

CHURCH NEWS

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The
United
Reformed
Church

Partnership Minister:

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JULY/AUGUST 2024

Friends,

Doubts about the Christian faith? – take action now!

Do you have doubts about the Christian faith? July is the month for you to decide what to do about them. This month the Church remembers Doubting Thomas, and there IS action *you* can take, either way.

You know the story: Thomas was the only apostle not present when Jesus appeared to the disciples on the evening of His resurrection. When the rejoicing disciples later told Thomas that Jesus was alive, he flatly refused to believe them. He had seen the crucifixion.

The gospel goes on to relate that a week later Jesus indeed appeared to Thomas, and invited him to put his hand into the holes in His hands and feet. Thomas was utterly overwhelmed. His response was 'My Lord and My God!' He saw, he believed.

Then Jesus said something which is relevant to us today. "Blessed are those who have *not* seen and yet have believed." (Jn 20:29) Jesus KNOWS it can be hard for you, who have never seen Him, to believe that He is indeed alive, and Lord of all. Which is, of course, where we are today. Perhaps you really struggle with doubt. Well, there are two courses of action you can take.

1. Don't read the Bible. Begin to forget what Christianity teaches. Don't go to church. Don't ask God, or anyone else, for help. Your 'doubts' are perfectly honest questions, but stop looking for answers. Assume that because you have questions, there are no answers.

2. Look for some answers. Find out what the New Testament actually says about Jesus - by reading it! Do not be confused into thinking that you 'doubt' something which you may not even really 'know.' Pray – remember that Jesus said that those who believe without seeing are 'blessed'. So, ask God that, if He is there, please would He 'bless' you by opening your eyes to spiritual realities. Go to church. Yes, the Christian faith demands that we take God at His word, with no evidence other than His Word. But though we believe in Jesus without seeing Him, we do NOT believe without considering Him. Faith is not blind credulity and unthinking naiveté. We have faith in the historic person of Jesus Christ.

Peter writes some real encouragement in his first epistle, "Though you have not seen Him, you love Him; and even though you do not see Him now, you believe in Him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls" (1 Peter 1:8-9).

*The Revd Dr Roger Roberts
Parish Pump*

NEWS AROUND THE FELLOWSHIP

Our thoughts are with those in our fellowship who are unwell or housebound for any reason and unable to join with us for services and social events. May they feel God's presence supporting them through their difficult times.

Our thanks go not only to The Lawrence Singers and Poynton Male Voice Choir for a wonderful evening of Song on 11 MAY in memory of David Williams but also to all those who supported the occasion. Tickets were free but donations on the night for our 5 church charities totalled £592.

A very enjoyable Anniversary Afternoon Tea was held on Saturday 22 June when 24 members and friends once again enjoyed Morag's splendid baking skills - cakes, meringues, scones. Many thanks to both Morag and Sandy for their hard work both before and on the day, including all the sandwich making. With the addition of the sale of jams and cakes, Morag hopes to send £260 to Transform Trade.

We welcomed Christopher Whitehead, Margaret Dexter-Brown and Rev Peter Sharp during May and June and are grateful to them for their continued support by leading worship, along with members of our Worship Group.

We send best wishes to all those who will be celebrating a birthday or special anniversary in July or August. We hope you have a very happy time.

The News Team

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Sun 14 JUL - CHURCH MEETING

Sun 1 SEP - Missional Partnership PRAYERS IN THE (Fog Lane) PARK at 2.30pm. All welcome.

Sat 28 SEP - ORDINATION and INDUCTION OF Steph Atkins - Gatley URC at 2pm

Sun 29 SEP - Joint Service at Cheadle Hulme led by the Moderator of NW Synod, Rev Clare Downing

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**SOUP, SWEET
& MEET**
noon Wed 17 JULY

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FELLOWSHIP CIRCLE

The Fellowship continues to meet at Mavis' on Wednesdays at 1pm. There are not so many of us now, but we still manage to put the world to rights and enjoy coffee and biscuits and sometimes even cake.

Cake was on the menu when we celebrated Marie's 90th birthday. Her daughter brought a cream cake with strawberries which we all enjoyed immensely. We are also very pleased that Eric is now back with us after his operation.

