

# Witney Congregational Church

Issue 15

February  
& March 2011

## R CROSS A D S

*Witney Congregational Church is a crossroads where we:*

*meet God in worship*

*meet one another in friendship*

*meet our community and world with the love of Jesus*



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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
Noah's Ark Service	1.30 pm	Tuesday	For under 5's parents and carers
Saturday Praise	11.00 am	1 <sup>st</sup> 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

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
Friday	6.00pm	www. - 1 <sup>st</sup> & 3 <sup>rd</sup> Friday of the month
	7.00 pm	Y4J - 1 <sup>st</sup> & 3 <sup>rd</sup> Friday of the month

## OTHER ACTIVITIES

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 200682 (Office)

## St ANDREW'S BOOKSHOP

☎ 01993 709429

Opening Hours: Monday - Saturday 09.00 am - 5.00 pm



Welcome to this the first edition to be published in 2011 and I hope that you all had a good Christmas and New Year, and that all your expectations were met.

So much has happened over the last two months, both within and outside of the church. Within the church family, many have been involved, along with Jason, on his PhD research and what a different and challenging subject this is. Outside of the church, there have been natural disasters in the way of storms, floods and earthquakes. Let us pray that this will be the end and everything will return to 'normal'. This will obviously have a differing perspective depending in what part of the world people live. For us in Western society, life generally is relatively comfortable, with very little hardship. Let us remember those who are not as fortunate as ourselves.

So, turning now to the contents, here is just a glimpse of some of the articles that have been submitted; Pip Cartwright concludes his series on 1662 and all that ....; Nanna Blackman reflects on the Covenant Service and there is news from Skegness, to name but a few.

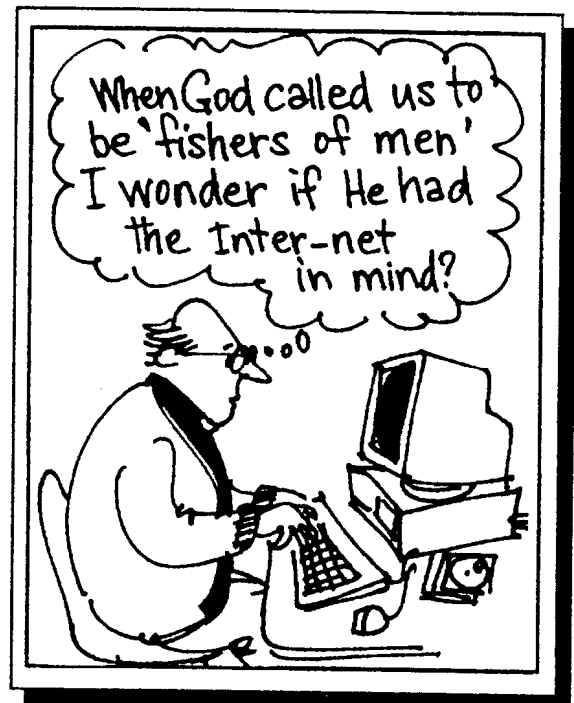
As always, many thanks to those who have contributed to this edition, but would also encourage anyone to consider submitting articles for the next edition by either:

- CD\Memory Stick

- E-mail: terrypowlesland@uwclub.net  
jacquipowlesland@uwclub.net
- Just plainly written on paper, which can be typed up.

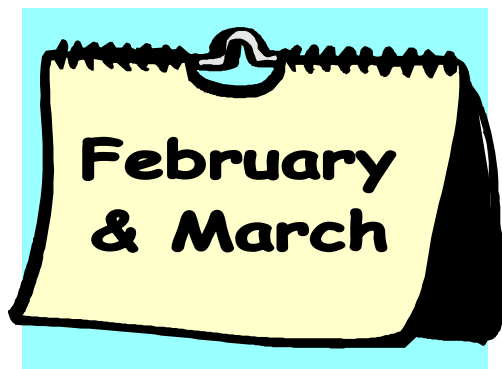
**ESSENTIAL NOTE:** All contributions should be submitted **NO LATER THAN the WEDNESDAY** of the week in which the magazine will be published.

The next edition is due on 2<sup>nd</sup> April  
Your Editor



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**Daily Prayer Time:**  
Mon-Fri 9.30 am

**Services**

10.30 am & 6.00pm and will normally be led by Rev Jason Boyd unless advised below

**Feb**

5<sup>th</sup> 11.00am Saturday Praise  
 6<sup>th</sup> am Morning Worship followed by Word Cafe  
 pm Joint Service at Congregational Church Communion  
 13<sup>th</sup> am Rev Toby Wright  
 pm Joint Service at High St Methodist  
 20<sup>th</sup> am Morning Worship Communion  
 pm Joint Service at Congregational Church Nanna Blackman  
 27<sup>th</sup> am Morning Worship  
 pm Joint Service at High St Methodist

