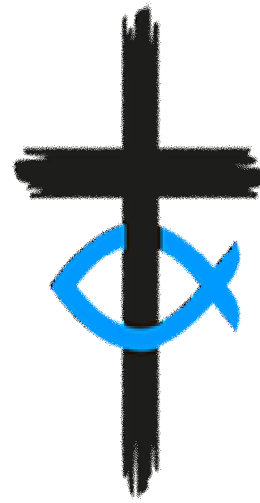


CH URC NEWS

Swann Lane Cheadle Hulme
STOCKPORT SK8 7HU
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Partnership Minister:
Rev Kurauone Mutimwii
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The
United
Reformed
Church

**DECEMBER
2023**



Friends,

Christ was a stranger; you went out and welcomed Him in [Matt 25:35]

Christmas time comes when homes and streets are decorated with Christmas trees and lights are all over. When we do that, sometimes some people have their beloved family and friends in their minds who they will be preparing to meet and thereafter celebrate, exchange gifts, and share life together. Such moments of coming together are hope refilling and they create beautiful experiences we can carry throughout the coming year. In Zimbabwe, around Christmas time, people travel all over the country to their rural or birthplace homes for family reunions, where they do whatever is fun, to celebrate those times together.

That sounds nice, especially for those with family and friends to share these activities. What about those who do not have families to go to, because of circumstances beyond them? One of the many good things I saw happening in some of our Churches was the packaging and dedication of Christmas presents in shoe boxes. They will be sent out into various parts of the world to people who we will never know and who will never know us. We may wonder how it is and how it feels to spend Christmas time with people who are not family but total strangers to us.

Through these gifts, the hearts of sharing generously, the joy of packaging them, and sending them off to be with other people, is the best way we can spend Christmas time in the company of people to whom we are total strangers. The people whom we do not know, but we make to feel what it means to be a part of a family and to smile as they open a gift box.

Christmas is always an opportune time to celebrate how our families are much beyond those we often focus on. We reflect on God, when he packaged himself, and sent himself out and away to be part of humanity, and a creation that was alienated from God's family on account of sin. May they become the household of God who can feel and understand what it means to be a part of God's family.

Christmas is our opportunity for family to be together with and as strangers. A blessed Christmas to us all.

Rev Kurauone Mutimwii

NEWS AROUND THE FELLOWSHIP

As the Christmas season approaches and folk think towards their families, we must remember the many people who have no family and will spend Christmas on their own. Our thoughts are with any members of our church fellowship who are ill, or troubled, in any way.

We are grateful for the worship support we have had during November from visiting ministers and preachers - Revs Kurauone Mutimwii and Peter Sharp, Prof Christopher Whitehead, Linda Rayner and Bernie who led a short Armistice Day service when there was a small exhibition of wartime memorabilia. Thank you all.

Thank you to the donors for their recent contributions towards CHURC News and Christmas greetings.

We hope that all those who will be celebrating a birthday or special anniversary in December have a very happy time.

Our best wishes for the future go to Robert Williams who moved house on 24 NOV.

Your donations for the Royal British Legion from the Coffee Morning, sale of poppies and Church coffee totalled £112.55p - thank you so much.
The News Team

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

TUES 9 JAN 2024 - Partnership: Legacy of Slavery Workshop at Swann Lane ~ 7pm

Sun 14 JAN - Church Meeting

w/e 20/21 JAN PREACH WITH A VIEW

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FELLOWSHIP CIRCLE

This month we have enjoyed meeting up for coffee, biscuits and chatting as usual. We are very grateful to Mavis for inviting us into her home again. She also treated us to some very nice cake and we tested our brains with a quiz on the names of young animals. Between us we got the majority of answers but not a baby ant. All the answers are on Google!

Carole Davies

COFFEE MORNING and CHRISTMAS BRING & BUY STALL with RAFFLE

Sat 2 DEC 10 am ~ 12 noon



...in aid of our church charities



CHRISTMAS GREETINGS

Madge and Ann Hardie wish all their friends at Swann Lane a very Happy Christmas and best wishes for the New Year

Best wishes to all our friends at Swann Lane for Christmas and the New Year
~ John and June Mitchell

Wishing everyone at Swann Lane U.R.C. a warm, friendly, and happy family Christmas Season. With love from **Mo**

Bernie and Alison wish everyone a very happy and healthy Christmas and New Year.

I wish a joyous and healthy Christmas and New Year to all my friends. Carole.

May you all have a peaceful and joyous festive season
Robert Williams

Christmas wishes and all the best for 2024 to all our friends at Swann Lane with grateful thanks for all your support for Christian Aid and Traidcraft throughout the year. Morag and Sandy

Wishing everyone a very Happy Christmas and a healthy & peaceful New Year. All the best from the Elsdon family.

CHRISTMAS INTERNAL MAIL

There will be a 'post box' in the church foyer for all those Christmas cards you want to send **to friends at Swann Lane**. There will be a box at the side for small donations to take account of the postage saved! These, along with those contributions for published Christmas Greetings in the magazine, will go to the charities.