Carole Davies

THANKS

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Alison, Bernie and Eric for their kindness following the death of my sister, Ruth. Bernie took the service of remembrance for us, Eric played the organ and Alison offered her much needed support. All the family join me in sending our heartfelt thanks to you all.

Carole Davies

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OPEN DAY for CHARITIES

from 11am ~ 3 pm

Friday 12 JUL 2024

at Church and Swann Grove

Coffee, Tea & Cakes and BUFFET

Bring & Buy, Bric-a-Brac and Plant stalls

All proceeds to 5 church charities...

Francis House, Lifeshare, Mary's Meals, Suk

Jai orphanage & Transform Trade

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(REV) STEPHANIE ATKINS

The ORDINATION and INDUCTION of our new Partnership minister will be at 2pm on Sat 28 SEP at Gatley URC - tell Alison if you want to attend. Steph will receive a minister's stole and a home communion set. The family will live in Cheadle Hulme but the children will probably go to Gatley URC (many children!). She actually starts work 1SEP.

Bernie

URC AT CROSSROADS

Structures

Both qualitative and quantitative data collected in the research reveal strong conviction regarding the need for structural reform. Most members we spoke to wanted structures of the denomination to be streamlined and simplified to account for the current size and condition of the denomination and to facilitate a clearer orientation toward local mission.

Concrete suggestions ranged from reducing the number of synods, disbanding committees, simplifying processes, including access to synod grants, and generally strengthening relationships and communication, forging new collaboration pathways between different levels and departments of the denomination, including individual churches.

Casting a vision of what the future of the URC might look like, a synod member of staff said: *It should be about being local, being comfortable with being small, being flexible, approaching the ministry in a more missional way. Yet remembering there is something tying the congregations together, pooling resources, helping each other, connecting meaningfully with each other, practicing 'intelligent networking' and remaining in constant dialogue.*

Indeed, several interviewees noted that sharing of money across synods and local contexts, according to need and missional opportunities should be encouraged and facilitated accordingly. Financial resources should be made more accessible to local congregations particularly where there is intent and opportunity to engage in mission-related work (e.g. employing visionary and theologically trained youth workers; projects that create new or deepen existing links with local communities; projects and programmes that build confidence in the Gospel and the sharing of faith through deeds and words; creative expressions of evangelism).

Conclusion

As the title of this report suggests, the United Reformed Church is a paradoxical church. It is top-heavy, with structures forged in, and arguably fit for a different era, yet vibrantly activist at the level of local congregations. It

is people poor, as a result of on-going congregational decline, yet for the same reason – and somewhat ironically – ‘cash rich’, with a solid financial situation resulting in part from the sale of closed church buildings.

At just over 50 years since it was established as an expression of ecumenical fervour and hope, the United Reformed Church now finds itself at a crossroads: will it simply manage its decline or leverage its paradoxical position and rich heritage to rediscover its *raison d’être* and forge a path towards the future? This report is offered as a resource to help with answering this question.

Chapter one outlined areas and aspects where the URC is flourishing, notably in the vibrant community outreach of many URC local congregations, the positive culture of listening, inclusivity and collective decision-making that are at the heart of the URC identity. Chapter two identified key barriers to flourishing, at both local and wider levels of church life. These include the various challenges faced by largely aging and declining local congregations, as well as denominational structures that risk stifling rather than enabling local congregational life and mission. Finally, in chapter three we suggested a series of pathways to flourishing, which include the improvement of leadership and ministerial training and reforming the structures of the denomination.

In the end, the future of the URC depends, we believe, on the way the denomination chooses to prioritise and properly resource local congregational life, discipleship, and holistic mission. Therein lies the promise of flourishing.

Nathan Mladin

CROSSWORD ANSWERS

ACROSS: 1, Sabbatical. 7, Opinion. 8, Laing. 10, Olga. 11, Galilean. 13, Sardis. 15, Severe. 17, Adultery. 18, Flea. 21, Swazi. 22, Acetate. 23, Revelation.

