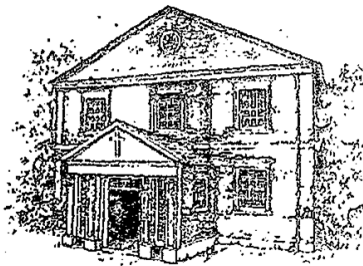
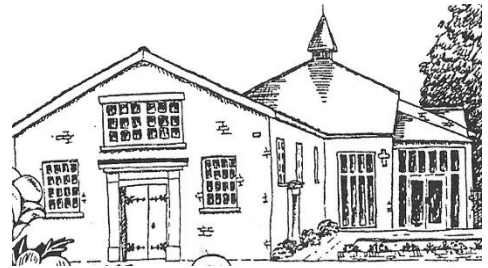


Stepping Stones

Newsletter for

EPPING UNITED
REFORMED CHURCH



ONGAR UNITED
REFORMED CHURCH

October 2023



Ministerial Vacancy Update

Following a recent meeting involving representatives from our two churches with the Synod moderator and others involved, the process to fill the vacancy is now in motion. The vacancy is to be advertised to ministers from November and if all goes to plan the hope is to have someone in place approximately six months from then, which would be roughly spring/summer next year. Due to the closure of the two Methodist churches, the pastorate has been rearranged and along with Epping and Ongar URCs will now include the URC churches in Bishops Stortford and Saffron Walden and the Minister will also become the HAEBEA area chair. There will be church meetings in both of our churches to decide on important aspects of the process, so please listen out to when the dates of these are announced.

Epping URC

Dates for your Diary

- **Sunday 8th October, 11am:** Harvest Festival service, please bring non-perishable gifts for the Epping Forest Foodbank.
- **Saturday 18th November:** Quiz Night in aid of Tearfund's Big Quiz campaign, more details to be announced.

Toddler Group

The toddler group raised an excellent £47 for Macmillan. This month they will be having a harvest service in the sanctuary and will be collecting gifts for the Foodbank.

Coffee Morning

We had a lovely morning of fellowship and cake at the recent coffee morning where £160 was raised in aid of Macmillan Cancer Support. The next coffee morning will be in December, exact date tba.

400th Anniversary

In 2025 we will be celebrating the church's 400th anniversary- we are one of the oldest churches in the United Reformed church and possibly one of the oldest non-conformist churches in the country, with us being able to trace continuous worship on the same site since 1625. We are already planning the celebrations for the anniversary which will include a special service planned for Sunday 11th May 2025, with the Synod Moderator Revd Lythan Nevard already booked to speak at that service- please put the date in your diaries!

October Preaching Plan, all 11am

1st Prayer and Praise

8th Revd Kathryn Taylor *Holy Communion*

15th Prayer and Praise

22nd Joan Smith

29th Alan Whymark

5th November Fred Arthur

Birthday wishes in October to Dick and Esther!

Ongar URC

Mission

I have now received back some of the Mission Questionnaires and would be grateful, if you have not already done so, to receive the completed questionnaires within the next couple of weeks so that I may have something to put forward to the Elders' Meeting and then to complete the form for the Area.

When I have looked at the ones I have received, the thing that has struck me is how much people look back to the past as a 'golden age'. Yes, the church was full and we had a Sunday School, but where have all these people gone now and why? It is no good saying that everything changed when shops started opening on a Sunday as that is just an excuse. Where did **we as a congregation** go wrong that people stopped coming on a Sunday? Did we ever ask people why they gave up or did we even consider that we might have been at fault in some way?

I know that there have been mixed feelings in the past over the appointment of ministers and, from conversations I had with people who had given up coming, this had resulted in a sense of division in the church and a lack of confidence in the minister of the time. Even now I hear people look back at certain ministers and blame them for the failures of the church. That is the easy way out; why do we never blame ourselves?!

When filling in the forms, I intended for people to really think about what we could do in the future, building on the work of the past. This work has largely disappeared now but, if you reflect, you may realise that it depended on a congregation willing to take on roles and work for the continuation of the church, not content to sit back and let a few others do all the work. It has been suggested that as we value our history of David Livingstone and Jane Taylor, we could make more of this, but how can we when people are not prepared to give up some time to open up and let people know about it? Our history will not bring people into our Sunday service.

