

# STEPPING STONES Dec 2020/Jan 2021

Epping Methodist Church – Epping URC- North Weald Methodist Church- Ongar URC

Minister: Revd Cecil White. [cewhaebea@gmail.com](mailto:cewhaebea@gmail.com) 07483147441 Rest day Monday

## From the Minister

As I write we are at the cusp of Advent. It is a time to be reminded of the arrival of Christ. There are two advents (or comings). The first advent is of Jesus born in Bethlehem and the second when Christ the judge will come. It is a season of preparation. In fact, there is never a time when Christians are not expectant and waiting for the arrival of Christ. It is what keeps us on our toes!

Covid-19 has involved each of our churches in the ritual of preparation, e.g. ensuring that buildings are safe to gather in. We have tried our best to ensure security for each one who comes to worship.

Yesterday the government announced that December 2<sup>nd</sup> will see the lifting of the current lockdown, with the hope, joy, and liberty that that will bring. It is, therefore, the expectation that our churches will be able to re-open for worship on **Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> December**. We will, of course, continue to maintain social distancing with the use of face masks, but it will be good to be back – expectant and waiting for Christ – brimming with advent hope!

On the four Wednesdays during Advent there are to be an opportunity to **'Pause for Prayer'**. This will be hosted on the Zoom platform and will last no more than 15 minutes during which time a designated minister will lead us in a reflection and time of prayer to mark the season. If you want the Zoom details then please email: [haebeaworship@gmail.com](mailto:haebeaworship@gmail.com)

It takes place at 12noon on the following days:

2 December (Revd Blair Kirkby)

9 December (Revd Cecil White)

16 December (Revd Kathryn Taylor)

23 December (Revd Debbie Hodgson)

Also, December is the Revd Kathryn Taylor's final month in HAEBEA before retirement. A good number of us have benefitted from Kathryn's ministry since 2008 and in particular her chairmanship of the Area since 2014. As she concludes her time in HAEBEA we say 'farewell' to a friendly face and valued minister. Due to Covid-19 we cannot gather to send her off as custom might have it, but we do have a Zoom

party lined up for Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> December at 7.30pm! All are welcome, so if you want to attend then please notify Michael on [haebeaevents@gmail.com](mailto:haebeaevents@gmail.com) and he will send you the log-on details.

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### **Epping United Reformed Church**

We will be saying a fond farewell to Ingrid and Archie later this month or early in the new year when they will be moving to Cambridgeshire. Archie has served as elder and Ingrid has been our organist both for many years. We will miss them but wish them well for the future in their new home.

Congratulations to Melissa and Matt on the birth of their daughter, Ada. A granddaughter for Karin and Tim and a great granddaughter for Hanna.

Everyone will be receiving an Advent box, whatever their age, full of activities to do during this season of hope, peace, joy and love... Don't forget to share pictures of what you've been up to! Families from toddler group have also received a box. Some of the resources are also available to [download here](#).

Birthday wishes in December to Hanna, Alan, Ingrid, Margaret, Angus, Fiona and Emily.

#### **Christmas Services:**

- 13<sup>th</sup> December: Christingle (*In Church*)
- 20<sup>th</sup> December: Lessons, carols & children's nativity (*In Church*)
- 24<sup>th</sup> December: Christmas Eve service, 4pm (*In Church*)
- 25<sup>th</sup> December: Christmas Worship, 10am (*Online*)
- 27<sup>th</sup> December: All-Age worship, 10:30am (*Online*)

### **Ongar United Reformed Church**

During our two periods of lockdown our church buildings have been closed. We have still been able to worship by means of the Sunday worship sheet or on Zoom but we have missed the fellowship of meeting together on a Sunday in person. Even during the few weeks we have been open, we have not really had the opportunity to share our usual fellowship due to social distancing measures. We may miss this fellowship but the major question that I have been reflecting on is whether **our presence** has been missed in the community. Has our community really been bothered or even aware that our church buildings have been closed?

Certainly people have missed the opportunity to gather at Open House and Twinkles for a break in their day to talk to others and enjoy tea or coffee. We have also missed the opportunity to meet people from the wider community during our

Saturday morning sales and coffee mornings, but has our church as a fellowship reached people so much that they have noticed the lack of our presence on a Sunday morning?

Has the pandemic been a time of testing for us? Our numbers are small and are not increasing. Do we need to take this time to reflect on whether our current forms of worship need to change? If our numbers decreased to the extent that we had to consider closing the church would anyone in the community really be concerned? Have we in recent years really been fulfilling God's mission for us or have we become isolated in our church building on Sunday mornings?

There are no easy answers to any of this! We all need to reflect on whether we are working to fulfil God's mission in the right way and what we can do to make people want to learn more about what we believe and why. We need to plant the seeds in people's hearts and nurture them so that they grow and flourish. It is down to us all to work for God in our community and to make the church a living, vital presence in our town. Please reflect on this and pray to God to guide us, so that when we reach the 'new normal' we may be revived by His Spirit.

