



ST ANDREW'S UNITED REFORMED CHURCH
WALTON AND WEYBRIDGE



THE GRAPEVINE



OCTOBER 2025

Volume 4 No 8



Harvest bounty at Borough Market, Southwark

*"The year goes wrong, and tares grow strong,
Hope starves without a crumb;
But God's time is our harvest time,
And that is sure to come."*

William Blake

From The Manse

October 2025



Dear friends

I wonder if this month and next I am allowed a couple of reflective letters? All jobs change over a period of time and the role and routine of a minister is no exception. One obvious big change since I was ordained, 38 years ago, is that in 1987 the majority of churches still had a morning and an evening service. Most churches had a Sunday School or Junior Church and the main church in my first pastorate had 40 or 60 children in theirs, split into the various “departments” or “classes”. In fact, whilst I was there the Juniors’ Department became so big it had to be split into two separate classes. Sadly, most churches are very different today, although thankfully at St Andrew’s Walton and Weybridge we do have Messy Church hanging on in there and excellent relations with our uniformed organisations whereas that main church from my first pastorate has no children at all today, not even on the fringe. I have not had a regular evening service since I left Swindon in 2006.

There also seemed to have been a lot more meetings 40 years ago although I am not sure that they got us very far. Like many ministers I shudder at the memory of monthly Church Meetings. Old Congregationalists regarded them as being the powerhouse of the church but I’m afraid that the experience of many ministers, me included, was that all too often they were utterly ghastly occasions; fractious and with there appearing to be a competition each month to see who could be the meanest and the most petty. Dreaded by many ministers, a number used to take a mild tranquilliser in order to cope with the monthly Church Meeting. I admit that I have never been a great meetings fan and have vowed that after this year I am never chairing another one! It will also probably take quite a bit to get me even to go to one. Perhaps I could call my new house “Dunmeetings”! Looking back in my diaries at the number of meetings I can’t help thinking that it’s a wonder I ever had any time to tell anyone about Jesus!

Forty years ago, early retirement packages were common and so we were encouraged to ask those members of our congregations who were taking early retirement to consider taking on significant roles in church life, regarding their work experience as being a rich resource on which to draw. Things are rather different today. Those early retirement packages don’t exist as they did; society has changed and grandparents are often far more actively involved in child care. Basically, for all sorts of reasons that pool has all but dried up.

Pastoral visiting has changed a bit too. Forty years ago I could call on retired people in the afternoon and they would probably be in. The idea of making an appointment to do a pastoral visit would have been really odd. Today it would be silly not to. Looking back, though, was it arrogant to assume that when you called unannounced people would be happy to stop what they were doing and put the kettle on? Or was it a nice surprise – a bit of company? I don’t know. I also do less hospital visiting now, partly because people tend to be in for shorter periods. For example, 40 years ago cataract ops used to be a 4-day stay. Now they are a short, outpatients appointment. Hospital parking can be expensive and difficult and so if someone is only going to be in for a short time I tend to wait until they are back home. I still think that home visits are important though and always feel that I know someone much better once I’ve seen them at home. I will admit that I disagree with those of my colleagues who don’t see pastoral visiting as being important. I also don’t see how you can preach week after week to the same congregation, trying to meet their spiritual needs, when you don’t really know them and what their needs are.

Then there is the whole world of IT. I’ve been on some steep learning curves! When I began I had a manual typewriter (on which I used to cut stencils as well), a packet of carbon paper and bottle of Tippex! When I asked my first pastorate about getting a computer the answer came back as a very firm, “No” – it wasn’t necessary for a minister! How times have changed since then. That same church also refused to buy an Overhead Projector

for use in church because they felt it was inappropriate for a place of worship. I wonder what they make of data projectors, powered by a computer? To us now, at St A W&W it's so "normal". Emails have become the norm too and since Lockdown, many of the meetings I attend are now on online. All ministers now must undertake regular "pastoral supervision" meetings. I meet with my pastoral supervisor every couple of months – but we have never met in person. And 40 years ago it would have been unthinkable for a local church to have a regular congregation joining in their service from different countries and continents. Today, we are delighted that ArtPeace are able to join in our service. As for a funeral where the service is conducted in England and the tribute is given from a house in Canada – we have done that! Forty years ago it would have been mind-blowing. For us it's now quite normal – indeed, back in June, when Janet and I buried Mum's ashes a cousin in Australia joined us in the cemetery via a Messenger call and he did the Bible reading in the service too.

