

Witney Congregational Church

CORNERSTONE

July & August 2008



*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*

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WHAT'S ON GUIDE

Witney Congregational Church offer a whole range of activities through which we seek to Worship, Work and Witness to the Lord Jesus Christ in this community today.

Further information can be obtained from the Church Administrator, Minister, Church Secretary or the leaders of the particular activities who are listed at the back of this magazine.

WORSHIP

Daily Worship	9.30 am	Mon-Fri	Short time of Prayer and Reading
	10.30 am	Saturday	Short time of Prayer and Reading
Noah's Ark Service	2.00 pm	Tuesday	For under 5's parents and carers
Saturday Praise	11.00am	1 st Saturday of the month	
Sunday Services	10.30 am		
	6.00 pm		There is a crèche facility at both services

Communion is normally held twice during the month at the first Sunday evening and third Sunday morning services

PRAYER

The Church is open each morning for Prayer; also in the Garden Room on Sunday morning and evening prior to, and after, Worship - All welcome

STUDY & FELLOWSHIP

Wednesday	7.30 pm	Church
Friday	10.00 am	Church

YOUTH ACTIVITIES

Sunday	10.30 am	Crèche, Noah's Ark & The K.I.C.K. on Sundays
Monday	10.00 am	Noah's Ark - Infant Group for babies and pre-school children

OTHER ACTIVITIES

	Monthly	Hi 5's
Tuesday	Monthly	Deacon's Meeting
	Bi-Monthly	Church Meeting
Thursday	10.00 am	Rest & Chat (Coffee/Tea available)
Saturday	10.30 am	Coffee Morning

SUNDAY LINK

Weekly bulletin for all Christians providing stimulating thought along with news and notices concerning our Church

WITNEY ECUMENICAL YOUTH TRUST (BASE 33)

4 Welch Way (Entrance - High Street) ☎ 01993 777870 Jude Levermore

St ANDREW'S BOOKSHOP

☎ 01993 709429

Opening Hours: Monday - Saturday 09.00 am - 5.00 pm



Well, what a month it's been, especially for those sport fans! Euro 2008 football (on both BBC & ITV), and now Wimbledon just beginning! So for those who are not interested in sport please be tolerant for another couple of weeks. It was disappointing that England were not playing, but nonetheless there have been some good matches, with the final to be played out by Germany & Spain. However, we can still put our support behind Andy Murray at Wimbledon!

The weather has also been reasonable, and hopefully may it continue and not repeat the floods of approx one year ago, of which some people are still suffering hardship! This good weather will probably be much welcomed as the holiday time is nearly with us again. Whatever your circumstances, hopefully it will be a chance for most people to take a break of some kind.

Turning to the contents, alongside the 'Standard' features, here is a glimpse of what has been submitted: The Presidential address by Rev Wayne Hawkins given at the Congregational Federation May Assembly; Peter Gamston writes about the discussion group topic - Food for the fed-up; and there is the CF Mailing to name but a few.

Many thanks for those who have contributed for this edition, but would also encourage anyone to consider

submitting articles for the remainder of the year, by either:

- Floppy Disk/CD
- E-mail: terrypowlesland@hotmail.com or jacquipowlesland@uwclub.net
- Or, if you haven't got a PC, just plainly written on paper which can be typed up

For your information, the magazine for the remainder of the year is due on: 31st Aug; 5th Oct; 2nd Nov & 30th Nov

ESSENTIAL NOTE: In order to meet these deadlines, all contributions should be submitted ***NO LATER THAN the WEDNESDAY*** of the week in which the magazine will be published.

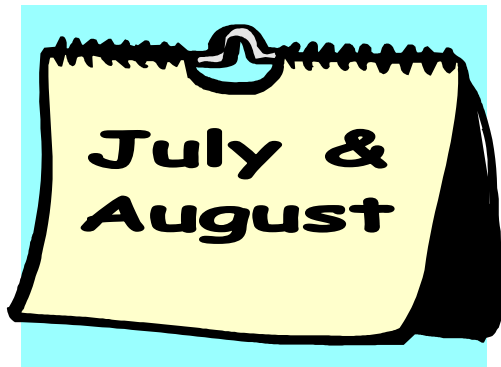
Hope you all manage to get a break over the summer period, and I will be back with you for September issue

Your Editor

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Worship Theme for 2008: Walk Through The Lectionary



Introduction

A Lectionary is a list of Scripture readings assigned to the various days in the Church Calendar. These readings are set according to the major events in the life of Christ and his Church (known as liturgical seasons), which are retold each year by the Church Calendar. As the year progresses, worshippers get the opportunity to celebrate the Advent of Christ, relive his transfiguration, his temptation in the wilderness, and his passion,

triumphant resurrection and glorious ascension; they're also able to relive the dramatic events that accompanied the pouring out of the Holy Spirit at the formation of the Church, as well as to honour the memory of saints who have died, and so forth.

When our worship is shaped by the use of a lectionary, it allows us to journey through the Scriptures in a systematic way, and to become a part of a tradition that has shaped the life and witness of the Christian Church for centuries. This year, as we walk through the pages of the lectionary, it is my prayer that we will encounter the Word of God in new and challenging ways; that the Scriptures will come alive, transforming us by its life-giving power; and that, importantly, we'll see the continued relevance of the Bible to the issues we all face today as citizens of the 21st Century.

Daily Prayer Time

Mon-Fri 9.30 am

Sat 10.30am

Services (10.30 am & 6.00pm and will be led by Rev Norman Francis unless otherwise stated)

July

5 th	am	11.00am	Saturday Praise (Praise, Prayer & Reflection)
6 th	am		Ask the average person
	pm		Communion
13 th	am	Good news for the tenant farmers	Baptism of Bethan Thorpe
	pm	Karen Brusch	
20 th	am	Weed-pulling	Communion
	pm	Joint Service at St Mary's, Witney	
27 th	am	The problem with finding the kingdom	
	pm	Beryl Cartwright	

Aug

2 nd	am	11.00am	Saturday Praise (Praise, Prayer & Reflection)
3 rd	am	All-Age Worship	Such sweet sorrow
10 th	am	Judi Holloway	
	pm	Evening Worship	
17 th	am	Judi Holloway	Communion
	pm	Evening Worship	
24 th	am	Judi Holloway	
	pm	Widford (St Oswald)	
31 st	am	Karen Brusch	
	pm	Madley Park Residential Home	



Sept

6 th	am	11.00am	Saturday Praise (Praise, Prayer & Reflection)
7 th	am	tba	
	pm	Karen Brusch	Communion

The following events in July & August are given for your particular attention:

July

1 st	Deacon's Meeting		
8 th	Seniors Outing	2.00pm	Woodford Way - outside of car park
12 th	Prayer Chain meeting	9.15am	
15 th	Church Meeting	7.30pm	
17 th	Fellowship Group	2.30pm	9 Pens Close
20 th	Meditation	7.30pm	
24 th	Pins & Needles	7.30pm	
25 th	Hi5's Walk/Games	7.00pm	
29 th	Elms Day Centre service	1.30pm	

Aug

2 nd	Christian Aid Cake & Coffee morning at High St Methodist	10.00-12.00	
3 rd	Lunch & farewell fellowship	12noon - 3.00pm	
9 th	Prayer Chain meeting	9.15am	
17 th	Sunday Diners		
21 st	Fellowship Group	2.30pm	9 Pens Close
22 nd	Hi5's BBQ	6.00pm	

Sep

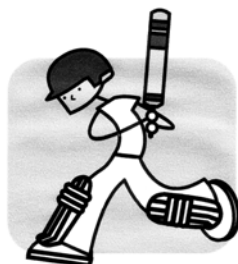
2 nd	Deacon's Meeting		
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HI 5's WALK AND GAMES

FRIDAY 25 JULY

7.00pm



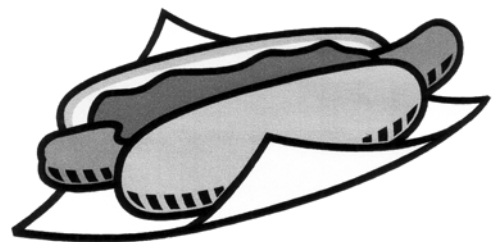
Meet at Church Car Park

Hi5's BARBECUE

FRIDAY 22 AUGUST

6.00pm

IN THE CHURCH GARDEN



Come along and join us!!

Minister's Letter

The Miracle of Change!

Dear Friends,

Can you believe it? After four years and some forty issues of Cornerstone, I am now writing my last Minister's letter to you. What does one say in such a letter? As I thought long and hard about this question, I decided that, rather than "blow my own trumpet," as so many are wont to do at the conclusion of their ministry, I would instead, share with you just how much your lives have impacted mine as together we shared ministry in this community.

