

Weoley Hill Church News



November 2019

From the Minister's study—

Dear Friends,

A few weeks ago, after a meeting in Church House, I had to wait a while before I could catch the train back to Birmingham. As I had never been there before, I decided to visit the Wellcome Collection, a truly wonderful museum of science, medicine, life and art. I would certainly recommend anyone who hasn't visited it yet to do so!

I was reminded of another museum that I visited in my home country a few years ago, the Boerhaave museum in Leiden, which was awarded the European Museum of the Year award for 2019. This is a museum of science and medicine of a country that, notwithstanding its small size, produced quite a few famous scientists and made some very significant discoveries in the fields of the sciences and medicine. However, the Netherlands is better known for its painters and, not surprisingly, the Boerhaave museum has some interesting paintings on its walls.

I remember being struck by a set of paintings that showed four representations of a physician. The first painting was of the physician as Jesus Christ. The second one was a painting of the physician as an angel. On the third painting the physician was relegated to the status of a mere human being. And the last painting portrays the physician as the devil (with horns and a fork in his hand)!

Surprised? First the physician is seen as Christ who can only cure the illness. As the illness takes its course, and while the patient is being treated, the physician is considered an angel. When the patient is getting better, the physician becomes an ordinary human being. And when the patient is fully recovered and the physician demands his payment, he is seen as the devil.

As it is one year ago that I was welcomed as your new minister, the paintings remind me of a saying that I picked up at several minister's meetings. When a new minister is moving to a new pastorate, he/she is (usually) first idolized, then criticised, then ostracized and then idealized! It is a joke, of course, but sometimes it may be a painful

reality. And not only physicians, and not only clergy, but many people in various professions find that they may fall from grace. We certainly have seen a few people fall from grace, sometimes being mercilessly attacked in the popular media too. People we held in high esteem or whom high expectations were laid upon have disappointed us. We may well feel let down. And that is a real shame and it makes me wonder if we do not sometimes have unrealistic high expectations. Should the physician (in the paintings) have offered his services for free? Should the minister avoid raising controversial issues or tone down the prophetic message of the Good News so as not to upset the congregation? Should politicians stick to their party's manifesto or be able to make compromises for a less confrontational and more united parliament holding the government to account?

Of course, it does not mean that we cannot have expectations. On the contrary, and often our expectations are encouraged by the same people who in their professional capacity make promises to serve us well, with honesty and integrity. Clergy included! But the danger is always that we idolize people, or make them into heroes or saints, which the "real" ones are very weary of! "Don't call me a saint, I don't want to be dismissed so easily" is a saying of Dorothy Day, a 20th century saint.

After a year in the Cadbury pastorate I do not think you will dismiss me as a saint, nor that you will identify me as the holiest person in the congregation – an honour sometimes conferred on the clergy! I am very grateful for the way you have welcomed me in your midst, with expectations, no doubt, but no unrealistic ones! No saint, I am, nor an angel, but one among equals as we seek together to be faithful and fruitful in our ministry and witness to the good news of Jesus Christ. While it is a great privilege that you have entrusted me with "tending the God-place in your lives" (Barbara Brown Taylor), in worship, preaching and teaching, and pastoral care, I feel very well supported by you as you share in this ministry in many different ways. So, thank you very much!

"I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance...."
(Rev. 2:19) God is "watching!" Let us be thankful for the goodness and faithfulness shared in the church and the community, and let us always be careful not to idolize or criticize each other. We are all doing our best – or trying to do better – and that is all that is asked of us!

With best wishes,

Leonora



STUDY/REFLECTION DAY

for the Cadbury Pastorate

Saturday 23 November 10 AM – 2.30 PM

at Bournville URC (Beaumont Rd)

Theme: PREPARING FOR ADVENT & CHRISTMAS

Learning to Walk in the Dark

Advent is a season of darkness. You wake up and it may still be dark. A few hours daylight and then it is dark again. When darkness is upon us, we hope, we wait for the light and in church we express our longing for light as we look forward to Christmas, the celebration of the birth of Jesus, "the light of the world"

Longing for light, we wait in darkness.

What can darkness reveal to us?

What can the dark teach us?

Please bring a packed lunch (Tea/Coffee will be served)

Personalia

Our sympathy and prayers for the Cope family following the death of David on 4 October.

Please remember everyone recovering from injury or surgery, including Alex Lukwago and Christine Grubb.

Please remember friends who are seriously ill, including Séana Davies, Betty Johnston, Deb Moriarty and Marilyn Raw.



