

Witney Congregational Church

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



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
Saturday Praise	11.00 am	1 st Saturday of the month	
Sunday Services	10.30 am		
	6.00 pm	1 st Sunday of the month	

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

PRAYER

The Church is open each morning for Prayer

STUDY & FELLOWSHIP

Thursday 2.30pm Church (2nd Thursday of each month)

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	7.00 pm	Y4J – Twice a 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 774402
01993 864853 (Office)

St ANDREW'S BOOKSHOP

Opening Hours: Monday – Saturday ☎ 01993 709429
09.00 am – 5.00 pm

CHURCH WEBSITE

For further information, please visit our website:

www.witneycongregational.org.uk



Welcome to this the first edition to be published in 2016 and I hope that you all had a good Christmas and New Year, and that all your expectations were met.

The month of February brings us Lent and recalls the events leading up to, and including, Jesus' crucifixion by Rome and His resurrection



So much has happened over the last two months throughout the world; there have been natural disasters in the way of storms, floods, and even a recent earthquake and many thousands of people fleeing persecution. 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.

Normally, for us in the UK, life is generally relatively comfortable, with very little hardship, but recently this has certainly **NOT** been the case, especially if you live in the northern area of the UK. So let us remember those who are not as fortunate as ourselves living here in Oxfordshire and surrounding area

Turning now to those who have contributed to this edition; alongside the standard pages, our Minister, Jason, gives us two additional articles; Jo Matthews reflects on the beauty of the church floral arrangements; Beryl Cartwright gives an article from Open Doors; Maureen Miles gives us a poem & there is an article on

boffins and technocrats to name but a few.

Many thanks for those who have contributed for this edition, but would encourage anyone to consider submitting article(s) for the next edition by either:

E-mail:

terrypowlesland@uwclub.net

jacquipowlesland@uwclub.net

or, just plainly written on paper, which can be typed up.

The next 2-monthly edition, covering April & May is due on **Sunday 3rd April**

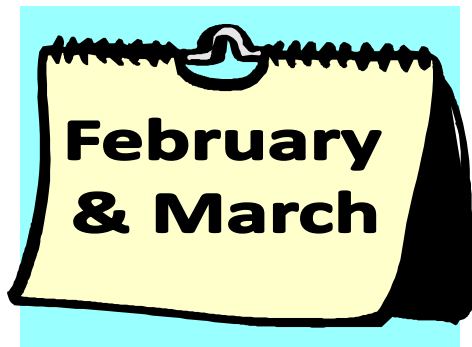
Your Editor



Sunday 27th March

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Daily Prayer Time:

Mon-Fri 9.30 am

Services

10.30 am weekly & 6.00pm on first Sunday of the month and will normally be led by Rev Jason Boyd unless advised below

Feb

6 th		Saturday Praise	11.00am	
7 th	am	Morning Worship		
	pm	Evening Worship	Communion	
10 th	7.30pm	Ash Wednesday Service		
14 th	am	Morning Worship		
21 st	am	Morning Worship	Communion	
28 th	am	Karen Brusck		

March

5 th		Saturday Praise	11.00am	
6 th	am	Morning Worship	Mothering Sunday	
	pm	Evening Worship	Communion	
13 th	am	Café Church		
20 th	am	Rev Elaine & David Kinchin	All-Age Worship	Communion
25 th	10.00am	Good Friday Service		
	1045am	Silent Walk of Witness		
27 th	6.30am	Dawn Service		
	8.15am	Communion Service		
	10.30am	All-Age Worship	Communion	

April

2 nd		Saturday Praise	11.00am	
3 rd	am	Morning Worship		
	pm	Evening Worship	Communion	

The following events are given for your particular attention:

Feb

2 nd	Lite Bite Piece of the Word	12.15pm	
	Deacon's meeting	7.30pm	
13 th	Prayer Chain meeting	9.15am	
18 th	Fellowship Group	2.30pm	Church
	Lent Bible Study	7.30pm	
25 th	Lent Quiet Day	10.00am – 4.00pm	

Mar

1 st	Lite Bite Piece of the Word	12.15pm	
	Deacon's meeting	7.30pm	
3 rd	Lent Bible Study	7.30pm	
10 th	Lent Bible Study	7.30pm	
12 th	Prayer Chain meeting	9.15am	
	Coffee Morning		
	Creative Fun in the Sanctuary	10.00 -12.00	
17 th	Fellowship Group	2.30pm	Church
	Lent Bible Study	7.30pm	