**Mar**

5<sup>th</sup> 11.00am Saturday Praise  
 6<sup>th</sup> am Morning Worship followed by Word Cafe  
 pm Joint Service at Congregational Church Communion  
 13<sup>th</sup> am Morning Worship  
 pm Joint Service at High St Methodist Church  
 20<sup>th</sup> am Morning Worship Communion  
 pm Joint Service at Congregational Church  
 27<sup>th</sup> am Morning Worship followed by Word Cafe  
 pm Joint Service at High St Methodist Church

**Apr**

2<sup>nd</sup> 11.00am Saturday Praise  
 3<sup>rd</sup> am All-Age Mothering Sunday  
 pm Joint Service at Congregational Church Communion

The following events are given for your particular attention:

**Feb**

1<sup>st</sup> Deacons meeting 7.30pm  
 3<sup>rd</sup> Footprints - Prayer Breakfast 8.30 - 09.30am  
 Fresh Expressions (Mission Shaped Church) 7.30pm  
 10<sup>th</sup> Fellowship Group 2.30pm 6 Swinbrook Court  
 Fresh Expressions (Mission Shaped Church) 7.30pm  
 11<sup>th</sup> www. 6.00pm  
 Y4J 7.00pm  
 12<sup>th</sup> Prayer Chain meeting 9.15am  
 15<sup>th</sup> 350<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Meeting 7.30pm  
 17<sup>th</sup> Fresh Expressions (Mission Shaped Church) 7.30pm  
 24<sup>th</sup> Fresh Expressions (Mission Shaped Church) 7.30pm

**Mar**

1 <sup>st</sup>	Deacons meeting	7.30pm
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Fresh Expressions (Mission Shaped Church)	7.30pm
4 <sup>th</sup>	Women's World Day of Prayer (Chile)	10.30am High St Methodist
	www.	6.00pm
	Y4J	7.00pm
12 <sup>th</sup>	Prayer Chain meeting	9.15am
13 <sup>th</sup>	Birthday Lunch	
15 <sup>th</sup>	Church meeting	7.30pm
16 <sup>th</sup>	CTiW - Lent Soup Lunch	details in Sunday Link
18 <sup>th</sup>	www.	6.00pm
	Y4J	7.00pm
23 <sup>rd</sup>	CTiW - Lent Soup Lunch	details in Sunday Link
26 <sup>th</sup>	SWMA Assembly at Moreton-in-Marsh	
30 <sup>th</sup>	CTiW - Lent Soup Lunch	details in Sunday Link

**Apr**

1 <sup>st</sup>	www.	6.00pm
	Y4J	7.00pm

**Churches Together in Witney and District  
Lent Study Groups 2011**

**LIVING SIMPLY**  
(A Lent study guide from Biblelands/  
Material may be downloaded from the internet)

<b>Week 1 Accountability</b>	<b>15 to 18 March</b>
<b>Week 2 Poverty</b>	<b>22 to 25 March</b>
<b>Week 3 Solitude</b>	<b>29 to 31 March</b>
<b>Week 4 Fleeing</b>	<b>5 to 8 April</b>
<b>Week 5 Simplicity</b>	<b>12 to 15 April</b>

**CTiW Joint services ( to be confirmed )**

Good Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> April 11.15am Witney Market Square  
Easter Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> April 6.00am The Paddock, St Mary's Church, Cogges

## Pastor's Papers

There are several things I want to share with you in my first Crossroads letter of 2011. First, I want to remind you that Judi Holloway is coming to the end of her training in April. She has a lot to do and will be feeling the pressure. So I would ask you to let her feel our prayers surrounding her. I do hope that you will take the opportunity to participate in her Mission Shaped Church evenings. The course began on 27 January and will run for six Thursdays at 7:30 pm in the Church Lounge. Not only will Judi be fulfilling her training requirement but we will have a chance to reflect on what it is for us to be church here in Witney.

Second, I am including a section on Word Cafe. The first cluster will be the transcripts, themes, and reflections for the 7 November, and the second will be for the 19 December. I would welcome hearing your thoughts. Thank you to all those who have taken part already and I would like to encourage more to get involved.

Third, as promised at the Church Meeting on 25 January, I would like to spend time reflecting on the exciting mission of Street Pastors. Street Pastors is an initiative of Churches Together in Witney. The following article was printed on 19 December in the Sunday Link. It has been modified and updated:

### Frozen Footprint

The snow lay on the ground and was compacted by pedestrian traffic and freezing temperatures. It was the school run and we were passing the Cogges Vicarage when we noticed a frozen left footprint. A person had

been caught short - presumably on their way home from a night of drinking - and an icy outline of their foot had been formed. We continued on our journey and as we walked along the path by Waitrose we found a woman's abandoned left shoe.

I shuddered to think of someone walking home in such a cold weather. It concerned me that a person would make that journey home in such a vulnerable state.

