



THE NEWS



September 2026

The Magazine of Potters Bar United Reformed Church



Saturday 26th September at 7.00 for 7.30 pm

Are you able to make up a table for 6 - 8 people - if so please let Frank Palmer know. (01707 873179)

frankpalmer@btinternet.com

If you can't make up a table, just let Frank know and he will join you with another table.

Pay on the night - £15 per person.

(includes sandwich+ buffet, but bring your own Bottles and Glasses)

Our usual Quizmaster – Steve England will be there to test your knowledge.





People make churches

The Gospel of Matthew includes a verse when Jesus asks Peter "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus replies "...and I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church." What Jesus did not say is "I will build many churches." Of course he didn't because the church built upon Peter was a **growing band of people**. This spread around the world in spite of travel and communications being primitive. Today there are 2.5 billion Christians in the world, and the number is still growing.

This is not the start of a sermon. My somewhat unusual ministry takes me regularly to 5 churches and I have been a minister for 36 years and an elder/Junior Church leader/treasurer before that. I have seen many things and can compare different styles of churchmanship and varying degrees of success and regrettably, some failures,

Why do churches fail? People, people, people! Or more precisely people to provide leadership. Bushey URC had sold part of its land and had well over £100,000 on deposit when it closed because of lack of leadership. Woodcock Hill URC, which was our family church from 1972 until I was ordained a minister in 1990, closed with over £100,000 cash but lacked leaders. My church of 28 years, St Andrew's Borehamwood had a rock-solid eldership for all that time but when two elders moved to Essex we couldn't go on. We didn't have the odd £100,000 knocking about but we kept rolling along keeping our heads above water financially.

Why do churches survive? By using their people and resources appropriately for their situation and their community. Good business practice is to measure what is available and not bite off more than you can chew. But we are not a business, we are a church. We are called by God to bring salvation to those in need. What, how? Let's get real. We all want to save Potters Bar URC for the next generation. Not the building but our Christian fellowship.

How do other churches do it. Adeyfield and St George's are in younger communities in Hemel Hempstead. There are families and middle-aged local to them. They are active in the community and have various church groups. They were able to attract a shared stipendiary minister because of what they were already achieving. Nearer home is Brookmans Park. They are active in the community on a weekly basis and pay for assistance. Christ Church Hatfield maintains a weekly prayer meeting and other activities, and their Sunday services attract other people even to the extent that I am considering a spot for children.

I am told that it is different for us because we exist within an older community (odd that the nursery is so successful). But we could fashion our church outreach around the older community. True we may need to bite the bullet and change our service time so there can be fellowship and back in time for lunch. We may need to have a minibus. There are things we can consider to make our church more welcoming and accessible. But this needs consideration by a team, The Outreach Team. Are there any volunteers please?

God bless you

David

Tony Alderman

We have learnt that Tony Alderman, a good friend of our church and its members over many years, has died after a long battle with cancer. Whilst this is sad for many it is a release from pain for Tony. Through his faith our Lord will welcome him home to the Kingdom of God.

It was good that he was able to come to our church one last time and meet his many friends.

Lord God, we commend our friend Tony to your loving care.

David

A Thanksgiving & Memorial Service to celebrate Tony's life will take place on **Thursday 10 September 2026 at 2pm** at St John's URC, New Barnet.



Church Officers and Elders

Interim Minister: Reverend David Aplin

Serving Elders

David Aplin, Revd. 07900673529

Alastair Maclean 653636

Maureen Marlow 652252

Janet O'Connor 856967

Frank Palmer 873179

Marian Poulton 07795516707

Lettings Officer:

Jane Wood

Mobile: 07879 687569

Chairman Premises & Finance Committee

John Knott Tel: 01707 335238

Treasurer (Asst): Alastair Maclean Tel: 01707 653636

Sunday 26th July, a Service of Hymns, Prayers & Readings –led by David Ramsay



We can always expect something novel from David. This time it wasn't the amazing technicolour shirt he was wearing, or him talking to us through the flowers ("durch die Blumen"), which in Germany means something tough is going to be said.

I think it is best summed up as "It was the worst of times; it was the best of times" – the worst of times because David's plan had been to use YouTube videos for his hymns and Computer frequently said NO! The best of times because when things don't go to plan we all perk up, enjoying the moment, and willing things to go right.

In that sense we were all fully engaged in a way that can sometimes be missing. And of course there was "Plan Steve"; Stephen ready to step in and play the hymns when the computer remained obstinate despite our best efforts.

David was apologetic, but several people told me just how much they'd enjoyed the session. Knowing David, I don't think he'll be "put off" by the day's experience. We'll all look forward to his next "big idea".

I've edited the video to remove some of those moments when the computer was at its most obstinate. It gives a fair record of what was an interesting and enjoyable morning's worship. You can view the Service video at <https://pottersbarurc.org/services/>



The Story Behind the Wedding Report

The July edition of our church magazine, pages 11 and 12 included a report and photographs from the wedding of Jennifer Lane and Peter Gooch on 20 June. The report ended by asking how Jenny & Peter had met and what had brought them together. Some people also asked where they had gone on their honeymoon. They'd spent time in the village of Frogmore near Kingsbridge in South Devon, followed by a few days in Torquay.



years they had been in the same building, though a head girl was hardly likely to take much notice of a little first-form boy.