19 th	SWMA Assembly at Stapleton Road Bristol	
20 th	Church Meeting following Morning Worship	
24 th	Maundy Supper	6.30pm for 7.00pm
Apr		
5 th	Lite Bite Piece of the Word	12.15pm
	Deacon's meeting	7.30pm

ROTAS

WELCOMING TEAM

Feb	07	Jill & Robert McBride
	14	Joan Currie & Susan Wass
	21	Nanna Blackman & Theo Howells
	28	Pat Smith & Claire Woodward
Mar	06	Lesley Barter & Irene St Clair
	13	Viviane Boyd & Cecily Lau
	20	Pip & Beryl Cartwright
	27	Robert & Jill McBride
Apr	03	Joan Currie & Susan Wass



COMMUNION

Feb	07 pm	Jacqui Powlesland	
		Preparation	Jacqui Powlesland
	21 am	Norline Martin & Viviane Boyd	
		Beryl Cartwright & Susan Wass	
		Preparation	Beryl Cartwright
Mar	06 pm	Lesley Barter	
		Preparation	Lesley Barter
	20 am	Karen Brusck & Judi Holloway	
		Lesley Barter & Jacqui Powlesland	
		Preparation	Rita Hayes
	27	8.15am	Communion
		10.30am	Viviane Boyd & Beryl Cartwright
			Susan Wass & Norline Martin
		Preparation	Pat Smith
Apr	03 pm	Viviane Boyd	
		Preparation	Viviane Boyd



FLOWERS

Feb	07	Sonya Boyd
	14	Jacqui Powlesland
	21	Judi Holloway
	28	Beryl Cartwright
Mar	06	Rita Hayes
	13	Joan Currie
	20	Val Obriain
	27	Easter
Apr	03	Sonya Boyd



COFFEE

Feb	07	Clare Woodward & Susan Wass
	14	Sue Birdseye & Irene St Clair
	21	Jill & Robert McBride
	28	Susan Wass & Judith Bungey



Mar 06 Viviane Boyd & Hilary Pratley
 13 Café Church
 20 Clare Woodward & Susan Wass
 27 Sue Birdseye & Irene St Clair
Apr 03 Jill & Robert McBride



REST & CHAT

Feb 04 Jean Stanley, Marina Bowerman & Irene St Clair
 11 Robert & Jill McBride
 18 Beryl Cartwright
 25 Joan Currie & Iris Lindsay
Mar 03 Pat Smith
 10 Jean Stanley, Marina Bowerman & Irene St Clair
 17 Robert & Jill McBride
 24 Beryl Cartwright
 31 Joan Currie & Iris Lindsay
Apr 07 Pat Smith



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

Feb 13 Judi Holloway
 16 Leah Cotton
 22 Dave Wesson
 24 Marion Walker
 25 Jean Howell



Mar 08 Joan Currie
 11 Lesley Barter
 Mel Knaption
 16 Ben Smith
 19 Beryl Cartwright
 22 Peter Sellman

Churches Together in Witney
invites you to a

LENT QUIET DAY



on **Thursday 25th February 2016**

at the Congregational Church
Welch Way, Witney



from 10.00 am - 4.00pm

Please bring a packed lunch and a Bible:
drinks will be provided.

For more information and/or to book please contact
 the Revd Joy Hance on 01993 707935
 or email: joysmail@talk21.com by Sunday 21st February.

Pastor's Paper

It was a sweet experience. I stepped off of the train onto the platform at East Disbury station. Walking the road to the Nazarene Theological College¹ was a mixture of distant familiarity. Many of the landmarks were the same and yet there were surprising changes too. The College itself has been transformed since I had last visited.

I arrived on Sunday evening and had to go into the village of Didsbury to get something to eat. Most of the shops had changed. The SPAR shop was now a Co-op store.

I spent quite a lot of time browsing for my evening meal and finally settled for a salmon salad, yoghurt, and bunch of grapes. I noticed the friendliness of the staff, especially a bearded man who seemed to know everyone. Just in front of me in the queue was a customer whose face beamed a smile at the cashier. Clearly they knew one another. The shop assistant called him by name: David.

As I paid, David continued to talk to the cashier. His speech was heavily slurred with an impediment. I knew what he was saying but the shop assistant couldn't make it out and so he came out from behind the counter and put his hands on David's shoulders. "I'm sorry mate. I couldn't make that out. It's noisy in here." He leaned into David with his ear trying to hear but still could not make it out.

