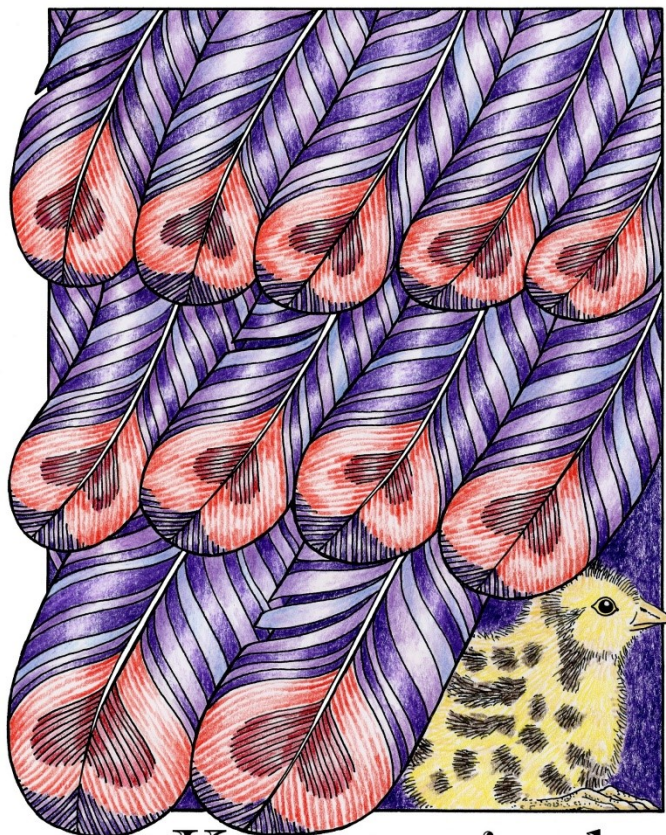


# InTouch

Winter 2021



shelter of your wings Ps 17:8

Keep me in the



The magazine of  
Fleet and Beacon Hill  
United Reformed Churches

# FLEET URC & BEACON HILL URC JOINT PASTORATE

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 **YouTube** Fleet and Beacon Hill United Reformed Churches

### CHURCH CONTACTS

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## SUNDAY WORSHIP

We are not meeting in our church building for worship at present, but please join us on Sunday mornings when we livestream our service on Zoom.

An email is sent out a few days beforehand giving details of the following Sunday's service, and instructions for accessing it. All service recordings are available later in the day on the church websites, Facebook pages and YouTube channel (see facing page).



For more information or help, please contact :

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(Beacon Hill URC) **Karen Smith**, 07742 669341; kpmsmith@hotmail.com

For details of all other regular activities please see page 7.



## FROM THE MANSE



### *Dear Friends*

This is the first time I have sat in front of my computer for many weeks—in fact since before Christmas—so it is an opportunity to greet you all and say 'Happy New Year'. Life finds us continuing with restrictions and national lockdown as we enter 2021, and my life has certainly changed in the last 12 months since I caught Covid-19 at the end of March/beginning of April.

I wanted to answer some of the questions you may have about my situation, so here goes:

### **What is 'Long Covid'?**

How long it takes to recover from coronavirus is different for everybody. Emerging evidence and patient testimony are showing that a growing number of people who contract Covid-19 cannot shake off the effects of the virus months after initially falling ill. Symptoms are wide-ranging and fluctuating, and can include anything from breathlessness to stress. Many people feel better in a few days or weeks, and most will make a full recovery within 12 weeks. But for some people symptoms can last longer. The chances of having long-term symptoms does not seem to be linked to how ill you are when you first get coronavirus. People who had mild symptoms at first can still have long-term problems.

### **What symptoms do I have and how does it affect me?**

The definition says that the condition usually presents with clusters of

symptoms, often overlapping, which may change over time and can affect any system within the body. It also notes that many people with post-Covid syndrome can also experience generalised pain, fatigue, persisting high temperature, chronic fatigue, 'brain fog', anxiety etc (the list is too long to put in this pastoral letter!)

My main symptoms have been:

- *Chronic fatigue*, which means that some days I am so exhausted I can sleep for 24 hours non-stop, and I find that I can only manage one 'activity' a day;
- *Lack of concentration and focus*, otherwise known as 'brain fog', which means that my memory is not as sharp as it was;
- *Difficulty with cognitive processing*, which means that I sometimes struggle to say what I want to say;
- *A feeling of detachment*: in other words, I feel as if I am in someone else's body. This includes a sense of not being in control.

Although I have had other symptoms linked to Long Covid, these four are my main concern. It would be fair to say that I have had these symptoms since I returned to work last year; however although I focussed my attention on ministry, they became worse as time went on.