Praying for our neighbourhood

As we were planning the Permission to Smile tea with Martin and Gina Graham, they told us that part of the programme is praying for the roads we invited to the tea. Aha! Worship & Arts and the Elders thought that in fact it would be a good idea to pray regularly for the people in specific roads in the area. So a list has been drawn up, including local institutions like Bournville Gardens and Bryony House, which will be included in the Prayer Diary in the newsletter and in the Prayer Book used for the intercessions. But don't let this restrict you—we live in different neighbourhoods, so please remember your own neighbours and places in your neighbourhood when you pray.

Cheryl Thornett

Neighbourhood News

News and events from other local churches:

Stuart Townend Live in Sutton Coldfield, 7.30 PM, Tuesday 12th November 2019 (doors open 6.30 PM) Sutton Coldfield Town Hall.

Sutton Coldfield URC: Carers' Rights Day Event 10 AM-2 PM, Friday 22 November

Selly Manor: The Shepherd Girl's Story, 2PM, 3 PM & 4 PM, Saturday 30 November. Tickets, £5, 0121442 2586, nicolaf@riverside-performingarts.org.uk

Thanks from City Mission

We have received a letter of thanks from Birmingham City Mission for our Harvest gifts and regular contributions. The letter mentions that they distributed 2300 food parcels over the last year—nearly 50 per week—and that these go to people in great need.



Exhibition Open Day

Thursday 14 November 10 AM – 3 PM

You are invited to join us at Westhill Lodge for the opportunity to see and hear about our faith-inspired original art collections which are available, free of charge, to venues across the UK. Join us for a chance to consider how these resources might enrich your work with your members and your community.

10:00: Arrival and refreshments. All exhibitions open for display.

12:00 Talk by Revd Peter Privet about the creation of the Gethsemane Garments

1.00 Light Lunch available in the small meeting room.

1:30 talk by Revd Debbie Collins about opportunities in the community

Until 3 PM: Opportunity to browse and talk with staff and trustees.

Westhill Endowment: Westhill Lodge, South Drive, Selly Oak, Birmingham B29 6WE.

Please let Leonora know asap if you want to attend.

HELP FOR HEROES



This charity was founded in October 2007 by Bryn Parry and his wife Emma who have since been awarded an OBE each for their work for the charity. Its aim is to offer physical, psychological, financial and welfare support, as well as career advice to any serviceman or woman who has been injured or wounded, or contracted an illness in the line of duty. Since the founding they have helped over 22,000 people and this support continues for as long as needed. They receive no government support but rely heavily on donations and grants so let us be generous in this “Remembrance “ month. More details and ideas of how you might help are available on their website.

Lorraine

The Shepherd Girl's Story

2 PM, 3 PM & 4 PM, Saturday 30 November 2019

Selly Manor, Bournville, B30 2AE (Book tickets: £5 per person)

11 AM & 1:30 PM, Saturday 14 December 2019

Riverside House, Moseley, B13 8AR (Book tickets: £5.50 per person or £16.00 for family of 4)

Riverside Performing Arts are a Christian theatre company based in South Birmingham who have 'some exciting Christmas performances coming up' of their new show 'The Shepherd Girl's Story'.

"Filled with fun, this Christmas Pantomime is suitable for the whole family – and is sure to bring festive cheer and warm the heart on a wintery day."

0121442 2586 or nicolaf@riverside-performingarts.org.uk



CHRISTMAS HAMPER RAFFLE



Once again Chris Grubb has organised some lovely hampers to raise extra funds for the December and Christmas Charity, 'Send a Cow', which sends money to poorer farming communities so that they can purchase animals to gain extra income. There are **two** 'Christmas Food' hampers and another 'Sweet Smelling' selection and tickets, costing £1 each, will be on sale every Sunday, and at all church functions throughout November. The draw will take place at the Lunch Club on Wednesday 4 December. Thanks to all those who contributed items and especially to Chris and Peter who had to do all the packing and most of the buying. Last year they raised £153 and would like to do more this year.

Lorraine

FRIENDSHIP GROUP

As decided last month, the group met at Lorraine's house to hear about her recent trip to India and look at the photographs and souvenirs of this interesting visit. There was a good discussion afterwards with contributions from Nancy and Michael, who both have experiences of this fascinating country.

The next meeting will be at the church when Rosalind McCarthy, a speaker from the Leprosy Mission, will come to talk to us about their work. We have been collecting for this charity with our retiring collections for over twenty years, a representative has even taken a service here, with several members having regular collecting boxes and receiving their magazines under the administration of Gill Hitchin. Please come along to support the speaker, who will have travelled some distance to be with us. We will start at 2.30 PM, but come along any time from 2.00 PM for a drink, a cake and a chat, and we hope to finish around 3.45 PM. We will also be taking names for our Christmas High Tea on 11 December.