I interjected, "He's saying 'Shrove Tuesday.'" David was looking forward to Shrove Tuesday. "Oh!" the shop assistant exclaimed to David, "You mean Pancake Day!" And the shop assistant said 'Ta' to me and I walked back down the street to

the college. My steps were light. I was filled with the warmth of care that the shop assistant had shown. I was touched by the openness of David's smile and the way the two had interacted with each other. And I was glad too that I had been able to help David to be understood.

I shared this experience with a colleague, Julie, and a group of students to reflect on the nature of communication. Julie brought a flash of insight to the interaction. Could it be that the reason the shop assistant had not understood David was not merely because of his speech impediment? Could it be that he had not understood David because he didn't have the vocabulary of 'Shrove Tuesday'? If David had slurred 'Pancake Day' the shopkeeper might have picked up on his meaning more quickly.

Let's collect a few of the words that characterise this period of time in the Christian calendar: Shrove Tuesday, Ash Wednesday, Lent, Mothering Sunday (quite distinct from 'Mother's Day'), Palm Sunday, Holy Week, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday. During this time we will focus on Jesus' temptations, his passion, and resurrection.

Though I do not believe that there was ever a golden age of Christianity in this country, it is probably true to say that most people possessed a working Christian vocabulary. Factors included religious observance in school in which the Lord's Prayer was spoken daily as well as many children being sent to Sunday School even if their parents were not church goers. The acquirement of a Christian vocabulary is not as likely to happen for the non-religious now.

The religious words have been infused with different meanings. Pancake Tuesday is a chance to indulge our sweet tooth rather than 'Shrove Tuesday' as a clearing out operation to prepare for a

¹ I studied at NTC in 1993/1994 and continued to use the library when I was the minister at Heaton Mersey Congregational Church.

Lenten fast. Mothering Sunday is no longer rooted in ideas of 'Mother Church' but an American honouring (or should that be honoring) of mother's and motherhood. Good Friday is a much needed day off in preparation for Easter which is about chocolate and bunny rabbits and the chance of a holiday.

So let's return to the shopkeeper. He was unable to understand David because he didn't have the vocabulary of 'Shrove Tuesday'. I wonder... To what extent do people in our society have the vocabulary to understand the Good News of Jesus that we are seeking to communicate? Are we aware of how alien our language is to those around us? Do we think about the barriers in communication that are there and try to find ways to create understanding? After all, the shopkeeper held David's shoulders and leaned in. He really did want to know what David was saying. I think our society wants to understand who we are and what we are saying even if they might not agree with us. There is a hunger to talk of spiritual things. There is a positive attitude to Jesus (not to the institutional Church).

So as we seek to deepen our relationship with Jesus as we follow him to the cross and discover him as risen Lord, the challenge for us is to find the actions and words that will be understood by those around us so that they can make a choice about whether or not to follow Jesus. In 1 Peter 3:15 & 16 we are challenged: "Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an account of the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence."

Shalom

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "JASON" with a stylized flourish underneath.

The following article has been written and submitted by Jo Matthews, and is entitled:

THE SILENT MINISTRY

How many lovely things are going on around us hardly noticed? How often are we benefitting from something of rare beauty which, sadly, we are taking for granted but would certainly miss if they were not there? Questions which are probably unanswerable, even after serious soul-searching and increased powers of observation.

This brief insertion into Crossroads is in order to draw from us all a huge vote of thanks to the dedicated people who ensure the presence week by week of really beautiful floral arrangements in the church sanctuary.

What a joy they are to behold! Occasionally enhanced by the addition of appropriate objects or fabrics, always pleasing to the eye and often positively uplifting. They have the appearance of having been lovingly and sensitively arranged. Time and artistic skills have been given freely to the glory of God and as an aid to worship.

There they are, quietly exuding tasteful blends of colour, satisfying formation and sheer beauty. Reminding us that our Creator God must have loved colour dearly and that Jesus himself took in the perfection of flowers, rating them far more splendid than the pomp of the richest person on earth! (Matthew 6: 28,29)

This is a potent, silent Ministry.
Thank you so much, Flower Arrangers!



PRAYER LETTER

No 173

Weathering the Storms

Recently when we were in Plymouth we had the opportunity to stay at a place on Plymouth Hoe and walk along this famous historic landmark.

The weather was very cold but very little wind and the short time we had there we were able to see and feel the atmosphere of this historic place.

Plymouth Hoe is a very spacious open area high above a beautiful large sheltered bay, for centuries a safe haven for explorers, sailors, soldiers and fishermen. There is a large statue of Sir Francis Drake in a prominent position in the centre of The Hoe looking out into the bay. Further along is a massive memorial dedicated to all those who lost their lives in the First and Second World Wars. At sunset we saw several fishing vessels going out of the bay heading for the English Channel for a night's fishing.

