



# Link

**October 2023**

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



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

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

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**Cover photo:**

Taken at the Malvern Autumn show. A Harvest entry - only came third! We thought it was the best!

# Thoughts for October

## The Challenge for our Church – for THE Church

My thoughts for this month have been stimulated by one short paragraph towards the end of the summary of the Theos report (summary written by ‘Word on the Streets’) - see page 7 in this magazine:

*“Flourishing churches we came across in the research had a clear understanding of why they existed in their localities as churches. They could articulate their mission in both spiritual and social terms. They were outward oriented, and maintained active relationships with their local communities.”*

At Rother Street we do have a ‘Vision Document’ which has been in existence since I started to be the Church Leader. Over the first four years to 2020 the document was updated regularly. Sadly, when the Pandemic and lockdown happened it fell dormant. But now it’s time to update it!

I would like to think that, though we are small (and small is beautiful!) we are a vibrant church, a welcoming church and a church that doesn’t just contemplate its navel!

In the original Vision Document, we divided our mission into two: Part I was how we catered for our own congregation and Part II was how we looked outward to our community – how we could serve our local community. Interestingly there was little in there about the 5th Mark of Mission (i.e. caring for God’s creation)., which we have been pursuing eagerly, recently, via Eco Church, Eco Chat and upgrading our heating system.

In order to fulfil ‘the great commission, in order to attract new people into our church community and share God’s love with them, we need to be active and have a strong purpose. We need to demonstrate that we ‘Walk the Way – living the life of Jesus daily’. People need to notice us and ask themselves “What have they got that we haven’t?” If we are not noticeable, if we don’t stand apart from the crowd, so to speak, who is to know what we do and what we believe? How are they going to find out about Jesus? We would be failing in our duties of being Christian if we weren’t different.

So now, I’m asking for your help!

Rother Street’s Vision and Mission is not just my vision alone, it’s the vision of our

whole community. We all need to own the vision; we need to own our direction of travel and our aspirations for the future.

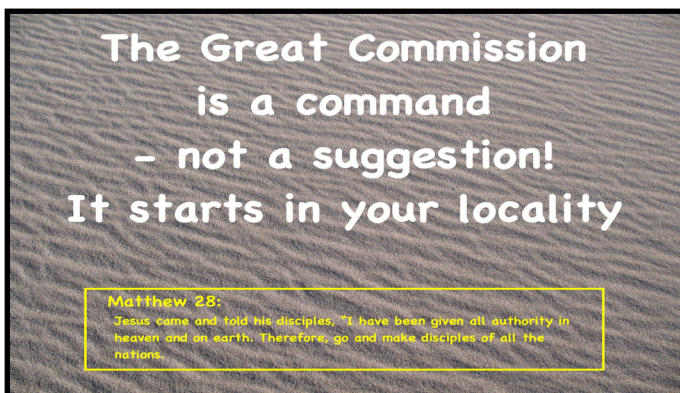
Just to help you think about it, I have listed here the 'Five Marks of Mission'. These are not the URC's solely; they were adopted by the General Synod of the Church of England in 1996 but they have been used by many denominations as a basis of action plans and creative mission ideas. The West Midlands Mission Fund Panel asks which of the five marks of mission are addressed by a particular application when they apply for supporting funding.

### **TELL – TEACH – TEND – TRANSFORM - TREASURE**

1. To proclaim the Good News of the kingdom.
2. To teach, baptise and nurture new believers.
3. To respond to human need by loving service.
4. To seek to transform unjust structures of society, challenge violence and pursue peace.
5. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.

So there's your challenge! Please send me your thoughts. Elders will consider them, and we will incorporate them into the next version of our Vision / Mission document. Your ideas don't have to be grandiose! – though grandiose will be considered! Every little helps. Even if you suggest a minor alteration in our direction of travel that will contribute.

And, if you contribute, then you will own the vision.



*Peter*



# Family News

Ivy is recovering from Covid and it was good to see her back in Church recently.

