

WHEATLEY URC NEWSLETTER



October 2019

Covering Thoughts

About five years ago I painted two iconic Shotover trees. One, the ancient Shotover oak, fell about a year later much to everyone's dismay. The remains of its decaying trunk can be seen today and it is now a haven for wild life. Children climb on its massive fallen branches. In the last few months the other tree was deemed a hazard as it leans heavily to one side and it was feared that branches could fall onto the path beneath. It is one of the hugest silver birches I have seen, its lower trunk deeply cracked with its dark greys making a contrast to the silver bark above where the sunlight dapples the sturdy branches.

I was unaware of this problem, but behind the scenes there was a mini battle waging to save what was being called Christine's birch. While there were those who loved the tree the council was concerned for public safety and wanted it felled or at least severely pollarded. The fate of the tree hung in the balance until imaginative lateral thinking saved the day. If the path was re-routed the tree could be saved in its entirety.

This afternoon I climbed the hill to see the results. Shotover Wildlife's volunteer working party had toiled all day and completed the task. Already the soft red ochre soil was being stamped smooth by walkers so that it blends into the woodland, and it will not be long before the old path will be covered with greenery.

I was encouraged by the way a problem had been solved to the satisfaction of both groups of people. There was a sharing of strongly held opposing views together with a willingness to listen and to be creative. It also depended on people generously giving of their time and energy to achieve their goal.

In situations of conflict and of personal difficulty I have found these words to be an inspiration and I hope you will find them so too.

Christine

*Seeing into darkness is clarity.
Knowing how to yield is strength.
Use your own light and return to the source of light.
This is called practicing eternity.
Lao-tzu (about 600BC)*

Pastoral Letter

We're almost there! It took no time at all to demolish the old 1960s block. Then a hole in the ground appeared, which got deeper and deeper. Little by little a structure began to rise, walls, then a roof. Soon we shall know exactly what it looks like from the inside. We've been enjoying the refurbished Victorian hall and kitchen for some while, but none of us knows exactly what awaits us when the Mulberry Room is finally revealed. One thing is sure, though: worship leaders and duty elders will no longer have to suffer the cold and damp of the old vestry as they prepare for Sunday worship.

From the start our new building project has been blessed with extraordinary generosity from many individuals, groups and charities and by the hard work of skilled and dedicated craftspeople. Our sincerest thanks are due to them all. Projects are good for communities. They bring people together. They involve a wide range of people working together to turn what began as a vision into a solid reality. But when it's a project which is part of a Christian community we must always ask ourselves how it relates to our mission. Part of the answer is straightforward enough: we want our new facilities to help build up the community. Modern life doesn't always make that easy. We rush around from one thing to the next, the demands of work and family mean that we easily become tired and we certainly need time for ourselves, to recuperate. We can become quite isolated, even when we are busy and surrounded by people, while for some loneliness becomes a real burden.

It's a good thing to move out of our comfort zone and spend time with different people doing different things. It refreshes us and reminds us that we share a common humanity with all kinds of folk, across the generations and across the barriers which separate us from one another. I hope and pray that our new building will help this to happen more effectively. Mission is a difficult word because it conjures up the kind of evangelism many of us find off-putting. As I read the Gospels it becomes clearer and clearer to me that Jesus spent a lot of his time simply being with people – what some have termed a ministry of presence. Because they came to trust him, they listened to what he had to say about God and good living. He went to where they were. Admittedly, that was easier in a culture which spent most of the time out of doors, in the fields and streets and markets. But it's a model we should keep in mind. The more we can share our human joys and sorrows with those around us, the more we can affirm our hopes and confront our fears, the more likely it is that our community will be strengthened and flourish.

It will, I think, help us imagine our mission better if we move away from thinking of our church as being constituted only by the members and friends who attend services and regard it instead as a community made up of all those who use its premises. When Jesus cleansed the Temple he pointed out that it was supposed to be a house of prayer for all the nations, not just the chosen few. Our church buildings are very modest in comparison, but their purpose is the same: a place where all kinds of people may find a welcome, and where, by God's grace, they may catch glimpses of a better vision for life than they had seen before.