It brought to my mind the experience Jesus' disciples had on one occasion when he accompanied them in one of their boats.

Launching off from the Sea of Galilee it was calm. Jesus was tired and lulled by the movement of the waves fell asleep. Later when the winds got up and the weather became stormy how frightened and terrified the disciples were. It must have been a bad storm because as some were fishermen they must have been used to some bad weather unless this was a freak storm. The disciples thought the boat was sinking and they were in danger of drowning. (Apparently many fishermen today can't swim)

So scared were they that they woke Jesus to tell Him of their predicament. According to Scripture Jesus stood up and ordered the waves and wind to stop. Within minutes everything was calm. Jesus said to his disciples, 'Don't you have any faith?' Whether the storm had suddenly abated or the winds and waves obeyed is a subject for debate BUT whatever the reason the disciples relied on Jesus to protect them and with Jesus awake and taking control of the situation the disciples, although amazed, were relieved to be safe.

The Bay at Plymouth Hoe has always been and still is a welcome sight for many explorers, sailors and fishermen who caught in rough seas head for the shelter of this bay. Many prayers of petition have been uttered by seafaring folk for safety in stormy situations and for thankfulness when arriving in the safe haven of the Bay.

Going through our everyday lives is not always calm and peaceful as we would like it to be. 'Metaphoric storms' either interrupt or intervene in our lives for one reason or another and we have to cope with 'weathering' these storms. People cope in different ways but Jesus is always there for those who believe in Him to help through these difficult times. God gives us the protection we need if we believe in Him.

John Newton's well known hymn 'Amazing Grace' is a reminder of God's love, protection and grace. Next time you are in a 'stormy situation' remember the words of this hymn.

Every Blessing
Beryl

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

1. Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.

3. Through many dangers, toils and snares
I have already come;
'Tis Grace that brought me safe thus far
and Grace will lead me home.

5. Yea, when this flesh and heart shall fail,
And mortal life shall cease,
I shall possess within the veil,
A life of joy and peace.

2. 'Twas Grace that taught my heart to fear.
And Grace, my fears relieved.
How precious did that Grace appear
The hour I first believed.

4. The Lord has promised good to me.
His word my hope secures.
He will my shield and portion be
As long as life endures

The following poem, written by Eileen Hay, has been submitted by Maureen Miles, and is entitled:

Nights Drawing In

I hear my neighbours all complain
That nights are drawing in,
That summer was a wash-out and
It really is a sin!
I sympathise and nod my head
As if I agree
But, actually, to tell the truth
It doesn't bother me!
I just don't mind the early dark
When I shut out the night –
I close the curtains, light the fire
And bask in its warm light.
It's time for stews and casseroles
And pots of home-made soup,
For catching up with tapestries
And box sets on a loop!
I love to see the cosy glow
When all the lamps are lit,
And hear the wind howl round the house,
No, I don't mind a bit



Martin Luther King famously once said: 'Before you finish eating breakfast in the morning, you've depended on more than half the world'. And eating breakfast is just what Fairtrade Fortnight has in mind for you this year - the campaign hopes to get as many people as possible to eat a Fairtrade breakfast in their homes during the Fortnight.

As a spokesperson explains: "It's a scandal that the people who grow the food we take for granted can't always feed their own families. We can support farmers and workers to put food on the table for their families by harnessing the power of a Fairtrade breakfast. When people are paid a fairer price, they can have more control over their lives when times are hard, and worry less about how they will feed their families."

More details at: www.fairtrade.org

A glimpse into my life as the minister of Witney Congregational Church

I am aware that whilst I know what I do as your minister and I report at Church Meetings, it doesn't hurt to give an account of what God's calling looks like as minister of WCC. In what follows, I give a little taster of what I get up to week in and week out. I am more than happy to discuss anything with you or to answer any questions you may have.

First, ministry in WCC is significantly less pressurised since completing my doctorate. Since July, I have taken a break from research in order to discern where God is leading me/us. I have needed a rest and the opportunity to focus on my family life and that of the congregation. I am praying that as we engage with LEAF (Listening, engaging, and acting in faith) led by Suzanne Nockels, we will find new ways of developing together.

