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# **Taunton**

## **United Reformed Church**



**AUGUST 2020**

Magazine



# TAUNTON UNITED REFORMED CHURCH MAGAZINE

**NO. 576**

**August 2020**

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## From the Editor



Churches have been permitted to meet in their buildings from early July, but only under strict conditions. A personal risk assessment was distributed in the second week of July to guide people in their aspirations. While the government is understandably keen to mobilise the spending public, our 'demographic' is such that changes in church life will be slow and gradual. Few churches in Somerset have rushed to take the opportunity. So this magazine continues to have a lockdown style, with the centre pages in colour again.

With Sunday worship being hosted by the Zoom video-conference system, we are getting glimpses of the homes of members we have never visited. Some pets have been making occasional appearances, so I invited you to send photos of yours. So we have what might be called a deuterocanonical section ( a sort of B-list) of the church directory.

With the economy fragile, and many businesses in perilous straits, how we spend our money may have even greater influence than usual. Our choices will help to determine which businesses survive and which do not. I am fortunate in that I do not need to buy the cheapest of everything. So I prefer to buy local produce or fairly-traded goods or from companies that treat their workforce and the planet well. Those are my criteria for economic survival; what are yours?

But there are people not so fortunate. The Taunton Foodbank remains active and busier than usual (see the figures on page 15). On the opposite page is their latest list of needs. If you cannot get out, monetary donations are always welcome, too.

Along with businesses, charities are also really struggling. You may have seen some of them appealing to you through television commercials. Among these is the Disasters Emergencies Committee ([dec.org.uk](http://dec.org.uk)), reminding us that Covid-19 is rife elsewhere and that simple hand-washing is a challenge in Yemen, Syria and Somalia. Christian Aid is one of their member charities - see the photograph on page 11.

Just recently, I have been so focussed on getting through the pandemic myself, I may have overlooked how much help I can still be to others.

*Peter Henderson*

Cover picture: St Paul and Onesimus in prison, by writer and cartoonist George du Maurier (grandfather of Daphne)

## Notable Dates

Fri 24 July - Thur 13 Aug  
 Monday 17 August  
 Saturday 22 August  
 Every Wednesday

Our minister, Susan, will be on holiday  
 Magazine deadline - BUT SEE NOTICE BELOW  
 Earth Overshoot Day (see below)  
 Work-Wise (by appointment, mornings only)

-----  
**NEXT MAGAZINE:** the editor will probably take holiday when he would be working on the next issue. So the deadline may change and the September issue may be late as a result. There will be news in the weekly notices.  
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Earth Overshoot Day is the date by which humanity's consumption of the earth's resources exceeds the planet's capacity to regenerate those resources in that year. This comes a little later this year, which is good (ideally New Year's Eve would arrive with it), because the pandemic has diminished global consumption, but it is still alarmingly early.

Social distancing in a supermarket queue



Urgently needed items:

- Corned beef
- Instant custard
- Red/brown sauce
- Sweets
- Washing powder
- Fruit squash
- Dog food

We have plenty of:

- Soap
- Bags for life

# From your minister:



Dear friends,

Like many people among us and in the big, wide world out there, I have been thinking a lot recently about risk. We've all been absorbing, and trying to interpret, the latest changes to government advice and we all have an armoury of new vocabulary; social distancing, bubbles, R rate and shielding among others. At one stage of the pandemic, when we were all staying at home, it seemed relatively simple. But now we are

having to take decisions about how far we venture from home, whom to meet and where and how we balance the risks presented by the virus and the risks presented by the precautions against it. Some of us have given time and thought to a Risk Assessment for the church, necessary even to open the doors for anything to happen there, and then there's Work-Wise and more to follow... There's also a document which we've sent round for each of us to think about the risks we face because of our age or health conditions as we consider returning, in any way, to the church building.

Doing risk assessments is part of normal life these days. Few of us enjoy form filling, but we can all see the sense in thinking carefully about the risks we face and how to mitigate them. But is there a Christian way to think about risk? Should a church risk assessment be any different from anyone else's?