May the peace of Christ go with you all

Colin



Prayers

Please remember in your prayers the members in Peter Devlin's pastoral list: Tom Goss & Bobbie Stormont, Sybil Beaton, Lynette and Richard Wood, Annie Hughes, Dave Crosby and Elliot.

We also ask you to pray for the members of the ACE Team: Tom Goss, Sybil Beaton, Pauline Main, Bobbie Stormont, Mark Williams.



ACE Bible Study - Update

Pauline, our minister, is organising a bible study for this autumn period with an "Advent" theme. The dates to put in your diaries are: Thursday 14, 21 and 28 November. We will be meeting, hopefully, in our new space, the Mulberry Room. There will be a sign-up sheet for these meetings closer to the time.

Tom Goss

ACE Team - invitation for new members

The ACE team would like to invite new members to join this lively and creative ministry team. Some members of the current team will be standing down in the near future to offer their services in other ways within the church community.

This team aims to offer ways to develop members of our church and the local community in various forms of Christian education through open dialogue, lectures, discussions and house groups. You can read about their exciting and recently developed plan in the Annual Reports document.

There are always lively discussions at these meetings, and opportunities to offer and develop new ideas and ways to explore our faith. If you would like to chat with a current member about joining then please talk with either Pauline Main, Tom Goss, Bobbie Stormont, Sybil Beaton or Mark Williams.

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COGWHEEL QUIZ



Friday 11th OCTOBER

7pm for 7.30pm start at Wheatley URC

It's time to gather your team to enter this quiz to help raise funds towards the completion of our exciting "Cogwheel Project".

Teams of 6; £10 per head to include a Ploughman's Buffet Supper. Bring your own drinks.

Further details from Ellen or Robert

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A bit of fun and laughter 😊

"There is nothing in the world so irresistibly contagious as laughter and good humor." Charles Dickens.

"Lexophile" describes those who love to fiddle around with words. Such as "you can tune a piano, but you can't tuna fish". or "To write with a broken pencil is pointless." An annual competition is held by the New York Times to see who can create the best original lexophile. Here are some of them;

No matter how much you push the envelope, it'll still be stationery.

If you don't pay your exorcist you can get repossessed.

You can read more at the bottom of pages 12 & 15.



Cogwheel Project

October 2019 Gift Month

The end is in sight! The Mulberry room will be completed by the end of this month. October 25th is the projected date of hand-over.

It seems to have been a long journey and everyone has pulled together wonderfully, exploring the edges of our 'comfort zones' as every part of our church has been pulled apart and put back together again.

All this has been made possible by the generous support of everyone – it has been wonderful to witness and is also a wonderful Witness too.

£356,000 has already been raised. Congratulations and grateful thanks to all who have contributed to this amazing effort. But we still need £20,000 in order to meet the cost in full. We do have the offer of a loan from Wessex Synod in place to cover this (at commercial rates of interest) but the Church Meeting in September decided we should have one final push to raise the full cost and nominated **October 2019 as Cogwheel Gift Month.**

So now we are asking you, if you are able to do so, to give what you can to complete the project. Please ask Chris Shelley how best to give - by cheque or bank transfer.

If you don't feel able to make a gift but could offer an interest-free loan then please make this known to Chris, because if we can't make the target, then this might be an option to top up.

And... if we *exceed* the target of £20k, the funds will be put towards the further work that will be needed in the main chapel building, work we were unable to do as part of the Cogwheel Project.

One last push for October Gift Month!

Minutes of Wheatley URC

Annual General Meeting 1 September 2019

Chair: Pauline Main (minister)

Minutes: Phyllis Williams (secretary)

Present: As recorded in Sign-in book.

Apologies: Robert and Catherine Harding, Bob and Ellen Webster, Cara Heafey, Angela Holdaway, Laurence Devlin.

The meeting opened with a prayer.

1. Minutes of the previous meeting on 2nd September 2018 had been circulated and agreed to be correct. A copy will be signed for the record.

2. Annual Reports 2018 had been issued in booklet form before the meeting. They provided an excellent record of the Church's life over the past 12 months.

3. Finance. Due to the late date chosen for our AGM the report which covers the financial year to December 2018 is rather old. The financial situation continues to be healthy with a reserve of over £20,000. There is not much change year on year. It is our aim to keep a reserve of about this level in order to be able to maintain our old buildings.

