

Link

March 2024

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**

Website: www.stratforduponavonurc.co.uk

Local Leader

Dr Peter Horrocks

Roseleigh, Barton Road, Welford-on-Avon, CV37 8EY.

Tel: 01789 750971

Email: peterhorrocks@doctors.net.uk

Church Secretary

Mairi Macdonald

Treasurer

Ashley Pettifer

Elders

Ileen Fisher

Ann Jones

Kirsty Knott

Barbara Lister

Mairi Macdonald

Ashley Pettifer

Sarah Salmon

Ann Walters

Finance and Fabric Committee

Rob Fradley

Peter Horrocks

Tom Purves

Sarah Salmon

Ann Jones

Iain Kelso

Ashley Pettifer

Thoughts for the Month

Preparing for the inevitable

Three unconnected events have stimulated my thoughts for March, one intensely religious and two not.

Whilst starting to compile the magazine for March, as usual, I looked at 'What's on at the Bear Pit'. One of the plays, which is a Bear Pit production, is called 'Colder than Here'. It's dark humour: the main character Myra has cancer and is preparing to die, but she wants to be in charge of her death, so she sets about planning the event. I haven't seen it but, apparently, as the family struggles to come to terms with Myra's condition and imminent death there are dark moments, but also humour (sometimes called Black Humour – I used to see a lot of that when I worked in the NHS – it's a way of coping with distressing events). We are naturally all sad when we lose someone close to us – we have lost a part of our lives. But there should, of course, be joy when somebody dies, because firstly, as Christians, we know that death is not the end and secondly, it's an opportunity to celebrate the events of the person's life. I look forward to going to see the play!

But what surprised me was the event that has been organised at 11.30am on the day of the last performance (see later in the magazine) – that is a 'Death Café'. The Death Café movement was started by a Londoner, Jon Underwood, who had been inspired by the ideas of Swiss sociologist Bernard Crettaz who had run 'Café Mortal'

events in France and Switzerland. The idea is that there is a relaxed time with coffee, tea and cakes to simply discuss death – our fears and aspirations. The idea is to de-mystify death. The director of the play in the Bear Pit is a trained funeral celebrant, and I suspect that the idea of putting on a Death Café will have come from her. In September my thoughts for the month were entitled 'Deathly Silence': I don't want to repeat those thoughts, but part of my gist, then, was our strange reluctance to talk about death. Death Cafés are held in many countries around the world nowadays, so it is good to have one right here on our doorstep. It gives us the opportunity to share our thoughts.

The second event that touched me, is that there was an announcement this week



from Wendy Mitchell herself, that she had died. She had prepared her final blog before her death and her daughters published it. Wendy Mitchell was an amazing lady and a celebrated best-selling author. She was diagnosed with early onset dementia when she was 58 and she died this week at the age of 68 yrs. She has written 3 best-selling books about her experiences of living with dementia – no mean feat in itself when you have dementia (she did have a ghost writer, however). Her first book was entitled “Somebody I used to know”. It details the profound questions she had to come to terms with about life and identity after her diagnosis. It is a profoundly moving, philosophical and insightful account of living with dementia. It was, however, ultimately full of hope. The second book is entitled “What I wish people knew about dementia”. It is a blend of how to cope with dementia and a plea for a more informed approach to the disease. Her message for people with the diagnosis is never to give up on themselves. Her final book was “One last thing: how to live with the end in mind”. In it she explores dying with the disease. Wendy reminds us that to get on with the business of living, we need to talk about death.



In her last blog, entitled ‘My final hug in a mug’ she wrote:

“If you’re reading this, it means this has probably been posted by my daughters as I’ve sadly died. In the end I died simply by deciding not to eat or drink any more. The last cuppa tea ... my final hug in a mug, the hardest thing to let go of, much harder than the food I never craved ... This wasn’t decided on a whim of self-pity as you’ll discover by reading on.