It is important to stress that my ministry in Witney involves inward responsibilities such as preaching, teaching, pastoral support, youth work, children's work and much, much more. I have enjoyed spearheading new initiatives such as the *Lite Bite and a Piece of the Word* on the first Tuesday of the month. This attracts between 12-14 people and seems to be meeting a need for fellowship and being nourished in the scriptures. I am grateful to Jacqui and the team of volunteers who make this an enjoyable event.

Crucially, my ministry faces outward into the community as I lead school assemblies, serve as a governor and chair of governors at Tower Hill Community Primary School, as a trustee of

Base 33, as well as supporting those outside the church who come to me for support.

Part of my responsibility is to contribute to the wider Church and academy. Now that 2016 is upon us, I have begun to re-engage with reading and research. My aim is to write one academic peer reviewed paper (hopefully for July) and put together book proposals to publishers. I hope to be successful in achieving this in the next 12 months. Add to this that I am rewriting a module for the Integrated Training Course (CF) as we commence our accreditation with York St. John University (it is due for the end of June! Yikes!)

Contributing to academia is not an 'extra' pastime in addition to my ministry, but rather a key part of my calling. The development of my practice and intellect is crucial to the development of my ministry locally and nationally. In particular, it is rewarding to come alongside students and learn from them as well as facilitating their growth. I am convinced it has benefits for the learning and development of WCC too (e.g. – support for our ITC students, preaching seminar).

Part of my ministry to the wider Church is through involvement in the Congregational Federation. In the CF, I serve as a tutor and the chair of the Programme Committee for the Integrated Training Course. This latter role requires me to be involved in the Learning and Development Group. One of the pleasures of having completed my research is that I now feel able to respond readily to invitations such as leading the Bible Studies at the Congregational Conference in April. These studies will share the research that we did together and how the Bible was 'ours' and the preaching became (and is becoming) an

ever growing dialogue. I would love if there was a Whitney contingency to help me tell the story.

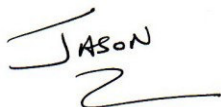
Recently, I was invited to be a guest lecturer at the Nazarene Theological College on an MA course in practical theology. I keep my research and learning up to date through membership of the British and Irish Association of Practical Theologians (BIAPT), participating in the annual conference when possible, and reading the Practical Theology Journal.

Ecumenically, I am about to serve a second stint as chair of CTiW (May 2016-May 2017). My commitment to unity is expressed in getting involved in activities such as Street Pastors (and much more!)

These varied aspects of ministry keep me stimulated and – I hope – energise me in the way I provide leadership as part of this congregation. Do remember that I am easily accessible. My contact details are readily available. I will respond promptly to pastoral requests whether meeting up for fellowship or providing support in crisis. Also, I am grateful for the support I receive in being accountable to Jacqui as my line manager as well as in the meeting of the appraisal group annually.

At the heart of my ministry is the life of prayer. I meet regularly with my spiritual director every 4-6 weeks as part of my continuing formation. Please pray for grace for me to know Christ and to live in his way faithfully. Know that all of you are in my prayers and that my desire is for each one of you to know the grace of Jesus Christ more and more each day.

Yours

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "JASON" with a stylized flourish underneath.

The following article, written by Nigel Beeton, has been extracted from Parish Pump, and is entitled:

The Boffins and the Technocrats

The boffins and the technocrats
Help folk like me and you
Inventing lots of clever things
That tell us what to do!

My car now has a clever light
Dispelling doubt or fear,
Without it I'd have not a clue
When to shift up a gear!

Of course there is the Sat Nav
To help me find my way
The time I learned to read a map
Was just a wasted day!

My PC's a law unto itself
So busy telling me
To upgrade this or restart that –
The net I never see!

And sometimes, when my work is done
I turn on my TV
All chance to watch my programme gone
"Retune" it says to me.

The oven, fridge, and microwave
They make a beeping sound
Or else they have bright lights which flash
To order me around.

And so I am a harassed man,
I live a hassled life;
The one who shouts at me the least
Is my sweet lovely wife!