One of the things I have really missed here though is the opportunity to go into schools and take Assembly. It doesn't seem to happen in this area despite my trying to get invitations. In the past I have always done a lot of school assemblies and thoroughly enjoyed them too. They seemed to be well received and schools often trusted me to the extent of asking me to take an assembly whilst they were having an inspection. That meant a lot to me. It's been one of the things I've been known for; which I miss; and I am really rather sad to think that I shall never do another one. I have been a School Governor but gave up because I disagree with the responsibility now placed on local governing bodies and the assumptions being made about those on them. I was happy to be an interested, encouraging friend who supported the teachers and the children but, sadly, that role has now changed and not for the better I think.

You may be interested to know that when I left college the thing which worried me the most was the challenge of having to write a sermon or two every week, to be preached to the same congregation, month after month, year after year. How would I ever cope? Could I produce them all? That prospect really scared me. It still does. About 45 years after I started as a lay preacher I've never failed – but it remains a challenge. That's why I write my sermons a month in advance (if not more). Writing ahead means that if I am struggling I have time to do something about it. It would scare me witless to write my sermons on a Saturday evening! What if I didn't get any inspiration? I am also mindful of a comment from one of my college lecturers about organising your working life. He said that, "You can ask the Holy Spirit to give you the strength and energy to preach the Word but you can't expect the Spirit to bail you out of your laziness". That may be a bit of straight talking but how right he was. All my sermons have been my own work too. I don't pull them off the web! I can't preach other people's sermons. I hope, therefore, that over the years I have preached a few good sermons. I know that I've preached a few bad ones but I can put my hand on my heart and say to you that they are all my own work and that no sermon of mine has ever failed because the work wasn't put into the writing in the first place.

My final reflection this month, though, arises from when I did my last sabbatical. I contacted my previous pastorates to ask them how my ministry had equipped them for their futures – what had survived, what had they been able to build on? Many of them came back and said that they remembered my ministry with them as being a happy time – a time when church life had been busy and had been filled with fun and joy and laughter. Many said they never knew what I was going to come up with next, one even remembering when I got the Boys' Brigade to erect a tent in church during a parade service. Another person, in another church, remembered when we had all made mince pies one Advent Sunday as the children's address, whilst we thought about the meaning of Advent. These were then cooked and served with after-church coffee. I hope that my ministry has never been boring or predictable and if it's being remembered for joy, for laughter, for fun and for fellowship then that's fine by me.

With all good wishes,



SERVICES AND OTHER KEY DATES OCTOBER 2025

"He who sows, even with tears, the precious seed of faith, hope, and love, shall doubtless come again with joy, bringing his sheaves with him, because it is the very nature of that seed to yield a joyful harvest."

Richard Cecil

Sunday 5 October	10.30 am	Morning Worship with Holy Communion We welcome the Revd Dr Michael Hopkins, Synod Moderator, who will be preaching.
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Tuesday 7 October	7.30 pm	Elders' Meeting Hersham Room
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Friday 10 October	12.30 - 2.30 pm	People Who Lunch - Church Hall Everyone is welcome at this monthly get-together on the second Friday of the month. For just £5 you can have soup, a roll, dessert, cheese cheese and biscuits and coffee/tea. Puddings a speciality!
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Advance booking recommended and necessary if you are coming in a group!

To book your place please contact Elizabeth Scharinger by email:
administrator@standrewsurc.org

Sunday 12 October	10.30 am	 Morning Worship celebrating Harvest
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COPY DATE FOR NOVEMBER ISSUE: WEDNESDAY 15 OCTOBER

*All items (provided they do not contravene copyright regulations) to the Editor or Associate Editor
 (please see back page for contact details)*

Sunday 19 October	10.30 am	Morning Worship
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	3.00 pm	 Messy Church
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Sunday 26 October	10.30 am	Morning Worship
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CELEBRATING HARVEST



Harvest Festival will be on 12 October at 10.30am. As usual, it will be a family service with the uniformed organisations present and taking part. It is always a lovely service and, although the Beavers will be away on District Beaver Camp, they hope to do a reading and send us a message as they did last year. Gifts of tinned and packaged food will be welcome and going to the Walton & Hersham Foodbank, as in previous years. The Foodbank is also appealing for toiletries such as soap, toothpaste, tooth brushes etc.

