



Abbey Lane & Newport United Reformed Church incorporating Saffron Walden Methodist Church

Proclaiming the Gospel – Growing in Faith – Reaching out in Service

25 July

Welcome to our weekly newsletter

Sunday Service – 25th July

**Worship Online and in Abbey Lane
at 10:30 a.m.
Led by Tina Wilson**

To attend in person please be aware that we still ask you to sit in accordance with social distancing, and face masks are required to be worn inside. Zoom meeting details are listed on the order of service sent separately, or call our Church Contact on 01799 528325

If you prefer to watch live on the website please go to <http://saffronwaldenurc.org.uk/services-recordings> where you will also find a recording of the service to YouTube each week available from Sunday afternoon.

Endings and fresh starts

This Sunday our service will be using recorded music for the final time, and we ask that the congregation in church refrain from singing for one more week, as we will still be broadcasting via Zoom. It is also our last service (for the moment!) with Tina Wilson – you can read her farewell letter attached. Her farewell to us means a new start for her in her ministry training. Next week we will be ending Zoom connection pre-service, and broadcasting only via YouTube, but we will be starting again live music, with John Evans on the organ, and singing is encouraged – behind your masks.

Another ending is this newsletter in this format. We will take a break for school holidays and then a fresh start for 12th September with a shorter newsletter that will include the order of service for that week in one document. Your comments and contributions will still be very welcome. Thank you for your continued encouragement throughout these recent difficult months. We hope the newsletter has given you some

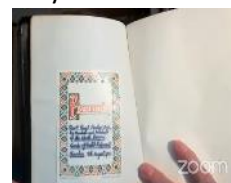
interest during a time when it has been difficult – sometimes impossible – to meet and talk.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

A time to weep and a time to laugh... a time to keep silence, and a time to speak.



Another ending and fresh start is of course retirement. We have seen several in this year, and last Sunday via our WEBS Zoom Service we said goodbye to minister Rev Roy Fowler (above), and his wife Christine. At Roy's request the recorded Introit was music by Bach. The first hymn, 'Praise the Lord, his Glories Show' also had special meaning having been sung at both the wedding and ordination of Roy and Christine. In his young people's talk Roy thanked them for the cards they had made then explained what ordination means,



showing the Bible (left) he was given on his day of ordination, 8th August 1981. He explained how he and Christine had served God ever since as ministers, but it

is not necessary to be a minister to serve God; he started work in a bank and she as a nurse. He hoped that our young people might find their own way of serving God and that they discover God is with them to help in whatever they do.

In his sermon, Roy spoke movingly on Ecclesiastes; he reflected on the many seasons in human existence. He quipped that it wasn't quite time for him to stay silent until he finished this service. Roy referred to Ecclesiastes as a book of Wisdom; according to one commentary the passage identifies that 'human activity is forever oscillating from one extreme to another'. Roy said, "Thank you for allowing me to lead you in worship...and to be alongside you in joy and sorrow" and suggested that the passage reassures us of God being ever present: "There is a time for every matter under heaven" may be understood as "under God". Roy encouraged us all that whatever lies ahead we should "hold onto our faith and trust in God, for

Ministers	
Rev'd Roy Fowler	01279 814 809
Church Secretary	
Val Bowtle	01799 526 271
Vestry Phone & Church Contact	01799 528325

Elders	
John Ford	07969 850 109
Stephen Rapkin	07730 393 603
Karen Start	01799 522 096
Elfreda Tealby-Watson	01799 530 175
Margaret Howell & Meg Nettle	Non-serving Elders offering pastoral care



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God has never finished with us so let us not be finished with God.”



After worship, we watched at Roy and Christine’s home, where Gill Hulme from the Bishop Stortford Methodists spoke about the

Fowlers’ contribution to ecumenical work locally, and Betty Francis (Church Secretary from Stansted) was able to present Roy with a gift cheque from all of us at WEBS. Back on Zoom, Judy Colliver thanked Roy on behalf of all members in the WEBS pastorate for his



ministry to us, and Tina Wilson thanked Roy on behalf of all the people he has mentored over the years. Rev Caroline Vodden closed the presentation with her own thanks for Roy’s support as her colleague, and with prayers

for Roy and Christine’s retirement and for the future of all in WEBS. The pictures show screen shots of everyone attending the service, which we will send to Roy and Christine as a lasting memento.