When I arrived in Witney four years ago, I was brimming with excitement at the prospects of charting a new future - I had grand dreams, bold visions and creative ideas. But there was just one problem - I hadn't taken the time to understand the peculiarities of the context before I embarked on my campaign to "change the world"! I soon noticed that when I looked over my shoulder, very few persons were following, and I learned very quickly that, even with the very best of intentions, a leader must first invest him- or herself in building relationships and earning trust before embarking on grandiose schemes that will affect the familiar things in people's life. This is a lesson that would change me and the way I practiced ministry.

And so, in the months and years that followed, I have gotten to know many of you so much better and I have grown because of that. Now, when I look over my shoulder, I see a very different

picture. I see people who are now poised to take on the future with excitement; to do exploits for God; and to make this congregation a place where others can see the very face of God and experience his unconditional love and abundant grace in the quality of our relationships.

And so, in the end, instead of the world being changed through my ambitious designs and elaborate plans, I was the one who, in fact, ended up being changed. Thank you for the valuable lessons you've taught me; the useful insights you've imparted; the many opportunities for growth that I've been afforded. But above all, I thank you for the immense privilege of having been able to serve you. You are truly God's gift to this community. May God continue to bless you richly in all your future endeavours.

Yours in Christ,
Norman O. Francis

No one is born hating another person
because of the colour of his skin,
or his background,
or his religion.

Hatred is learnt.

And if people can be taught to hate,
they can be taught to love,
because love comes more naturally.

Nelson Mandela

The following Bible Study series has been submitted by Rev Norman Francis, and is entitled:

Dangerous Praying

Part 11: For God's People

Review

In the last module, we examined the phrase "*always keep on praying*," and said that it can have several meanings. It can mean "pray regularly," *i.e.*, at specific times of the day. It can mean "pray in every kind of situation or context." And it can literally mean "pray without ceasing," *i.e.*, "never to give up," but to "persevere in prayer"!

Introduction (6:18-20)

Though prayer has many languages and is found in many different human contexts, it embraces all who are part of God's family. Wherever we live and whatever our ethnic background, we are part of the Body of Christ. In him, the differences between us are transcended (Eph 2:19; 4:3-4). We, therefore, ought to be committed to respect and care for others in the church (1Cor 12-14), and prayer plays a critical role in achieving this. Thus, Paul exhorts us to...

Pray Always for God's People (6:18)

William Barclay once said, "I think that often our prayers are too much for ourselves and too little for others. We must learn to pray as much *for* others and *with* others as for ourselves." The story is told of a young woman - an only child - who was heard praying one day. "Lord," she said, "I'm not going to pray for

myself today; I am going to pray for others." But at the end of her prayer she added, "And give my mother a handsome son-in-law!" We just can't seem to end a prayer without asking for something for ourselves.

But here, in our text, Paul is calling on us to give up the tendency to be excessively preoccupied with our own concerns and instead, to pray for countless millions! He says in v. 18: "...*be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.*" Why should we do this? Prayer is a priceless gift and a matchless opportunity. The future of the world is in God's hands, and that future is bound up with the future of God's people (Rom 8: 18-22). Prayer transforms people, pressures, problems, situations and relationships. It has unlimited power because its only limit is an infinite God. So in praying for God's people we will be participating with him in fulfilling his purposes for the world.

Prayer builds relationships. The Jews used to say, "Let a man unite himself with the community in his prayers." Positive relationships help motivate us to pray. When we pray *for* people as well as *with* them, relationships are formed, developed and strengthened. Prayer is itself a form of relationship. It includes thanking God for those we are praying for, forgiving them (or asking for their forgiveness), seeking to understand their needs, desiring their well-being and their place in the purposes of God, as well as interceding directly for them.

Through prayer, our lives become interlocked.

Praying for all God's people develops those who pray. Prayer for those we know builds our faith as we see God bring blessing into their lives. Meanwhile, prayer for those further afield helps build stamina for the work of the kingdom and increases our awareness of the vastness of God's purposes.

Finally, praying for all God's people saves us from becoming egocentric or narrow-minded. We are all inclined to relate well to those we like. Becoming caught up with others helps us to appreciate more fully the intricacies of the whole Body of Christ. In doing so, we begin to understand and experience the purposes of God. We become more generous with our money and our time. We grow in our desire to share our faith and gain a greater sense of the dynamics of the Great Commission. In other words, praying for all God's people promotes the health of the Body of Christ, individually and collectively.

In the face of the vast array of the needs of others, we can avoid becoming overwhelmed if we take note of how Jesus sends out his disciples in Acts 1:8. Here Jesus commissions his disciples to witness for him, first "*in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*" Notice the progression: they were to begin where they were (Jerusalem); next the gospel was to be taken throughout the province in which

Jerusalem was located (Judea); still further away was the neighbouring province of Samaria; then finally, to "*the ends of the earth,*" felt at that time to have been Rome.

This pattern provides us with a good model for our own prayers: we can begin right where we are, the people and situations we are involved with, and move out from there. As we do, we will find that our prayers for our own context will help us know how to pray for the wider world.

Do you think that Paul's instruction to "*keep on praying for all the saints,*" means that we should only pray for fellow Christians in our time? There were Christians before us and there will be Christians after us. I believe that prayer for all God's people must include what the writer to the Hebrew calls "*a great cloud of witnesses*" that surround us (Heb 12:1) - i.e., those who are now dead. I believe we can pray meaningfully for them by giving thanks to God for them just as fully and as freely as for those who are alive. Whether the focus of our prayers is a great Christian like Paul or someone in our own family; whether they are recently dead or have been for a thousand years, they are part of the fullness of God's gift too. Such prayers will give us a growing appreciation of the saints who have gone before us and the inheritance they have handed on to us.

But what about coming generations? In Revelation 8:1-5 we read: "*When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half*

an hour. And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets. Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all the saints, on the golden altar before the throne. The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel's hand. Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth; and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake."

This passage seems to suggest that God gathers together the prayers of his people, implying that prayers offered now can be applied in the future. It seems reasonable to me, therefore, that we can pray for those who are not yet born. If our prayers can transcend distance, surely they can transcend time.

Pray Also for Me (6:19-20)

Paul's prayers are both majestic and intimate: he knows God's awesome power, yet enjoys a close relationship with God. In the new churches across the Mediterranean, in Ephesus and elsewhere, were people struggling with their pagan background and immorality, quarrelling among themselves, getting their faith all wrong. Yet Paul, this great prayer warrior, does not despise their prayers. "*Pray also for me,*" he asks them time and again.

If Paul is here asking for prayer for himself, then presumably it is only reasonable that we too should be willing to ask others to pray for us, whoever we are. Some people think they can cope without prayer, but it is important to remember that we are not meant to be spiritual "Lone Rangers." Asking for prayer serves to remind us that, individually, we are part of the Body of Christ. We can't do anything without our Head and we can't do much without the rest of the Body (1Cor 12). Without God we are helpless, and we need others to pray for us so that we are empowered to live for Christ and be his faithful witness, especially in presenting the gospel (Eph 6:20).

As we read the account of Paul's missionary journeys in Acts, and follow his correspondence, the last thing most of us would have expected was that he needed prayer for boldness in his presentation of the gospel. Whether debating with learned philosophers in Athens, facing a hostile mob in Ephesus, dealing with dangerous criminals in Philippi, or coping with an over-enthusiastic crowd in Lystra, he always seems confident, composed and compelling in his expression of the Good News of Jesus. Neither weariness nor the strength of opposition seems to faze him in the slightest. But it often is the case that at the very place where a person appears strong and extraordinarily successful is also the place where he or she struggles and feels vulnerable.

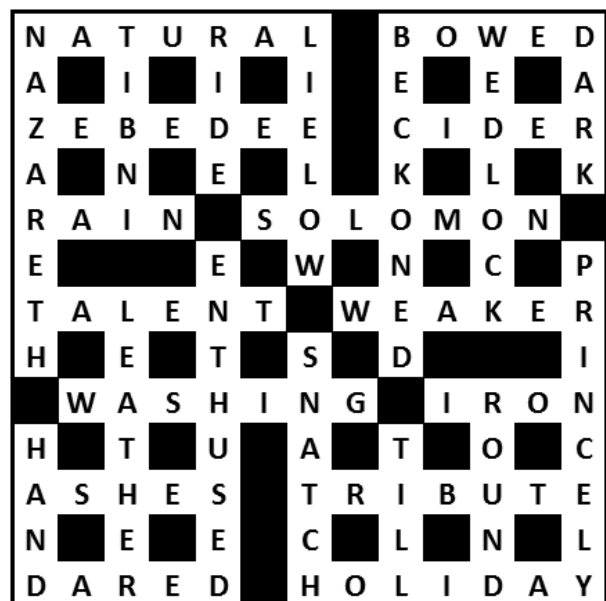
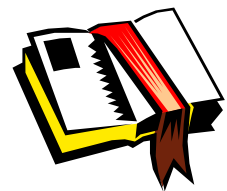
In this way, God *always* gets the glory. This means that when anyone becomes a Christian, the glory is God's; when anyone overcomes temptation, the glory is God's; when anyone is helped, healed or comforted, the glory is God's; when anyone gives their life in martyrdom, the glory is God's; when anyone sacrificially devotes themselves to serving others, the glory is God's; when anyone edifies other Christians by using their spiritual gifts unselfishly, the glory is God's.