Dementia is a cruel disease that plays tricks on your very existence. I’ve always been a glass half full person, trying to turn the negatives of life around and creating positives, because that’s how I cope. Well, I suppose dementia was the ultimate challenge. Yes, dementia is a bummer, but oh what a life I’ve had playing games with this adversary of mine to try and stay one step ahead.”

That is just her opening two paragraphs: the whole thing is much longer. If you want to read it all I suggest you go to <https://whichmeamitoday.wordpress.com/blog/>

So, Wendy also prepared for her death. She was an ardent advocate for assisted dying. She had planned to travel to Dignitas, originally, but she had a fall, breaking both wrists, and was unable to travel alone as she had planned. Instead, she simply

stopped eating and drinking - but, euthanasia is a debate for another time!

The third issue is, of course, Christ's crucifixion and death, which we commemorate on Good Friday at the end of March. Without his death and resurrection Jesus would be just another good teacher, but because of his death and resurrection, our sins will be forgiven and we know that death is not the end for us. This is the most momentous event in Christianity, indeed in the history of the human race.

If you were going to die tomorrow, how would you spend your day today? Jesus faced that very serious question 2,000 years ago. His answer was obvious.



He would spend that entire evening with those whom he was closest to, those he loved. He would dine with them, he would pray with them and he would prepare them, teach them and encourage them. For, what was about to happen would be shocking and horrifying. The world of the disciples would be shattered, and he wanted them to be as ready as their minds could allow them to be. What he taught them that night through his words and actions was extraordinary. You can read about it in chapters 13 – 16 of John's gospel. He had actually spoken to them on several occasions before that about how he needed to go to Jerusalem, how he would be mocked and suffer at the hands of the leaders and the high priests, how he would be killed and would rise again on the third day. The disciples didn't always believe him, and Peter in particular was rebuked by Jesus ("Get thee behind me Satan!") for telling Jesus that he shouldn't say such things in public. On that last night, knowing that they would be sad at his death and feeling lost, he promised them a 'helper' – the Holy Spirit – they, and we, couldn't get better help than that! Finally, Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane for himself: he asked if the 'cup' could be taken away from him, but if not, he would bow to the Father's will and endure the suffering.

We all have to be prepared for our death, just as Jesus did (and as Wendy Mitchell

did). Because of Good Friday, death is no longer a frightening spectre. It is not the end of our existence. Let us immerse ourselves in Jesus's experiences in his last days on earth and learn from them, so that we too are prepared for that event which **will** happen to all of us.

Peter

Family News

Jill has been suffering from an outbreak of shingles but thankfully this seems to have cleared up pretty quickly - probably due to the fact that she has been vaccinated against such an event. Rob was taken to Warwick Hospital with a strangulated hernia recently, but this was dealt with in A & E and he was able to return home. He has been given a date for cataract operations on both eyes in the very near future which will hopefully allow him to drive.

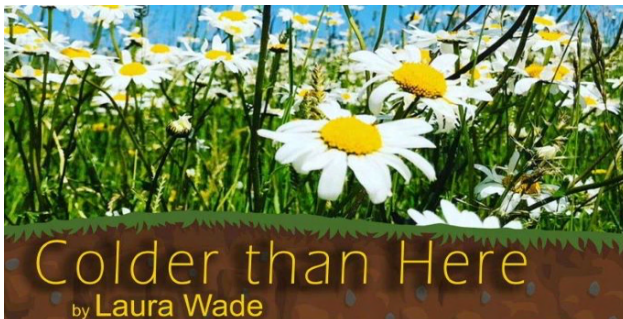
Diane has been unwell and has been unable to get to Church. We trust she feels better soon.

I bumped into Julie Sprake at our coffee morning on Friday 23rd and was interested to hear that she is currently studying theology at Edgbaston. It is something she has wanted to do for some time now. We wish her every success in her endeavours.

Ileen Fisher

What's on at the Bear Pit

Colder than Here: 12th to 16th March at 7.30pm
Matinee at 2.30pm on Saturday 16th



A Bear Pit Theatre Company Production.