Street Pastors were commissioned on Saturday, 11 December at High Street Methodist Church. The vision for Street Pastors began with Revd. Richard Donoghue but was taken forward by Captain Jeff Hill. The sponsor churches are HS Methodist, Congregational, St. Mary's on the Green, and North Witney Community Church. Eleven people (one had to drop out) began their training in the autumn and were unleashed onto the streets from the service. The Mayor, James Mills, and Chief Inspector Jack Malhi handed out Bibles and caps to 'arm' the SPs. The service was inspirational! Good music and impassioned prayer in concert with a rousing message preached by Revd. Paul Rush propelled the Street Pastors into their new calling. Paul spoke of the work of Street Pastors. It's simple. A Street Pastor is a person who does what every good citizen should do. They see someone in need and stand alongside them in love. Street Pastors are there to help people like that woman who lost her shoe and trudged through the snow leaving frozen tracks.

The final hymn, "Will you come and follow me if I but call your name?" has already been answered by several people. Revd. Toby Wright gave an inspirational benediction to all at the

Street Pastor's Commissioning service saying:

May the God of glory thunder in your lives;  
shatter your fears;  
and blast you out of your comfort zones.  
And the blessing of God almighty,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit  
Come down upon you  
and remain with you always.  
Amen.

At the united evening service for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, held on 23 January 2011, Captain Jeff Hill reported on the work that Street Pastors have been doing since the commissioning service. Dressed in his uniform he told of how they have handed out flip flops to those who've lost their shoes and, even though they are identical, the girls compare them to see who has the best pair! Lollies have been given to those whose blood sugar has dropped. Girls who are being harassed have been shadowed to make sure they get safely to their bus, taxi, or home. A lot of listening has been going on too. There are those who pour out their anguish and others who have heaped vitriol on religion. Jeff said that Street Pastors know how important it is to listen to each every person whatever they have to say.

Importantly, Val Obriain has begun her training as a Street Pastor and Judi Holloway will follow on later in the year! The Church Meeting agreed to pay for the training of anyone from our congregation who responds to the call to become an SP. But more than the financial support is for us to offer our prayers and envelop each of them with love.

**Prayer:** Father you know the name of that person who walked barefoot through the snow. We pray that Street Pastors will be your love present to all who need someone to be alongside them.  
Amen

The following article has been submitted by Nanna Blackman, and is entitled,

### **How do you find people in your town?**

A traveller once asked a wise man who was sitting at the city walls what the people inside were like.

'What are the people like in the city where you come from?' replied the wise man. The stranger then pondered a moment.

'They're generous and kind, they're patient and good folk,' he said.

'Well, that's how you'll find them here too,' the wise man said.

A few days later another traveller came to the city and asked the wise man the same question. "What are the people like in the city you come from?' the wise man wanted to know. Again there was some hesitation.

'The people are fairly mean,' he said.

'They're a grumpy lot and pretty miserable.'

Well,' said the wise man, 'That's just how you'll find people here.'



## News around the world

The following information has been taken from CWM Website dated 28 January, so is up to date at the editing of this month's magazine

### **African church acts to strengthen ministerial families**

Church leaders in South Africa are inviting ministers and their spouses to a first ever conference aimed at supporting families throughout their time of service.

The United Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa (UPCSA) is organising the event in a bid to provide fellowship for couples and help them address issues that some ministerial families encounter during ministry service.

Church leaders are hoping the conference will provide a forum in which couples can inspire, bless, and spiritually encourage each other. The church has also invited ministers and their spouses to contribute to shaping the course programme to ensure it focuses on the real issues that need to be addressed. The conference, which will take place in Gauteng in September, is being opened up to ministers across the church region. The UPCSA has also pledged to help delegates with travel and accommodation costs.

UPCSA general secretary Rev Dr Jerry Pillay said he is hopeful that the conference - which draws inspiration from Ephesians 3. 7-21 - will draw in couples from all over South Africa. "We are hoping the delegates will leave encouraged and inspired to serve both

God and God's people wherever they are," he said.

"This promises to be a really exciting and wonderful time together providing a time for fellowship with colleagues, find encouragement and inspiration in fulfilling the Call God has placed upon their lives, and an opportunity to celebrate their ministry and respond to the challenges as we draw from each other's experiences and wisdom."

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### **PCT helps UCA in Australia flood**

The Presbyterian Church in Taiwan has donated US\$10,000 towards flood relief to churches in Queensland, Australia.

The funds were forwarded to the United Church in Australia - a mission partner of the PCT which also ministers to Taiwanese congregations based in the country.

Following the devastating flooding, PCT General Secretary Andrew Chang wrote to the UCA to express solidarity and concern on behalf of the church.

The PCT was also concerned for the Brisbane Taiwanese Congregation of the UCA - situated in the worst hit part of the country. Fortunately as most of the congregation live on the outskirts of the city they were not affected by the devastation.

The PCT has assured the UCA of its prayers and the leaders of the two churches have been in regular contact to discuss the latest updates on the floods.

PCT leader Mr Chang said the UCA had been a great partner of the

PCT in its mission ministries in the past and had consistently lent its support to Taiwan during past natural disasters.