### **What treatment am I having?**

As some of you may remember, when I had Covid-19 I had a very high temperature for 12 days (39.4°C), and in fact I cannot remember anything of that time, including being visited by the paramedics. I felt as though my body had been in a fight and I was truly exhausted—and that degree of exhaustion has never left. Initially the recommendation for people who have Long Covid is to rest, and this is something that I struggle with. Nowadays I can sit in front of the television and go to sleep; I read one page of a book and I have forgotten what I have read.

### **How is my recovery going?**

Since I have acknowledged that I need time to recover, life has been different: I cannot concentrate on anything, so I am not answering emails or phone calls, as I need complete rest. I am waiting to start the Long Covid Clinic at the Royal Surrey Hospital at Guildford, and have had blood tests and X-rays to eliminate other possible illnesses. At the Long Covid Clinic I will have cognitive assessments and an MRI scan, to eliminate cerebral changes. The investigations may not show anything; however my viral load is still high, hence my symptoms.

### **How will this affect my ministry?**

As you can see, it has affected my ministry in many ways. I find it difficult to concentrate, even on a phone call. It has taken me a number of days to compose this letter. I am the sort of person who normally carries a lot of

information in my head, but it is as though I have lost the key! This is why the Moderator and the doctor have said that complete rest will aid any recovery.

### **What support am I getting?**

As well as attending the Long Covid Clinic, I am still seeing my spiritual director and having counselling, and Clare Downing (the Moderator) is in frequent contact with me. I also keep in touch with Margaret Armes and Karen Smith. However my biggest supports have been William (making lots of cups of teas) and Hannah (being quite strict with me).

### **When will I be back to full strength?**

This is the six-million-dollar question! I mention at the beginning that I am a changed person since Covid, and I fear that my mind is not as sharp, my cognitive ability has altered, and I have a sense of detachment. So, my friends, I have no idea when I will be returning. I am leaving that to the experts, medical, spiritual and psychological.

### **How is my relationship with God?**

It is incredible. Having said all the above, I feel a real sense of being held by God: almost as Mary cradled Jesus, so God is cradling me. My prayer time is fruitful and peaceful. I have started yoga, and I am leaving it up to God to guide my thoughts and open the door I need to take for my recovery—whatever that may be.

I attended online worship at a church last week, and the leader talked about a lighted candle. He described the candle being lit in the darkness, but that the candle was 'Reformed': as the light says to the darkness, '*I am not done, there is more*'. This spoke very powerfully to me, and so I share it with you today.



I do appreciate all the cards, flowers and prayers I have received, and please continue to pray for me. I will update you all again in the next magazine—but Christine will have to give me a gentle nudge!

Blessings to you all,

*Ruth xx*

## **THANK YOU**

Many thanks for the Christmas gifts you gave me for 2020.

It has certainly been a challenging year, but I am humbled to continue to be God's servant with the Church, and serve the congregations at Fleet and Beacon Hill.

With every blessing—Ruth x

## CHRISTMAS GIFTS

In the weeks before Christmas the church family at Fleet URC were invited to donate small gifts to make up gift baskets for two elderly members of our congregation, Jill Durbin and John Gelder, both living in residential homes and without close family.



Numerous gifts were generously offered so that in the end the baskets were full to overflowing. Jill and John were both delighted to be remembered by the congregation in this way—as you can see from the smile on John's face!

*Left: Jill's Gifts*



*John with gifts*



## A PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING AND SUPPLICATION

*Written in November 2020 and brought to a Beacon Hill Elders' meeting close to Remembrance Sunday for opening devotions*



Lord, we recently commemorated the centenary of the 'Unknown Warrior' in Westminster Abbey, honouring the service and sacrifice of countless lives lost as a result of war, many in unmarked, unrecorded graves, only known by you.

Many of us have not experienced the ravages of war in our daily lives. We thank you for our innocence. Most of us have ancestors, or know of someone who, after going through unspeakable horrors, gave their all so that we might enjoy our freedom today. Lord, we look them directly in the eye and say with all our hearts, thank you with our deepest and most heartfelt gratitude for the ultimate sacrifice you gave.

We ask that you help us fight the wars that confront us day by day, such as COVID-19, hunger, homelessness and poverty. May they become a chapter in our history books. We ask this in your name. *Amen*

*Michael Orchard, Beacon Hill URC*





## HOLY COMMUNION

Communion is celebrated on the first Sunday of the month on Zoom as part of the regular service. This is an opportunity to sense God's presence when we share bread and wine together in our own homes. Since we cannot share communion in our church building, we gather on Zoom as a scattered community of disciples of Christ to partake in this sacrament.



## REGULAR MEETINGS ON ZOOM

### VIRTUAL COFFEE MORNINGS ON ZOOM



Beacon Hill URC:  
**11 am, Saturdays**

Fleet URC:  
**11 am, Thursdays**  
(includes a quiz)

### ZOOM MONTHLY PRAYER GROUP

The monthly Prayer Group will meet on Zoom on **Mondays at 2 pm** on the following dates:

**8th February, 8th March (Lent),  
12th April**

Come and join us for 30 minutes of quiet meditation



### MONTHLY BIBLE STUDY/ NURTURE GROUP

This group will be suspended in February and March because of the Lent Group meetings.