Myra is planning a big event. She's choosing an outfit, selecting a venue and getting

quite excited about the music choices. But Myra will only be there in spirit. As their story unfolds we follow relationships between Myra, her husband Alec and their grown-up daughters, Harriet and Jenna. Tender, funny and moving – each character navigates denial, fear and resistance for Myra’s path. Yet they discover hope, humour and acceptance, uncovering that strength can allow us to find joy and light from the darkest place.

Directed by Jacquie Campbell, a local, trained and accredited celebrant. Jacquie’s ability to deliver beautiful and unique storytelling to celebrate life with empathy, passion and understanding promises a play that will also be presented with heart and soul.

There is a Death Café event on Saturday 16th March at the Bear Pit - see later in the magazine.

Tickets: £15 (concessions £12)

La La Land: 17th March at 7.30pm (lasts 128mins)



Bear Pit Community Cinema - *Supported by Stratford Town Trust*

The story of aspiring actress Mia and dedicated jazz musician Sebastian, who struggle to make ends meet while pursuing their dreams in a city known for destroying hopes and breaking hearts. With modern-day Los Angeles as the backdrop, this musical about everyday life explores what’s more important: a once-in-a-lifetime love or the spotlight. Director Damien Chazelle - Released 2016. Cert 12A. Cast includes: Ryan Gosling & Emma Stone

Tickets: £5 on the door (cash or crd) and available online.

The Importance of Being Earnest: 20th to 23rd March at 7.30pm Matinee at 2.30pm on Saturday 23rd

A Sweet Sorrow Theatre Company Production

Jack has a very useful fictional wicked brother called Ernest, as well as a very mischievous real friend called Algernon. When Algernon arrives at Jack's country house claiming to be Ernest, only a handbag and a Governess can provide a solution to the ensuing confusion.



In their first production of 2024, Sweet Sorrow Theatre Company are bringing Oscar Wilde's delightfully silly comedy from 1895 to life at the Bear Pit Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon.

Tickets: £15 (concessions £12)

Death Cafe

At the Bear Pit Theatre on 16th March from 11.30am to 1pm.

Free of charge. All welcome. Refreshments provided.

Talking about death is often much easier than you think. A Death Café is a place for tea, cake and open conversation about death and dying, and a space to think about living well until we die. There is no charge, no theme, no agenda – the conversation goes where it leads us.



As spaces are limited, please book a place: <https://www.ticketsource.co.uk/booking/select/wXgYrfZTcUqD>

Event supported by BrumYODO, which is a Birmingham-based community organisation creating spaces for talking about death, dying and loss. <https://brumyodo.org.uk/>

You can find out more about the Death Café movement here:

<https://deathcafe.com/>

St Patrick's Day (17th March) groaners

Why do people wear shamrocks on St Patrick's day?

Because normal rocks are too heavy!

How can you tell if an Irishman is having a good time?

Because he's Dublin over.

Purpose in everything

I was running late for a funeral and kicking myself. I had no good excuse.

Arriving just ahead of the undertakers, I saw a man hesitate, then turn away from the church gates.

At the risk of being even later, I asked if he was OK.

"I really wanted to go in to pay my respects", he told me. "But look at me! I have no smart clothes and I didn't want to be disrespectful".

I took his arm and led him back towards the door.

"Actually," I told him, "the family requested casual dress. And here I am in a suit! If you come in with me, it might make me look less out of place!"

Was that the reason I was late? Was there a purpose I wasn't aware of? Is God in our lives to such a degree?

I don't know, but I do know that the more I look for him, the more I find him.

I was late coming to that realisation in my life as well, but I'm glad I got there in the end.

From the 'Friendship Book' - submitted by Fran Maddy

Green Corner

EcoChat

EcoChat meetings continue on a monthly basis, being held at the Methodist Church on the 4th Saturday in the month starting at 10.30am. This year we are concentrating on the State of Nature Report 2023. That was reviewed in the November 2023 issue of Link. Here is a report by Anthony Woollard from Holy Trinity about the last session held on 24th February:

HOW CAN FARMING RESPOND TO CLIMATE CHANGE?

