



Link

November 2023

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



Worship, Witness and love for others through Jesus Christ

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

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Thoughts for November



Growth

These thoughts sort of follow on from my thoughts for October, where I talked about our church's vision for the future.

On the 30th of September Linda and I attended a Saturday morning conference in Nuneaton, organised by our Synod, entitled 'Leading Your Church Into Growth' (LYCIG). It was presented by Nick Stanyon, the Synod Evangelist, and Peter Clarkson the URC minister of Christchurch, Abbeydale, in Gloucester. Peter has been involved in LYCIG both in his previous church in Yorkshire and during the four years that he has been in Gloucester.

LYCIG usually has a seven part plan that could help each church to grow. This is so important, as I have said before, and as was said on the morning, most denominations are in decline and if we don't do something about it there is a prediction that the URC will cease to exist by 2035.

It is no longer fashionable to go to church. The Sunday morning ethic that we all grew up with is no longer there. We need to change our tactics. We need to be more open in our Christian faith and we need to make Christianity more relevant to modern society. Let's not forget that we have something great to offer, we have the life of Christ to show and demonstrate to people.

We met an old friend this week, at the funeral of another old friend. She is an intelligent person. She was surprised to hear that I was a Lay Church Leader: I guess I haven't had a meaningful conversation with her since I took over the leadership. But what surprised both Linda and me was that she was completely in the dark about religion. We had to define what a Christian is for her! – and as I said this is an intelligent person whom I respect and have known for many years. This illustrates

what we are all up against, in terms of promoting our faith and our Christian beliefs. I'm pretty sure our friend would agree with the ethics of Christianity, but she knew nothing about the basis of Christianity.

One of the statements from the Saturday morning session, that stuck in my mind, was Peter saying that after 4 years of LYCIG he was bringing the names of one or two people to EVERY Church Meeting for consideration of membership. They have the same number of church meetings each year that we have. That might be up to eight new members per year!

LYCIG is a national initiative, originating, I think in the Church of England, but it is open to all denominations, including the URC. It has six main principles:

1. Change the culture.
2. Pray for growth.
3. Become an inviting and welcoming church.
4. Build an evangelism strategy.
5. Make disciples.
6. Improve the worship.

They may not be all in this order, but 1 & 2 are essential building blocks. 3 to 6 could be in any order.

It is essential to start with an enthusiastic leader, but this is not an initiative that a leader does on their own. It is vital that the eldership and indeed the whole congregation are excited and enthused by the process and the prospects. It is essential that we all embrace Jesus's Great Commission to "Go make disciples of all nations". I think we are already a welcoming church, but we need to add to that the element of invitation. For instance, perhaps, we should be saying to the people who regularly come to our Friday Coffee Morning – "What about joining us on Sunday morning? – I'm sure you would enjoy it". That means, of course, that we must ensure that Sunday morning is an enjoyable and fruitful experience (Item 6 above)!

What do you think?

I know that we all think that we are doing a lot, and issues like "Who is going to do the work?", "Have we got time?", "We are only a small, elderly congregation" will, no doubt, be in people's minds. But this is an urgent agenda; we are in a situation of 'Act or Die' (slowly, I suppose, not in the next five years, hopefully!).

Whether we formally adopt the LYCIG agenda or not, I think we do have to implement some or all of the strategies. We could do that formally, or informally. If

we do it informally then we must not lose sight of our aims and actions. 'Church Growth' should, in some form, be high on our committee agendas. It should come before we discuss the lighting, the heating, church repair and fundraising.

As was mentioned last Saturday and is emphasised on the LYCIG website, changing the culture is the first essential.

We need to have prayerful discussions around this subject. Here, for example, is the LYCIG prayer:

*God of mission,
who alone brings growth to your church.
Send your Holy Spirit to give:
vision to our planning,
wisdom to our actions,
joy to our worship,
and power to our witness.
Help our church to grow in numbers,
in spiritual commitment to you,
and in service to our local community.
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen*

Peter

Family News

Sadly, John Insoll, a long-time loyal supporter of our Friday Coffee Morning, died on 11th October. He had suffered a debilitating road accident in the summer and spent some considerable time in hospital and latterly in a nursing home. His funeral took place at St. Andrew's Shottery on 31st October. We offer our sincere condolences to Janet and all his family at this time.

