebhe** - Racial Justice Advocate

## From Small Seed to Giant Mustard Tree

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**Tools with a Mission** was born in 1978 and started in a double garage and shed in Bexleyheath. Just after five years they moved to a barn in Ipswich and quickly outgrew the space, so from a barn to a warehouse.

My granddad supported the charity for many years and since his death in 2019, my grandma has continued to support them in his memory. With my parents having to downsize quite significantly (turns out a boat is a lot smaller than a 3 bed bungalow!) and my grandpa who was an engineer and therefore an avid tool collector passing away in 2013, I had more than my fair share of tools stashed in our garage collecting dust.

I visited a TWAM collector in Wallingford, armed with various full toolkits to donate and to this date it is still a really fond memory. Him and his wife were a lovely couple, invited us in for tea and cake, back in the dark ages when we were allowed inside people's houses! The cake, baked himself, was delicious and he had so many good stories including the collections he has received over the years. They turned up to one house to collect just a couple of sewing machines. Three vans later they

had managed to clear the collection, to this date he is not sure how many sewing machines they took away!

Some may argue you can never have too many tools but if you do find yourself in a

position of needing to find a new home for any, please consider Tools with a Mission.



**Charlotte**



## **Ministry and Mission**

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It would be fair to describe the year-and-a-bit since March 2020 as having been "different", wouldn't it? Lots of us have experienced loss of loved ones, loss of income and perhaps jobs. All have experienced periods of lockdown; periods without 'non-essential' shops; and continuous and extensive disruption to our 'normal' social interactions and relationships. The world we thought we understood and could take for granted has been utterly transformed. How many of us imagined at the start of 2020 that we could go months without a haircut or without people not in our 'bubble' entering our homes?

As members of United Reformed Church congregations ourselves, we understand much of what your church community has experienced since March 2020. The absence of what is now regularly labelled "in-person worship" for much (or all) of this time has compelled us to turn to other ways of being church. Buildings in which we used to praise God regularly have been shut, both to regular worshipers and others who might have sought solace within their walls during these desperate and troubling times. It has been hard to maintain close fellowship with people we only meet over Zoom (or the like) – if we are digitally enabled.

Financially, things have been extremely tough too. Plate offerings have collapsed; some regular givers have had to reduce or entirely stop giving to support God's work; and those churches which hire out their premises have seen income from that source disappear.

At denominational level, we feared that these financial troubles would spell disaster for the URC's Ministry and Mission ('M&M') fund through which the URC has always supported and developed our stipendiary ministers and Church Related Community Workers. It would have been all too easy for congregations to forget that for almost 49 years this fund (under various names) has provided stipends, pension contributions and training for all ministers throughout the three nations in which the URC operates: so that ministry reaches where synods judge it to be most needed and is paid for



according to each congregation's ability to contribute (though the ways of determining that vary from synod to synod). It was all very well to remind ourselves that the M&M fund is meant to be the first call on every congregation's resources if the undertaking to financially support our ministers is to be honoured. We feared that drastically reduced income would make that impossible and that, because the need was less visible than the other calls on your diminished resources, payments to the M&M fund would have stopped first.

We are sorry if we ever doubted you.

It quickly became apparent that, although some congregations had to reduce their pledged giving to the M&M fund, many more of you were continuing to meet the 2020 commitments you had made during better times, despite the struggles that required. At the start of that year we had been expecting churches and synods to contribute around £18.5 million to the fund. By the year end, all but half-a-million pounds of that had been received.

Since Church House staff and committees managed to reduce their budgeted expenditure by almost £1 million, your money enabled us to meet the full costs of our Ministries, Education & Learning, Children's and Youth Work and Mission departments in 2020 as well as covering amounts spent on safeguarding, denominational governance and communications.

What is perhaps even more amazing is that, collectively, you have pledged to give £17.3 million during 2021 despite the financial problems caused by the pandemic being fully apparent well before your offers for this year were made.

We are always grateful for the financial support given each year to the M&M fund by all of you; but this past year has been phenomenal.

Thank you to those of you who have been able to maintain or increase financial support for your church congregation through this difficult time. That has enabled those responsible for your congregation's finances to keep more money flowing to the M&M fund than we expected.

Thank you for all your previous financial support to those of you who, after prayerful consideration, have had to reduce or stop giving in response to your changed financial circumstances.

Thank you for the pledges your congregation has made about contributing to the M&M fund during 2021 even though you were by then aware of the impact the pandemic was having on your local congregation's finances.

Thank you in anticipation for what you agree to offer to the M&M fund during 2022 to enable the denomination to deliver ministry, education and learning, children's work and mission activity on God's (and your) behalf.

We are aware that synods have played a significant part in encouraging and supporting many congregations with their contributions to the M&M fund. We have separately written to Synod Treasurers to express our thanks to them and their colleagues too.

Of course, our giving for God's work is in response to the amazing generosity and love of God which we see in Jesus. Nonetheless, it is important for us to thank every one of you for what you do for God, your congregation and its and our denominational finances.

Thank you!

If you have any questions or comments arising from this letter, please speak to your church treasurer who has been provided with more detailed information. If they are not able to help directly then they can get in touch with the finance team at Church House.

Yours in Christ,

**Ian Hardie** (Treasurer) and **John Piper** (Deputy Treasurer)

## Prayer for Church Unity

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A prayer by Nick Fawcett

You've called us as your Church, Lord,  
your people here on earth,  
a fellowship of equals  
where all are given worth,  
a family together,  
distinguished by our care,  
one hope, one faith, one gospel,  
one vision that we share.  
Yet we have been divided  
by doctrine, dogma, creed.  
estranged from one another -  
your body left to bleed.  
Too full of our convictions,  
believing others wrong,  
we've lost sight of the body  
to which we all belong.  
Our differences deny you,  
betray the faith we claim;  
instead of love uniting,  
we squabble in your name.  
Lord, heal the wounds that scar us-  
suspicion, fear and pride;  
reveal the good in others  
that all our labels hide.  
May cords of love unite us,  
too strong to be undone -  
although we may be many,  
equip us to be one.

from **Linda Fenwick.**

## Church Contacts

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**Minister.....Rev. Stephen Ansa-Addo**

*phone:* 07835 810424  
*e-mail:* minister@parkurc.org.uk  
minister@parkandhungerfordurcs.org.uk

**Church Secretary .....Roger Clark**

*phone:* 0118 935 2324  
*e-mail:* churchsecretary@parkurc.org.uk

**Assistant Church Secretary ....Simon & Jenny King**

**Treasurer: .....Yvette Gayford**

**Assistant Treasurer .....Rod King**

**F & GP Chairman .....Tim Lancaster**

**Centre Manager: .....Becky Joyce**

*phone:* 0845 463 6426  
*e-mail:* centremanager@parkurc.org.uk

**Magazine Editor.....Rod King**

*e-mail:* editor@parkurc.org.uk

**Church Website: .....[www.parkurc.org.uk](http://www.parkurc.org.uk)**

**Facebook:**[www.facebook.com/ParkURC?ref=aymt\\_homepage\\_panel](http://www.facebook.com/ParkURC?ref=aymt_homepage_panel)