Ministry & Mission Contributions were £20,640 in 2018, rising to £21,360 in 2019 and we have agreed a figure of £22,128 for 2020. These figures include the '1% challenge' to pay 1% more than the minimum assessment. This shows a rate of increase of about 3 to 3½% per year. A letter setting out the use to which this is put will be published in the October Newsletter.

Cogwheel Project Accounts are held separately and those attending the meeting were given an up to date financial spreadsheet.

The accounts are subject to scrutiny.

The meeting formally unanimously received the report with thanks to the treasurer: Proposed: Mark Williams, Seconded: Ann Hardiman.

4. Reflections and Aspirations:

The minister reflected on the past year and was pleased to recall that terms for her settlement as a 50% minister at Wheatley had eventually been agreed during the year. She felt that the 'Real Harvest Festival' at Sandy Lane Farm was a particular highlight of the year.

The year has been transitional in more ways than one:

physically and organisationally we coped well with the demands of the Cogwheel project. We opened the sanctuary as a multi-use space and people had shown great patience with the transitional arrangements and

administratively we had a smooth handover of the role of church secretary from Robert Harding to Phyllis Williams.

Just 2 years ago the Cogwheel Project had been only a 'gleam in the eye' and now is rapidly nearing completion of the infrastructure phase. Pauline reflected that this compares favourably with the speed of projects in other churches. The next challenge will be to make the best use of the additional facilities the new room will offer.

She mentioned in particular that ACE (Adult Christian Education) ministry team had worked on a strategic plan for their work.

She spoke of Cara Heafey's student ministry as a great blessing to us all and felt that we have been blessed with a very gifted minister -in-the-making. Cara's future after ordination is still being worked out and explored. As a non-stipendiary minister she will likely have a role in the Oxford area but she still needs to maintain her paid employment.

For the future: We plan to develop our outreach and diversity, particularly with our mission to young people and those struggling with dementia. Where possible we will work with other churches. We might need to focus our attention on our mission in service to the community making full use of our enlarged and modernised facilities.

The Children & Young People's Ministry Team are looking for more members of the team to provide support for the work of the church with children and young people particularly through prayer.

A possible Theme for 2020 might be around the concept of 'New Life'.

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## Wheatley URC Minutes of Church Meeting 1<sup>st</sup> September 2019

**Chair:** Pauline Main (minister)

**Minutes:** Phyllis Williams (secretary)

**Present:** As recorded in Sign-in book.

**Apologies:** Robert and Catherine Harding, Bob and Ellen Webster, Cara Heafey, Angela Holdaway, Laurence Devlin.

**Minutes** of the previous meeting 7<sup>th</sup> July 2019 had been circulated and agreed to be correct. A copy will be signed for the record.



**Minister's Report.** In line with her 50% scoping the minister is reducing her preaching commitments at Summertown and Marston and will spend more time in Wheatley. This may not be always used in leading the service but in participating in the worship and being available pastorally. She likes to attend the outreach activities of the church such as lunch clubs. She continues to build on her relationships with other ministers including Helen Garton (minister of St Columba's and Cumnor) and Nigel Hawkes (vicar of St Mary's, Wheatley). She has met Al McNicol the new pastor of Wheatley Community Church and looks forward to working with him in future. She recognises that Summertown, Marston and Wheatley all have local missions and ecumenical links but there may be opportunities for sharing there too.

She will be on leave from 10<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup> September.

### **1. Elders' Report.**

- **The Fete.** It has been recognised that members of the church are finding it harder to find the energy to undertake running this event, and that it would not be appropriate to ask Dr Flury or his family for use of his garden for this purpose in future, therefore other options are being considered. We have approached the other churches in the village with the proposal that this could be more of a 'village' event shared by all the churches. Wheatley Community Church and Our Lady of Lourdes have responded positively to this idea and the proposal will be discussed at the next Wheatley Area Churches meeting. We are still actively seeking a suitable venue. A large garden would be much preferred to using the recreation ground.
- **Dementia Friendly Church.** A working party has been formed to explore how we as a church might become more inclusive of those with mental health challenges including in particular dementia. One possible way to do this might be to set up a monthly **Dementia Café** to support those with dementia and their carers. The group are exploring the best way to do this taking into account the physical environment and training needs. An appeal was made for anyone interested in being part of this initiative to join the group by speaking to Laurence Devlin in the first instance. Barbara suggested the existing monthly coffee morning might be expanded to undertake this work. Another initiative could be for a special service catering for the spiritual needs of those with dementia.

