



SOLIHULL UNITED REFORMED CHURCH

An amalgamation of three fellowships - Hobs Moat, Olton and Christ Church - Solihull URC seeks to continue serving the three communities in different ways. Sunday worship is focused at Christ Church, but opportunities at other times and in other places are being explored and developed.

Prayer is at the heart of what we are doing, as our desire is to fulfil God's calling to us as a Christian fellowship.

We invite you to join us on the exciting and challenging journey we are on, and look forward to seeing you in the future.

Just in case you are wondering, God isn't on Twitter. He created birds to do the twittering! He isn't on Facebook either – which is why I have such trouble finding pictures of him for my *Youtube* videos.

But many of his churches are on Facebook – including ours. So God does keep up with the times and modern technology – but he doesn't rely on it – unlike some humans!

Carol Andrews

Olton History



At our Celebration service on 8th March, various people contributed to a brief history of Olton Congregational and URC Church.. This has now been put together and is available on application to Marian Batten (0121 689 8213).

IS GOD ON E.MAIL?

I've been talking to God a lot this morning' I announced to my friend Jill. I'm like a dog with a bone sometimes and need to keep telling him things. God is very patient with me I have to say. And then it suddenly struck me that maybe it would be a good idea to email him as well – to remind him about things. I doubt he's forgetful like me of course.

Jill replied – by email – that it would be good if God were on email and she wondered if he is on Windows 8.1, like her. I replied that he is doubtless on Windows 9 by now as he is always at least one step ahead of us – and ahead of Bill Gates too of course.

So what is God's email? Well for the Holy Trinity the address is *god@heaven.com*. For God the Father there is *god@alwayswatching.com*. For God the spirit the address is *god@alwayslistening.com*, and for Jesus there is *god@alwaysloving.com*.



HolyTrinity.com makes a good team as we know, and the company is never hit by a power cut. Their internet provider is free for all users and their computers are never down. What is more their broadband speed is far quicker than any of the internet providers on earth – it is instantaneous!

However, our computers are sometimes down and some of us don't have computers. So how can we contact God? Don't worry. God knows we have technical problems on earth – as well as countless other problems to tell him about. So he doesn't rely on email. We don't even need to type our message. Just talk to him – whisper if you like. Don't bother with the phone or the internet. He is there for everybody, never has a power cut and is always listening. Better still, you don't even pay a penny for the service. It is no wonder that the likes of Apple and Bill Gates can't compete with *god@inheaven.com*!

Fulfilling the Mission of the Risen Christ - *Mark reflects*

Easter eggs do not quite out-market Christmas shopping, but for Christians Easter is the 'high-point' in the calendar and we make our way with Jesus on the roller-coaster that is a triumphal entry into Jerusalem, through a hideous suffering and death to the surprise of Resurrection and the rejoicing of Easter morning. I wonder, though, how much the rejoicing is shaped by custom? The hymns we sing, the spring flower decorations, a sense that the weather has turned a corner, and of course chocolate eggs, all serve to maintain tradition.

At the heart of it all is the truth that Jesus Christ was raised from death three days after his execution, so he is alive for us today. For the first disciples and followers this was indeed life-changing, and as the message spread whole civilisations and cultures were re-shaped. We misunderstand if we think that it is all about an event in history and that God wants us to celebrate what happened 2000 plus years ago, when in reality it is about a living Lord and our celebration should be focused on what he is doing in us and through us today.

What do we offer to the world? We might happily sing "Jesus Christ is alive today, I know, I know it's true" while offering the world our theology, our culture, our values, our creeds, our traditions, our spiritual practices, our type of baptism, our preferred form of communion, our style of sermon, our church, our denomination, our understanding of salvation, our style of worship, our form of ministry, our interpretation of the Bible, our moral values etc. Of course we cannot say that these things do not speak of God in some way, but imagine if we were to introduce people to our God, rather than our religion?

Often when we talk of engaging in mission or evangelism it is to share our own specific brand of Christianity rather than the Gospel. We are also well practised at doing this with other Christians - being critical of their version of Christianity. We become inward-looking, focusing on the differences within the Christian family, rather than on the

centrality of Jesus Christ as a person to us all.

Commercial markets are full of 'brands' vying for attention and custom, and we often fall into the same pattern with our faith. But Christian faith is not a commodity - it is about the person of Jesus Christ who died and was raised to life. So, how might we offer the community around us a life-giving, hopeful, joyous, and loving faith rather than a message that says: I'm *right* and you're *wrong*?

