



# **SOLIHULL**

## **UNITED REFORMED CHURCH**

Serving Central Solihull, Olton and Hobs Moat  
Communities

**February 2021 Newsletter**

*Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the  
Lord.*

***Psalm 27: 14***



## **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](http://www.solihullurc.org.uk)**  
**[www.centralsolihullchurches.org.uk](http://www.centralsolihullchurches.org.uk)**

### **LEADERSHIP TEAM**

**VACANT - Minister**

Gordon Justham - **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)**

Jackie Justham - **Elder (charities, social activities)**

Gordon Laurie – **Elder**

Chris Harman - **Elder**

Liz Amos - **Treasurer**

Areas of special responsibility are listed in brackets.

## **WORSHIP DURING FEBRUARY**

At the time of writing the country is in National Lockdown and although the rules of lockdown permit churches to open for worship, the Elders have decided that it is safest for the congregation that we remain closed for communal worship. However, we will continue with offering an online service through Zoom.

If and when we are able to open safely for worship then we will do so, but we will also continue with the simultaneous broadcast of the service via Zoom for those unable to attend for whatever reason.

The Worship leaders for February are:

<b>7<sup>th</sup> February</b>	10:00am	Mr Gordon Justham (Communion)
<b>14<sup>th</sup> February</b>	10:00am	Mrs Linda Faber
<b>21<sup>st</sup> February</b>	10:00am	Mr Blair Kessler
<b>28<sup>th</sup> February</b>	10:00am	Mr Gordon Justham

## **DIARY**

<b>14<sup>th</sup> February</b>	<b>Racial Justice Sunday</b>
<b>17<sup>th</sup> February</b>	<b>Lent begins</b>
<b>22<sup>nd</sup> February</b>	<b>Fair trade fortnight begins</b>
<b>23<sup>rd</sup> February</b>	<b>SURC Lent course begins on Zoom</b>



## THE LECTIONARY

Readings for Sundays in February from the Revised Common Lectionary are as follows. Please note that worship leaders are not obliged to follow the lectionary but you may be interested to know what the lectionary readings are for the specified Sundays. The readings in bold are the gospel readings for the day. An interesting challenge is to try and understand the link between the readings for a particular day.

**7<sup>th</sup> February** Mark 1.29-39; Isaiah 40.21-31; Psalm 147.1-11 & 20c; 1 Corinthians 9.16-23

**14<sup>th</sup> February** Mark 9.2-9; 2 Kings 2.1-12; Psalm 50.1-6; 2 Corinthians 4.3-6

**21<sup>st</sup> February** Mark 1.9-15; Genesis 9.8-17; Psalm 25.1-10; 1 Peter 3.18-22; Romans 16.25-27;

**28<sup>th</sup> February** Mark 8.31-38; Genesis 17.1-7 & 15-16; Psalm 22.23-31; Romans 4.13-35

**Gordon Justham**

## MESSAGE

I am sure I was not alone in being glad to see the back of 2020 and praying that 2021 would be better, and yet so far I doubt the year has started as any of us would have hoped. As we start the year with yet another lockdown, I am sure many of you, like me, will have struggled with anxiety and missing loved ones. Somehow it is harder when the days are short and cold and often wet as well. Throughout the first lockdown, I drew great comfort from nature, becoming an unusually enthusiastic gardener and dog walker, delighting in the sounds and smells and sights of nature. I could count my blessings more easily with the sun shining upon me, and yet despite covid-19 and all that it has wrought upon us there are green shoots and buds appearing that give

hope that spring will soon be with us and a degree of normality will return. There is still beauty all around us if we look for it.

We are told in Genesis that God gave man dominion over the earth and all living things on it, we were also given the loving gift of free will. Rather than be a master puppeteer God allowed mankind to have discernment and discretion, the ability to choose between right and wrong. I believe that being good custodians of the earth and all living things, is a fundamental part of honouring God and exercising dominion. Having a care for the environment is not something separate and distinct from faith, it is inherently part of our faith life. With rights come responsibilities. God looked at his creation and saw that it was good, rather less good after mankind has upset the balance, I fear.

