

# Weoley Hill Church News

*September 2017*



We regret to announce that the Minister, the Revd David Littlejohns, died suddenly on Saturday 2 September following a stroke. Please remember Hilary and the family in your prayers.

## *Dear Friends*

Last year I remember reading an article about the top 15 UK cities for traffic congestion and about the worst 'hotspot' in each of them. Much to my surprise Birmingham was only 14<sup>th</sup> in the list with London (no surprise – although it was interesting to see that Belfast was the city with worst traffic problems). That the A38 / M6 junction was the site of Birmingham's slowest traffic was not a great shock!

Back in 2015 Aberdeen was voted the most dismal city in Scotland but in 2016 was voted the kindest city. In 2013, Coventry was named as the seventh least appealing town. At the same time the achievements of Wasps Rugby Club were being celebrated whilst the 'new' Cathedral and the ruins of the old were described as an "atmospheric delight" and the various museums as great places to enjoy.

So, how about a church? How do you measure a congregation's well-being? I suggest there are at least two ways of measuring the health of a congregation.

Lesslie Newbigin trained as a Minister (of the Presbyterian Church of England) at Westminster College in Cambridge and worked as a Church of Scotland missionary in India from 1934-1974. Although a white European, his humility, warmth and clear thinking commended itself to the Indian church. He was elected as a Bishop around the time several traditions and denominations came together as the Church of South India. Back in the UK in retirement he served in the United Reformed Church, teaching at the Selly Oak Colleges and serving as Minister at Winson Green URC. The phrase he carried with him through all his work was that "the health of the whole depends on the health of the smallest unit."

Just as an infection can enter the body through the smallest cut, so organisations can be prone to weakness through its frailest part. That can be true of a congregation.

So far as the traditional Church Calendar goes we are in the 'long drag' between Pentecost / Trinity Sunday to the beginning of Advent on December 3<sup>rd</sup>. We have celebrated all the major Christian festivals from Christmas to Easter and beyond. The Revised Common Lectionary would have us recall and reflect on the life and ministry of Jesus before we begin preparing for Christmas through Advent.

This is recalling and reflecting isn't just about satisfying intellectual curiosity or helping us feel good, although these aren't bad things. We are invited to growth in faith, hope love and commitment to Jesus learning to walk with him as he leads on to the future and the next stage of our individual and church lives. There will be opportunities in the Autumn to explore the Bible together in a relaxed environment. Look out for more information.

May God's big love meet us in our need and openness.

Every blessing

*David*

## *Personalia*

*Please remember all who are ill or undergoing treatment, including Jean Greening, in hospital with a broken hip, Cath Upton, Gordon Thornett (surgery delayed while he recovers from broken ribs, ).*

*Please remember all the Thompson family following Jack's death, especially Phyllis, who is very ill with cancer.*



## **EMAIL ADDRESS CORRECTION**

Can you all please check the email address you have for me? It should be [christinemarlow3@gmail.com](mailto:christinemarlow3@gmail.com)

Unfortunately somewhere along the line it was incorrectly copied and circulated and another lady with the same name and a similar email address has been receiving church emails intended for me! She is understandably not happy, and I have also missed important messages. The point to remember in particular is the '3' after my name.

Christine

*The Church Secretary will be away 2-10 October.*

## Neighbourhood News

*News and events from other local churches and groups:*

**At Barnes Close:** Reflection Days, Reflection Days 10 AM to 4 PM, £15 2<sup>nd</sup> Thursday of each month.

**Weoley Castle Thursday Café sessions**(10 AM): Advice Café, Dementia Café, Carers' Café, Arts Café in rotation.

**Carrs Lane Lectures :** 13-15 October, **Revd Gretta Vosper**, United Church of Canada minister speaking. Leaflets and reservation forms in corridor off car park door.

**St Francis, Bournville:** Flower Festival Friday 8 - Monday 11 September, and Bournville Heritage Open Day. Saturday 9 September

## Alan's 3 Peaks Challenge

**Alan Cotgreave** has pledged to climb the 3 peaks to help end world hunger with Langar—please contribute now if you haven't already. Unbelievably in Malawi, it **costs as little as 15p to serve one child** food for a day.

Just look at the **impact you** could have:

**£5 = 33 meals, £10 = 66 meals, £15 = 100 meals!**

**A free school meal means more children can go to school.**

Every day, about 21,000 people die from hunger or hunger-related diseases. But it doesn't have to be that way. *Zero Hunger with Langar* is tackling world hunger by serving Langar (The concept of **free** compassionate food for **all**) to those communities around the world that need it most.