The first meeting after Easter will be at **11 am on Monday 19th April**, (please note change of time), when the topic will be '*Nehemiah—Principles for Life*', the first in a series on the prophets.



## LENT GROUPS

You are invited to join the Lent groups on Zoom, which will be held on **Mondays at 11 am** on the following dates:

**22nd February; 1st, 15th, 22nd & 29th March**

(For more information, see pages 8—9)

## LENT 2021: SEEDS OF HOPE

This year we will be offering a number of events to mark the season of Lent, the latter part of Holy Week and the joy of Easter Day. Our focus throughout this period is Seeds of Hope, which is explained below.

You are invited to **join the Lent group** on Zoom, with the opportunity to meet on five occasions during Lent (see page 7). As we journey through the challenge of the current lockdown and the impact of the pandemic on our lives, we will discuss the seeds of hope we see—those spiritual essentials that will help us continue to be active disciples in unusual times. We will explore scripture from the Parables, the Epistles and Old Testament prophets such as Hosea, Isaiah and the Psalms, reflect and discuss how these develop our discipleship and sustain us in these strange times. Come to one, some, or all!



### OUR GROWING PROJECT



In this difficult time, looking to the future with hope is important for our well-being and walking together in faith. Lent is often associated with giving things up: this year, let's look at how we can grow together, looking to the future. So this Lent we are asking everyone to join together as a church community in a growing project.

*Jesus explained many things to people in stories. He asked them—and us—to really listen, with our hearts as well as our ears.*

*This is one story he told...*

<sup>5</sup> 'A sower went out to sow his seed. As he was sowing, some fell by the road, and was trodden on, and the birds of the air ate it up. <sup>6</sup> Other seed fell on stony ground, and when it came up it withered, because it didn't



have any moisture. <sup>7</sup> Other seed again fell into good soil, and came up, and gave a hundredfold yield.' ....

<sup>11</sup> 'This is the parable: the seed is the word of God. <sup>12</sup> Those by the roadside are people who hear, but then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they don't believe it, and are not saved. <sup>13</sup> Those on the stony ground are those who hear the word and receive it with delight—but they don't have any root, and so they believe only for a time, and then, when persecution comes, they draw back. <sup>14</sup> The seed that falls in among thorns represents people who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and they don't bear proper, ripening fruit. <sup>15</sup> But those in the good soil are the ones who hear the word and hold on to it with an upright and good heart, and who patiently produce fruit.'

(Luke 8: 5-7; 11-15)

## The growing project

We are all invited to grow a plant, taking care of it and watering it. We will start them off as part of the service on Sunday 21st February, and periodically give time in services during Lent to see how each other's plants are growing. By Easter Sunday there should be healthy plants for us all to see.

## What to grow?

You may want to grow a herb plant, a vegetable plant, a flower or even grass. You may start with a seed or a bulb. If you don't have a pot, compost or seeds, there are many gardeners among us who will happily drop these off for you.

## A growing prayer

Lord of the seeds,  
Blow your seeds of Love and Hope,  
Whirl them around by your Holy Spirit  
And as the seeds land, bless them,  
And bless those who will pick them up. *Amen*

© Ruth Dillon



**Remember: have a pot, compost, seed or bulb available  
on Sunday, 21st February**

*Karen Smith, Beacon Hill URC*

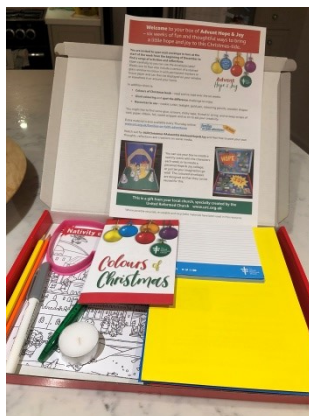
## ADVENT ACTIVITY BOXES

In the lead up to Advent and Christmas the United Reformed Church's Children's and Youth Work and Communications Teams launched an activity kit for churches to engage with families.

Advent Hope and Joy was a box that could be given to families to show that the church remembered them, cared for them and wanted to connect with them. Inside each red box was a wealth of material to enable people of all ages to discover a little of the hope and joy of the Christmas story.

Each box included a '*Colours of Christmas*' story book, plus numerous activities to cover the six weeks from the start of Advent to Epiphany: puzzles, colouring pencils, cookie cutter, postcards, stained glass window to decorate and display, Nativity set to make, and craft ideas—these were just a few of the things that were included.

Six boxes were distributed to families associated with Fleet URC, and by all accounts they were very much appreciated.



## BEACON HILL ADVENT COFFEE RUN

Following the huge success of our *Harvest Virtual Coffee Morning* delivery run for our Macmillan fundraiser, where we raised £330, we decided to run another... for Advent!

As before, all the church family were contacted to advise a visit on the Saturday morning.

