

# Link

**March 2025**

The Magazine of the United Reformed Church  
Stratford-upon-Avon



***Worship, Witness and love for others, through Jesus***

**The United Reformed Church  
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Stratford-upon-Avon**

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# Thoughts for March

## Spring Cleaning?

March is a transition month—winter fades, spring begins, and everything feels like it's waking up again. It's a time of renewal, growth, and fresh starts. The daffodils, the crocuses and the snowdrops are popping up and showing their beauty.



Here are a few thoughts:

The first day of Spring is around the 20th March. As I said, everything feels like it's waking up again. It's a great time to plant seeds – literally, in the greenhouse, and metaphorically in our minds. What new habits, projects or ideas do we want to cultivate? (And, let's not forget the seeds I planted in my thoughts for February!)

The 17th March is St Patrick's day. That reminds me of the phrase "the luck of the Irish". This originated in the second half of the 19th century when there were a lot of Irish miners. Many of the most successful miners were Irish. The phrase implied that the miners were finding success purely based on luck, rather than based on intelligence and skill. Most 'luck' however comes from preparation meeting opportunity. Let's not forget that preparation is key to success.

The days are getting longer, which often brings about a boost in our motivation. Why don't we use that extra sunlight to refresh our routines? Spring is associated with spring cleaning. Whether that is decluttering your spaces, your minds or your goals, it means that March is a perfect chance for a 'reset'.

And most importantly for us, in the church, March is the time that Lent begins. Ash Wednesday is the 5th March. Don't forget our Sausage Casserole lunch on that day! That's where we join with the Lutherans and Huldrych Zwingli in rebelling against the, then, tradition of fasting or not eating meat in Lent. He argued that the Bible does not prohibit the eating of meat during Lent.

Like Advent, Lent is a season of preparation. Let me re-iterate: preparation is key to success. We prepare ourselves to remember Christ's sacrifice on the cross and his



subsequent resurrection. So many of the aspects of Spring and March that I have already mentioned are highly relevant to Lent. We spring clean and declutter our minds to prepare to gladly accept the crucifixion and the resurrection. Lent encourages reflection and sacrifice. It's a season for us to pause, to think about our personal lifestyles, a time to focus on the deeper meanings of our faith and the enormous sacrifice that Jesus made on our behalf. Some people give up something for Lent, reflecting Jesus' fasting for forty days in the wilderness and mirroring in a small way Jesus' sacrifice. Others prefer to do some good during Lent, perform acts of kindness for other people, again mirroring Jesus' act of giving himself.

Lent aligns well with the overall theme of March as a month of renewal—letting go of what no longer serves us and preparing for something new. Re-aligning our lives to reflect the ideals and values of Jesus. Renewal, in that sense, means making ourselves spiritually new.

Bodily renewal relies on our resting our weary bodies. Spiritual renewal is only possible in the life of a believer. When God created Adam and Eve, they had a perfect relationship with God. But when they disobeyed, that relationship was broken and could not be restored except through a sacrifice. Eventually, God sent His own Son to die on a cross and rise again, so that our relationship with Him could be renewed .



Good Friday and Easter Day are not new, at all, but it's our chance each year to re-align ourselves with our Christian faith. Our chance to, once, again be so thankful for the principles of Good Friday and Easter Day. That thankfulness should be apparent in how we live our lives on a daily basis, how we treat other people, how we pray, how we listen to what God is saying to us and how we act appropriately on his words.

As human beings, we so easily fail in our task of 'Walking the Way' (as the URC says – 'living the life of Jesus today'). As believers we are still prone to sin and failure. It's important for renewal to become a regular practice – so perhaps it is good that we celebrate Lent every year! Lent is a time to renew our efforts to get back on the right path of 'Walking the Way'.

We look forward, with eagerness to Easter, in Lent, just as we look forward to Summer in the Spring. It's an important time of renewal.

***Peter***

## Family News

We have welcomed Peter and Linda back from a well earned holiday in Australia visiting family and we trust they feel rested and refreshed.

Jill is now registered blind which is devastating for her. Thankfully, she has Rob to support her although he has his own health issues to contend with.

Ashley has been given a date for his upcoming operation (28th April). Please hold him specially in your prayers as he awaits what will hopefully be a successful outcome.

The Alvarez family have now completed their course of interviews and we wish them well moving forward to a new stage in their lives in this country. We trust the path will not be too stressful and we will continue to support them in any way we can.