The Revd Richard Wilde, Rural Officer for the South Warwickshire Methodist Circuit (who has a strong farming background) spoke on the above topic at the EcoChat meeting on 24 February.

Perhaps it was inevitable that someone with such a deep identification with, and pastoral care of, the farming community should tend to concentrate on the factors outside that community which made a response difficult. Farming, always a most

demanding occupation (with the highest suicide rate of any profession), is under growing pressure to produce more food for a growing population – even in the UK and far more in the wider world – which continues to grow. Many in that community are trying to respond, for example to a Government grants system which increasingly emphasises biodiversity and climate responsibility – and, at great cost, are adopting new and far more efficient machinery to minimise pollution and waste.

But most changes come with a downside. For example, the creation of new and more diverse habitats for wildlife means the destruction of old habitats, often with unpredictable consequences. Some changes may necessitate more imports from other countries, most of which (outside the EU) have lower environmental standards than our own, so that we simply “export” problems – and this trend may be exacerbated by some post-Brexit trade deals.

There are few, if any, simple answers. As voters, we should encourage Governments of any colour to give much more priority to joined-up thinking in the areas of agriculture and food policy, which has rather weakened over recent decades as other political issues have come to the fore. As consumers, we can adopt the mantra “Eat less – eat locally – eat thoughtfully” (and not, for example, assume that white meat, which uses large amounts of, often imported, feedstock, is necessarily more environmentally friendly than red meat where that is produced non-intensively from grazing).

The large and lively audience benefited considerably from Richard’s input, and hopefully at the least will have been encouraged towards more sympathy and support for our local farming community.

THE REPAIR CAFE



Don't throw it away! Take the item along to the monthly Repair Cafe at Stratford Methodist Church where a team of friendly volunteers will be ready to fix your broken or worn items. The cafe takes place on the first Saturday of the month from 10am till 2pm, in partnership with NetZero Stratford. It's free to go along but donations are welcome, on a pay as you feel basis. Refreshments are available, as you might expect in a Cafe. It can be busy in the first hour and it is generally only one item per person. Repairs take time, so don't arrive after 1pm.

The Repair Cafe tackles things which need repair, but not alterations or up-cycling projects. They cannot accept:

- Microwaves
- Weapons
- Anything requiring welding.
- TV's can be problematic. It's best to call in and discuss the fault before you take the set in.

Typically they can repair:

- Clothing and other things that need sewing
- Bikes
- Electrical items
- Computers and other IT hardware and software
- Things that need gluing and screwing
- Sharpening for garden tools, knives, scissors, etc.

The Repair Cafe also features a 'Give and Take' stall, where you can bring things to swap. There's a different theme each month which is publicised on their website, along with the specific items can be accommodated at the subsequent Repair Café. On 2nd March the theme is 'Clothes and accessories', in April there is no Give and Take, but in May it is: Plants, pots and seeds.

Repair Cafés take place all around the world and are free meeting places where people can come together and repair broken items, pass on and learn new skills and have fun. They were started as a way to reduce the vast amount which is thrown away; a threat to a sustainable future. Repairing items reduces the volume of raw materials and energy needed to make new products. It cuts CO2 emissions because manufacturing new products and recycling old ones causes CO2 to be released. It's a local resource which we all can use.

<https://www.repaircafe.org/en/cafe/stratford-upon-avon-repair-cafe/>

Since our last edition of Link we have received the following letter from the Foodbank

ADLENT

asking for support during Lent:

With Christmas over, our Foodbank has already started to see a dip in food donations and we are expecting this to continue until Easter. After the expense of Christmas and with the colder weather, many people who were just about managing to afford the essentials now find they can't. People are choosing between heating or eating.

We need to make sure our warehouse stays well-stocked with ALL the different items we use in our food parcels. Up until Easter we will be running an AdLent campaign to boost donations and spread the word about the different kinds of items we need.