- Instead of comparing versions of the Bible — share what God has been speaking to you.
- Instead of complaining about worship styles — share a time you experienced God's presence.
- Instead of criticising a particular theologian — share how God is moving in your life.
- Instead of questioning a denomination — share what you love about God.
- Instead of rubbishing someone's beliefs about eternity — share how God has changed you.
- Instead of arguing over the proper way to facilitate the sacrament of communion — share about the ups and downs of your relationship with God.
- Instead of talking about religion, *introduce* people to Jesus Christ.

The most important truth within all of Christianity *is* God. God exists. God is real. Christ is risen and God is alive today. So why do we as Christians seem to talk about almost everything *related* to God without actually talking about our *relationship* with God?

In a world with unlimited spiritual choices, Jesus is distinctly unique! By introducing Jesus, we will reveal the work of God.

Mark Fisher



Lord you're the potter; I'm the clay.
Re-shape the life in me today.
Lord in my darkest night,
Please let your light burn bright;
Bright like a lamp inside my heart.

Carol Andrews.

ZIMBABWE - Extract from Stories for Change 108

Using local markets to improve livelihoods.

The economic and political environment remains stable, enabling smooth project implementation. However, availability of cash is still a challenge in rural communities and barter trade has become common as an adaptive strategy. Local leadership and stakeholders actively participate and support project activities. The rainy season started well and the seasonal yield forecast is good. Improved production of better quality small grains and vegetables is evident.

Labour-saving mobile solar water pumps

This initiative responds to the gender and labour challenges facing communities in Matabeleland region. Most middle-aged and labour active males emigrated to neighbouring South Africa and Botswana to look for employment, leaving the elderly and women with the heavy work. 18 gardens, each with an average of 15 households are using the solar pumps. 207 smallholder farmers are improving their vegetable yields and plot sizes because of improved irrigation methods and extension support they get from Dabane Trust and local extension workers.

COMMITMENT FOR LIFE PRAYER

We pray for, and give thanks for all Churches that are part of Commitment for Life. That they may continue to support the programme through action and giving because their faith demands it.

CAROL'S SONG

I'm very aware that Olton folk in particular feel, 'Lost like a lamb' at times and wonder what the future holds for our Olton outreach and our church buildings there. Little by little God reveals his plans – and often we are amazed and awestruck by his wisdom.

Learning to trust is one of the hardest things God asks of us, I think. As the last verse of the song reminds us 'Lord you're the potter; I'm the clay'. That is true of every one of us. The re-shaping of our lives can be painful at times – but, like the mystery of the healing effect of prayers, we know that the wisdom of God is way beyond our own understanding.

Lost like a Lamb

Lost, like a little lamb, oh Lord,
Lost like a little lamb, dear Lord;
Lord in my darkest night,
Please let your light burn bright;
Bright like a lamp inside my heart.

Lord when my light is burning low,
And I don't know which way to go;
Lord in my darkest night,
Please let your light burn bright;
Bright like a lamp inside my heart.

Lord let your light shine in my soul;
Heal me and then I will be whole.
Lord in my darkest night,
Please let your light burn bright;
Bright like a lamp inside my heart.

WORSHIP PLANNING GROUP

Wednesday 15th April 7.30pm at Hobs Moat

This is an opportunity **for anyone who is interested** in helping to shape or prepare our worship to come together. It may be that you don't wish to help lead worship in any way, but you may have some creative ideas to share.

We will be looking ahead over the year for significant occasions and seasons that may be a focus for worship. We will share thoughts and possibilities and we will identify people or groups to prepare.

MEETING PLACE - Pursuing the idea

Monday 20th April 7.30pm at Christ Church (Mayflower Room)

All are welcome to share in the ongoing discussions exploring aspects of this project:

- * How this will help us fulfil our mission?
- * What activities can we enable in this space?
- * What groups might we invite to use this space?
- * What might the space look like and what are the practical steps to achieve it?

PRAYING WITH THE PAPERS

Friday 24th **1.30pm** at Christ Church

Zaidie is leading this and will be 'observed' by her college tutor. It would be good to have a reasonable number of people participating. PLEASE NOTE THE CHANGED TIME.



A DATE FOR THE DIARY

Friday 12th June 7.30pm at Hobs Moat

A Concert of Popular and Folk Songs presented by Colin McIlwaine (minister in Hall Green) in support of our church charities.

