



SOLIHULL

UNITED REFORMED CHURCH

Serving Central Solihull, Olton and Hobs Moat
Communities

December 2022/January 2023 Newsletter

"...and he began to teach them, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"."

Matthew 5:2-3



Faith – Hope – Love – Since 1972

SOLIHULL UNITED REFORMED CHURCH

Based in the town centre, Solihull URC seeks to minister and witness to the local community, the wider town and the areas of Olton and Hobs Moat where we have formerly had a worshipping presence.

We share our mission with other Churches and are in partnership with others in the community. We invite you to join us as we seek to be faithful disciples of Jesus Christ.

www.solihullurc.org.uk
www.centralsolihullchurches.org.uk

LEADERSHIP TEAM

VACANT - Minister

Gordon Laurie - Church Secretary & Elder

Linda Faber - Mission Enabler & Lettings Administration

Maureen Butler - Elder (worship & prayer, charities, social activities)

Barrie Jones - Elder (Property, Health & Safety)

Elaine Jones - Elder (Administration, Data protection, Catering)

Ian Carnell – Elder

Howard Cotes – Elder

Liz Amos - Treasurer

Areas of special responsibility are listed in brackets.

ADVENT MESSAGE: THE SHEPHERDS RUSHED INTO BETHLEHEM; WE DON'T HAVE TO!

Luke tells us that after the angels had announced the birth of Jesus, the shepherds agreed that they should go into Bethlehem and see for themselves what the Lord had told them about, and so “they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger” (Lk 2:16 NRSV).

Sometimes, as Longfellow put it, “the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceeding small.” It can seem like forever for church life to achieve anything – to make decisions and put them into action, to see change, to bring about growth in our churches. Sometimes, time is exactly what we need to spend to make the right plans and get the right results. Sometimes it simply is better, even if frustrating, to wait, and not rush into action.

On other occasions, it is the opposite that is needed: we’ve put off making a decision or taking action for long enough, and time is slipping away. If we don’t get on with something – anything – there will be none of us left to do it. There is what we call a *Kairos* moment – that’s a Greek New Testament word that means the exact moment of opportunity; precisely the right time for something to be done. If we miss the *Kairos* moment, we may never get another opportunity.

How do we get the balance right between waiting and acting? There is no simple answer, other than to listen for God speaking through the Holy Spirit. Is God saying, “move; act now,” or “not yet; not that?” How do we learn to hear God speaking? By practice. By spending time being still and knowing that God is God and asking God to speak and taking time to listen. We learn to hear God by learning to listen.

I was grateful to be reminded this week of Toki Miyashina’s paraphrase of Psalm 23:

The Lord is my Pace Setter, I shall not rush,
He makes me stop and rest for quiet intervals,
He provides me with images of stillness,
Which restore my serenity.
He leads me in ways of efficiency,
through calmness of mind; and his guidance is peace.
Even though I have a great many things to accomplish each day,
I will not fret, for his presence is here.
His timelessness, his all-importance will keep me in balance.
He prepares refreshment and renewal in the midst of my
activity,
by anointing my head with his oils of tranquility,
My cup of joyous energy overflows.
Surely harmony and effectiveness shall be the fruit of my hours,
For I shall walk in the pace of my Lord,
and dwell in his house for ever.

It's worth remembering, too, that a pace setter has two tasks: to help the runner run fast enough, and to stop the runner going too fast so that they last the course. The Lord is my Pace Setter. I shall seek to run at the Lord's speed – no faster and no slower, and be guided by the Spirit as to what that pace should be.

With my prayers for a peaceful Advent and Christmas season, and a happy and healthy year ahead.

Rev Steve Faber

DECEMBER 2022 DIARY DATES

Thursday 1st – Tots and Tales – 10am in the Hall

Thursday 1st - Singing for Pleasure - 2pm in the Hall

Sunday 4th – Sunday Worship with Communion led by Nick Stanyon, including receiving new members and inducting a new Elder – 10am

