

STEPPING STONES *February 2022*

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

Minister: Revd Cecil White. cewhaebea@gmail.com 07483147441 Rest Day Monday

From the Minister

The current unrest in the UK political scene has tested the electorate, not least those who had faith in the Prime Minister at the time of the General Election. 'Get Brexit Done' was the mantra adopted by Boris and the party and so it was achieved, albeit partially as the border with the EU still causes concern. Then came the pandemic! I suppose some would say that despite Brexit and the Pandemic life appears somewhat stable. But, for whom?

We read of the anxiety of people on low incomes facing the instability of increased gas prices, housing costs, petrol and diesel costs, food inflation, reduced benefits, and for those of us privileged to have steady employment there are the further financial demands of an increase in National Insurance contributions looming.

If we are honest with ourselves, we will have noticed the increase as 'the pound in our pocket' doesn't seem to go that far these days. A packet of three courgettes in Aldi until recently cost 79p, now they are £1.19. We are all feeling the pinch.

A mother, Bex, is reported in the 'i newspaper' of having to rely on foodbank offerings which she has found a challenge to her self-worth and pride, but using them has been a life saver. She used her 'Community Fridge' for 6 months during the pandemic and after a break, when she was managing her income satisfactorily, had found herself falling back on charity due to the soaring cost of living.

The Church is deeply involved, and always has been - certainly in living memory, in the plight of the poor. This is not a condescending act, as if Christians are richer, on the contrary, it's part of the Christian DNA to contribute for the relief of the poor, the homeless, and those who need food on their plate.

During the season of Lent there has been a tradition amongst Christians to show solidarity with the poor by sacrificing oneself in mainly small yet significant ways. Our self-denial is a mirror image of how we walk with Jesus in his 40 days in the desert temptations. By observing Lent, one fills one's life with

acts of prayer, almsgiving, and fasting (fasting might mean giving up one luxury food product or maybe one meal a week for something lighter, and giving the proceeds to a charity for the homeless or hungry). But whatever your practice, or maybe this is the first time you have been challenged to observe Lent, make sure that it is a time when you draw yourself nearer to God and by doing so become mindful of the sufferings of others.

Lent commences on Ash Wednesday which this year is on 2nd March. It's the season that leads us inexorably towards the drama of Holy Week and Christ's Cross. Let's make a personal effort this year to do something practical in order that life may become a little more bearable for those who suffer. We can all play a part.

Lent is almost a month away, but let us use the time beforehand as a time of preparation. There are a lot of resources out there to assist us, two of which I list below. Also, if you would like to have a conversation with me about the practice of Lent then please do get in touch.

Websites for Lent:

<https://livinglent.org/>

<https://www.christianaid.org.uk/appeals/key-appeals/lent-easter-appeal>

Epping Methodist Church

A belated Happy New Year to you all. It all seems a long time ago now but we opened the Church on Saturday 4th December when Epping Christmas Market was taking place. The Church was decorated with crib scenes and coffee was available in the Church Hall. Our Carol Service was held during morning worship on 19th December.

Women's Fellowship held a Christmas tea in December and 12 members attended and all seemed to enjoy themselves! We suspended meetings in January as we were worried about the omicron virus but hope to return in February. Meetings will be on 8th and 22nd at 2pm in the Church. Everyone is very welcome; tea and biscuits are served during the meetings which last for about an hour.

Our Coffee mornings are continuing on the first Saturday of the month in the Church Hall between 10 and 12pm. We have some very loyal customers who support us whatever the weather! Our Lent Lunch takes place on 5th March after the Coffee Morning.

Epping United Reformed Church

It is with sadness that we announce the death of Hanna Thomas, Karin's mum. She was a much-loved member of our church for over twenty years and enjoyed helping at coffee mornings and at toddler group. The funeral will be at Parndon Wood Crematorium, Harlow on Tuesday 15th February at 2:30pm. We remember Karin and family in our prayers at this time.

Ongar United Reformed Church

"I believe churches are meant for praising God. But so are 2am car rides, showers, coffee shops, the gym, conversations with friends, strangers, etc. Don't let a building confine your faith because we will never change the world by just going to church, we need to be the church."

This was a post from the United Reformed Church Facebook page at the beginning of January which gave me cause for reflection and, in fact, I used it in my sermon at Hatfield Heath. Does our building confine our faith? Do we come here each Sunday and think that our service to God is over and done with once we leave these doors?