The following article, extracted from OpenDoors Daily Discipleship Guide 'Live Like a Refugee', has been submitted by Beryl Cartwright, and is entitled:

The world is on the move. No, the world is on the run

The picture haunts us. Desperate young men, clinging to the sides of trucks and trains. Haggard, hollow-eyed fathers and mothers, carrying the remains of their lives in plastic bags. Refugee camps the size of small cities, spreading towards the horizon of a dusty plain. A toddler on the beach, lying face down in the sand

And while the world looks on aghast, the politicians and the media argue about what to do and whether these people are migrants, refugees or asylum seekers.... Jesus had a word for them. He called them 'neighbours'

Jesus said that the two most important commandments were these: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind', and 'Love your neighbour as yourself' (Matt 23: 34-40)

And when a lawyer pressed him to define terms, Jesus told him a story about someone in need and his neighbour who helped him. The twist, of course, was that the man who acted like a neighbour was someone who had every reason to hate or fear the person he helped

That's the thing. Our neighbours are not just those nearest to us. They are not those most like us. They are those in need, those who are desperate, or unwelcome. They are even those whom the world tells us to despise

Refugees and Persecution

According to the UNHCR, the UN refugee agency, some 60 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced by the end of 2014, through persecution, conflict, generalised violence, or human rights violations

For many years, Open Doors has been working with refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) because there is a strong link between displacement and persecution. Christians are often vulnerable to the humanitarian crises, especially in countries where they are a minority

Ultra-violent Islamic extremism causes millions of Christians to flee their homes in places like Syria, Iraq and Nigeria, while in North Korea and Eritrea, many Christians flee an oppressive and violent political regime. In Nigeria and Columbia, many people have been displaced by tribes who adhere to other faiths

Persecution causes many people to flee. The journey is not always far. For every desperate refugee risking their lives on a boat in the Mediterranean, there are many more who remain closer to what used to be their home, scratching out a living in refugee camps, or in areas which are supposedly safer. There are many, many cases of localised displacement, whether families exiled from villages or Muslim converts to Christianity fleeing their homes. They are refugees from reprisal

Nor does 'escape' mean 'safety'. Christians from Sudan, Ethiopia or Eritrea are often trafficked and held to ransom. Some have been summarily executed in Libya and Syria. Even in the refugee camps, Christians can face danger in the Central African Republic, some Christians were put in the same camps as Seleka rebels, the very people who attacked them

Millions of refugees and IDPs do not flee for economic reasons or because they are seeking a 'better life' – they flee because they are in danger of being killed for their faith. So actually, these are not even our neighbours. They are our family

AS A REFUGEE, HERE ARE THE THINGS YOU LEAVE BEHIND.

Homes and possessions You have nothing more than the clothes on your back.

Safety Your journey takes you across hard terrain, through disease-ridden and violent refugee camps. You live rough, endure heat and cold. And all the while at the mercy of traffickers, terrorists, officials.

Status Once you were a doctor, lawyer, pastor, business owner... now you are a 'refugee' or 'migrant'. Reduced to a word, a statistic.

Privacy You find yourself living at close quarters with other people. Maybe 20 people in tent or a borrowed church hall. No privacy, no intimacy, no quiet.

Purpose Your life is boring. Get up. Seek work, food, escape. Not much to do, except the soul-destroying tedium of everyday survival.

Identity 'Where are your papers? You have no papers?' You are a citizen of nowhere. No identity means no job, no official status, no admittance.

Yes, living like a refugee means leaving so much behind. But all those losses are bearable, by the grace of God. The real killer is when you lose hope.



Open Doors

60 years of serving persecuted Christians

The following article extracted from Parish Pump, is entitled:

Ugandan policeman killed after converting from Islam to Christianity

A policeman who converted from Islam to Christianity has been murdered in eastern Uganda.

According to the Ugandan newspaper, Morning Star News, the murder took place in Odek village, north of Kampala. Ismail Kuloba, 43, was responding to an urgent call for police help to settle a land dispute, but when he arrived at the scene, it proved to be an ambush.

One local Christian witnessed the attack. He later told the press that the gang of about 20 Muslim men was furious because "they saw that Ismail had become an apostate." The Muslims therefore began to stone Ismail Kuloba, and one man shouted: 'You converted... to Christianity, and now your time has come for you to receive the punishment of Allah.' A few minutes later they shot him in the head, shouting 'Allah Akbar [God is greater]'.

The Christian who witnessed the attack said: "We need prayers, as the Muslims are out to destroy people who converted to Christ in this area, especially those of us who have sacrificed to share the love of Christ to our fellow Muslims. We shall continue becoming the voice of the persecuted church, and the work of God will eventually emerge victorious against the evil forces of darkness."

Other local Christians have retaliated by burning down the house of one Muslim allegedly involved in the attack. Morning Star News reported that fears are growing this will spark a subsequent retaliation and further violence.

Minister's Musings

I wish to update you on a few things that will be of interest to you.

In the last magazine I intimated that Suzanne Nockels would be leading us at our next Church Meeting regarding the LEAF programme. Unfortunately, her diary was already choc-a-bloc. I will be in correspondence with her to arrange a date but it will most likely be late spring/early summer.