We pride ourselves on our 'warm welcome' but even I have experienced a very chilly welcome at times! One time in the past I was reduced to tears before the service through some ill-judged comments made to me about my sick husband, which was definitely not very welcoming! At other times I have seen strangers completely ignored while people huddle in their little friendship groups. Tea and coffee after the service

regularly does make people feel welcome and gets them together to learn more about us, but again we do not have sufficient people to start this and keep it going. Rotas have been suggested in the past but from my own experience with the rota for the music, door and vestry these are not observed and, where swaps are made, these are rarely reciprocated. Anyone who volunteers to start this up again is left to do it in perpetuity!

So I ask once again that those of you who haven't filled in the form take time to really think about the future of this church and, in particular, think about what **you personally** could offer.

Joan

Ministerial Vacancy

The Elders have been meeting and considering the sort of minister we want, as have the other churches in our pastorate. We now have to have a Church Meeting to finalise some decisions to be put forward to the Moderator before the profile can be sent out to any prospective ministers. It has been decided to hold a Special Church Meeting on **Saturday, 28th October at 2.00pm**, which will be solely to discuss this. Please put this date in your diaries and make sure that you can attend.

Joan

Twinkles

Every year in September, we wonder how many children we will receive on the first day back after the school holidays and every year we are amazed at God's grace to us in sending people through our doors. The past two weeks have been extremely busy, with some old faces, but many new ones. It does help, I think, that we have a Facebook page as so many people find that and I try to keep it up to date with our special days and term times. Once again, we feel unable to include stories or crafts in our mornings due to the ages of the children attending, the majority being under 2 years old. On 28th September we will have our coffee morning for Macmillan, which will be added to the monies raised at the Church coffee morning and sale on 30th September. Our other plans so far for this year include our Harvest Service in the Church on 5th October, a coffee morning for Children in Need on 16th November and, of course, our Christmas service on 14th December. Please do ask either Pam or me if you are interested in the work we do and how we organise our mornings.

Joan

Fresh from the Word Daily Bible Readings/Leprosy Mission Christmas cards and gifts

If you are interested in ordering any of these please speak to me. I now have the Leprosy Mission catalogue or it can be viewed online.

We would like to wish "Happy Birthday" to those having a birthday during October.

Services During October all at 11.00

1st Rev. Kathryn Taylor *Holy Communion*

8th Efua Koi-Larbi *Harvest Service followed by lunch which will be provided*

15th Joan Smith *A service of praise and thanksgiving remembering especially the life of Gertie Thomas*
22nd Elizabeth Stockdale
29th Heather Gale
5th November Revd Kathryn Taylor *Holy Communion*

Herts and Essex Border Ecumenical Area (HAEBEA)

Autumn Fair at Roydon URC

Saturday 7 October 10.00 am – 1.00 pm

You are cordially invited to join us at Roydon United Reformed Church for our Annual Autumn Fair.

There will be lots of stalls, refreshments served, and entrance is FREE!

And don't forget we have a LARGE FREE carpark at the church.

So why not pop along and get a few early Christmas presents!

We look forward to welcoming you.

*Roydon United Reformed Church
Harlow Road, Roydon, CM19 5HF*

Enquirers Day

Do you feel called to lead worship?

Do you feel called to preach?

Come to our Leading Worship & Preaching 'Enquirer's Day'

Saturday 28th October 2023

10.30am – 12.30pm

St Andrew's Methodist Church, The Stow, Harlow, CM20 3AF

We'll have information and resources to browse

Some of our preachers & worship leaders will share their experiences

There'll also be ample opportunity for you to have all your questions answered...

To register your interest

Email: haebeabookings@gmail.com or Tel: 07597 109819

Church Closure

Watton-at-Stone Methodist Church has decided that it will close. The final closing service will be on Sunday 19th November at 3pm followed by refreshments. All are Welcome.

Morocco and Libya Appeals

On Sunday 10 September, Storm Daniel hit Libya. More than 11,300 people are known to have died after the catastrophic Mediterranean storm burst two dams and flooded the eastern port city of Derna. Over 10,000 people are missing after torrents of water and debris swept away entire districts. Bodies are being recovered from the sea. Storm Daniel has destroyed houses and utility supplies, leaving many areas without any electrical power or water. Families seeking refuge at shelters have lost everything. Hundreds of homes are buried under mud and debris, and the fear is that many people are also buried in the mud. People are without the basics such as access to clean water and proper sanitation facilities to prevent the risk of diseases. Even before this latest disaster, Libya has been beset by the lack of a unified government, with rival factions in the east and west of the country jostling for power. Several humanitarian partners expressed serious concerns of increasing human trafficking and smuggling networks targeting vulnerable migrants in Libya. Rainfall associated with devastating storms like this are being supercharged by the climate crisis, scientists are confident in saying. People are facing crisis on crisis.