Michael Hodgson

News of the Church Family

In Memoriam

We were sad to learn of the death of Jean Smillie on 6 September. We send our condolences and love to her family and friends. There will be an appreciation of Jean's life in the November issue.

Prayers

Please remember in your prayers everyone in the church family who has some special need at this time.

Remember particularly

those who are unwell at home or in hospital;
those no longer able to live an active, independent life;
those living in care homes;
those who feel lonely and isolated;
those for whom daily life is proving difficult.

Chinese Whispers

After a little gentle encouragement from the Editor, we have received this welcome news of Zacc who is happily installed and enjoying his second spell in China. We look forward to more Chinese Whispers soon!



In Yuexiu Park, Guangzhou

I arrived here at the start of August, so it's hard to believe I've been out here nearly two months already. As well as exploring Guangzhou and all it has to offer (which is plenty!), I've also managed a bit of travelling - trips to Hong Kong and Shanghai, with Cambodia coming up next week.

I'm teaching at the British School of Guangzhou, which is the longest running British international school in the city. Life at school is busy but enjoyable, and I'm settling in well.



At work

I'm definitely missing playing the organ and everyone at St Andrew's, but Stratus has a new album out on Spotify in a few days (please stream it!) and I'll share more next month. Not long now until I'm back for Christmas - I'm really looking forward to being part of the carol service again, and hopefully squeezing in a Stratus gig too.

Zacc Rodwell

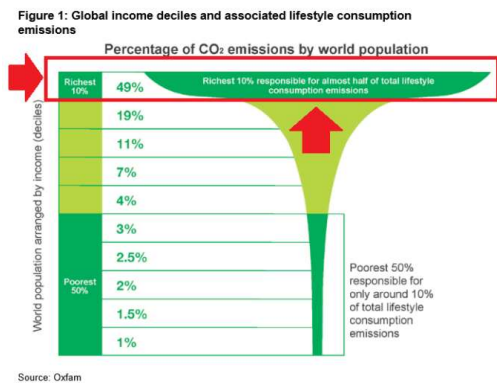
Climate justice

Teresa Bacon



Climate change hurts us (remember those four heatwaves this summer?) and it hurts the natural world too, but climate change isn't fair. The poorest and most vulnerable people suffer the most - people on low incomes in the UK living in homes that are stifling hot in summer, or freezing cold and damp in winter, and people in developing countries in the Global South who are simply struggling to survive.

Christian Aid has been talking about climate justice for years and it continues to be a key focus for good reason: failing to address the effect of climate change in the poorest countries risks undoing some of the progress that has been made in tackling poverty. Climate justice is about finding solutions to the climate crisis that reduce emissions and protect the natural world in a way that creates a fairer, more just and more equal world.



The climate crisis is deepening inequalities, driving disadvantaged people into even more vulnerable positions, yet they have contributed the least to the problem. Wealthy and powerful people and countries, who are largely responsible for the crisis, often make money from it.

The richest 10% of the world's population accounts for almost half of total lifestyle consumption emissions (Oxfam 2024; Carbon inequality kills).

The poorest 50% are responsible for about 10% of these emissions.

Without dramatic action to mitigate climate change and reduce the risk of climate disasters, by 2050, the United Nations estimates that 200 million people per year will need humanitarian assistance due to the effects of climate change.

One phrase stuck in my mind from the time when I was a volunteer at Christian Aid's office in London: 'Leave no-one behind'. This should frame our thinking around climate justice as well as sustainable development, as the solutions for both should promote social and economic fairness.



Many countries in the Global South and some people here in the UK need help to adapt to a climate that is becoming harsher and more unpredictable, and support when disaster strikes, e.g. floods, drought, wildfires or rising sea levels. Who should pay? It seems only right that those who have done the most to cause the climate crisis should pay to deal with it. The 'polluter pays principle' may be applied to climate policy to address greenhouse gas emissions e.g. via carbon taxes and emissions trading schemes to ensure that polluters are financially responsible for their impact on the climate and air pollution.

As Christians, we are called to challenge injustice wherever it exists. I love seeing very different organisations such as Christian Aid, Oxfam, Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth, CAFOD, Extinction Rebellion, the Quakers, Global Justice Now, Christian Climate Action and Islamic Relief standing together calling for climate justice!

Climate justice is no longer simply a moral obligation, but a matter of international law. This feels like a seismic shift.