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### **Stop the black rain**

For New Zealander Faye Pouesi the patterns of a violent and abusive childhood quickly followed her into adult life - leading to a string of hostile relationships and rock-bottom self-esteem. But rather than stay trapped in a life sentence of abuse, she has broken the cycle

Now, as director of her own counselling service, she is helping other women and families in communities across West Auckland to break their own cycles of abuse and start again. The journey began after a successful course of therapy inspired her to study a Diploma in Counselling. Faye realised that government programmes set up to tackle family violence were not enough. "I knew there was horrendous violence in homes," she says. "My own children suffered for years, and I knew those of my friends did too. The need back then to create a bridge to get into the homes of those women whose lives were being impacted was crucial in order for them to step out and start addressing what was happening."

With financial sponsorship under her belt, Faye gained the support of Massey Community Church and set up free counselling for women and children affected by abuse in her community. Five years later - she started Westside Counselling Services.

With poverty, unemployment, domestic violence, drugs and alcohol at dangerously high levels in the community, her service was soon

flooded with women seeking help. They needed long-term programmes that would sustain them on the difficult journey towards freedom. Faye wrote a recovery programme based on her own experience and began working with male and female family members to provide what she describes as a "community of care".

Her methods include one-to-one counselling, provision of practical support to meet basic needs, setting up sports teams for women & men; organising "pamper days" for the women to learn about self-care (make-up, hairdressing), dinners at which the men serve the women; and weekend retreats where women can reflect on their experiences and plan ahead.

Over time she developed specific programmes for men (MATES) - which includes mentoring, discussing health issues, risk reduction and restoring family relationships - and for teenage girls (Girls Talk).

Gradually change began to occur in the lives of women who had lived in violence. They transformed from reserved and withdrawn to outgoing and confident with more energy and self-esteem.

Those that need ongoing support are able to join a special weekly group called "Celebrate Recovery" which includes Christian worship and provides a chance for each person to share personal issues and their ups and downs from the week.

But the changes take years to embed, Faye says, with a time-frame for learning new patterns at between two to five years. "We are trying to change habits which are 30 plus years old. What we celebrate is people being integrated into a community of care and

learning to extend their hand to new people who come into the programme. We provide that sense of whanau (family)," she says.

"We don't see people coming back though we witness them moving forward personally, academically and professionally," says Faye. Many of the women participants in the programme have since entered tertiary study, becoming social workers and counsellors, nurses and teachers. Several have become facilitators supporting others on the programme. Becoming Christian has been an important part of Faye's journey, though she says she's careful not to push that on others.

"For me the context of Christ is that he extended his hand and he left that for us to do, extend your hand to the people who are broken, let them know they're not there on their own." The changes that have been made and the stories she has heard over the years have inspired Faye to begin a Master's thesis on her work, involving focus groups and interviews. "These women's stories are sacred, and I aim to write about this in a way that's totally honouring of them and their journeys." Helping others escape the cycle she herself was trapped in has become something of a passion for Faye. She says: "Yesterday I was at a prison and I talked about a black cloud that was over my parents and their parents, and when the cloud burst, black rain would hit me and my brothers and sisters. Someone has to stop the black rain."

The following article, written by Laurieann Kelly, has been submitted by Maureen Miles, and is entitled:

### **Some friends are forever**

"Sometimes in life,  
You find a special friend  
Someone who changes your life  
By being a part of it.....  
Sometimes you find a friend  
Who makes you laugh  
Until you can't stop  
Someone who makes you believe  
That there really is good in the world.  
Someone who convinces you  
That there is an unlocked door  
Just waiting for you to open it.  
This is forever friendship.  
When you are down,  
And the world seems dark and empty,  
Your forever friend lifts you up in spirit  
And makes that dark and empty world  
Suddenly seem bright and full.  
Your forever friend gets you  
Through the hard times, the sad times,  
And the confused times.  
If you turn and walk away,  
Your forever friend follows you  
If you lose your way,  
Your forever friend guides you  
and cheers you on.  
Your forever friend holds your hand  
and tells you that everything is going to  
be okay.  
And if you find such a friend,  
You feel happy and complete  
Because you need not to be worry.  
You have a forever friend for life,  
And forever has no end....."





## PRAYER LETTER No 145

### Gifts

The Gold wrapped gift box, tied with a cross of blood red ribbon, dominating the front wall of the Sanctuary covering the 'Cross Window' has made a big impact on me during Christmas and Epiphany. This simple pictorial idea displayed so dramatically has such symbolic meaning:

- A gift can be given as a present
- A gift can be a natural ability or talent given by God
- A gift does not necessarily have monetary value

God gave Jesus freely to the world in His **birth**. **God** gave Jesus as a 'Gift Voucher' in exchange for Jesus' life for our salvation in His death and resurrection.

What is inside the Gift Wrapped Box?

What is inside us that we can freely give to others?

Perhaps it may be a smile to brighten someone's day; a listening ear; an encouraging touch or word; time to spend with someone who needs us whether family, friend or stranger; time praying for others. These are only a few of the moneyless free gifts we have to offer. Pray that the gifts in the form of abilities and talents that God has given us do not lie dormant but in the spring awakening of our souls will be used for God's glory.