Joan

### **Rev. Richard Cecil**

As you may know, during the hall modernisation work, a gravestone was found under the floor of the small hall. Obviously when the hall was built (remodelled) early last century they did not consider this of sufficient importance to merit preserving like the Taylor stone. However, they must have felt that it was of some importance for it to be preserved under the floor. It has been resited now to the left of the entrance gates, resting against the wall.

I decided during the summer to do a rubbing of the inscription, which I did on a rather windy day and therefore due to that and the fact that there was cement still left on the surface, it was incomplete. I have now managed to fill in the blanks through tracing them with my finger and give below the inscription. Perhaps we could give some thought to preserving this in some way from further weather damage as Rev. Cecil played an important part in training missionaries both here, including David Livingstone, and at Turvey in Bedfordshire.

**In Memory of Salome, (Wife of the Revd. Richard Cecil, Minister of this Chapel). She died 3rd of June 1844 aged 43 years.**

**Also of Salome, their second daughter, who died 23rd of February 1843 in her seventeenth year.**

**Lucy Jane, (Eldest daughter of the above Revd. R., Cecil and Salome, his wife, and wife of the Revd. John Hay), who died aged twenty years, 19th January 1844 at**

**Vizagapatam, where together with their infant daughter, she was interred.**

**If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so they also who sleep in Jesus, will God bring with him. 1 Thessalonians 4c 14v.**

This inscription is similar to the stone above the door by the organ in the church, but the latter does not mention the infant daughter. Joan

### **Thoughts from Pam**

Another month has passed by very quickly. It wasn't until I received Joan's entry for Stepping Stones that I realized we were coming towards the end of the month again!

I have finished my Christmas shopping, all on line. The next job will be Christmas cards.

Our garden is now tidy and ready for winter. Spring bulbs have been planted for a good display, when the time is right for them to show themselves.

Our thoughts are now turning towards decorating some rooms in the house. Something to keep us busy during the winter months.

The puppy minding is very enjoyable. She is a little bundle of fun. As she is so young she has times when she dashes around the house and garden causing mischief, then all of a sudden she sits down and falls asleep. When she wakes up the fun starts again.

We haven't had any of our 'days out' this month but are hoping to go somewhere when this lock down ends.

#### **Nature's Way**

The little tree by the old fence,  
Great in the summer sun.  
"I want to grow tall" said the little tree,  
"And growing is so much fun."

The little brook running beneath the bridge,  
Babbled and sang all day.  
I want to become a river," it said,  
"So I am on my way."

The little bird fluttered from out the nest,  
And flew far across the yard.  
"I'll be a big bird," said she and twittered,  
"If each day I try real hard."

The little boy stood on his tiptoes and stretched.  
"I'm just like the rest" said he,  
I want to grow up and see the big world

And the sooner the better for me."

Mother Nature smiled at all her fledglings,  
But she did not bid them stay.  
She knew that to live and grow and age  
Is forever Nature's way.

Pam

### **Cheryl's Diary notes for November**

Most of us entered the latest lockdown in the hope of a normal Christmas; so it seemed a perfect time to get down to those Christmas cards and think of the recipients & how they have been coping the past months; what news to share with them in the 'round robin' or a phone call.

Although I've had help from the young ones ordering gifts on-line, I've also had challenges retrieving parcels delivered to the wrong houses; some couriers being unable to read addresses & only go where the satnav tells them!!

Having had the last-minute haircuts & flu jabs we've been tidying up in the garden, dug up the Dahlia & cooked the last of the apples to freeze.

On the sunnier days I've taken the opportunity to soak up some vitamin D by getting out walking. On meeting with my daughter & granddaughter at Hylands Park was surprised at finding so many cars, people and dogs & wondered what event was on. But it appeared that everyone was just enjoying the space & beauty of the trees.

It's been refreshing to spend time with family & friends walking around the field footpaths airing our problems & worries but also to share more positive happenings. We are being kept up-to-date about our Grandson's Basic Army Training at Pirbright & smile at the thought of him having to start the day at 5am & the chores each one has. He's missing his Mum's cooking too.

I wish you all a peaceful & content Christmas celebration in whatever form you are able & leave you with this prayer.

Make sure you test positive for Faith. Keep your distance from doubt & isolate yourself from fear. Trust in God through it all. Amen

Cheryl

Happy birthday to those who may have a birthday during December.

As usual we wont be having a January edition of Stepping Stones, the next one will be in February.

