Pathway

The United Reformed Church

Newsletter of Broadstone United Reformed Church
December 2021 & January 2022

Dear Friends

For quite a number of years during ministry training, and then all through my time in our last churches, Christmas was a time for long trips in the car. One year we even went straight from church and hit the M6 on Christmas Day! Unsurprisingly traffic was pretty clear and yes the services are open, because we really weren't sure before we left. Motorway services for Christmas lunch is not quite the family feast we all normally look forward to!

Of course this is also the case for many of the heroes of the Christmas story! I know officially they're part of Epiphany, but I suspect the unknown number of people from the East spent a long time getting to Jerusalem when all they had to lead them were the stars. More than one motorway services lunch and no GPS! How did they do it! I imagine it took an accumulation of knowledge and wisdom, a good deal of patience and a decent smattering of knocking on doors to ask the way.

We are perhaps getting used to uncertainty, the big constant in our lives seems to be that the way ahead remains unclear. We should be fine to meet up and worship over Christmas (get your festive face masks on order now!), but really, who knows? The big question, asked by many a Christmas movie and school Christmas play, is: "what's the true meaning of Christmas?"

The movies and plays will more often than not come down on the side of the family gathering. Nothing wrong with that at all, but is that why we celebrate? Or is that more about how? If we're setting off into another time of uncertainty, what are we hoping that bright star will lead us to?

It's a birthday party for sure and birthdays should be celebrated (even if the date is somewhat sketchy), but this birthday party is a sign and in many ways this birthday party is actually the star itself in the modern era. We hope that it will lead many on their way to meet the one we celebrate, to find that the birthday reveals God's heart to be with us, God's love for the world he created and God's single-minded determination to bring salvation to the world!

Happy Christmas!

Andy

FAMILY NEWS

We remember in our prayers those who are, or have recently been injured, unwell or in hospital, including **Mary Joyce, Eddie Lowdon, John Mogg, Anna Venable, Audrey Wiffen** and **Betty Wilson**.

The Litany of Reconciliation

Written by Canon Joseph Poole in 1958, the litany was kindly suggested for inclusion in *Pathway* as a companion to Pat's article about Coventry Cathedral and the Cross of Nails (*page 4).*

All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

The hatred which divides nation from nation, race from race, class from class.
Father, forgive.

The covetous desires of people and nations to possess what is not their own.
Father, forgive.

The greed which exploits the work of human hands and lays waste the earth.
Father, forgive.

Our envy of the welfare and happiness of others.
Father, forgive.

Our indifference to the plight of the imprisoned, the homeless, the refugee.
Father, forgive.

The lust which dishonours the bodies of men, women and children.
Father, forgive.

The pride which leads us to trust in ourselves and not in God.
Father, forgive.

Be kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

A note on next year's offertories

This is the time of year when the Finance Committee prepares for next year's offertory. If you were at the church meeting in November, you will already have been made aware that we are making a small change to the way we deal with offertory envelopes. During the pandemic many members of our church family have found it easier to take out a Standing Order for their offertory, and the church benefits because the Treasurer can rely on a fairly consistent income even though not everyone can actually come to church regularly. (And have you noticed how cash has become a difficult thing to come by??)

There is also a relatively new way of reclaiming tax from HMRC under a Gift Aid scheme called "GASDS" – Gift Aid Small Donations Scheme – and, if non taxpayers make their donations by simply placing them in the offertory baskets provided, this considerably simplifies the calculating of the tax rebate claim under this scheme.

From January, to further streamline the offertory, the Gift Aid claims, and church expenditure, **envelopes will only be issued to those who are able to Gift Aid but don't donate by Standing Order**. As already mentioned, all other donations can simply be put in the offertory baskets in the church. This cuts down on cost and several people's time at a period when both are so important to our church. We do hope that you will understand and appreciate that this change is all for the good of the church and its members. Anyone not giving by Standing Order, but wishing to, should speak to Martin Sales who will be delighted to advise you. Additionally, if you still have a problem with the change, then please take this to Val Rowberry who will do her best to accommodate your needs.