Ileen goes in for a hip replacement operation on 12th March with a view to being mobile and fit for various holidays and events upcoming in the year ahead.

***Ileen Fisher***

## Is this familiar?

My luck is like a bald guy who just won a comb.

# What's on at the Bear Pit

## The Importance of Being Earnest: 2nd March at 7pm



The National Theatre's latest production of 'The Importance of Being Earnest' is a vibrant and joyous revival directed by Max Webster. This classic Oscar Wilde comedy, known for its witty dialogue and satirical take on Victorian norms, has been given a fresh and flamboyant twist. The screening of this play stars Ncuti Gatwa as Algernon Moncrieff and Hugh Skinner as Jack Worthing. Gatwa, widely recognized for his role in "Doctor Who," brings a charismatic and playful energy to the role of Algernon, while Skinner's portrayal of Jack is both humorous and endearing. Webster's direction emphasizes the play's subversive and queer undertones, making it a delightfully modern take on Wilde's work. The production features lavish set designs by Rae Smith and costumes that blend traditional Victorian styles with contemporary flair. The result is a visually stunning and thoroughly entertaining experience that honours Wilde's original wit while adding a fresh perspective.

Overall, this production of "The Importance of Being Earnest" is a must-see for both fans of classic theatre and those looking for a lively, thought-provoking evening out.

**Tickets: £14**

## Abigail's Party: 21st to 29th March at 7.30pm

### Matinee 22nd March at 2.30pm

A Bear Pit Theatre Company Production

Abigail's Party, written by Mike Leigh, is a dark comedy set in 1970s suburban England. The play revolves around a social gathering hosted by the pretentious and controlling Beverley Moss and her passive-aggressive husband, Laurence. They invite their new neighbours, Angela and Tony Cooper, and the lonely divorcee,

Susan Lawson, who is the mother of the titular Abigail, a teenager hosting her own party offstage. As the evening unfolds, Beverley's superficial charm and passive aggression create a tension-filled atmosphere. The guests endure awkward conversations, forced politeness, and escalating conflicts fuelled by alcohol and Beverley's relentless need to control the evening.



Whilst the production opened in April 1977 at the Hampstead Theatre, it remains a favourite with audiences. Voted by industry professionals as the 11th greatest British TV programmes it has seen many revivals with the latest being from Sep 6th – Oct 12th 2024 in London, Stratford East featuring Tamsin Outhwaite.

Abigail's Party is directed by Tony Homer who directed the Bear Pit Theatre Company production of 'The Visitors' in 2019. Tony also performed in the recent Bear Pit Theatre Company production of The Cherry Orchard.

**Tickets: £15 (Concessions £12)**

## Christmas Tree Festival

Firstly, Sarah & I would like to thank everyone who contributed in any way to the festival in December. It was a great success, attracting many visitors into the church and raising funds for our charity of the year.

Although it feels a long way off, we have already had our first meeting to discuss this year's festival, which will be held on 12th & 13th December.

We are keen to encourage as wide a range of trees as possible and there is always room for more exhibits! You may have noticed that I managed to sneak in a Birmingham City Football Club tree last year (I'm thinking of doing a Bruce Springsteen tree this year!) which got us thinking that people may have interests or passions that we don't know of, but which might inspire a tree - be it a sport, gardening, bird watching, you name it! Please give this some thought and see what



ideas you can come up with. Also, if you know of, or are involved with, any organisations who might wish to exhibit a tree, then please go for it! The more trees, the merrier!

Thank you.

*Ann Jones*

## Those who wish to sing , always find a song

Whether “music is the food of love” as Shakespeare asserts or a song is “three chords and the truth” in Harlan Howard’s classic definition, there is no denying its impressive pedigree.

Some researchers believe that music may even have preceded the acquisition of language. Neanderthal people may have hummed or chanted in their caves which gave them an echo effect. Singing still doesn’t need words as with Jazz, scat singing, or Gaelic mouth music. Certainly, even in those early times, singing was part of ritual and worship as it is in the majority of religions today.



It is widely accepted that a song a day may be as efficacious as an apple for keeping the doctor at bay. Singing releases endorphins giving a feel-good factor. Fortunately, the quality of the singing has no effect on the positive results!

Similar taste in music is one of the 7 primary factors leading to friendship compatibility. Those teenage squabbles over the relative virtues of the Beatles or the Stones, Blur or Oasis or any other bands reflecting your own demography may have a point. Sending a prospective partner a playlist is still a good move! At our advanced age we can truthfully assert that our friends who have stood the test of



time for 60 years were both people we sang beside as teenagers.