Years later, in the 1980s, they'd found themselves sitting next to each other at a London Baptist Association meeting at Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church. Jenny knew that Peter had been a Baptist pastor, and he knew that she'd had been a Baptist missionary. Jenny had been part of Winchmore Hill Baptist Church for 70 years, while Peter had grown up at Oakwood Baptist Church. Having also been pupils at the same secondary school, they'd met and chatted at annual school reunions.



On the morning of the funeral, Jenny had been undecided about whether to attend. Then she'd received a clear instruction from God: "Go to the funeral, as you might meet someone." At the time, Peter knew nothing of this. He had just walked into the church lobby when Jenny arrived. They'd greeted one another, and her first comment had been that she had been charged an extra pound by the taxi driver because she had kept him waiting for a minute or two. So God's timing had been perfect. If Jenny had not delayed the taxi, they probably would not have met in that moment.

Hearing about the taxi problem, and wanting to help, Peter had offered Jenny a lift home. His car, however, was more than half a mile away.

They'd sat next to each other during the service and afterwards spoken with others who were there.

As they prepared to walk to Peter's car it had begun to rain, so Jenny had stayed at the church while he'd walked to the car with a lightness in his step. At that point, they'd not even known each other's address or telephone number, but he'd taken Jenny home and she'd invited him in for a cup of tea, but he'd said he had to be on his way. She'd asked for his telephone number so she could send a thank-you WhatsApp message. As they'd shaken hands, he'd given her a kiss on the cheek. She'd been a little surprised, but he was beaming.

The WhatsApp message had duly arrived: "Hi Peter. Thanks so much for bringing me home. Much appreciated. Love and prayers. Bless you. Jenny." It had come with affectionate emojis and pictures of smiling flowers and praying hands. He'd replied that it had been a pleasure and he'd take her up on a cup of tea soon. Unknown to Jenny, that evening and night Peter's insides had been doing cartwheels.



On Friday 29 August, Jenny had sent Peter a "Happy Friday" picture, and on Sunday morning a line of emojis. That Sunday, he'd invited himself round for a cup of tea and a chat the following Wednesday. They'd talked at length, shared Communion together, and Jenny had accepted an invitation to come to Peter's for lunch the following Monday. She'd thought that collecting her at half past eleven for lunch was rather early, but it was half past five before he'd taken her home. The next day, she'd wondered whether she had "blown it" because there's been no morning WhatsApp message. It had come in the afternoon. During the lunch, Peter had told Jenny he would be her taxi man. She'd asked how far he could drive in a day and suitably reassured she'd asked whether he would take her to Frinton. Frinton was a place where Jenny had spent family holidays in years gone by and he'd responded enthusiastically, "Yes — we can have fish and chips." The outing to Frinton took place just 20 days after the 28 August meeting. It had been a very enjoyable day: walking around the

town and along the seafront, hand in hand, looking either like an older couple who had been married for decades or like teenagers just getting together.

Another word from the Lord had come to Jenny for them: "I have given Peter to you, and you to Peter, for your mutual comfort. Do not be afraid; I am in control." And there had been other challenging and exciting words from the Lord for them, and they believed that there were going to be God-given great times ahead.

And there was a demand from the floor for a kiss – duly delivered with that enthusiasm that comes from practice

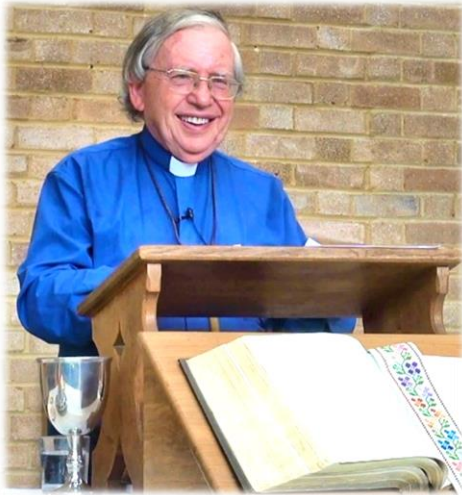


David Aplin's 56th Wedding Anniversary

Little did Maren and I know 56 years ago that getting married on 15th August would prove ideal for gathering the family together to celebrate it. But here we are at Ilfracombe where we managed to fit 4 generations including great-grandson Theo. Great-Grandma and Great-Grampy had a lovely week of bonding and smiles.



Communion Service Sunday 16th August – led by Revd David Aplin



The day's reading was about the Canaanite woman and her great faith. David had prepared a sermon, but when he'd returned from celebrating his 56th wedding anniversary, his computer seemed to have taken a holiday of its own. Sometimes (he felt) we were reminded not to place too much faith in technology, but to trust God instead.

Faith That Trusted God's Way

The reading had been about a woman who'd asked Jesus to heal her daughter. It raised an important question: what did it mean to have faith?

