

CORNERSTONE

The Magazine of
WITNEY CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH



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)

April & May 2023

4 Welch Way Witney Oxon OX28 6JF
Tel: 01993 709992

www.witneycongregational.org.uk
Office: witneycongooffice@gmail.com



As you read this edition, we will soon be celebrating the greatest of all Christian feasts - **Easter**; where we are free to rejoice in a risen saviour who is near to us in resurrection power. Let us not forget the magnitude of Christ's sacrifice made for us all on the cross, and the increasing number of Christians within Witney, and the local area, who would normally do the 'Witness Walk' to the Market Square service on Good Friday; but this year sadly this will not be taking place. As families, especially with children, no doubt you also celebrate by the giving, and receiving, of Easter eggs



I now turn to some of this month's contents: along with the standard contributions, Lesley Barter has written about what travels have taught her; Elaine Kinchin has written about Knit & Natter & Warm Space; there is the continuation of Ken Lee's Bible Study, which sadly, will be completed by the end of the year; Pip Cartwright gives us the history of WCC and some articles have been extracted from Parish Pump, 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 3-monthly Summer edition, covering June, July & August is due on **Sunday 4th June**

Your Editor

Hearing

A man went into a church and asked the vicar to pray for his hearing. Touched by his faith, the vicar agreed. "Kneel here," he began in a loud voice. The man knelt, and the vicar placed a hand on each ear and bellowed a prayer. "I hope that will help," he finally shouted. "Well, I won't know for a while," the man replied. "It isn't until next month".

Rabbit Habits

If Easter bunnies lay chocolate eggs there soon won't be any rabbits

They should think of the environment and resume their usual habits.



Contents

1. Editorial
2. Diary
5. Minister's Letter
6. Prayer Letter No 207
7. Easter Meditation
8. What my travels have taught me
9. How can a Christian be a scientist?
10. History of WCC: 1986-1988
11. Knit & Natter
12. The Amazon River
13. Bible Study
16. Ukraine Church Leaders
17. St George & A Cross Attitude
18. Redemption & Easter Prayer
19. Online shopping fraud

April & May Diary

April

2 nd	am	Rev Bryan Doyle		
	pm	Rev Judi Holloway		Communion
6 th	pm	Maundy Supper	Rev Judi Holloway	6.15 for 6.30pm
7 th	am	Good Friday	Rev Bryan Doyle	
9 th	am	Rev Bryan Doyle		
16 th	am	Rev Bryan Doyle		Communion – Rev Judi Holloway
23 rd	am	Rev Chris Damp		
30 th	am	Rev Judi Holloway		
	3.00pm	Madley Park Residential Home		Rev Bryan Doyle

May

7 th	am	Rev Bryan Doyle		
	pm	Rev Elaine Kinchin		Communion
14 th	am	Rev Bryan Doyle		
21 st	am	Rev Bryan Doyle		Communion
28 th	am	Rev Oliver Kinchin		

June

3 rd	11.00am	Saturday Praise		
4 th	am	Rev Bryan Doyle		
	pm	Rev Bryan Doyle		Communion

The following events are given for your particular attention:

April

5 th	Hi 5's Music Evening	6.00pm	
6 th	Safe Place and repeated on 13 th ; 20 th & 27 th		12.00 – 2.00pm
14 th	Quiz Night	6.00pm	
29 th	Witney Book Circle	10.30am	

May

2 nd	Lite Bite piece of the Word	12.15pm	
4 th	Safe Place and repeated on 11 th ; 18 th ; & 25 th		12.00 – 2.00pm
5 th	Hi 5's Memories & Puddings	6.00pm	
27 th	Witney Book Circle	10.30am	

June

1 st	Safe Place		12.00 – 2.00pm
-----------------	------------	--	----------------

Rotas

WELCOMING TEAM

April	02	Janet Hayes
	09	Pat Brent
	16	Lesley Barter
	23	Joan Currie
	30	Jacqui Powlesland
May	07	Pat Smith
	14	Janet Hayes
	21	Pat Brent
June	28	Lesley Barter
	04	Joan Currie



FLOWERS

April	02	Pat Brent
--------------	----	-----------

	09	Easter Garden
	16	Joan Currie
	23	Janet Hayes
	30	Jacqui Powlesland
May	07	Judi Holloway
	14	Rita Hayes
	21	Pat Brent
	28	Joan Currie
June	04	Janet Hayes



SUNDAY COFFEE

April	02	Jacqui & Terry Powlesland
	09	Jean Hodgson & Ann Clack
	16	Elaine Kinchin & Glenn Ryan
	23	Pat Smith & Pat Brent
	30	Sue Birdseye & Claire Woodward
May	07	Jacqui & Terry Powlesland
	14	Elaine Kinchin & Glenn Ryan
	21	Jean Hodgson & Ann Clack
	28	Sue Birdseye & Claire Woodward
June	04	Jacqui & Terry Powlesland



THURSDAY COFFEE	(10 – 12)	Soup Lunch (12 – 2)
------------------------	------------------	----------------------------

April	06	Elaine Kinchin	See Rota in kitchen
	13	Ann Clack	
	20	Judi Holloway	
	27	Pat Smith	
May	04	David Kinchin	
	11	Jean Hodgson	
	18	Elaine Kinchin	
	25	Ann Clack	
June	01	Judi Holloway	



Nanna Blackman as standby - We would be extremely grateful for other people to join

SOUND SYSTEM

April	02	Terry Powlesland
	09	Nanna Blackman
	16	Terry Powlesland
	23	Nanna Blackman
	30	Terry Powlesland
May	07	Terry Powlesland
	14	Terry Powlesland
	21	Nanna Blackman
	28	Nanna Blackman
June	04	Terry Powlesland



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

April 07 Hazel Woodward
12 Andrew MacLarty
23 Jo Rudd
26 Joyce Kearsey
28 Tony Houghton

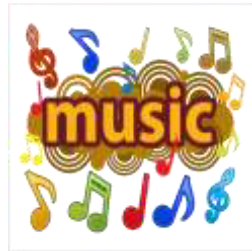


May 04 Graham Beechey
16 Jean Stanley
21 Terry Powlesland
23 Usha Reifsnider
24 Pip Cartwright
30 Pat Smith

Forthcoming events:

5th April at 6.00pm in the Sanctuary

Hi 5's Music evening



All Welcome to an evening of music which will be part concert and part audience participation!