There are so many other ways that we can praise God and express our faith during the week. In the past two years I have made many new friends just by talking to people as we met during our morning walks in Ongar. Two dogs now count me as their friend too and run up to meet me for a pat when they see me! We can share God's love in so many little ways – taking in parcels for a neighbour, making phone calls to people we might not have thought of ringing in the past, learning through these more about people we thought we knew, sharing worries and concerns, offering help with small errands, even just a 'Good morning' accompanied by a smile.

Our journey of faith does not end when we become church members as we should continually be learning more about the nature of God, his Son and the Holy Spirit throughout our lives. We are never too old to work for God, learning ourselves as we do so. Joan

Twinkles

Attendance varies as can be expected with the varying demands of young children. We were surprised and grateful to God at the numbers of people who have come through our doors since we re-opened. This has been helped a great deal through having a dedicated Facebook page and also linking our posts to other community Facebook pages. Usually we have at least 10 children with parents, grandparents or carers, and one day we had over 20, which necessitated a re-think on our part with regard to the amount of toys we put out as well as the layout in the Hall. We are rather restricted for space at times because of the need to keep children away from the serving

hatch area in the small hall, due to the danger of scalding when tea and coffee are being passed around, as well as the need to keep fire exits clear.

We had our short Christmas service in the church, to which we were pleased to welcome Cecil, and the children all took home a booklet about Christmas and some chocolate. Their adults all appreciated the mince pies, mulled wine and a chance to talk and exchange Christmas greetings afterwards. We will have our charity coffee morning for Red Nose Day and hope that we will be able to find an activity that the older children can take part in, although most are now too young to do much beyond playing with the toys. We will finish for Easter on 24th March with a short service in the church and our usual Easter egg hunt, hoping that they are returned so that they can be shared out equally at the end of the morning!

Each week God is good to us sending us new people and we thank Him for the love that surrounds us each Thursday as we share fellowship together.
Joan

Coffee Mornings

The January Coffee morning raised £126.00 for Ongar Voluntary Care who provide a vital service for those who need transport to hospital or GP appointments in the Ongar area.

The February Sale will be a Jumble and Bric-a-brac sale with our usual coffee and cakes available. March will include our usual popular Easter Chocolate tombola. Donations of chocolate eggs etc will be very welcome. The charities to benefit from the proceeds of these two Coffee Mornings is to be decided. Suggestions on the list on the notice board in the Entrance Hall will be appreciated. Sandra

Open House news

It's so good to serve these lovely people who obviously enjoy this convivial time with one another; sharing their problems or highlights of their daily lives over a 'nice cup of tea' or coffee. The buzz of conversation is most comforting.

During December our Charity table was in aid of Breast Cancer Research. Steve Jukes' hobby is Wood Turning and kindly donated various wooden items, bowls, vases, snowmen and hedgehogs. It was lovely to see people looking at the various items and their interest in the different colours, grains and textures of the wood. Along with other donated items we were able to send £123.50 to this Charity. So thanks to the donators and buyers. This month we shall continue supporting Diabetes UK with our sales. Our Charity table has plenty of interesting items that people donate. We also have a good selection of cards suitable for most occasions at exceptionally good value, like cheap! Come & see. With Open House funds we have been able to buy a bouquet of silk flowers to decorate our Church when fresh flowers are not

available. During Open House 10~12noon, our Church is open to visitors to use for personal meditation.

We send birthday wishes to those with birthdays during February.

Churches Together in Epping & District

Lent Lunches, all from 12 -2pm

5th March – Epping Methodist Church

12th March – Epping United Reformed Church

19th March – Epping Immaculate Conception RC Church

26th March – Life Church at the Box

2nd April – Epping Green Chapel

9th April – St John's Church, Epping

URC Eastern Synod

SAVE THE DATE- CELEBRATE- EASTERN SYNOD'S BIG DAY OUT 2022

Saturday 16th July- In the Jubilee Year “Celebrate!”

Venue: Trinity Park, Felixstowe Road, Ipswich, IP3 8UH

A Fun Day for all the family- Come and Have fun!