Also in Genesis we have Noah and The Great Flood. in Chapter 6 verse 6 NIV " The Lord was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain". The flood was an attempt to cure mankind of its evil ways and after it the Lord said in his heart "Never again will I curse the ground because of man..." It distresses me when I hear people ask how a loving God could allow something to happen, almost always the something in question being a disastrous exercise of free will by an individual or group of people. The old expression "act of God", no longer used in an insurance context, often referred to events such as floods, fires, tidal waves, landslips, avalanches which are caused entirely by the way mankind is exploiting the earth and its resources. Covid-19 too is not a Biblical style plague God has visited upon us, it was caused by mankind and has been spread by us, albeit unwittingly or carelessly rather than, usually, deliberately. God has made us a promise and he does not go back on his promises, if the earth and all living things on it are in danger of being destroyed, we cannot blame God for it. Rabbi Kalonymous Shapiro was imprisoned for several years in the Warsaw ghetto and kept a journal in which he tried to rationalise Gods' role in the Holocaust, he made reference to God weeping in heaven at events on earth. I fear there will have been more tears since then.

It is easy to feel overwhelmed by the ecological disasters that feature so regularly in the media and to feel that we are too insignificant to make a difference, but every tiny change that we make is a mark of respect for our planet, a small step in the right direction and an affirmation of our intention not to cause God grief. Don't clean your teeth with the tap running, collect rainwater to water your garden, wait for a full load before putting the washing machine or dishwasher on, recycle where you can, these tiny changes will add up. Don't beat yourself up for what you can't do but think of something that you can do, and remember, the oft repeated saying of the moment - it is ok to not be ok, God will understand.

We need to be mindful of our responsibility to look after the earth and all living things, and in doing so we are acknowledging that we are doing it for God and we will be trying to restore the world to a place where God can again look at it and see that it is good.

I pray we will all keep safe and in good spirits until we are able to be together again.

## **Beverley Hands**

### **THAT REMINDS ME**

I didn't know this until last week when I read it in the Methodist church newsletter: It is believed that all the cooling systems used to keep the supercomputer servers cool which run our emails and internet are as environmentally damaging as the airline industry. So choosing to email fewer people, or choosing to reply to one person rather than 'reply to all' is an environmental saving choice. Linda

## **CHRISTMAS WASN'T CANCELLED**

To me Christmas seems to have been such a long time ago as it was in a different era—the pre-the-latest-lockdown era, when we had in-person worship in our church building. Thank you to all those who decorated the church in one way or another, it was great to make a bit of an effort when so much couldn't go ahead as we hoped. Our usual carol service was a Readings and Reflections service instead, and was not such a large affair as it might have been. We had a few visitors joining those of us who worship regularly and it was great to be reminded that worship is not just about us meeting with God but an opportunity to, under normal circumstances, invite others to join us where they can experience worship for themselves. We couldn't enjoy chatting over a coffee and mince pie afterwards but we sent home a little 'party bag' with a mince pie to be enjoyed at home instead.

The Christmas Eve service was led by Ian Carnell and was an opportunity for us to approach Christmas prepared and putting Christ at the centre. Then Christmas Morning Steve Faber led worship for a whole bunch of people with quite a bit of the congregation made up of visitors. A true reminder that all sorts of different people can come together before Christ.

Although it was challenging to worship at Christmas without singing, it is good for us to be reminded that there are other ways of doing things and I hope all those who were a part of our Christmas services found something to help them connect with God and His incarnation.

**Linda Faber**

## NUMBERS

Each year the URC ask us to send it lots of information about our church to head office. Gordon Justham puts a lot of effort into gathering all the information required which varies slightly from year to year. This year there is an extra section about online worship. I wondered if you might be interested in the little bit of information that I collated—that of how many people have been worshipping at our church of late. Before the lockdown of March last year in 2020 we had an average weekly attendance of 52 people which was already up by one on 2019 and up from 46 in 2018. However, we then went into lockdown and nothing is the same any more.