Monday 5th – Moments Dementia Group – 10am

Monday 5th – Job Club – 10:30am

Monday 5th – Elders Meeting – 12:15pm

Thursday 8th – Tots and Tales – 10am in the Hall

Thursday 8th - Singing for Pleasure - 2pm in the Hall

Saturday 10th – Saturday Café – 9am

Sunday 11th – Sunday Worship led by Ian Carnell and Elisa Gusmao – 10am

Monday 12th – Moments Dementia Group – 10am

Monday 12th – Shout Out for the Girls – 10am

Monday 12th – Job Club – 10:30am

Thursday 15th – Tots and Tales – 10am in the Hall

Thursday 15th - Singing for Pleasure - 2pm in the Hall

Sunday 18th – Carol Service led by members of the congregation – 10am

Monday 19th – Moments Dementia Group – 10am

Monday 19th – Job Club – 10:30am

Saturday 24th – All Age Worship led by Ian Carnell – 4pm

Sunday 25th – All Age Worship led by Linda Faber – 10am

JANUARY 2023 DIARY DATES

Sunday 1st – Sunday Worship with Communion led by Ian Carnell - 10am

Saturday 7th – Saturday Café – 9am

Sunday 8th – Sunday Worship led by Peter Bates – 10am

Monday 9th – Moments Dementia Group – 10am

Monday 9th – Job Club – 10:30am

Monday 9th – Elders Meeting – 12:15pm

Tuesday 10th – Leisurely Lunch – 12:30pm

Thursday 12th – Tots and Tales – 10am in the Hall

Thursday 12th - Singing for Pleasure - 2pm in the Hall

Saturday 14th - Saturday Café – 9am

Sunday 15th – Sunday Worship led by Linda Faber – 10am

Monday 16th – Moments Dementia Group – 10am

Monday 16th – Shout Out for the Girls – 10am

Monday 16th – Job Club – 10:30am

Wednesday 18th to 25th – Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

Wednesday 18th – Churches Together Prayer Lunch in our Café – bring your own packed lunch - 12:30pm

Thursday 19th – Tots and Tales – 10am in the Hall

Thursday 19th – Singing for Pleasure – 2pm in the Hall

Saturday 21st – Saturday Café – 9am

Sunday 22nd – Sunday Worship led by Beverley Robottom-Scott – Pulpit swap for Week of Prayer for Christian Unity - 10am

Monday 23rd – Moments Dementia Group – 10am

Monday 23rd – Job Club – 10:30am

Thursday 26th – Tots and Tales – 10am in the Hall

Thursday 26th - Singing for Pleasure – 2pm in the Hall

Saturday 28th – Saturday Café – 9am

Sunday 29th – Sunday Worship led by Linda Faber – Café Style – 10am

Monday 30th – Moments Dementia Group – 10am

Monday 30th – Job Club – 10:30am

ROTAS

Please sign the rotas at the back of church if you can serve in any of the following roles. Thank you to those who have volunteered:

Sunday Welcome (2 people needed each week)

Serving Coffee (2 people needed each week)

Providing flowers for the Communion Table

Please consider if you can learn how to serve in any of these ways for the first time. If you have no previous experience in serving in any of these ways, we would be more than happy to help you.

GREETINGS FROM OTLEY

Greetings from Otley. It is slightly over four months since we moved to Yorkshire. By the time you read this our membership should have transferred to the Bridge Church URC, Otley (their church meeting is 27 Nov).

We are settling in well and it's as if we have never been away. However, we do miss you all. If you are ever in the Wharfedale Valley then please feel free to drop in and see us. We hope you are well and wish you all the best for a very happy Christmas and prosperous New Year.

Best wishes,

Gordon & Jackie Justham

CAFÉ STYLE WORSHIP

At the last Church Meeting it was decided to reintroduce our quarterly Café Style worship services in 2023. We had stopped this because of Covid restrictions and concerns. We know that this style of worship doesn't suit everyone but there are those who enjoy this type of service very much.

We hold these services at the back of church, where we usually serve our after-church coffee, asking people to sit in groups around the tables. There is opportunity in the proceedings to discuss the topic of the day with each other. The first of these services will be on 29th of January when I am leading and, keeping in mind that it is a worship service, I would like to know if there is a particular topic that anyone would like us to consider. Let me know.

SAVE THE DATE—ADVANCED NOTICE

The next World Day of Prayer is on Friday 3rd March. There will be opportunity to pray at any time of the morning or early afternoon at St Alphege using prayer stations of the type that we laid on when we hosted last year. I am again going to be organising the day but in the different venue.