CALENDAR FOR APRIL

Thursday 2nd 8.30pm @ Olton - Cell Group Leaders 'catch up'
Saturday 4th 2pm Marriage Blessing @ Christ Church of
Hazel (Smart) and Marc
Sunday 6th EASTER DAY
Tuesday 7th 10.30am Neighbourhood Coffee Morning @ Hobs Moat
Monday 13th 12.30pm Generations Lunch Hour
Wednesday 15th 7.30pm @ Hobs Moat - Worship Planning Group
Thursday 16th 8.30am from Olton, Coach Trip to Tatton Park
2pm Singing for Pleasure @ Hobs Moat
Sunday 19th 7.45pm @ Oliver Bird Hall (St Alphege)
Hustings with opportunity to question parliamentary
candidates - chaired by the Archdeacon of Aston.
Monday 20th 7.30pm @ Christ Church (Mayflower Room)
Pursuing the idea of a Meeting Place
Tuesday 21st 10.30am Neighbourhood Coffee Morning @ Hobs Moat
Wednesday 22nd 12.15pm Churches Together in Olton @ The Friary
Thursday 23rd 2pm Singing for Pleasure @ Hobs Moat
Friday 24th 1.30pm Praying with the Papers @ Christ Church
(Please note the different start time)
Saturday 25th 7.30pm 'Sing Bentley Heath' Concert @ Christ Church
Sunday 26th 2.30pm Pleasant Sunday Afternoon @ Hobs Moat
Thursday 30th 2pm Singing for Pleasure @ Hobs Moat

HOBBS MOAT

The following friends need our prayers at this time. We pray for God's love and peace to surround each of them: all of those on our prayer list, all who are unwell and their carers; Maureen Bellamy, Peggy and Harold Crosby, Alf Andrews, Jean and Brian Mather, Margaret McWilliam, Joan Shaw, Vera Thomas, Nita Renshaw, Irene Lambert and partner Keith, Irene Kettle, Thelma Phillips.

Jeanne

OLTON

PRAYERS for, and News of OUR CHURCH FAMILY

In our thoughts and prayers we remember **Mark** and **Judy**, and every member of our combined church family, trusting that God will keep each one of us in his loving care.

Our thoughts turn especially: to **Josie Loftus** who was feeling well enough to join in Sunday worship recently; to **Gweno Nichols** spending time in Australia; to **Christine Yapp**; and to all those who have been elected to serve the church as elders— may we lighten their load by playing our part in supporting them and all they are striving to do to organise our newly created Solihull URC.

Rita.

CHRIST CHURCH

Prayer Fellowship for Christchurch

Let us pray for the following members and friends: Barbara and Keith Fisher, Brian Gibbs, Brenda Cotes, Michael Hogg, Syd and Michelle, Peter, Ifor and Sheila Jenkins, Sheila Schwartz, Doris Thompson and Gordon Straight.
May God be with them.

Christian Aid.

Can I please remind everyone that Christian Aid week falls on 11th May, when we do house-to-house collections for that week. On Saturday, 9th May, we have the coffee morning at The Methodist Church Hall in Solihull. I have a book stall annually at this event. I would be grateful for help with any of these events. We need paperback books for the bookstall, and I would be glad of volunteers for the house collections.

In anticipation,

Bridget.

Greetings

I send greetings from Job's Close in Knowle and would like to express my sincere thanks to all at Christ Church for their prayers, friendship and support, especially since I broke my hip last March. Your phone calls, flowers, cards and visits have helped keep my spirits up and are very much appreciated. I also send my good wishes to everyone at Solihull United Reformed Church as you journey on together.

Brenda Cotes

WORSHIP IN APRIL

Wednesday 1st

2pm @ Newholme Gardens - Holy Week & Easter Worship

Maundy Thursday 2nd

3pm @ Deerhurst Court - Holy Week and Easter Worship

7.30pm @ Olton - led by Mark - Tenebrae and Holy Communion

Good Friday 3rd

7.30pm @ Hobs Moat - led by Zaidie - Reflection on the Cross

Sunday 5th

10am @ Christ Church - led by Mark - Easter Day Holy Communion

11.45am @ Star and Garter Home - Easter Day worship

Sunday 12th

10am @ Christ Church - led by Zaidie - Family Worship

Tuesday 14th

11am @ Hampton House - Holy Communion

Wednesday 15th

10am @ The Grove - Worship

Thursday 16th

10am @ Olton - Fellowship Prayers

Sunday 19th

10am @ Christ Church - led by Ian Carnell & Mark - Family Worship
with the Baptism of Luke Bradburn