"But this precious treasure—this light and power that now shine within us," Paul says in 2Cor 4:7, *"is held in perishable containers, that is, in our weak bodies. So everyone can see that our glorious power is from God and is not our own"* (NLT).

Asking for prayer requires that we let people nearer to our heart than we may find comfortable. It requires a degree of honesty with our own feelings. Rick Warren, in his book, *The Purpose Driven Life*, says, "Authentic fellowship is not superficial, surface-level chit-chat. It is genuine, heart to heart, sometimes gut-level, sharing. It happens when people get honest about who they (really) are and (about) what is happening in their lives. They share their hurts, reveal their feelings, confess their failures, disclose their doubts, admit their fears, acknowledge their weaknesses, and ask for help and prayer." This level of disclosure and vulnerability allows God to build us together into a living wall instead of remaining disjointed pile of bricks.

But this, according to Warren "is the exact opposite of what you find in some churches. Instead of an atmosphere of honesty and humility, there is (a lot of) pretending, role-playing...superficial politeness (and) shallow conversation. People wear masks, keep their guard up, and act as if everything is rosy in their lives. These attitudes are the death of real fellowship"

We should not hesitate, then, to seek the prayer support of others. We need never be ashamed to say, "Pray for me." As we see the prayers of others for us answered, we will experience real joy. With the power of prayer behind us, we will find that God accomplishes for us far more than we ever dared to imagine.



June answers



News around the world

The following information has been taken from CWM Website dated 27th June, so is up to date at the editing of this month's magazine

Jamaica: A pastor for seafarers

In the port city of Jamaica, a port chaplain is required to be part diplomat, part minister and part lawyer, reports the *Jamaican Gleaner*.

United Church in Jamaica Portmore minister, Rev L Christopher Mason, 44, has been doing extensive ministry at the Port of Kingston for seven years. "I have found it very rewarding," he said. "You don't see the same people everyday. It is not the same routine everyday."

The United Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands has offered a voluntary chaplaincy service to the Port of Kingston and other ports in the country for more than 40 years.

Mason said sailors recruited to work on ships are often drawn from poverty-stricken circumstances and are often given extremely low wages. Sometimes when they arrive in Jamaica, they have been at sea for many months with little or no contact with their families in their homeland.

Furthermore, they have little sense of what is happening in the news - in their homeland and the wider world. It is against that background that the work of port chaplains is particularly crucial and meaningful to these seafarers. "We port chaplains are their only source of contact with the rest of the world when they come into port," he

said. "We try and contact their families. We give encouragement. We speak hope to them. We also try to deal with the problems they might have with the shipping companies, and the contracts they might have."

The challenges in port chaplaincy are diverse. From sailors being stranded in foreign countries to helping crews get visas and safe passage documentation to leave Jamaica.

Sometimes too, he said, the seafarers are stranded in Jamaica and have not been paid for a long time. In those circumstances, the port chaplain assists with the welfare needs including sourcing food by knocking on the doors of shipping companies, churches, embassies, and the private sector.

Zimbabwe: Student leader begs UN for intervention

Zimbabwe Student Christian Movement general secretary Prosper Munatsi yesterday asked for help from the international church community and the United Nations during a visit to Swaziland.

He had hoped to visit Geneva last week to offer his testimony about the unfolding political and humanitarian crisis in Zimbabwe at the UN Human Rights Council.

Instead, he was jailed in Zimbabwe after police and security forces raided the Harare Ecumenical Centre, where several Christian groups have their offices, on 9 June. His prison experience and first-hand knowledge of the situation in Zimbabwe is causing him to call for the elections to be postponed and for some form of international intervention.

Although he had been imprisoned for a longer period before, his 24-hour stay in jail last week "was terrifying", he says.

Munatsi's depiction of the Harare prison where he and several other members of Christian organisations were detained resembles a snapshot of the country's situation.

"The violence is really out of hand", Munatsi said. "Right now, the election observers sent by the international community are observing the killings," Munatsi said.

"Under the current conditions, the election must be postponed and the international community must intervene to stop this violence and madness, and the war that has been waged against the innocent and defenceless people of Zimbabwe."

But Munatsi is not afraid of going back. "Mugabe cannot kill the whole of Zimbabweans", he said.

"We need to be brave enough and work for the people" so they can live free and "enjoy their Godly given rights".

Pacific: Churches unite to stop violence

Churches around the world will pray for the peoples of the Pacific as the World Council of Churches initiative against violence focuses attention on the region this year. Pacific churches themselves will work together on how best to promote peace in their communities.

Inspired by the theme *Witnessing to the peace of God in Oceania*, a number of activities and events are to take place in the coming months.

A youth campaign will be run to promote peace and non-violence, during the Congregational Christian Church in

American Samoa General Assembly along with the 10th Festival of Pacific Arts in American Samoa (20 July - 2 August 2008).

A "Pacific stories of peace art competition" encourages young people to define peace in the Pacific through artwork.

The best works will be featured in a 2009 *Overcoming Violence* calendar. The deadline for submissions is 31 October 2008. See additional information at overcomingviolence.org

On 9-15 July, church representatives from all over the world will meet in Fiji to plan the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation, due to take place in Jamaica in 2011.

Simultaneously, the World Council of Churches general secretary Rev Dr Samuel Kobia will visit churches in Tahiti, Fiji, Tonga and Samoa.

Nauru: Church leaders worry for island's future

Leaders from the CWM-member Nauru Congregational Church are waiting to see the long-term impact of the closure of the Australian detention centre for asylum seekers on the island.

The detention centre, which closed in March 2008, was a lifeline for the tiny island, which was virtually bankrupt in 2001.

CWM deputy moderator Winnie Tsitsi said the closure would affect hundreds of employees. "We will know in the next few months what the real impact of the closure will be. The biggest problem will be the unemployment," she said.

"The ones who are hardest hit are those who were working in hospitality. One woman worked at a hotel accommodating

Australian officials. After the centre closed she and 40 others were handed their termination notices.

People working for the Australian government in administration and skilled roles had found new jobs abroad, Tsitsi said.

"Many of the people working for the Australian government were chosen because they were skilled and capable. Now, many of them have taken other government jobs. Some have stayed with the Australian government and others have gone into private business," she said. For the greater part of the 20th century the island was wealthy thanks to a booming trade in phosphate mining. But the nation's money ran out shortly after the phosphate was exhausted, a result of a string of bad investment decisions. With virtually no tourist trade, the island's government put its hand up to process applications for asylum to Australia.

"In the beginning it was controversial," Tsitsi said. "It was a big cultural difference because they were mostly from the Middle East and to come to the Pacific was a big change. Nauruans are very open to others and friendly, but the refugees were not like that at all and they were also going through a very frightening experience."

For the moment Nauru is making the most of the infrastructure left behind by the Australian government, the cars and vehicles have been left to the Nauru government and the buildings once used for housing refugees have been transformed into schools and government offices.



The following article has been extracted from Church News Service, and is entitled:

Olympic determination

The Olympics, Mexico, 1968: a ground of diehard spectators lingered in the Olympic stadium, watching the last finishers of the marathon. An hour before, Mamo Wolde of Ethiopia had won. It was getting cold and dark and the remaining spectators were beginning to leave when suddenly they heard the sound of sirens and police whistles coming into the stadium. As they watched in amazement, one last runner made his way onto the track for the last lap of the 26-mile race. It was John Stephen Akhwari of Tanzania.

As he ran the 400-metre circuit, people saw that his leg was bandaged and bleeding. He had fallen and injured it during the race, but he refused to let it stop him completely. Suddenly the people remaining in the stadium rose (some in tears) and applauded him until he crossed the finishing line. As he finally hobbled away, he was asked why he had not quit since he had no chance of winning a medal.

He said simply: "My country did not send me to Mexico City to start the race, they sent me here to finish it!"

What an attitude! He looked beyond the pain of the moment and kept his eye on the purpose for which he was there.

Next month at the Olympics, China will be full of athletes, all determined to finish their race.

As Christians, we are also called to finish the race before us. To fulfill God's particular calling for us.



The Mailing

Congregational Federation

Issue 2008/06

Bringing together independent free churches for mutual support through a vision of unity in creative diversity

Latest news and resources available from the Congregational Federation

Forthcoming Events

July

Pastoral Care Board Vocation days 4/5
Training Weekend Foundation level 11/13

August

CWME Conference - Window on the World 11/16
Investment Trust & Trading Board 20
Gofrit Summer Camp 27/30

September

Pastoral Care Board 3

Congregational Federation

Travelling Together
to bring



in our villages, towns & cities

Special points of interest:

- Congregational Churches of Myanmar
- CF President to head up CWM Europe
- Great success at Longleat Pilots day
- Help with Sprouting Churches
- News round up

Gift and Prayers for Myanmar

The Federation Assembly when it met in Plymouth responded to the cry from the Congregational Churches of Myanmar who had experienced devastation following the recent cyclone.