14th April at 6.00pm

Quiz Night in aid of Witney Foodbank



People can enter in teams of two to six & the entrance fee is just £1 per person

To book your team in please contact Sue on (01993) 709992 or email: witneycongooffice@gmail.com by 11th April

5th May at 6.00pm

Hi 5's Memories & Puddings



Minister's Letter

In John 3:16, we read, *"For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life."*

It's all about God's amazing love!!!

The Bible is a love story about a Holy God reaching out to save an unholy people – to rescue them from sin and death and to reconcile them to Himself.

God calls people to respond to His offer of salvation, by believing in His Son, Jesus Christ, and thereby receiving forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

This incredible story of God's *self-sacrificial love* comes to a head in the Easter story – the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ!

We read in John 13:1, *"It was just before the Passover feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for Him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved His own who were in the world, He now showed them the full extent of His love."*

Included in the "full extent of His love," was enduring unimaginable depths of suffering, for us!

To help us to establish a *strong foundation of faith in Him*, Jesus foretold numerous details of what was going to happen to Him and around Him. John 13:19, *"I am telling you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe that I am He."*

The following are some of those prophecies that Jesus spoke:

"Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt there, which no one has ever ridden." (Luke 19:30)

"He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that He must be killed and after three days rise again." (Mark 8:31)

"But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself. He said this to show the kind of death He was going to die." (John 12: 32-33)

"And while they were still eating, He said, "I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me." (Matthew 26: 21)

He makes all these predictions, so that we would believe He is God and that what He says about Himself is true.

Throughout Holy Week, from triumphal entry, to betrayal, arrest and trial, to death and burial and triumphal resurrection, let us keep our eyes fixed upon our Lord and Redeemer, Jesus Christ, who *"...being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!"* (Philippians 2:8)

Have a blessed Easter!

Much love and God's richest blessings,

Bryan



PRAYER LETTER No 207

Prayer

I have been co-ordinating the prayer chain for a few months now and it is wonderful to know that we have a team of dedicated prayer warriors. These people pray as soon as they check their messages – perhaps just a really quick prayer to our gracious God and then incorporate that request into their daily devotions. It is not an onerous task to speak to God about a specific need in the middle of a time of prayer which focusses on the needs of the world around us. We remember that God already knows the situation, and better than we do, so we do not need to know all the details of someone's condition. We just need to faithfully bring that person to mind in our time with God.

Prayer is a conversation with God; which often starts with a monologue while we get off our chests all the things we have been focussing on. These might be items in the news, things happening in our families or our circle of friends or personal details known only to us. We need to allow a quiet time for God to respond to our requests – we might be prompted to phone a relative of the sick person; to send a congratulations card to someone who has just graduated; or we might just feel a sense of peace – we know we can leave the situation in God's hands, trusting in his infinite love and mercy.

The hardest part of praying is when what we pray for does not happen. We may pray for a person to recover from an accident but he or she dies; we may pray for someone to regain full use of their limbs following a stroke but they remain hemiplegic; we may pray that an elderly person's sight or hearing stops deteriorating but they become functionally blind or deaf. Why have our prayers not been answered? Are we doing our prayers wrong?

The answer to these questions is tucked into the beginning of the Lord's Prayer: *Your will be done, on earth as in Heaven*. How can we, as mere mortals, know what is in God's will? If a prayer is not answered in the way we want, we have to learn to accept that God has a better plan, that we are not privy to. We are not asking God to do our bidding, we are not presenting our plans for God to rubber stamp; we are hoping, on a human level, that what we want meshes with God's purposes.

If you pray regularly and would like to join our prayer chain, please ring or text me on the number at the bottom of this page.

Father God, we know you hear our prayers. Help us to learn that you never change your mind but you will help us to change ours! Amen.

Every Blessing, Elaine

Please note that for up-to-date prayer requests contact Elaine Kinchin (07534 879449)

The following article, written by Dr Herbert McGonigle, formerly Senior Lecturer in Historical Theology & Church History, Nazarene Theological College, Manchester, has been extracted from Parish Pump, and is entitled:

An Easter Meditation

In the New Testament the resurrection of Jesus is presented as a simple historical fact. He did rise from the grave on that first Easter morning.

The four evangelists, and Paul, carefully lay out the evidence. They record for us the details of the empty tomb, the names of those who visited it, the various appearances of the risen Jesus and how He was seen by more than five hundred witnesses. But the New Testament tells us more than that.

It tells us, not only of the power of God that raised Jesus from the grave (eg. Romans 1:4) but also of that same power being invested in the Church. Christians are new people! We are 'made alive' in our Risen Head (Ephesians 1:1). His victory has become our victory! As Jesus promised: 'Because I live, you will also live' (John 14:19).

Until our Lord returns again one day, Christians will die physically, but their victory over death is already guaranteed. As Paul demonstrates in 1 Corinthians 15, death is 'swallowed up in victory'! Death's sting is abolished! And so Paul proclaims our victory anthem. 'Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ' (vv.55-57)!

Down through 2,000 years Christ's people have lived in that glorious victory. One example was Donald Cargill (1619-1681). Cargill was a Presbyterian minister and a Covenanter in the years known in Scotland's history as 'the killing times.' The Covenanters opposed all attempts by the English parliament to impose Episcopacy on

Scotland. With other Covenanters, Cargill strongly denounced the immorality and irreligion of the court of King Charles II. Hundreds of Covenanters were imprisoned at this time, and many were executed, both men and women.

Cargill's fearless itinerant preaching made him a marked man. He moved from place to place, preaching in cottages, fields, and town squares, protected by loyal friends. Then in July 1681 he was arrested and imprisoned. The outcome of his trial was never in question. The government of the day was determined to silence this influential 'rebel.' He was sentenced for execution on July 27th of that year.