Lent is an important time in the Christian calendar. It is also a time that many people, religious or not, choose to give up certain luxuries and to think about others. In the spirit of an Advent Calendar, we'll be asking people to donate from different categories of food or essentials over the 40 days of Lent. So instead of giving something up for Lent, why not consider donating an item each day or each week? As 40 items is a lot, we suggest you get together as a church community to club together to do AdLent.

The themed weeks can help us think about what goes into food parcels and how we can do our best to make sure the basic needs of people in our community are met. We will run reminders on social media of each weekly category.

N.B. The six weekly categories are displayed on a poster at the back of church (the list was too long for the magazine!). The black bin at the back of the church is available for you to put your donations into. At end of Lent we will arrange for the items to be delivered to the Foodbank warehouse.

If your church would like to collect for us over these six weeks, we'd be incredibly grateful. You'll be helping to make sure that no-one in our district goes hungry. If your collection is a large one and you'd like us to collect it from you, please do get in touch..

Two Successful Community Events

Last month in the article about 'URC Statistics', I quoted John Buchanan, who essentially stated that growing congregations are associated with a sense of mission: not continually looking inwards but looking out into the community and living out their faith. This was also echoed in the Theos Report that was a part of the URC's Church Life Review, last year. Navel gazing doesn't grow congregations, but living out the life of Jesus in the local community is beneficial. I have said it before but we need to make people think "What is it that these Christians have? - I want some of it".

We have just had two very successful community related events: the Tarantara Concert and the Ukrainian Coffee Morning. Both in their own ways were serving our community: one to raise funds for our annual charity and one to support medical aid to Ukraine.

Tarantara Concert

This was not only an enjoyable event, but it raised over £700 for Warwickshire Vision Support. The songs were a mixture of the thoughtful, the popular and the comic. Tarantara themselves said that they enjoyed themselves and would be ready to come back in the future. A elderly gentleman came up to me as he was leaving and said "Thank you for organising the event", which he described as a spark of light in a currently dismal world. "Please do it again", he said.



Ukrainian Coffee morning

Linda and I could not attend this event because we were away with our family. But from reports it was a very successful morning. Not only did it raise over £2000 but the church was packed to the gills with the attendees. Coffee tables extended throughout the whole church and, in addition, people were also seated around the outside. It sounded like a 'go-to' event. The cakes looked amazing! and I'm told that the atmosphere was magical! A short speech and a 'Thank you' was given by Dr Tania Herbert, a Coventry GP who co-ordinates the charity 'Medical Aid Ukraine'. The Stratford Town Mayor, Kate Rolfe, was apparently very complementary, telling Mairi that, despite being a small church, we provide lots of services to the community. I say : Small is beautiful!! Let's continue doing what we are good at!

If you weren't there then the following pictures will, I hope, give you a flavour of the morning.



Attendees



Dr Tania Herbert (centre)



Ukrainian items for sale



Olga and the food



Some of the workers!



Further Help for Ukraine

Following on from the coffee morning the Church has discovered other ways that we as individuals can help Ukraine.

There is a scheme whereby we can drop off medicines / bandages at Stratford District Council's Elizabeth House. Medicines need to be in date. Packaging can be missing or damaged and bandages can be out of date. The donations will be sorted and then sent to hospitals most in need in Ukraine. If you have a car or van load! - then you need to email: MedicalAidUkraine.Westmidlands@gmail.com.

Here are some of the things needed. We have missed out the major medical equipment, which we as individuals are unlikely to have.

Medications	Small equipment	Other supplies
Paracetamol Lemsip Antibiotics Anti diabetic agents Heart medication	Splints Pulse oximeters Inadine dressings Bandages Blood pressure machines Needles and syringes Blood glucose stripos Insulin syringes Elastic bandages Tubigrip Thermometers	Water pourificcation tablets Headlamps Batteries Disinfectants 70% ethanol Masks / filters Emergency blankets First Aid kits Tourniquets Neck braces

Ann Walters

Creative Business names

Puff Dad E - (A Vape shop in Essex)

Jean Claude Van Man - (Removals Firm in Southport)

Some Fin Fishy - (Pet shop in the Wirral)