Tuvalu, an island nation in the Pacific Ocean, has seen one-third of its citizens seek 'climate refuge' in Australia. Sea levels are rising relentlessly, eroding lands, swallowing homes, decimating livelihoods and washing away the people's futures. Entire islands are sinking.

The quote is from Dr Maina Vakafua Talia, the Climate and Environment Minister of Tuvalu (1 Sep 2025) welcoming an advisory opinion by the International Court of Justice that says nations can face legal consequences if they don't act on the climate crisis.

Isaiah 55:12

A vivid picture of earth rejoicing giving us inspiration to care for the planet

Psalms 24:1

The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it

Philippians 2:4

Do not be concerned about your own interests, but also be concerned about the interests of others.



News from the URC

Prayer Calendar for October

- 5 Anniversary of the formation of the URC
Meeting of Synod at Avenue Southampton
St Andrew's Walton and Weybridge
- 12 Broadstone
The Spire Church, Farnham
- 19 Bitterne, Southampton
Christ Church, Marlow
- 26 London Street, Basingstoke
St Columba's, Oxford

Visit of Synod Moderator to St Andrew's Walton and Weybridge

We look forward to the visit of The Revd Dr Michael Hopkins who will be preaching at St Andrew's Walton and Weybridge on Sunday 5 October. Michael is well known to many of us, having been the Interim Moderator before I was appointed. He is known as a good preacher and I know that he is looking forward to coming to us. Do please make a special effort to come along to this service. We are hoping that it will be our first time back in the main worship area after the work has been completed.

Michael Hodgson

Shoebox Appeal – Link to Hope



It's time to start filling those shoeboxes again! A leaflet will soon be available but you are well used to the sorts of things to send and have possibly even made a start in getting things, either for a "family" box or an older person's box. They do also need a £3 donation with each Christmas shoebox to cover the cost of shipping it to the recipient.

If you can't do a shoebox, then you can make a donation and we can then send it to the charity to fill boxes on our behalf. The Treasurer, Jem Ward, will be pleased to receive your donation which can be made via Bank Transfer to the church's bank account indicating that it is for 'Link to Hope' or by cheque made out to St Andrew's United Reformed Church, Walton and Weybridge, or by cash. Please put your cheque/cash in an envelope marked 'Link to Hope' and place it in the offertory plate back the back of the church. This can be done in advance if you are not going to be in church on 2 November. The Treasurer will then add Gift Aid to your personal donation (making it 25% more to the charity) and your gift will then be included in the total payment made by the church. If you need a shoebox then we do have some for you. I will put them in The Gateway. Don't forget to cover the shoeboxes with Christmas paper!

'Link to Hope' tells us that our shoeboxes will go to the poorest people in Ukraine, Moldova, Bulgaria and Romania. Unlike some other shoebox appeals, this scheme collects boxes for entire families and the elderly, so nobody is left out.

Please bring your shoebox to church by **2 November**.

Immediately after the service they will begin their journey so it truly is the cut off date!

Michael Hodgson

WORKING MIRACLES WITH 'CURE'

In our February 2022 issue, we published an uplifting article about the work of Rick Gardner, an orthopaedic surgeon who specialises in paediatric orthopaedics and works for the American Christian charity CURE, in an article entitled 'Micro Finance in Zimbabwe'. It was a pleasure to have him in church in August to speak about his work. His mother Caroline has contributed this piece.



Rick with some of his happy patients

Just after qualifying as a doctor, Rick began to work at the Best Cure Hospital in Blantyre in Malawi. Cure International exists to do two things, namely: to heal the sick and proclaim the Kingdom of God as commanded by Jesus in Luke 9:2. That calling has led them to service children with treatable disabilities in places where surgical care is often unavailable and where many have never heard the name of Jesus.

As the word spreads the need is growing. Around the world nearly two billion children lack access to safe surgical care. Disabilities such as clubfoot, displaced hips, cleft lip and bowed legs often become lifelong barriers to mobility, dignity and hope. Rick told us that a disabled child is often hidden from view. In addition to a malformation these children often present with advanced rickets from lack of sun and vitamin D. He showed us pictures of the children as they came in and the miraculous transformation surgery can achieve.

The children come with very low expectations of life. They have a minimum self-esteem and this is where the Christian teaching can transform their view of their lives and those of their parents. Many children and a parent spend months in the rehab wing of the hospital. They receive education, improve their physical fitness with the playground facilities and enjoy the company of other children and hear about Jesus' love for them.