Tom has recovered well from his recent knee operation.

Anne W. is awaiting a physio appointment following her recent fall.

Many congratulations and love to Phil S. who celebrated his 99th Birthday on 25th October. He is now one of a handful of survivors of the D-Day Landings.

St. Basil's Card Tree

St. Basil's Tree Card will be available again this year for those who choose to display

one card for their friends in the congregation and give a donation in lieu of postage/ additional cards. We have been supporting St. Basil's at Christmas for many years now - a very worthy cause as they provide shelter and positive help and support for young people in need in the Birmingham area and other venues in the Midlands. The "tree" will be put in place on 19th November and will be available at our services on 3rd December, during the Tree Festival and Carol Service. Please contact me with any queries. Thank you.

Ileen Fisher

What's on at the Bear Pit

Pride and Prejudice: 8th to 11th November at 7.30pm



A Caramba Theatre Company Production

Since its immediate success in 1813, *Pride and Prejudice* has remained one of the most popular novels in the English language. Jane Austen called this brilliant work "her own darling child". Jane Austen's radiant wit sparkles as her characters dance a delicate quadrille of flirtation and intrigue, making this the most superb comedy of manners of Regency England.

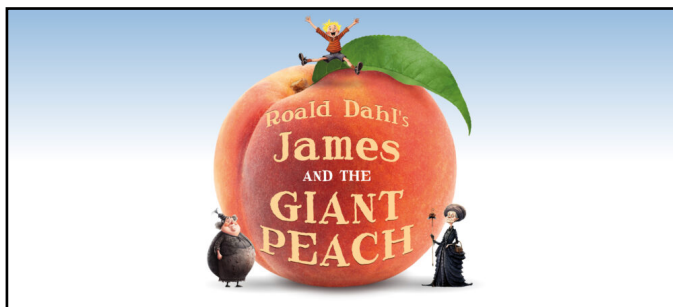
This adaptation of Jane Austen's beloved romantic comedy about the intersection between love, marriage, and social status remains faithful to the novel.

The headstrong Elizabeth Bennet faces mounting pressure from her status-conscious mother to secure a suitable marriage. But is marriage suitable for a woman of Elizabeth's intelligence and independence? Especially when the irritating, aloof, tall, vaguely handsome, mildly amusing, and impossibly aristocratic Mr. Darcy keeps popping up at every turn?! Can each overcome their own pride and prejudice

Tickets: £14 (concessions £12)

James and the Giant Peach: 1st to 10th December at 7.30pm

A Bear Pit Theatre Company Production



Adapted for the stage by David Wood, from the book by Roald Dahl and directed by Emily Myerscough.

James lives with his mean Aunt Sponge and Aunt Spiker, they make his life miserable. Until one day, he meets a mystical man who gives him the most magical beans. James' world soon becomes very peculiar as he finds himself in a giant peach having wonderful adventures with an amazing group of giant insects.

This Roald Dahl classic is packed full of humour and ridiculousness for all ages. Prepare to be taken on a journey of crazy characters, creative costumes and colourful storytelling.

Returning to the Bear Pit following the sell-out success of The Twits in 2022 and repeated performances earlier this year, Emily, show Director, gives an insight to what she has in store ...

“Peach promises to be a spectacular feast for your senses. Expect organised chaos, revolting aunts, fantastical costumes and a collaboration of wonderful local talent. And... a gigantic peach!”

Home

The service on the 17th September was an Elders' service led by Sarah and assisted by Ann. The theme was 'Home'. There has been a call to publish Sarah's words of wisdom, so here they are:

What is a home?