On the scaffold in Edinburgh, Cargill spoke to the large crowd that had come to support him. "I climb this ladder," he declared, "with less fear than ever I entered a pulpit to preach." Then, raising his eyes to a blue July sky over his beloved Scotland, he cried out: "I have gotten me Christ and Christ has gotten me the victory." The blade fell and the brave soul of Donald Cargill joined the martyrs who lived and died in the victory of the Risen Christ.

Thanks be to God indeed! That glorious victory is not only for all the brave martyrs, but for all of us who belong to Christ. Death is defeated. The grave is conquered. Christ lives for ever in the power of an endless life. And we live in Him! We can all say: '*I have gotten me Christ and Christ has gotten me the victory.*'



The following article has been written & submitted by Lesley Barter, and is entitled:

What my travels have taught me:

As I write this, I am watching the rain from my study window and reflecting on the last 2 months in Australia. It is astonishing how many similarities there are between the two countries where my heart is. I am always struck by the fact that I can be on an aeroplane for nearly two or more days, fly thousands of miles, and emerge in a country where, if not the weather, the language and the way of life are completely familiar. It is also true of our churches.

I have become a long-distance member of a Uniting Church in Adelaide City, the profile of which reflects ours. A nucleus of members of advancing years and a large building requiring expensive maintenance. They too are facing a dilemma about the kind of church they want to be in the future - Like us, they have just appointed a new Minister, who is part-time, but unlike us they are very fortunate to have a paid specialist in outreach work who makes pastoral visits and is building up a fellowship for young people, focusing on students at the University next door. I shall be receiving their newsletter on a regular basis so I can pass on any good ideas they are implementing.

Another familiar scenario is the public focus on ethnicity, the dark shadow of the colonial past and the rights of Aboriginal people today. It reflects our own Black Lives Matter campaigns and the changing attitudes of people to the legacy of the past. Some feel that they had no part in what happened and see little point in endless apologies. Others campaign for the return of territory and the artefacts to which we have no legal right. Neither view will right any wrongs and history can't be changed, however differently we may feel about it now. Our

two countries face these challenges in common.

We have been reflecting upon Love during the lead up to Easter and I have certainly encountered it in spades during my travels. The effortlessly warm welcome of the people I have met and their genuine interest in life in Britain are heart-warming. It is indeed a reflection of God's love for us all. It follows us and envelops us wherever we go. It is unchanging in its steadfastness, as we are reminded in the hymn by Thomas Chisholm:

Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father
There is no shadow of turning with thee
Thou changest not, thy compassions they
fail not

As thou hast been, thou forever wilt be

(based on Lamentations 3 v.23)

When we are in unfamiliar territory, be it on holiday or in our lives generally, it is important to remind ourselves of this. May it guide us this Easter and in the year ahead.

The following article, from the Congregational Federation series of reflections during Advent and Lent, has been submitted by Elaine Kinchin, who today, 21st March, I read a verse from a poem by Christina Rossetti. This Victorian poet is well known as the author of *Love came down at Christmas* and *In the Bleak Midwinter*. But the words of her poem entitled Good Friday are amazing:

*Am I a stone, and not a sheep,
That I can stand, O Christ, beneath Thy cross,
To number drop by drop Thy blood's slow
loss,
And yet not weep?*

*Not so those women loved
Who with exceeding grief lamented Thee;
Not so fallen Peter, weeping bitterly;
Not so the thief was moved;*

*Not so the Sun and Moon
Which hid their faces in a starless sky,
A horror of great darkness at broad noon –
I, only I.*

*Yet give not o'er,
But seek Thy sheep, true Shepherd of the
flock;
Greater than Moses, turn and look once
more
And smite a rock.*

Not only does this poem tell of how all around the cross were moved, it also has an echo of Ezekiel 36:26 (KJV, the version Christina would have read and loved): “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh”.

The following article, written by Dr Ruth M. Bancewicz, who is Church Engagement Director at The Faraday Institute for Science and Religion in Cambridge, writes on the positive relationship between Science and Christian faith, and is entitled:

How Can a Christian be a Scientist?

I used to ask this question as a student. I wondered, who could make it in the world of science and still hold onto their faith? Soon enough I met a good number of successful scientists who were sincere Christians, some of whom were at my own university. So, what do people like this make of the opportunities and challenges that a life in science holds for a Christian?

Science is an exercise in observing and measuring things in the world, and coming up with general principles about the way things are. Exploring the world is a great thing to do to express our gratitude to the Creator. There is a sense of awe and wonder that comes when we expand our minds and our horizons by discovering things about the universe can feed into our worship.

Of course, there may be things in science that some Christians don't want to get involved in because of what they believe. But there should also be ethical issues that make them want to get stuck into new research that will help people, protect creation, or tackle injustices. I am glad to see that many senior scientists do their best to find appropriate ways to make their own faith visible, so that people like my younger self can find role models and mentors.

Another helpful thing about science is that although our beliefs may at times affect what we notice about the world and how we interpret our data, they shouldn't affect the outcome of experiments themselves. This means that a scientist can be respected by her colleagues for doing good work, regardless of what she believes and what her colleagues think of that worldview.

In my work at [The Faraday Institute for Science and Religion](#), and my involvement with [Christians in Science](#), I have the privilege of meeting a great number of scientists who are also Christians. One of the most famous living biologists is Francis Collins, who was Director of the project to decode the whole of human DNA. He wrote that it is “possible for the scientist-believer to be intellectually fulfilled and spiritually alive, both worshipping God and using the tools of science to uncover some of the awesome mysteries of His creation.” (Francis Collins, [The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief](#) (Simon and Schuster, 2007)

The following article, written & submitted by Pip Cartwright, was correct when first published in July 2006, and corrections have been made since then, and is a continuation from the last edition, and is entitled:

History of WCC: 1986-1988

During the ministry of the Rev. Bob Henry the Church grew in ministry and 8 adults were baptised at the Cote Fellowship Baptistery. Several young families joined to supplement the long-established members so that the Junior Church and YPF flourished.