CCM General Secretary Elvis Sa Do had written the following plea to CF General Secretary Michael Heaney *"Dear brother. As you know the storm has been killed many souls. My church members badly required the funds for relief effort. Please pray for us. I hope we will receive your help. As my place and mission fields were most terrible places and I can not express fully about how we need the food and water, shelter.*

Assembly passed an emergency recommendation to offer solidarity support with Congregational Churches of Myanmar and to send a gift of £1,000. This amount was supplemented by other gifts received from Federation Churches.

The relief work will take a long time to restore essential services, and for many the effect of the loss of loved ones will take even longer. Sa Do responded to our gifts with the following message *"As you know, our relief and reconstructions shall be long*



terms as the needs are so big. As they lost all properties including farms, children and parent, they need spiritually, physically and mentally your prayers. We are grateful to you and your people for all concerns, as they did good work for Christ. We sent our love and prayers. Please, convey my thanks and regards to them."



Wayne Hawkins to be new CWM European Region Mission Enabler

What a busy time for new CF President Rev Wayne Hawkins. In addition to being inducted as President for 2008/9 his family had an addition just days before the Assembly with the birth of his second son Samuel Joseph. Shortly afterwards he was confirmed as the

new CWME Mission Enabler to take up the post recently vacated by Francis Brien. This role based in London begins in September. Wayne and family will continue to live in Southam when his ministry concludes then at the Congregational Church.



'Sprouting Churches' has sprouted



Becky Hartwell's new manual for churches is now available.

Attractively produced and full of practical tips and inspiring

stories, it is free on request to Federation churches.

'Sprouting Churches' can help any church start new work with under 18's – including those who feel out of touch with this age group.

To obtain your church's free copy, please contact the Youth and Children's Office:
rose.heaney@congregational.org.uk
tel. 0115 9111 466.



'Safer Still' New Members of Disclosure Panel - From time to time the Federation's protection procedures require us to assess information from a criminal records check.

These sensitive cases are presented in anonymous form to an assessment panel.

We are seeking to recruit additional members for this safeguarding role. We should especially welcome recruits with a legal or child protection background and those from Wales or Scotland.

For further information, please contact Revd Stephen Haward, Director of Youth and Children's Work,
stephen.haward@congregational.org.uk
tel. 0115 9111 452.

Caring for Creation

Window on the World - is a holiday conference organised by the European Region of the Council for World Mission, taking place on 4-10 August 2008. At Window on the World Christians of all ages can meet people from the world church, learn more about God's mission and grow in faith. Not too late to book £50 subsidy to all members of CF Churches. Do ask for a booking form.



Lord Bath welcomes the Pilots to Longleat

Over 2000 Pilots and family members from CF and URC/Methodists churches descended on Longleat Wiltshire as featured on BBC's Animal Park in May for a superb day of fun and games in a truly Christian atmosphere.

The Federation was well represented with General Secretary Michael Heaney and CF President Wayne Hawkins and their families meeting up with Pilots from CF Churches far and wide including Walkden, Steeple Bumpstead, Newcastle under Lyme, and Tillicoultry in

Scotland.

What impressed Michael in addition to the excellent organisation of the day by the Pilots team was to see so many youngsters, their family members and leaders having such great fun in a non threatening but clearly Christian setting.

Michael said "I am convinced that Pilots provides a superb resource for our churches working with the children of our communities, one which I believe is sadly underutilised."

Lord Bath was on hand to meet with the Pilots and welcome them to Longleat. Michael Heaney took the opportunity of speaking with him about Horningsham Congregational Church which is a part of the Estate.



News round up

Racial Justice Sunday - has been observed on the second Sunday in September for some thirteen years. This year it falls on Sunday 14th September. Each year excellent material is produced to help churches focus on racial justice and celebrate their diversity. This year the title is 'A banquet for all peoples' (Isaiah 25 vs. 6-9). For all the details visit the excellent new CTBI website at www.ctbi.org.uk/racialjusticesunday

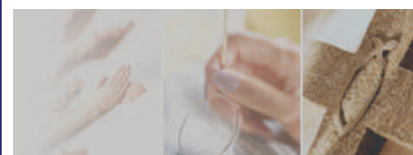
Sea Sunday - This is to be celebrated on 13 July this year. A good number of CF Churches in England, Wales and Scotland are on the coast so this Sunday is especially relevant for them. Free resources are available from the

Sailors Society in Southampton. Full details are with Church Secretaries

The Federation needs you!

Children's Advocate
Confident and committed people currently working with children in a Congregational Federation church are being sought to speak for children where decisions are made.
Youth Representative

Confident, committed, assertive people aged 16-26 in fellowship with a Congregational Federation Church are being sought to strengthen the voice of young people where decision are made.
Full details are with Church Secretaries.



The Congregational Federation

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Visit the Website for more copies of this Mailing and much more at www.congregational.org.uk

The following article, re the discussion group, has been submitted by Peter Gamston, and is entitled:

Food For The Fed-Up

Although the current theme of the discussion group remains the topic 'Who is Christ for us Today?' this month we made something of a diversion. Having introduced the theme with some of his poetry I wanted to discuss the more explicit Christology of The Rev. G. A. Studdert Kennedy M.A., M.C. This is from his Sermons on the Apostles' Creed, Published In England Under The Title Of "Food For The Fed-Up" (1928). This is, however such a remarkable (and I'm sure controversial) book that I felt I needed to ground his Christology in the context from which I have taken it. This digression is therefore my paraphrasing and précis of that context - that of his unique, outspoken and personal thoughts on the Apostle's Creed, beginning with his thoughts on Creeds in general.

Kennedy's argument is that the terms of reference in which our whole Christian theology is framed are largely irrelevant to the modern world-view or mind. Not everyone will agree with him, but I hope all may find much of interest and at least something of value. Certainly his is not a timid apologetic, and whatever was true in 1928 is not less so today. He writes ...

We are living for the sensation of the moment, and it is profoundly unsatisfying. It is like trying to live on fancy cakes - little bits of God knows what with cherries on top, pure sensations without satisfaction. You cannot live on them. You must have bread and butter, solid food; if you try a diet of fancy cakes you get fed up, which means you are still hungry,

but can't eat. We have been trying it on. We have in these post-war days a sensational press, a sensational stage, sensational dress, sensational literature, and sensational everything else, except sensational souls, and the consequence is that our daily lives are as dull as the daily press. They are full of murders, divorces, bloody massacres, and monotony... We are fed up...

But as one surveys the whole drama of history it does seem to be enormously probable that Christ was right, and that the other name for that great Power which moves behind all things is Love, and that God is working out down the ages the purpose of Brotherhood. From our point of view He is working it out appallingly slowly and painfully, it seems still to be miles and miles away. The idea of progress in and through Christ is, I believe, the most powerful and man-moving reality in the world to-day, and I believe that we have in Christ a rational right to look upwards and onwards and to, see the New Jerusalem coming down from Heaven adorned as a bride for her husband. That is our objective...

We are 'fed up' with creeds and formulas. We suspect them. What difference do they make? What does it matter what a man believes so long as he does what is right? It is not your creed but your conduct I am concerned with. You can believe what you like, you can be a Roman Catholic or a Plymouth Brother... a Calvinistic Confucian with leanings towards Buddhism if you like, so long as you pay your debts. Creeds don't count; it is doing right that matters. That is the common point of view. It sounds well, and is nonsense... It does not express thought, only feeling. It is doing right that matters; but what is Right? What

ought we to do? What is our duty as men and women? A man does right when he fulfils the purpose of his life, but what is its purpose? ... 'We need to love our enemies' Why do we need that? You cannot answer that question unless you have a creed. You cannot really answer any question involving right and wrong unless you have a creed, a belief about life's final purpose and the meaning of the world.

All men act upon their real creed. It may not be the creed that they profess, because they may be liars or hypocrites--most men are both more or less... The only thing that really does matter is what god a man worships and believes in... You must have a god or gods. Your god is what you live for, and you must live for something, if it is only your dinner. If you live for your dinner, then your god is your belly, and a very common god too. The most popular creed is still the one with which the human race began, the belief in many gods. Men are naturally polytheists. They tend to believe in and worship anything that touches them, grips them, possesses them, and lifts them out of themselves. Men have destroyed the temples of Bacchus, but they worship the Wine God still; they have thrown down the shrines of Venus, but millions believe in Lust; they have broken the images of Mars, but still his hoarse voice calls the nations out to slay and still his fever, War Fever, turns men into beasts. Christ has won the churches, but the old gods hold the streets.