On Friday 8 September, 11pm local time, a 6.8 magnitude earthquake struck Morocco. The epicentre was in the High Atlas Mountains, approximately 70 kilometres south of Marrakesh. A 4.9 magnitude aftershock followed just 20 minutes later. Local authorities are reporting that more than 2,900 people have died, with many more critically injured. The total number of people affected is in the hundreds of thousands. Many of the worst affected areas are remote and mountainous, and the impact of the earthquake has made them even harder to reach. People have lost everything. Homes have been reduced to rubble and survivors are in need of basic support like shelter, food and water.

Donate to the appeals:

Christian Aid (Libya) : <https://www.christianaid.org.uk/appeals/emergencies/libya-floods-appeal>

British Red Cross (Morocco): <https://donate.redcross.org.uk/appeal/morocco-earthquake-appeal>

British Red Cross (Libya): <https://donate.redcross.org.uk/appeal/libya-floods-appeal>

Prayer

Lord, you promise to always be with us

You are a God of love, hope and healing
Please pour out your blessings upon the people of Libya and Morocco
Bless the hands and efforts of the aid workers
and provide all those who have lost loved ones with comfort and strength in the coming days
In Jesus' name we pray
Amen.

Church Leaders Respond to Net Zero Announcement

In response to the Prime Minister's announcement on net zero policies, the following joint statement has been issued by the Baptist Union of Great Britain, The Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church.

We are dismayed that the Prime Minister is delaying the implementation of policies to achieve net zero. As Christian leaders we are deeply committed to encouraging all within our sphere of influence to be ambitious in reaching net zero as we seek to care for God's creation. This transition must be rapid, equitable and just.

At a time when so many people are struggling financially, the government has a crucial role to play in ensuring the cost of transition to net zero does not fall most heavily on those least able to afford it. Delaying measures to insulate homes will have the opposite effect, and slowing efforts to reduce fossil fuel use will increase climate impacts on vulnerable communities around the globe.

Extreme weather events this year have demonstrated the urgency of the situation. The independent Climate Change Committee have assessed that even current policy measures are insufficient to meet the UK's climate targets. The government needs to urgently demonstrate how it will get the UK back on track to reach net zero before 2050.

The commitments made at COP26 were instrumental in providing confidence to industry, investors and civil society that the UK was serious about rising to the climate challenge. It is a source of extreme disappointment that the Prime Minister's announcement will damage that confidence and undermine our collective efforts. As a country, we have moral and legal responsibilities to show leadership in tackling the climate emergency together.

Revd Dr Tessa Henry-Robinson, Moderator of General Assembly, United Reformed Church

Revd Lynn Green, General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Great Britain

Revd Gill Newton, President of the Methodist Conference

Deacon Kerry Scarlett, Vice-President of the Methodist Conference

Tearfund's Rubbish Campaign

The junior church at Epping URC have recently been focusing on Tearfund's "*Rubbish Campaign*" focusing on the increasing issue of plastic pollution which will also be the focus of our service on the 1st October. As part of the campaign, the children have written wonderful letters which will be sent to the UK Government asking them to take action on this very important issue.

We're facing mountains of plastic pollution. 2 billion people have no safe way to dispose of rubbish, and it's people in poverty who are suffering the worst impacts of this rubbish problem. They are forced to live and work among piles of waste, which is making them sick, releasing toxic fumes, flooding communities and causing up to a million deaths each year.

But Jesus told his followers that even the smallest amount of faith can move mountains.

So, we are asking you to put your faith into action and join us in demanding an end to plastic pollution. And we have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to do just that.

During 2023 and 2024, nearly 150 governments are meeting to develop the [first-ever global treaty on plastic pollution](#). But it's not a done deal. Please add your voice to demand an end to plastic pollution and its harmful impact on people living in poverty.

Poverty is not God's plan. You are. Sign our petition today:
<https://www.tearfund.org/forms/rubbish-campaign-petition>

Church expresses solidarity with refugees as Illegal Migration Bill passes

The United Reformed Church (URC) has joined nearly 300 civil society groups and charities in expressing solidarity with refugees as the government's controversial Illegal Migration Bill passes into law.