Rick has been with Cure for 12 years, seven years in Ethiopia and three years in Zimbabwe where he opened a new hospital. Since he moved to Canada he has been the Director in charge of Forward Planning. He is at present negotiating with the Burundian Government to open a new Cure Hospital there, 25 miles from the border with the Democratic Republic of Congo, in one of the poorest countries on earth.

May we pray for Cure International that they will be able to continue their work to heal the sick and proclaim the Kingdom of God. *Caroline Gardner*



FLOWER POWER

"If you love a flower which happens to be on a star, it is sweet at night to gaze at the sky.
All the stars are a riot of flowers."

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, The Little Prince

Here is a selection of the lovely floral tributes that we have enjoyed over the past month.
The flower provision board is available in The Gateway.

**If you feel you can help with distribution, please speak to Claire, Irene or Moira.
*Your offer would be most welcome***



*31 August - Pam Russell
for family*



*7 September - Valerie Dow and Fiona Reardon
in memory of their father, David*



*14 September - Michael Hodgson
in celebration of his Ordination on
13 September 1987*



*21 September - Valerie Horton
in memory of her husband, Ken*



I decided to use my trip to Io Iona as a starter and take St Columba as our topic at Messy Church. The children all enjoyed painting the sea and sky at Iona. I showed them postcards and picture scenes and I was amazed at their finished paintings.



The children also enjoyed making coracles using quick dry clay. We tried - not very successfully - to make compasses using magnets and a needle. The favourite occupation was planting bulbs. We provided hyacinths for Christmas and put daffodils outside. They love digging the soil and unearthing bricks (presumably left from when the front of the hall was added) to plant these bulbs. Elizabeth was on hand to take photos for our Eco Church project. We welcomed a new family. The little girl loved running after and dancing with the older girls.

Carolyn provided us with chicken drummers, chips and beans before we left.

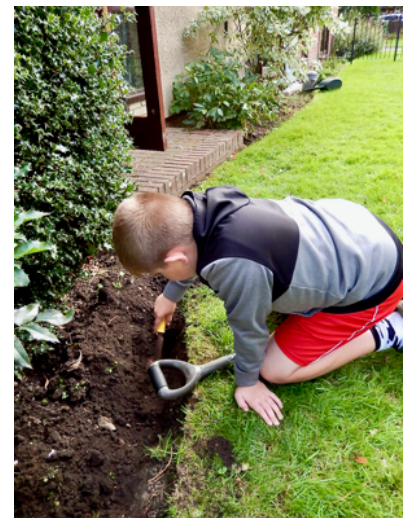
Anne Fitzgerald



Making a coracle



How will our garden grow?



A VISIT TO IONA - ISLAND OF DREAMS



An ambition of mine from an early age was to spend time on Iona, having listened to my Father talking about the time he had spent working with George McLeod renovating the Abbey. I finally achieved it this summer when I was invited to join a group of local Methodists on a retreat there led by Adam Payne, a URC minister currently at Godalming United Church.

The journey there is quite an adventure - train from Glasgow, ferry to Mull, bus across Mull and finally ferry to Iona. Luckily I met several others on the Glasgow train who guided me through! We were staying in the Argyll Hotel with views over to Mull and we could watch the ferry coming and going.



Martyrs' Bay Beach

Each day we joined in worship at the Abbey morning and evening, giving us time during the day to explore this beautiful island. The first day, we walked to the North of the Island and Adam led us in devotions on the White strand of the Monks Beach. The rain stopped and the sun came out briefly as we remembered martyrs killed by raiding Vikings and afterwards we spent time on this amazing stretch of white sand.

We went on a boat trip to Staffa and were able to walk along a narrow rocky path to enter Fingal's Cave - an unforgettable experience - and then climb to the summit to marvel at the view. On the way back we were entertained by a pod of dolphins.

After the communion service in the Abbey on the Sunday, a group of us walked over the hills to St Columba's Bay battling gale force winds which had led to the ferry being cancelled, quite an exhilarating time. Another memorable experience was going to St Corin's Chapel after morning worship to sing. As we arrived, another visitor was singing there. She filled the tiny chapel with her fantastic voice and joined us as we sang together. It was so uplifting.