Pest in Peace - (Pest control in Wilmslow)

Thaitanic - (Thai restaurant in Belfast)

Hairy Pop-Ins - (Pet nannies in Shetland, Scotland)

William the Concreter - (Concrete mixer van, from Battle, East Sussex)

Jason Donervan - (Kebab van at Bristol)

Taco Look At Me Now - (Taco van in West Sussex)

Bonnie Tiler - (Tilers in Llantwit Major, Vale of Glamorgan)

Love you a Latte - (Cafe in Mumbles, Swansea)

Apocalypse Cow - (BBQ restaurant in Birmingham)

Doner Summer - (Kebab shop, Leeds)

World Water Day 22nd March



World Water Day became a UN day in 1993. It wants to focus attention on the global water crisis, and raise awareness of the 2.2 billion people still living without access to safe water. It hopes to inspire action to tackle the water and sanitation crisis. This year, World Water Day 2024 will focus on the theme, 'Leveraging Water for Peace'.

Did you know:

Water can create peace or spark conflict. When water is scarce or polluted, or when people have unequal or no access, tensions can rise.

More than 3 billion people worldwide depend on water that crosses national borders. Yet, only 24 countries have cooperation agreements for all their shared water.

2.2 billion still live without safely managed drinking water, including 115 million people who drink surface water. (WHO/UNICEF, 2023)

Roughly half of the world's population is experiencing severe water scarcity for at least part of the year (IPCC, 2022).

Water-related disasters have dominated the list of disasters over the past 50 years and account for 70 per cent of all deaths related to natural disasters (World Bank, 2022).

Key messages for World Water Day 2024

- Water can create peace or spark conflict. When water is scarce or polluted, or when people struggle for access, tensions can rise. By cooperating on water, we can balance everyone's water needs and help stabilize the world.
- Prosperity and peace rely on water. As nations manage climate change, mass migration and political unrest, they must put water cooperation at the heart

of their plans.

- Water can lead us out of crisis. We can foster harmony between communities and countries by uniting around the fair and sustainable use of water – from United Nations conventions at the international level, to actions at the local level.

Creating a positive ripple effect

The theme of World Water Day 2024 is ‘Water for Peace’.

When we cooperate on water, we create a positive ripple effect – fostering harmony, generating prosperity and building resilience to shared challenges.

We must act upon the realisation that water is not only a resource to be used and competed over – it is a human right, intrinsic to every aspect of life.

This World Water Day, we all need to unite around water and use water for peace, laying the foundations of a more stable and prosperous tomorrow.

Play your part!

Suggested actions:

- Don't waste water! Have shorter showers, stop taps running
- Don't pollute our drains
- Donate to WaterAid
- Take part in local clean-ups of rivers, lakes and beaches
- Fix water leaks
- Write to your local MP.

Amusing images



An attempt at Beef Wellington

An old lady with a cane was walking past a young man at a bus stop singing "21 today, 21 today". The young man says "You're not 21 you crazy old bat". She turns to him and with a mighty swing cracks him over his head with her cane and walks away singing "22 today, 22 today."



Sunday Services at 9.30am

3rd March	Holy Communion	Revd Robert Maloney
17th March	Morning Service	Peter Horrocks
29th March	Tenebrae at 8pm	Elders
31st March	Easter Day Communion	Revd Brian Mason
7th April	Holy Communion	Revd Katherine Louch

F&F Rota February

Please report any problems with the buildings in March to:

Sarah Salmon 01789 295976 / 07816 565371

or

Ashley Pettifer 01789 293578

Flower Rota

3rd March	Wendy
17th March	Kirsty
31st March.	Ileen
7th April.	Marion

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 Wednesday 27th March.

The deadline for submission to the next edition is earlier than normal, because of holidays, Wednesday 20th March .

Please send us your articles, pictures, humour etc.

Editors contact details:

Telephone: 01789 750971 Email: peterhorrocks@doctors.net.uk

**Who would have
thought?**



**that
a
form
of
torture**

**Would become
a symbol of**

LOVE