Lorraine DaCosta

FISH AND CHIP SUPPER AND QUIZ

The second quiz of the year, this time to raise money for the Youth and Family Worker, will take place on **Saturday 30 November at 6.30 PM**. There will be the usual break at 7.30 for the food—fish, chips, mushy peas, pickles, bread, butter and a hot, or cold, drink—and we hope to finish around 9.00 PM. **Teams of six at £6 per person** with a prize for the team with the highest, or lowest, score. Words cannot fully express the value of the prizes (!) and there will also be a raffle (any donations gratefully received). Come along for a fun and friendly night out.

Lorraine

Dear Friends in Weoley Hill (& surroundings),

We hear how urgent the climate crisis is becoming: on Countryfile last Sunday we were told we all – babies included, would have to plant 48 trees every year from now on to make our carbon footprints carbon neutral. That really is a tall order. Surely making one's footprint a bit smaller is a better idea? I think that if we put our heads together we can all think of ways to do so. Therefore we intend to organise a 'Carbon Conversation' series of meetings at the United Reformed Church on Green Meadow Road. We would meet six or seven times once a month for about 2 hours, discuss ways of saving greenhouse gas emissions, taking the book "In time for Tomorrow" chapters as framework, with our own preferred solutions thrown in.

I am really delighted about the way religious groups come together to fight the climate crisis: "The Time is Now: Faith Communities for Climate, Nature and People". Both "Christian Aid" and CAFOD see us as caretakers of the planet and all that lives on it. How can we choose not to look after our beautiful world and leave it barren and depleted for those who come after us? It's our common home!

So far some people would like to hold Climate Conversation meetings on a Saturday. It's a popular day. The only time a room is available is on the 1st Saturday of the month from 4 to 6 PM from January 2020 onwards. Otherwise the room is mostly available on Mondays and Fridays, on Tuesday mornings and Thursday afternoons

Wiebina Heesterman

If you are interested in joining, please let Leonora or Cheryl know and indicate which day and time would be best for you. (Check the bookings calendar for free times.)

Report on West Midlands Synod 11-12 October 2019

Renewing hope: we will walk and not be faint

Keynote talk, The Missional challenge in the West.

Friday evening's speaker was *Martin Robinson of ForMission* (a mission training college based at Rowheath Pavilion), who mentioned Lesslie Newbigin and Dan Beeby as teachers and colleagues who were a great help to him. (He also has family connections at Bournville.) Martin talked about the church renewing through paradigm shifts, as it has moved through Primitive, Hellenistic, Medieval, Reformation, Enlightenment, and Ecumenical/Pentecostal paradigms. The forms most of us have inherited come from the early 19th Century, with the 'high tide' of these around 1914, when 60% of the population was in church on any Sunday. Churches had a passion for mission then, especially Nonconformists, who were active in the new industrial cities and involved in education, health and social support. Their structures, he noted, are more modern than we might think, and came originally from the joint stock companies of newly industrial Britain. But can we adjust to the post-industrial world?

Trends and new paradigms: the denominations we are familiar with are no longer the mainstream; that has already shifted to Pentecostal, Evangelical and Charismatic churches. Church planting is more widespread than we might think, with Fresh Expressions being the biggest growth area for the Anglicans, attracting people who were not previously church attenders. Black majority churches are growing; churches with migrant congregations are important in cities but are less evident because they rarely own buildings. These are all grass roots developments and the biggest churches in these new movements are those that take neighbourhoods and neighbourhood context seriously. What is God doing in our neighbourhood, he asked; how can we connect with it? This is the challenge of the modern or post-modern world.

The church expanded in the 1950s but halved in the 60s. (Don't read this part if you are a baby boomer and tired of being blamed for *everything*.) The 60s saw young people, now with disposable income of their own, moving away from their parents' culture and religion; the response of the church, that a new model would bring them back in, did not work. The answer is not in programmes or methods.

The wager of modernity is that life can be good without God, and that pursuit of happiness is life's main goal. Modernity offered 3 narratives—security provided by the state, security provided by the market, and self-actualisation, dependent on no one else. All institutions, including marriage and family life suffered from this. But we are made as social beings and the wager is unravelling.

Can church be renewed? This is possible but not inevitable. The new movements can help renew the existing church.

In a question time, people asked about what we are called to be and to do. How do we gather, just during services? Why and how do we connect with each other, not just as an organisation and in our history. How do we connect with resources beyond our own structures, form partnerships, share training?

