



**ST ANDREW'S UNITED REFORMED CHURCH
WALTON-ON-THAMES**

NEWSLETTER

Volume 77 No 7

SEPTEMBER 2020



Dear God

*I tried my best but if today I lose my hope,
please tell me that your plans are better than my dreams*

Amen



From The Manse

September 2020

Dear friends

Hopefully this month's letter is an exciting one. When the Government allowed churches to reopen, with restrictions, we decided to take a cautious approach and remain entirely "on line" and by post a bit longer whilst we saw what happened to Covid levels. Although the current Covid pandemic worryingly continues, and although the restrictions and regulations around public worship continue to change (and have recently been increased), we are now probably in a position to be able to expand a little on what we're currently offering. Thus far we have faced the current situation together, as a pastorate, and working together is the way forward too. I'd like to say right from that start that the Elders and I remain grateful to suggestions made in response to the questions asked in the July magazine because they have helped identify this possible path.

- **Zoom Service.**

It is fairly obvious that, together with the Thought for the Day and Prayer, this will remain key to us. Available to everyone, these ensure that everyone receives something from their church every week and I know that it's appreciated. They will remain our base. Nothing will change at this point. The hope, by the way, is that it will evolve into the live streaming of a "real" service, probably using a different service provider. The order for an upgrade to the St Andrew's system has been placed but as you may imagine, world-wide demand for this sort of equipment has vastly exceeded supply. The people who supplied and installed the system will do the upgrade as soon as they can get the equipment they need.

Moving forward, though, you'll probably have already realised that a return to the old "normal" simply isn't practical yet. We have no idea how many from either congregation would feel safe to turn up to an actual church service. We have no idea how many Elders would be prepared to be on duty and we do also know that the number of visiting preachers willing to come at the moment is much reduced. The preaching plans for both churches lie in tatters and working within our own resources makes much sense. This means that the unvarnished truth is that, at this point, it's not realistic to try to open both churches immediately, every Sunday at 10.30am, but working together we can offer something from both sites so we're going to have a trial week start 13th September, to see what happens.

- **Reopening for service on a Sunday**

Subject to changes in regulations, on Sunday 13th September the Zoom service will come live from **St Andrew's** at **11.30am** and the church will be **OPEN** for any who would like to come. By law there will be a number of restrictions. For example, everyone will need to wear face coverings, sanitize their hands on entering the church, observe the 2 metre social distancing, and they won't be able to join in the singing of the hymns. There can also be no "after church coffee". Nonetheless, those who want to join together for an act of worship have the option to do so.

A number have already openly said they'd prefer to stick with the Zoom service in their home at the moment. Some, however, would like to come out to a service though so this could be how we can offer that. We shall need to keep a record of everyone who attends (in case we need that

information for tracking) and many churches have found it best to ask people to book a place in advance. Partly this is to help with fitting people in and partly because the number of places is limited. No one wants to have to turn people away if that limit is reached.

So, for those wanting to come to church and to share in a live act of worship then St Andrew's on 13th September at 11.30am - as an experiment. **Please "book" a place with me by 10th September.** It'll then be a bit like a wedding reception with a seat reserved and allocated to you to help maintain the social distancing. By the way, there is no intention to alter the normal service time permanently away from 10.30am. We shall be returning to it. It's just that at the moment 11.30am works better for a variety of practical reasons.

- **Reopening a mid-week opportunity**

Again as part of the trial, I'm keen to get something going at **Weybridge URC** as well. Here we have to be realistic and accept that relying on internet capability in the church isn't successful, even using a phone as a mobile hotspot, so instead we're looking at something Weybridge can do and can do well. As part of the trial, Weybridge URC will restore its customary **Wednesday morning** opening for an hour on the morning of **Wednesday 16th September - 10.00am – 11.00am.**

This then offers something (a) for those seeking a more personal "spiritual" space; (b) for those who don't want to go into an inside space where there may be a number of people; and (c) for those for whom physically coming into a church building is important but who think that what can currently be offered in a public service feels unappealingly bleak. There'll be appropriate, quiet music playing in the background the hope being that it's an opportunity for people to step aside from all the worries at the moment and offer a sacred space. The legal requirements, of course, will have to be in place and we shall need to keep a record of those attending in case of the need to contact them. For the experiment you'll need to book, although an allocated seat will probably not be necessary. **Please book with me by the evening of play on 15th September.**

So, using the resources available to us, albeit a little differently, are going to try to expand what we're able to offer and get something "up and running" at both St Andrew's and Weybridge URCs. No one's pretending it's going to be a return to normal. We can't manage that - but it will get both buildings open again and in action and it expands what we're offering quite a bit. That's why I hope you will think that this is an exciting letter as we look at ways of re-opening both churches.