The instinct of the world is right in rejecting purely formal creeds and dogmas as of no importance. Of course they are of no importance. Purely formal *anythings* are of no importance. Purely formal five-pound notes would be of no

importance. But real five-pound notes are of great importance... To throw out the reality because the form is in itself of no importance, is pouring out the baby with the bathwater. Of course the form is in itself of no importance, and while creeds are only forms they are purely silly. But creeds must have a form - like everything else in this odd world. They must find expression somehow. Like every other spiritual thing, they must have a material *symbol* of some sort. That is the best name ever given to creeds, and it is a pity we did not stick to it. They are 'symbols' of Truth. Symbols, mind you, not exhaustive statements. There isn't such a thing existing as an exhaustive statement of final Truth. We don't know it yet, and therefore cannot state it... that is why creeds and dogmas are ridiculous as expressions, but wonderful as symbols. All dogmas are poetry, and can only be understood and criticised as poetry as an endeavour to symbolise what cannot be stated... The brevity of the form is deceptive. It is taken as the brevity of careful prose, when it really is the brevity of lyric poetry. You know what I mean; Poetry does not say what it means, it hints at it. So do creeds. They are absurd as statements, but superb as symbols. You must have them, you must have dogmas. Undogmatic teaching is the driest, dullest, dreariest thing in the world. It is teaching minus conviction.

I believe in God the Father : The Christian is an Optimist, and believes that at its heart the world is good. It is well to get that fixed for a start, because there are those who reject Christianity to-day as being a pessimistic faith, and they have some reason on their side. I am sure that the plain Christian Creed has never been pessimistic. These brave words: 'I believe in God the Father

Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth,' shout out defiance of pessimism. Yet it cannot be denied that theologians have so misinterpreted and twisted the meaning of the great challenge that it has appeared as if men were really called upon to believe in the pessimistic lie that this world is bone bad, and that the most we can expect is that God will save a remnant of its teeming millions from a lost and ruined universe, and that all the rest must be cast for ever into the eternal furnace where their worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched. It cannot be denied that any amount of Christian theology and philosophy is based upon that idea. The whole cycle of doctrines that surround the 'Fall of Man,' 'Original Sin,' 'Eternal Punishment,' 'Propitiation,' and the 'Sacrifice of the Cross,' have been, and still are, so stated as to give the impression, not indeed that God made the world bone bad - but that at some point in time the world that God made good met with an awful disaster and fell under a curse which turned it from a garden of glorious flowers into a wilderness of weeds, from which man was doomed to wring subsistence by the toil of his hands and the sweat of his brow, and in that awful state it remained until Christ came with His offer of salvation for those who would accept. And, moreover, even this offer has been made to mean not that He came to retrieve the ruin of the world, but to save the elect from that hopeless ruin and preserve them for life in the world to come. Salvation was put off until after death. This world of sunshine, sea, and flowers remains a splendid ruin, the monument of a past without a future. That has been the idea behind a tremendous amount of Christian teaching; it is pessimistic, and I feel...that it is blasphemous and absurd.

Christian theology has been, and is still often ghastly wrong, but what I maintain is that the Christian religion, the intuitive faith which is the fire behind its creeds, has always been supremely right. (Today)...We simply can't believe in this utter disaster that came upon the world in the Fall, the Flood, the Ransom paid to the Powers of Evil, and the propitiation of God's just wrath. It lies right outside reality for most of us, and there is no good tinkering with it. It is all an effort to face facts with such knowledge as its authors had at their command, and it is impossible for us to bring ourselves back into the atmosphere of their minds. We can't do it. Why? What change has come over us? Well, the fact of the matter is, that there has been born to us an idea, not a really new idea, but an idea which has been coming to birth all down the ages, and with which the mind of man has been travailing for centuries. It is the idea of Progress. Whether or not the world is now progressing is a very debatable question, and it certainly is impossible to prove to demonstration that it is. But that is not the real point. The real point is that it has become impossible for us to think of the world except in terms of motion, just as impossible as it is to think of it except in terms of cause and effect.

The idea of Progress, although individuals among the ancients may have had it in their minds, is essentially a modern idea, and *the* essential modern idea. It has filtered through from the study to the street, and has taken hold, not merely of the intellectual, but of the ordinary man... an essentially modern idea, for on the whole the ancients did tend to regard Time as the enemy... That is the change.

The idea of motion or movement has taken hold of us, gripped us, and we cannot get away from it, and we have an intuitive conviction that it is vitally important. It may in time prove to be an inadequate idea, but we are convinced that it will never be proved to be a false idea. It has got into our very blood and bones, and, of course, it has got into our religion. In spite of tremendous efforts to keep it out, it has become perfectly plain that either we must admit it, and interpret God, - the Christian God, in terms of progress and movement, or else force people to find a new god.

It is of no avail for men to write books to show that the idea of Progress is largely an assumption, a pure hypothesis. It may be, but it has proved such an inspiring and fruitful hypothesis, that men simply cannot afford to give it up except for something nobler and better, and that is not forthcoming. The alternative that Christian theology offers hasn't a dog's chance. Christian theology of the orthodox sort, that is the sort that clings not merely to the spirit, but to the letter of the Church's formularies... God conceived of in terms of absolute Monarchy... the Great King Who administers justice, and maintains order in a static finished world, distributes His favours to whom He pleases, ordaining the lives of men according to His Will... the God of battles, who ...made this earth as a training ground for a future life, and at His pleasure He will destroy it, fill up the number of His elect... damn all rebels to Hell, and reign supreme in Heaven. It is all worked out in metaphors belonging to another age and another political system. Men thought in those days in terms of Providence and Security; we think in terms of Progress and Adventure. They

thought in terms of Despotism, and we think in terms of Democracy and Self-Government. It is not so much that this presentation is untrue to us, it is worse; it is unreal, it is chimerical, it is the stuff that dreams are made of, and romances of a bygone day. It is like a love story of the time of Alfred the Great, vaguely interesting, but not convincing. We cannot get there. It is all static. This world as finished, complete, and the only change we have to contemplate is the change from this world to another. To us this world is moving, growing; it is not finished, it is on a journey; it is part of something much larger than itself, which is all changing, all growing, with a growth in which we all share. We cannot get away from this idea of growth; it is in the very air we breathe, and it was not in the air our fathers breathed; they never really grasped it at all.

The point we have to think on is this. Does this idea mean that we must abandon the old Creed, abandon Christ as the Saviour of the World, or can we interpret the Creed in terms of the great idea? I believe we can and must. I believe that the new idea comes from God, that it is new light which brings out the essential meaning of Christ's teaching much more fairly and fully than the old could ever do. It lights up this whole question of evil and of good. The world is moving; every soul is moving, growing - where to? that is the essential point to decide.

This radical thought leads into his section of 'I believe' beginning *...And in Jesus...* which is where we will pick it up next month. Please do not come expecting a comfortable ride of conventional orthodoxy !



PRAYER LETTER No 124

**'There is a time for everything
And a season for everything under heaven:
A time to plant and a time to uproot,'**

Ecclesiastes 3: 1,2b

This is a time of moving on, looking ahead. As things move on, changes will occur, some to challenge, some to encourage.

New pastures

Pray for our young people as over the summer as they prepare to move on to new classes, courses, schools and university. Pray that God will be with them and guide them in their opportunities and challenges they will encounter.

Thank God for the opportunities of worship, study and fellowship we have had with Norman and Karen. Thank God for their knowledge, teaching and ministry they have shared with us during their time in Witney. Pray for them as they prepare to move to Edinburgh for further study and work. May God continue to guide them and use them for his service.

Thank God for leading Jason Boyd and his family to us. Pray for Jason in the coming months as he completes his work in Cumnock and for all the preparation needed in the move from Scotland to Witney. Pray for Vivienne and the children as they anticipate the move too.

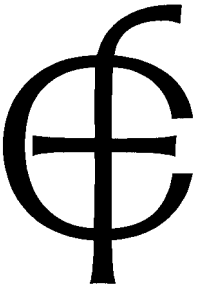
Pray for our Church that in the period of the Interregnum we will all work together not only in maintaining our Fellowship but encouraging one another in our continual growth of life as a Christian Community.

Bind us together, Lord,
Bind us together with
Cords that cannot be broken,

Bind us together, Lord,
Bind us together,
Bind us together in love.

God Bless you all,
Beryl

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



Rev Wayne Hawkins
Presidential Address May 10th 2008 at Plymouth

“A Place to Belong.”

Bible reading **John 1:29-42**

An anthropologist was travelling around the world filming tribal dances when he heard of a mystic Australian Aboriginal ceremony called the Butcher Dance. The dance had never been seen by outsiders before so the anthropologist travelled to the Australian outback to try and film it. It turns out that the Butcher Dance is only performed in one remote settlement, so the anthropologist put together an expedition and the group drove into the bush. Bad luck strikes the expedition when their petrol tank is punctured forcing them to walk. They walk for days and days and the expedition members gradually drop through exhaustion, sun-stroke and thirst. Finally only the anthropologist is left struggling along with his camera. He too has enough and collapses in the dust. That evening he wakes to find that he's been rescued. He's in a tribal encampment and is delighted when he discovers that his saviours are the very tribe that perform the fabled Butcher Dance. It turns out that the Butcher Dance is usually performed only once every ten years but since the anthropologist has suffered so much the tribal elders agree to put on a performance especially for him. The anthropologist sets up his camera and the tribal dancers get into a circle. The tribal chief claps his hands, the anthropologist starts recording, and the Aborigines start their mystic dance, “You butcher left arm in. You butcher left arm out. In. Out...”