*Deadline for donations: 7 October*

# FRIENDSHIP GROUP

Once again we were blessed with lovely weather for the annual garden party at Nancy's house and garden on Wednesday 12 July. In between admiring the flowers and shrubs, and the water lilies and fountain, the twenty members who came helped themselves to a wide selection of cakes and savouries. As usual there was plenty to eat and plenty left over for those who wanted to take a 'doggy bag' home for later. Many thanks for all those who donated items and of course especially to Nancy who spends a great deal of time getting her garden 'picture perfect' as well as organising enough cups, plates and chairs so that everyone had a lovely time.

We are in the process of confirming next year's speakers and activities but don't forget on Wednesday 13 September we will be going to the National Trust *Hanbury Hall, Droitwich* for an afternoon's visit. Prices are £10.90 standard (£12.00 Gift Aid) for the house, garden and park, or £7.27 standard (£8.00 Gift Aid) for garden only for non-members. **We will leave the car park at 1.30 PM. Note the changed time.** Please tell Deb, Nancy or Lorraine if you would like to come and/or will require a lift.

Lorraine DaCosta

## Quiz and Fish & Chip supper

6.30-9.00pm, Saturday 7 October,

£6 per person, teams of six (individuals welcome). The price includes fish, chips, peas, pickles, bread and butter. The proceeds go towards our youth and family worker fund.



# HARVEST LUNCH



## Joint meal with Korean Church

This will take place on Sunday 24 September after our usual Harvest service. We have shared our buildings with the Birmingham Korean Church for about 20 years and their members have contributed, both financially and spiritually, throughout that time. Although pastors and most members change every year as they attend and complete courses at the university, this is a good way to welcome the new arrivals as well as meeting with those who are mid-way through their course or those who live locally and are permanently resident here.

We are therefore asking for donations to a 'bring-and-share' lunch which will take place **after** our usual service, beginning about 12 and finishing about 1.30 PM. We hope that you will stay to eat and to meet everyone in fellowship. There will be sign-up sheets on Sundays in September for sweet and/or savoury contributions, which can be brought to the John Kydd Hall prior to the service. This is the **one** time in the year that both churches come together so please do try to come and you could be introduced to some delicious and very interesting Korean food!

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## September Retiring Collection

**Practical Action** is a charity whose aim is to provide simple solutions to practical problems facing poor people and communities throughout the world.

In Africa, building a rainwater tank means that smallholders can water vegetables in the dry season instead of having to buy food. Or making 'desert fridges' of one pot inside another helps keep food cool. On the Bangladesh coast, simple fish cages help people to keep young fish and feed them till they are ready to eat. However the floods may rise, the cage floats just below the water.

**Practical Action** does more sophisticated stuff too, and finances much research, but whatever emerges will be something which is cheap to do. They say 'We are about simple ideas that change lives for ever'.

# Constance Coltman Centenary

## *Celebrating 100 years of women's ministry*



**Constance Coltman**  
**Ordained in 1917**  
**The first woman minister**  
**in the Congregational**  
**Church**

Wednesday 18 October  
3 PM to 5 PM  
at Barnes Close  
See the film  
Enjoy Afternoon Tea  
Share stories

Further information and to reserve your place:  
Ian Ring, [cfrenquiry@aol.com](mailto:cfrenquiry@aol.com) 01562 710231  
Barnes Close, Chadwich, Bromsgrove, B61 0RA



## **Slimming World Clothes Throw**

The church and the approval of the elders played a part in our cancer research clothes throw so thought I'd share the outcome....

We're delighted to reveal the incredible news that we've smashed our £3 million Big Slimming World Clothes Throw target reaching a sensational £3,306,630.25!

An astonishing 122,739 bags were donated and we want to say an enormous, heartfelt thank you for taking part in the campaign.

£2 million of the money raised will fund two immunotherapy trials (one 4 year trial and one 6 year trial) at the Southampton Cancer Research Centre and the remaining money will fund obesity-related cancer research projects which are just being finalised. As one huge fabulous team we really are touching hearts, changing lives and indeed saving lives too!

Denise Robinson

# In Memory of Dr T. Jack Thompson

*Professor Brian Stanley remembers Dr T. Jack Thompson (1943–2017), former director of the Centre for the Study of Christianity in the Non-Western World*

It is with great sadness that the School announces the death on 10 August 2017 of Dr T. Jack Thompson. Jack came to New College as Lecturer in Mission Studies in 1993 from the Selly Oak Colleges in Birmingham. He remained on the staff until December 2008, becoming Senior Lecturer in African Christianity. He served as Director of the Centre for the Study of Christianity in the Non-Western World (now the Centre for the Study of World Christianity) from 2005 to 2008, and fulfilled a number of key roles in the School, including that of Director of Postgraduate Studies. He was a devoted supervisor of many PhD students in world Christianity.