Finally, we have to remember that in both congregations we have a number of people who are highly precious to us but who are also highly vulnerable. We also realise that some are still shielding for a number of reasons. I do not want anyone to feel under any pressure to come to something with which they are not comfortable. That's why I'm looking at expanding what we are offering but not replacing anything.

If you've any questions please don't hesitate to contact me - and remember, if you want to attend the Zoom Worship on 13th Sept or the "open hour" on 16th you're very welcome - but do also remember to book a place.

With all good wishes,



THE STATEMENT OF NATURE, FAITH AND ORDER OF THE URC

Our trip on the URC's Statement of Nature, Faith and Order, this month of September, moves to what happens when we all fall out!!

Held together in the Body of Christ
Through the freedom of the Spirit,
We rejoice in and uphold the rights of personal conviction.
For the sake of faith and fellowship
It shall be for the church to decide
When differences of conviction hurt our unity and peace.

**We commit ourselves
To speak the truth in love
And grow together
In the peace of Christ.**

This section is all about order and discipline and conviction- always a potential minefield! It begins by recognising that we are one body but that we don't all think in the same way, nor do we all come to the same conclusions. Since one of our tradition's roots is firmly placed within the soil of dissent there will, inevitably, be disagreements, just as there are in any family- and we talk about the family of the church. It's how those differences are dealt with which is the key.

In the past the church has not always been very good in dealing with different opinions- often resulting in schisms, bad feeling, violence and, all too often, extremely unchristian behaviour. Are we getting any better? That's actually quite an interesting question and the answer is one which I could be quite proud of the URC over.

Over the years, the General Assembly has had to arbitrate where differences of opinion could not be resolved within the other councils of the URC. As you know, I was ordained in 1987. That means that for much of my ministry a number of different issues surrounding matters of human sexuality have aroused hot debate. Interestingly, the way the Resolutions have come about have drawn on the fact that in our system the authority lies in local church meetings and that one church meeting can make a decision and that the next nearest URC's Church Meeting can make the exact opposite decision - and that both can be equally valid and respected. When the URC has been sailing through stormy water recently I reflect that, effectively, it's when there have been attempts by some to make "blanket rules" and undermine the authority of Church Meeting that the problems have become bitter. At its heart, it's our understanding of "the authority of Church Meeting" as opposed the authority of General Assembly which has seen us through. The reason why I could be quite proud of the URC therefore is that in some very fraught and difficult situations we have wrestled and managed to find ways forward which have retained our unity and allowed different churches and individuals to reach different conclusions with equal integrity. In other words, we've learnt how to disagree with one another without falling out with each other irreparably. That has to be an improvement on the days of yore!

Allow me another of my tangents. Inevitably, when the URC was formed some opposed it and spoke forcefully against the union. They argued their case but didn't carry the day. Some of those then became some of the hardest workers and staunchest supporters of the URC, throwing their lot in since they believed that the leading of the Holy Spirit had been discerned. Though they may have wished for a different outcome, that was, nonetheless, the way the church, of which they were a part, had discerned the Holy Spirit was leading. Their graciousness showed that corners need not be backed into.

I always have to hide a slight smile with the congregational response to this: “We commit ourselves to speak the truth in love.” I can think of a few arguments in Church Meetings where love has been noticeable by its absence in some remarks and I am also reminded of Dr David Cornick (a URC Minister and former URC General Secretary) who commented that “Our Fathers may well have been high-minded men (CP 516) 55- but they were also frequently bloody-minded men as well.” Perhaps in recent decades though we’ve also learnt to “grow together in the peace of Christ”, even when we hold different opinions - and to see our love and unity as being more important than winning every argument.

Sometimes the General Assembly has to resolve an issue but learning how to respect other people’s opinions, even if you can’t agree with them, is a rather more effective way of growing together in the peace of Christ, particularly since we’ve stated that we “respect the rights of personal conviction”. Freedom of conscience is a basic human dignity and the URC recognises that every person has this right. No one can dictate to another person what that person can or should believe.

Christians do have a dilemma when they come to witness for their own faith. They must be careful that they respect other people’s views and traditions, whilst maintaining their own enthusiasm for their own discoveries of faith. From our recent experience in the URC, I do believe we have something worth sharing more widely here.

Michael Hodgson



The Assembly Review Group met on Wednesday 22nd July by video-conferencing and carefully considered review documents from Wessex Synod, a reflection by their Synod Moderator, the Revd Clare Downing, and references sought from people in the wider church who have worked with Clare during her current term. The Synod document comprised a description of the review process conducted within the Synod, a summary of the feedback resulting from this, and the report of the Synod Review subsequent to their meeting with Clare.