When we think of the word or image of 'home', what comes to mind? We may think

of a building made with bricks and mortar or a houseboat or a tent in a refugee camp. Do we think of it as a shelter from the storm or a place of refuge and a place of solace and comfort where we can feel safe.

Perhaps we think of people there, with their hopes and dreams. A place where people build and share together. A place where husbands and wives and their families share their hopes and hurts, their joys and sorrows of life.

Some say 'home is where the heart is' other say 'home is where you hang your hat'. Robert Frost said 'home is the place, where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in'.

Somehow home has a special place in the human heart; it seems that we are longing for a place where we can belong.



There are the words from that well known Beach Boys song 'I feel so broke up I want to go home'. This is a song for every human heart as whenever we feel abandoned or lonely, we want to go home and whenever we are filled with doubt or despair or are lost - we just want to go back to our place of safety.

Home is a human right, it is our foundation and where we thrive. Children need the security and safety to grow and cope with schoolwork as they try and make their way in the world.

Some families need support, especially if they're in a multi-generational environment and maybe both parents are working and the elders, not having a good grasp of the local language, feel isolated with no-one to talk to or able to understand them.

We need to remember that God is likened to the caring, protecting Shepherd while his flock, the sheep, are those who put their confidence in Him and believe in Him. His sheep are His followers, not blind, but trusting in His guidance and direction as a wiser and all knowing Shepherd. The Kingdom of God is accessible to all, even those who were sinners or who have strayed from God's path. Everyone is precious to Him. There is room in His home in Heaven. He will never give up on us no matter what. As we heard earlier, He left the 99 sheep that were safe, to go and find the lost one because that sheep is important to Him. Just like each one of us, we are all part of God's Family.

In the story of Naomi and Ruth we know that Ruth said “Don’t make me leave you, for I want to go wherever you go, and to live wherever you live; your people shall be my people, and your God shall be my God; I want to die where you die, and be buried there.

Ruth chose to leave the only home that she had ever known, her family and her friends and make the journey to a foreign place, Bethlehem. We can only imagine her fears, a stranger in a foreign land. Through her love and loyalty, God remained faithful. Ruth became the great grand mother of David. The people of her new society welcomed her with open arms.

We, as a society, tend to stick to our own, which means that the boundaries of age, race and religion etc., are very much still there.

If we follow the example of Ruth and Naomi, when it comes to befriending those who are different from us, then we could change the World. Accepting our differences is necessary to live together and to build wholesome communities. We could then live in our homes in peace and security.

The most fundamental message of Jesus is that we must love and care for one another.

Sarah Salmon

Green Corner

This is a report recently published by the State of Nature Partnership

The State of Nature Report



The UK, like most other countries worldwide, has experienced a significant loss of biodiversity. The trends in nature presented here cover, at most, 50 years, but these follow on from major changes to the UK’s nature over previous centuries.

As a result, the UK is now one of the most nature-depleted countries on Earth.

The main causes of these declines are clear, as are many ways in which we can reduce impacts and help struggling species. The evidence from the last 50 years shows that on land and in freshwater, significant and ongoing changes in the way we manage our land for agriculture, and the effects of climate change, are having the biggest impacts on our wildlife. At sea, and around our coasts, the main pressures on nature are unsustainable fishing, climate change and marine development.

More broadly there has been growing recognition of the value of nature, including its role in tackling climate change, and the need for its conservation among the public and policymakers alike.

With each report our monitoring of change improves and we have never had a better understanding of the state of nature. Yet, despite progress in ecosystem restoration, conserving species, and moving towards nature-friendly land and sea use, the UK's nature and wider environment continues, overall, to decline and degrade. The UK has set ambitious targets to address nature loss through the Global Biodiversity Framework, and although our knowledge of how to do this is excellent, the size of the response and investment remains far from what is needed given the scale and pace of the crisis.

We have never had a better understanding of the State of Nature and what is needed to fix it.

Terrestrial & Freshwater Birds

The abundance of 753 terrestrial and freshwater species has on average fallen by 19% across the UK since 1970

Invertebrates

The UK distributions of 4,979 species have on average decreased by 13% since 1970.