Reminders for your Diary

25th July - Salvation Army: Katrina Thurlow from The Salvation Army has written to say that they will be resuming their meetings from this Sunday

1st August - live music at Abbey Lane for our service that includes Holy Communion; bring your own bread.

18th August - Elders’ Meeting by Zoom

4th September - The URC History Society 2021 AGM 10am. After the AGM there will be a chance to discuss the Annual Lecture ‘William Wilberforce and the Dissenters’. The lecture, by Professor John Coffey of the University of Leicester, will be circulated in advance. YouTube and Zoom links for the lecture and AGM will be sent out late August. Contact michael.hopkins@mansfield.oxon.org

12th September – Church Meeting after worship.

August Action for COP26

As reported in the Joint Public Issues newsletter, consider in your prayers the Young Christian Climate Network who are walking a relay “G7 to COP26” to raise awareness of the issues they want to see governments tackle when they meet in Glasgow in November. Or you may want to join them? Across 5-8 August there is a ‘London Residency’ including a walk

on Thursday 5th August from St Paul’s Clapham, (meet at 10am) to St Paul’s Cathedral via Lambeth Palace for refreshments; Christian Aid will then host an event on the steps of St Paul’s Cathedral with walkers arriving for a YCCN Relay photo call at 2pm. Others are welcome to come straight to the Cathedral. On Friday 6th August Westminster Cathedral hosts a Prayer Service for the Climate 3:30pm - 4.00pm and ‘Supper, Chat and Prayer’ 6:00 - 8:00pm will be at St Andrew’s Church, Short Street, SE1 8LJ sign up here: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/supper-chat-and-prayer-tickets-162395291689> Various other events are in planning but on Monday 9th August there is another chance to walk, starting with breakfast and prayer hosted by All Hallows’ By The Tower (EC3R 5BJ) 9-10am <https://www.ahbtt.org.uk/whats-on/green-city/> then walking to Muswell Hill, where there is a final London event with Wave Church (an inclusive accessible church) at St James Muswell hill N10 3DB. Find out more or sign up for the walks <https://www.yccn.uk/>



Busy September Stephen Rapkin writes that **we can look forward to September with eager anticipation – there will be so much happening at Abbey Lane. Here are some of the highlights:**

On the first Saturday, 4th September, Marion and Janet are holding the regular Coffee Morning in aid of ‘Friends of Essex Churches Trust’ (FOECT). Usually this is linked to FOECT’s Ride & Stride event, although this year Ride & Stride will take place on the following Saturday – see below. ‘Friends of Essex Churches’ has been very generous to us, making a significant grant when we urgently needed help to pay for repairs to the church building in 2019. FOECT does a lot of good work helping churches throughout the county when they are most in need, and we are thankful to Marion and Janet for their sustained support of FOECT over many years.

On Saturday 11th September **Saffron Walden Bible Focus** will be holding its annual event in our Abbey Lane church building and will also be using our hall and the Salvation Army Hall for refreshments and young people’s activities. SWBF effectively takes over the whole site for the day, which in previous years has attracted more than 150 people. This year’s speaker will be Rev Rob Hudson, vicar of St Peter’s, Harold Wood. If past years are anything to go by, he will be presenting a powerful and evangelical message. Do come and be challenged. On the same day, our church



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will be one of the drop-in locations for **Essex Ride & Stride** so, during the morning, we will have a small presence around the front doors and portico to welcome Riders and Striders and tick off their sheets – as well as giving them sustenance before they continue on their way. The next day on Sunday 12th September there will be a special service led by our young people to reflect on our environmental responsibilities and to tell us about progress in moving Abbey Lane towards certification as an **ECO Church**.