Relax- Create- Reflect- Celebrate

“This is the day that the Lord has made let us rejoice and be glad in it” Psalm 118



Children's and Youth Synod Jubilee Event



The event is for children aged between 5 and 11 (year 1 to year 6) and Young People aged 11 (year 7) to 18. The theme of the day is 'Jubilee' celebrating faith, hope and love- 50 years of the URC. We have lots of exciting spaces to explore and use at Westminster College including the art room and chapel. There will be a variety of activities including art and crafts, stories, games, worship, and a time to chat and explore. A hot lunch will be provided along with drinks and snacks throughout the day. This is a great opportunity for children and young people to take part in a synod wide event, in a fun and active way to meet young people from other churches. Please do put this date in your diary and come and celebrate together.

Booking details here: <https://urceastern.org.uk/events/1142-jubilee-childrens-a-youth-eastern-synod-event-5th-march-2022>

Apology and Confession by the United Reformed Church

In July the General Assembly of the United Reformed Church will hope to adopt a statement concerning Legacies of Slavery in the church. We are asked to reflect on this institutionally as a denomination and personally.

The statement hopes to offer an apology and confession for the institutional sins of the church and to embark on a programme of 'repairing justice' – to include financial commitment, community projects and education - both in the UK and in parts of the Atlantic world still scarred by the legacies of

slavery. These acts should be regarded as the start of a journey – part of our commitment to becoming an actively anti-racist church in God's name.

So, what the denomination is doing is not jumping on a bandwagon which has become vilified by some sectors of the press and news media. On the contrary, being challenged to consider our part in the legacy of the Slave Trade is a correct and proportionate thing to do as a Christian people.

Please note that what follows is the draft which shall be tabled and discussed at General Assembly when it convenes in July. Please give it consideration and join the whole church in prayerful reflection:

We, the General Assembly of the United Reformed Church, are mindful of our own current history, that of our antecedent bodies, the scriptural and theological groundings of our Basis of Union, and of our many declarations and resolutions over the years related to justice and the embracing of the humanity of all our sisters and brothers.

As a Conciliar Church, we have listened to one another as we received the report of Mission Committee on the ongoing Legacies of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. We have heard the pain of sisters and brothers who have been hurt and are still being hurt today by its legacies and by the continuing scourge of racism. We have heard God in Christ speaking to us in what we believe to be a Kairos moment. We acknowledge our weakness, the ambiguities we embody, and yet, in a spirit of humility and vulnerability, we are urged on by a movement of God's Spirit, calling us to a journey of words and actions born out of what we have felt and heard, a commitment to a future built on equity, justice and love.

To this end, the General Assembly of the United Reformed Church, gathered here in Swanwick in the year 2022:

- humbly acknowledge our share in and benefit from our nation's participation, and that of our own antecedent bodies, in the Transatlantic Slave Trade.
- acknowledge that we speak as those who have shared in and suffered from the legacies of slavery and its appalling consequences for God's world.
- offer our apology to God and to our sisters and brothers in Africa, the Caribbean, and their descendants, for all that has created and still perpetuates such deep hurt, which originated from the horror of slavery.

- repent of the hurt we have caused, the divisions we have created, our reluctance to face up to the sin of the past, our unwillingness to listen to the pain of our African and Caribbean sisters and brothers, and our silence in the face of racism and injustice today.
- admit that these sins are part of our continuing failure to see and hear God in all our neighbours, whoever they may be.
- commit ourselves, in a true spirit of repentance to take what we have heard and learnt at this Assembly and share it widely across the whole of the URC and beyond, to find constructive ways by which we can turn this apology and confession into concrete actions of 'repairing justice' and so contribute to the prophetic work of God's coming kingdom; continue working to promote racial justice as part of our Christian commitment to justice for all.

As we ask for forgiveness, we invite all of the United Reformed Church to recommit ourselves to walking together in the Spirit of Christ so that all peoples may be blessed, and God's creation healed.

Fairtrade Fortnight 2022

21st February – 6th March 2022

Fairtrade's Choose the World You Want Festival will return for a second year for Fairtrade Fortnight 2022. It features a series of virtual events designed to engage, inform and educate people around the urgent message of Fairtrade and climate change, the future of our food and those who produce it. The online initiative will bring the Fairtrade movement together and feature panel discussions, performances, workshops and collaborations between the Fairtrade Foundation and retailers, chefs and high-profile names in the world of food and sustainability.

Fairtrade Fortnight 2022 will this year be a show of solidarity with communities overseas on the frontline of the climate crisis. November's COP26 summit didn't deliver the change needed to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees, nor did it secure finance to directly support farmers and workers on the frontline, but the Fairtrade Foundation believes there is hope if we all act together.