If you would like to help put the prayer stations together and/or have ideas as to what those prayer stations should be, please let me know. The world day of prayer material this year is provided by the women of Taiwan on the theme of "I have heard about your faith" from Ephesians ch 1 v15-19. Whilst we won't be using the service they provide, we might use their theme as a launch for our ideas. Come and speak to me for more information.

Linda Faber

FRESH FROM THE WORD - BIBLE READING MATERIAL FOR 2023

I am now taking orders for the 2023 Bible reading material - Fresh from the word which offers a fresh approach to Bible reading - to Bible reading READ, REFLECT and GROW.

It is written to support all readers of the Bible, from new Christians to those seeking to deepen their faith and relationship with God. It brings together 50 international writers to give you new insights every day with verses, notes, prayers and action points. The writers include theologians and biblical scholars, church leaders and activists for peace from across the world, all of whom share a passion to bring the Bible into conversation with day-to-day concerns by looking at different themes and books, opening up thoughts and insights to help you think more deeply about your faith, develop a greater understanding of who you are in Christ, whose you are and His Infinite love for you. This helps you grow in your knowledge and appreciation of the Bible and carries on the 140-year-old tradition of the International Bible Reading Association (I.B.R.A.) of encouraging people around the world.

2023 themes include: Matthew's gospel, Healing divisions, Exploring the Lord's Prayer, Social Responsibilities and Love in Action, and others.

Comments from the users of Fresh from the Word say "it reminds me each morning that God is always by my side." "It challenges me to look at things in a new light, inspires me and uplifts me...," "it has strengthened my spiritual being and helped me with my Christian walk in life."

Copies of Fresh from the Word can be ordered through Irene Bound and will cost £11.70. Why not try it??

Irene Bound

ECO CHURCH

Please consider the environment and natural world this Winter. Please consider using cards and wrapping paper that are recyclable this Christmas. What about choosing to buy gifts that have minimal packaging? Put out food for the birds, if you have space to do that, and try to provide a source of water for them that isn't frozen on really cold days. Have you somewhere that you could leave a pile of leaves for caterpillars, and other small creatures to hibernate—or even something bigger like a hedgehog? What else could you make a decision to do with the environment or natural world in mind?

ADVENT HIGH TEA—OUTREACH EVENT

Not many from the congregation were inspired by the idea of a tea to have with friends or family but a few were. We went ahead with those who responded to the 40-ish invitations I gave out to those we know, and some of those invited came. Some were unable to come but were clearly touched that someone had thought to invite them, others were unable to come but made a donation to our church charity as a response to us laying on such an event.

The theme was the 'The 12 days of Christmas' and we gave out copies of the Advent booklet—the same one that you all should have received for yourselves by now—(hopefully), which also covers that theme. Have a lovely advent season everyone!

Linda Faber

FROM OUR POSTBAG

It is so good to receive letters from our sponsored pupils and their termly reports. They do enjoy getting letters from their sponsors as well. One university student wrote:

I am very grateful for the great assistance that you are giving me in support of my education. Without your help I would not have been where I am in my education or have any hopes in completing my studies. Your generosity and kindness have been inspiring to me. Again I say thank you so much.

Secondary Students wrote:

- 1. I got your letter and was very glad for I consider it is a way of motivating me. I am always very grateful to see that there is somebody who is concerned with my education and my future life goals.*
- 2. I appreciate your support towards my studies and for sure you have truly been a blessing to me, may God bless you. I'm doing well in my studies and the progress is good since I recently completed my second academic year. This far I couldn't have made it if it were not for you.*
- 3. I would like to express my sincere appreciation for your generosity and support that you have shown me by paying my fees. Were it not for you I don't know where I would be right now. May God bless you abundantly.*
- 4. It is a wonderful moment for me to communicate to you. Your support has really helped me and I will forever be grateful to you. My time in school has been good. The teachers, parents and other stakeholders combination has made me grow different abilities.*

5. *I thank you for your charity work and may Almighty God grant the desires of your heart. I wish you well in your life so that you continue having such generous hearts.*
6. *Working hard is my target in this my secondary course to attempt my goal and to meet my dream in life. There is no lift in life. Working hard is the only thing that can make you be at a good place which can help you to deal with the challenges in life with confidence.*

One of our past students is working in education and has described the new system of education in Kenya:

The system of education in Kenya has changed from 8-4-4 – that is eight years in primary, four years in secondary and four years in university to 2-6-3-3-3 – that is two years in pre-primary, six years in primary, three years in junior secondary, three years in senior secondary and three years in university.