On the morning we met up at church, masked and socially distanced, to sort and fill the bags ready for delivery and for the collection of donated items for our Christmas charity—our local Food Bank.

By mid morning, again masked up, we were delivering gift bags filled with 'All you need to make your own Christingle', plus amazing mince pies for the virtual coffee morning, and homemade jars of mincemeat and marmalade—a Christmas gift as a reminder of our church family friendship. The bags also contained a Christmas card from our two churches designed by Fleet URC (*thank you*), and other Christmas information leaflets.



*Our church window filled with Christmas tree, lit hanging stars, and LED Advent ring candles and Nativity scene*



*Part of the filled bag—the Christingle gift bag, jars, and churches' Christmas card*

We then collected the food items donated for our local Food Bank, and brought them back to church ready to be taken to Haslemere Methodist Church for distribution.

Once again, a widespread delivery! Beacon Hill, Grayshott, Liphook, Haslemere, Farnham, Fleet, Farnborough and North Warnborough!

And then home in time for the virtual Coffee Morning, to join everyone and enjoy those amazing mince pies.

A big 'thank you' to all who made this happen!

*Bridget Mitchell, Beacon Hill URC*





## FLEET: PALANI MISSION UPDATE

### Tasty Takeaways Fit the Bill

A major part of our fundraising in support of the Christian Palani Mission community in the Indian province of Tamil Nadu has been our curry nights, with food prepared and cooked by our own international chef, Saju, ably assisted by Mary, Melvin and Mahima. Many a night the church hall has been transformed into the finest Indian curry house, where eighty or so diners are treated to a fabulous meal and great fellowship.

Then the pandemic was upon us and put a stop to these events. However we were not to be deterred and decided that takeaways were the answer. A few adjustments to the menu, the way we stored and served the food, and finding a way to socially distance the customers, and we were ready!

Three different curry dishes (chicken, lamb and lentil), chicken breast tandoori roast, Bombay aloo, pea pilau rice, tandoori spicy cauliflower, green salad, poppadums and naan bread for main course, followed by carrot halwa pannacotta in coconut milk jelly—offered as a set meal for 97 people.



*Satisfied Customers*

Chaos and confusion reigned in the church car park, but eventually all the meals were despatched. Thank goodness it did not rain, as our guests took advantage to socially distance and chat for the first time in months!

The final verdict: an excellent meal for the bargain price of £15, which everyone enjoyed. Thank you to Saju and his family, to all those who helped on the night, and to those who bought the meals. We raised a total of £1450 for Palani Mission, which will pay for the second year of our sponsorship of the two trainee community nurses, new roofs for two houses, the purchase of eight goats, a medical camp, and the provision of an emergency aid fund.

The next takeaway night is planned for March/April 2021, depending on restrictions. Watch this space!

*John Gibbons, Fleet URC*



# EASTER 2021



This year we will be offering a number of events to mark the latter part of Holy Week and the joy of Easter Day, continuing our Lent theme of Seeds of Hope, which is explained on pages 8—9 of this magazine.

We will be live online for these services during Holy Week and Easter:

## Palm Sunday—28th March

Join us to mark Jesus's entry into Jerusalem and the distribution of palm crosses. There will be a chance to look at those seeds you planted at the beginning of Lent. If you are feeling creative, prepare some improvised palm branches and have them with you at the service, ready to wave as and when. Why not share videos or photos of you waving them for us to include in the images of the service? (Please send them to me in advance of the service.) Or ask children or grandchildren to film their own procession of palms and cloaks for us to include in the Call to Worship?

## Maundy Thursday—1st April

We will be offering the opportunity to join a short Communion Service at **7.30 pm**, culminating in a Tenebrae service. Tenebrae means 'darkness' or 'shadows'. It is a service of readings of the trial, sentencing, execution, death, and burial of Jesus. After each reading a candle is extinguished. By the conclusion of the service only the Christ candle is lit. The service will end in silence, with no social time at the end, as we reflect on the impact of Christ's death and await the celebration of the coming Resurrection.

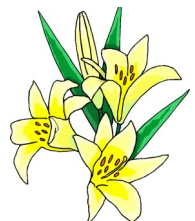
## Good Friday—2nd April

There will be a short reflective service at **3 pm**.

## Easter Sunday—4th April

**Agape breakfast:** Join us at **8.30 am** in this very happy time of fellowship to welcome the light that follows the darkness. It is Easter morning and we celebrate the resurrection of our Lord in a short time of prayer, and then... breakfast!

**Easter Sunday morning worship at 10.30 am:** We celebrate Communion on Easter Day within our service. We will be showing everyone the plants we have been growing, and the Easter garden at Beacon Hill. It would be wonderful for this to be a colourful and bright service so you are invited to display some flowers in your Zoom window, or an Easter cross; wear flowers or an Easter bonnet; show off your Easter eggs—anything that represents new life.