Friday 17th and Saturday 18th September will be **Heritage Open Days** at Abbey Lane. Once again, we will be participating in the national Heritage Open Day scheme whereby interesting heritage buildings which are not normally accessible to the public are open free of charge. There will be an updated historical display with some new material (I hope!). ‘Heritage Open Days’ originated in 1991 when the Council of Europe and the European Commission set out to raise appreciation for Europe’s rich and diverse cultural assets. Today, Heritage Open Days are held in September in 50 signatory states to the European Cultural Convention.

Contact Stephen if you want to help with Riders/Striders on 11th or the Heritage Open Days on 17th/18th. Marion and Janet would welcome help and, of course, customers for the FOECT Coffee Morning.

Remain Cautious

The District Council has sent community groups a message from Essex County Council’s Director of Public Health, Dr Mike Gogarty. He recommends that we should continue to take sensible steps to ‘Keep Covid in Check’ such as:



- Meet in ventilated areas where possible (outside or with windows open if indoors)
- Wear a face covering when seeing people you don’t normally meet in enclosed spaces
- Consider individual risks, such as clinical vulnerabilities and vaccination status
- Continue with hygiene measures
- Stay at home if you are unwell, even if it’s not Covid, to reduce passing on other illnesses

Dr Gogarty reminds everyone that there is still a need to self-test regularly: people can still catch the virus (sometimes asymptotically) and pass on the virus after having both doses of vaccine. It remains a legal requirement to self-isolate if anyone tests positive or are told to do so by NHS Test and Trace. More information at [Essex County Council’s Coronavirus Hub](#).

Now we are entering vacancy...

We are blessed that our pulpit rota is filling well, but would you consider an active role in leading worship yourself? URC Communications writes that a new programme to train as an Assembly Accredited Lay Preacher (AALP) begins in September, agreed by Mission Council. Synods can also continue to use their own training courses or use **Stepwise** to train what will now be known as Locally Recognised Worship Leaders (LRWL). Those interested in AALP training should contact their **synod** or if you prefer Nicola Furley-Smith, Secretary for Ministries, by **email** for more information. We have also received links to video training from Eastern Synod; nine mini-sessions on YouTube which offer an introduction to worship, put together by Lindsey Brown. If you would like to join a group to watch these, contact Elfreda. Some of us intend to develop our worship leadership and others would be welcome! Attached to this newsletter Stephen Rapkin writes about how we are called to share the Good News: please consider your role in this.

Prayer (Extracts from Sue Glass prayers for 18th July)

Loving God, we rejoice in sharing worship again as the WEBS pastorate, and in our mutual support and growing friendship amongst us. For Roy and Caroline: we give thanks for their commitment, care and ministry, friendship and being able to confide easily our worries. As this time draws to its close may we still draw together with you God surrounding us with your loving encouragement. We will need to consider our future together and also the needs of each church. As members of the pastorate may we all play our part in caring for this precious world, but we are aware of its imperfections. We pray for those in hardship and those campaigning to eradicate these vast discrepancies... We pray about the growing dilemma of climate change... We pray for the safety of all aid workers... We remember nations affected by conflict... We pray for those still so badly affected by the pandemic... May the power of prayer never be ignored. And finally, we pray for a long, healthy, and happy retirement for Roy and Christine in their chosen new home and all the opportunities that lie ahead. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

and from WhatsApp...



An entertaining afternoon out for Junior Church members (Jo Ford)



The last meeting of Roy and Tina with Val and Elfreda for worship planning via Zoom



TINA'S LETTER, 21st July 2021

Dear Friends

I recently shared the following scripture on social media and would like to share it with you, as I write to say goodbye for the time being;

Jeremiah 29:11 - For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

It is just over 20 months since I arrived at Abbey Lane to assist in Worship with Caroline as part of my training to become an Accredited Lay Preacher and here, I am saying goodbye as I embark training at Westminster to become an Ordained Minister of Word and Sacrament, a truly amazing gift that I thank the Lord for every day.

What a privilege it has been to share the journey of faith with you. I count it amongst my deepest joys. Even in sad times, what a blessing it has been to support each other in these moments, and I thank you sincerely for all that you have done after I broke my arm in March. Our lives have been interwoven in the fabric of faithful service to our Lord. I thank you. And Savanna and Pelin add their thanks to my own.