Our thanks are due to Martin Sales who, during this prolonged Covid pandemic, has worked tirelessly on our Church finances taking most of the responsibility on himself.

Val Rowberry

CTiB – Justice and Peace Group

Churches Together in Broadstone has formed a new 'Justice and Peace Group'. This group plans to work for Justice, Love and Peace in our community and beyond. Issues to be considered locally, nationally and internationally include:

- Social and economic justice
- Conflict
- Equality of opportunity
- Health
- Education
- Poverty
- Ecology

If you are interested in the work of the group or have any issues that you would like to be considered, please see Revd Andy Hall or George Goodbody. The work and progress of the group will be reported on the St Johns Church website: www.stjohnschurchbroadstone.org.uk/ctib-justice-peace.

George Goodbody

Church Life in Pictures… As is tradition in the lead-up to Christmas, Broadstone URC prepared Christmas shoeboxes for Link to Hope's shoebox appeal, containing gifts from school supplies to toys to winter woollies, for recipients in Romania, Bulgaria, Moldova and Ukraine. A big thank you to Janet Meachin who assembled the boxes, and for all the generous donations from the people of BURC. The donations included over £600, as well as hats, scarves, mittens and lots of other items to go in the shoe boxes.

Photos by Janet Meachin and Jim Tudor

Stepwise is making a difference!

What is Stepwise?
Stepwise is an integral part of *Walking the Way – living the life of Jesus today*, the United Reformed Church's focus on whole-life discipleship and mission.

Wessex Synod is delighted that Stepwise is now part of the life of the Synod with people having completed the first stream, while others are just about to start. A Synod Stepwise Advocacy Group has been formed and they have been working hard to make sure that all the procedures were in place to ensure that Stepwise has been able to happen through the last 18 months.

Stepwise is a programme of learning and discipleship development for everyone – including you! – whether you are exploring and enriching your personal faith life, discerning where God's call on your life may be leading, preparing for a new direction, or developing a specific role within your community or church.

One key aspect is that, as a Stepwise participant, your group will have a facilitator and you will also have a mentor who will be with you throughout your Stepwise stream. The Synod Advocacy Group is ensuring safe recruitment and orientation of voluntary facilitators and mentors.

What is a Stepwise Stream? Stepwise has five streams: Faith Filled Life, Faith Filled Worship, Faith Fuelled Leadership, Faith Filled Confidence and Faith Filled Community. Everyone starts with Faith Filled Life, and then after that depends on you! You don't have to follow any set path through it.

Stepwise is open to anyone who is keen to reflect on and develop their Christian faith. If you're ready to be stimulated and challenged – and want to make a difference in your own life and the lives of others – then Stepwise could be just what you're looking for.

Stepwise is learner-orientated and designed to draw on the strengths and to address the needs of individual learners, in the context of their communities and churches. The programme emphasises the vital importance of people learning from their daily lives, wherever and whoever God calls them to be.

There are different start times, so there should be a group that is convenient for you – either online or in person.

This is what you need to know

- All participants wanting to engage in the Stepwise programme will have to begin with completing Faith Filled Life
- If you want to participate in Faith Filled Life, go to our Synod website and fill in an application form, and send this to Ruth Heine, development@urcwessex.org.uk
- You will then be contacted by a member of the Synod Advocacy Group.
- Synod will identify where the learning Hubs will be located within the Synod, and what online offering there may be.
- Groups will be formed logically for participants and will be registered with Synod. This will connect you for your login for your online learning.
- You will have a mentor throughout Stepwise, and if you are unable to identify one from your church, you will be given help to find one.

If you want to know any more about this, please contact Mary Thomas, dso-s@urcwessex.org.uk, or Ray Stanyon, dso-n@urcwessex.org.uk.