Faith was Not Control

When David had been at Oak Hill College, he'd attended a healing service. Two people with a recognised healing ministry had come to lead part of the service. Some students had received healing, and many of those present had sensed the presence of the Holy Spirit.

But then some of the students had demanded healing for the course-leader who had terminal cancer. They'd seemed to believe that if the right people prayed in the right way, with the right words and rituals, then healing would *have* to happen. That was not faith. We might believe in miracles, but we could not organise them. We could ask for God's help, but we could not order God to act according to our wishes. God's help often came as strength, peace, and support. We knew from the Old Testament particularly that horrible things had happened and that God had not intervened. God had responded in his own way.

The Canaanite Woman's Faith

The Canaanite woman did not come to Jesus as though she could command him. She came because she had seen, or heard, what he could do. She believed that, if he chose, her daughter could be healed. That was her great faith: not a demand, but trust. She believed in Jesus' power and appealed to his mercy. Jesus answered her, "Woman, you have great faith. Your request is granted."

Faith in the Face of Evil and Fear

The Bible also told us that Jesus drove out evil spirits. Today, people might find that difficult to talk about, and we rightly recognised that some suffering could be connected with mental illness. The Scripture did not avoid the subject of evil, and neither should we pretend that it was never real.

David had once met a woman who came seeking help. She had already gone from church to church asking for prayer against what she believed was an evil spirit. He'd remembered advice from people in the Church of England whose ministry involved this kind of work: never go alone. So he'd taken someone with him. Over time, the woman had spoken about the spirit in different ways. At first, it seemed to comfort her. Then it became pleading and fearful. Later, it became threatening. As the situation changed, David had become increasingly convinced that this was not simply in her mind. The key issue was faith and will. The woman had to want to be free. She had to stop clinging to the thing that frightened her and trust God to release her. She'd prayed with a cross in her hand, and through faith she'd found freedom.

Faith and the Future of the Church

This led David to our own church and its future. It was tempting for us to think only in terms of decline: to continue as we were until the money ran out, the building closed, and someone turned it into flats or homes. It was true that we did not currently have the families and resources that would make things easier. But that did not mean nothing could be done. We might need to think differently about the resources we did have. Instead of using all available funds on the building, perhaps some could be invested in people and mission: someone who could help us plan, organise, reach out, and make things happen. If we wanted the church to have a future, we had to be willing to invest in it. If this was the kind of work God wanted us to do, then we should have faith that God would help us as we made the effort.

The Challenge

The challenge was this: did we have faith in the future of our church? The second candle had been for faith in our church and its future. We should be asking what we could do to pass the church on to the next generation, not as a burden, but as a living witness.

We should not say, "It is too difficult."

We should have faith that God would help us.

- We had to be willing to put in the effort.
- We had to be bold enough at least to try.

Correction!

Last month we featured pictures of Margaret Hill as part of a reflection on her life. The pictures were cropped and so excluded the other church members who were a part of her life, and that of our church. So, to be inclusive and recognise the contributions of “the excluded”, here are the originals. A “trip down memory lane” for some of you?



Lunchtime Recital Friday 4th September at 12.15 – Alan Dorn

(piano)



Alan was last with us in May 2023 when the theme was Songs 'Without Words' and Alan played us pieces from Bach, Liszt, Mendelssohn, Chopin and Gershwin.

This time the theme is '**Carillon up the Keyboard**' - a programme of piano music inspired by bells



'Carillon up the Keyboard'

A programme of piano music inspired by bells

Les cloches du soir (Evening Bells) (1889)

Camille Saint-Saëns (1835-1921)

Abendglocken (Evening Bells)
from Walzermasken (1912))

Leopold Godowsky (1870-1938)

Allegretto
from Quelques riens pour album (c. 1860))

Gioachino Rossini (1792-1868)

Cloches à travers les feuilles (Bells Through the Leaves) from *Images*, book 2 (1907)

Claude Debussy (1862-1918)

La fuente y la campana (The Fountain and the Bell) from Paisajes (1942)

Federico Mompou (1893-1987)

La cathédrale engloutie (The Sunken Cathedral)
from *Préludes*, book 1 (1910)

Debussy

Les cloches de Genève: Nocturne from
Première année de pèlerinage - Suisse (1855)

Franz Liszt (1811-1887)

Prelude in A flat major op. 28 no 17 (1839)

Fryderyk Chopin (1810-1849)

La campanella from *Grandes études de Paganini*
(1851)

Liszt

About the performer

Alan Dorn is a Hertfordshire-based piano performer and teacher who frequently performs in London and the south-east. He performs a wide range of music spanning many centuries, genres and composers and enjoys constructing themed recital programmes.

Alan studies classical piano with Dorian Lejak and jazz with Marco Marconi. He has received advice from artists such as Leslie Howard, Charles Owen and Philip Fowke, and holds a Fellowship diploma in piano performance from the Royal Schools of Music.



Vicar of Dibley – The Second Coming – Saturday 5th September

The Potters Bar Theatre Company is presenting a follow-on from last year’s performance of their own version of The Vicar of Dibley, and Chris Ramsay is organising a block booking for church members, to be preceded by a sandwich and cake platter. Hopefully this time they won’t arrange to go on holiday for the event!

