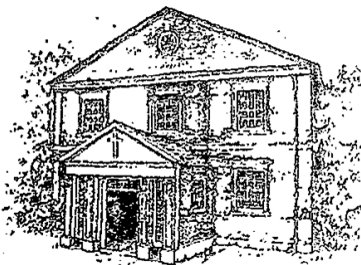
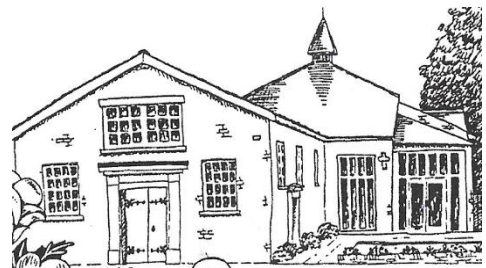


Stepping Stones

Newsletter for

EPPING UNITED
REFORMED CHURCH



ONGAR UNITED
REFORMED CHURCH

February 2023



Since Christmas I have been thinking a lot about darkness and light. The lectionary readings seem to have focused on this theme. “The people walking in darkness have seen a great light” (Isaiah 9:2). We remember too that the shepherds were overwhelmed by the light shining from the angels proclaiming Christ’s birth and that the star guided the wise men to where Jesus was. In John 1 we read of John the Baptist, “He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world”. (John 1: 7-9).

Once Christmas is over with all its festivities, we may feel that darkness has descended once more and there is nothing to be cheerful about. Certainly this year, with everyone’s worries about heat and light, we have been trying to cut back on our use and darkness has descended on us, literally and mentally. Since we have now passed the shortest day, it is now getting a bit lighter in the evenings but there are still days when the gloom of evening descends on us early due to rain or cloud cover and we need to put our lights on.

In the world too, we may feel that everything is in darkness; there is rarely any good news reported. The war in Ukraine means that its people are living too often in darkness and cold, sheltering in dark basements or cellars, or the metro system, from Russian bombardments; in the States there has been a series of mass shootings which we in this country cannot understand, although we too have suffered frequently from shootings and stabbings lately.

We need to remember that light came into the world at Christmas in the form of our Saviour, Jesus Christ. His arrival was heralded by a light, the star, and His light we are assured will never be extinguished. We need light to show us the way in the darkness and, at these times, more than ever, we need to search for the light of Jesus and trust in Him to lead us forward, guiding us through the darkness, making sure we don’t get lost or stumble over the rocks in the difficult path of our lives. At times we may feel that we have lost that light completely, we are wandering in the darkness, but think of those trick birthday candles which relight even if they are blown out. Jesus is always there for us, even when His light might seem to have gone out. We need to trust in Him, pray to Him, and that light will rekindle in our hearts.

“Lead, kindly light, amid the encircling gloom,
lead thou me on;
the night is dark, and I am far from home,
lead thou me on.
Keep thou my feet; I do not ask to see
the distant scene; one step enough for me.

I was not ever thus, nor prayed that thou
shouldst lead me on.
I loved to choose and see my path; but now
lead thou me on.
I loved the garish day and, spite of fears,

pride ruled my will: remember not past years.
So long thy power hath blest me, sure it still was written w
will lead me on
o'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till the night is gone,
and with the morn those angel faces smile,
which I have loved long since, and lost awhile.

This hymn by John Henry Newman was inspired by a voyage he undertook whilst suffering from a fever from Italy to England, when the ship was becalmed in the Mediterranean and surrounded by a dense fog. The ship's captain eventually pointed heavenward and said, "The star is shining tonight. If a wind rises, we can chart our course. At night one little star is sufficient."

Newman later wrote that he had been looking for dazzling sunlight to guide him through his life, "but He sent me the kindly light of a star to show me the way one step at a time."

Even in the darkest days and nights the little star is still shining and Jesus is there to guide you onwards one step at a time.

Joan

Epping URC News

Margaret Mead

Margaret sadly passed away shortly before Christmas and her funeral took place in January at the Epping Forest Burial Park. Margaret was a very active member of our church for many years, serving in many ways including treasurer, junior church leader and pulpit supply secretary. We always enjoyed the quizzes which Margaret and husband Mike organised to raise money for various charities. She also volunteered for Citizens Advice Bureau and was active in the WI. Our thoughts and prayers are with Mike at this time.

Lent group

We hope to run a bible study throughout Lent, but this is to be confirmed.

Christingle

We raised £200 for the Children's Society from our Christingle service before Christmas.

Churches Together in Epping & District

Our Lent lunch will be on Saturday 1st April, 12-2pm. There will be a lent lunch at a different church in Epping each Saturday during Lent- but locations are to be confirmed.

Preaching Plan for February

5th Graham Watson

12th Julie Finbow

19th Revd Ernie Bosse *Holy Communion*

26th Revd Stuart Veitch

5th March TBA

Birthdays

Happy birthday in February to Nathan and Karin.