Ann J. has succumbed to Covid but is hopefully now testing negative and getting back to normal.

Jill has had her awaited eye operation but is very frustrated with the apparent slowness of improvement.

Tom is recovering from a successful knee operation and is progressing well.

Katie is suffering from problems with an inflamed leg and has sadly had to cancel a planned visit to Hungary.

Her son recently went to Morocco as part of a rescue team following the devastating earthquake.

Irene P. is due for a cataract operation but is keeping active and gets out and about regularly.

Congratulations to two couples who both celebrate their 60th wedding anniversaries on 5th October: Tom & Janette Purves married in Leith and Geoff & Margaret Reynolds in Reading

*Ileen Fisher*

## What's on at the Bear Pit

**Blithe Spirit: 4th to 7th October 2023 at 7.30pm**  
**(Matinee at 2.30pm on 7th October)**



Blithe Spirit by Noël Coward a **Second Thoughts Drama Group Production**, directed by Nic Walsh

When writer Charles Condomine needs to conduct research for his first novel about

the paranormal, he sets up a séance with village psychic Madame Arcati, inviting along the village doctor and his wife. What could possibly go wrong?

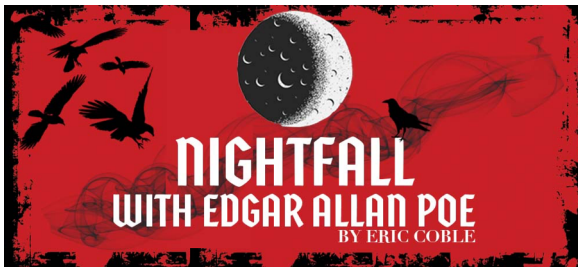
In the comedy *Blithe Spirit*, Noël Coward skilfully and wickedly lays bare the realities of Charles' two marriages to reveal his underlying selfishness. First produced in the dark days of 1941, this witty and acutely observed classic can be seen as a laughter-filled condemnation of arrogant behaviour, while also offering a ray of hope as Charles prepares to escape the ruins of his domestic life.

This amateur production of "Blithe Spirit" is presented by arrangement with Concord Theatricals Ltd. on behalf of Samuel French Ltd.

[www.concordtheatricals.co.uk](http://www.concordtheatricals.co.uk).

**Tickets: £14 (£12 concessions)**

**Nightfall with Edgar Allan Poe: 11th to 14th October at 7.30pm**



### **A Phoenix Players Production**

Edgar Allan Poe stands alone in the flickering darkness of his mind, trying desperately to convince himself — and us — that he's not mad. The spell he weaves brings us a highly theatrical adaptation of four stories Poe himself considered his best: "The Raven," "The Fall of the House of Usher," "The Pit and the Pendulum," and "The Tell-Tale Heart."

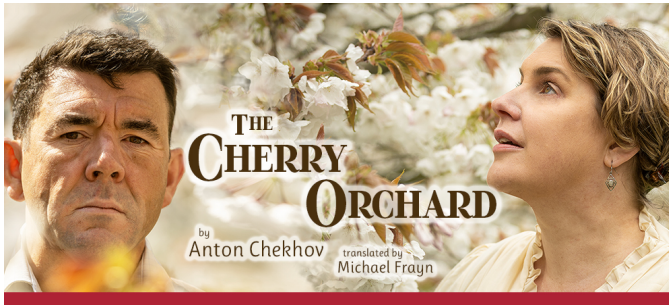
Enter the world of Poe and check your heartbeat at the door...

The Phoenix players are proud to present a 14 strong cast, original music score, puppetry and maybe a little blood. Prepare to cry, laugh & SCREAM!

**\*Warning\*** This show contains: Loud Noises, Blood, Mild Language, Smoke Effects & Strobe Lighting. It may not be suitable for children or those of a nervous disposition.