Jesus asked the people who were following him, “What are you looking for?” That could quite easily have been the title given to this address today but that would have only given me a place to begin. Now I have never been chased down the road by two young men – well, not recently – but if I had been my first question would not be, “What are you looking for?” It might be, “What do you want?” or “Are you following me?” But this isn't a story about what you may want, but rather a story about what we are looking for. Some of you will know that the word for staying and remaining is the same word and it is used five times in this story.

Remain, remain, stay, stay, stay.

The story is telling us something about the disciples that they have yet to discover for themselves. The writers are telling us something that is important and I want to suggest important for us too – that is why they say it a few times for added emphasis.

What the people who follow Jesus are looking for is not information, answers to questions like “Who is Jesus?” or even “Is there a God?” What they are looking for, what we are all looking for without even knowing it is a place to stay, to remain. We, like all people, seek a place where we can truly belong, where we are understood and valued, living at peace with ourselves, the world and those around us. Whilst we might say Jesus is that place, a person who is himself a home, a place to belong, I want to say that our churches ought to be an expression of that place.

We live in a time of great dislocation and disorientation. As a society there is unease and uncertainty about a great many issues, seemingly with every forward step there is flip side that makes the progress seem more doubtful. We are ill at ease with our involvement in Iraq and yet we know that human rights abuses need to be challenged. We want to participate in the Olympics and share its high ideals of togetherness and peace, but have grave concerns about the lack of freedom in Tibet. Whilst we live with the benefits of globalisation, we are increasingly aware of those who live in poverty and we feel powerless to persuade leaders to bring about real and lasting change. Medical and scientific improvement mean that we can live longer lives, but how to support an aging population? With increased mobility and movement how do we maintain family and social cohesion when people seldom meet together? All these issues contribute to a growing sense of unease and uncertainty.

And God's people don't live in a vacuum; these issues affect us too. They present challenges to our faith but also I believe opportunities. As people of faith we have something to say and as Christians something to say that is distinctive.

There are challenges for our churches too. Faced with declining numbers, large buildings to maintain, and a real desire to reach out and share the good news. What should the shape of the church be for the future?

In the midst of our disorientation as churches there are some clues. I am convinced that our future is formed and forged in the creative tension between the geography around us – our world, our communities – and God's good intentions. A future shaped by the conversation between where we live, work and rest and the good news of Jesus Christ. Friends, we ought not concern ourselves with new ways of being church or the emerging church conversation if it is only to secure our future, but rather it must be to ask what role faith has in forming and sustaining healthy human communities – communities that reflect God's life giving purposes. If there is any hope, it is that God intends to renew the world and we are a tool in God's hands for that purpose.

I want to put before you three strengths that I perceive are relevant in shaping the communities we serve.

Strength to be Together

At a time when we live increasingly isolated and individualistic lives we are called to be together – to be a community of people. Rising life expectancy, greater mobility, deeper poverty, family crisis - caught in a storm not of our making often our response is to withdraw and hoard the resources we might need closer to home.

The power to bring people together in meaningful relationships is something that Jesus did and the church has sought to do throughout the ages. Meaningful, mutual and loving relationships are the foundation and bedrock of every local Church. We all know how we feel when we find those meaningful relationships, how love and care embraces and warms us. We all know how we feel when such love and care is absent. When we find ways to love each other we discover that love has no boundaries.

As patterns of church and ways of being community change space is created for new ways of accompanying and being together to emerge. Whilst so much pulls us apart, there are new ways of pulling together. Humble and unremarkable binding together - visiting an elderly neighbour, being a volunteer driver, emailing a student away at university. Such practices develop patterns that grow and extend community.

I have the privilege of being the minister of Southam Congregational Church and part of the mission of that local church has been the work at the Graham Adams Centre. A building leased by the Congregational Federation to a local charity made up of a partnership between the Congregational Church and various local groups. Today the Centre is home to over 30 community groups, a nursery, a youth centre, a community café and 400 people using the Centre every week and this year becoming a Children's Centre, part of the Government's "Sure Start" programme. Through the work at the Graham Adams Centre some people have found their way to Christian faith and into the fellowship of the Church, but that isn't the real intention. Many more have found a place to belong, a place of acceptance and welcome.

You see the Christian faith is not only about a set of ideas and beliefs it must also be about action. A set of ideals, no matter how high or good, divorced from life is not offering much. But being a place to belong, accepting difference and diversity, welcoming the outsider, standing with the weak, speaking for the silent – this is the good news of Jesus Christ. This is the good news that makes a real difference to people's lives and our churches ought to be those kinds of places. In our hurting, needy world this is the good news we are invited by God to live out.

I used to sing in a Male Voice Choir where the conductor would often remind us that, "If you cannot hear the person next to you singing, you are singing too loud."

Tomorrow at worship if you cannot see the person next to you mourning – what are we about?

Today at assembly if you cannot feel the person next you hurting – why are we?

At work this week if you cannot sense the person next to you struggling – what good are we?

God's economy is a household economy where the house is expansive and inclusive. Living that reality is not 'pie in the sky' but a reality that spreads out roots through the social soil from one person to another, gradually individual by individual creating relationships that can withstand all manner of difficulty.

God wants to renew all creation and our churches are the demonstration plot.

Strength to Belong

Every year Southam's local schools come and visit the church buildings to have a look around. Normally

they visit the other churches and then come to the Congregational Church, consequently there questions are often “Why haven’t you got any stained glass windows?” or “Why does your building look so plain?” On one such visit, I asked the children if they knew the name of the church – which I then usually go on to explain – one suggested a name we might adopt “The Congratulationists.” I thought that was quite a good idea to be the people that affirm and accept others as congratulationists.

Occasionally I might be asked, “What does your church think about?” or “What does your church believe?” At such times, I resist the strong temptation to give a definite answer and certainly never a statement of faith, rather I suggest that people come and see. Our churches are like our homes; the worship space is like the living rooms where we welcome important and special friends. But if you want to know the family, you have to go into the kitchen, dining room, bathroom and garden.

It is in the other parts of our churches where we offer real community. It is in the church hall, lounge and kitchens where faith is transformed into action. Our working faith that is not a collection of individual thoughts, but rather a faith that grows out of a life that is more than any single one of us.

It is in the church hall where on Tuesday you welcome retired folk for lunch that faith takes on action. On Thursday when parents and toddlers come to play and worship together that faith can make a difference. On Friday when the young people meet together, drink coffee and hang out that faith takes on hands, feet, heart and face.

The experience of my or our individual spirituality is not all there is. Spirituality is nurtured and bears fruit only in community with others. It is exactly when I am sick, desperate and broken that my faith is inadequate, but what happens? My church gather round to comfort, visit, feed and remind me of a God who believes in me when I cannot even believe in myself. And when we cannot find our way forward, or our way home, it is the faith of others that holds us up and takes us by the hand.

Our churches can be the kinds of places where all people find space to be themselves and a place to belong. Where else can such different people meet and work together, overcoming the dividing walls, boundaries and divisions that everywhere else keep us apart and separate? The community of faith is the place where God shows off to the world how humanity is supposed to be – now I know there is a huge challenge there! We all know churches (maybe your own) where those very boundaries and divisions are maintained and nurtured, where every Sunday we put another brick in the wall, but we can choose to be the kind of place where all are welcome, with their differences and their challenges.

The heart of the church is in our capacity to be places of blessing, forgiveness and encouragement. It is the power to evoke, not compel; to draw, not to push.

And of course, our local churches belong together within the Federation where there also needs to be space for our churches to be themselves. We mustn’t define ourselves as a Federation of what we are not or what we decided in the past, but rather defining ourselves positively by what we offer today to the ecumenical discussion and the communities we serve. We have the opportunity to shape our churches in new and innovative ways that meet the demands of mission and service because of our freedom – because we are congregational.

Strength to Mend

The Bible is of a very mixed mind about breaking things, brokenness and the circumstances in which breaking happens. But what we can say with certainty is that brokenness attracts God’s attention. Broken communities, bones, promises, families, hearts, eco systems. We learn early in our Christian journey that brokenness is God’s whole point. But with eyes of faith we see brokenness as incompleteness that will be restored. So, while brokenness may litter communities, churches, lives and relationships, this is not a mark of failure that has the last word. God is not finished and has not left us alone.

Brokenness is merely something that needs fixing but it is also the path to wholeness. It is through being broken that we are made whole. Nothing happens without breaking the old. This is the truth about eggs and omelettes, wine and wineskins, seeds and gardens.