In a statement, signed by representatives from each of the organisations, including the Revd Dr Tessa Henry-Robinson, Moderator of the URC General Assembly, the signatories accused the government of abandoning its legal and moral obligations towards refugees.

The statement reads:

“We all deserve to live safe from harm. But this senselessly cruel Act will have a devastating impact on people’s lives. It turns our country’s back on people seeking safety, blocking them from protection, support, and justice at a time they need it most.

In abandoning the UK’s moral and legal obligations, the Act risks breaching multiple international human rights treaties including the Refugee Convention and the European Convention on Human Rights while shielding the government from accountability. The UK government has admitted that it cannot confirm if the Act is compatible with the UK’s obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights.

The Act will force people into situations that threaten their lives – whether by placing children in detention or sending people off to countries where their lives might be at grave risk. Moreover, the Act attacks the very core of human rights, which is the principle that we all have them regardless of who we are or where we are from. In stripping the most basic rights from people seeking safety and a better life, the Act dismantles human rights protections for all of us.

Either all of us have human rights, or none of us do. While the UK government’s plans will harm those seeking safety the most, this is an attack on all of us and the values we hold dear.

The government has rushed through this law despite broad and deep opposition. But our fight is not over. As caring people, we will continue to fight for the right for people to seek safety and a better life without being forced to take dangerous journeys and without being punished for how they enter the UK. We will keep holding those in power to account for upholding the UK’s international obligations. We will strive for an asylum and immigration system that treats everyone with dignity and respect. We will stand in solidarity with and fight alongside everyone who makes the UK their home and build a society that treats everyone with compassion.”

The URC has been outspoken in its opposition to the Illegal Migration Bill since it was announced by the government earlier this year. Working with ecumenical allies in the Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT), it coordinated a public statement from senior church leaders arguing that the Bill would “foster discrimination and distrust” and cause “immeasurable harm” and was supported by more than 14500 church leaders and handed to the Prime Minister in April.

The Illegal Migration Act will make it illegal for people to claim asylum in the UK if they arrive via ‘irregular’ routes. It will result in the detention and potential deportation of thousands of people made vulnerable by war and persecution, and create a range of challenges around infrastructure in the UK to house and support people whilst attempts are made to remove them from the country.

The Church's General Assembly in July passed a resolution from the North Western Synod condemning the Bill for undermining the UK's long-standing commitment to human rights and the protection of human dignity.

Simeon Mitchell, the URC's Secretary for Church and Society and JPIT Team Leader, said: "Our Churches will continue to advocate for safe and legal routes by which people can claim asylum in the UK, and for policies which treat people with dignity and respect. Many local churches continue to be active in their communities, welcoming refugees and asylum seekers and offering support and care. This is essential work, and bears witness to our Biblical calling to welcome the stranger."

Epping Forest Foodbank

As Autumn has arrived, we celebrate Harvest festival together.

This Harvest we're asking you to help feed local people in crisis by collecting tinned and dried food for our Foodbank. We are asking everyone to rally round to donate during harvest to help us provide food parcels to those in crisis in our busiest time of the year. 1 in 5 people in the UK live in poverty; many families hit crisis and cannot afford food. More people are being referred to the food bank because they don't have enough money coming in to cover essential living costs. Rising food and fuel prices, static incomes, high unemployment and changes to benefits are causing many families to struggle to put food on the table but you can help be part of the short term solution to those in crisis by supporting Epping Forest Foodbank.

The food bank helps local individuals and families in crisis through the provision of emergency food supplies donated by churches, schools, businesses and the general public. The circumstances surrounding a crisis are unique to every individual, so the food bank partners with frontline care professionals, such as health visitors, social workers and other community-based support workers, who are able to identify people facing hunger and refer them to the food bank. As well as receiving nutritionally-balanced food parcels, people are welcomed with a cup of tea, listened to and signposted to agencies that are able to help resolve the underlying cause of their crisis. Last year Epping Forest Foodbank distributed over 4,600 kilograms of food to 3,178 adults and 2,901 children. The demands on the food bank are as strong as ever with a 38% increase compared to the previous year and this is where we can help. Please join us by giving food so that local people in crisis don't go hungry. Thank you.

Most Currently Needed Items

- Tinned soup
- Tinned Meat
- Jam & Spreads
- Soap & Shower Gel
- Puddings