Flowering plants

Since 1970, the distributions of 54% of flowering plant species and 59% of mosses and liverworts have decreased across Britain.

Insects

10,008 species were assessed using Red List criteria. 2% (151 species) are extinct in Great Britain and a further 16% (almost 1500 species) are now threatened with extinction here.



Marine Birds

The abundance of 13 species of seabird has fallen by an average of 24% since 1986. The situation is worse in Scotland (11 species fallen by 49% since 1986).

Marine Life

There is less information about changes in species abundance and distribution in UK seas. The picture is mixed with some species increasing and some declining.

What do our headlines mean?

This report focuses on three measures of biodiversity change: abundance (the number of individuals), distribution (the proportion of sites occupied) and extinction risk. These measures have been assessed for hundreds and in some cases thousands of species native to the UK, as the available data allow.



Responding to the Crisis

The UK is party to a new set of international biodiversity targets under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). To support these, each UK country has committed to developing and implementing national biodiversity strategies. In many cases, countries have developed (or are committed to developing) legally binding targets to restore nature. The report groups the CBD targets into five broad areas:

1. **Targeted conservation.** There is good evidence that conservation can be effective for individual species when it is applied to a large proportion of the population. Targeted conservation has set some species on the road to recovery.
2. **Increasing nature-friendly farming, forestry and fisheries.** In the UK a fifth of farmland is in agri-environmental schemes, but only a part of this could be considered as nature friendly farming. 44% of woodland is certified as sustainably managed. Half of marine fish stocks are sustainably harvested.

These three measures are improving but there is a long way to go.

3. **Expanding and managing protected areas.** 11% of UK land is in protected areas (areas subject to a legal nature conservation designation). However, within this only 44% of the measured attributes of terrestrial and freshwater Areas or Sites of Special Scientific Interest are in favourable condition. In protected areas on land, there is some evidence that target species or species of conservation concern have more positive trends than outside them. Although 38% of UK waters are designated as protected areas, we lack a comprehensive condition assessment and management is not yet fully implemented at most sites. Work is ongoing to designate marine protected areas and implement fisheries management within them.
4. **Increasing Ecosystem restoration.** Restoration is taking place across a wide range of ecosystems, from peatlands to urban forests to seagrass beds, with more than 5,000 hectares (ha) of degraded peatland being restored each year. Despite this, only 14% of priority habitats, 7% of woodland and 25% of peatlands are assessed to be in good condition. Large areas of the UK seafloor do not meet Good Environmental Status because of habitat disturbance from fishing. Restoration and creation of carbon-rich habitats have clear co-benefits for climate change mitigation and adaptation, as well as biodiversity, but realising these will require a step-change in the rate and scale of restoration.
5. **Co-ordinating our response.** Action to restore nature is best co-ordinated with action to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change because land-use scenarios suggest that wildlife is likely to benefit from maximising nature-based solutions (for example, native woodland creation and peatland restoration) in order to achieve net-zero in the land sector. However, this will need to be achieved whilst meeting people's needs for food, energy and access to nature. Access to nature supports human health and well-being but there is inequality, with people in poorer socio-economic settings having less access to wildlife-rich natural spaces.

There are ways in which you can help:

Count, Volunteer, Manage, Campaign and Live sustainably. Producing the State of Nature report was only possible due to thousands of volunteers giving up their time to help record and monitor wildlife. There are still a number of schemes that need

your help. See the report for a list of societies that you can volunteer for.

This is only a short summary of the report. If you want to read about the details you can go to: www.stateofnature.org.uk. The full report is very long!

Peter

A Helping Hand

Two apt Biblical quotations.....

Esther 4:14

'Perhaps this is the moment for which you have been created'.

1Corinthians 13

'Love never gives up'.

These two quotations hang in our downstairs toilet (along with others!) and caught my eye the other day.