- **Budgeting.** As a church our future budget is reckoned to be similar year on year so that we do not formally set out a budget. As elders we consider any requests for financial support for initiatives relating to the mission of the church on their individual merits. Small grants may be made from our own funds and for medium and larger projects it may be possible to apply for grants or to other funding bodies eg up to £500 per project may be available through Wessex Synod 'Small Grants for Mission'. All Ministry Teams (and individuals) are encouraged to be creative and not be discouraged from requesting financial assistance either for a missional project or support for Christian education or training. Speak to the Minister or one of the elders in the first instance.
2. **Ministry Teams** *These reported to the AGM meeting just prior to this one so reports were not taken at this meeting*
  3. **Cogwheel.** The project is moving forward to the final stages and it is still anticipated that the completion and hand-over of the Mulberry Room will be in the week commencing 21<sup>st</sup> October. A celebration 'Open Weekend' and dedication service is being considered for early in the New Year. Financially: money raised so far will be about £356,000 ie about £20,000 short of the actual cost now becoming more clear at about £376,000.  
A loan of up to £31,000 (on which interest would be payable) is available from Synod.  
The question now is whether to 'have one last push' to raise the remaining £20k through making October a 'Gift month' in order to avoid having to accept the loan from synod was put to the meeting. A suggestion was made that members might be able to offer interest free loans to the church even if they could not actually give any more to this project. It was agreed that it would be good to try to raise the remaining funds ourselves if at all possible.
- 4. Christian Partners:**
- **St Mary's.** Reported that their building project 'Project 2020' is moving forward despite their chairman having had to resign due to ill-health. There will be an Open Day on the 28<sup>th</sup> when the plans will be shown and fund raising will be launched. A Table-top sale on 7<sup>th</sup> September and a Quiz on 13<sup>th</sup> September have been arranged in aid of the project. The recent initiative **Holiday at Home** whilst not hugely well attended was very enjoyable and it is hoped to run it again next year.

- **Wheatley Area Churches** meeting next week. Wheatley Community Church has called Al McNicol to be their new Pastor and he will be commissioned at a special service on Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> September at 10:30am, followed by a BBQ at the Ewbanks home to which all are invited.

#### 5. **Upcoming Event Dates:**

- **22<sup>nd</sup> September** Harvest Service and Shared Lunch
- **3<sup>rd</sup> October** Elders Meeting
- **11<sup>th</sup> October** Cogwheel Quiz
- **31<sup>st</sup> October** Elders Meeting

**Next meeting: Church Meeting Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2019**



## Community Emergency Food Bank

I received the following information in a note from the Director of CEF, Mrs Jane Benyon. It casts light on the continuing need for food banks. CEF has just opened a third food bank in Oxford.

“The number of individuals being referred to the CEF cafes each week has increased considerably since the beginning of 2018, 30% higher than during the previous 3 years, when numbers coming for food had remained fairly static. There has also been an increase in the number of children needing food. With the introduction of Universal Credit in Oxfordshire and the predicted delays in payment, sanctions and debts accruing during these delays has had an adverse effect on our client base. Others in part time work find they are unable to pay their way as the cost of food continues to rise. CEF provides a life line during this period of financial difficulty.”

**Additional helpful information:** There is an older organization in Oxford, very useful but different from CEF, called the Oxford Food Bank. It collects surplus fresh food from local supermarkets and wholesalers and supplies and distributes it free to over 100 charities in Oxford and Oxfordshire (including CEF). To avoid confusion it is best to stick to our correct title, Community Emergency Food Bank.

Many thanks to all who donate tinned and dried food to our cause.

**Anne Bettes**



## Ride and Striders 14<sup>th</sup> September

The Wheatley URC 280 bus route Ride & Striders group managed to visit 9 churches in and between Wheatley and Thame during the day and will have raised in excess of £100. Thank you to striders & hall welcomers.

**Tony Barry**

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### More Lexophiles: 😊

I'm reading a book about anti-gravity. I just can't put it down.

England has no kidney bank, but it does have a Liverpool .