*God bless, Karen*

## BERNARD AND MAVIS POTTER— A GOLDEN MILESTONE

In March this year Bernard and Mavis will celebrate 50 years of membership at our church—a wonderful achievement! Over all these years they have been committed and active servants of the church. Many have been encouraged by their example and witness, and benefitted from their experience.



Bernard has taken on a wide range of responsibilities during that time, first as a deacon in the Congregationalist years, and then as an elder in the United Reformed Church. He has been a superintendent of the Junior Church, a representative on the local Action Group of the Bible Society, Secretary of Churches Together in Fleet and Church Crookham, and Church Secretary for 26 years. Until recently and for many years he and Mavis have led a well supported Bible Study group in their own home. In all these roles Bernard would be the first to acknowledge Mavis's loyal support and encouragement.

Naturally Bernard and Mavis have seen many changes and have many stories to tell of their 50 years at the church, and I invited them to reflect on some of these. This is the first instalment in a series of 'Golden Jottings'...

*Christine Gibbons, Fleet URC*

### GOLDEN JOTTINGS NO 1: March 1971

When we were first asked to contribute some jottings on being members at Fleet Congregational/United Reformed Church for 50 years, our immediate thoughts were: where does one begin? First and foremost our minds went back to March 1971. The union between the Congregational Church and the Presbyterian Church was still over a year away from becoming a reality.

On Membership Day, Sunday 7th March, beside Mavis and myself the Minister's new wife, Mrs Eileen Seymour, was also received into Membership.

In September 1970 the Revd George F Seymour, a widower, had recently answered the call to be Minister of the Fleet Congregational Church after a very successful ministry at Bitterne Park, Southampton, and having retired as a full time Minister. His Induction took place on Thursday, 24th September.

On 20th February 1971 Mr Seymour was married in the Church to a long-time friend, Miss Eileen D B Taylor, who had served the LMS (London Missionary Society) as Matron of Mbereshi Hospital in Zambia\* for 21 years.

Following Mr Seymour's death in 1975, Eileen studied to become a Minister in



the United Reformed Church, the Union having taken place in 1972 (*Golden Celebrations for the Union next year*). After becoming a Minister she became an associate in Chelmsford, and a coachload from Fleet shared in her Ordination and Induction Service. Then, after a period in Chelmsford she accepted the call to be Minister of Milton Road Church in Portsmouth. Again, the Fleet Church was well represented at the Induction Service.

Obviously Eileen was attracted to return to Fleet, and in 1986 she became Revd Eileen Ashworth when she married Jack Ashworth, who was our Church Treasurer for many years. Eileen became a very active member of the congregation on her return.

*Bernard and Mavis Potter*

(\*For anyone interested, WIKIPEDIA has an article about Mbereshi, and also the Hospital, now run by the Uniting Church of Zambia. The page was last updated on 11 January 2021, so is well up to date.)



## FLEET URC FINANCES

2020 was a challenging year financially—with the church buildings closed from the end of March onwards, and with no worship services able to be held physically, our income has been severely reduced.



The use of the premises by third parties and affiliated church groups was also very restricted. However in the summer, following work to make the buildings comply with Government guidelines and with the easing of the tier restrictions, some groups were able to meet, especially activities for young people.

Our cash reserves have been severely tested, and without the ongoing donations of our members and friends they would have been halved. I should like to take this opportunity to thank all those who have reviewed their giving, often donating by standing order for the first time, and others who have made significant one-off donations to further the life of our church.

I hope that we will be able to ride out these difficult times, and that with the vaccination programme gaining momentum, together with subsequent easing of restrictions, our income stream will eventually become stronger.

*John Gibbons, Fleet URC Church Treasurer*



## FLEET URC PRAYER CIRCLE UPDATE

It's ten months since we launched the Circle, with four people committed to daily prayer, responding to requests received. Unfortunately, due to sickness we are now a Prayer Triangle; but we have experienced several reasons for thanks and praise to God.

I have tried to break down the requests into areas, but some are for the same people and some are for the same person with a different need. Therefore total numbers are not relevant.

There have been sadnesses due to bereavement, and all within our church will be aware that seven of our members are now with the Lord. We give thanks for what they mean to each of us individually. There have also been five deaths of people not known to us, but whose relatives or friends have sought our support.

Requests range from babies through to over 90s, and are not confined to the UK. We remember our Palani friends, as well as individual people and families.

Several of the numbers in the following list represent ongoing prayers:

Covid related: 8

Age related issues: 5

Cancer related: 7

Important life issues: 2

Mental health: 11

Bereavement support: 7

General health issues: 7

It's such a privilege to be part of bringing people and their needs to God. Sometimes we feel overwhelmed and unable to pray ourselves, and that's when others can take over for us.

I stress again that all requests are totally confidential and only shared by telephone or closed WhatsApp, never by email or in company. Nothing is too small or too big for God to cope with, and if you need help with relaying your concern, please phone me on the numbers below.