But it must not be forgotten that we were blessed with a number of 'older comers' whose experience and wisdom was invaluable. They came having served other churches in many capacities. Norman (and Eileen) Chapman led some unforgettable bible studies. Bill and Beatrice Hardcastle (parents of John Hardcastle) worked in the background organising 'Rest and Chat' and keeping us cheerful. Jim (and Monica) Davidson served on the Diaconate and helped practically around the church buildings. Cliff and Nell Puleston were much loved people who took interest in the young people and were active in most things. Jack and Florence Field were staunch members and proved to be most influential. All were sincere active Christians, bringing a deep faith and commitment and proved to be fantastic role models for all the younger generations.

At the start of 1986 Mr Cliff Puleston had taken on the mantle as temporary Church Secretary. The Treasurer was Mr Tony Clark and the Deacons were Mrs Beryl Cartwright (Sunday School Leader and Easter Extra organiser), Miss Mary Witt (organist, Leader of Pilots and Tuesday Fellowship), Mr Jim Davidson, Mr Robert May and two younger Deacons, Mr Paul Keates and Mr Graham Lee who, with Dr Richard Paradine, ran the YPF. The Women's Guild was led by Mrs Linda Wheeler and Mrs Kathleen Collis.

The YPF (Young Peoples Fellowship) had an active social calendar which included joint

meetings with the young people at High Street Methodists, Elim Pentecostal Church, Welcome Church and the Carterton churches. They took Church Services at smaller churches in the District and also organised an 'Odd Job Team' to help pensioners and older members of the Church.

The Church outing to the Severn Valley Railways was enjoyed by all ages and the Junior Church organised a picnic and the traditional visit to the Pantomime and Party afterwards.

It was at this time that Choruses were becoming more popular in Church Services. Mission Praise was introduced and under the leadership of Mr Pip Cartwright, with Mrs Doreen Richards on the piano, a small choir sang new unfamiliar choruses before the Morning Service. Despite the cramped conditions, after Service Coffee and Tea was served. The Mother and Toddlers Group became very popular and once a month a speaker was booked to give a short talk to the mothers on health and safety issues whilst the Toddlers were entertained elsewhere.

At the AGM Mr Jack Field agreed to become the Church Secretary, Miss Mary Witt asked to stand down and two new Deacons, Mr John Hardcastle and Mr Ernie Gascoigne were voted on.

Towards the end of the year Mrs Elsie Auty celebrated her 90th birthday.

Most of the Church activities continued through 1987 including three bible study groups (Development Groups). The Junior Church Picnic was held on White Horse Hill. It was a whole Church family event and was so enjoyable that many remember it to this day.

Perhaps the most significant development was the opening of the Neighbourhood Centre in September. The idea was for the Churches in central Witney to be open daily from 9am to 5pm to offer coffee and tea, and crèche facilities and organise short courses on anything which was needed or of interest to the general public. It was mainly based in our Church and organised chiefly by Mrs Pam

Rubley and Mrs Sheila Gascoigne. It was all run by enthusiastic volunteers and proved to be popular.

In June, Graham and Sue Lee and family left for central South Wales. They felt called by God to develop a Christian Conference Centre, particularly for young people, which they called the Kingfisher Centre. They left their comfortable home in Long Hanborough and bought a small holding in South Wales. The farmhouse and buildings needed renovating so they lived in a caravan. For several years our YPF used their facilities for their annual camp. Mr Luke Taylor was elected onto the Diaconate in Mr Graham Lee's place.

Sadly on the 22nd October 1987 Mrs Linda Wheeler died. For many years she was Witney Congregational Church. She was determined that the Congregational Church should continue in Witney. For many, many years she was a Deacon and was the Editor of the Church Newsletter. She was chairperson and organiser of the Women's Guild and strived to keep the church going when it was at its lowest ebb. She was related to the Sellman family who have served the church so well over the years. Her activity was not just devoted to the church, but she was involved with many organisations in the Town. She was sorely missed.

1988 was a shock year. In January Cliff and Nell Puleston left our church to live near their family in Reading. For the ten years they were with us they gave so much of their love and energy. They, too, were sadly missed.

Also, in January the Rev. Bob Henry announced that he had accepted the call to Kilmarnock Congregational Church in Scotland and he and his family would be leaving in February. Bob originally preached at our old church building at Staple Hall when he was a student at Swansea University studying for the Ministry. He was inducted in 1978 and had been at the helm as we got established in our new premises at Field House. With his wife, Ann, Bob had worked tirelessly to build up the church, both in members and young people.

As Cliff Puleston said "The Church's outlook has now become its outreach and has grown to a major evangelising movement in the town". This firm foundation was going to be needed in the following interregnum.

The following article, written & submitted by Elaine Kinchin, is entitled:

Knit & Natter

There's lot of soup around at the moment. Lite Bite on the first Tuesday of the month (not April 2023 though) features a soup lovingly made by Jacqui, our catering manager. Thursdays 'warm space' soup is served with love but comes from packets! And these cup-a-soups taste surprisingly good.

Thursday morning Rest and Chat started many moons ago as a warm and welcoming space for old age pensioners who had been to the Post Office and visited the market to come into and wait for the bus back to their village or area of the town. Times change. Now pensions are mostly paid into bank accounts and fresh produce can be delivered to your door, either in a 'veg box' or from your choice of supermarket. But we all need a human connection – we were not created to exist alone. So Rest and Chat morphed into Knit and Natter. The energy and cost of living crisis provided a reason to extend the time the church was open into the afternoon. The original idea was that people would bring their own lunch and sit with company to eat it. Offering soup, roll and a cereal bar was supposed to be a back up plan, so that no-one was excluded who had not brought their 'butties' with them. But no-one does – I told you those cup-a-soups were good!

On a serious note – does the phrase Knit and Natter exclude men? The two dozen or so people who gather are predominantly female. Ideas on a postcard please.

The following article, written by Suzanne Knockels, who has given permission to publish it, has been extracted from Congregational Federation Secluded Space series, and is entitled:

The Amazon River

And he said to them 'Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not exist in the abundance of possessions'

Luke 12:15

Do you remember the Argos catalogue? My mum used to subscribe to a couple of catalogues in the 1980s. It was a delight to flick through the thin glossy pages in early December and share what I hoped Father Christmas would put under the tree. I never questioned why Father Christmas ran a catalogue business. After Christmas I would create collages by cutting out items. In an age when we scroll rather than flick it seems an oddly quaint form of consumerism.