Friendship, community and faith are all foundations of society, and each has strong connections with music, incorporating every different style and form, including: chanting, songs of praise, psalms and contemporary music. The use of instruments, for example drums, wind instruments, strings, pianos and organs enhance worship in many religions.

Our nephew struggled to find wedding hymns and fell back on the favourites of primary school, “One more step along the world we go” and “All things bright and beautiful”. After a long journey to Germany, the sun shone, his bride provided similar songs in her language and the congregation sang enthusiastically in both languages.

Christian music today might incorporate anything from a Gregorian chant, through Handel’s Messiah, John Wesley and Graham Kendrick to the more contemporary Stormzy’s powerful rap “Blinded by the light.”



So, let us sing. We will feel better, improve our confidence and well-being and build up our sense of community and togetherness.

Singing will be good for you.

***David and Carole Sampson***

***David and Carole say that this item was a joint effort, and challenged us to decide who wrote which paragraph! See if you can work that out!***

## Random Sayings

I fell off a 25ft ladder yesterday. It’s a good job I was only standing on the first rung!

The older I get, the better I was!

# A Prayer for Lent

Holy God,  
our lives are laid open before you:  
rescue us from the chaos of sin  
and through the death of your Son  
bring us healing and make us whole  
in Jesus Christ our Lord

Amen

## It's a Small World

As you may have noticed, the F&F committee have arranged for the replastering of the front wall of the church where the old plaster had fallen off.

Ann, who liased with the builders, DN Brickwork, received a WhatsApp message from Becki at the company. She realised that her grandparents Phillip and Muriel West were married in our Church on 14th June 1956. They ran the family business of a greengrocers shop on Rother Street opposite the church. Becki is their eldest granddaughter and runs her own family business!

Phillip West and Muriel Lines were married in the,then, Congregational Church by the Minister the Revd Edgar Bowen.

The Wests ran a successful market gardening business in Wellesbourne for many years. He died in 2000 and she died in 2018.

She forwarded some photos of the wedding, which you might find quite interesting.

The photograph of the wedding party outside the front entrance reveals that Edgar Bowen lived at 5, St Grgory's Road. There is actually a picture of the Minister in the alcove on the left hand side at the back of church. Who knew that the minister then lived in St Grgory's Road (actually Ashley DID know!)?



Take a look at the inside of the church. The organ hasn't changed very much, but there wasn't much room on the dais then - they must have had a substantial choir. The organist was a man. Even then they had five hymns to judge by the hymn number boards. Look how close the front pews were to the dais - hardly room for the Bride and Groom. I'm not sure how they managed to get a coffin in for a funeral!! The lights have certainly changed. It all looks a bit dark, and not as inviting as it is today. ALL the women were wearing hats - well it was a wedding after all!

Did any of you know either of the Wests? If you did then let us know.

*Peter*

## English Contradictions

**Here are some funny ones:**

- 1) Found Missing**
- 2) Open Secret**
- 3) Small Crowd**
- 4) Act Naturally**
- 5) Clearly Misunderstood**
- 6) Fully Empty**
- 7) Pretty Ugly**
- 8) Seriously Funny**
- 9) Only Choice**
- 10) Original Copies**
- 11) Exact Estimate**

## Stonehenge



# Lenten Facts & Traditions

The first thing to say is that Lent is not described in the Bible.

The word Lent comes from the Old English word *Lecten* meaning 'Spring Season'. There are similar words in other European languages: *Lentin* in Old Dutch and *Lenz* in Old German.

Ash Wednesday is the first day of Lent. Ash Wednesday is celebrated in several denominations. It is traditionally observed with fasting and abstinence from meat. Many Christians attend special Ash Wednesday church services at which the



churchgoers receive ash on their foreheads or the top of their heads. Traditionally, the ashes are prepared from the Palm Branches used to celebrate Palm Sunday the year before. The wearing of ashes was a sign of repentance in Biblical times. The placement of the ashes is accompanied by the words: "Repent and believe in the Gospel". Reformed churches and the Baptists have historically not observed Ash Wednesday and some not even Lent in general. The liturgy for Ash Wednesday contains the following "Invitation to Observe Lenten Discipline":

*"We begin this holy season by acknowledging our need for repentance and our need for the love and forgiveness shown to us in Jesus Christ. I invite you, therefore, in the name of Christ, to observe a Holy Lent, by self-examination and penitence, by prayer and fasting, by practicing works of love, and by reading and reflecting on God's Holy Word."*

Many Lent-observing denominations emphasise making a Lenten sacrifice as well as fasting and abstinence.