11.45am @ Star and Garter Home - Worship

Friday 24th

1.30pm @ Christ Church - led by Zaidie - Praying with the Papers

Sunday 26th

10am @ Christ Church - led by Mark - Family Worship

LECTIONARY READINGS

Easter Day 5th April

Acts 10:34-43 or Isaiah 25:6-9, Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24,
1 Corinthians 15:1-11 or Acts 10:34-43, John 20:1-18 or Mark 16:1- 8

Sunday, 12th April

Acts 4:32-35, Psalm 133, 1 John 1:1-2:2, John 20:19-31

Sunday 19th April

Acts 3:12-19, Psalm 4, 1 John 3:1-7, Luke 24:36b-48

Sunday 26th April

Acts 4:5-12, Psalm 23, 1 John 3:16-24, John 10:11-18

**West Midlands Joint Public Issues Team -
Baptist, Methodist and United Reformed Churches working
together on public issues
'Tomorrow's Country'**

As the General Election approaches two documents have been produced to support churchgoers' engagement with the General Election. Copies are being sent to every Baptist, Methodist and United Reformed Church and from the 30th March will be available on the West Midlands Synod's web site. There is other material around of course. Some exceedingly helpful material has been produced by the denominational Joint Public Issues Team whose web site details are included at the end of the booklet.

But what makes these West Midlands documents distinctive is how they have been produced. Baptist, Methodist and United Reformed Church Leaders with others from these denominations have undertaken an exercise to elicit the views of churchgoers across the West Midlands. What appears in these regional documents are views

Mr Charles, who sold her one of the copies already promised to another.

The impact

Mary's visit profoundly impacted Thomas Charles. He began to wonder what could be done for others such as Mary, for people who long for the Bible around the world. He proposed to the Council of the Religious Tract Society that they form a new Society to supply Wales with Bibles. And, in 1804, the British and Foreign Bible Society was established in London.

Mary's Bible

Mary Jones died in 1864 and was buried at the graveyard of Bryn-crug Calvinistic Methodist Chapel. The Bible she walked 25 miles to buy is now owned and stored in the Bible Society's archives in Cambridge University Library. It is a copy of the 1799 edition of the Welsh Bible and also contains the 1800 Book of Common Prayer in Welsh.

'A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS'

Union Theatre's production of 'A Man For All Seasons' will take place at St Edburgha's Church in Yardley, B33 8PB from 23 to 25 April at 7:30pm.



Tickets are priced at £9 (£8 for concessions). Tickets can be bought online at www.uniontheatresolihull.co.uk, by telephone: 0121 784 4067 or via Sam Ensor, Jackie Justham or Gordon Justham.

A Man for All Seasons is an enduring modern classic written by Robert Bolt and first performed in London on 1 July 1960. It is a tense play in which Thomas More, Lord Chancellor of England, enters into political and moral conflict with King Henry VIII when he refuses to support the King's move to divorce Catherine of Aragon. “

AN INVITATION

Solihull Bible Society...

are organising a trip to the Mary Jones Centre at Llanycil on April 25th. The visit will include a tour of the Centre, a trip to Bala and presentations about the life of Mary Jones and Revd.Thomas Charles.

The trip will leave Solihull at about 8.30am returning by 7.00pm. The cost of the tour and lunch is £10. This should be a very enjoyable day exploring the life of Mary Jones.

We will be travelling by car so places are on a 'first, come first served' basis. If you are interested, please speak to Geoffrey Drake (0121 681 1411) or Trixie Harman (01675 442 859).

The story of Mary Jones

Mary Jones was born in December 1784 into a poor Welsh family. Her father was a weaver. Her parents were Calvinistic Methodists and Mary herself became a Christian aged eight. They lived at the foot of the Cader Idris mountain, in Gwynedd, North Wales. Longing for a Bible, Mary learned to read in schools organised by Thomas Charles, a preacher from nearby Bala, who had a passion for teaching children from poor families. Mary used to visit a farm two miles from her home to read a copy of the Bible there, but it became her burning desire to possess a Bible of her own. It was a vain hope, money was scarce and Welsh Bibles were hard to come by, but Mary saved money for six years, and eventually had enough money to buy one.