There have been some cases, around the world, of churches where people have been persuaded that Christians are not at risk from a virus, that church buildings are protected by God and are risk free. Some people have paid, tragically, with their lives for such misleading theology. There have been some churches too who have told the world that the virus is a punishment for sin and that the only thing to do is to repent (which is at least quicker than filling in a URC Risk Assessment). But this too is a kind of false theology. It seems that with almost every kind of illness, from the plague, to leprosy to Covid-19, we have somehow always to struggle against the stigmatisation of those who get it.

There is another kind of theology that says that risk is part of faith and that, as Christians, we should not try to hold on to our lives by keeping ourselves safe, but rather 'give' our lives in selfless ways, not caring for our own safety.

We should 'not count the cost'. There is a kind of heroic martyr spirit that sometimes encourages us to take risks in the name of Christ. And, of course, we all have immeasurable regard for those who care for the sick and who accept a higher level of risk as a consequence (while also doing all we can to minimise that risk by getting the best kind of PPE).

But it has struck me that the way that this present virus works means that we are all actually asked to consider *first* the risk we might present to others. Wearing a face mask, for example, reduces the risk to those I might sneeze over. Staying at home as much as possible may be the sacrifice I can make in order to keep *others* safe. With this kind of pandemic the most heroic I can be might seem the least apparently daring option – it might be just staying at home for a bit longer.

There are those who would say that some churches are being cowardly in not taking the risks of opening up buildings quickly. And of course, we have to balance all sorts of considerations. But it may be that we have to let go of the thought that the bravest, and most loving and faithful, thing is just to open as quickly as possible. Perhaps the most faithful thing is, rather, to sacrifice our being physically together for a bit longer than we would choose, for the sake of those who might be put at most risk.

I am aware of temptations in all this; the temptations to be ahead of the game, to get 'back', to be brave and risk-taking, not to let the virus define the future, even to be in denial about it all. But I am also aware of our responsibilities to one another, of the love that Christ deepens in us that values each human life and of the way that God calls us not to panic about the future, to be patient and not to rush.

We are fortunate indeed that, as things stand, no-one's livelihood is at risk if we take things slowly, and we do not need to let financial or other pressures overwhelm us. We can take the risk of waiting. Whatever we do in terms of opening the building for all sorts of things, we will not lose the deeper connections that we have made with those who couldn't come to a building before all this, and we will keep faith with those who might need to stay at home for longer than others. We are the church wherever we are and we will hold together through the coming months. God is with us. God bless you all as you make decisions and God keep you safe.

Your minister

Susan

# Praying through the week:

*A candle is lit*

*A time of silence is kept*

*Prayer*

God, who breaks open the morning,  
come and break into my life today.  
I receive this day as your gift  
and accept it from your hands.  
As I rise from my bed to begin the day,  
take my hand and lead me into life.

*A verse from the Bible is read, repeated and reflected on.*

*Prayer*

O God,  
who speaks to us through the Scriptures  
and through the events and moments of our days,  
let your Word interpret my life,  
and my day frame this verse,  
so that the light of your love may shine upon me.

I pray that I will grow in love for family and friends.  
I pray that I can do my tasks with diligence and joy.  
I pray that I shall be a blessing to others and true to myself.  
I pray for your protection and your peace.

Today, I pray especially for.....

*The Lord's Prayer*

The blessing of God be upon the church.  
The love of God warm the hearts of all your people.  
The beauty of God touch all creation, today and always, Amen.