Practices for a declining church: culture, not programme; parish, not congregation; developing a rhythm of worship and life, practising stability, inhabiting the local, being God in the neighbourhood. We offer the gift of stability, but we are here to change the world. Another question was whether we can form partnerships with less inclusive groups and find more in common with them?

The Moderator led worship with the theme *Renewing hope—how big is your God? How great is God?*

Note from Ann: Martin was an excellent speaker and I will ask him to come and lead worship next year.

Synod Critical Business

The Synod Budget, Financial Review and Finance, Property & Trust Reports were presented, with a query regarding the new **Ministry and Mission** calculations (the biggest item in our church budget), and whether treasurers had enough notice of proposed changes. The changes have not gone into effect, and affordability is a consideration. Mervyn Davies pointed out that Synod has resources to help congregations. Katherine Harris, a solicitor by training, is taking over Rachel Wakeman's role as Trust Officer. The reports were accepted.

The Clerk introduced **2 proposed changes to General Assembly and Mission Council**. The first is that there would be one Moderator at a time for one year, who could be a minister or lay person. Each synod would still nominate 2 candidates. Thought must be given to ensuring balance so that Moderators are not always ministers. Synod has no objection to this proposal. The Name of Mission Council will be changed to Assembly Executive. There were no objections to this.

Youth Executive proposal: current representative provision is for young people 25 and under, who are a third of the church, but the age group 20-40 is shrinking. This proposal is that West Midlands Synod 'will make every effort to send at least one person aged between 20-40 to General Assembly and other meetings in addition to the prescribed places for under 26s. This was agreed after some discussion of practicalities for people with work and family commitments.

Other discussions included who can register to verify lay preachers for DBS checks; a new good practice guide is due soon.

West Midlands Synod is still looking for a new Synod Clerk to replace Margaret Marshall. A new Children and Youth Development Officer should be appointed after clearance and the Safeguarding Officer's post is about to be advertised.

Because many congregations, like ours, have people listed as members who have moved away and may not be near a new URC congregation,

there are now 3 '**Wider Fold**' host churches who will list the URC membership of these people, rather than distorting the numbers of local churches. A change to the procedures for registering marriages is forthcoming. [Our registrar, Ken Davenport, is aware of these.] CT

Synod Lite:

The Revd Mhari McLintock, diagnosed with midlife dementia, discussed dementia issues with the moderator . She said that dementia-friendly churches are important because everyone matters; we are all different, and Jesus cared for people on the margins. Ask how someone would like to be helped, don't assume you know. Not everyone loses everything all at once. Don't be insular in what you do, share with other churches.

Kristy Mabbot, formerly on a placement at Weoley Castle, was welcomed to the West Midlands as a CRCW, and Fiona Elvins was congratulated on her ordination and induction.

Richard Gamble appealed for support for his Wall of Answered Prayer project, intended to create a national landmark by the motorway near Coleshill, with donations not only paying for the bricks of the wall, but hopefully for 100 homes.

Clare Nutbrown-Hughes spoke about a visit to Arab and Christian Palestinians and the problems towns like Bethlehem experience due to illegal settlers. Few Christians are left there. Participants of the visit are willing to speak to church groups.

Rachel Wakeman was thanked, and given a bouquet, for her time as Trust Officer. CT

Mission Streams workshops

Bible studies on faithfulness, perseverance & hope in the Lord, led by Simon Helme of Dursley

This study focussed on Isaiah, especially the verses of hope which were the theme of the Synod. Authors recommended for serious Bible study included Walter Brueggemann, Tom Wright and Steve Chalk. Themes from a lively discussion included the tendency to blame, our culture as a kind of exile, the deep memory, exuberant hope and covenant fidelity of the book of Isaiah. What are we witnessing to? Who is God for me?
CT

Messy Vintage, led by the Revd Carol Marsden & Ann Davies of Shrewsbury URC

Shrewsbury URC has taken a number of steps to make their building and worship more accessible to people with dementia and disabilities, but found that lack of transport and behaviour issues still kept some people from church, so they investigated Forget-me-not teas and Messy Vintage.

People with dementia or disabilities and their carers were involved in all stages of planning. A team was formed, who have put on summer and harvest sessions for people with dementia or age-related disabilities. 35 attended the Harvest Messy Vintage in early October. Careful initial organisation is being further improved.

The sessions include activities, a quiet area, singing, worship and tea. People will be reminded that it's 'ok' to use taxis when other transport isn't available. A small charge will be made, Messy Vintage will have a budget, and any excess will go to church funds. Publicity, including social media, will be simple and clear.

I have signed up for a sample of materials and further information. CT

Hope made real, led by Martin Robinson.