In the world of scholarship Jack will be remembered for a series of important books, notably on Donald Fraser, the pioneering Scottish missionary to Malawi; Xhosa missionaries in Malawi; and missionary photography in Africa. He remained research active in his retirement; one of his last publications, 'Religion and Mythology in the iLembe Rising of 1915 in Nyasaland and the Easter Rising of 1916 in Ireland: Preparing for the End Times?', was published in *Studies in World Christianity*, 23:1 (April 2017). Jack had a lifelong love of Malawi, where he first went as a missionary in 1970. He played a leading role in the Scotland-Malawi Partnership that has been so influential in sustaining the historic links between Scotland and Malawi, and in recent times served for a year as Vice-Chancellor of the University of Livingstonia.

Jack was not simply an accomplished historian and dedicated servant of the School, but also a fine Christian man of great loyalty with a delightful Irish sense of humour. We shall all miss him greatly. Our thoughts and prayers are with his widow, Phyllis, their two children, Mark and Jenny, and his grandchildren.

# Celebrating what we achieve together

*Extracts from the URC leaflet—see David Marlow for a copy.*

Thank you for all that you give. For the time, the love and the money that is poured into local United Reformed churches week by week. Without the resources that are generously provided by you and the rest of the church family, the life of the local—and the central—United Reformed Church could not continue to operate and serve as it now does. Thank you. ...

The URC may be a relatively small Church, but its achievements – both locally and nationally—are substantial. We are ‘punching above our weight’ in many areas, not least in our commitment to social justice.... support of local churches, not least through funding the stipends of ministers and ensuring they are assured of reliable pensions and adequate housing in retirement. And, in addition to these things, we also invest in the long-term future of individuals—from training our ordained ministers and lay preachers to giving advice to new church treasurers..... Not everything your money is used for will directly benefit you; and some expenditure won’t even appeal to you. But that’s the way it is with families—we seek to express our unity, our love for one another and our mutual commitment by supporting each other’s interests.

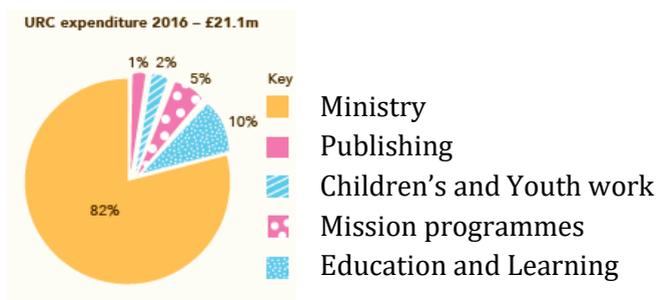
## **The basis of your gifts**

... In the URC, part of the money that you give, week by week, month by month, is sent to the national finance team working out of Church House, and added to the ministry and mission fund (better known as ‘M&M’). Most of what the Church achieves in terms of mission and ministry is paid for from this fund.... local congregations contribute to the M&M fund according to their ability to pay. The ministry that is available and affordable is allocated across the synods and then deployed within the Synods according to mission priorities. This covenant together is certainly very different from a consumer model, where the rich can always have more than those with more limited

resources. We believe that it is important that all are willing to share. The URC's adoption of this approach means that not only do we express our support for each other through M&M, but everyone can truly celebrate all that the denomination achieves – because it has been achieved together.

How do we spend our money?

In 2016 local churches gave a total of £19.3m to the M&M fund. The consistency and faithfulness of this giving is greatly appreciated. The broad areas of spending are shown in the pie chart.



If you would like more information on what the M&M money was spent on, please speak to your local church treasurer, who has been sent more detailed figures.

### **How much should I give?**

We are looking to encourage 'giving with grace' rather than being prescriptive. However, on several occasions General Assembly has suggested that giving 5% of after tax income is a useful benchmark.

### **Any questions?**

Resources on stewardship are available at:  
[www.urch.org.uk/stewardship](http://www.urch.org.uk/stewardship)

## Time, Eternity and Creation.

My step-daughter gave me a set of Brian Cox DVDs as a Christmas present last year, containing five programmes about the wonders of the solar system. I like his programmes very much, for they never fail to leave me in awe of the universe which we inhabit and, which I believe, our God created. And that, in turn, increases my sense of awed reverence for God.