The chorus from the song 'God forgave my sin'

**Freely, freely you have received,  
Freely freely give.  
Go in My Name and because you believe,  
Others will know that I live.**

May the image of the 'gift' and words of this song stay in our minds and hearts encouraging us to use our gifts

Every Blessing  
Beryl



The following article has been submitted by Pip Cartwright, and is the last in the series:

## 1662 and all that

On 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1658 Oliver Cromwell died. This not only ended an era but also brought to an end the dream of freedom of worship.

On May 25<sup>th</sup> 1660 King Charles II returned and this also meant the return to prominence of the 'official' Church. The royalist clergy who had previously lost their living demanded to be reinstated. There were quite a few well educated Congregationalists, who under Cromwell, were appointed to high positions in Universities and public institutions. Some served as preachers in Cathedrals and others were lecturers appointed to Churches as was William Gilbert at Witney. Many were apprehensive about possible royalist revenge. The King declared a free general pardon to all his subjects, except for 59 who were specifically named as having signed the death warrant of his father Charles I. Some escaped to New England, others to Holland, but of those that remained, 13 were executed, 25 were imprisoned for life, I believe that nine were Congregationalists. During the summer of 1660 over 108 Congregational lecturers, preachers, teachers and academics were ejected or decided to retire quietly.

The new Parliament elected in March 1661 saw a change in the balance of power. The Puritan element had divided and the Cavaliers predominated. The Prayer book was revised and the drive for a State imposed uniformity of public worship, gathered apace.

Liturgical uniformity was opposed by most Independents, Quakers and Baptists on the grounds that Church, the apostles and the early Church never used liturgies. It was argued that liturgies stultified spirituality and kill the gift of prayer. Despite the gathering pressures for conformity many Congregationalists continued to pastor their congregations and continued to serve in municipal office. This infuriated the establishment.

In December 1661 The Corporation Act was passed. It required all municipal officials to reject the Solemn League and Covenant of 1643, later the Oath of Supremacy, and to receive the Lord's Supper according to the form prescribed by the Church of England. Thus unless citizens conformed, they were excluded from public office and as time went on this was extended to exclude nonconformists from education and the law. Interestingly it wasn't until Victorian times (1812) that this law was repealed and nonconformists ceased to be second class citizens and could play an equal part in society.

In 1662 the Christian people in England and Wales were legally split into Conformists and Nonconformists.

The Bill of Uniformity in 1662 demanded that all Ministers should use the newly revised Book of Common Prayer before Saint Bartholomew's Day 24 August 1662. Those who refused automatically lost their position in the Church. Similarly, lecturers had to conform. Schoolmasters also had to make the same declaration and receive a licence from the Bishop. Thus all Nonconformists were 'ejected' and the day referred to as 'Black Bartholomew's Day'.

In fact over 2000 clergy refused to comply. From that day forward Nonconformists were subjected to persecution in the attempt to destroy all who could not follow the narrow restrictions applied by Anglican conformity. On that day William Gilbert, the Lecturer in Witney, was ejected with others of the congregation (Calamy page 593). This could be said as the birthday of the Witney Congregational Church.

From 1662 to 1688 was a time of persecution for all nonconformists, Independents (Congregationalists), Quakers, Baptists and other smaller sects. Conventicles (secret, unlawful religious meetings) appeared everywhere. Some gathered in existing Churches where the local Lord or Magistrate was sympathetic to the cause and there was a considerable body of lay supporters. Others met in houses or a Church if it had been abandoned during and after the plague.

Many of the nonconformist leaders were very learned men. Some had private incomes but others were deprived of an occupation, residence and income. Many ministers, lecturers and schoolmasters with their wives and children were cast out into the wilderness. Some started private schools and became private tutors.

These developments angered the Church and the Government so further restrictions were imposed. The Conventicle Act of 1664 forbade conventicles (unauthorised worship) of more than five people, who were not of the same household. Any offenders who were caught were firstly imprisoned and fined and if they continued to offend they could be transported, at their own cost, or if they pleaded poverty they

could become indentured labourers. To make this law more effective, informers received a portion of the fines. When it became obvious that Conventicles flourished despite the Act and in defiance of the law, further steps had to be taken.

The Five Mile Act of 1665 was aimed at the nonconformist teachers and clergy. This Act forbade those that had been ejected that they should not live within five miles of any city, corporation, borough or parish from where they had been ejected. They were also forbidden to teach in School.

These series of Acts are known as the Clarendon Code named after the 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Clarendon, Chief Minister of Charles II, who encouraged and approved of them. Apart from preventing freedom of worship these Acts excluded all Nonconformists from being awarded University Degrees and from holding military and civic offices.

It is fair to say that persecution ebbed and flowed over time and the severity of abuse varied from place to place. After the Great Plague (1665) and the Great Fire of London (1666) there was not so much eagerness to harass Nonconformists, as some felt that the two disasters suggested divine retribution.