This girl today said she recognized me from the Vegetarians Club, but I'd swear I've never met herbivore.

Police were summoned to a day-care centre where a three-year-old was resisting a rest.

Did you hear about the fellow whose entire left side was cut off? He's all right now.

# CHURCH CALENDAR FOR October 2019

Everyone is invited to stay for coffee or tea after 10 am Sunday services

| Date           | 6 <sup>th</sup> Oct       | 13 <sup>th</sup> Oct | 20 <sup>th</sup> Oct                        | 27 <sup>th</sup> Oct      |
|----------------|---------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Service        | Morning Service with H.C. | Morning Service      | Morning Service                             | Morning Service with H.C. |
| Time           | 10 am                     | 10 am                | 10 am                                       | 10 am                     |
| Worship Leader | Rev. Pauline Main         | Richard Bainbridge   | Laurence Devlin<br>Joan Van Emden preaching | Rev. Colin Thompson       |
| Vestry Elder   | <b>Catherine Harding</b>  | Charles Bennett      | Peter Devlin                                | <b>Pauline Shelley</b>    |
| Welcomer       | <b>Tom Goss</b>           | Peter Devlin         | Tom Goss                                    | <b>Moira Watson</b>       |
| Steward        | Bobbie Stormont           | Zena Knight          | Ann Gadja                                   | Ellen Webster             |
| Reader         | Pauline Shelley           | Bob Webster          | Phyllis Williams                            | Liz Barry                 |
| Prayers        | Liz Barry                 | Joel Rasmussen       | Barbara Joiner                              | Malcolm Benson            |
| Flowers        | Wendy Benson              | Angela Holdaway      | Liz Barry                                   | Ellen Webster             |

Elders' names in **Bold** are on Communion duty

Simple evening worship in the style of Taize at Barns Close 13<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> October

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COMMON LECTIONARY READINGS FOR October 2019

Note: leaders may choose to use other readings

Date	6 th Oct	13 th Oct	20 th Oct	27 th Oct
First Reading	Habakkuk 1 : 1-4 and 2: 1-4	Kings 5: 1-3 and 7-15c	Genesis 32: 22-31	Jeremiah 14: 7-10 and 19-22
Psalm	Psalm 37: 1-9	Psalm 111	Psalm 121	Psalm 84: 1-7
New Testament	2 Timothy 1: 1-14	2 Timothy 2: 8-15	2 Timothy 3: 14- 4:5	2 Timothy 4: 6-8 and 16-18
Gospel	Luke 17: 5-10	Luke 17: 11-19	Luke 18: 1-8	Luke 18: 9-14

OCCASIONAL EVENTS IN SEPTEMBER 2019

3 rd Oct	Thursday	10 am to noon	Coffee Morning, Church open
6 th Oct	Sunday	2.30 to 4.30 pm 6.30pm	Food Bank Afternoon tea in Hall Pulse – discussion URC Chapel
7 th Oct	Monday	2.00 to 4.00 pm	Not So Young Club
8 th Oct	Tuesday	1.00 pm	Lunch Club Two
11 th Oct	Friday	19.00	Cogwheel Quiz
13 th Oct	Sunday	6.30pm 7.30 pm	Pulse trip out - bowling – meet URC hall Taize at 3 Barns Close Holton
14 th Oct	Monday	2.00 to 4.00 pm	Not So Young Club
15 th Oct	Tuesday	1.00 pm	Lunch Club
20 th Oct	Sunday	8.00am	Morning Meditation and breakfast No Pulse – Half Term
22 nd Oct	Tuesday	2.15 pm	St Mary's Guild
27 th Oct	Sunday	7.30 pm	No Pulse – Half Term Taize at 3 Barns Close Holton

WEEKLY EVENTS

(NB several activities are term-time only)