At the end of the year when we started in-person worship again we had an average weekly attendance of 46. Then when we had services exclusively over Zoom we also had an average of 46 people, though different people—some were continuing to isolate at home, or didn't have transport so didn't come to in-person worship, and some don't have computer access so can't access the Zoom worship. When both options were on offer at the same time the total accessing the worship services combined averaged at 46 people. We hope that some sort of normality may resume in the future and we hope to carry forward the lessons we have learnt during this phase of our church life.

It is necessary to know how many people attend worship because it helps us to get a true picture of whether we are a declining or growing church. Additionally, research also tells us that in order for a church worshipping congregation to grow, services need to attract the same number (or more) of first-time visitors over the course of a year as there are in an average weekly congregation. So we are properly informed now of what we are aiming at to ensure a continuance of our church. Let's hope it is soon safe to start inviting people to come and join us again.

**Linda Faber**

## LENT

Providing special activities during lent will be a challenge this year. Last year everything was cancelled and we were not sufficiently together enough to be able to offer anything over the internet. I did, however, manage to send out some thoughts by email during Holy Week to those who were able to receive information that way. This year we are offering a discussion group over Zoom and there will be sent, to everyone on our church family list, some printed material to follow at home across the whole of Lent. I have another computer-based idea which may or may not come to fruition so keep an eye out for further information as we get closer to Easter.

If you have ideas that you have thought about, or have heard about from other places about Easter or for any time of year, please let me or the Elders know as we would love for your involvement in developing our way forward.

**Linda Faber**

## CONGRATULATIONS

Congratulations to Iris Webb who celebrated her 90th birthday on 11th January. We send our love and best wishes to her on this milestone.

**Janet Ince**



## BEAUTY FOR BROKENNESS

This year Lent starts on 17<sup>th</sup> February, which is Ash Wednesday. According to the internet a popular hymn for this particular day is *'Beauty for Brokenness'* by Graham Kendrick. Let's ponder for a while on some of the lyrics from this poignant song – particularly as some of the sentiments are especially relevant in the current COVID-19 crisis.

*'Beauty for brokenness: hope for despair.  
Lord, in the suffering, this is our prayer.  
Bread for the children: justice, joy, peace.  
Sunrise to sunset, your kingdom increase!*

*Shelter for fragile lives: cures for their ills.  
Work for the craftsman: trade for their skills.  
Land for the dispossessed: rights for the weak.  
Voices to plead the cause of those who can't speak.*

*God of the poor: friend of the weak.  
Give us compassion we pray.  
Melt our cold hearts: let tears fall like rain.  
Come, change our love from a spark to a flame.'*

**Graham Kendrick**

Footballer Marcus Rashford has, yet again, been urging the government to ensure children on free school meals do not go hungry, especially during half term. His persistent concern for children from poorer families is one excellent example of, *'Voices to plead the cause of those who can't speak'*, as mentioned by Graham Kendrick in the hymn. The lyrics further remind us about, *'Bread for the children'* and other nutritious foods of course.

*'Shelter for fragile lives: cures for their ills'*, the hymn lyrics continue. Think of the homeless through the pandemic and how shelter has been found for them during the coldest months of the year. Praise be for

this compassion from the government – but this needs to be true every year for homeless people!

*'Work for the craftsmen: trade for their skills'* – the hymn continues. Many people, including craftsmen, are now unemployed due to the pandemic – not only in the UK but worldwide. People who have been made redundant often find it hard to put food on the table for their families. Let's remember them in our prayers.

*'Land for the dispossessed'* – we recall many people who desperately try to get to the UK in search of a better life, crossing the channel in small boats at great risk to their lives and those of their children. Some have drowned in the attempt. What courage it must take to escape from countries that are besieged by war, let alone Covid-19. *'Melt our cold hearts: let tears fall like rain'* as the hymn rightly says.

Here in Olton and throughout the UK older people are hoping to have the Covid-19 vaccine as soon as possible. Many vulnerable 'at risk' people have been inoculated already. But what about third world nations? We can be thankful that the scientists who created the Oxford vaccine in this country specifically intended that it should also be offered to third world countries and not for profit. *'God of the poor, friend of the weak: give us compassion we pray'*.

God bless the Oxford team that they produced a vaccine that can be used with lower temperature refrigeration than some other vaccines – and they have indeed produced amazing *'cures for their ills'* which can be used in countries all over the world, for rich and poor alike.