On the same day the Assembly Review Group met first with the Synod Review Panel and then with Clare Downing, to discuss the documents they had provided and to examine carefully points arising in these.

The Assembly Review Group discerns an ongoing call from God to Clare to be the Wessex Synod Moderator and unanimously concurs with the Synod recommendation that she be re-appointed to serve a further term as Synod Moderator until her retirement on 31st August 2026.

This recommendation will now be brought by the Nomination Committee to November’s Mission Council, which will be asked to confirm it as a decision of the Church.

Look out in the October issue for an easy-to-complete, short Questionnaire giving you the opportunity to share your thoughts on the Newsletter and to put forward suggestions for what you would most like included in the future! *Ed*

Thanks to our Minister for providing this Biblical Quiz to keep us on our toes!

WHO AM I?

Here are 10 well known Biblical characters - but can you identify them from these clues? Most are very simple but just a few to stretch the old grey matter! There are five from the Old Testament and five from the New.

- 1) My Mother is Eve and the offering I made to The Lord was unacceptable.
- 2) I am a youngish woman, who was widowed young when my first husband, Mahlon, died. I gained great support from my Mother-in-law, who had also been widowed and I stuck with her. Happily I have just remarried a man called Boaz, who is one of her relatives.
- 3) I had a difficult start to life but if Pharaoh thought that a group of women didn't know how to get their own way then he really didn't know women very well! I had problems with a bush though, long before America had even been discovered. *Nec Tamen Consumeatur!*
- 4) My father was a key figure in the story of the Old Testament - a king in fact. To be honest, I'm not a very nice person but my big downfall was that I really should have got my hair cut before I tried riding a mule under an oak tree. I was left a sitting, or rather, a hanging target for Joab to kill. When my Father heard I was dead he was devastated.
- 5) I was the last of the Judges of Israel. Mum was Hannah and Dad was Eklanah. My first job was in the Temple working with Eli where, contrary to a hymn's false statement, I didn't never nick his watch, honest! I didn't have an easy life and even after I died Saul couldn't manage without me. He got the Witch at Endor to contact me so I told him that he should have listened to me whilst I was still alive!
- 6) Brother of Andrew, I was happily working as a fisherman until Jesus called me to become a disciple. I got lots wrong but must have done something right because Jesus changed my name to something rather flattering.
- 7) Do you know, my name doesn't even get a mention but after I'd been healed guess who had to get up immediately, make a meal for a group of men and look after them. Men are so useless - they couldn't even bring me a cup of tea before I had to start cooking for them!
- 8) My husband is Zechariah and I've a cousin called Mary. Zech and I have a son called John. Think he's going to turn out to be a hippie though and he flatly refuses to wear a nice shirt and tie for him Mum.
- 9) I'm a senior civil servant, working for the Roman authority. Lots of papers come across my desk each week and I'm currently working through the second of two from a chap called Luke. He's not a bad writer. It's a more interesting read than many. Just wish he'd not got so bogged down in his frankly tedious travelogue of the journeys made by a man called Paul - or is it Saul?
- 10) I come from Thyatira. I'm a professional lady with my own business selling purple goods- very expensive. I heard Paul speak and was very impressed by him so I got baptised - and my household did too. He and Timothy even stayed with me, which was great, but there was then an unfortunate incident in the street which culminated in Paul and Timbo having to make something of a hasty exit.

Answers in the October issue



75TH ANNIVERSARY OF VJ DAY

Whilst VE Day marked the end of the war in Europe, VJ Day marked the day Japan surrendered on 15 August 1945, which in effect ended the Second World War. VJ Day came at a heavy price. Britain and the Commonwealth's principal fighting force, the Fourteenth Army, which came to be known as the 'Forgotten Army', was one of the most diverse in history: over 40 languages were spoken and all the world's major religions represented. In commemoration of the 75th Anniversary, there was a Service of Remembrance at the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire where The Prince of Wales, who attended the event with the Duchess of Cornwall, led a two-minute silence.

Members of our two congregations at St Andrew's and Weybridge had memories of relatives who had been Prisoners of War at the time, some of whom had miraculously survived. One survivor had returned to describe Burma as "a land of mystery and a thousand smells". Another recalled two Rotary Club members one of whom had operated the radio in Changi Jail (during the Japanese Occupation of Singapore from 1942-45 Changi Prison was converted into an internment camp for civilians and Prisoners of War). Another remembered his relative who had been in India as a doctor supporting those with malaria: he had, sadly, died of polio just before VJ Day. Yet another member's relative had been a POW in Japan for four long years and lived to tell the tale. Another member recalled an uncle from Peterhead who was a trainee pharmacist in the Medical Corps and died as a POW in Borneo in 1945 at the age of 20 (his name lives on in his great nephew, Ian, who was named after him). A common theme running through was that those who survived to return home never spoke of their POW experiences.