Like in the UK, Education has been disrupted due to the epidemic: *After the disruption of Covid, the teachers did their best to catch up with the left part of the term's syllabus. Teaching and learning activities went on as usual but, this time, with a lot of seriousness due to limited time. All teachers could not afford even to miss a single lesson. Practical lessons eg physics, chemistry and biology were done with a lot of seriousness in order to give accurate results. I individually also expanded my reading skills and knowledge by regularly visiting the library and reading various types of books.*

It's not all work without play and it is good to hear of some of the extra-curricular activities they enjoy:

1. *We had a lot of activities this term including a Maths Contest and many schools came to our school. We also heard that the winner would be given a big prize so we worked hard and our school became position one and was given a big trophy and*

certificates. We also had sport competitions such as basketball, volleyball and football. I participated in the football competitions and our team gained position 3.

- 2. My studies are well guided by the timetable that I have. I strictly follow it and it has become a routine to me. I normally try up and down to make sure that I meet all lessons on time and without delay. During my free time, I make good use of it by reading storybooks and even play football and have fun. From doing so, there is a lot I have gained and it has also avoided me from being idle.*
- 3. This term we went for a geography trip to a weather station. There were many weather instruments some of which I have never seen with my naked eye for example a sunshine recorder, Stevenson's Screen, and a Sixes Thermometer. After that we went to a place where I enjoyed swimming with my fellow students.*

Eventually our students graduate from secondary school and here is a final thank you letter from one:

Being my last letter to you, I would really like to say thank you so so so so much. I hope God will answer my prayers of joining a nice university to study medicine. It has always been my dream. I also pray that one day God will answer my prayer that I shall one day get a chance to meet you and your family. I don't even know how to thank you for your support. May God bless you more and more to be able to support other children too.

A great vote of thanks to Streetsbrook Infant and Nursery School in Solihull who raised over £1100 for EducAid Africa by completing a mini marathon earlier this year.

I do hope that you find reading these extracts from letters interesting and useful. At the end of this year we shall be asked to sponsor new

students and therefore we need new sponsors. If you may be interested, do contact me for further details at info@educaidafrika.org.

Thank you for your continued interest and support – it is most appreciated.

Every good wish,

Ian D. Carnell MBE
Chairman of the Trustees, EducAid Africa

SHOE BOXES

A big thank you to all who managed the herculean task of doing a shoe box. Link to Hope collected our 21 boxes last week. They said the numbers are badly down this year so we did very well increasing on last year's total. We also gave a donation of £50.

Thank you all for your efforts and generosity.

Anne Cherry

MERRY CHRISTMAS

Wishing you all a Happy Christmas and a Healthy New Year.

Barrie and Elaine Jones

We wish you a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

The Mills Family

INVITATIONS TO CHRISTMAS SERVICES

Thank you so much to all those who volunteered to help deliver the invitations to Christmas services to those who live in streets around the church. Because the photocopier broke 3 times in three weeks (each time within an hour of the engineer leaving!) I was unable to print as many as we hoped but about 400 went out. In fact I had more volunteers than were needed—so thank you for that.

Please look out for the same task which we will aim to do again at Easter time. There are more copies now available with just the Christmas week services on them that you can give to friends or neighbours. Could you give out 5-10?

CHURCH CHRISTMAS CARD

The church Christmas card is available at the back of the church for you to sign if you would like to send greetings to one another. We provide this to reduce the number of cards being exchanged amongst us and hope that the money saved might be donated to the church charities instead. (The donation box is by the card on the back table).

Please remember to keep looking at it to read the greetings which are to you too!

Linda Faber

CHRISTIAN PERSECUTION IS A GLOBAL REALITY

At least 340 million Christians around the world experience systematic discrimination, unfair treatment and persecution. That means 1 in 8 Christians are affected by 'extreme', 'very high' or 'high' levels of persecution in 74 countries.

Open Doors assembles a list of the top 50 where there is the most extreme persecution and asks us to pray for them.