We have not looked at all the moving and thought-provoking lyrics of Graham Kendrick's hymn, *'Beauty for brokenness'* in this article. The complete hymn is well worth looking up in a hymnbook or on the internet and reflecting further on its lyrics.

God bless you all, **Carol**

### **BSWA Thanks**

We have recently received two cards of thanks from the BSWA:

“We are writing to thank you for your donations of Christmas gifts. Your support is very much appreciated and will have created a magical Christmas for our service users.

With best wishes from all at BSWA.”

“We are writing to acknowledge the receipt of your cheque. We would like to thank you for this donation and the Christmas gifts you have donated. Your continued support is so appreciated, and helps to make Christmas a magical experience for our families in refuge.

With best wishes from all at BSWA.”

### **ANOTHER LOCKDOWN**

Love, best wishes and a Happy New Year to all my friends at Solihull URC.

It seems such a long time ago since I was able to worship together with you inside the church building and I know that this has been a very difficult and sad time for many of the church family. Thankfully many faithful members of the church have been providing us with the opportunity to share together on line (and for a short time in person at church) by continuing to prepare services and resources for worship and providing pastoral support to many. Thank you.

I have spent a great deal of the past year caring for my elderly parents who are in their early nineties. As they live in South Gloucestershire close to Bath, I travel down to their home regularly, sharing the caring with my sister, ensuring that we both socially isolate as much as possible when we are at home and when we are with them. I am pleased to say that they both received their first dose of the COVID-19 vaccination this week.

I know it has been very hard for many of you being on your own and unable to meet up with family and friends. Our son William lives in London and we catch up with him regularly via social media. Our daughter Katie and her husband Laurence, welcomed another baby (Jasper Melvyn Collier) into the world in early December and it has been very hard not being able to be with them to enjoy him and our other Grandson Alec. Needless to say, Jasper is beautiful and thankfully fit and healthy like his older brother and we spend a great deal of time FaceTiming them. My parents particularly enjoy to see videos and photographs of their 8 great grandchildren. This has been a real tonic for them!

Hopefully with the arrival of the vaccination programme and people continuing to abide by the Lockdown regulations, our lives may start to see a return to some sort of normality over the coming year and we can once again meet with our family and friends and enjoy worshipping together at church.

Until then, God bless you all and keep you safe and healthy.

**Caroline Clarke Xx**

## **MARIAMA – SPONSORED CHILD**

Happy New Year everybody with brighter hopes ahead of us.

I'm afraid I'm asking yet again for your help. The annual payment towards our sponsored child, MARIAMA, is due in January but in view of the present situation there may be some problems.

In previous years each sponsor has paid £12 a year to meet the minimum required amount at which the charity operates. Unfortunately, we are hit by a double whammy of an increase in the minimum amount and a decrease, sadly, in the number of sponsors.

So we need to adjust the figures. If we were to increase the annual payment to £14 and hopefully gain new sponsors, we could probably still do it. As we are not together at the moment and the newsletter might not reach everybody, not all sponsors will know so please spread the word.

If you still wish to continue your support of Mariama or would like to join in you can pay me either with cash if you see me or by cheque made out to me. My address is in the Directory.

Please get in touch if you have any questions. Thank you for your support.

**Anne Cherry**

## REFORM MAGAZINE

We currently have a number of subscribers for this magazine. It is described as follows:

*“Reform is a fresh and challenging magazine exploring theology, ethics, personal spirituality and Christian perspectives on social and current affairs.*

*The magazine is for thinking people who enjoy reading about Christian ideas from a range of viewpoints. It features writing from journalists, academics, politicians, campaigners, scientists and religious leaders. As well as high-profile interviews, in-depth features and book, music and film reviews, Reform carries letters and a regular light-hearted column.*

*The magazine is published 10 times a year by the United Reformed Church but has readers from all Christian denominations, as well as readers from other faiths and from no faith tradition.”*

I am the contact for Solihull URC. I need to put in this year’s order. If you would like to join our list of subscribers would you please let me know by no later than 14<sup>th</sup> February. My email address is [howard@cotes.me.uk](mailto:howard@cotes.me.uk) or alternatively give me a ring on 01676535692.