Lent is thought to have originated around the First Council of Nicaea in 325 AD.



which spoke of Lent as a period of fasting for forty days before Easter.

Why is it forty days? Lent is actually 46 days in total. Forty weekdays and six Sundays – on which days it was acceptable not to fast.

The phrase “40 days” occurs in the Bible more than 20 times. Moses went into the mountains for forty days and forty nights to pray and fast, before receiving the Ten Commandments. Elijah also went into the mountains to fast and pray for forty days, until he reached Horeb, the Mountain of God. Jesus went into the wilderness to pray and fast for forty days after his Baptism. In all these three cases the forty days prepared them for their ministry. God sent 40 days of rain, before the Great Flood. Goliath threatened the Israelites for 40 days. Jonah delivered a prophecy, warning the city of Nineveh that they had forty days to repent before the city would be destroyed. After his resurrection Jesus spent 40 days visiting with people before his ascension into heaven. So, the phrase “40 days” designates a period of time to complete an important spiritual challenge. Basically, we have 40 days to grow spiritually.

Three traditional practices are to be taken up with renewed vigour in Lent:

- Prayer
- Fasting
- Almsgiving

Shrove Tuesday is the opportunity for a last round of merrymaking – known as Carnival, Shrovetide or Fastleven, before the sombre Lenten season. Carnival (sometimes called Mardi Gras) is often celebrated, particularly in Roman Catholic countries in the last hours before Lent by processions through the streets, with merriment, masked balls, parades and dressing up. Mardi Gras means Fat Tuesday! – a using up of all the fats in the home before Lent. The most famous modern Carnivals are those in Rio de Janeiro and New Orleans.



In some countries the Carnival Season opens on Twelfth Night and climaxes with Mardi Gras festivities commencing 10 days before Shrove Tuesday. The whole period is filled with revelry and elaborate parades, building up to Mardi Gras and what is known as the Rex Parade. Beads of gold, green, and purple (representing power, faith, and justice, respectively) are commonly distributed, and the eating of king cake is an iconic part of the celebration. King cake is a ring of sweet, buttery pastry topped with loads of purple yellow and green sprinkles. King Cake originated in France and was taken over by the French to Louisiana.



Pancake Tuesday is the tradition of cooking and eating pancakes as a last treat before Lent Starts the next day.

Fasting has historically included abstinence from alcohol, meat, dairy products, and other edible produce derived from animals (such as eggs), continuously for the whole duration of the season including Sundays. In some denominations, some adherents continue to mark the season with a traditional abstention from the consumption of meat, most notably among Catholics, Lutherans, and Anglicans. The form of abstention may vary depending on what is customary; some abstain from meat for 40 days, some do so only on Fridays, or some only on Good Friday itself.

*Peter*

Patience





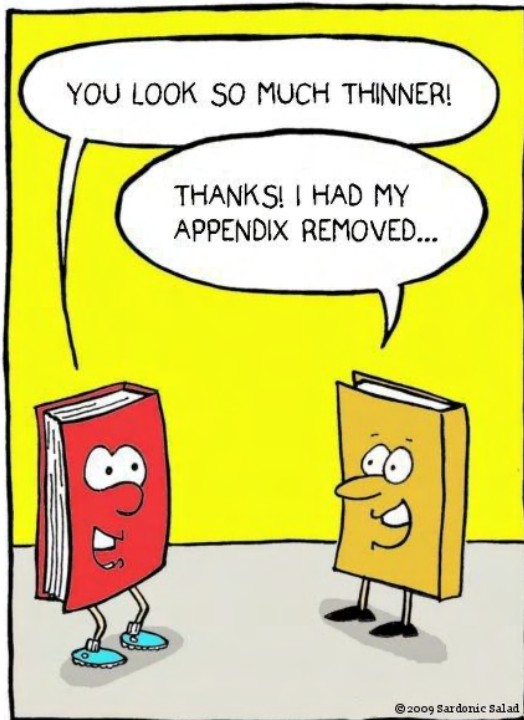


A circular map of Stratford town centre with a black line tracing a route for a prayer walk. The map includes landmarks like the Swan Fountain, the River Avon, and various streets. The map is surrounded by a decorative border of small circular icons.