Our profound thanks to all those Commonwealth and Allied Forces, without whose contribution victory and the freedoms and way of life we enjoy today would not have been possible.

Ed

From the World Peace Prayer

Lead me from death too life;
From falsehood to truth.

Lead me from despair to hope;
From fear to trust.

Lead me from hate to love;
From war to peace.

Let peace fill our hearts, our world, our universe.

Amen

ARTPEACE AND FRIENDS

OUR SUPPORT: I have lost count of the occasions when people have told me of their reticence to donate to Africa. They are either wary whether their hard-earned money will reach those in real need or that it might disappear into a large hole with no meaningful feedback. Not so with support for 'ArtPeace and



Friends' as donors are often shown photos of the recipients of their gift within a week or so. The artists are keen their UK friends know their donations are being put to good use. The few left with old mobiles do their best to provide photos like the above.

Last month readers may recall how artist Fortune shared his food with three impoverished children - thirteen-year-old Charmaine above right who has a few menial jobs to support her two siblings Chipu and Rudo (above left). This story prompted a couple of donations from different ends of the country with quick feedback. The family were thrilled with the money. Fortune said: 'I bought a sack of mealie meal, flour, sugar, salt and the change I left with them for Grinding meal fee. The older sister says she wants to buy some pads which are used by women when in periods as she was using some old cloths which cause nasty infections.' Charmaine said: 'Thanks Mr Simpson - now we have got something for porridge especially sugar and money to pay for grinding our meal – please thank the donors very much. Later that day, Fortune said: 'This little girl (right) is my close neighbour. Her parents are away cutting firewood to sell and have left her with nothing to eat and no option but to go around looking for food and ending up eating junk from garbage bins.'



THE MASS PROTEST planned for the 31st July never took place. The government shut down the capital Harare in order to halt planned opposition protests. It also used the coronavirus as a pretext for clamping down on civil society. In the run up to the demonstrations, innocent men and women were beaten by army and police and terror reigned. Few dared show their face as they risked arrest and imprisonment. I received some horrific videos of beatings taken clandestinely. In the days after, soldiers with AK47's strapped on their backs or sticks in their hands were seen on the streets. Award winning journalist Hopewell Chin'ono who originally exposed corruption at the highest levels is still incarcerated along with many other brave Zimbabweans - the misery continues. People fought for freedom, not to replace one oppressor with another.



TOO LATE: Another artist reported: 'No Transport to take a woman about to deliver a baby - it was around 5 pm when I came across this scene and took this photo. The woman had been waiting for transport since midnight to take her to hospital. Her family hired this couch cart passing by selling vegetables, so the owner agreed to offload his cargo and take her later that day. The following day sadly I heard that this woman died together with her unborn baby. The cart guys refused to take her on seeing her condition as she was too far gone.'



ZIMBABWE'S HEALTH SERVICE HAS ALL BUT COLLAPSED:

Warning: Some readers may find the image below distressing. Recently, seven babies were stillborn in one night at Harare Central Hospital after urgent treatment was delayed because of staffing issues due to a strike. Harare's two main state hospitals are run by a skeleton nursing staff - mostly senior matrons who cannot go on strike and only a handful of nurses and doctors are working. The nationwide strike is due to a lack of personal protective equipment and meagre salaries too low to live on. Maternity wards are overwhelmed. It is alleged that multi-million-dollar contracts were awarded to buy supplies at inflated prices - the health minister has subsequently been sacked over the allegations. Many of the capital's smaller clinics have also been affected, or closed, by industrial action which began in June, prompting many pregnant women to come to Harare Hospital, overwhelming the maternity ward. One doctor said: 'These are not isolated incidents. This is repeated every day and all we can do is watch them die. This is torture for the families and for the junior doctors.' Zimbabwe's Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists described the situation in hospitals as 'grave,' and 'beyond dire'.



GOOD NEWS! Marlow URC elders have again decided to recommend to its congregation, a substantial donation towards the cost of seed, fertiliser and vital pest control chemicals. This is wonderful news for ArtPeace and Friends. The artists have already started the back breaking work clearing their fields. Last year's bumper harvest kept their heads above water – not only the group but neighbours and friends and often desperate children like Charmaine and her siblings – so many benefit. Some artists said that without this help, they would surely 'be lying in their graves'. My thanks again to all those whose vital support so lifts morale and puts smiles on faces – together we can change lives for the better. **Johnston Simpson**

THANK GOD FOR THE GIFT OF A SENSE OF HUMOUR!