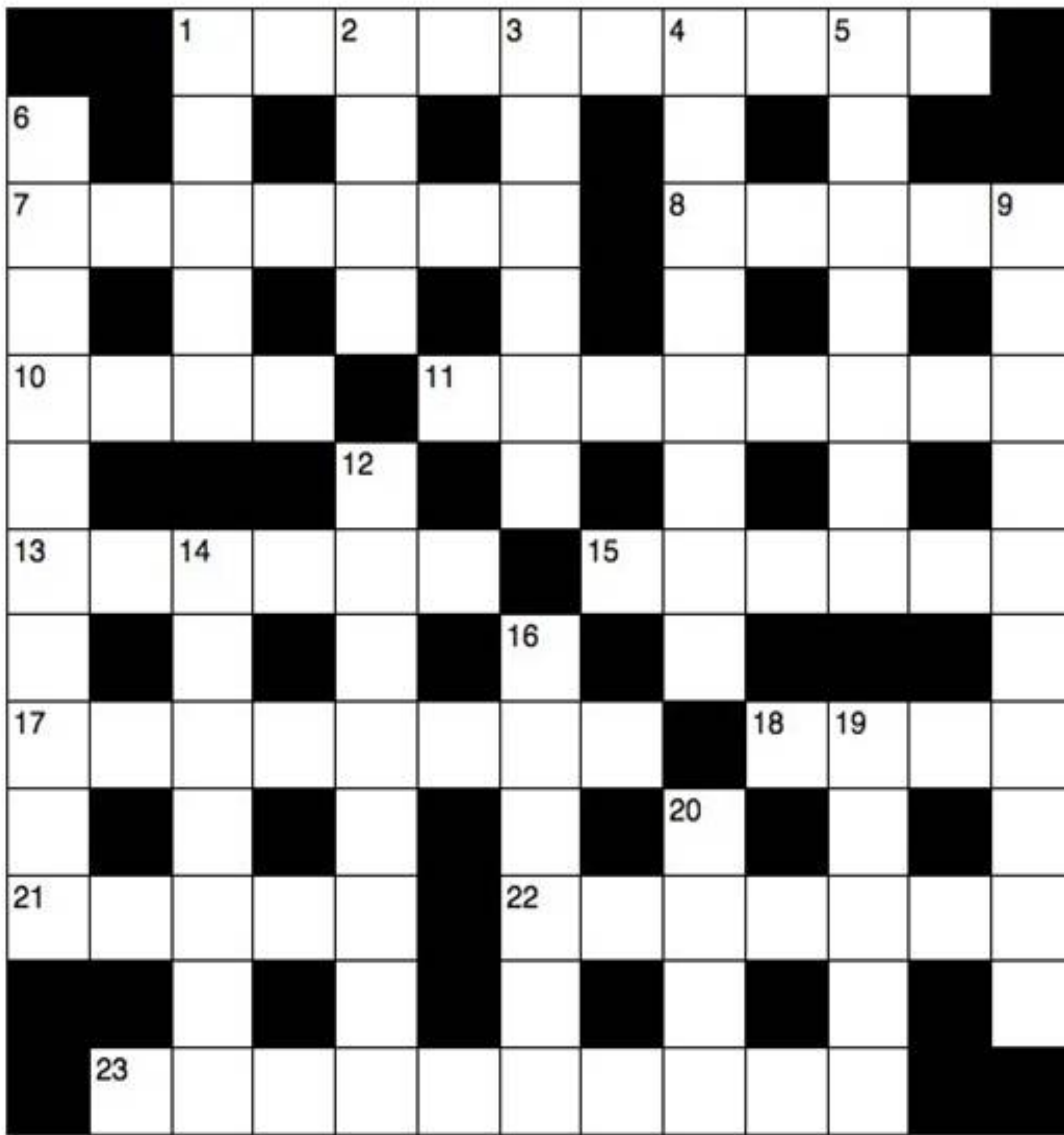
DOWN: 1, Sling. 2, Brim. 3, Annual. 4, Ill-timed. 5, Abilene. 6, Colossians. 9, Gennesaret. 12, Diatribe. 14, Roulade. 16, Errata. 19, Learn. 20, Levi.

CHURCH MEETING - SUN 14 JULY

A copy of the minutes of the last Church meeting in April is enclosed for all members together with the Agenda.

Please do what you can to be present at the meeting which will be held after the service.