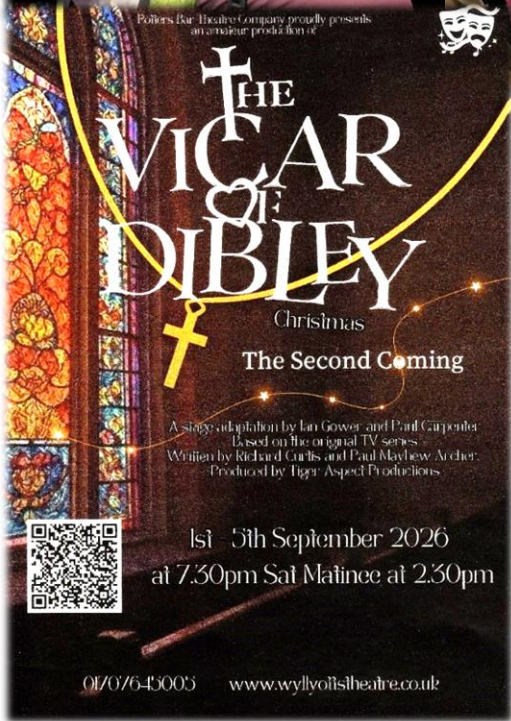
All who went last year enjoyed both the platter and the performance, which was hilarious.



If you are interested, please let Chris or David know as soon as possible, so that they can get the booking numbers right.

It’s Saturday September 5th at 6.30 pm for the platter, and 7.30 pm for the show.

Tickets for the show are £21.00 and the platter costs £12.00



Total £33.00 – and well worth it!

Visit to Bekonscot Model Village 22nd September 2026

Day/Date: Tuesday, 22nd September 2026

Time to Meet/Start: - from 11.20 a.m. at the entrance, for start time of 11.30 am

Venue Address: - Warwick Road, Beaconsfield, Bucks, HP9 2PL

What to expect: - We will have the opportunity for a self-guided tour of the model village.

Bekonscot Model Village & Railway actually comprises of seven little towns, which capture 1930s rural England. Bekonscot Town is the biggest, with the others scattered across the 1.5 acres of gardens. Each town has its own unique character, villagers and features, from coal mines to great castles, aerodromes to farms, docks to cable cars, racecourses to escaped convicts!

The site is wheelchair friendly!

There is also a Light Railway. The 7 1/4" narrow gauge light railway weaves its way behind the model village. A perfect introduction to the village, it criss-crosses some of the gardens and encircles the pond to return to the terminus. The railway runs every day during the open season from 10.30am – 4.30pm every few minutes. There is a charge of around £2 for the ride.

Following the walk-about: There is an on-site tearoom that provides hot and cold drinks, sandwiches, pre-packed snacks and hot rolls. Alternatively we could visit "The Crown Inn", Church Rd, Penn, HP10 8NY. This is about 5 minutes' drive up the B474 from Bekonscot. It is possible to re-enter the village if you retain your receipt.

Cost: £15.00 p.p. approx.- for entry to the village. If we have 15+ people, we can go for a group visit the entry price is £10.30 p.p. There is also the option of having a cream tea. (*Prices start from £8.50 per person and include scones, clotted cream, jam and a hot drink*).

We have to decide whether to lunch on-site or drive to the pub. This will depend on the numbers involved and the wishes of the drivers.

We need to know numbers by Sept 10th latest but the earlier the better. Please let Robert Hillyard know (robert_hillyard@hotmail.com or Tel. 654165).

We'll need to identify drivers and make decisions on the lunch options prior to the day though two drivers favour the pub.

When Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli tried to visit his friend, Lady Bradford, he was told by her servant that she had gone into town, as she usually did on Mondays.

"I thought you would know that, sir," the servant said.

"I did not," replied Disraeli, "nor did I know that it was Monday."



Diary for September

Tue 1	14.00	Elders Meeting
Fri 4	12.15	Lunchtime Recital with Alan Dorn (pianist)
	13.15	Charity Lunch
	14.30	Phoenix Whist Group and every Friday
	19.00	Choir Practice and every Friday
Sat 5	18.30	Platter before performance of
	19.30	The second coming of Vicar of Dibley at Wyllyotts
Sun6	11.00	Communion Service led by Mr Martyn Macphee
Thu 10	11.20	Visit to Bekonscot Model Village (see Robert)
Sun13	11.00	Morning Service led by Pastor Peter Gooch
Sun20	11.00	Communion Service led by Reverend David Aplin
		Followed by Church Meeting (bring lunch)
Sat 26	17.00	Quiz Night (see Frank Palmer)
Sun27	11.00	Morning Service led by Mrs Anne Walton
Wed	30	14.00 Knit & Natter Group

Rotas for September

Pulpit Supply

6th Mr Martyn Macphee 13th Pastor Peter Gooch 20th Revd David Aplin 27th Anne Walton

Duty Officer

6th Janet Green 13th David Ramsay 20th Frank Palmer 27th Janet Green

Communion Preparation

6th Marian Poulton 20th Janet O'Connor

Bible Readers

6th Robert Hillyard 13th Mary Deller 20th Frank Palmer 27th Marian Poulton

Coffee

6th Chris Ramsay 13th Margaret Hillyard 20th Marian Poulton 27th Chris Ramsay

In 1974 while doing a tour of Australia which is part of the British Commonwealth, Prince Charles attended a service at a small parish church. After it was over, the cleric apologised for the small turnout: "Being a bank holiday weekend," he explained, "most of the parishioners are away." The prince was vexed. "Not another bank holiday!" he exclaimed and then asked sarcastically what this one was in honour of. "Well," the rector replied, rather embarrassed, "over here we call it the Queen's birthday."