I'm sure we've all put things in safe places so that we don't lose them - and then can't remember where that safe place is. I'm sure, too, that we've all gone into a room (or gone upstairs) to get something, got distracted and then returned to what we were doing without it, completely forgetting that we'd gone into the room for a reason. Over the years, however, I've learned never to say "I can't have been that stupid". The evidence proves, beyond all possible doubt, that I can.

Some years ago I was having some friends round for supper and decided to make an apple pie. I decided to be all posh and use the pie dish that matches my dinner-service. I made the pastry and put it in the fridge to rest and chill whilst I went into the dining room to get the aforementioned pie dish. Now, I am sure that none of you will know what I'm talking about if I say about a sideboard with rather more in it than there should be. I'm sure that you won't understand the concept that in order to reach something a number of other things had to be taken out first! Anyway, I sat on my haunches and began.

It was when I had taken the last thing out of the sideboard and now had its entire contents ranged around me on the floor that I was left wondering why'd I'd just done that? What was I after - what did I want? Needless to say, I hadn't got a clue. Totally unable to remember why I'd started this I decided to make the best of a bad job and get a cloth to wipe the sideboard out since it was now completely empty - even though I didn't know why. As soon as I went into the kitchen I saw the rolling pin and the bowl of stewed apple and remembered what I'd gone into the dining room for in the first place. At least on that occasion I did get a clean sideboard in compensation.

I've been known to buy the same thing twice, completely forgetting that I've already bought it. On the other hand, not long ago I went to buy toothpaste and whilst in that section of the shop, made a detour to pick up some Germoline. That evening, as I went to brush my teeth I found the empty toothpaste tube and remembered what I'd actually wanted to get. I also suspected that Germoline was unlikely to make a good substitute.

My classic, though, has to be the toilet duck. I bought it with the rest of my weekly shop; got home; unpacked the shopping and went to take the toilet duck upstairs. Do you think that I could see it? As Herod commanded the Wise Men, I went and searched diligently through the shopping but, in the immortal words of AA Milne, "The more Pooh looked, the more Piglet wasn't there". Perhaps I'd forgotten to get it - but I was sure I had - and the receipt (which I could find) confirmed that I'd paid for it. Still no toilet duck was to be found though and in the end I just had to put it down to having left it in the bagging area at the supermarket.

A couple of months later I had to ask myself a rather unusual question. "Michael, why is there a toilet duck in the freezer?"

Never say, "I can't have been that stupid". The answer is so depressing. Also, thank God for the ability to laugh at yourself. It's a very valuable gift that he gives us.

Michael Hodgson

**A THANK YOU TO ALL MEMBERS AND FRIENDS OF THE 1,400 URC CONGREGATIONS
FROM IAN HARDIE, TREASURER OF THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH
AND JOHN PIPER, DEPUTY TREASURER - AUGUST 2020**

‘THANK YOU’ for your unique and vital contribution to the life of the United Reformed Church, and for the work of the kingdom which we are able to do together in God’s name

We are living through an extraordinary and challenging time – a very anxious time for everyone; a difficult time for many; and a time of suffering and loss for some. Yet, the main purpose of this letter is to say **‘thank you’** to each of you for all that you have done for the Church in the past; for all that you continue to do even in these difficult times; and for what you will do in the future.

As we are treasurers, you will not be surprised that the focus of this letter is on finance. But we recognise that finance is only a means to the end which is our doing of God’s work together.

‘Thank you’ for your giving to your local church.

Financially, this giving is the lifeblood of your own church and of the whole United Reformed Church across England, Scotland and Wales. It is this personal giving that enables your local church treasurer to pay your church’s bills. Typically, the largest of those ‘bills’ is the contribution your local church pays to the URC Ministry and Mission Fund. This Fund meets the central costs of the United Reformed Church. The total budget is around £20 million and is approved each year by Mission Council. Over 80% of this money is spent on ministers and church related community workers – their training, stipends and pensions. But the other 20% also achieves an enormous amount on behalf of us all. General Assembly 2020 was severely constrained because of the Covid-19 lockdown, but the reports written for General Assembly are available on the URC website, and they paint pictures of all the work that has been done in our name over the last two years and much of that work is ongoing.

‘Thank you’ for your giving and the giving of your local church last year.

In 2019, over **£19.4 million was given by local churches and synods to the Ministry and Mission Fund**. The total contributions from local churches reduced very slightly but the average giving per member has, once again and remarkably, gone up by more than inflation.

‘Thank you’ for your continued giving this year.