**Tickets: £13**

## The Cherry Orchard: 24th to 28th October 2023 at 7.30pm (Matinee 2.30pm on 28th)



Russia 1904, Mme Ranyevskya returns to her estate following a five-year absence to discover her property and beloved cherry orchard, a nostalgic childhood sanctuary, is to be auctioned off to pay the family debts.

Lopakhin, the son of peasants now a successful businessman, offers to help the woman he has loved since boyhood. In denial she continues living in the past with ruinous consequences.

Chekhov's masterpiece is an exploration of loss, love, a disparity of class and a fascinating insight to a changing society.

Absorbing characters, beautiful costumes and poignant humour.

**Tickets: £15 (£12 concessions)**

## The Theos Report – part II

The URC Church Life Review Group, which reported to General Assembly this summer, commissioned an independent report about the state of the United Reformed Church carried out by an independent organisation called Theos. We at Rother Street contributed to that report by filling in a questionnaire. The Christian blog site 'Word on the Streets' has published a summary of the report for all Christians to read. I felt it was a readable and digestible summary and so we are reproducing it in Link. It's quite long: we published the first half last month and this is the second half. The boxes with quotes are reproduced from the original Theos report. They are comments from people who were interviewed - mainly Church Leaders.

All the documents which make up the Church Life Review Group work can be found on the URC national website:

<https://www.urc.org.uk/clrg>

As a result of the Church Life Review Group's work they have asked Assembly to approve a number of task groups to report back to Assembly in the future:

- Resource sharing across Synods
- How best to support lay work - asking how mission and ministry might be encouraged in the development of new URC communities of discipleship and worship
- The shape of church structures - reducing the number of committees down to a size proportionate to the current size of the URC

## Part II:

### 4. Church structures developed when the church was larger need reassessing

One of the key findings of our research was that the structures and processes of the URC need simplifying and streamlining. Conceived when the denomination was significantly larger, structures that were once fit for purpose now risk stifling rather than enabling congregational life and mission. As many historic denominations with elaborate governance and administrative structures experience decline, the need to reform structures discerningly, to be more agile and fit for mission in changing times, is critical.

The URC is not alone in considering how its structures can best serve the needs of the church and community in the twenty-first century. The Church of England has particularly attracted mainstream media attention as it considers the balance between central structures and the parish level. The Quakers are engaged in a "Simpler Meetings" scheme to reduce the burden of structures and roles on the worshipping community. More positively, this reassessment is not always motivated by decline, as in the case of Pope Francis's declaration that "synodality [is what] God expects of the Church of the third millennium", calling the international Catholic Church to an inclusive process of discernment regarding how its culture, structures, and decision making can be more open to the leadings of the Holy Spirit. These movements are not intended to bring about complete transformation of church structures, but rather seek to be agile and imaginative in the face of modern challenges.

“

16% of respondents to our survey said their church building was no longer fit for purpose.

## 5. Ministers and paid time make a real difference

There is a shortage of ministers in the URC. Ministers are stretched untenably between several congregations and localities. The minister-to-church ratio varies from synod to synod, but in one of the synods we studied, the ratio was approximately 20 ministers to 100 churches. Our research shows that the absence of a full-time minister has a negative effect on the congregational life and ministry of local congregations, limiting particularly their ability to meet the needs of their local communities through outreach activities. On the flipside, all of the churches we studied that thrived had a minister.

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In one of the Synods we studied, the ratio was approx 20 ministers to 100 churches.

In a context of church decline, however, there is a need to innovate both at the level of theological training, improving quality and access, and building lay capacity for a more agile, participatory form of local leadership.

Other Theos research has also emphasised the critical importance of investing in leadership – not only for the flourishing of the church, but for the good of the whole community. Churches are wellsprings of formal and informal community leadership, forming (and paying) community champions who take initiative and empower their neighbourhoods, building up ‘dignity’ and a sense of ‘purpose’ in individuals and groups.