## **HAEBEA**

### **Online Worship**

With our 4 churches reopening from the 6<sup>th</sup> December, if you are unable to come to church for any reason you are welcome to join online with other churches in the area and the home worship will also continue [click here for details of both.](#)

### **URC Eastern Synod**

The URC Eastern Synod has a Youtube channel on which there are videos for children, all age worship, prayer & reflections and Bible study. [Watch the videos and subscribe to the channel here.](#)

### **Advent Resources**

#### God is with us

It is fair to say we're all a bit uncertain about what Christmas is going to be like this year – and perhaps we're feeling a bit anxious about this. It's also fair to say that this year as much as ever it is critical we reach out to people who aren't part of our churches. The Christmas message of Emmanuel – the good news that God is with us – feels perhaps more pertinent than ever before in this extraordinary year.

The Methodist Church Christmas campaign for 2020 **#GodsWithUs** seeks to share this good news through twenty-four stories of individuals and their experiences of this extraordinary year. Each day of Advent we will share a testimony from somebody connected to the Methodist Church reflecting on what hope has looked like for them this year and how they have experienced God with them.

The individuals whose stories the campaign tells include those who have felt the painful effects of isolation this year, who have experienced extreme poverty, who have struggled with poor mental health, who have lost loved ones – like so many millions of others. But ultimately, incredibly, God's loving presence radiates from each of them in beams of powerful hope. Hope that is so necessary for such a time as this.

The campaign name, which ties in with our Presidential theme for the year, of course comes from John Wesley's purported words on his death bed: 'the best of all is, God is with us' which reminds us that even in the times which feel most uncertain, we can be certain of God. Who do you know who needs to hear this message over the coming months?

The materials ask questions which encourage Methodists and non-Methodists alike to consider their own story of faith in 2020 and to share it with one another or online.

The campaign aims to encourage Methodists to reflect, share their stories, and reach out to others outside the church and encourage them to do the same.

[Click here for more information.](#)

From the Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT):

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called **Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.**” ~ Isaiah 9:6

Reflections for each Sunday in Advent, exploring stories of how God's people have been working for justice and peace this year and how we see the God of Justice working for hope in our current world.

*How do we see the **God of Justice** as our Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace?*

*How do we see the **God of Justice** in the stories and situations of our Church in 2020?*

*What message of **Hope** can we hear after the year we've had?*

[Click here to view the resources.](#)

## **Green Issues**

**Climate Change** More than 60 faith leaders, including representatives from the URC and Methodist churches, signed a letter last month which called on the UK Prime Minister to commit to bold reductions in fossil fuel emissions particularly ahead of the COP26 summit next year. [Read what they wrote here.](#)

**Single Use Plastics.** Usage has increased very significantly during the pandemic. Some of this has been entirely necessary, but there is a need to consider carefully as to where adjustments and reductions in the use of single use plastic can be made. The URC has produced an excellent guide on single use plastics which [can be read here.](#)

**Having a Green Christmas.** Plan your festive gifts well - for your pocket and for the planet! Get creative with home-made crafts or food or invest in something that helps someone else enjoy nature. If you're really trying to cut back from shop-bought stuff, why not offer to do something nice for someone? Going further - agree to a 'No Unnecessary Presents Pact' or send your Christmas cards online rather than by post or have a communal church card. More waste ends up in landfill over Christmas than during the rest of the year, so why not cut down on food or decorations or try buying recycled/recyclable wrapping paper or crackers.

**RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch.** 29<sup>th</sup>- 31<sup>st</sup> January. Spend an hour counting the birds in your garden, from your balcony or in your local park and report what you have seen to the RSPB. [To find out more click here.](#)

## **International Aid**

Both the URC & Methodist churches expressed strong concern over the possibility of the government reducing the budget for overseas aid, with a clear feeling that these difficult times make it even more important to maintain this commitment to our overseas neighbours.

The URC Mission council *"believes that a commitment to the poorest in the world should not be an optional extra but at the heart of our country's responsibilities, especially in the context of a global pandemic and a climate emergency."* [Link to article.](#)

The Revd Richard Teal, President of the Methodist Conference, and Carolyn Lawrence, Vice-President, said:

*"Times are tough for many of us – both here in the UK, and for our brothers and sisters across the globe. UK Aid is a percentage of the UK's GNI – and so it changes each year, and is never beyond what we as a nation can afford. It is vital that we preserve the UK's reputation as a champion of global justice. A measure of a nation's values is seen not only by actions in times of plenty but by resolve during other times too. As Christians, we believe it is our duty to stand alongside our global neighbours, and seek justice for the most vulnerable. As we are called to love our neighbours – wherever they might be - remaining vocally committed to 0.7% GNI is a moral imperative."*

## **Upcoming Dates to Note**

25<sup>th</sup> November – 10<sup>th</sup> December - **16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence** - [Find out more here](#)

1<sup>st</sup> December - **World Aids Day** – [Discover more here](#)

10<sup>th</sup> December - **UN Human Rights Day** – [Find information here](#)

18<sup>th</sup> December - **UN International Migrants Day** – [Find out more here](#)