The Cross of Nails – A symbol of reconciliation

Earlier this year I visited Coventry and, of course, the cathedral. The last time I had visited was at the end of the '60's when I did not have the knowledge that I have now about their work for reconciliation and how the Cross of Nails became an international symbol for Christian reconciliation.

I came across the Cross of Nails during a twinning visit to the Thüringen area of Germany in October 2012, when a small group of us from Broadstone spent a few days with friends from Frankenthal following the lives of Bach and Luther.

One of the places we visited was Erfurt, which is described as "the spiritual home of Martin Luther" as he studied at the university there from 1501 – 1505 and then lived as a monk in the Augustinian Monastery.

The monastery is now a conference centre, but the crypt (*pictured above)* is set as a memorial to the 267 people who were killed when sheltering in the cellars there during an allied bombing raid on 25th February 1945. Erfurt received its Cross of Nails in 2008, the first in Thuringia, but the one we saw in 2012 was stolen in July 2020, and so a new one was received and blessed on 25th February this year.

Most days, but especially on a Friday, the Litany of Reconciliation (*printed page 2*) is said at 12 noon local time throughout the world by the members of Community of the Cross of Nails. We followed the litany in Erfurt, and this year I did so again in Coventry.

Pictured above is the Cross of Nails (within the cross), Coventry Cathedral.

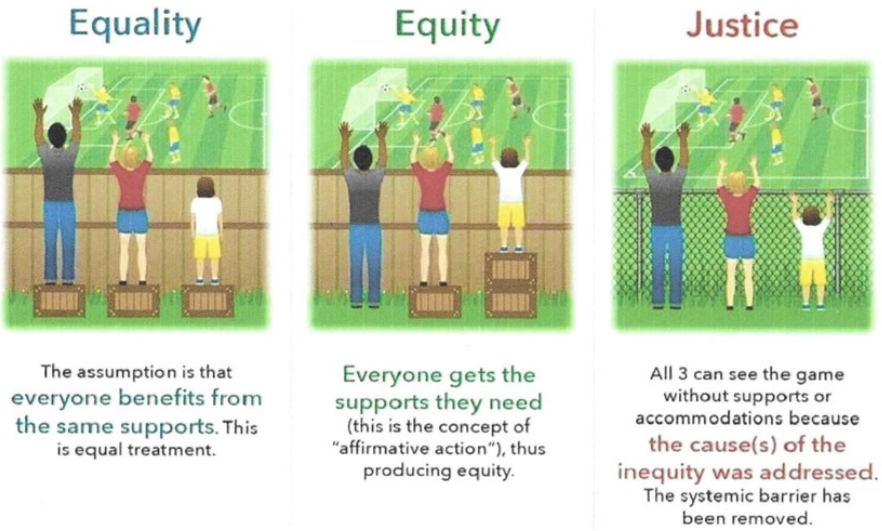
Pat Johnson

"Let justice roll on like a river…" (Amos 5:24)

It's that time of the year again when TV programmes remind us of what's been in the news during the year. There'll be no shortage of subjects for 2021 as we look back on what can only be remembered as a momentous year, as we've lived through our second year in a global pandemic. As well as Covid and many other stories, I'm sure TV producers will reflect on COP26, Black Lives Matter, Me Too and violence against women campaigns, Afghanistan and the refugees crossing the English Channel.

There is one common thread that runs through these different issues – they shine a light on the inequality in all societies around the world. How can it be right that only 5.5% of low-income countries have received at least 1 Covid vaccination, or that 1 in 3 women globally will experience violence in their lives according to latest UN figures?

It would be far too simplistic to believe we can fix the ills of the world simply by ensuring everyone has equality, although that would be a good start. In this simple illustration we can see that equity is far more successful in addressing discrimination.



So, my hope for 2022 is that Justice is the prayer of Christians everywhere, just as Amos spoke to the people of Israel, all those years ago. As we pause this Christmas to hear again Mary's Song of Praise, and reflect on our own community, I'll leave the last word to one of my favourite hymn writers, Fred Kaan:

"He calls us to revolt and fight
With him for what is just and right,
To sing and live Magnificat
In crowded street and council flat."