A Doctor's Dilemma

I specialise in lupins, they're my pride and my delight
I fertilise and water them, converse with them each night.
They win me many prizes, they're the glory of my life,
When I show them to my neighbours and share them with my wife.

I look at all this beauty, that God and I have made,
(I buy the seed, He made the earth, I dug it with my spade),
And when I dwell with pleasure , on our joint co-operation
I look upon my flower-beds, with awful consternation:
For my very special lupins, in the bed which I have dug
Have been absolutely ruined, by a hungry burgling slug.

I pile the slugs in flowerpots, and take them far away,
And instruct them very kindly, that this is where they stay.
I know that I have treated them, as fairly as I could,
But slugs are very greedy, and the taste of lupin, good:
The minute that I leave them, they require a tasty snack
And by the time I'm home again, the slugs are also back.

This time I am very angry, to a Garden Centre drive
And intend that pretty shortly, there will be no slugs alive:
I say I wish to purchase, a really lethal pellet
And the Garden Centre stock one and are very keen to sell it.
Now I spend my days in healing, and cure the sick and ill,
But suddenly I wonder, if a doctor ought to kill?

I see those lovely lupins, in the bed which I have dug,
But question: are they meant for me, or are they for the slug?
I ponder on the matter, of God's manifold creation
And decide perhaps the slugs and I should go to Arbitration.

A dinner at the Petit Mignon on 5th August.



A chance for some intimate conversations.....



A masterclass in making a Pimms.....



A big thankyou to David Ramsay for organising this year's "outside evening meal" at the Petit Mignon. I think we were 20 on the night. A warm evening brought out the fans.....



and some less so.....



And great food when it came.....

What could be not to like?



David Morris's PHOTO CORNER – Exhibition selection

Welwyn Garden City camera club recently held a photo exhibition at the Howard Centre for two weeks. The aim was to attract new members. When I first joined, it was restricted to a membership of 110 and a waiting list. Membership has declined over time; Covid made the situation worse and due to changes in location. Live screening was adopted to keep the club running and is still used today monthly for presentations and competitions. We have presenters from the USA and our live screening sessions are open to anybody, in fact, we have members from all parts of the UK.

We were asked to select six pictures, from the many hundreds of pictures taken over the years I found it difficult to choose. Here is my selection and a summary of why they were chosen.



Ely Cathedral - after climbing 170 steps to reach the top of the Octagon Tower. It features 8 large painted wooden panels, commonly known as the "Angel Doors". One was open to enable me to get this picture. It was taken a few days after Remembrance Sunday, some poppies remained on the ledge.

Longleat Safari park – I had a Longleat Big cats VIP Experience which provides direct, off-show access to the pride's private enclosures, it allows you to have the vehicle window therefore allow you camera lens sticking, (not your hands). This picture was taken with the tiger 3M away from the vehicle – a bit nervous!



Singapore Zoo – during one of our holidays we took a trip to the Zoo. We went for breakfast with the orangutan, 9.00 in the morning. The orangutans swung freely in their enclosed space on an intricate network of ropes and



platforms right over the visitor boardwalks. You can hear them waiting for the gate to open to be let out. I had the opportunity to take this picture with mother and youngsters. Watching them peel a banana is fascinating, how gentle they are. Keeper is around just in case they misbehave.



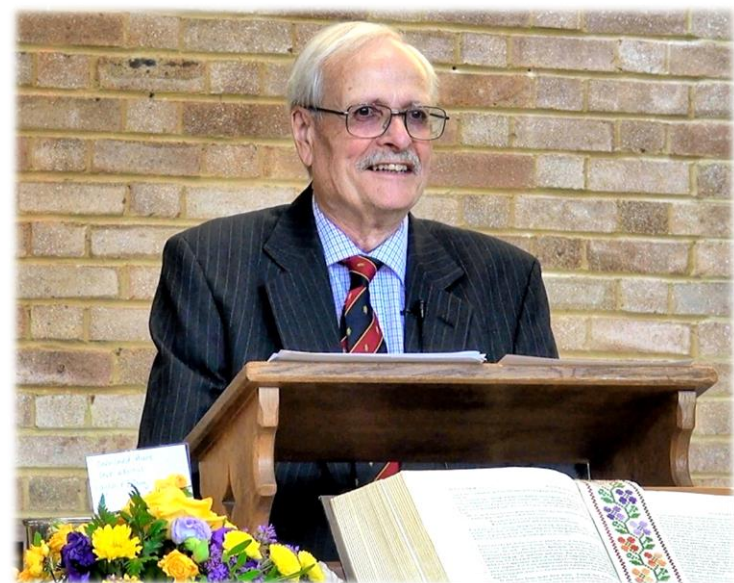
Cowe's week (Isle of Wight) – this picture was taken from a launch which followed the fleet of some 600 boats during the race, and was taken on the home leg, running down wind to the finishing line. There are a number of classes, they start at 10 minute intervals over two hours therefore they will be spread out as they approach the finish.