This month: The Maldives

The Maldives are viewed by many as a luxury holiday destination, but behind this lies an oppressive regime relentlessly determined to keep the island 100% Muslim.

Believers must follow Jesus in secret as conversion to Christianity can result in harassment, violence or imprisonment. Being a Christian is so dangerous that family members may not even know of each other's faith. Expatriate Christians, the majority of whom work in tourism and come from India and Sri Lanka, are also closely watched, making Christian fellowship very difficult.

Pray

- Ask the Lord to provide opportunities for believers to gather safely to worship.
- That God will use the Bible to powerfully strengthen, encourage and nurture believers.
- That attitudes among government officials, especially the President will soften towards Christians and other religious minorities.

Linda Faber

DIGITAL WORSHIP

Did you know we had a Minister for Digital Worship? No, well neither did I until recently. He is the Rev'd Andy Braunston and he provides various digital resources which are free to URC Churches and their congregations.

There is a wealth of resources including material for leading services but the one I want to bring to your attention is the daily email providing a reading, reflection and a short prayer. These are designed to help us know the Bible better and to build that knowledge into our daily lives. These Daily Devotions are written by a wide range of people from different places and with different perspectives.

Why not give it a try. You can sign up to receive them via devotions.urc.org.uk

Gordon Laurie

CAROLS AND MINCE PIES

Come and join us for our Carols and Mince Pies afternoon in the Church Cafe on Sunday 4th December at 4pm. This is hosted by the Singing For Pleasure Group. Plenty of audience participation!! There will be a charity collection.

The Singing For Pleasure are meeting on

- Thursday December 1st, 8th and 15th and restarting on
- Thursday January 12th, 19th, 26th at 2pm.



Janet Ince

HOMELESSNESS WORK IN SOLIHULL

I was invited to the council offices to meet with those who professionally work with the homeless and who want to connect more deliberately with faith communities. It is the Mayor's initiative that these connections are being made, and exploited, to increase the work in this area. Apparently there is an ambition/plan to eliminate homelessness by 2025 in the country(!) and faith groups are recognised as having a vital role in this field of work.

As well as the obvious types of projects, faith groups offer a community to join which is often the most stabilising part of rehabilitation for those who have previously been adrift in society. Homelessness work in Solihull has just had a reorganisation and the Outreach Street Team are now employed directly by the council rather than the work contracted out to SIAS (Solihull Integrated Addiction Service) but they are working together with both now represented at the Solihull Link group which we host on a Wednesday and Friday morning each week. Part of the Mayor's initiative provides help and some offers of financial support for new projects, so if you have ambition to fill a need in homeless provision in this area please raise your idea and we will put you in touch with the relevant people.

Linda Faber

DRAINAGE

You may have noticed that the drains have been cleared at the bottom of the carpark and that the area no longer floods when it rains. Hooray! However the drainage company were called in because the vestry toilet keeps overflowing (if you didn't know there was one in there you do now!).

The toilet has been unused for a few years because when you flush it, it drains very slowly and the flushed water comes up into the sink. Recently however we have had a few episodes of the effluent water from the drains back-filling, and overflowing from the toilet, and flooding that part of the building. On Monday, Tuesday more than once in the day, and again on Wednesday morning slurry water greeted me as I opened the door. The vestry therefore smells like a sewer and our post lands in the water (I will get a basket to catch it). There is conflicting advice about what to do and we are mindful that we do not want to push the problem along to the next set of toilets along the line, which we think is the Nattery Foyer toilets, but there are no drainage plans, so we don't really know. But we will have to do something and it might end up being disruptive (and expensive)—but who knows?

Linda Faber



I want to thank everyone who donated to my fundraising appeal for NICE. In total I raised £850, of which £390 was raised by church members. This is an incredible amount and far more than I was expecting! I completed the race in 51 minutes and 1 second, a new personal best. Thank you again.

Stuart Mills

KEY CONTACTS & INFORMATION

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VACANT

Church Secretary

Mr. Gordon Laurie

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Generations Project - enabling the Church in care homes

www.generationsssolihull.org.uk generationsssolihull@icloud.com

FEBRUARY 2023 NEWSLETTER

Material for the February 2023 edition

Is due to Stuart Mills: 07931 614393

stuartkmills@gmail.com

by Sunday 22nd January please.