Also, if you are thinking that this is something you would like to be part of, please ring me for a chat.

*Margaret Tracey, Fleet URC*

*Tel: 01252 246195; or 07881 625913*



## YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT?

Food plays a big part in our everyday lives and in our special times... turkey and all the trimmings at Christmas, chocolate at Easter, cake on your birthday!

I have written before about the environmental benefits of buying food 'plastic free'. Loose fruit and vegetables are better than those wrapped in plastic, and of course don't forget Fleet Scoop for herbs, spices, cereals, dried fruit, chocolate, nuts, oils, vinegars, cleaning products (the list seems nearly endless). They are still open during lockdown, so why not check them out if you haven't been in yet, or follow their Facebook page to learn more about them?

The BBC show *Horizon* recently broadcast a programme focusing on the carbon footprint of food. Entitled *Feast to Save the Planet* it allowed celebrity guests to choose dishes from a three course menu. They were free to choose what they wanted, but were scored on the carbon footprint of the ingredients. There was a clear winner at the end, despite some surprising and eye opening results. It is still available on iPlayer, and well worth a watch.

So what might we choose to put on our plates and into our bodies that are better choices for the environment? One of the key words is 'local'. Buy British if you can, and buy in season. Try to avoid fresh foods that must be flown in, typically food like soft fruit that would go off if not flown here quickly. Foods that can be shipped are a better choice as they will have a lower carbon footprint. Fruit and veg box schemes often champion local produce.



The production of meat is another huge source of carbon. I recently read that 'Every time you choose a veggie burger over a beef burger you are using 75-95% less water, 95% less land and causing 87% fewer emissions!' (UN environment programme). I'm not suggesting that everyone should become vegetarian or vegan. That is not the answer, for a variety of reasons. However, the best options would be to buy local, British meat, as demand for beef from some parts of the world is driving deforestation in order to make cattle ranches. Typically, the larger the animal, the greater its carbon footprint, so poultry is a better option than red meat. Perhaps buy a little less, but better quality meat, or reduce the amount in a recipe, whilst increasing the vegetables. As a family we started to explore and test out more vegetarian recipes a few years ago, and now typically have between 2 and 4 meatless

dinners a week. For me personally, out of 21 meals a week, only 3 or 4 might have meat or fish. This has been a gradual process... some people choose one day of the week to go meat free, eg 'Meatless Mondays'.

Similarly, dairy products have quite a high carbon footprint, as they come from cows. Softer cheeses have less carbon footprint than hard cheeses, and if you try to reduce the quantity in a recipe or use cheese less frequently, this will all have a positive impact on your own carbon footprint. By reducing how often I eat cheese, it has become a real treat when I do have it!

How do you fare when it comes to your dietary carbon footprint? Perhaps the ideas mentioned here will give you food for thought? We can all take small steps to improve, but we must keep striving to make those improvements for the sake of our planet. Bon appetit!

*Grace Bagshaw, Fleet URC*

## BEACON HILL AND ECO CHURCH

Very few people now dispute that the stability and health of God's earth are under threat from human activity in many ways (greenhouse gas emissions, pressure on nature, exploitation of natural resources, excessive consumption in some countries; exploitation and the desperate measures which follow from extreme poverty in others). The URC, along with other churches, deplores this state of affairs and exhorts Christians and secular institutions to take whatever measures are possible to reverse this trend and take proper care of God's earth.

In 2016 A Rocha, an international charity present in over twenty countries, established Eco Church (<https://ecochurch.arocha.org.uk/>) to assist churches to take stock of their environmental impacts, and to advise them on impact reduction and 'greening steps' appropriate to their circumstances. This it does in the first instance by inviting churches to complete online surveys with a total of 84 questions under five headings: Worship, Buildings, Land, Community/Global Engagement, and Lifestyle. In 2017 we at Beacon Hill had a shot at completing the Eco Church survey, but on the basis of our score felt that we had no chance of an 'award' at that time. Since then we have worked towards putting more ticks in boxes and in



October 2020 made a formal survey submission to Eco Church. We were surprised to hear back that we had received a Bronze Award!

To receive a Bronze Award a church has to be at least at Bronze level in all of the five headings; however, the Bronze 'pass mark' is only 25%! I suspect that Eco Church sets the bar quite low to give maximum encouragement to churches to try to become greener and go for the next grade, which they set a lot higher. The 'pass mark' for a Silver Award is 50%, and for a Gold Award it is 75%.

Some may think this whole procedure sounds like a time-consuming exercise in virtue signalling. However, when it comes down to brass tacks, attempts to deal with the global environmental crisis depend as much on small, positive changes in individuals' outlook and behaviour as they do on the policies of corporations and governments.