So if you need something to read during lockdown here is your opportunity. The cost is £29.50 pa which covers 10 issues.

There is an alternative option should you wish. Instead of a paper copy you could have a digital copy by email in which case the cost would be £18 for 10 issues.

The paper copy of the magazine is sent to me and I arrange to distribute it to all subscribers. I look forward to hearing from you.

**Howard Cotes**

## VACCINE! – A POEM

'Thou shalt not covet,' from the Bible I learn.  
Yet now I just long to take my turn –  
To stand in a socially distanced queue  
And offer my arm to a nurse in blue!

For I'm waiting here and all alone,  
Just longing and longing for the doctor to phone.  
'Please invite me to come for this precious vaccine,  
To stand in that queue, where my friends have been.'

I'm 'old and vulnerable', so they say.  
And I'm patiently waiting for day after day.  
There are plenty of people walking my street,  
'Don't stop and talk if you chance to meet!'

Instead you must simply 'walk on by',  
And the loneliness makes me want to cry.  
Yes we know we must take exercise,  
But stopping and chatting is simply not wise.

So I'm waiting and longing for the doctor to ring,  
And when that time comes what joy it will bring!

**Carol Andrews**

## **THE GOOD SHEPHERD**

The sheep are safely folded, their shepherd rests, conscious of the great responsibility he has. Individual sheep have different needs, different temperaments and different aspirations. He is their leader, their protector and their friend. Dangers often beset them, temptations surround them and yet they are not afraid because their shepherd is always near.

I wonder if the shepherd is ever lonely, longing for human fellowship. Is **he** ever afraid? Do the sheep worry him, distress him, forget him, let him down, stray or reject him? However, does he manage to keep patience with them, keep loving and forgiving them in spite of all they do.

Perhaps Good Shepherd is too weak a term to describe such love, such unselfishness, such care! Good Shepherd, I am such a sheep. Thank you for saving me.

**Saviour**

**Hope**

**Eternal Love**

**Protecting Souls**

**Holy Spirit**

**Enduring Pain**

**Radiating Forgiveness**

**Drawing People Near**

**Ian Carnell**

## **WORLD DAY OF PRAYER**

The newsletter is a little late going out this month not because of any production issues but because we were waiting for some details about how we plan to progress with World Day of Prayer this year.

The World Day of Prayer (formally Women's world day of prayer) takes place this year on March 5<sup>th</sup>.

We will not be able to hold the usual services in the area but a church in Dorridge are going to be putting together an on-line service which we have been told we will be welcome to join. The details will be available for that next month.

I wanted to get the information in the newsletter this month about how to give to the charity which does lots of good things around the world. Usually an offering is taken up at the service but as we will not be able to do that I am asking that you send your offering directly.

You can donate

- via the website: [www.wwdp.org.uk](http://www.wwdp.org.uk), there is a 'Donate' button at the top right

- or send a donation to World Day of Prayer at Commercial Road, Tunbridge Wells, Kent, TN1 2RR

- or text to 70085 using the phrase 2021WDP adding the amount they wish to donate, eg 2021WDP 5 or 2021WDP 10

**Linda Faber**



## KEY CONTACTS & INFORMATION

### **Minister**

VACANT

### **Church Secretary**

Mr. Gordon Justham: 07540 289855 - 01564 776229 -  
gordonjustham@talktalk.net

### **Website**

[www.solihullurc.org.uk](http://www.solihullurc.org.uk)

**Hall Lettings:** 07925 573259

**Generations Project** - enabling the Church in care homes

[www.generationsssolihull.org.uk](http://www.generationsssolihull.org.uk) [generationsssolihull@icloud.com](mailto:generationsssolihull@icloud.com)

**Moments (currently not meeting)**

Mondays 10am—12 noon@ Central Solihull

### **MARCH 2021 NEWSLETTER**

Material for the March 2021 edition

Is due to Stuart Mills: 07931 614393

[stuartkmills@gmail.com](mailto:stuartkmills@gmail.com)

by Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> February please.