Caroline Foster

Love in Action

"Teacher" he asked "which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and the most important commandment. The second most important commandment is like it: 'Love your neighbour as you love yourself.' " Matthew 22:36-39.

Seventy-six years ago, on VJ day+1, I began my working life as an apprentice electrical engineer. I was a member of Parrs Wood Road Congregational Church and its youth fellowship, a Sunday school teacher and a lay preacher. I was also a King's Scout, member of a football team, keen cyclist, had a paper round, and was the proud owner of an ancient Rudge Auto bike!

One Sunday, as we shook hands following morning service, our minister, the Revd John Hellon, said to me 'have you thought about candidating for the Christian Ministry'? So began the process of having my 'Call' tested and verified by the Church Meeting, the Lancashire Congregational Union Ministries committee and the Education and Training committees of Lancashire Independent College (LIC). Thus, seventy years ago I entered the hallowed halls of LIC with ten other Ordinands, including Helen Clayton, the first woman to be accepted for ministerial training since the Revd Kathleen Hendry 25 years earlier!!.

There were many things to learn and discover during my five years in theological college, the most significant being the theories of: *Realised Eschatology* and *Situational Ethics.*

REALISED ESCHATOLOGY:
Realised Eschatology was introduced by the Congregational liberal theologian C H Dodd in his book *The Parables of the Kingdom* (1935). The prophetic passages in the New Testament, argues Dodd, do not refer to the future but to the earthly ministry of Jesus and his eternal presence. Realised Eschatology teaches that all the Bible's prophecies about the Kingdom are fulfilled in Jesus. When Jesus said "the Kingdom has come near" he was saying, the Kingdom is here now, an ever-present reality and experience, rather than a distant future event. The Messiah came into the world, for all time, in the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. Each year, at Christmas time, Christians celebrate the 'LOGOS', the WORD, breaking into time and space and dwelling among and within us.

SITUATIONAL ETHICS
Church of Scotland minister, theologian and prolific author William Barclay's books of sermons, prayers and Bible studies were found in every minister's study before the age of lectionaries, Internet sermons and prayers. Barclay's sermons were preached in hundreds of churches, and remind us, as we consider the concept of Situational Ethics, that: *We may well come to the conclusion that one of the great problems of the present situation is to adjust the delicate balance between freedom and law, and between the individual and society. And the only solution is that a person should discover what it means to love my neighbour as myself'*. Ethics in a Permissive Society (1972).

The 1st century BC Roman poet, Virgil, wrote '*Amor Vinci Omnia*' (Love Conquers All). In the first half of the 20th century, Christian forms of 'situational ethics' were about putting love above all 'rules'. Liberal theologians of the time pointed particularly to 'AGAPE', unconditional love, as being the highest end to which Christians should aspire. More recently, the American theologian Joseph Fletcher, credited with establishing and verbalising a theory of Situational Ethics, stated in his book Situation Ethics: The New Morality (1997): "*All laws and rules and principles and ideals and norms, are only contingent, only valid if they happen to serve love*".

Can it be argued that people's needs come first rather than a set of rules? When the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima in August 1945, killing 140,000 people, the pilot of the plane said "My God what have we done?". Three days later a second bomb was dropped on Nagasaki, killing 150,000 Japanese civilians. The next day Japan surrendered. Before the bombs were dropped, US President Truman had set up an advisory committee of scientists, distinguished members of government and military advisors. After lengthy discussions it was decided that lives saved by ending the war quickly, by using the bomb, outweighed the number of lives destroyed by using it.

Agatha Christie, in the final scene of *Murder on the Orient Express*, poses the question, should Poirot in his report to the police tell the truth, or does the deep grief outweigh the scales of justice; can the scales of justice always be evenly balanced?