On our final evening together, we held our evening devotion on the beach by our hotel as the sun was setting and then made our way to the Abbey for our last service there. It was an emotional time walking back with our torches in the pitch black, knowing that we were leaving this special place in the morning and returning home to go our separate ways. I am so grateful to have had this opportunity to share friendship and fellowship with this wonderful group who welcomed me, to most of them a stranger.



'Fingal's Cave - unforgettable!

Anne Fitzgerald

PRAYER CORNER



A Harvest Prayer

Loving God,
Thank you for the many ways
in which you provide for us:
food, family, friendship,
housing, health, happiness
and ways to use our time and talents.
We lift to you, too, the ways
in which we remain in need of these things.

*God of generosity,
May your kingdom come.*

We pray for people in our community and beyond
who are facing unemployment,
ill-health, isolation or money worries at this time
and especially for those
who are unable to afford enough to eat.
We pray for supportive relationships,
practical provision and real hope.

*God of compassion,
May your kingdom come.*

Thank you that you call us to play our part
working with you
and with others to bring about change.
We pray for political decision-makers and leaders.
Give them courage and insight
to develop policies and systems
that support the flourishing of all,
so that even in challenging times
no-one goes hungry
and everyone has dignity.

*God of justice,
May your kingdom come.*

Thank you for those
who are serving and caring for others
in churches, in charities and public services,
in our neighbourhoods,
in our homes
and in many other contexts.
We pray you would give them
strength, rest and perseverance.
As they work to support others
we ask that they, too,
would receive all they need to thrive.

*God of love,
May your kingdom come.*

Amen

trusselltrust.org

The Trussell Trust has

1400 food banks

26,000 volunteers

100,000s of supporters in churches, schools and community groups.

Last year food banks distributed 2.8 million emergency food parcels.

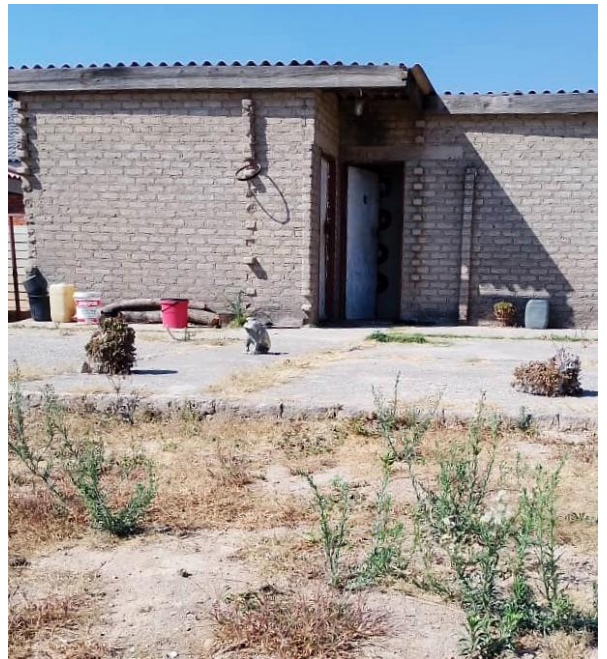
ARTPEACE AND FRIENDS



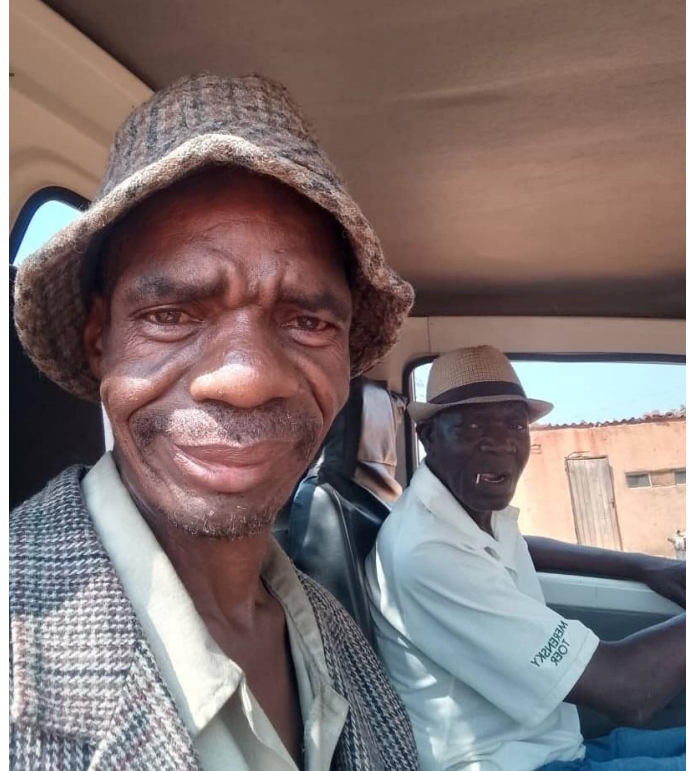
THE PHOTO SAYS IT ALL: Last month's article detailed the plight of badly disabled artist Fortune Masiyiwa whose little wooden cabin had collapsed leaving some of his meagre possessions exposed to the elements and subsequently stolen. His plight moved some of the congregation and two enthusiastic ArtPeace lady supporters north of the border, all of whom kindly sent donations to get him back on his feet. Fortune was overjoyed and thought hard how best to use this money which arrived a week after the article was published.