<i>Mindfulness Sitting Group</i>	<i>Monday 8.50 to 9.40 am</i>
<i>Brownies & Rainbows (Term time)</i>	<i>Monday 5.30 to 7.00 pm</i>
<i>Choir Around the Piano (Term Time)</i>	<i>Monday 7.30 to 9.00 pm</i>
<i>Wheatley Singers (Term Time)</i>	<i>Tuesday 7.10 to 9.00 pm</i>
<i>Pre-School Music Group (Term time)</i>	<i>Wednesday 9.30 am and 10.30 am</i>
<i>Guides (Term time)</i>	<i>Wednesday 7.00 to 8.30 pm</i>
<i>Prayers and Breakfast</i>	<i>Thursday 8.00 am</i>
<i>Mindfulness Sitting Group</i>	<i>Thursday 8.50 to 9.40 am</i>
<i>Table Tennis</i>	<i>Friday 10.00 am to 12 noon</i>
<i>Hymn Practice</i>	<i>Sunday 9.30 to 9.45 am</i>

Disclaimer: The Editors of this Newsletter welcome letters, articles and announcements from individuals and organisations but reserve the right to publish or not, and to edit.

Deadlines: Wednesday 16th October 2019 is the deadline for the November Newsletter. Please send copy to: newsletter@wheatleyurc.org.uk and not to individuals and please try to use A5 layout. Paper copy can be given to Bobbie Stormont – again A5.

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A statement from Laurence about her Bi-blog

I would like to inform you that the Bi-blog published in the last issue of the Newsletter (September) was the last one for a while as I have decided to stop for the time being. This has been a difficult decision as I love the intense academic research and I have enjoyed the writing process enormously but after 45 editions (I started in May 2015) I feel I need a bit of a break. I hope to resume writing it in the near future but in the meantime, I want to thank very much those who have shown their appreciation.

Laurence

A note from the Editor: On behalf of all who have read your Bi-blog Laurence, and awaited it eagerly each month for the last 4 years, we extend an enormous thank you. Your commitment to researching and writing such interesting, informative, rich and sometimes challenging blogs each month has been appreciated very much by not only our own worshipping community but many many others. Thank you for enriching our lives. ☺

~ ~ ~

And a final few Lexophiles: ☺

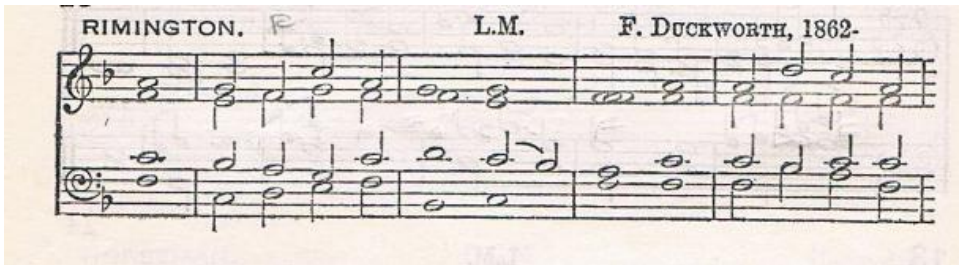
When you get a bladder infection, urine trouble.

Those who get too big for their pants will be totally exposed in the end.

I didn't like my beard at first. Then it grew on me.

The guy who fell onto an upholstery machine last week is now fully recovered.

Hymns And Hymn Tunes – Rimington



The hymn tune 'Rimington' was composed by Francis Duckworth and named after the village of Rimington, where Francis was born in 1862. The village is near Clitheroe in East Lancashire, in the shadow of Pendle Hill of witchcraft fame. Legend has it that when he was a boy, Francis heard his uncle singing the hymn '**Jesus shall reign where're the sun**' and resolved to compose a better tune – which he did in 1904! The tune soon became very popular and today many orchestral and choral versions are available on u-tube.

Francis grew up in Rimington next door to the Wesleyan Chapel, which was the musical centre for the village, and four of his family played in the Chapel orchestra. After his mother died when he was twelve, he left the village to live and work in Colne, where he settled as a grocer. He was a talented musician and became the organist at the Albert Road Methodist Chapel which was a very important centre in Colne at that time. He remained the organist at the Chapel for 50 years and during this time he composed some 18 hymn tunes which were published in the ***Rimington Hymnal***.

Choral music was a major activity at the Albert Road Chapel and my mother, Esther, who was born in 1906, was an active chorister and a good friend of Francis until his death in 1941. In the Lancashire Methodist Chapels '**Jesus shall reign....**' is nearly always sung to Rimington! Maybe not so in the URC Churches. It is definitely one of my favourite hymn tunes.