The artist Theresa Bruno has spent months cutting out every item from the last Argos catalogue to be published and laminating them to reflect the catalogues on display in the stores. The whole piece takes up the floor in Yorkshire ArtSpace in Sheffield. She's arranged the cut-out pieces in what look like rivers that swirl around the floor. This is more like my on-line shopping experience where I begin looking for a new set of saucepans but get caught up in the flow of the Amazon river and end up purchasing something else. One river ends with a pair of earrings - yep, that is me.

I remember hearing Ruth Valerio, who worked for the Christian environmental charity A Rocha before moving to TearFund, telling us to be more careful with our spending and to internally deliberate our consumer choices. She wasn't being a kill-joy. She said that there

was more joy and satisfaction in selecting something that we genuinely needed, that was of quality and that we had researched the environmental impact of. In other words, more Argos and less Amazon (other sites are available!).

Did Jesus flick or scroll? He wasn't against the material world but lived simply and lightly. He lived according to the flow of the Spirit and didn't drown in the abundance of possessions that, if we are not on our guard, end up possessing us.

Take a moment and pause the next time you are poised to make a purchase (online or on the High Street). Do you really need it? Is there a more environmentally friendly alternative? Could you make it or borrow it instead? Might there be more joy in that?



Palm Sunday visit

It was Palm Sunday, but because of a sore throat, five-year-old Bobby was kept home from church with his grannie. When the family returned home, they were carrying several palm fronds and Bobby asked them what they were for. "People held them over Jesus' head as He walked by," his father explained.

Bobby was aghast. "I don't believe it! The one Sunday I don't go, and He shows up!"

Bible Study

In this edition, and with permission from Ken & Marjorie Lee's family, and in memoriam to Rev Ken Lee, a series of Bible Studies, written by Ken and first submitted back in 1999, will be re-produced and is entitled:

MEANDERING IN MARK

"Meander" means "To wander deviously or aimlessly". Perchance this is not too accurate a description of these studies; it is hoped that they are not too devious nor totally aimless. However, the term "meander" is used to indicate an approach which takes its time, stops as needful to let a thought, an idea, an insight develop - all with the purpose of seeing what the Lord has to say to his people. May He speak, and to Him be the glory.

27. Mark 10:17-31

"As he was setting out on his journey" - with these words of reminder that events are moving rapidly towards a climax at the end of the journey, Mark introduces the story of a man in a hurry. This man runs up to Jesus and kneels before him. He is in a hurry to get to Jesus, in a hurry to have his question answered, his whole future depends on sorting out his problem. Mark paints a picture of him as a man in a state of desperate need. Mark describes his action by using a word which he has only used once before in his account, used it of those with unclean spirits who on seeing Jesus fell down before him, recognising him for whom he was and submitting to him (3:11). So this man comes and adopts a position of submission, maybe even of worship as he addresses Jesus as "Good Teacher". Jesus questions this form of address: "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone." What was Jesus saying by this response? Was he denying that he was indeed good? Or was he perchance saying to this man, "Do you really find God in me?" It is as though Jesus sees this man at his feet in an attitude of worship and seeks to remind him that only God is to be worshipped, for only

God is good enough to be worshipped unconditionally. Subsequent events enable us to draw our own conclusions about the reality of this man's devotion.

The man poses his question to Jesus: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Most Jews would not have asked such a question for they were convinced that they knew the answer; the answer was to keep the Law, to obey the commandments. But this man seems to have become aware that there was a need for something beyond just Law. Maybe he thought that his devotional life, his attitude towards God, his communion with God could be strengthened in some way. So he asks his question. The response of Jesus is to remind the man to keep the commandments. However the commandments which Jesus lists are not those concerning attitude to and worship of God but rather the six commandments to do with human relationships. Jesus briefly lists these, slightly modifying the last commandment from a prohibition of covetousness to that of not defrauding ones neighbour. This later change may be seen as Jesus being concerned with actual actions; coveting is an attitude of mind while to defraud involves definite action. Perhaps the change is to emphasise that his response is to the man's question: "What must I do?" The answer of Jesus speaks of how to act in everyday human relationships.

The man is not satisfied. He claims to have kept all these commandments: in terms of legal behaviour towards other people he was beyond reproach. Jesus accepts his statement as true. He looks at the man and sees in him the depth of his longing for something greater than the Law - and seeing this, Jesus is filled with love towards this man so that he seeks to help him onto the path of eternal life. Jesus goes straight to the heart of the man's problem, that which is coming between him and God, as he says to him: "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." The man is to dispose

of every material thing in which he has put his trust and, trusting in God alone, commit himself to follow Jesus, the person whom he has called "good". This is the way for him to have "treasure in heaven". The man's question had been about doing something in order to inherit eternal life: the answer of Jesus poses for him the question as to how much he values the prospect of eternal life, of heavenly treasure when set against his present state of physical, earthly comfort. He is given a choice to make. Presented with such a choice, the man is shocked to the very depth of his being; this was something far more than he had bargained for and he could not rise to the challenge. Earthly comfort in the here and now was more important for this man and so he went away very sadly, a prisoner to his many possessions, possessions which kept him from following Jesus.

Jesus seizes the opportunity now presented to broaden the understanding of his disciples as to what following him entails. He says to them, "How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" The disciples were perplexed, astounded by this statement. Mark uses a word here to describe their reaction which he had previously used at 1:27 to describe the reaction of the people in the synagogue at Capernaum when Jesus had cast out an unclean spirit. At that time the people raised the question "What is this? A new teaching - with authority!" The event, the teaching did not fit with their preconceived understanding of the ways of God. So it is now for the disciples. In their thought, as in that of their contemporaries, wealth was the blessing of God upon those who kept the Law. They would recall the giving of the Law through Moses with the exhortation to "follow exactly the path that the Lord your God had commanded you, so that you may live and it may go well with you" (Deut. 5:33.) "Going well with you" had become equated with gaining riches! No wonder the disciples were perplexed. Jesus adds to their perplexity as he goes on to say:

"How hard it is to enter the kingdom of God!" There is no mention here of wealth, of riches; to enter the kingdom of God is hard for anyone, be they rich or poor. But maybe it is more difficult for the rich! Jesus continues with the picture of a camel going through the eye of a needle. It is easier for such an event to take place than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God! The disciples are astounded! They know that a camel cannot go through the eye of a needle; to even suggest any possible way by which this might conceivably happen is beyond their imaginations. We can picture the looks of disbelief and perhaps despair on their faces as they question one another: "Who then can be saved?" Jesus doesn't answer that question. Mark reports "he looked at them". May we not also picture the love in that look as he reminds them of where power and authority lie, as to whose is the gift of eternal life, and whose is the kingdom. "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible". Such is the challenge Jesus presents to them and to us - to believe or not to believe.