We are increasingly aware that our ways and models of being church are broken, that they are not meeting that missionary purpose which is at the heart of the good news. In the midst of this disorientation and

searching we come afresh to the story of Christ and seek new models for mission that, understanding the geography of our place, we can then engage in mission where God has set us.

We recognise our brokenness and incompleteness but also we know a story with the strength to put us back together, a story that refocuses and re-orientates us for life – that is God's good purposes.

As we break ground and move as we break bread and share we cannot possibly forget this truth. We are made whole by God alone, for God so loved the world – all the rest is commentary.

Churches make enduring contributions to their communities when they are healing places, reconciling safe places of renewal and recovery. Places of learning, safe for asking questions and for discovery, even debate, because in humility, we know only in pieces and search for the rest.

Conclusion

Are our churches these places where we discover strength to be together, to belong and to mend? Do you recognise your church and say 'yes' to God's good purpose for relationships, belonging and mending?

Today we can look at the urgent anxiety of our time with a slightly ironic smile because we have discovered that all that counts is not often counted in the modern world. We find time to accompany the lonely, to meet with our neighbours, to connect with someone in need. We know God's work will go on, as we too go on, patiently telling our stories of his love and welcoming the hopeful and hurting into safe places. We witness to a God who has not given up on us; who has not given up on his world; we witness to that God as we offer a touch of friendship, a word of blessing and as we become a place of hope.

Prayer

Jesus said "Trust in God, trust in me. There are many rooms in my father's house, and I am going to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to myself, so that you will be where I am."

Prepare for us a place
where hearts can dwell in peace,
where souls can find their rest,
where bodies can heal their wounds.

Prepare for us a place
where longings are fulfilled,
where hunger is satisfied,
where thirst is quenched.

Prepare for us a place
where wrongs are set right,
where injustice finds an end,
where hatred finds no victim.

Prepare for us a place
where lands smell of Eden,
where rivers run free,
where fruit grows in plenty.

Prepare for us
a home,
a paradise,
a Kingdom.

Prepare for us a place
where God is:
the loving Creator,

the passionate Son,
the life-giving Spirit,
and lead us there.

Prepare in us a place
where love can grow,
where visions can flourish,
where hope can spring.

Prepare in us a place
where truth is lived,
where justice matters,
where good triumphs.

Prepare in us a place
a home,
a paradise,
a seed of the Kingdom.

Prepare in us a place
where God is:
the loving Creator,
the passionate Son,
the life-giving Spirit,
and lead us in your way.
Amen.

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The following has been extracted from Church News Service, and reflects on what children may write to their minister, and is entitled:

"Dear Vicar...

- ❖ I know God loves everybody but then he never met my sister. Yours sincerely, Arnold. Age 8
- ❖ My father should be a minister. Every day he gives us a sermon about something. Robert , age 11
- ❖ I'm sorry I can't leave more money in the plate, but my father didn't give me a raise in my allowance. Could you have a sermon about a raise in my allowance? Love, Patty. Age 10
- ❖ I think a lot more people would come to your church if you moved it to Disneyland. Loreen. Age 9
- ❖ I liked your sermon where you said that good health is more important than money but I still want a raise in my allowance. Sincerely, Eleanor. Age 12
- ❖ I hope to go to heaven some day but later than sooner. Love, Ellen, age 9
- ❖ Please say a prayer for our school football team. We need God's help or a new goalkeeper. Thank you Alexander. Age 10
- ❖ My father says I should learn the Ten Commandments. But I don't think I want to because we have enough rules already in my house. Joshua. Age 10
- ❖ I liked your sermon on Sunday. Especially when it was finished. Ralph, Age 11
- ❖ How does God know the good people from the bad people? Do you tell Him or does He read about it in the newspapers? Sincerely, Marie. Age 9

The following meditation, written by Cardinal Newman (1801-1890), has been submitted by Elaine Gudem.

God has created me
to do him some definite service;
He has committed some work to me
which He has not committed to another.
I have my mission -
I may never know it in this life,
but I shall be told of it in the next.

I am a link in a chain,
a bond of connection between persons.
He has not created me for naught,
I shall do good,
I shall do his work.
I shall be an angel of peace,
a preacher of truth
in my own place
while not intending it -
if I do but keep
His Commandments.

Therefore, I will trust Him.
Whatever, wherever I am,
I can never be thrown away.
If I am in sickness,
my sickness may serve Him;
in perplexity,
my perplexity may serve Him;
if I am in sorrow,
my sorrow may serve Him.
He does nothing in vain.
He knows what He is about.
He may take away my friends.
He may throw me among strangers.
He may make me feel desolate,
make my spirits sink,
hide my future from me -
still He knows
what He is about.

Christian Aid welcomes green power revolution

Christian Aid today, June 26th, welcomed the unveiling of the government's proposed strategy to source 15 per cent of Britain's energy from renewables by 2020.

Eliot Whittington, Christian Aid's senior climate change policy analyst, said: 'Climate change represents an unprecedented threat to us all, and in particular to the lives and livelihoods of vulnerable communities in poor countries.

'We've been calling for real ambition and a response that matches the scale of this challenge. Today's report shows the government is looking hard at how it can revolutionise the UK energy supply and showing some of that ambition.'

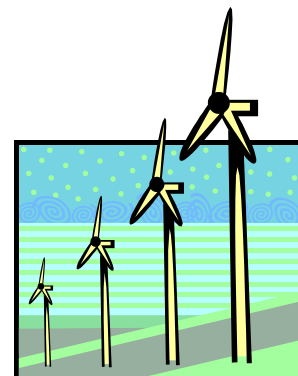
'Tough decisions have to be made about how carbon emissions can be drastically cut. This is a good start to that process.

'Although there will be a cost to consumers, the plans deserve the widest support. The cost of doing nothing would be a great deal higher. And if we refuse to take on our share of the burden we just add to the toll on people in poor countries who are already struggling to cope with a changing climate. Doing nothing is not an option.'

The government has said the target will be met by building thousands of wind turbines, the use of biofuels, and financial incentives to persuade homeowners to fit roof top solar panels. Christian Aid remains concerned, however, that renewables projects in developing countries - funded through a form of carbon offsets - may also be

used to help meet the target.

Christian Aid's concern over carbon off-setting is based on its view that countries such as the UK, where major industrial CO₂ emissions first began, must help finance clean development in poorer countries on top, not instead, of emission cuts at home.



The following article has been extracted from Church News Service, and is entitled:

Bibles - made in China!

A new, expanded printing facility seems set to make China's ancient capital, Nanjing, the Bible centre of the world. The Amity Printing Company - a joint venture with the Bible Societies - can now produce 23 Bibles every minute to keep up with growing demand for the Bible in China. In 2007 it printed six million Bibles. With the new press, the potential will be 12 million - most of which will be distributed throughout mainland China.

About 55,000 churches distribute the Bibles. According to experts, there is a real increase of interest in Christianity in China, where now an estimated seven per cent of the one billion population are believers.

A pocket edition of the Bible costs about 68p and Chinese Christians can receive the full-size Bible at a subsidised cost of £1.16.



- July** 3rd Irene Jephcott
 6th Tom Hopwood
 8th Samuel Harper
 9th Sarah Hopwood
 30th Irene St Clair
Aug 4th Andrew Watson
 13th Melisa Gundem
 24th Fiona Hayes

Thanks

To the church family at Witney Congregational Church, please accept my heartfelt thanks for your prayers, enquiries and kind thoughts for me during my recent hospitalization. It is entirely consistent with the love and fellowship with which you embraced me during my time in Witney. By God's grace my health is improving and my strength is returning.

May God continue to bless you and I will remember you in my prayers as you continue to be faithful to Him in your work of ministry.