Ongar URC News

Twinkles

Unfortunately, due to the snow and ice, we had to cancel our last meeting before Christmas so we were unable to hold our Christmas service and party, although we welcomed the children back in January with their Christmas chocolate!

We have welcomed some new children in January and lost some to nursery, but our numbers remain constant and we always offer a warm welcome. Pam and I have started to learn some Ukrainian for 'Good morning', 'How are you' and 'Goodbye' from one mother, although our accents and pronunciation leave much to be desired! We were interested to learn that Ukraine now largely celebrates Christmas on December 25th like us, as they wanted to get away from the Orthodox Christmas when the Russians invaded and took over Crimea.

We will now meet every Thursday, except for Half Term week, until Easter when we will finish with our Easter egg hunt and service in the church.

Joan

Leprosy Mission

£27.41 has been received as commission from orders at Christmas for five people. Please consider ordering through me as the Church benefits from most orders placed.

Joan

Open House

There's been slow joining-up sessions since Christmas, due to health & weather conditions; but hopefully our numbers will increase again now everything's getting better. We still need your help to complete our jigsaw!!

David & Vijaya will be back from India at the end of this month and a warm welcome awaits them.

Throughout February we shall be supporting Parkinson's UK (Research). Donations of items to sell on our Charity table or monetary gifts will be most welcome for this fundraising venture.

On Saturday 25 February Open House will also host the Coffee Morning with table top sales, cakes & raffle; all in aid of research for a cure of Parkinson's disease.

Please do come & support us and bring a friend. Look forward to seeing you.

Cheryl

We would like to wish a happy birthday to those having a birthday in February.

Preaching Plan for February

5th Joan Smith

12th Revd John Buxton

19th Joan Smith *Holy Communion*

26th Revd John Buxton

5th March TBA

Fairtrade Fortnight 2023

Fairtrade Fortnight 2023 (27th February – 12th

March) will spotlight the harmful effect of the climate crisis on the future of our food.

Thousands of people across Britain are gearing up to take part in Fairtrade Fortnight 2023. This year's campaign will highlight the

message that whatever your budget and wherever you shop, when you choose Fairtrade, you support farmers to take care of the

environment through Fairtrade's Price, Premium and Programmes. The two-week campaign will focus this year on the climate crisis and the increasing threat it poses to

some of the planet's most beloved food products as well as the livelihoods of the farmers and agricultural workers who grow them. It will show how the future survival of

the world's most popular foods – such as bananas, cocoa, and coffee – hangs in the balance unless we achieve inclusive and equitable climate solutions, with farmers and

agricultural workers playing a central role in the climate response.

Support for Fairer prices

Jackie Marshall, Head of Brand and Marketing at the Fairtrade Foundation, said:

“Fairtrade Fortnight highlights the urgent threat to the future of British staples produced overseas. Without our support for fairer prices today, farmers will find it even harder to tackle the climate and economic challenges of the future. “Smallholder farmers have a critical role in addressing climate change and have the expertise and knowledge to do so – but they simply can't afford to foot the bill for adapting to economic and climate change on their current incomes. There is a huge amount we can all do. Fairtrade is asking each and every one of us to act now and shop Fairtrade so farmers can keep going through these tough times. “By choosing Fairtrade now, you are helping protect nature now as well as the future of our food.”



Moving STORIES

Commitment
for **Life**

Life-giving Faith | Defiant Hope | Generous Love

Committed to supporting our global partners **ZIMBABWE**

Christmas as Resistance

Luke 1:46-55, 2:10-12

Julie Sim from the Council for World Mission reminds us that Mary's Prayer is a revolutionary song – not just a spiritual hymn but a social and political revolution in rousing verse. 'It is,' she asserts, 'a declaration of liberation and emancipation, a construction of a new social order for all people to live with hope.'

'The language of the angel is political: this child is the anti-Caesar; this babe will radically oppose the designs of Empire. In this anti-empire reading of the story, we see how 'the family' experiences the political, social, and spiritual consequences of choosing to resist rather than succumb to empire.

'Empires tend to follow one another through history. They all manifest themselves in domination, arrogance, self-congratulation, and wealth distribution to the top. If there are differences currently from previous times, it is only that today empires are way more efficient in the devastation of cultures, species, and the planet itself in pursuit of profit.

'This New Year, may we develop a renewed discernment of the subversiveness of Christmas. May we pledge allegiance not to the lure of power, violence, and economic exploitation, but to the Jesus of life-flourishing communities.'

Prayer

O God, we come to you this Christmas with grateful hearts. We praise you for the gift of Jesus. We are deeply thankful that Jesus changes our stories of hardship into testimonies of hope. We rejoice in all the great things you have done. Guide us, O God, so we can bear witness to your love, grace, and justice. Amen.