URC AT CROSSROADS

A culture of listening and collective discernment

Barriers to flourishing

In the first chapter we described encouraging aspects of flourishing within the URC, while also noting challenges and vulnerabilities for each of the things highlighted. We now turn to discussing some of the key barriers to flourishing in the denomination, as borne out by the data collected during the research. These are split into barriers found particularly at the level of local congregations and barriers that relate to wider denominational structures and dynamics.

Local challenges - Congregation overstretch

The URC is people-poor and most congregations are overstretched and tired. As one interviewee put it, "It's mostly retired folk, and those who are active are getting a bit older." This creates a financial burden as fewer people are asked to give more to keep up with demands ('Ministry & Mission' contributions, which are contributions to the denomination's 'common purse' for ministers' salaries, pensions and other essential expenditure, day to day ministry costs, and so on) and a volunteering crisis as fewer lay people are asked to take on more jobs – attending meetings, filling in forms, and taking a variety of other roles.

The "biggest problem is not lack of willingness to go out and reach the community, it is a lack of energy and resources," a synod staff member said. They added: "There's no real desire to do anything because people are tired... People who were confident, have lost confidence. People who were healthy have lost a sense of healthiness..."

When asked "What are the barriers to your congregation thriving?", 50% of respondents chose "limited staff resources". The second most common response to this question was written in by respondents ("Other"). Of the 157 "Other" responses, 20% (79/402) mentioned the age profile of the congregations and age-related factors as barriers to congregational life and thriving. Specifically, while responsibilities for ordinary congregational life and worship, as well as building upkeep, compliance and safeguarding demands have remained broadly the same, small, aging

congregations rely on a limited, indeed diminishing, aging and overstretched body of volunteers. Representative responses included:

"Members are all elderly and unable to fulfil tasks"; "Aging congregation, finding it hard to fill volunteer roles"; "Aging membership struggles to deal with the increasing amount of administrative work – very challenging to the point of being beyond its capabilities."

Both qualitative and quantitative phases of this study showed many churches are consumed with the fear of closure and lack the energy and imagination to be more outward/mission-focused and experiment with new initiatives. When asked "What kind of growth do you expect to see in your congregation in the future?", 22% of respondents (90 out of 402) to our survey replied, "No growth". One respondent to the 'Jubilee Questions' expressed their concern tersely: "We would like to be free of the worry about having small numbers and declining revenue."

The impact of Covid

Both regular and more novel forms of worship and fellowship (e.g. Messy/Café Church; community Christmas tree decorating) were stopped during Covid lockdowns and have either not restarted or are returning slowly, in a diminished form, with fewer people.

Where congregations had the technology, people with know-how and time to develop some form of online worship, initial pick up was in many cases significant, but this tapered off. Some members were happy to receive 'Daily Devotions', a discipleship resource produced and distributed by the URC containing Bible readings, reflections and prayers, but have got out of the habit of showing up in person, when restrictions were lifted.

With the pandemic over, the post-covid legacy is mixed. According to data from Peter Brierley consultancy, the URC as a whole has "an average digital congregation of 20,000". But as one interviewee put it:

Providing worship in hybrid real life/Zoom forms enables people who cannot get to church to participate, but makes it more difficult for us to feel a single community and is deleterious for the experience of worshipping in person, as the sense of corporate worship is diminished when there are fewer people present.

Similarly, Martin Camroux, a retired URC minister and researcher, points out that online worship

"cannot be a substitute for personal contact, and some of those who worship digitally will be existing church members and/or may visit more than one church website." Regular, in person midweek activities, like prayer and fellowship meetings, have suffered. Several interviewees and survey respondents noted a marked drop in attendance and loss of volunteers following the pandemic, although it should be noted that this may be true across other denominations. Some churches reported that they have seen attendance drop by a third or even a half, to say nothing of congregations that simply closed during the pandemic. A survey for the Evangelical Alliance found average attendance 32% down, as well as a drop in financial support and in children's and youth work.

Moreover, organisations that would hire out church halls and other spaces managed by churches are either slow to come back or never return. This has had a knock-on effect on congregational revenue and raises questions of financial viability and ultimately survival, especially when that income is critical to the financial viability of the congregation.

**Nathan Mladin
to be continued...**

YOUR CHRISTMAS DINNER TABLE

Gaze around your dinner table
As you dine on Christmas Day
Treasure them while you are able -
One day they may well go away.

Love is really hard to measure,
Love's not easy to define,
But memory's the only treasure
That will stand the test of time.

So, treasure all that Christmas laughter,
Hold it close – that's my advice.
For there may come a time soon after
When memory is worth great price.

It is sad that life is temporary,
Happy times will disappear;
When those you treasure are a memory,
The memory is a treasure dear.

By Nigel Beeton

CAROLS IN THE PARK

~ Oak Meadow
11 am SAT 9 DEC

**ALL ARE
WELCOME**



"Goodness! is it time for Christmas Fair organising, carol service planning and nativity play rehearsals already?!"