In March 1669 the 1<sup>st</sup> Conventicle Act lapsed. The King favoured greater tolerance, however Parliament insisted that the laws against Nonconformists should be enforced. In 1670 a more stringent Conventicle Act was passed which made Nonconformist worship illegal indoors and outdoors. It stipulated that heavy fines should be levied on Magistrates who did not do their 'legal duty'. This time the liability for paying the fines

lay on the Preacher and the householder. If they were too poor or refused to pay then richer members of the Congregation could be fined. If all else failed, a person's goods would be sold at auction. Guilt could be proved just on the sworn evidence of two people. This Act enabled the policy to impoverish rich Nonconformists and undermine the economic power of Dissenters. Although death was not prescribed in the Act, many people died in filthy prisons from disease and malnourishment and those that survived were often 'fleeced' by their jailers. Richer congregations were able to support their Minister, however, clergy without that support, had to move, live with relatives or languish.

In 1672 Charles II recognised that repression had not been successful and that the Anglican Church did not include the whole nation. The (1<sup>st</sup>) Declaration of Indulgence suspended all penal acts and that allowed citizens to worship openly with the provision that preachers and meeting places be approved (licensed) by the authority. Even Roman Catholics were allowed to worship privately. Parliament was displeased and a year later in 1673 they passed a resolution declaring that penal laws could only be suspended by Parliament. Not the King. Thus the Nonconformist Church had to go underground again, persecution resumed. In 1673 the Test Act banned Catholics and Dissenters from National Office, a ploy to make Parliament Anglican.

Ministers and Congregations contrived to thwart the authorities. Some outdoor preachers preached from horseback in case a quick getaway was needed. John Gibbs preached at Three

Counties Point where he could evade arrest by moving from one county to another. Others chose to meet on rocks or a beach at low water (no mans land) or along narrow streets with many doors for escape.

Indoor meetings were more dangerous, nevertheless Conventicles contrived to outwit Government spies and informers. Ministers could preach from a lofty doorway which could be closed at a moment's notice when warned by lookouts. Some rooms had exits across adjoining lofts.

Although many Nonconformists were ruined and quite a few emigrated, persecutions and the malice shown by authority didn't seem to dampen the need for free worship. Conventicles tended to be small in number although some meetings attracted a crowd of over 1000. Services were simple, sermons were scholarly, relevant and aimed at men's consciences. The Bible and free prayer was central to Nonconformist worship.

From 1670 persecution was renewed and strictly applied when possible, right through to the 1680s. When Charles II died in 1685 he was followed by the Catholic James II. The Nonconformists were rightly apprehensive as James tried to make England a Roman Catholic country. It was the time of Judge Jeffreys and the Bloody Assizes, so disloyal citizens were brutally dealt with. James tried to make the Church of England subservient.

Parliament resisted by refusing to provide money for his army, so the frustrated King James dissolved Parliament in 1687. The unthinkable was a possibility in that Anglican and Dissenters might be united. To

frustrate this, James contrived to strike an alliance between Catholics and Dissenters, by suspending Penal laws. Only a few Nonconformists were willing to co-operate. Nonetheless the 2<sup>nd</sup> Declaration of Indulgence on 27 April 1688 allowed freedom of worship and licensing of Nonconformist preaching and churches.

Behind the scenes Anglicans and Dissenters co-operated and made possible for William and Mary of Orange to take the throne. James II was deposed by his protestant daughter Mary Stuart and son-in-law William. Once done the High Churchmen and Tories backtracked. However, toleration for Dissenters had been conceded. The Toleration Act of 1689 granted liberty to orthodox Dissenters (Independents and Baptists), Quakers and Presbyterians, but not to Roman Catholics and Unitarians. Although Dissenters had gained freedom of worship, they remained second class citizens until much later. All that is another story, however all these events which I have described explain the importance of 1662 and all the unpleasanties it caused.

What relevance does this have to our Congregational Church here in Witney? As you can see, 1662 and after were dangerous times for anybody not in agreement with the Anglican Church and the Cavalier Parliament. Not surprisingly there is next to no written evidence for Nonconformist worship in and around 1662 in Witney and so we have to surmise with what we have and what we know went on in the rest of the Country.

Relying on local history and historians it is agreed that Witney had been a Puritan stronghold during the

Commonwealth Period under Oliver Cromwell. However during the Civil War it appears that Witney was not convinced one way or another and similarly it appears that after 1662 the area was quiet backwater where power and politics were concerned. Thus after the Puritan Lecturer William Gilbert at St Mary's Church was deprived of his office and ejected, we hear no more of him or his supporters. However it seems Witney was a fairly convenient area for ejected clergy to stay low or return to.

According to Calamy and his History of South Area Congregational Churches, "Witney Congregational Church is supposed to date back to 1662 or very nearly so". In 1669 the Rev. Dod was living in Witney and preached at Cogges. It is known that the benefice at Cogges was vacant and with the sympathy of the local Lord, up to 200 Dissenters worshipped there. Conventicles were very mobile. It would make sense to think that many Nonconformists crossed the River Windrush and found a spiritual home at Cogges.

It obviously got so popular that the royalist Anglican elements in Witney became angry enough to do something about it. It is recorded that Francis Gregory, a Witney schoolmaster (at Henry Box) confronted their local Dissenters at Cogges and, no doubt, with the weight of the law behind him, evicted them.