In the context of church life and property, some reductions in environmental impact are a matter of common sense—for instance, who wouldn't replace a boiler with the most efficient available, or put insulation in a loft? However at Beacon Hill we have found that participating in the Eco Church process has brought to mind changes which otherwise we might not have considered—installation of a composter and bird boxes in our garden, a focus on 'creation time' in worship, recycling. And now—with thoughts of gaining a Silver Award—we are in the process of making further changes: installation of water butts and a wildflower patch in the garden, switching to purchasing items made from recycled materials, participation in the World Wildlife Fund's Earth Hour, involvement with Transition Haslemere, recycling of tools etc.

We know from listening to news programmes and reading newspapers that achieving Net Zero Carbon Emissions and the restoration of natural ecosystems nationally will require massive capital investment. At a church level, major changes to a building's fabric is beyond the means of most congregations, especially in these Covid times. However not all positive practical steps are expensive: Beacon Hill's 'sensory garden' was created from recycled materials acquired via Freecycle, Gumtree and donations by members of the congregation. Also, bear in mind that other issues are important too: for instance, content of worship, group discussion, relations with community groups, participation in environmental campaigns and consideration of one's own lifestyle.

'A march of a thousand miles begins with a single step...'

*Hugh Le Fanu, Secretary, Beacon Hill URC*



## SOME WORDS TO THINK ABOUT

Many will be familiar with the 17th century Nun's prayer which is reprinted below. Even though it is unlikely to have originated from the 17th century, it contains some pertinent and wise sentiments we would all do well to ponder.

It has also inspired a member of one of our congregations to produce a personal version. Would anyone else like to take up the challenge to do the same? Please let me know if you do.

*Christine Gibbons, Editor*

### 17th CENTURY NUN'S PRAYER

**LORD,**

Thou knowest better than I know myself that I am growing older and will some day be old. Keep me from the fatal habit of thinking I must say something on every subject and on every occasion. Release me from craving to straighten out everybody's affairs. Make me thoughtful, but not moody; helpful, but not bossy. With my vast store of wisdom, it seems a pity not to use it all, but Thou knowest Lord, that I want a few friends at the end.

Keep my mind free from the recital of endless details; give me wings to get to the point. Seal my lips on my aches and pains. They are increasing, and love of rehearsing them is becoming sweeter as the years go by. I dare not ask for grace enough to enjoy the tales of others' pains, but help me to endure them with patience.

I dare not ask for improved memory, but for a growing humility and a lessening cocksureness when my memory seems to clash with the memories of others. Teach me the glorious lesson that occasionally I may be mistaken.

Keep me reasonably sweet. I do not want to be a Saint—some of them are so hard to live with—but a sour old person is one of the crowning works of the devil. Give me the ability to see good things in unexpected places, and talents in unexpected people. And give me, O Lord, the grace to tell them so.

**Amen**

*Author unknown*



## 21st CENTURY A'NUN'YMOUS PRAYER

**LORD,**

You know better than I, that I am not old by today's standards. But some days I do feel it. I used to have a view on every topic, but now I don't think my ideas are very palatable, so unless asked, I try to keep quiet.

I have my own thoughts about how others might lessen their worries, but try not to impose them uninvited. Sometimes my patience runs out, and I surprise people by a sudden outburst of unasked for suggestions. I hope I have a few remaining friends.

I prefer to get straight to the point, which seems to bewilder, if not upset, some folk—especially if they are not aware of my preceding bias and thought processes.

If my arthritis is having a bad day it is likely that my tolerance level is low, which is not the valid excuse that I hope it might be. I try not to compare others' aches and pains with my own, as everyone's pain threshold is different. Thank you for the grace of that realisation.

Memory is such a variable commodity. If I'm not sure, help me to keep my lips sealed, and sometimes even when I'm sure I'm sure. It's so hard to be wrong!

I don't want to be sweet: sweet can be sucrose, syrupy and cloying—but I would like to be a Saint, if that's possible in this life. Less introspection and more looking to you, Lord: finding you in birdsong, the scent of a hyacinth, wind in the trees. And in the love and care of family and friends.

For these and all your blessings, I give you thanks, O Lord.

**Amen**

*Author known only to the Editor*





## CHRISTIAN AID WEEK, 9th—15th MAY

Looking ahead to May, we will again be holding our annual plant sale on-line. We did this last year and it was a great success: people were very generous with their donations for their purchases/sales. Plants for sale—both flowers and vegetables—were circulated on-line, as were appeals from prospective buyers. Then interested parties made contact with each other. It worked so well that we are encouraged to it again this year.

If you are interested in selling or buying some plants, please contact one of us and we can give you details of our central coordinator.

Happy gardening!

Linda Storey (01252 647650) & Liz McClune (01252 628206), Fleet URC

## ST VALENTINES DAY—Did you know?

This month we celebrate St Valentine's Day which, many believe, was named after one or more Christian martyrs and was established by Pope Gelasius 1 in 496 AD. Valentine of Rome was martyred about 269, and this day usually 'belongs' to him.