SYNOD & PARTNERSHIP

The new Transitional Moderator, Rev Clare Downing, a very experienced moderator from the midlands and ex moderator of General Assembly is already making a difference by bringing the committees together and settling everyone into a new way of working. She is proving to be just the leader we have lacked for several years.

The Partnership Steering Group have been busy organising the 'preach with a view' which we hope will lead to 'calling a new minister' to team up with Kura.

Kura and I recently attended the Mayor's Prayer breakfast and met many Stockport colleagues.

Bernie Stevens

SERVICES

Elders' wish to keep everyone safe, so please stay home if you are unwell.
You may wear masks (perhaps for singing). Also, understand our plans may change with little notice.
We may sometimes have a speaker and sometimes a simple in-house led service. Video conferencing continues and Leaders or readers may Zoom in or speak in church.

Duties are performed by a small team on a rota. Please check the board for changes.

Date	3 DEC	10 DEC		11 DEC	17 DEC	24 DEC	25 DEC	31 DEC
Service	Morning Worship	Morning Worship	MP Evening Zoom Service	SERVICE OF LIGHT	Morning Worship	Morning Communion	CHRISTMAS DAY	Morning Worship
Time	10.30 am	10.30 am	***6.30 pm***	2.00 pm	10.30 am	10.30 am	10.30 am	10.00 am
Leader	Margaret Dexter-Brown	Glyn Elsden & Alison Stevens	Rev Kurauone Mutimwii	Margaret Dexter Brown	In House	Bernie Stevens	Rev Kurauone Mutimwii	Rev Kurauone Mutimwii
Elder Duty	B Stevens	D Phillips		S Smith	P Oliver	A Stevens/ D Phillips		
Door	C Davies	J Hodson		M Smith	M Morton D Green	H Elsden		
Reader								
Flowers	H Elsden	Christmas		Christmas	Christmas	Christmas		
Coffee	C Davies	M Hardie			H Elsden	M Morton		
N o t e s	CHRISTINGLE	ADVENT SERVICE	Meeting ID: 717 0575 5463 Passcode (case sensitive) 2Hs7w3	In memory of those we have lost	LESSONS & CAROLS		Café Style SERVICE AT HEALD GREEN	JOINT MP SERVICE AT BRAMHALL

CHURCH REGISTERS - none

LECTIONARY for DECEMBER

3 OCT: Isaiah 64.1-9; Psalm 80.1-7,17-19; 1 Corinthians 1.3-9; Mark 13.24-37
10 OCT: Isaiah 40.1-11; Psalm 85.1-2,8-13; 2 Peter 3.8-15a; Mark 1.1-8
17 OCT: Isaiah 61.1-4,8-11; Psalm 126; 1 Thessalonians 5.16-24; John 1.6-28
24 OCT: 2 Samuel 7.1-11,16; Luke 1.47-55; Psalm 89.1-4,19-26; Romans 16.25-27; Luke 1.26-38
25 OCT: :Isaiah 9.2-7; Psalm 96; Titus 2.11-14; Luke 2.1-14,(15-20)
31 OCT: Isaiah 61.10-62.3; Psalm 148; Galatians 4.4-7; Luke 2.22-40

CHRISTMAS LUNCH (pre-booked)

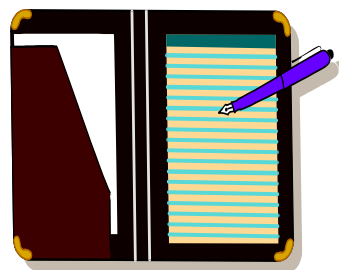
Wed 13 DEC
12 noon FOR 12.30 pm
+++++

Members, friends & neighbours

FILM MATINEE

Sat 16 December

CALENDAR



.....to the best of the editor's knowledge, unless you know better...

DECEMBER

Fri 01	2pm	Choir Rehearsal	
Sat 02	10am~12 noon	COFFEE MORNING and CHRISTMAS STALL	
			in aid of CHURCH CHARITIES
Mon 04			
Tues 05			
Wed 06	10.30am	Elders' meeting	1.30~3 pm FELLOWSHIP CIRCLE
			7.30 pm Worship Group ~ Church
Thu 07			7.30 pm MP Steering Group meeting on Zoom
Fri 08			2pm Choir Rehearsal
Sat 09		CTCH 'Carols in the Park on Oak Meadow	
		11am~4pm Cheadle Hulme Precinct Charity Market	
Mon 11			
Tues 12			
Wed 13	12pm for 12.30 pm	CHRISTMAS LUNCH (pre-booked)	
Thu 14			
Fri 15	10.00 am	Management meeting ~ Church	2pm Choir Rehearsal
Sat 16		2.30 pm Film Matinee	
Mon 18			
Tues 19			
Wed 20			1.30~3 pm FELLOWSHIP CIRCLE
Thu 21			
Fri 22			2pm Choir Rehearsal
Mon 25			
Tues 26			
Wed 27			1.30~3 pm FELLOWSHIP CIRCLE
Thu 28			
Fri 29			2pm Choir Rehearsal
Sat 30			

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