Edinburgh Tattoo – During our many visits took a large selection of pictures - from the Scottish dancers, bands and visiting participants from all over the world showing their skills in polished performances. This picture shows The United States Air Force Honor Guard Drill Team who carried out complex weapon exchanges and silent drills at this event.



Cromer (Winters Day) – This is Pauline's favourite picture taken during one of our traditional visits every year to Norfolk prior to Christmas. This was taken on a **very cold winters day** with a refreshing breeze.

Communion Service Sunday 2nd August - led by Martyn Macphee



Good to have Martyn back with us again! But first we had to sing Happy Birthday to Maureen Marlow, who was to mark another year passing during the coming week.



The New Testament reading was from Matthew 14, where **Jesus fed a great crowd.** And each time Martyn heard this Bible story, he remembered reading about a teacher packing food for people who were starving. Among the beans, powdered milk, vegetables, and meat, he'd found a brown paper bag containing a peanut butter sandwich, an apple, and a biscuit. On it, in large letters, was a girl's name: Chris, Room 104. She had given up her lunch for someone hungry.

Chris sounded much like the boy who'd offered five loaves and two fish, willing to give up his meal without knowing what would happen.

There was much to say about this miracle, the only one recorded in all four Gospels: the crowd's hunger for Jesus, his compassion despite grief and exhaustion, the disciples' role in serving, and the boy's generosity. But Martyn wanted to focus on the menu: five loaves and two fish, and just how little it seemed.

The disciples had said, "Lord, it's late. Send the crowds away so they can get food." But Jesus had answered with words that must have stopped them in their tracks: "They need not go away. You give them something to eat." The disciples could only look at what they had and say, in effect, "Lord, we have nothing here but five loaves and two fish."

That phrase "nothing here but five loaves and two fish" was not only the response of the disciples. It was the response of people in every age who felt overwhelmed by the needs around them and painfully aware of their own limited resources.

It was the response of a worried parent whose child was going off to school or college, surrounded by influences she did not know, could not fully understand, and naturally feared. It was the response of a small business owner facing a changing economy, suddenly confronted by a vast new store around the corner with thousands of items under one roof. How could an ordinary shop compete with that? It was the response of an employee whose workplace had become miserable, and whose conscience was troubled by things that ought not to be happening. Should he speak up? And if he did, what would happen to his job, his bills, and his family? It was the response of a spouse trying desperately to hold a troubled marriage together, growing weary of being the only one working at the relationship, and wondering whether there was enough love, patience, or strength left to carry on. And it was the response of young people who found life so demanding that they barely knew how to cope. Each generation had its burdens. The struggles were not always the same, but the question was familiar: "What are we to do, Lord, when all we seem to have is five loaves and two fish?"

Martyn remembered a letter he'd read a long time ago. It had been responding to someone who'd said younger generations had "never had it so good." The reply was not angry, but searching: did older generations grow up amid divorce, youth suicide, drugs, violence, guarded schools, and fear of diseases like AIDS?

The question remained: what was a young person - or any of us - to do when life overwhelmed us and our resources felt inadequate?

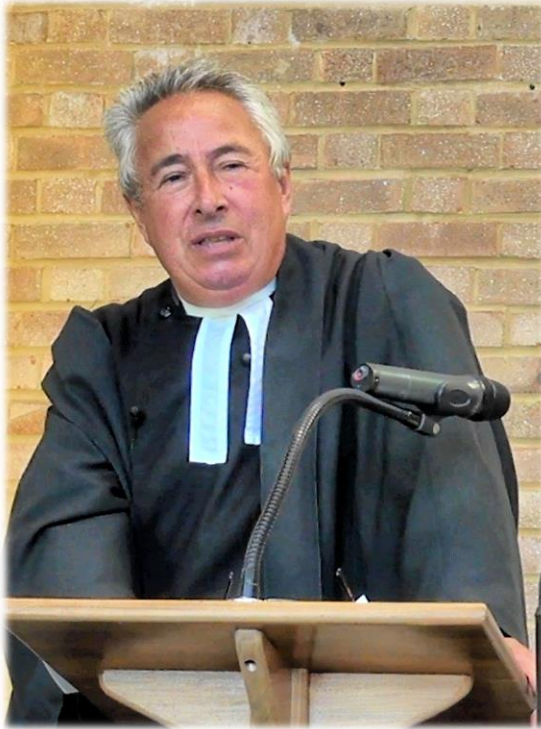
Jesus had told the disciples, "You give them something to eat." Often, he seemed to be asking more from us than we could give: to love when love was hard, forgive when we were wronged, and stand firm even if we stood alone.