- The first recorded association of Valentine Day with romantic love (1382) is from Geoffrey Chaucer. He wrote, 'For this was Saint Valentine's Day, when every bird cometh there to choose his mate'. This poem was written in honour of the first anniversary of the engagement of King Richard II of England to Anne of Bohemia.
- Valentine is also referred to by Ophelia in *Hamlet* (1600—1601):

*Tomorrow is St Valentine's day  
All in the morning betime  
And I a maid at your window  
To be your Valentine.*

- However the first modern mention of Valentine's Day is to be found in a collection of English nursery rhymes (1784):

*The rose is red, the violet's blue  
The honey's sweet, and so are you.  
Thou are my love and I am thine  
I drew thee to my Valentine.*

<https://www.parishpump.co.uk>



## UNLOCK: Still Opening Doors!

I have recently received a 2021 update from UNLOCK, which I opened with a slight sense of doom and despondency. All unfounded! Because despite the pandemic difficulties known to us all they, being a very small, totally God-dependent charity, are full of gratitude and optimism.

Most of the always part-time staff have been furloughed, in an area of 'the north' that has been subjected to more lockdown and deprivation than we've experienced in Fleet. In addition they had to vacate their office in Sheffield, for perfectly valid reasons, and move to 'Shiloh' in Rotherham. It's about 10 miles away, but as staff are mainly working from home that impact has yet to happen. 'Shiloh' is a local charity for the homeless who were able to let office space to UNLOCK—mutually beneficial!

Financially, they are full of praise! The 2020 walk, which obviously couldn't happen as planned, raised over 73% of the usual annual walk income—over £19,000. And that was for a guided virtual walk!

Another is being planned for this April, available on line from the 18th. It can be accessed, along with updates on all the outreach work that continues, on [www.unlock-urban.org.uk](http://www.unlock-urban.org.uk). If it's possible to actually walk the walk it will be on 24th April.

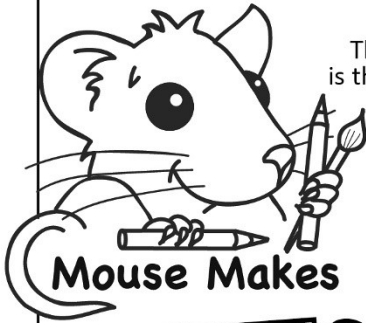
Thank you for the interest and support shown by fellow members at Fleet URC. It's good to be able to support those who answer God's call to live as Jesus did, reaching out to people largely ignored and on the margins. If isn't our calling, maybe we can be part of the enabling by our giving.

*Margaret Tracey*

*[Do you support a small, less well known charity that is important to you? If so, do let me know about it so that we can raise awareness of it in a regular Charity Spotlight section—Editor]*



Items for the Spring issue of *In Touch* (April—May) should be with the editor, Christine Gibbons by **Sunday 21st March** ([christine.gibbons@beech-ride.co.uk](mailto:christine.gibbons@beech-ride.co.uk)).



## WHAT AM I?

The last letter of one word is the first letter of the next ....

|  |  |   |  |   |   |
|--|--|---|--|---|---|
| E  |  |   |  |   | H |
| • What two things did God create first?<br>Genesis 1:1 |  |   |  |   |   |
|  |  | S |  |   |   |
| • What was the Earth without? Genesis 1:2              |  |   |  |   |   |
| • What came before morning? Gen 1:5                    |  |   |  |   |   |
|  |  |   |  |   | G |
| • Who is the creator?<br>Genesis 1:1                   |  |   |  |   |   |
| • What was separated from light? Gen 1:4               |  |   |  |   |   |
|  |  |   |  |   |   |
| S  |  |   |  |   |   |
| • Which day did God finish work? Gen 2:2               |  |   |  |   |   |
| • Who was created God's image? Gen 1:27                |  |   |  |   |   |
|  |  |   |  | H |   |
| • Who moved over the water? Gen 1:2                    |  |   |  |   |   |
| L  |  |   |  |   | S |



By the **seventh** day God finished the work He had been doing. God *blessed* the seventh day and made it *holy*. When God gave Moses the Ten Commandments the **fourth commandment** said to *remember* the seventh Sabbath day, to *keep it holy* and set apart for God.



## DID YOU KNOW?

The first word of the Old Testament in Hebrew is **bereshith** which means "in the beginning". The Greeks translated this word as **GENESIS** which means *creation, origin and generation*



C R E A T U R E H G O D P  
D G A L R E F R U I T E L  
L O R I E S L B M O S E A  
A O T G E T Y D A R K P N  
N D H H E A V E N I G H T  
D A Y T R R S P I R I T W  
A S E E D S K Y B I R D O

Can you find these words in the word search?  
GOD • HEAVEN • SPIRIT  
FLY • DEEP • EARTH  
DARK • DAY • LIGHT  
NIGHT • STARS • SKY  
SEA • LAND • BIRD  
CREATURE • HUMAN  
TREE • PLANT • SEEDS  
FRUIT • GOOD • TWO