All things are possible for God! Such belief is expressed again and again in the Old Testament. The final submission of Job to God opens with Job's words, "I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted" (Job 42:2). God can do what God chooses to do - so the rich man can enter the kingdom of heaven and the camel can go through the eye of a needle if God so chooses. All such things, at the last, are in the gift of God. But as to whether God does so choose remains an open question to which Mark records Jesus as giving no answer at this point in his story. Rather does Mark picture the bewildered disciples, once again with Peter at spokesman, seeking to know where they stand in this quest for eternal life, in gaining entry to the kingdom. Peter poses their question in the form of a statement: "Look, we have left everything and followed you." He is claiming that the disciples have done what the man who has just gone sorrowfully away would not

do. In this he perhaps exaggerated for, according to Mark's earlier account, Peter still had a house (1:29) and the fisherman disciples had access to and use of a boat (3:9, 4:1). They had left these things behind, but they had not totally "burnt their boats". Although the price of following Jesus was high for those disciples, they still had the possibility of going back for they had not sold all that they had and given it to the poor. There were still choices open to them as to the way they could go; even now they could turn back.

Jesus however does not point this out, he does not question Peter's statement. He has accepted these followers just as they are. He is still engaged in teaching them what more is to be required of them, what it means to follow him. Meanwhile, Mark pictures Jesus as responding with a truly awesome promise of a hundredfold replacement "now in this age" of all that has been left behind for his sake and for the sake of the good news. The promise is for something immediate; the word used, *καιρος*, speaks of an occasion rather than an extended period of time while the accompanying promise of eternal life "in the age to come" uses the word *αιων* indicating a prolonged period, even eternity. The hundredfold gift is to be received at the time of leaving behind house, brothers, sisters etc. while eternal life has a much more long-term dimension. While being awesome, this promise of Jesus is also puzzling as to its precise meaning for "now in this age". It could well be that Jesus is reminding his disciples of the new relationships that come into being through following him, where all who follow him become to one another, fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, children together of the one Father. The omission of mention of wives and husbands from the list fits well with the nature of the special relationship given to marriage by Jesus as indicated in his previous teaching (10:2-12). Following Jesus immediately makes a person's family so much larger, it opens up the houses of all that enlarged family to be for each

member "home". It also gives a different sense of what it is to possess "fields" - all of God's creation is the gift of God to those who follow in the way. Yet the way ahead in the company of a great new family is not a totally smooth path for there is a promise also of "persecutions". What this may mean is yet to be revealed; maybe all the followers of Jesus have not got to sell all that they have and give to the poor, but there remains a cost for everyone who wills to follow Jesus and that cost may be greater than his followers imagine. Certainly the disciples were not yet able to imagine what it meant to deny themselves and take up their cross (8:34) even as they had not yet been able to grasp the cost of his way for Jesus himself despite his having spelt it out twice over for them (8:31-33; 9:31-32).

Mark now pictures Jesus concluding this particular teaching session with a saying which may well have been used by him in more than one context: "Many who are first will be last, and the last will be first." By including it at this point, Mark obviously sees it as summing up the events and teaching which he has just recorded. The statement is a reminder that the priorities and values of human beings are not necessarily those of God. Striving to be "the first" is not something those who follow Jesus should be concerned about; their calling is simply to follow him, to walk in his way. Being "the last" is unimportant for those who know that they are following Jesus to the best of their ability. God, for whom all things are possible, will set all in their right place within eternity. Meanwhile the call is to know who Jesus is and to follow him. There is a journey which is yet to be concluded.



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

Ukraine: church leaders targeted by Russian forces

Church leaders in Ukraine are being singled out for persecution by Russian forces in occupied areas. Some pastors have been arrested, interrogated, tortured, and even expelled from their towns by the Russian military and their supporters.

Occupying forces have confiscated church buildings and Christians have received harsher treatment at Russian military checkpoints, say partners of Release International, which serves persecuted Christians around the world.

According to reports, Russian forces broke into a Baptist place of worship in occupied Berdyansk, in Zaporizhzhia. After checking the identity of everyone present, they searched the church and sealed it. The next day they seized another Baptist church nearby.

Later that month, according to Forum 18, Russian forces seized a priest of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine in occupied Kherson.

In the following account, names have been changed to protect the individuals:

Before the war Pastor Ivan led a growing congregation of more than 200 people in a town in the Kharkiv region. He also supported a thriving network of five evangelical churches in the area.

Last spring when the Russian military were poised to take the town many fled, including families with young children. Only some elderly people remained. Pastor Ivan and his wife Viktoria stayed behind too.

They felt called by God to serve the elderly and vulnerable in their occupied town. So, they did what they could to provide those

who remained with food, prayer, and comfort from the Bible.

But the Russian forces came to Pastor Ivan's home to arrest him. They threw him into prison and tortured him, accusing him of being an American spy. They are suspicious that evangelical pastors are agents of the West.

Enduring their beatings, Pastor Ivan tried to talk about God with them. And when he was stuck in a tiny cell with eight other prisoners, he prayed for them.

Two days later the Russian soldiers interrogated him again and beat him so badly he thought he would die.

"Other prisoners tried to help me and called for help. The Russians sent me to a hospital, which I believe was divine grace and intervention. I believe God saved my life through the Ukrainian doctors who helped me."

After two weeks, Pastor Ivan was allowed home where he recovered slowly. And, as the Russians tightened their grip, Pastor Ivan and Viktoria left for Poland. As soon as their town was liberated by Ukrainian forces, they returned.