# Stratford

Town Centre Chaplains  
Invite You To Join Them For a  
**Prayer Walk**  
Around the Town Centre  
on Wednesday 12th March  
Meet at The Swan Fountain for a 7pm start  
For More information phone Colin on 07968 868405

## Humorous Surgery



# Green Corner



## **MARCH 'S ECO TIP: Plan this year's holidays, with creation in mind**

At this time of year, our thoughts can often turn to the hope of warmer weather and planning a summer holiday. Visiting new places and seeing God's creation is a great way to be refreshed and rested. Yet how we travel and where we stay, can either be positive or negative for the very environment we care about. Follow the link for simple prompts to help you plan a greener break this year:

### **1. Select an Appropriate destination**

How far will you need to travel? Most forms of transport contribute to climate change. To minimize your holiday emissions, choose a destination closer to home and/or one you can reach by transport other than plane.

Look at eco-tourism options. Many travel companies now offer holidays which support sustainable development, do not impact negatively on the environment, and provide financial support to local communities.

### **2. Choose the best way to get there**

Choose the most environmentally friendly form of transport. Can you drive or take the train to your destination instead of flying? Try especially to avoid short haul (< 500 km) flights, and if you must fly, choose airlines with higher occupancy rates and more efficient aircraft.

### **3. Choose the right place to stay**

Choose environmentally friendly accommodation. Look for hotels and other accommodation with effective waste treatment systems, that recycle, that are energy efficient, and, where possible, that use environmentally friendly energy

sources such as solar energy or hydroelectric power.

#### **4. Be a responsible guest.**

Respect the local environment. Stay on trails and public footpaths; do not remove plants or feed animals; and never litter.

Choose reputable, conservation-minded tour operators and suppliers.

Conserve water. Take showers rather than baths; use a refillable water container, sterilizing water when necessary rather than buying bottled water. Minimize your use of personal care products and detergents to wash linen, and reuse your hotel towels and bed linen.

Limit energy use. This includes your use of air-conditioning and hot water. Turn off all lights and taps when you leave hotel rooms.

Dispose of sanitary waste properly. Don't flush cotton buds, condoms, tampons and plastics down the toilet.

Recycle and reduce. Recycle newspapers, magazines and your beverage containers (many can be returned for refunds), and reduce the number of bags, napkins and disposable cups you use when you eat fast food.

Choose environmentally friendly transport. Rather than hiring a car, choose other ways to get around like taxis, trains or buses. In many places you can also rent bikes. And don't forget your feet!

Avoid damaging recreational activities. Avoid sports which have a significant harmful impact on the environment, or choose more progressive establishments (e.g. golf courses which recycle water).

#### **5. Coming home ....**

Watch what you buy for a souvenir! Think twice before you buy any products made from any endangered species, including animal hides and body parts, tortoise-shell, ivory, or coral - they could be illegal.

**With thanks to ARocha and the WWF website**

## *More Random Sayings*

My grandfather used to say: "One door closes and another one opens".

Great philosopher, terrible carpenter!

I remember being able to get up without making sound-effects.

Hello darkness, my old friend, I just stood up to fast again!

**Thanks to John Clees for this month's random sayings**

# Sunday Services at 9.30am

2nd March	Holy Communion	Peter Horrocks
16th March	Morning Service	Peter Horrocks
30th March	Morning Service	The Elders
	Mothering Sunday	
6th April	Holy Communion	Revd Robert Maloney

## F&F Rota March

Please report any problems with the buildings in March to:

Iain Kelso on 01789 299698 / 07770 688984

or

Sarah Salmon on 01789 295976 / 07816 565371

## Flower Rota

2nd March	David & Carole
16th March	Wendy
30th March	Ann Rowe
6th April	Mairi

## Link

**Because of the way our Sunday services are now structured, the editors have decided that the physical copies of Link magazine will be available on the 1st Sunday of each month rather than the last Sunday of the month. The electronic version may well be available before then. When there are 5 Sundays in the month the Link will be available on that 5th Sunday.**

**The April edition of Link will be published on the 30th March.**

The deadline for submission to the next edition is Monday 24th March.

Please send us your articles, pictures, humour etc.

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**ASH  
WEDNESDAY**



**SAUSAGE CASSEROLE LUNCH**

**ON 5TH MARCH AT 12.30 FOR 1PM  
IN THE CHURCH**

**COST: 3 POUNDS**