Alison Stevens



Down

- 1 The young David's favourite weapon (1 Samuel 17:40) (5)
 2 'Your vats will — over with new wine' (Proverbs 3:10) (4)
 3 Once yearly (Exodus 30:10) (6)
 4 Milled it (anag.) (3-5)
 5 Region north of Damascus of which Lysanias was tetrarch (Luke 3:1) (7)
 6 Comes between Philippians and 1 Thessalonians (10)
 9 Lake where the first disciples were called (Luke 5:1–11) (10)
 12 Abusive outburst (8)
 14 Are loud (anag.) (7)
 16 Printing errors (6)
 19 'Take my yoke upon you and — from me' (Matthew 11:29) (5)
 20 Jacob's third son (Genesis 29:34) (4)

Crossword Clues

Across

- 1 Relating to the Jewish day of rest (10)
 7 Point of view (Matthew 22:17) (7)
 8 20th-century Brethren philanthropist whose construction company became one of the UK's biggest, Sir John — (5)
 10 Girl's name (4)
 11 Peter was accused of being one in the courtyard of the high priest's house (Luke 22:59) (8)
 13 The fifth of the 'seven churches' (Revelation 3:1–6) (6)
 15 'Now the famine was — in Samaria' (1 Kings 18:2) (6)
 17 Banned by the seventh Commandment (Exodus 20:14) (8)
 18 Insect most closely associated with itching (1 Samuel 24:14) (4)
 21 Bantu tribe which gives its name to tiny landlocked country in southern Africa (5)
 22 Familiar material in churches that use an overhead projector (7)
 23 Last book of the Bible (10)

MISSIONAL PARTNERSHIP

The Missional Partnership prayer for **July** is from Cornerstone URC...

We thank God for the warm and friendly congregations of the former churches getting to know each other, making friendships and starting to examine the ways they function as one church., We pray for patience, guidance and vision as we seek to keep the best of the past and try new ideas which make best use of our resources, both human and financial.

May God grant us courage, energy, resilience in his work and also open minds and faithful hearts as we prayerfully try to discern his will in promoting Christian mission in our local area.
 Amen

and for **August** from Gatley URC

Lord, we pray for all the congregations in our missional partnership that work together, helping and encouraging the work we all do in the name

of our Lord, sharing in the worship across the partnership whenever there is a need.

We pray for the work of Gatley, for their outreach and commitment to the community, for continuing activities and new endeavours, and for mission opportunities that come along.

We pray for all Ministers and lay people and for all who enter our buildings, that they may experience the love of Jesus in their lives.

Amen

LECTIONARY for JULY/AUGUST

7 JUL: 2 Samuel 5:1-5,9-10; Psalm 48; 2 Corinthians 12.2-10; Mark 6.1-13

14 JUL: 2 Samuel 6:1-5,12b-19; Psalm 24; Ephesians 1.3-14; Mark 6.14-29

21 JUL: 2 Samuel 7:1-14a; Psalm 89:20-37; Ephesians 2.11-22; Mark 6.30-34,53-56

28 JUL: 2 Samuel 11:1-15; Psalm 14; Ephesians 3.14-21; John 6.1-21

4 AUG: 2 Samuel 11:26–12:13a; Psalm 51.1-12; Ephesians 4.1-16; John 6.24-35

11 AUG: 2 Samuel 18:5-9,15,31-33; Psalm 130; Ephesians 4.25-5.2; John 6.35,45-51

18 AUG: 1 Kings 2:10-12; 3:3-14; Psalm 111; Ephesians 5.15-20; John 6.51-58

25 AUG: 1 Kings 8:(1,6,10-11),22-30,41-43; Psalm 84; Ephesians 6.10-20; John 6.56-69

Hole for one



TwistyNoodle.com

A golfing priest, after having been beaten by an elderly parishioner, returned to the clubhouse s o m e w h a t depressed. "Cheer up," said the layman. Remember, you'll eventually be burying me some day." "Maybe," said the priest. "But even then, it will be your hole-for-one!"

Parish Pump

Members, friends & neighbours

FILM MATINEE

Sat 27 JULY

NO FILM IN AUGUST

The M&M FUND

The Ministry and Mission Fund is the central organ that pays the ministers, their pension contributions and the central administration costs. The 12 Synods pay a levy based on their total membership and each church pays their Synod a levy based on their average Sunday congregations. Simple enough.

However, the fund has been in deficit for a couple of years due, in part, to declining numbers, and is eating into reserves. So the URC national treasurer has asked Synods to hold their declining contributions at the 2023 levels, until 2027.