Says Release International CEO Paul Robinson: "Pastor Ivan is again leading a congregation of more than 300 people, many of whom are new to church. God is using him and others like him to share the gospel and to help people in practical ways in the liberated areas of eastern Ukraine."

Release International has launched an [appeal](#) to help Christians in Ukraine and around the world who are suffering oppression for their faith. If you would like to help, please go to:

<https://releaseinternational.org>



The following articles have been extracted from Parish Pump

23rd April: St George, our Patron Saint who isn't English

The English have a patron saint who isn't English, about whom next to nothing is known for sure, and who, just possibly, may not have existed at all. But that didn't stop St George being patriotically invoked in many battles, notably at Agincourt and in the Crusades, and of course it is his cross that adorns the flags of English football fans to this day.

It's most likely that St George was a soldier, a Christian who was martyred for his faith somewhere in Palestine, possibly at Lydda, in the early fourth century. At some point in the early centuries of the Church he became associated with wider military concerns, being regarded as the patron saint of the Byzantine armies. There is no doubt that St George was held as an example of the 'godly soldier', one who served Christ as bravely and truly as he served his king and country.

The story of George and the dragon is of much later date and no one seems to know where it comes from. By the Middle Ages, when George was being honoured in stained glass, the dragon had become an invaluable and invariable visual element, so that for most people the two are inseparable. Pub signs have a lot to answer for here: 'The George and Dragon'.

However, it's probably more profitable to concentrate on his role as a man who witnessed to his faith in the difficult setting of military service, and in the end was martyred for his faithfulness to Christ.

The idea of the 'Christian soldier' was, of course, much loved by the Victorian hymn-writers - 'Onward, Christian soldiers!' The soldier needs discipline. The heart of his commitment is to obedience.

The battle cannot be avoided nor the enemy appeased. He marches and fights alongside others, and he is loyal to his comrades. In the end, if the battle is won, he receives the garlands of victory, the final reward of those who overcome evil.

St George's Day presents a challenge and an opportunity. The challenge is to distance the message of his life from the militarism and triumphalism that can easily attach itself to anything connected to soldiers and fighting. The opportunity is to celebrate the ideal of the 'Christian soldier' - one who submits to discipline, sets out to obey God truly, does not avoid the inevitable battle with all that is unjust, wrong and hateful in our world, and marches alongside others fighting the same noble cause.

Discipline, obedience, courage, fellowship and loyalty - they're not the most popular virtues today, but that doesn't mean that they don't deserve our admiration.

Canon Paul Hardingham considers what happened on Good Friday and Easter, and is entitled:

A Cross Attitude

In this Easter season, how does Philippians 2 help us to understand more about the cross?

Paul explains what Jesus did in this way: *'He did not consider equality with God something to be used to His own advantage... And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross!'*

Jesus' example (v6-8)

Paul reminds us that Jesus, although He was fully God from eternity, entered our world as a man to take on a life of service. *'He made himself nothing by taking the*

very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.’ He completely surrendered Himself, by identifying with all the weakness, problems, and frailties of human life. This took Him to the cross, where He rescued us from the power of sin and death, so that we might know God’s eternal life.

Our Response (v3-5)

Paul says that our relationships should reflect the same attitude as Jesus: *‘Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.’* We should look out for the needs of others before our own. This will transform our relationships at home and church. How practically can we develop a *cross attitude*?

God’s Purpose (v9-11)

The Resurrection demonstrates how God has exalted Jesus in triumph: *‘Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name’* (v9). Our willingness to serve, like Jesus, will be rewarded by God, especially when we feel used or exploited.

‘This is our God, the Servant King, He calls us now to follow Him, to bring our lives as a daily offering, of worship to the Servant King’ (Graham Kendrick)



All part of the same BIG story of redemption

Ever wonder how the Old Testament fits in with the New Testament? They are not different stories, but different stages in one and the same story – of how God has reached out and rescued mankind.

Throughout the Old Testament there are references to a coming Messiah who will redeem His people. For Jesus did not come to abolish the Old Testament, but to fulfil it. As St Augustine put it long ago: *‘The New is in the Old concealed; the Old is in the New revealed.’* Above all, the Bible – both Old and New Testaments – is a portrait of Jesus Christ.



Easter Prayer 2023

Thank you, Father, that you raised Jesus from the dead on that first Easter Day and that He is alive now and forever.

Thank you that whoever believes in Him and turns away from selfish living and towards you can be forgiven through His name.

Thank you that Jesus is the same today as He was then and will always be.

Thank you for the Bible - your inspired, unchanging, and living Word to guide us. Help us to hold fast to Your teaching and not to be led astray.

Your Word is truth. Fill us with Your Holy Spirit, Lord, that we might be Your faithful, fruitful Resurrection People.

In the name of our living Lord, Jesus.
Amen. *Daphne Kitching*

Online shopping fraud

FACT SHEET

How does online shopping fraud happen?

Online shopping fraud happens when you discover a problem with something you're buying or selling in an online auction or marketplace, such as eBay, Gumtree or Etsy.

Online auctions and marketplaces have become a very popular way of trading online, but fraudsters are using them to take advantage of your trust to sell poor-quality or non-existent items. You may find that something you've bought online arrives late or never at all. In some cases the products you've paid for are less valuable than shown in the advert, different from the original description, or you weren't told crucial information about the product or terms of the sale.

What can be done if you are a victim?

- ▲ If you paid via bank transfer, debit card or PayPal this guide from consumer rights organisation *Which?* explains how you might be able to get your money back after you have been scammed. www.which.co.uk/consumer-rights/advice/how-to-get-your-money-back-after-a-scam. Action Fraud cannot help you recover any money lost to fraud.
- ▲ Reporting to Action Fraud enables intelligence to be gathered, the police to catch criminals and preventative action to be taken. For example, suspending fake websites used to commit online shopping fraud.

- ▲ We can provide you with a copy of your National Fraud Reporting Centre (NFRC) number but we cannot liaise with other companies or tell you if a seller is real or not.
- ▲ It is difficult for police to investigate every instance of fraud – prevention and protection is a far better method of dealing with it. By taking some simple steps, you can avoid falling victim in the future.
- ▲ In some cases the police and other law enforcement agencies may want to contact you for further details so it is important that you keep any relevant information about the crime.