We fully understand that circumstances this year are difficult. Most local churches have been unable to meet for over five months. We have not had the usual opportunities to make our offerings for the work of the Church. But most of the costs of the local church and of the denomination have not reduced and some have increased as a consequence of the pandemic. We are also aware that some have lost income or work this year and are therefore in great financial difficulty. But there are others on fixed incomes who are actually better off than they might otherwise have been. **So, please continue to give what you can in whatever way you can – or save it up until you can hand it over.**

Any giving of ours is a response to the amazing generosity and love of God which we see in Jesus. Nevertheless, **it is important for us to say ‘thank you’ to each and all of you.**

If you have any questions or comments arising from this letter then please speak to your church treasurer, who has been provided with more detailed information. If they are not able to help directly then they can get in touch with the finance team at Church House.

Yours in Christ,

Ian and John

Another interesting article from our friend Fr David Harold-Barry SJ. David, like many of us is somewhat restricted in his movements. There is also a curfew in Harare from 6pm to 6am. **JS**

HAGIA SOPHIA, DIVINE WISDOM. It was twelve years ago; I was in Turkey and we were running late. A visit to Hagia Sophia, the massive Cathedral built by Emperor Justinian between 532 and 537, was on our programme. We were crossing the Sea of Marmora and I was looking at my watch. We would not make it. But Mehmet, our Muslim guide, persuaded the guards to allow us in even though it was after hours. We had this magnificent building to ourselves and I felt the emotion of standing in a place, adorned with icons and mosaics, where people had come to pray and celebrate the Eucharist for nine hundred years before the city fell to the Muslims in 1453.



The Muslim Ruler at the time, also called Mehmet, had the icons and mosaic decorations covered over, but not destroyed, by whitewash. Then he put up Muslim symbols and turned the building into a mosque and so it remained for near to five hundred years. The Ottoman (Muslim) Empire collapsed at the end of the First World War and the founder of modern Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, in a gesture of reconciliation and modernisation, kept Hagia Sophia neither as a mosque nor as a Christian cathedral, but made it a museum, a neutral meeting place for all people.

Now this generous and imaginative act has been reversed and, despite protests from all over the world, the Islamic fundamentalist minded Muslims in Turkey, led by their populist-oriented ruler, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, have made it a mosque again. 'Populism' is a rediscovered ideology which thrives on responding to the narrow interests of inward-looking nationalism. The opposite is imagination, generosity and compassion and the loss of these qualities through this decision is causing the world to weep. Just when we need a dose of hope in a time of multiple challenges, we have an action which takes us backwards. Islam is going through this phase at the moment.

It has not always been like that and, even now, not all Muslims agree with this revanchist response. If Mehmet, who took us round the sites of the Apostle Paul's labours in, what was then, Asia Minor, is one to go by, there are many in Turkey who want to be open and welcoming to people who are different. Mehmet astonished me by the number of times he devoutly referred to 'Mother Mary', who appears in the Koran more often than she does in the Bible. He was not just being nice to a group of retired teachers from Catholic Ireland.



Hagia Sophia, Divine Wisdom, was from 1934 to a few weeks ago a symbol, drawing all people together in solidarity. This decision, to return it to being a mosque, is deeply painful, as Pope Francis has said. The people who made it cannot see that they are returning to a divisive past just when the world is searching for ways of coming together.

One consolation is that they do not have the momentum of history on their side. The decision will be reversed but not until it has run its course – as happened in Russia, when the revolutionaries renamed St Petersburg as Leningrad. The name was used for seventy years but now the city has reverted to its old name. And so it will be with Hagia Sophia, when narrow religious feeling has become a spent force.



! CONGRATULATIONS !

To Shirley McGrath's grandchildren, Kitty and to her cousin Joe Xiberras. Kitty is delighted to have been accepted by Durham University (her first choice) to read Spanish, Biology and Maths. Joe has done well to achieve 10 GCSEs while also having a huge commitment to training for rock climbing. He is on the Olympic Team (one of only 73 in the country) and hoping to represent the UK in the near future.

To Jim and Janet Sommerville's grandson, Callum Walsh, for his excellent results in Maths, Physics, Chemistry and Further Maths. He will be going to Birmingham University to study Chemical Engineering.

We wish them all the very best for their future careers!



DESPERATELY SEEKING TO MOVE

I'm looking for a new home and wondered if I could come and live with any of you? My name is Lucy and I'm a very quiet, industrious little spider, a distant relation of Charlotte. My capacity for work is considerable. Each day I spin lots of webs around the manse, all of the finest quality. I make no fuss - just get on with it. Your minister, however, doesn't seem to appreciate all my hard work and has been really horrible to some of my family. So, if any of you would like to give me a nice home I'll happily come and create my cobwebs for you.

Yours hopefully, Lucy

PS Your minister says he'll gladly give me a lift over.