The 1672 1<sup>st</sup> Declaration of Indulgence allowed Ministers to license their Church. It is recorded that Francis Hubert M.A., the 'rejected' Vicar of Wintersborne Monkerton was licensed to preach at his house in Witney on 10<sup>th</sup> August 1672. Originally

he settled in Oxford but after the Five Mile Act, he had to move and eventually settled in Witney. By many he is considered to be the first pastor of Witney Congregational Church. He was educated at Westminster School and Balliol College, Oxford. For illegal preaching in a private house in 1676, he spent 6 months in the Bocardo Prison in Oxford.

It was during this sad time of persecution that a member of the local Gunn family was a Minister and Member of the Congregational Church. It appears he was obliged to visit Eynsham and in so doing he was punished for being a Dissenter. It so affected his mind that he drowned himself in a part of Emma's Dyke known thereafter as Gunn's Hole. This was part of the Town Ditch and was situated at the southern end of the High Street.

Where the Church worshipped in the latter part of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century no-one knows. In 1703 a Rev. Samuel Mather, married to a daughter of the wealthy Townsend family who owned Staple Hall Inn, gained a licence to worship in his house, which may have been part of Staple Hall. Rooms in Staple Hall were used for all types of meetings so it is likely that sometimes the congregation met there. With the financial wealth of the Townsends, the Rev. Mather built a Meeting House along Marlborough Lane (then just called Meeting House Lane). The Rev. Samuel Mather came from a famous New England family who were all noted Preachers. It was noted by an early historian (Calamy) that he had a small congregation estimated to be between 400 and 500. One wonders what a large Church was like. He was still the Minister in 1728 when he passed the

reins to a gentleman named Blake. Samuel Mather died in 1733. From this time onwards we have an almost continuing line of Ministers, so our Church was well established.

Thus it is, that we have been deemed a 1662 Church and in 2012 it will be our 350<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. Do we have cause to celebrate?

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By Edmund Calamy 1713 Vol 2 pages 593, 815-816
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The following article has been submitted by Nanna Blackman, and is entitled:

## **Covenant Service 2011**

Although I attended the Covenant Service last year, for some reason it didn't really resonate with me. This year I found it profoundly moving experience. Perhaps I was more aware of what it was about, having talked to Richard Donoghue before the service. So I thought I would share some facts and the experience with you. Perhaps you might be inspired to go to the Covenant Service next year.

John Wesley saw the relationship between humans and God as a Covenant, a marriage (Ephesians 5: 21-33). He saw a need for that relationship to grow and eventually developed the ritual of renewing the Covenant on an annual basis. The aim was not only to remind people and religious communities of their relationship with God but to help them grow in that relationship. The Methodist Church traditionally holds the Covenant Service the first Sunday in January. Our friends at High Street Methodist Church had theirs in the morning and Richard then kindly led the service for us in the Congregational Church in the evening. Richard told us that some Methodist Churches hold their Covenant Service in September, which is the start of the Methodist year. He also told of some American Methodist Churches where that part of the service is an option extra, bolted on to a 'normal' service. I got the feeling he didn't approve.

The Covenant Service is a powerful reminder of what God has

done and still does for us. It is also a heady challenge for us to renew our commitment to His way. The Covenant Prayer is difficult to say and mean:

*I am no longer my own but yours.  
Put me to what you will, rank me with  
whom you will;  
put me to doing, put me to suffering;  
let me be employed for you or laid aside  
for you, exalted for you or brought low  
for you;  
let me be full, let me be empty, let me  
have all things, let me have nothing;  
I freely and wholeheartedly yield all  
things to your pleasure and disposal.  
And now, glorious and blessed God,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
you are mine and I am yours.  
So be it.  
And the covenant now made on earth,  
let it be ratified in heaven.  
Amen.*

However, before we got to that part of the Service there were readings, reminders and celebration of what God the Father and Jesus the Son had done for us; opportunity for confession and a lifting of voices in prayer and in praise. This was a time to explore what was in our hearts, before making the commitment to Christ all over again.

After the Covenant we shared in the Lord's Table, which seemed particularly poignant. Our voices were raised and confident as we sang "Here in the love of Christ I stand", before the Benediction.

For me the Covenant Service was a reminder that being a Christian is serious and wonderful stuff



### Thank You

Dear all  
please accept my thanks for the many  
cards, gifts and beautiful flowers I re-  
ceived from the church for my birthday  
and all who came to my surprise party.  
I hope you all enjoyed it

Love and best wishes to all—Iris



The following article has been submitted by Irene Jephcott, and is entitled:

## Notes from Skegness

Happy New Year to all our brothers and sisters.

John thanks you for the Farewell, the cake was fantastic with the steam train on it and the sweets in the tin train have long gone, the voucher has been spent on rail track, crossovers, points and a station which we we got at Grantham as Skegness shop has stopped stocking PECO.

We enjoyed time at Christmas with my son and his 2 boys. They arrived on Thursday 23rd and stayed until 26th when they had to go back to their mother. They went to see Peter Pan at the Embassy Theatre in the afternoon of the 24th and while they were enjoying the show it snowed so we had a white Christmas. We have not had as much snow as you and not so cold either.