How to shop online safely

- ▲ Before you enter your payment details into a webpage, ensure that it's using a secure connection. Look for a small padlock symbol in the address bar (usually next to the web address). The web address of the payment page should begin with https. The 'S' stands for secure. Avoid carrying out any financial transactions over unsecure connections, such as public wi-fi.



Online shopping fraud



FACT SHEET

- ▲ Remember, when you're making a payment online, you'll be asked for the 3 digit security (CVV) number on the back of your card; but you should never be asked for your card's PIN or any internet banking passwords.
- ▲ If you're buying something online that costs between £100 to £30,000, credit cards offer increased consumer protection over debit cards.
- ▲ If you're unfamiliar with a site you want to buy something from, do some research first and look for ratings and reviews from customers that have previously used the site. Always be cautious about offers that seem too good to be true, or if a site or seller requests payment via a bank or money transfer service.
- ▲ Always ensure that you install software and app updates as soon as they're available for your device. Install anti-virus software on your devices and remember to keep it updated. Some forms of malware can intercept and steal the payment details you enter into online shopping or banking sites.

How to shop safely on online market places

- ▲ Check the item description carefully and ask the seller questions if you're unsure of something.
- ▲ Know the terms and conditions of the auction website, including its dispute resolution policy.
- ▲ Pay on the auction site every time and don't click on links the seller sends to you. Never pay by money transfer – use a recognised service such as PayPal which protects your money until you've resolved any problems with the seller.

Be suspicious if:

- ▲ The buyer or seller has a bad feedback history or has only recently set up a new account to avoid a poor reputation.
- ▲ You get a private message or email offering to buy below the current bid or reserve price or to sell a similar item after an auction has ended.
- ▲ You find an expensive item for sale at an incredibly low starting bid. If an offer sounds too good to be true, then it probably is.

Report and get advice at:

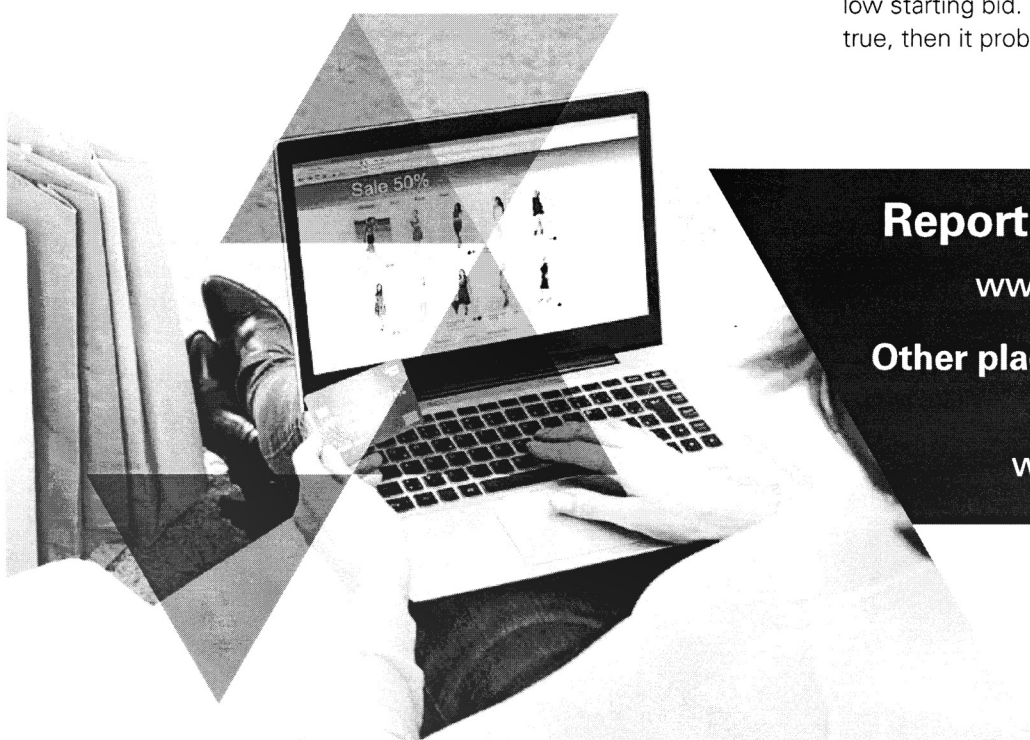
www.actionfraud.police.uk

Other places for help and advice:

www.getsafeonline.org

www.cyberaware.gov.uk

ActionFraud
National Fraud & Cyber Crime Reporting Centre
 actionfraud.police.uk







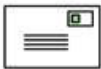


The following article has been written & submitted by Elaine Kinchin, and is entitled:

Universal Credit

Kerry Harris, West Oxfordshire’s Community Builder, often pops in to visit us on a Thursday morning. She left with us a precis of a report issued jointly by the Trussell Trust and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. It makes for sobering reading.

“Inadequate social security is the main driver of food bank need, with almost 1.3 million parcels given out from Trussell Trust food banks between April and September 2022. Without an adequate safety net, a setback can be hard to overcome. Poverty comes at a significant cost to the individual, but also to the economy and wider society, with downstream costs to public services such as the NHS.”

Amount needed to afford essentials for the adults in a household (for 2023/24)

Essential	Single £ per week	Couple £ per week
 Food and non-alcoholic drinks	£37	£67
 Electricity and gas	£35	£44
 Water	£6	£7
 Clothes and shoes	£6	£13
 Communications, including phones, internet and postage	£8	£11
 Travel	£16	£32
 Sundries - for example toiletries, haircuts, cleaning materials, bank charges	£13	£23
Total (rounded)	£120	£200

SHARE

So, how much does Universal Credit give to a single person? £85 – this is £35 per week less than the above analysis. And how much is a couple given for essentials per week? £134.

Among voters, there is cross-party support for this reform to Universal Credit.

Let’s bring that closer to home. West Oxfordshire Food Bank has given out 2250 parcels in the last year; 2352 children were provided with emergency meals. Is this acceptable?

<https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/guarantee-our-essentials>