"My daughter asked me for a pet spider for her birthday so I went to our local pet shop and they were £70! Blow this, I thought, I can get one cheaper off the web... (or free, as above!)."

SOME MEDICAL GEMS (from Medical Secretaries, NHS, Glasgow)

The patient has no previous history of suicides.

Patient has left her white blood cells at another hospital.

Patient's medical history is remarkably insignificant with only a 40lb weight gain in the past three days.

Patient has chest pain if she lies on her left side for over a year.

On the second day the knee was better and on the third day it disappeared.

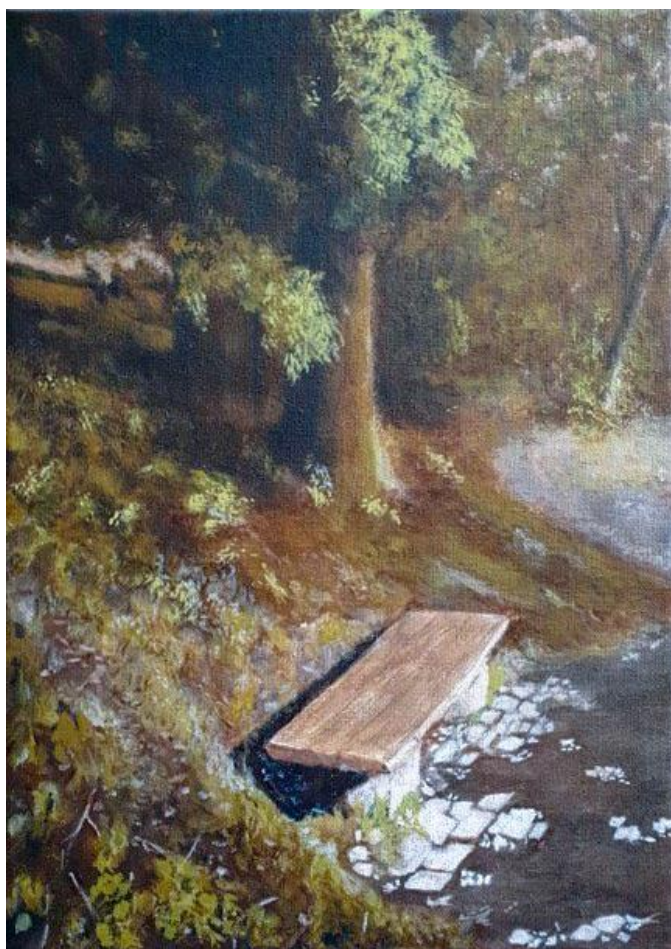
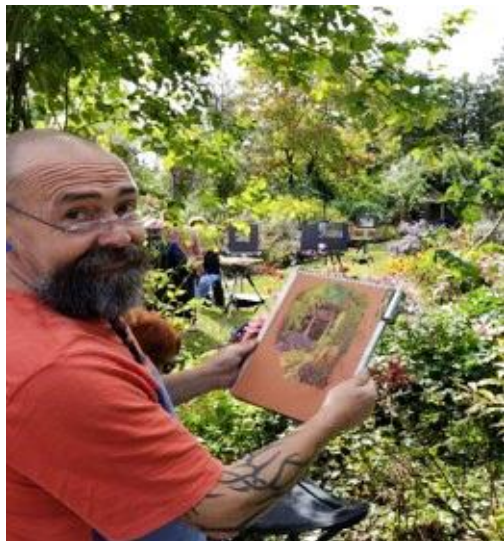
Healthy appearing decrepit 69-year old male, metal alert but forgetful.

COPY DATE FOR OCTOBER ISSUE : WEDNESDAY 16 SEPTEMBER

ALL ITEMS TO THE EDITOR, NORMA REID, 3 GWALIOR ROAD, LONDON SW15 1NP
Tel: 020 8785 4392 Email: aristocats.2000@gmail.com

A WORK OF ART

I first met Stephen Best (62) at the Windermere URC centre around seven years ago when he attended a painting course along with Susan. We got on like the proverbial house on fire and shared the same sense of humour - most evenings, the rafters shook with the sound of laughter. Stephen, a quiet thoughtful man, was born in Cardiff and like many of his countrymen is blessed with a great voice. Once, on being called to give a Bible reading after the evening meal, his voice was electrifying and made the words leap off the page and come alive. After University (studied French and Russian) from 1981, he spent thirty years as a Lawyer including twelve running his own business. He joined the URC in 1982, candidated for ministry, studied part time at Northern College, Manchester and ordained as a non-stipendiary minister in 2016. His specialisms are: Transitional Ministry, Good Grief (training funeral celebrants) and mentoring those exploring roles in the church. His current title is Emerging Ministries Mentor. He has contributed for a number of years to the URC Prayer Handbook. We kept in touch after the Windermere Centre sadly closed. Our editor is always desperate for new material, so I thought why not add another artistic dimension to ArtPeace. Shown below is some of Stephen's work and the thought processes that went into each painting.