But Jesus had not left the disciples with an impossible task. When they'd said, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish," he'd answered, "Bring them here to me." He'd blessed and broken the bread and given it to the disciples who'd served it. All had eaten, and twelve baskets had been left over.

That was good news for parents, grandparents, spouses, students, workers, and anyone who felt unequal to the task. On our own, we might not have enough. But we had a friend who said, "Bring your skills and weaknesses, your hopes and fears, your children and their futures, your burdens and responsibilities, your convictions and dreams". Bring them to Christ, and he would make them sufficient for the task in hand.

When life overwhelmed us, it might be because we focused too much on how little we could do and too little on how much Christ could do with what we placed in his hands.

Morning Service Sunday 23rd August – led by Revd. Jonathan Hyde



Good to have Jonathan back with us after a multi-year break while he was Minister at Chingford URC. He loves looking at stars and thinks that God delights in stars and takes joy in creating stars and galaxies. Well, he certainly wouldn't have found any stars with us this Sunday. Anything that could go wrong did – no organ, no screen projection, a missing microphone and a wrong reading (your reviewer holds his hand up for the latter). Jonathan sailed through it all serenely as befits an ex-military chaplain.

The day's theme was God's Love, and we had three readings from the Scriptures and a commentary on each from Jonathan – *much of it unscripted and redolent of a military-style situation report!*

The first reading was from the book of Hosea, usually described as a minor prophet because only a smaller collection of his writings had come down to us. Hosea could be difficult to take in as his personal life had been complicated. Yet through his teaching, God had used Hosea's experience to speak powerfully about divine love. He was speaking around 726–722 BC, at a time when Israel was under threat, and within

a century of Hosea's ministry, the Jewish people had been taken into Babylonian captivity. During that exile, what we now call the Old Testament had begun to be gathered and written down. Before then, the tradition had been passed on orally.

Hosea spoke about the love of God. The Scriptures used several words and images for love, but the love here was often understood as *agape*: a deep, faithful, self-giving love, like the love of a parent for a child, the love we have for those dearest to us, and the love we are called to have for God. And that was the theme of the reading: Hosea trying to help the people understand the steadfast love of God.

The passage presented Israel in a state of serious moral and spiritual decline. Many people had turned to the worship of Baal, a popular god in the ancient Middle East. But Baal worship involved practices that were profoundly contrary to what God desired, including sexual exploitation and child sacrifice.

Anyone who had cared deeply for children, family members, or even much-loved animals knew that love could be tested. There were moments of frustration but love still longed to welcome the other back. That was the assurance God gave through Hosea.

The people had gone astray and neglected God, yet God's message was still one of mercy and return:

- They would face the consequences of their choices.
- They would be taken into captivity.
- But if they remained with God, God would not abandon them.

That message spoke to us as well. We also sinned, went astray, and sometimes distanced ourselves from God. Yet Hosea reminded us that God's love was patient, faithful, and always ready to draw us back.

The second reading was from Paul's first Letter to the Church in Corinth. Paul had visited Corinth earlier, had stayed there for some time, and helped build up the Christian community, though by this time he had been on his third missionary journey and was based in Ephesus. Corinth and Ephesus had been important centres of Greek culture and learning within the Roman Empire, but the church there was facing real tensions.

The Christian communities had been small, perhaps only a few dozen people in each gathering, and differences had begun to emerge between them. In the early church, this was understandable: they did not yet have the written Gospel accounts, and much of their faith was being shaped through teaching, letters, and personal witness. Some were attaching themselves to particular teachers or leaders, and divisions were forming. In response, the church wrote to Paul for guidance.

Paul's words were striking: "You are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it." We might not always think of ourselves in that way, but every person who gathered for worship contributed to the life and witness of the church. Paul named different gifts and roles within the church, including apostles, prophets, teachers, miracles, healing, guidance, and other forms of service. His point was not to create a hierarchy of holiness, but to remind the church that each gift had its place.

Paul was addressing a very real challenge in the early church: the temptation to ask, "Who is the best Christian among us?" or "Who is more spiritual than everyone else?" Was a prophet more important than someone who performed miracles? Was speaking in tongues a sign of greater holiness? These were the kinds of questions and tensions the church was facing, and his answer was to point the church away from status and towards something far greater: love.

"I will show you the most excellent way". "If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a sounding gong or a clanging cymbal." – the point being that religious activity could become empty noise if it was not rooted in love. However impressive our words, prayers, or gifts might appear, they lost their meaning when love was absent.

Prayer had to be meaningful. It needed sincerity, attention, and the right spirit behind it. This was not always easy. Many of us struggled with prayer at times. We might wonder whether our prayers were meaningful, whether we were truly concentrating, or simply repeating familiar words. There was comfort, though, in remembering that in the Lord's Prayer, when we prayed "Our Father," we were not praying alone. Christ had given us those words, and when we prayed, we prayed together with Him.