Her journey

One morning in 1800, Mary set out to buy her Bible. It was 25 miles to Bala, and she was barefoot, as usual. Her journey took her through valleys, across streams and around mountains. Eventually, she came to Bala and to the home of Mr Charles, the only man with Bibles for sale in the town, but all the copies he had were either sold or spoken for. Distraught and heartbroken, Mary wept. Her despair touched

that you can with some confidence say are **THE VALUES AND PRIORITIES FOR THE SORT OF SOCIETY FELLOW CHRISTIANS ACROSS THE WEST MIDLANDS WANT TO SEE IN 'TOMORROW'S COUNTRY'**.

The booklet tells you (a) how we went about getting the information, (b) the details of the responses and (c) honestly admits the limitations of the exercise as well as noting what it has achieved. It further suggests some reflection points that have arisen which might provide useful discussion material for you and your church.

The leaflet is for your pocket or handbag. Drawing on the results in the middle section of the booklet it indicates what sort of society those who responded want to see unfold in 'Tomorrow's Country' and suggests some question you might ask candidates at hustings and doorsteps and other encounters and lists in summary form the priorities of fellow Churchgoers.

I and those who have worked with me across our denominations in the West Midlands hope that this will seriously help churchgoers' engagement in the election. We hope it will allow you with confidence to know that what you are asking are things grounded in the concerns and hopes of fellow Christians working and worshipping alongside you in this region - all inspired and challenged by the same gospel

The Revd Roy Lowes
United Reformed Church Synod Moderator and
Secretary to the West Midlands Joint Public Issues Team

HUSTINGS EVENT

Sunday 19th April 7.45pm @ Oliver Bird Hall (St Alphege)

Hustings with opportunity to question parliamentary candidates for the Solihull Constituency - chaired by the Archdeacon of Aston.

GOOD FRIDAY WALK OF WITNESS

Churches Together in Central Solihull

We will gather outside St. Alphege church by the war memorial at 10.00am. We will process along the High Street and into Mell Square, where there will be a short service, after which we process back to St. Alphege Church for refreshments in the Oliver Bird hall.

Everyone will be very welcome

Churches Together in Olton

The Walk of Witness for Olton will start at 10.30am from Sonya's Bakery on Dovehouse Parade. We will walk down to Olton Hollow with stops for Worship along the way. There will be refreshments afterwards at St. Margaret's Church.

Churches Together in Hatchford Brook

Friends will gather on the Coventry Road, Sheldon, opposite the Wheatsheaf Hotel., at 11.30am, to walk down the Coventry Road.

PLEASANT SUNDAY AFTERNOON

26th April at 2.30pm at Hobs Moat.



There will be yet another opportunity to enjoy home-spun entertainment of the highest quality, provided as usual by **'You Yourselfs, Ladies and Gentlemen'**!

We shall stick to the tried and tested format – so do start polishing up your party pieces, songs, music, monologues, sketches, conjuring tricks, recitations, etc. This will be followed by tea and cakes (please bring cakes). There will be a retiring collection. Contact: Janet Ince (706 0204).

COACH TRIPPERS UNITED

TATTON PARK, Thursday, 16th April

Tatton Hall is located in 1,000 acres of beautiful deer park, We can witness life above and below stairs in the Mansion (open 1-5pm), wander at leisure through glorious Gardens (open 10am-6pm) and meet special rare breed animals at the working Farm (open 12-5pm). There are the Stables Restaurant and the Gardener's Cottage tearoom, and there are picnic tables in the Stableyard. It is a National Trust property.

If you would like to come, please contact **Val Cross (706 9687)** by **Sunday, 5th April**. The cost of the coach remains £18, and we leave Olton Church at 8.30am.

On 21st May we will be going to **Bletchley Park**. Further details next month.

In June we are going to Nottingham for a 3-hour cruise with Princess River Cruises. The inclusive cost of the coach and cruise will be £25.00.

What we have to do **now** is choose our meal. The options are:

Roast Beef and veg.

Roast Chicken Breast and veg.

Stuffed Pepper (stir-fried veg) and savoury rice

Lasagne (layers of pasta & chunky veg) with creamy white sauce

Please let Val Cross know your choice without delay.

Announcement



John and I would like to announce the marriage of our daughter Hazel Smart to Marc Taylor on Friday 3rd April.

Their Marriage Blessing is on Saturday, 4th April, at Christ Church Solihull at 2.00 pm, and all are welcome at the church.

Rosalind