Left: When walking I always look out for spots which resonate with a particular energy or have a special feel to them. At the Windermere Centre I liked to spend any free afternoon walking the path from the town uphill to Orrest Head. The views from the top were always spectacular, but I could never pass this bench without pausing to sit a moment. It's one of my "quiet connecting places".



Right: My inspiration for this painting came from the poem "The Empty Church" by the great RS Thomas. It is a poem which speaks of the hunger of faith and unfulfilled (as yet) hope, as well as human yearning for light in the darkness.



Left: I painted this as an ordination present for a great friend, to remind her of the times we walked under the trees in the local park outside theological college and pick horse chestnuts together (my mother holds to the belief that they deter spiders coming into the house). I wanted it to speak too of the hope of new beginnings which can only come after we have seen gone through the endings which precede them. Autumn always holds that promise for me and sustains me through the winter, as I look for the tentative fresh green shoots of Spring.

Right: I had begun an imaginary landscape and had not intended to paint this cross, but it asked to come out of the oranges reds and yellows I had been wrestling with. So I picked up some blue paint and within 20 minutes it was there.



Below: My inspiration for this painting was the Old Testament story of Elijah in the cave (1 Kings: 19). I painted it at a time of introspection when I was thinking about a future direction in ministry. But everything is open to interpretation; one friend remarked that she thought the painting was a view INTO the cave, not out of it.



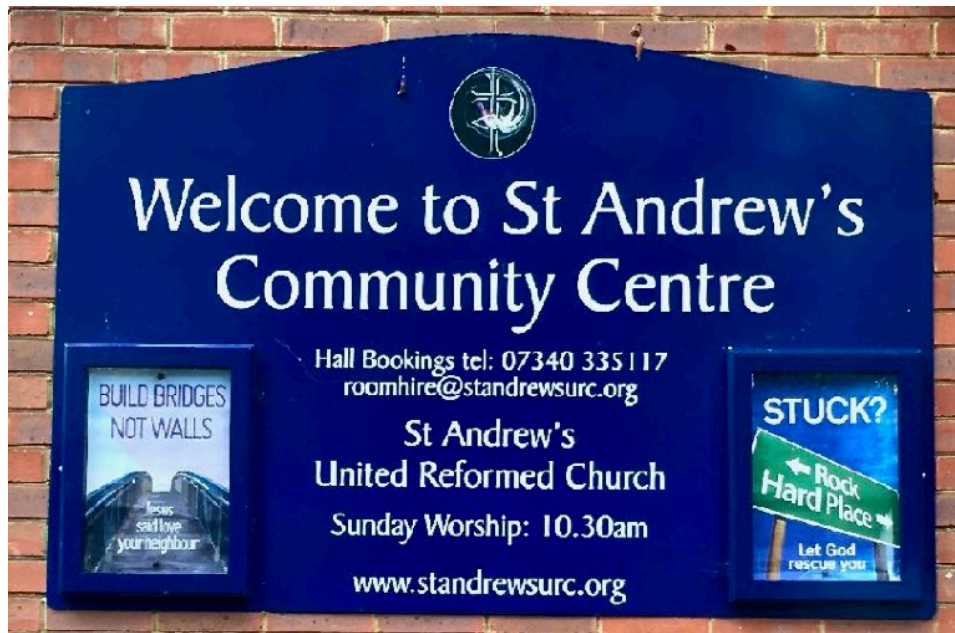
Below: I like to work with charcoal. I came up with numerous studies of hands and feet during lockdown and here are two which for me captured



something of the angst, vulnerability and bewilderment which I found so prevalent at the time.



Stephen has enjoyed several very successful exhibitions and methinks he is perhaps on the cusp of yet another new career. **JS**



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Please note that we are opening St Andrew's once again for a service, for the first time since lockdown, on Sunday 13 September. For now, it will start at 11.30 am rather than its original time of 10.30 am. Face coverings and social distancing are required and there will be no singing of hymns.

We plan to continue with the Zoom services for the foreseeable future and a weekly "Thought for the Day" and a prayer are also available by post or email. Please contact the minister for inclusion.

Anyone who wishes to take part in the Zoom service should contact the minister, who will be able to send them a link to enable easy participation.

You are all most welcome to join us!

If you would like the church to be opened for private prayer, please contact the minister.

Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaining. Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.

I Peter 4 vv 8-10