Just think of the vastness of the universe. Our own little bit of it is mind-boggling in its immensity, never mind the rest. Each of those twinkling pin-points of light we see at night is another sun, each with its own system of orbiting planets, so far away that it is impossible to comprehend the distance. Some of those suns, and their attendant spheres, died light-centuries ago, yet their light is still travelling to reach our eyes. If that doesn't make us feel small, what will?

Reflecting on this, I found myself wondering what it said about God's nature. It can be pretty challenging, even to a believer. Let's begin by saying that I believe in a Divine Creator, who is also my saviour and who I can know and relate to in a personal way. And before I say anything else, we all struggle with the limitations of human minds and words when it comes to describing that being, for the imagery we have to employ can only go so far before it becomes potentially self-defeating. To convey theological truths I think you need to have something of the poet or the artist about you, rather than the scientist.

Quite simply, the creator – any creator – is by definition greater than the thing created. So what does the size of the universe say about the One who upholds it? They have to be spirit – they cannot be anything else, for no physical being could do it. That does away with so much 'traditional' Christian imagery which so many people feel gets in the way, or demeans God by reducing 'Him' to forms we can mentally handle.

This, of course, is where Jesus, the Son comes into the frame; one common cliché describes him as 'the best photo God ever had taken'. I believe in the living Incarnation, which is one of the central planks of my faith; that the Living Word 'became flesh and dwelt among us' in Palestine. And yet that Word was also the 'Spoken Word' which was the driving force behind the act of Creation. One of our most widely accepted Christian insights is that Christ, in his original form as part of

the Trinity, was active in the beginning – and through him all things were made.

Now another major factor in my faith is that the Incarnate Son of God died upon the cross. As Graham Kendrick puts it, ‘hands that flung stars into space, to cruel nails surrendered’. And we’re back to the limitations of human imagery – I don’t believe that Christ’s hands literally ‘flung stars into space, but I do believe that they were skewered to a Roman gibbet. Now this is something hard to grasp; there is and always has been an eternal dimension to the cross. John the Divine, in the book of Revelation, refers to Jesus as ‘the Lamb that was slain from the foundation of the world’. The cross of Calvary nails that eternal event down to a specific time and place in human history; puts flesh and blood and bone on what is otherwise a wholly supernatural and metaphysical event from beyond our understanding.

And yes, without going into details, I do believe he was raised from the dead, ascended into Heaven and comes again to live within each believer in the shape of the Holy Spirit, the third member of the Trinity. That is the most wonderful thing of all; that this supreme, awe inspiring Creator can inhabit fallible, frail beings like ourselves without harming us. Think of the destructive power of nature, or nuclear power, which we cannot control. Yet the living God and Saviour, vastly more powerful than that, can share their life and existence with us. That itself is beyond explanation or understanding; I can only accept it, and experience it.

(Nor do I have any problems accepting the scientific understanding which Brian Cox or Charles Darwin has given me about the origins of the universe, incidentally. To me they’re describing the manner in which God did it all. That’s a different discipline, but the two are not mutually exclusive. But that’s another story.)

So thank you, Professor Cox, for such marvellous insights.

John Davies

# WEOLEY HILL UNITED REFORMED CHURCH PRAYER DIARY

*For the Spirit that God has given us does not make us timid;  
instead his Spirit fills us with power, love and self-control.*

	<b>Church members</b>	<b>Topical prayers</b>
<b>WK 1: 3-9 Sept</b>	Lorraine DaCosta Gary Davenport Ken Davenport John Davies	<i>The 3 churches in the Cadbury pastorate as we resume our full schedule of activities after the summer break.</i>
<b>WK 2: 10-16 Sept</b>	Seana Davies Corinne Dawson Roland & Arrah Ebot-Arrey, Reyan & Malcolm Rob & Anila Edge, Oliver & Yona	<i>That we long to learn and grow together as a fellowship.  For guidance about how to proceed in our desire to employ a Youth and Family worker; that we are bold to step forward in faith; that there are those who are able and willing to move this project forward soon.</i>
<b>WK 3: 17-23 Sept</b>	David & Geraldine Evans Emlyn & Ann Evans Samantha Evans, Chelsea, Mikey, Kayden & Chase	<i>Our young people and how we might help them grow in their faith and in being active participants in our fellowship.</i>
<b>WK 4: 24-30 Sept</b>	Marius & Jennifer Felderhof Margaret Field Josie Fisher John Fletcher	

*NOTE: As always, please feel free to send any feedback on the 'Prayer Diary' and specific prayer requests that you would like to include in future lists to Sue Beeby*

Names in the prayer lists are on our church register but please add other members of the families mentioned to your prayers.