Jim Watson

So did Jesus

You feel the cruel lash of violent words;

So did Jesus,

And He still does, as He holds your heart in His love.

You feel the bitter loneliness and pain of rejection;

So did Jesus,

And He still does, as He holds your heart in His love.

You feel the uncaring hatred of the world;

So did Jesus,

And He still does, as He holds your heart in His love.

You feel despair, hopelessness and suffering of mind and soul;

So did Jesus,

And He still does, as He holds your heart in His love.

In agony, you scream out: "WHY?"

So did Jesus,

And He still does, as He holds your heart in His love;

But there is a greater hope,

which you can know, and treasure within you;

So did Jesus,

And He still does, as He holds your heart in His love:

As you open your heart to Him, trust Him, and follow Him,

You will become confident in Him, as His love fills your heart,

Because He's always loved you...

AND HE ALWAYS WILL!

Hallelujah!

David Herring

Thank you from -

The United Reformed Church Finance Committee

To- The members and friends of each local URC congregation

'THANK YOU' for what you help us achieve together in God's name

The purpose of this letter is to say **'Thank you'** to each and every one of you for all that you do for the Church and, especially, for your help in **raising over £19 million in 2018 for the URC Ministry and Mission Fund**. For Christians, any giving of ours is in response to the amazing generosity of God in pouring out his love through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and through his risen life in the world and the church today, through the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, it is important to say 'thank you'.

The United Reformed Church is like a big family – about 46,000 members in 1,400 churches served by just under 400 ministers. In any thriving family, the members support each other and want the best for each other. In the URC, we are all seeking to *'Walk the way: live the life of Jesus today'* – and to enable others to do so as well.

For most of us, this idea of the church as family is most easily seen in the life of our own local church. That is where we regularly worship God and also seek to serve our own community and share God's love with them. There are 1,400 different ways in which this is happening and a colossal amount of worshipping and witnessing and working for the kingdom happening in URC congregations across our three nations. **'THANK YOU' for all you do for the kingdom in your local churches.**

A crucial part of what your local church does, like any family, is support you in all that you do in your daily lives. That is where we all *'Walk the way'*. **'THANK YOU' for all you do for the kingdom in your daily discipleship.**

But the wider family of the United Reformed Church is more than the sum of its parts. We belong to each other under God and through our sharing of resources as well as burdens, opportunities as well as challenges, we achieve more together. You can get a flavour of this from the reports of the last Mission Council on the URC website – from new resources for Pilots and children to disinvesting in fossil fuels; from the challenge to be better at safeguarding to the need for a new General Secretary.

‘THANK YOU’ for all you do for the kingdom through the wider Church, including your giving which enables your church to give to the Ministry and Mission Fund.

You might ask ‘how much should I give?’ That is a matter for you. The Church has sometimes suggested 5% of after tax income, but that is only a guide. If your church is looking at ‘Holy habits’ then one of those covers giving. If not, there are other resources on the stewardship pages of the URC website.

The URC Finance Committee is responsible for the oversight of the finances of the central United Reformed Church. Each year, our local churches raise more than £19 million for the Ministry and Mission Fund. Over 80% of this money is used to pay for stipendiary ministers and church related community workers and their training.

For a long time, the number of ministers in the United Reformed Church has been falling at roughly the same rate as the number of church members. What has fallen more dramatically over the years has been the average size of URC congregations – now around 35. So, the challenge which is exercising people across the Church is not so much a shortage of ministers, but how to make the best use of the ministers we have got in the context of small, often widely dispersed, congregations.

It is an extraordinary demonstration of commitment and generosity that the average giving per member to the Ministry and Mission Fund continues to go up each year. Although the number of URC members has been going down by a few percent each year, the total amount raised has been going down much more slowly. The total raised in 2018 was less than 0.5% lower than the total for 2017. These contributions are voluntary but they are not optional. They are an expression of our commitment to each other. The United Reformed Church could not function without them. **‘THANK YOU’ for your church’s contribution to the Ministry and Mission Fund.**

NB: the contribution to the Ministry and Mission Fund requested from each local church is a matter for its Synod. The central Church is not directly involved.

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 then they will get in touch with the finance team at Church House.

Yours sincerely,
Ian Hardie (Treasurer)

John Piper (Deputy Treasurer)



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CHURCH CONTACTS

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