NEW HOME: He wasted no time in moving to a safer area and renting a small room for \$60 a month. His truck driver friend, who loaned his own small room whilst

away driving, moved Fortune's few remaining belongings to his new abode in Eastview. It's still a modest small room with a hanging clothes rail and not exactly 'St Georges Hill', but he is able to cook food on a small gas ring on the floor of this room. There is no electricity or running water so his toilet has to be flushed with buckets of water from a nearby borehole. However, it's home, and he is now safe and dry with donations also covering a few months' rent giving him time to reorganise his life.



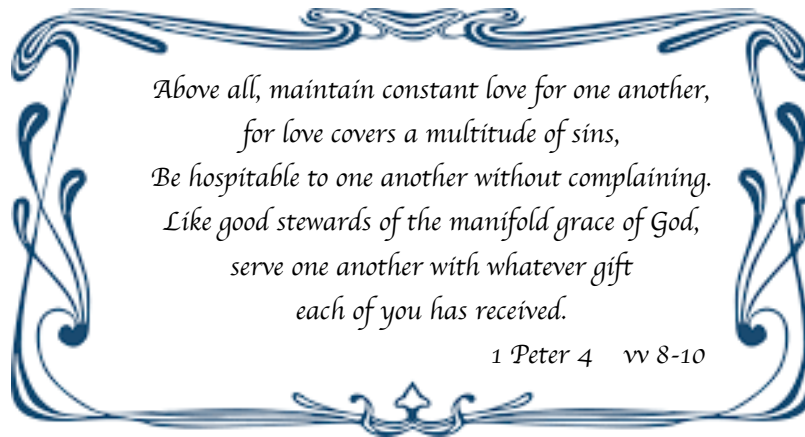
BUSINESS VENTURE: Fortune decided to journey by bus over the border into Mozambique (photo below) to buy second - hand clothes to sell at a roadside stall near his new location. He will face stiff competition as this is a common means of making a livelihood. He finds carving hard on his hands nowadays so has little choice and there is no State support. He bought forty jackets and other items which his truck driver friend took home. Photo shows Fortune in cab clearly wearing some of his purchases and



looking quite the country gent! Everything will be stored in his room so there will be no room to swing the proverbial cat! He will start selling early October, as families are now broke from paying children's school fees for the new term.

ROYALTY: What a change for Fortune as many years ago, he was banqueting floors' manager at the 5 star Meikles hotel in Harare where he once shook hands with the late Queen Elizabeth – a proud moment, and met a young Prince Charles. Fortune said: *'John tells me some of you suffer poor health but you took my problems as yours. Forgive poor English - I have not enough words to express my thanks. I should have died by now without your help and also managed to buy three months' supply of ARVs as US AID has stopped - many of my friends have died. May God bless you with many more years. Peace be with you.'*

BACK AT THE RANCH, ArtPeace begin a three day Foundations for Farming course on the 7th October with some anxiety, as few like change. However, they must learn new, more productive growing techniques to enable them to become more self-reliant through sustainable farming. Sadly, our shrinking URC congregations will lessen support, so needs must. **Johnston Simpson**



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FOR ANY ENQUIRIES PLEASE CONTACT THE CHURCH ADMINISTRATOR

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Instagram: Insta: [standrewsurcww](https://www.instagram.com/standrewsurcww)

Services start at 10.30 am.

Services are currently accessible on Zoom on the third Sunday of the month.

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

You are all most welcome to join us!