Concurrently, there is already a review into Synod payments, and due to report in 2025. The conclusion of this review is **expected** to report that there are a lot of reserves held by individual churches that might provide an answer to the immediate problem, if a strategy can be found to transfer it.

After much prayer, the NW Synod has **agreed** to hold its contribution, but only to 2025, in the belief that answers may be forthcoming in the review.

We ourselves now hold significant reserves following the sale of the Bramhall manse and a recent bequest, though some other churches are understood to hold rather more, and some much less. Last year we voluntarily paid above our levy and we probably will again this year. The strong support the weak.

Conversely, Elders & Management group, acutely aware of our dwindling membership, are finding it difficult to **justify** spending large sums that may only be of use a few years...

Bernie Stevens

SERVICES

Elders' wish to keep everyone safe, so please stay home if you are unwell.

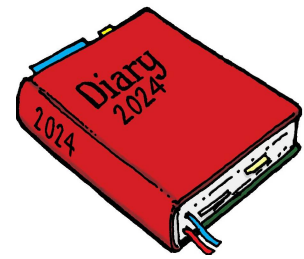
You may wear masks (perhaps for singing). Also, understand our plans may change with little notice. We may sometimes have a speaker and sometimes a simple in-house led service. Video conferencing continues and Leaders or readers may Zoom in or speak in church.

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

Date	7 JUL	14 JUL		21 JUL	28 JUL
Service	Morning Worship	Morning Worship	MP Zoom Evening Service	Morning Worship	Morning Communion
Time	10.30 am	10.30 am	***6.30 pm***	10.30 am	10.30 am
Leader	In House	Elley Noden	Rev Kurauone Mutimwii	Liz Delafield	Bernie Stevens
Elder Duty	D Phillips	B Stevens		A Stevens	P Oliver /D Phillips
Door	M Hardie	H Elsden		G Elsden	P Grieve
Reader		D Green			
Flowers	Silk	M Morton		Silk	H Elsden
Coffee	M Morton	S & M Smith		B & A Stevens	D Green
Notes			Meeting ID: 817 9799 2059 Passcode 518433		

Date	4 AUG	11 AUG		18 AUG	25 AUG
Service	Joint Morning Worship	Morning Worship	MP Zoom Evening Service	Morning Worship	Morning Communion
Time	10.30 am	10.30 am	***6.30 pm***	10.30 am	10.30 am
Leader	Bernie Stevens	ON-LINE	Bernie Stevens	Alison Haigh	Alison Pope
Elder Duty	CHEADLE HULME CLOSED - JOINT SERVICE AT HEALD GREEN	B Stevens		A Stevens	S Smith/ B Stevens
Door		C Davies		M Morton	M Smith
Reader					
Flowers		B Danson		Silk	M Smith
Coffee		M Hardie		H Elsden	M Morton
Notes	SERVICE AT HEALD GREEN	ONLINE	Meeting ID: 817 9799 2059 Passcode 518433		

CALENDAR



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

JULY

Mon 01

Tues 02

Wed 03

1.00-2.30 pm Fellowship Circle

Thu 04

7.30 pm MP Steering Group ~ Bramhall

Fri 05

Sat 06

10~11.30am Coffee Morning in aid of MARY'S MEALS

Sun 07

Mon 08

Tues 09

Wed 10

1.00~2.30 pm Fellowship Circle

Thu 11

Fri 12

11am-3pm CHARITIES OPEN DAY ~ Swann Grove and Church

Sat 13

Sun 14

11.45am CHURCH MEETING

Mon 15

Tues 16

Wed 17

12 - 2pm SOUP, SWEET and MEET and Fellowship

7.15 pm CTCH Reps meeting ~ URC

Thu 18

7.30 pm Worship group

Fri 19

2 pm Choir rehearsal

Mon 22

Tues 23

Wed 24

10.30am Elders' meeting

1.00-2.30 pm Fellowship Circle

Thu 25

Fri 26

2 pm Choir rehearsal

Sat 27

2.30 pm FILM MATINEE

Mon 29

Tues 30

Wed 31

1.00-2.30 pm Fellowship Circle

AUGUST

Fri 02

10 am Management meeting ~ Church

Sat 03

10~11.30am Coffee Morning in aid of CHELWOOD FOODBANK PLUS

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