It had been a hard three weeks. A Food Bank client needed help with schooling for her Year 10 daughter. The family had been rehoused in the village and were trying to settle. The primary aged children had been allocated school places in a neighbouring village as our village school was oversubscribed. The Year 10 student needed a State, non faith, school asap because subject choices had to be made for the GCSEs. The mother was informed that there were only two places in the WHOLE of Warwickshire. After the completion of many forms, a letter was received saying a school had been allocated. This was in Alcester at the Roman Catholic School. This was logistically impossible as mother had to transport the younger children to their school and spiritually insensitive. Since the mother received this news, I have become very well acquainted with the staff at Warwickshire County Council, the Appeals Staff and the MP's office.

Letters have flown back and forth and my voice is recognised in the School Appeals Office when I phone!

On Friday, an overjoyed Year 10 pupil phoned me with the news that she had been offered a place at Stratford upon Avon School Sixth Form. Her mother and she were to await a call from the Head of Year, who would be inviting them to join her for an 'induction visit'.

Ah! Her joy and thanks made me think that

'Perhaps THIS was the moment for which I had been created'.



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Stratford upon Avon
CV37 9NF
Tel 07884 418 732

Email info@stratforduponavon.foodbank.org.uk

5 October 2023

Dear Mairi,

On behalf of the Trustees and volunteers of Stratford-upon-Avon Foodbank, I would like to thank everyone at the URC Church very much for your most generous and thoughtful donation of 98 kg of food for our Foodbank. We are very touched that you should think of those in crisis at this time and I am also pleased to enclose a certificate of acknowledgement of your special kindness.

The Foodbank is extremely grateful to all individuals and organisations who support our work and to the people of Stratford-upon-Avon and its environs who regularly donate food and cash. Without this, we would not be able to improve our service to the growing number of people who need our help in times of crisis.

Thank you again for your thoughtfulness at this time.

Kindest regards and all good wishes,

Mary Finegan
Data Administrator

Seeing Clearly

Given the disturbing news about the Palestine / Israeli war and the images confronting us I think this article from the Friendship Book, submitted by Fran is very relevant:

There's a quote attributed to Benjamin Franklin that goes, "I would see clearly, near or far".

I don't know if that genius of a man was referring to spectacles or telescopes, or some other lens, but I suspect he had something more profound in mind.

For myself, whether we are talking about international affairs or how my nearest and dearest are feeling, I would ask something similar.

That I see clearly. That I understand.

Submitted by Fran Maddy



*“Autumn is a second
spring when
every leaf is a flower.”*

—ALBERT CAMUS

Two Minutes Silence

What do you think about during the two minutes silence on Remembrance Day?

It's easy, during such moments, not to think about anything - perhaps just the colour of the ceiling? Clearly, we should remember all the thousands of people who died, and those who were injured during the two World Wars and the many conflicts since. Perhaps you think about the members of your family who lived through the conflicts and what they had to endure. Many didn't go off to fight but they still had to endure the Blitz and the blackouts and the rationing. We should also remember with thanks the relatively peaceful lives we have had and now enjoy.



The 2023 Poppy Appeal

This year, the Royal British Legion has revealed a major redesign of the classic poppy pin. The main change is that, for the first time, the badge is now both plastic-free and recyclable. The new design is created from paper produced from a blend of renewable fibres (including offcuts from coffee cups), while the green plastic stem has been replaced with paper leaves with a crease and the black centre is now embossed with 'Poppy Appeal'.



The process of redesigning the pin apparently took three years, with the aim of making the campaign more environmentally friendly. The Legion's poppies feel a little different but, unless you examine them up-close, they look very much the same as before.

Andy Taylor-Whyte, the Poppy Appeal director said: 'We want to encourage as many people as possible to get a poppy this year and show their gratitude and support to those in the armed forces whose service and sacrifice should never be forgotten. We're so proud that this year, we have our new plastic-free poppy too, so that the public can wear this poignant symbol of Remembrance, with less impact on the environment.'