"As far as I know my own mind" was a favourite expression used by my College Professor of Philosophy, reminding us of the dangers of intransigence and dogmatism. Situational Ethics is about considering thoughtfully the lived experiences of those of the present and those of the past. In other words, the 'context' in which we as Christians live out our lives. Thomas Aquinas wrote his great *'Summa dialogue*' mindful of the philosophy of Aristotle and aware of the history and the lived experiences of both Jews and Muslims.

Today, in the West, living in a post-Christian multicultural world, the question is how as Christians do we, should we, ethically contextualise and practice the faith in which we believe, a faith made manifest, in the Life of Jesus our Living Lord.

Love Conquers All!

Revd Charles Meachin
Advent 2021

In the second series on the festivals Jesus would have known, from a Christian perspective, we revisit:

Hanukkah

What would Jesus be doing at this time of year when he was a young boy? It's the holiday season and it is one of our most exciting dates in the Jewish calendar: it's Hanukkah! The most important Jewish festival days, the Yom Tov, include Passover, Yom Kippur, Rosh Hashana and others, but not Hannukah, which despite being better known amongst many non-Jewish people is actually a minor holiday. It's not really mentioned in the Torah (the Jewish Bible), and instead comes from the Talmud, another collection of Jewish writings. It is also mentioned in the Apocrypha books of the Old Testament, with the whole story of Hanukkah given in the first two books of Maccabees. Definitely worth reading.

Hanukkah is known as the "Festival of Lights" or the "Festival of Dedication". It is an eight-day celebration beginning on the 25th day of the Jewish month of Kislev, which typically falls in November or December. This year Hanukkah is November 28th to December 6th.

The holiday celebrates the events which took place over 2,300 years ago in the land of Judea, which is now Israel. It begins in the reign of Alexander the Great, who conquered Syria, Egypt, and Israel, but allowed the lands under his control to continue observing their own religions and retain a certain degree of autonomy. Under this relatively benevolent rule, many Jews assimilated elements of Hellenistic culture, adopting the language, the customs, and the dress of the Greeks.

More than 100 years after Alexander, Antiochus IV rose to power in the region. He began to oppress the Jews severely, placing a Hellenistic priest in the Temple, massacring Jews, prohibiting the practice of the Jewish religion, and desecrating the Temple by requiring the sacrifice of pigs (a non-kosher animal).

Following a large revolt, the Maccabees cleansed the Temple and re-dedicated it on the 25th day of the Jewish month of Kislev. When it came time to re-light the Menorah (the multi-branched lampstand), they searched the entire Temple, but only one small jar of oil bearing the pure seal of the High Priest could be found. Miraculously, the small jar of oil burned for eight days, until a new supply of oil could be brought. From then on, Jews everywhere have observed a holiday for eight days in honour of their historic victory and the miracle of the oil.

As believers, we can celebrate the "Festival of Lights" by rededicating our lives to Christ and acknowledging Him as the true light of this world. Hanukkah can remind us of God's wonderful miracles on our behalf, and of God's protection throughout our lives. It reminds us to remain true to God even when the world around us is full of doubt or pressure to conform.

Jesus told us that whoever follows Him will not have darkness, but the Light of Life. What a wonderful time of the year to remember and commemorate the great miracle that God has done for us, by giving us new light and new life. Enjoy the holidays and happy new year!

Saz Holland

Items for the February & March 2022 issue of *Pathway* should be given to Dominic Casey by Sunday 30th January 2022

Weekly Activities

Sunday	10.30 am	Morning Service *Holy Communion celebrated 1st Sunday in the month*
Tuesday	12.30 pm	'Oasis' House Group (*3rd in month*)
Wednesday	10.00 am	Yarn with Yarn Charity Craft Group (*alternate weeks*)
	2.00 pm	Toddler Group
Thursday	10.30 am	Ladies' Coffee Morning (*alternate weeks*)

Monthly Church Meeting - contact Church Secretary for details.
See weekly news-sheet or get in touch for details of 'Oasis', Ladies' Coffee Morning, and other activities

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