In some ways I was rather relieved that Suzanne was not available to come because, as it turned out, the Church Meeting in January was very poorly attended and in fact we were not quorate. The Church Meeting is at the heart of the Congregational Way and it is the privilege and responsibility of every church member to participate.

There are a number of reasons which may account for Church Meetings being poorly attended. First, there are those who do not take part in them because they have had a negative experience in days gone by. During my ministry in Witney I am pleased to say that Church Meetings have been enjoyable. Yes, there has been healthy debate but I have never found the Church Meetings here to be destructive. So, if you are a member who does not come for this reason, I would implore you to reconsider your position. The Church Meeting needs you.

Second, we have a membership list that is slightly inflated making a quorum harder to achieve. As a minister I am always reluctant to remove people from membership as it tends to close the door to a person returning should they change their mind. The last Church Meeting proposed that we remove members where it is clear that the link is completely

broken and retain those members where it is less clear, placing them on an 'inactive list'. This 'inactive list' will be agreed by Church Meeting and these members will not be counted towards our overall membership. The advantage of this is that it will allow inactive members to return and to be 'activated' with relative ease.

Another reason why participation in Church Meetings may be low could be due to our meeting time. Having a meeting on a weekday evening makes it difficult to attend for some people. Older people and those with health issues as well as working folk with families do not find evening meetings easy to participate in. Church Meetings are for the whole church and it is important that we make them as accessible as possible.

The timing of the Church Meeting was discussed at the last CM and there was a consensus that we trial holding the meetings after a service on a Sunday. Our next Church Meeting will be on 20 March. Please be there. This matter will be discussed again and (I hope) we will be quorate and able to make a firm decision.

I would ask you to continue to pray for God's calling to be recognised by someone in our fellowship to serve as our next Church Secretary. This is such an important ministry and we need to take great care in attending to the Spirit and discerning the way forward.

There are a number of developments following on from the Giving for Growth Campaign two years ago. One of the ways in which we are attempting to ensure that we are using all the gifts that were offered in 2014 is to develop a plan. Jacqui has been working hard to put this plan together. Hopefully you have been approached (if you indicated your willingness to share your

gifts). If you have a gift that you want to share but you didn't put your name forward in 2014, please let Jacqui or me know so that we can get you involved. As a general principle this is how the pattern will work:

- a) First Sunday of the month: All age talk.
- b) Second Sunday of the month: Leading in prayers.
- c) Third Sunday of the month: a deacon to do a reading and or a prayer during communion.
- d) Fourth Sunday of the month: one of our preachers will preach.
- e) Fifth Sunday of the month: something special (e.g. – youth service, songs of praise etc...)

In addition to this plan to use all the gifts, the diaconate is looking at ways to share responsibilities. For example, Karen Bruschi is taking responsibility for the music rota. Another is that we are looking for someone to take care of pulpit supply. Please keep the deacons in prayer as we seek to share out the ministries of the church as widely as possible. If you think you might be able to help, please let Jacqui or me know.

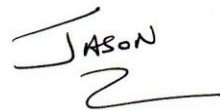
I would like to remind you of the Congregational Conference from 29 March to 1 April at Brunel Manor, Torquay. This conference is for all members of the Congregational Federation and will focus on the theme: Being Together. Consider coming along and enriching your spiritual life and fellowship with other Congregationalists in the UK. Leaflets with registration forms are available.

As we journey towards Easter, I would urge you to attend the Ash Wednesday service on 10 February at 7:30 pm. Start your Lent well with worship

celebrating communion. We will journey through Lent with a series of studies on Thursday at 7:30 pm in the Church Lounge. We will be following the Open Doors material 'Live like a refugee'. Our first session will be an introduction to the theme and then the following sessions will focus on four countries: Iraq, Syria, North Korea and Nigeria. These will take place on 18, 25 February & 3, 10, 17 March. Then we will move through Holy Week with the Maundy Thursday supper with footwashing and communion (6:30 – 8 pm), the Good Friday service at our church (10 am) followed by the Silent Walk of Witness (10:45) and United worship in the Market Square (11 am).

May God richly bless you as we walk together in the Way.

Yours



I would like to thank you all for your kind words, thoughts, prayers and gifts that I received after my fall last year.