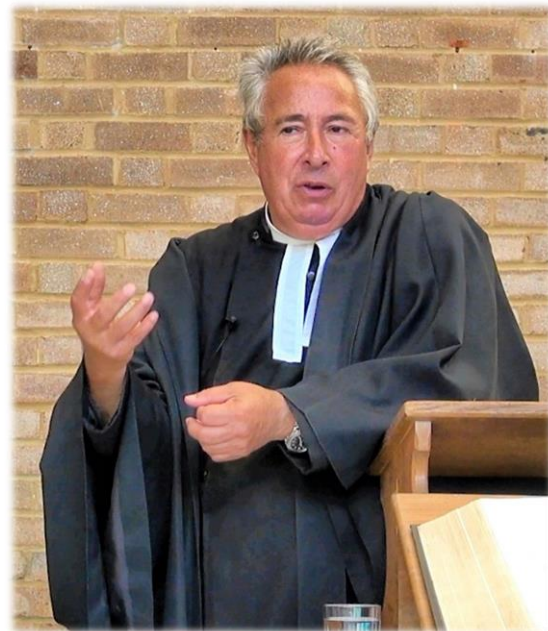
Our prayers changed as we moved through life. As children, we might pray about school, exams, worries, and immediate needs. Those particular concerns passed, and new ones took their place. We might find ourselves praying more for other people: for those who had shown an interest in God, for those we might no longer see, and for those whose circumstances we might not fully know. Even when we were unsure how effective our prayers were, we could still bring them before God in love. If our prayers were offered with genuine concern and commitment, then they were moving in the right direction.

The heart of Paul's message was that love never failed. Prophecies, tongues, and knowledge would pass away, but love remained. This truth was especially powerful in times of bereavement, separation, and loss. Someone might die, or move far away, but love did not simply stop. We didn't stop loving them, and their love for us was not erased by distance or death. That was because love belonged to the very nature of God. God was love and therefore love had a permanence and strength that nothing else could match.

When we accepted the truth that God was love, it became a deep source of assurance. Whatever happened to us, God was present, and His love remained. We might face heavy blows and difficult seasons, but we were never truly alone when God was with us.

To love God, we had to seek to know Him. Love grew through relationship, understanding, trust, and attention. That was the continuing challenge of faith: to know God more deeply so that we might love Him more fully. We might not fully understand the mind of God, but we could trust what Scripture revealed: God was love. His creativity, generosity, and greatness were beyond our limits, and we needed to be careful not to make Him smaller than He was. Some people placed narrow constraints on God, saying, "God would never do that." But the truth was that we did not know the full mind of God. What we could say with confidence was this: God is love.

The third reading came from Mark. Many of us would have known difficult experiences at work or in other demanding settings: unpleasantness, anxiety, worry, or the strain of being in an environment where we didn't feel at peace. Jesus understood that kind of pressure and knew what it was to suffer. He could truly say, "I have been there." At some point—perhaps at his baptism—he'd come to understand the full weight of his mission: that he would suffer and die. He'd also known the frustrations of daily human relationships. His disciples had argued among themselves and struggled for position, while others tried to catch him out or condemn him because they'd disliked his teaching.



Jesus had been in the temple in Jerusalem. As often had happened, his teaching had disturbed some of the religious authorities, including the Pharisees and Sadducees. (The Sadducees were a small, elite group, not especially popular. They did not believe in the resurrection, so in their view death was simply the end. When the temple was destroyed their movement died out. The Pharisees had had a different outlook and continued as a movement for longer. Luke's Gospel sometimes presented Pharisees in a less hostile light).

In Mark's account, the man who'd approached Jesus had not seemed to be simply trying to trap him; he'd appeared genuinely interested in learning. He'd asked Jesus which commandment was the most important. Jesus had answered by quoting two passages from Scripture. First, he gave the great call of Israel's worship: *"Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one."* Then He'd continued: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength." These words came from Deuteronomy and were central to Jewish prayer and devotion.

Then Jesus had added the second commandment: "Love your neighbour as yourself." This had been the striking moment. The man would have known the command to love God, but Jesus joined it inseparably to love of neighbour. The man recognised the truth of Jesus' answer. He agreed that loving God with all one's heart, understanding, and strength - and loving one's neighbour as oneself - were more important than burnt offerings and sacrifices.

Jesus had seen that the man answered wisely and said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." That must have been a stunning moment for those listening. Jesus was saying that a life shaped by love of God and love of neighbour stood close to the heart of God's kingdom. After that, no one had dared ask him any more questions.

The answer had brought the whole matter into focus: faithful worship cannot be separated from practical love for others.



When God had made the earth and sky, the flowers and the trees,
He then made all the animals, the fish, the birds and bees.
And when at last He's finished, not one was quite the same
He said "I'll walk this world of mine and give each one a name"

And so He travelled far and wide, and everywhere He went,
a little creature followed Him, until it's strength was spent.
When all were named upon the earth, and in the sky and sea,
The little creature said, 'Dear Lord, there's not one left for me.'

Kindly the Father said to him, 'I've left you to the end
I've turned my own name back to front and called you
Dog, my friend.