Mavis Burke (Karen's mum)

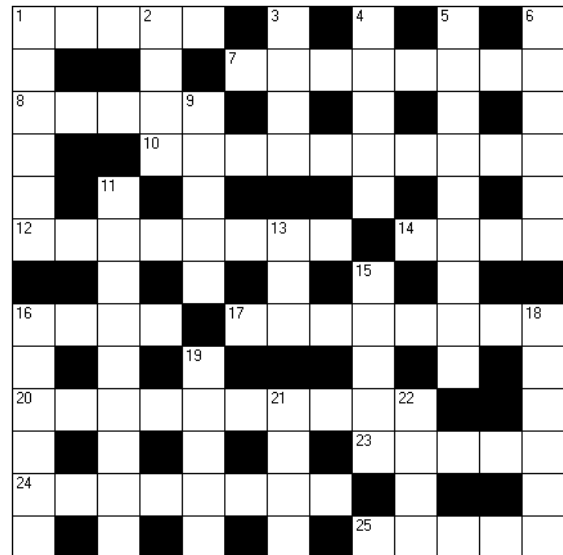
Thanks

Dear Friends

I wish to thank you all for your visits, phone calls, messages and cards which I have received following my recent surgery; but, most of all your prayers which have sustained me during this time

I feel privileged to be a member of such a caring church

May God Bless you all
Gwen Mee



Across

- 1 Abram's home during the famine in Gen 12 (5); 7 Bull fighters (8); 8 Into which Chemosh, in Jer 48, was to go (5); 10 Fourth in command of the Gadites in 1 Chron 12 (10); 12 Prov 12 says that such lips endure for ever (8); 14 Moses, in Lev 10, told Aaron not to let his become unkempt (4); 16 Fortified city in Josh 19 (4); 17 _____ were Kattath, Hahlal, Shimron (Jos 19.15) (8); 20 Guiltlessly (10); 23 Unleavened bread would not contain this (5); 24 What Gideon did to the fleece in Jud 6 (8); 25 Mistake (5)

Down

- 1 Then the sons are _____ (Mat 17.26) (6); 2 Ps 92 predicts that the righteous shall flourish like this tree (4); 3 Measure equal to an ephah in Ez 45 (4); 4 The Devil (5); 5 Towards the ground (9); 6 OT book named after a woman (6); 9 Number of chapters in Song of Songs (5); 11 Governor of Syria in Luke 2 (9); 13 Funerary receptacle (3); 15 In a surreptitious manner (5); 16 Of which the fish in Is 50 die (6); 18 Cleaning cloth (6); 19 Threaded fastener (5); 21 Require (4); 22 Time taken for the Earth to orbit the Sun (4)

Rainbow Rhymes

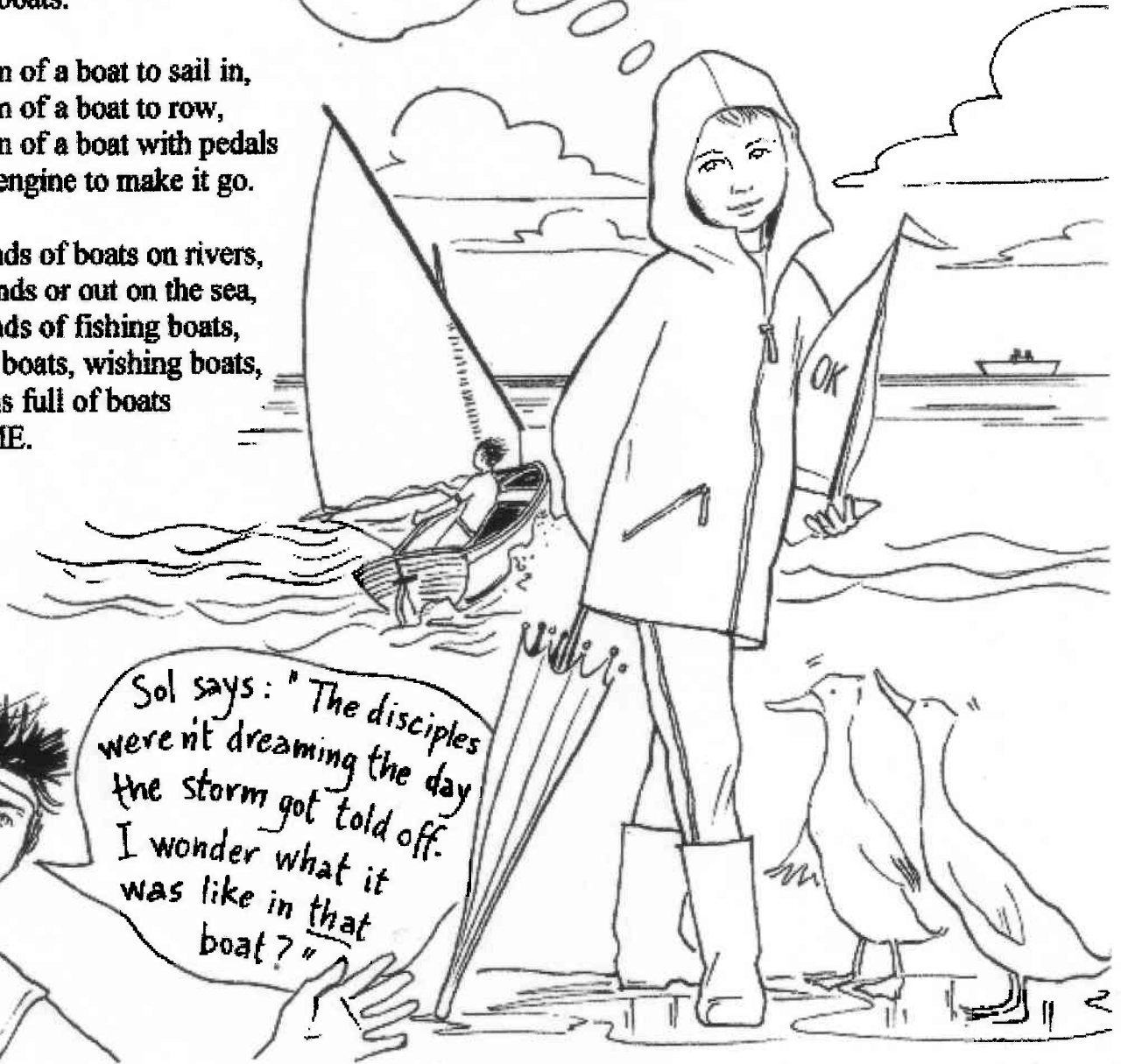
Poems and Promises to cut out and collect.

Boat Dreams

Wobbly walking,
Thick warm coats,
Drips and splashes,
I love boats.

I dream of a boat to sail in,
I dream of a boat to row,
I dream of a boat with pedals
Or an engine to make it go.

All kinds of boats on rivers,
On ponds or out on the sea,
All kinds of fishing boats,
Leaky boats, wishing boats,
Dreams full of boats
And ME.



Sol says: "The disciples
were n't dreaming the day
the storm got told off.
I wonder what it
was like in that
boat?"

Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him.
(Mark 4: 41 NIV)

Poem by Daphne Kitching, Picture by Elaine Hill, Coloured by

ROTAS

DEACON & STEWARDS

July	06	Pat & Ben Smith
	13	Pip & Beryl Cartwright
	20	Judi Holloway & Theo Howells
	27	Nanna Blackman & Val Obriain
Aug	03	Susan Wass & Sue Birdseye
	10	Dave Wesson & Irene Jephcott
	17	Pat & Ben Smith
	24	Nanna Blackman & Joan Currie
Sep	31	Pip & Beryl Cartwright
	07	Susan Wass & Val Obriain
	Note:	Reserve Irene St Clair



COMMUNION

July	06 pm	Pat Smith	
		Preparation	Iris Lindsay
	20 am	Dave Wesson & Nanna Blackman	
Aug		Judi Holloway & Elaine Gudem	
		Preparation	Rita Hayes
	17 am	Peter Gamston & Jacqui Powlesland	
		Susan Wass & Pat Smith	
Sep		Preparation	Pat Smith
	07 pm	Nanna Blackman	
		Preparation	Iris Lindsay



FLOWERS

July	06	Jean Howell
	13	Jacqui Powlesland
	20	Joan Currie
	27	Rita Hayes
Aug	03	Elaine Gudem
	10	Val Obriain
	17	Pat Smith
	24	Jill McBride
Sep	31	Beryl Cartwright
	07	Alison Hazell



COFFEE

July	06	Peter Gamston & Gwen Mee
	13	Susan Wass & Theo Howells
	20	Marjorie Lee, Iris Lindsay & Judith Bungey
	27	Pat & Ben Smith



Aug	03	Sue Birdseye & Linda McCormac
	10	Sue & David Harper
	17	Val Obriain & Sarah Hopwood
	24	Peter Gamston & Gwen Mee
	31	Susan Wass & Theo Howells
Sep	07	Pat & Ben Smith



REST & CHAT

July	03	Jean Stanley
	10	Iris Lindsay & Joan Currie
	17	Pat Smith & Gwen Mee
	24	Marjorie Lee & Elaine Gudem
	31	Jean Stanley
Aug	07	Iris Lindsay & Joan Currie
	14	Pat Smith & Gwen Mee
	21	Marjorie Lee & Elaine Gudem
Sep	28	Jean Stanley
	04	Iris Lindsay & Joan Currie
	Note:	Reserves June & Derrick Woodley



Every effort has been made on the rota list to meet individual circumstances. However, please change with someone else if the dates are not convenient for you - Thank You

Something to make you chuckle:

Signs found outside churches

- ❖ It is unlikely there'll be a reduction in the wages of sin
- ❖ If you don't like the way you were born, try being born again
- ❖ Looking at the way some people live, they ought to obtain eternal fire insurance soon
- ❖ This is a ch__ch. What is missing? (U R)
- ❖ Forbidden fruit creates many jams
- ❖ In the dark? Follow the Son
- ❖ Running low on faith? Stop in for a fill-up
- ❖ If you can't sleep, don't count sheep. Talk to the Shepherd.