Knowing you were all there for me gave me the strength and determination for my speedy recovery. To my dear friend Jean I would like to say a special thank you, for being with me at my time of need and helping immensely

Thank you
Love Marina

The following article has been extracted from Parish Pump and is entitled:

Attacks on Kenya Christians on the increase

Release International has charted a 'worrying' increase in attacks against Christians in Kenya, as Al-Shabaab militants seek to infiltrate the country. So says Paul Robinson of Release International, which supports persecuted Christians around the world.

A recent fact-finding visit by Release recorded increasing attacks against churches by Islamist gunmen based in Somalia, who are affiliated to al-Qaeda. There are also disturbing signs of hard-line intolerance towards Muslims who change their religion.

Now Release has also called for prayer for Hassan Ali, a recent convert to Christianity, who has had to leave his home for fear of being murdered by his relatives. According to Hassan, his in-laws were among a group of men armed with knives who came to his door in Witu, Lamu County, demanding to see him. He escaped through a window when he heard the visitors questioning his wife about her faith. His wife and their children, aged seven and four, have been taken back to live with her relatives. Her parents are reportedly insisting the children attend a madrassa (Islamic school). Hassan was raised as a Muslim but became a Christian about ten months ago.

Attacks against churches in this Christian majority country are increasing. In the last few months Islamist extremists set fire to two church buildings in Tiribe near Mombasa. Pastor Mutuku of Faith Victory Church says his congregation now meet in a tent.

Pastor Nyawa, whose Holistic Church was also burned, says his remaining members are now forced to meet outside, under police protection, but are contending with heavy rains and flooding.

Release International is urging the Kenyan government to do all it can to step up security. Release says: 'Muslim leaders must take urgent steps to counter the radicalisation of their youth.'

Last April, al-Shabaab attacked a predominately Christian college in north-east Kenya, killing 150. The terrorist group became notorious after attacking the Westgate shopping Mall in Nairobi in September 2013, killing at least 67 people.

The Kenyan government has sent troops to Somalia, where al-Shabaab is based, and has raided mosques in Kenya to counter the growing radicalisation.

Through its international network of missions Release International serves persecuted Christians in more than 30 countries around the world.

Leap Year – 29th February

2016 brings us a Leap Year. We need to add this extra day every four years in order to keep our calendar in alignment with the Earth's revolutions around the Sun. The problem is very simple: our calendar has 365 days, but it actually takes 365.242199 days (a tropical year) to circle once around the Sun. That means we are 'out' by nearly six hours a year. Four times six hours is 24 hours - hence an extra day every four years.

Adding the extra day in February goes back to Julius Caesar in 45 BC. In his Julian Calendar, February was the last month of the year, and 24th February was Leap Year Day.

The following article has been extracted from Parish Pump, and is entitled:

Recent report on religion and belief in Britain ‘seriously misguided’

A recent report led by Baroness Butler-Sloss which said that Britain is no longer a Christian country has been criticised by cabinet ministers who said it was ‘seriously misguided’, and by the Church of England which claimed it appeared to have been ‘hijacked’ by humanists. The report into religion and belief in Britain, calls for a ‘new settlement’ for religion because the religious landscape has been ‘transformed’ by a growth in non-Christian religions and numbers of people with no religion.

In response, a spokesperson for the Church of England said: “We welcome the call in this report for greater religious literacy and the highlighting of the scale of social action by the Church – as well as its recommendation that where a religious organisation is best placed to deliver a social good, it should not be disadvantaged.

“We also welcome the acknowledgement that the establishment of the Church of England has helped the integration of non-Christian perspectives in British society and helped them to make their voices heard in the public sphere. The Church of England, through its dioceses, parishes and at national level has been at the forefront of work to increase understanding between the different faiths.

“We are however disappointed that the report misunderstands the role of Church of England schools in providing a rounded education to more than a million pupils from all backgrounds as part of our commitment to the common good. If

there is a significant problem with our schools it is that many of them are so popular that they are oversubscribed and not every parent who wants to can send their children to one.

“The report also misunderstands collective worship in schools. We believe that if the law on collective worship were repealed schools would risk losing this vital element of shaping a community that reflects the full breadth of human experience. We know, for example, that the response of many schools to the horror of the Paris attacks will have been in the context of collective worship.

“The report is dominated by the old fashioned view that traditional religion is declining in importance and that non-adherence to a religion is the same as humanism or secularism.”

After recent “overwhelming public support for the Church of England over the Lord’s Prayer cinema advert, it is important to remember that most public opinion is strongly opposed to the marginalisation of Christianity.”



CTiW Lent Soup Lunch

17th February St Marys Church Green

26th February High St Methodist

1st March Holy Trinity

10th March Congregational Church

18th March Our Lady & St Hugh