Fairtrade Fortnight is an opportunity for individuals, communities, and businesses around country to stand with farmers in low-income countries such as Honduras and Uganda who are affected daily by climate change. Together, by keeping the pressure on government and businesses, we can all play a role in ensuring farmers can benefit from fairer prices, fairer trading

practices and the resources needed for tackling the climate emergency, says the Fairtrade Foundation.

The climate crisis is the biggest threat to the livelihoods of millions of small-scale farmers and agricultural workers in low-income countries worldwide. Without a fairer income, they are unable to invest in the types of mitigation and adaptation techniques needed to protect the environment, and their businesses. This represents a vicious cycle of poverty in which steps towards environmental protection and decarbonisation are likely to be beyond reach for those who aren't even able to earn a living income because the price they receive for their produce is far too low. COP26 fell short of what farmers and workers need but together we can still make a difference, participants at Fairtrade Fortnight events nationwide will hear.

Nilufar Verjee, Director of Public Engagement at the Fairtrade Foundation, said: *'We are all facing an existential planetary threat and politicians are still not moving fast enough to stand a chance of keeping warming to 1.5 degrees. Current levels of global heating are already disastrous for the farmers and workers who grow our food – they need the cash to adapt to new ways of farming. The life support is that we have another chance with COP27 in 2022 for world leaders to tackle the climate crisis and secure finance, fast. 'Poverty and environmental damage in our food supply chains will not end until exploited farmers are paid fairly, have the power to make their own choices and to plan for the future. Only then will they be able to effectively fight the impacts of the climate crisis. This also matters to UK conscious consumers and businesses. Climate change, and the ability of farmers to grow their produce, is also threatening the survival and sustainability of supply chains behind some of the UK's best-loved imports, such as coffee, cocoa and bananas.'*

Mr Kouamé N'dri Benjamin-Francklin, a cocoa farmer from Côte D'Ivoire and Fairtrade Africa vice-chair board member, says financial support is a vital element of ensuring that farmers in low-income nations have the tools they need to tackle the increasingly destructive impacts of the climate crisis: *'If we carry on planting when we have always done before, when there is no rain and it is so hot, whatever we try to grow is destroyed. Then there is nothing to harvest. That has been happening now for years and production has massively decreased. Because of that, our incomes have massively decreased.'* Mr Kouamé, who attended COP26 as part of Fairtrade's farmer delegation, added: *'What is more, the little that we can sell isn't paid at the price it should be paid. For example, take cocoa. Cocoa farmers only earn*

3% of the price of a chocolate bar. As a person responsible for farmers, it is really sad [...] Being a farmer shouldn't be a route to poverty.'

Each year, thousands of schools, organisations and communities nationwide play a key role in promoting Fairtrade Fortnight through their own campaigns, events and materials, in order to help raise awareness of the link between trade and poverty. The Fairtrade Foundation hopes people will engage with Fairtrade Fortnight once again this year, as part of their ongoing efforts to protect people and planet. As valued members of the Fairtrade movement, thousands of Fairtrade towns, villages, schools and churches are proud to use Fairtrade products, including tea, coffee, sugar and biscuits, and to supporting Fairtrade as a key solution for making trade fairer for those in lower-income countries. Fairtrade is committed to fighting the climate crisis. Fairtrade Standards encourage producers to protect the environment by improving soil, planting trees, conserving water and avoiding pesticides, while Fairtrade's programmes include climate academies for farmers to share best practice. At the same time, Fairtrade makes training available to producers so that they can use the latest agricultural methods, such as intercropping and shade-grown coffee to adapt to conditions. Join us this Fairtrade Fortnight and choose to act for climate justice. To find out more about how to take part in 2022, visit: <http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/fortnight>

Buy Fairtrade products from:

- Traidcraft: www.traidcraftshop.co.uk
- Ethical Superstore: <https://www.ethicalsuperstore.com/>

**CHOOSE THE WORLD
YOU WANT**



FAIRTRADE

Pandemic Prayers

O God
We are weary

Weary of the pandemic
Weary of bad news on the TV
Weary of public figures who behave like they are untouchable
Weary of civil and human rights injustices around the world

Renew us O God
Refresh us O God
Restore us O God
Reinvigorate us O God

So we can share your Hope with the world
So we can share your Love with the world
Amen

By Kirsty-Ann Mabbott, a Church Related Community Worker in Coventry