## 6. The church will flourish at the local level or not at all

Flourishing churches we came across in the research had a clear understanding of why they existed in their localities as churches. They could articulate their mission in both spiritual and social terms. They were outward oriented, and maintained active relationship with their local communities.

As older, historic denominations reckon with the reality of decline, the promise of flourishing rests with a renewed sense of missional identity and purpose expressed locally, and the courage to drastically reform or jettison altogether wider denominational structures and processes that hinder rather than enable congregational life and mission.

Read the full report: [\*\*The United Reformed Church: A Paradoxical Church at a Crossroads.\*\*](#)

# Comfort from Nature



*It's hard to hold on to your troubles  
when you walk all alone on the shore,  
for the waves seem to whisper their comfort  
as they've done for millenia before.  
While the sky is so wide and unending  
that anxieties shrink into place,  
and the breeze that has travelled the oceans  
fills our hearts with new courage and grace.  
May the gifts given freely by nature  
ever stay with us all, day by day,  
and the solace and peace of their presence  
sustain us, each one, on our way.*

***Maggie Ingall  
Submitted by Fran Maddy***

## Battery Power

I liked this comparison between people and torches: all of our batteries run low from time to time!

Torches use AA batteries, or AAA, or C or D.

We can't physically change people's power packs, but when their light is low we can give them AA, for attention and affection; AAA, for attention, affection and acceptance; C for compassion; or D for direction.

If those don't work, we can sit with them and be a light in their darkness until they feel a bit brighter.

***From the Friendship Book  
Submitted by Fran Maddy***

# Green Corner

## Secondhand September

We know that, probably, by the time you read this it will not be September, but some of the facts in this report from Oxfam are so astonishing that it bears repeating in October! September is the month NOT to buy any new clothes. In the electronic version of Link, clicking on the underlined phrases takes you to the evidence.

Our planet is in serious trouble and our nation's addiction to new clothes is doing more harm than you may think. In the electronic version of the magazine the underlined links will take you to the quotes - double click them.

## 11 FAST FASHION FACTS AND STATISTICS

- The world uses an estimated 80 billion pieces of clothing every year, a 400 percent increase from two decades ago. — [The True Cost](#)
- Textile production contributes more to climate change than international aviation and shipping combined. — [House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee, 2019](#)
- Buying just one white cotton shirt produces the same amount of emissions as driving 35 miles in a car. — [WRAP](#)
- By 2030, global apparel consumption is projected to rise by 63%, from 62 million tons today to 102 million tons—equivalent to more than 500 billion additional T-shirts. — [House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee, 2019](#)
- 75% of consumers believe that sustainability is important, but one-third are willing to choose brands that help environmental and social improvement. — [Ellen MacArthur Foundation](#)
- The fashion industry is responsible for 10% of annual global carbon emissions. — [Morgan McFall-Johnsen \(2020\)](#)
- Half a million tons of plastic microfibers are dumped into the ocean every year, the equivalent of 50 billion plastic bottles. — [World Economic Forum](#)
- Around 300,000 tonnes of textile waste ends up in household black bins every year, sent to landfill or incinerators. Less than 1% of material used to produce clothing is recycled into new clothing at the end of its



life. — House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee, 2019

- Clothing companies create more than 1 million garments every day. — Greenpeace
- Fast fashion emissions will grow by 50% by 2030, if current growth continues. — Ellen MacArthur Foundation
- Extending the life of clothes by just 9 months of active use would reduce carbon, water and waste footprints by 20-30% each. — WRAP

It's estimated that more than two tonnes of clothing are bought each minute in the UK, more than any other country in Europe. That amount produces nearly 50 tonnes of carbon emissions, the same as driving 162,000 miles in a car.

In one month alone, the carbon footprint of new clothes bought in the UK was greater than flying a plane around the world 900 times. This is the same amount of carbon emissions the nation could save if we all took part in Second Hand September.