If we could take a snapshot of the congregation in November of 2019 and hold it alongside today, we would see a church we recognise, but also a church that has been much transformed. Our responses to the pandemic and all the measures we initiated to handle this unusual situation required optimism and dedication and we saw it all through together. Two years ago, none of us could have predicted Zoom meetings, or the livestreaming of worship. I am sure, just as we have done these things for the pandemic, so, too, they will continue into the future, for the worship and praise of our Living Lord.

This Sunday I will lead my last service at Abbey Lane for a while where I will extend my thanks to you. After that day, I will continue to hold you in my prayers and hope to return from time to time whilst I am training; in the meantime following on from the above scripture, I encourage you all to have hope for the future and trust that God will work things out for you and for Abbey Lane.

Love and blessings, now and always,

Tina

Note from the editor – Tina will be training at Westminster College; Cambridge. Tina's home and home church are in Buntingford, but we extend our thanks to her and our invitation to her, Savanna, and Pelin to join us for worship at Abbey Lane (and no doubt any WEBS activities!) whenever they are able to do so.

As our treasurer Stephen Rapkin heads off for his summer break he has asked to share these comments for us all to consider over the summer:

A challenge for the Autumn

Dear Friends

It's no great secret that numbers at Abbey Lane have been in decline and our average age is, to put it politely, advanced. What might the future hold? Of course, we have positive plans – EcoChurch, Family Friendly, and more. Sadly, though, even in the last couple of years we have seen that closure is what's happened to several URCs not far away. Businesses which fail to sell their products go out of business.

We, along with most other mainstream Protestant churches in England (if that makes us feel 'better'), have for many years failed to do two things – we've largely failed to pass on our faith to our children and we've failed to bring other friends and acquaintances to faith and then to church. We've failed in the Great Commission to make disciples – the commandment Jesus gave in Matthew 28: 19-20. We seem unable to 'sell' the meaningfulness and relevance of (i) faith in Jesus Christ and (ii) the conviction that faith only works within a Christian community called Church.

If even a small proportion of those who attended Junior Church at Abbey Lane or Castle Street, and still live in the town, attended now as adults, we'd have a considerably bigger church. If you add those who, as children, attended URC or Methodist churches in other places but now live in Walden we would have a large vibrant congregation.

A recent discussion in Bible Study came round to the Mormons and the Jehovah's Witnesses. These are groups which are passionate about evangelism. We might cringe at aspects of how they do it, but I'm sure many of us have a sneaking admiration for their courage. Time and again, when talking to our own members (and examining my own heart) I hear people say that we prefer to evangelise by example – we try really hard to show our Christian faith in how we live our lives. We do our very best to live out Matthew 25 and keep our fingers crossed that the imperative of Chapter 28 will be a knock-on effect. But this rarely happens. Uniquely, as a denomination, we've formalised this with a special group of ministers called Church-Related Community Workers (who we pay for through our M&M contribution).

Of course, all of this is fiendishly difficult. We don't experience much hostility from general society, just a bemused sense of irrelevance. Somehow, we need to convince others that they need our 'product', that a commitment to Jesus Christ is relevant to their lives.

So how do businesses do this? They employ sales staff and then they train them. They give them a simple understanding of the product and make sure they can explain its benefits and answer objections. But we don't employ sales staff: all of us are called by Jesus to 'sell' our faith. Do you (i) have a simple understanding of your faith, can you (b) tell others of its benefits and (c) answer others' objections? I admit I struggle with this.

Surely where we've gone wrong is the lack of training? Can we address this? Some (usually more 'evangelical') churches do formalise this – teaching their members how to talk about their faith. Rather than the unthinkable of our church closing could we embark on a different 'unthinkable' – training ourselves to evangelise? And, remember, the word 'evangelise' simply means 'tell the Good News'.

I would love to hear your thoughts on this. Perhaps some of us have some experience of this? What do you think?

Autumn is the 'Season of Invitation'. We'll be hoping you can bring friends and relatives to some of our special services. But who can teach us how to 'make disciples'?

With best wishes
Stephen.