The Manyenga dam, in Mutoko District. Part of the BRACKT programme, which is helping communities adapt to climate and socio-economic shocks in Zimbabwe. Photo: Christian Aid

BRACKT in Zimbabwe

Christian Aid has had a long and fruitful presence in Zimbabwe, in affiliation with various partners who deliver transformative programmes on the ground.

One such programme is BRACKT. This initiative over five years has formed part of the Zimbabwe Resilience Building Fund (ZBRF). It was developed with the aim of helping communities prepare and adapt to a changing climate and economic shocks and stand up for the rights of ordinary people.

The programme's full title is: Building Resilience through improving the Absorptive and Adaptive Capacity for Transformation (BRACKT) of at-risk communities in the Mutoko and Mudzi districts of Zimbabwe.

Through BRACKT, Commitment for Life supports vulnerable households that are affected by recurring shocks, mostly related to climate change. BRACKT has enabled us to build partnership in Zimbabwe, and we are grateful to those who administer the work on the ground.

As we begin the new year, Commitment for Life wants to thank each of you for the precious gift of your support. This enables us to deliver support programmes like BRACKT that make an enormous difference in the lives of the people of Zimbabwe.

World Day of Prayer 2023

A women led, global, ecumenical movement

“I have heard about your faith”

Our sisters in Taiwan are sending us blessings with the service they have prepared for World Day of Prayer 2023. Taiwan is an island rich in natural resources and culturally diverse. The women of Taiwan share the issues faced geographically, politically and socially and also their hopes for the future. Let us join with them as we give thanks for the beautiful island and people of Taiwan and encourage one another in our faith just as Apostle Paul did in his letters. World Day of Prayer is an international, inter-church organisation which enables us to hear the thoughts of women from all parts of the world: their hopes, concerns and prayers. The preparation for the day is vast. An international committee is based in New York and there are national committees in each participating country. Regional conferences meet to consider the service and then local groups make their plans. Finally, at a church near you on Friday March 3rd 2023 people will gather to celebrate the service prepared by the women of Taiwan, our nearest service at the time of printing is at Theydon Bois Baptist Church, time tbc

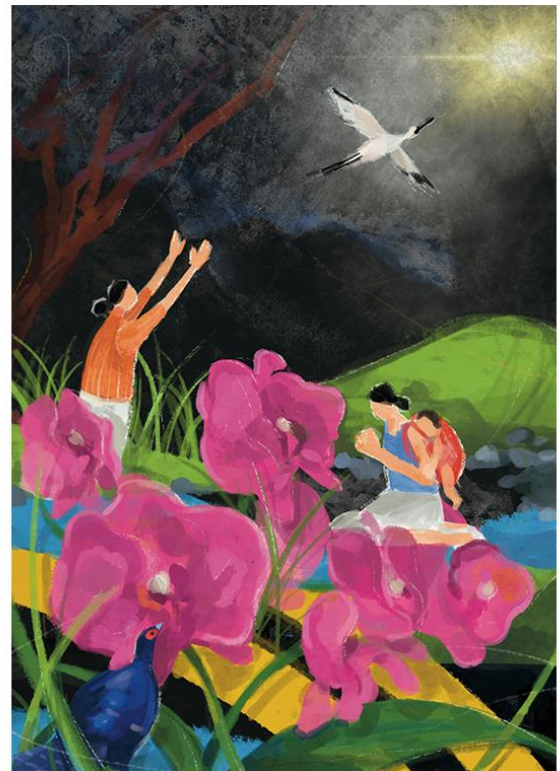
[<https://www.wwdp.org.uk/services/>]

For the artwork this year, the artist, Hui-Wen HSAIO, has used several motifs that highlight Taiwan’s best-known features to express how the Christian faith brings peace and a new vision to Taiwan.

The women in the painting are sitting by a stream, praying silently and looking up into the dark. Despite the uncertainty of the path ahead, they know that the salvation of Christ has come.

Two endangered species are featured: the Mikado pheasant and the Black-faced Spoonbill, which are both of unique significance to the Taiwanese people. The Mikado pheasant is endemic to mountainous regions of Taiwan and is usually regarded as one of Taiwan’s national birds. The Black-faced Spoonbill migrates thousands of miles every year to spend the winter in Taiwan. Their distinctiveness symbolizes a characteristic of the Taiwanese people—confidence and perseverance in times of difficulty.

The green grass and Phalaenopsis (Butterfly) orchids stand out against the dark background. They are the pride of Taiwan, which has a worldwide reputation as the “Kingdom of Orchids.” In recent decades, Taiwanese orchid’s exports have increased,



and Butterfly orchids have frequently been featured in international competitions. This beautiful island is known by its rich natural resources. Green grass represents the Taiwanese as simple, confident, strong and under God's care.

The Day of Prayer is celebrated in over 120 countries. It begins in Samoa and prayer in native languages travels throughout the world - through Asia, Africa, the Middle East, Europe and the Americas before finishing in American Samoa some 38 hours later. For further information and resources, see the WDP website: www.wwdp.org.uk