This session was about mission and partnerships. The church has differing opinions and the URC is a broad church, so partnerships could

be difficult if we do not agree to respect differences. Churches benefit from mission strategies like looking at what God is up to in our community and how we can help, so forming local relationships. Martin related a personal journey when, as a young, newly qualified pastor in Nechells, he managed to plant a church there if not actually in a church building. He engaged with the community, found what they needed, prayed and sought resources, and things happened. It took time but it happened. Having done one thing well, it impacted on other things. Think outside the box; find worship spaces where people are, different places and different times. Accommodate different styles of worship for different groups. If you cannot do it alone, partner another church or group. Let us look at what we can do by ourselves, with the pastorate or ecumenically—let's talk and pray and see if we can find God out there. AE

Developing leadership for the next decade led by Steve Faber, Synod moderator.

Some statistics: by 2028 our synod will be entitled to only 20 full-time equivalent ministers and there are currently 110 churches! This is scary. Church work will have to rely on lay leadership. We should have started to look at this years ago, but hindsight is wonderful! The Western Church is declining across the denominations. Do we accept that or can we make a difference? We are all disciples; disciples should engage in mission and leadership, should be followers of Jesus Christ and learn from him. This is a lifelong growth. Are we still growing?

Leadership comes not from status but character. Leaders are doers of the word, not students. We must look outward and be accountable to fellow church members and those around us. We cannot leave it all to the minister and people should not expect that the minister is always available; it is a task to be shared as we do at Weoley Hill. We are all disciples, a lifelong task, so all encounters have potential for discipleship. We can mentor each other. Leadership starts with vision, a picture of the future with 4 aspects: *purpose*—the business we are in; *image*—how it would look if running well; *values*—how we should

behave in areas like welcoming and finally *goals*—where to focus our energy. Discerning vision is best done together, so let's talk and see what ideas we have and what ideas we share that can be used to help people develop their skills in different areas, some of which may be leadership. Steve used many quotes; I have a printout of the slides used if anyone would like to know more. One quote from Revd Dr Alison Morgan: *The plural of disciple is church. If a church is not about making disciples, it is not church. Discipleship is not something the church **does**; it is what the church **is**.*

I felt the weekend was summed up by Sunday morning's hymn, *The church of Christ in every age*: We have no mission but to serve/ in full obedience to our Lord;/ to care for all, without reserve,/ and spread his liberating Word. AE

Cheryl Thornett & Ann Evans

Note from the secretary

Eldership: We need to consider changes to our rules of eligibility and length of term for elders. We can reduce the number of elders in line with a smaller congregation, but even so an increasing proportion are nearing or over 80. Suggestions so far for changes to our eldership rules are 1) allowing spouses to serve at the same time, 2) allowing an elder *who is willing* to serve an additional year to fill a gap, 3) removing the upper age limit, 4) increasing terms to the previous 5+5 year arrangement. Because the Budget must have priority for this month's Church Meeting, we may not have much time to discuss this at that meeting, but please think about this before it becomes an urgent issue. Currently, Gill Hitchin is reaching the end of an 8-year term; Ann Evans will complete 5 years and we hope will agree to serve another 3, so we should nominate at least one elder in January. Two elders will complete 8-year terms in 2021.

Cheryl Thornett

WEOLEY HILL UNITED REFORMED CHURCH

PRAYER DIARY

The eternal God is your dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms. Deut. 33:27

	Church members	
WK 1: 3 rd -9 th Nov	Rob McManus, Anna Ostojitsch, Ieuan, Ciaran	The Kurds in Syria. Continuing Christian witness in that country. <i>Weoley Hill</i> <i>Weoley Park Rd</i>
WK 2: 10 th -16 th Nov	Deborah Moriaty Nancy Nicholls	Japan as it deals with the consequences of its worst typhoon in recent years. <i>Middle Park Rd & Close</i>
WK 3: 17 th -23 rd Nov	Brian & Audrey Nganwa, Jonathan, Elizabeth & Michael	Unity across the UK in a common purpose to work towards a future that cares for our citizens and the environment. <i>Fox Hill</i> <i>Tillyard Croft</i>
WK 4: 24 th Nov- 30 th	Marilyn Raw Tony Sames	House churches in China under surveillance. Believers are subject to severe restrictions, harassment & sometimes imprisonment. <i>Bristol Rd</i> <i>Head injury centre</i>

NOTE: As always, please feel free to send feedback on the 'Prayer Diary' and specific prayer requests that you would like to include in future to Sue Beeby. You may wish to add other members of the families mentioned to your prayers.