And this isn't the first time the poppy has been redesigned. Since the first Poppy Appeal in 1921, the pins have gone from silk and cotton to cardboard. Here's how the poppy has evolved through the years.



Peter

God's Coffee Lounge

The 'Flavour coffee lounge' in Flavel Church, Dartmouth.



Whilst on holiday last week in South Devon, Rob and I drove to Dartmouth. We happened to park right opposite a lovely church which advertised their 'Flavour' coffee lounge. We were desperate for a decent cup of coffee and noticed that a trained barista would be inside to make us our top quality drinks.

The 'Flavour' coffee lounge advertised itself as a place to relax, a place to refresh, a place to connect and God's front room. The comfortable chairs and sofas were placed around the room in front of small coffee tables filling all the space. The lounge was open on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays, but they hoped very soon to open it on the other days.

Sunday is a special day and the 'Flavour' coffee lounge is open for worship from 10.30 to 12md.

Many of the church groups, courses and projects take place within the coffee lounge. These include Bible study groups, journaling groups, prayer meetings, parent and toddler group and a 'knit and natter' get together. They also host other activities, community groups and charity events throughout the year as part of their church community focus. There is always someone there to talk to or pray with - you just have to look for a helper in a Flavel t-shirt.

They believe church is a safe space where people can meet to build community and to encounter God's love in a new and accessible way. One of their aims in supporting their community is to increase a sense of belonging and decrease isolation for all. They like to think of 'Flavour' as God's front room, a place where all are invited whatever their beliefs and background.

Jill Fradley

Funnies

Apt Anagrams

Presbyterian – Best in prayer

Astronomer – Moon starrer

Desperation – A rope ends it

The eyes – They see

The Morse Code – Here come dots

Dormitory – Dirty room

Slot machines – Cash lost in me

Election results – Lies; let's recount

Snooze alarms – Alas! No more Z's

A decimal point – I'm a dot in place

The earthquakes – That queer shake

Eleven plus two – Twelve plus one

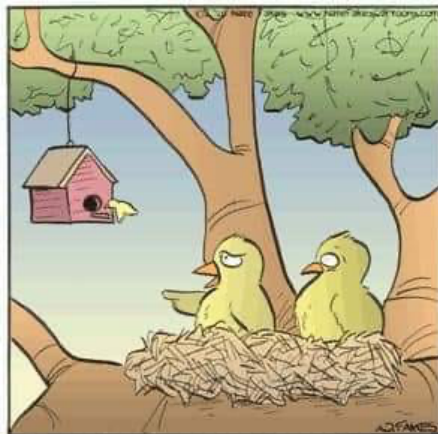
Did Noah fish?

A Sunday school teacher asked, "Johnny, do you think Noah did a lot of fishing when he was on the Ark?"

"No," replied Johnny. "How could he, with just two worms?"

St Matthew

Underneath a street sign 'St Matthew's Close', someone had added: 'Well, I can't see him.'



"That could've been ours.
But noooo...You and your DIY."

Sunday Services at 9.30am

5th November	Communion	Peter Horrocks
	Covenant Service	
19th November	Morning Service	Simon Burne
3rd December	Communion	Peter Horrocks
	1st Sunday in Advent	
17th December	Carol Service at 6.30pm	Peter Horrocks
25th December	Christmas Day	Peter Horrocks

F&F Rota November

Please report any problems with the buildings in November to:

Iain Kelso: 01789 2998698 / 07770 688984

or

Sarah Salmon: 01789 295976 / 07816565371

Flower Rota

5th November	Iain Kelso
19th November	Phil Sweet
5th December	Linda Horrocks

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 December edition of Link will be published on the 3rd December 2023.

The deadline for submission to the next edition is Monday 27th November 2023

Please send us your articles, pictures, humour etc.

Editors contact details:

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Charity Christmas Card Shop

Will be open at the
United Reformed Church

Fridays & Saturdays only

From: 4th November

To: 9th December

(92.5% of takings go to charity)

Open from 9.30am till 3pm



Easy access