*Thanks to Oxfam*



***Watch a YouTube video about the cost of fashion - it's shocking!***

***<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5-0zHqYGnlo>***

***Next time you shop for clothes think:***

- Where is it made? Are the working conditions safe: Do the workers get a living wage?
- Will I wear it a minimum of 30 times?
- Could I rather use a charity shop?

# How Grandchildren view their Grandparents

**Did you know that the 1st of October is Grandparents day? It was first introduced to the UK in 1990. Since 2008 it's been celebrated on 1st Sunday of October. Here are a few quotes on how Grandchildren view their Grandparents:**

My grandson was visiting one day when he asked, "Grandma, do you know how you and God are alike?" I mentally polished my halo and I said, "No, how are we alike?" "You're both old," he replied.

I didn't know if my granddaughter had learned her colours yet, so I decided to test her. I would point out something and ask what colour it was. She would tell me and was always correct. It was fun for me, so I continued. At last, she headed for the door, saying, "Grandma, I really think you should try to figure out some of these colours yourself!"

When my grandson asked me how old I was, I teasingly replied, "I'm not sure." "Look in your underwear, Grandpa," he advised "Mine says I'm 4 to 6." (WOW! I really like this one -- it says I'm only '38'!)

A year four child came home from school and said to her grandmother, "Grandma, guess what? We learned how to make babies today." The grandmother, more than a little surprised, tried to keep her cool. "That's interesting," she said. "How do you make babies?" "It's simple," replied the girl. "You just change 'y' to 'i' and add 'es'."

A 6-year-old was asked where his grandma lived. "Oh," he said, "she lives at the airport, and whenever we want her, we just go and get her. Then, after her visit, we take her back to the airport."





## Bible Sunday



### **Bible Sunday (29th October) - Ukrainians request more Bibles**

The war in Ukraine has led to a dramatic rise in the demand for Bibles, as people ask existential questions about life and death.

The Ukrainian Bible Society reports that, in the last 15 months, some 700,000 Bibles have been distributed across the war-torn country. This is a five-fold increase in numbers handed out before the war.. In 2020 some 136,767 Bibles were distributed in the Ukraine.. Anatoliy Raychynets, deputy general secretary of the Ukrainian Bible Society explains, “The experience of this time is that so many people are looking for Bibles and Churches. We are doing everything possible to reach all the needs, but more Bibles are needed. With the help of the Word of God, we can bring the love of God to those who need it”

Bibles are distributed around the country, including to soldiers and civilian communities on the front-line, and to those in hospital. “Wherever the Bible is taken, it is much appreciated” said Anatoliy.

# Sunday Services at 9.30am

1st October	Holy communion	Peter Horrocks
	Thank you / Harvest	
15th October	Morning Service	Blair Kessler
29th October	Morning Service	Tom Meldrum
5th November	Holy Communion	Peter Horrocks

## F&F Rota October

Please report any problems with the buildings in July to:

Ann Jones: 01789 266177 / 07580 567163

or

Tom Purves 01789 293013

## Flower Rota

1st October	Margaret Reynolds / Ileen Fisher
15th October	Ann Jones
29th October	Ivy Dyall

## 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 November edition of Link will be published on the 29th October 2023.**

The deadline for submission to the next edition is Monday 30th October 2023

Please send us your articles, pictures, humour etc.

**Editors contact details:**

**Telephone: 01789 750971 Email: [peterhorrocks@doctors.net.uk](mailto:peterhorrocks@doctors.net.uk)**

# Reference page 11

Isaiah 46:4

“Even to your old age and grey hairs  
I am he, I am he who will sustain you.  
I have made you and I will carry you;  
I will sustain you and I will rescue you.”

Proverbs 16:31

“Grey hair is a crown of splendour;  
it is attained in the way of righteousness”

Proverbs 20:29

“The glory of young men is their strength,  
grey hair is the splendour of the old”

Leviticus 19:23

“Stand up in the presence of the aged, show  
respect for the elderly and revere your God.  
I am the Lord”