After Christmas Dinner I went for a walk on my own. There were many Christmas Greetings shared on the walk and it is the first time I have seen the beach white with snow and the sand frozen. Some people were having a picnic in among the sand dunes and others were like me just enjoying the sun and snow.

On Boxing day my son found his car was undrivable (Clutch trouble) so I had to drive him and the boys to Thirsk in North Yorkshire then I drove my son back so he could call out the AA to get him and his car back to RAF Honington for duty the next day.

I have been attending the Methodist Church and they are very friendly and welcoming but they are mostly older than me so I miss seeing families with children so I will probably

try to find a younger congregation in the future.

Please note our new telephone number & e-mail:



01754 768827

[ireneandjj@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:ireneandjj@hotmail.co.uk)

God Bless to you all  
Irene and John

The following article, written by Brian Cavanagh, has been extracted from 'The Sower's Seed', and is entitled:

## Anonymous

A man attending a crowded church service refused to take off his hat when asked to do so by the ushers. Others also asked him, but he remained obstinate.

The preacher was perturbed too, and waited for the man after the service. He told the man that the church was quite happy to have him as a guest, and invited him to join the church, but he explained the traditional decorum regarding men's hats and said; I hope you will conform to the practice in the future.

Thank you, said the man, and thank you for taking the time to talk to me. It is good of you to invite me to join the congregation. In fact, I joined it three years ago and have been coming regularly ever since, but today is the first time that anyone paid attention to me.

After being an unknown for three years, today, by simply keeping my hat on, I have had the pleasure of talking with the ushers, and now with you, who always appeared too busy to talk to me before. What do you do to make strangers welcome? Are you too busy?

# ROTAS

## WELCOMING TEAM

<b>Feb</b>	06	Pat & Ben Smith
	13	Susan Wass & Joan Currie
	20	Beryl & Pip Cartwright
	27	Nanna Blackman & Irene St Clair
<b>Mar</b>	06	Jill & Robert McBride
	13	Pat & Ben Smith
	20	Sharon Watson & Theo Howells
	27	Iris Lindsay & Joan Currie
<b>Apr</b>	03	Susan Wass & Val Obriain



## COMMUNION

<b>Feb</b>	06 pm	Jacqui Powlesland & Nanna Blackman
		Preparation Iris Lindsay
	20 am	Sharon Watson & Nanna Blackman
		Jacqui Powlesland & Chris Esapa
<b>Mar</b>	06 pm	Preparation Iris Lindsay
		20 am Judi Holloway & Chris Esapa
		Sharon Watson & Nanna Blackman
		Preparation Susan Wass
<b>Apr</b>	03 pm	Preparation Iris Lindsay



## FLOWERS

<b>Feb</b>	06	Jill McBride
	13	Jacqui Powlesland
	20	Alison Hazell
	27	Joan Currie
<b>Mar</b>	06	Beryl Cartwright
	13	Judi Holloway
	20	Val Obriain
	27	Jill McBride
<b>Apr</b>	03	Jacqui Powlesland



## COFFEE

<b>Feb</b>	06	Linda McCormac & Sharon Watson
	13	Susan Wass & Irene St Clair
	20	Peter Gamston & Gwen Mee
	27	Marjorie Lee, Iris Lindsay & Judith Bungey
<b>Mar</b>	06	Jill & Robert McBride
	13	Linda McCormac & Sharon Watson
	20	Susan Wass & Irene St Clair
	27	Peter Gamston & Gwen Mee
<b>Apr</b>	03	Marjorie Lee, Iris Lindsay & Judith Bungey



# ROTAS

## REST & CHAT

Feb	03	Jean Stanley, Marina Bowerman & Irene St
	10	Marjorie Lee
	17	Pat Smith
	24	Iris Lindsay & Joan Currie
Mar	03	Jill & Robert McBride
	10	Jean Stanley, Marina Bowerman & Irene St
	17	Marjorie Lee
	24	Pat Smith
Apr	31	Iris Lindsay & Joan Currie
	07	Jill & Robert McBride Clair



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



Feb	10	Thomas Hayes
	13	Judi Holloway
	16	Leah Cotton
	22	Dave Wesson
	25	Jean Howell
Mar	26	Alison Hazell
	08	Joan Currie
	09	John Watson
	11	Lesley Barter
	15	Doris Hall
	16	Ben Smith
	19	Beryl Cartwright
22	Peter Sellman	

Note: Apology to Jan Schunselaar for missing birthday on 30<sup>th</sup> December



**Pancake Day or Shrove Tuesday**

### What is Shrove Tuesday?

Shrove Tuesday is the day before Ash Wednesday, which this year is on 8<sup>th</sup> March, which marks the start of [Lent](#), a period of liturgical fasting for forty days.

Shrove Tuesday is a day of penitence and the last chance to feast and celebrate before Lent.

Shrove Tuesday comes from the ritual of shriving where Christians would confess their sins in order to receive absolution. The absolution would release them from the guilt and pain their sins have caused them.