## Revised Common Lectionary for forthcoming Sundays

2 August	9 August	16 August
Genesis 32:22-31 Psalm 17:1-7, 15 Romans 9:1-5 Matthew 14:13-21	Genesis 37:1-4, 12-28 Psalm 105: 1-6, 16-22, 45b Romans 10:5-15 Matthew 14:22-33	Genesis 45:1-15 Psalm 133 Romans 11: 1-2a, 29-32 Matthew 15:10-28
23 August	30 August	6 September
Exodus 1:8–2:10 Psalm 124 Romans 12:1-8 Matthew 16:13-20	Exodus 3:1-15 Psalm 105: 1-6, 23-26, 45b Romans 12:9-21 Matthew 16:21-28	Exodus 12:1-14 Psalm 149 Romans 13:8-14 Matthew 18:15-20



## Daily devotions

If you haven't already, do have a look at the Daily Devotions produced from the URC. There now also include regular posts of material for use on a Sunday morning. Here is the link: <https://devotions.urc.org.uk>

From 10am each Sunday, there is material to read and follow (including readings, hymns, prayers, a sermon...) OR you can listen on-line to a recording and join in that way. These services have been led each week by a different URC minister, with different voices doing readings and prayers, and with a wonderful variety of hymns and music. Services are planned to go on in this way well into the autumn, so that they can still be accessed for some time to come.



# Church Family News

## Denis Newman's ministerial jubilee

Sunday 5th July was the 60th anniversary of the ordination of Denis Newman to the ministry of Word and Sacraments. This milestone was recorded at the brief meeting of URC General Assembly the following Saturday, with rejoicing for the service that Denis, and others mentioned that day, had given to the Church. Our Synod Moderator, Ruth Whitehead, told our congregation about this the following day and showed us and Denis the certificate expressing the Church's gratitude that would be on its way to him.

Shortly afterwards, in a conversation with the editor, Denis insisted that things were the wrong way about and that he should be thanking the Church for the opportunity and the privilege of being one of its ministers.

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## Birthday Corner

Special greetings to those in our wider fellowship who have a birthday in August. May God bless you all ...

- 2 Susan Durber
- 17 Janet Sowerbutts
- 20 Diana Holmes
- 25 Andrew Powell



# United Service – the three churches

We planned, long ago, to hold a united service for our three churches; our own, Temple Methodist Church and St John's parish church - on Sunday 16th August. We had hoped to have a joint communion church in our church, Taunton URC. That is now, of course, impossible. Even if we were to be ready to open for public worship we could not get the number of people involved into our building with the necessary social distancing. So, we are planning something different.

The three ministers have met (via Zoom of course) and we are putting together a service that we will produce in a full transcript, so that everyone in our three churches can have it and pray through it - as many as possible at the same time - at 10.30am on that Sunday morning. Not everyone wants to Zoom or has access to the internet to watch a video and so we are providing this service in print form so that absolutely anyone and everyone who wishes to can access it in the same way. The three ministers will distribute the service, each to our own congregation, but we will each have a part in preparing it and contributing to it.

As the day before our service is one of the days traditionally celebrating Mary, we are going to reflect on her significance, from our three traditions and from our three perspectives. There will be readings, prayers, reflections, hymns, pictures too - and the service will provide suggestions for music that people might like to listen to as well as encouragement to spend time in silence.

We will each be free to enjoy the service in the way we wish; in *our* house we will surely 'say' it out loud and sing the hymns... and if it helps to be in a 'bubble' with others of course that can be done. And who knows quite what our situation will be by August 16th. But we hope that we shall enjoy sharing with one another an experience of worship together, each of us deepening our experience of the church universal and ecumenical. Christians have, for long centuries, understood that all prayer is common prayer and that we never pray alone - and on 16th August we shall pray in common with people from our three churches. Do join us!

"Accessibility is being able to get into the building. Diversity is getting invited to the table. Inclusion is having a voice at the table. But belonging is having a voice heard at the table."

*Augustine Yanner-Ihm, Anglican ordinand*

# The Covenant and Confidence of Faith

A friend has recently introduced me to this hymn (based on a longer poem) by Richard Baxter, who was one of the most famous of the 17th century Puritans who left the Church of England in 1662 - and a rare preacher against slavery for his time. It is based on Philippians 1:21: 'For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain'. I think it speaks into a time when many in our world, and some known closely to us, are facing death and bereavement, and it evokes very powerfully Christian confidence in the face of death. It reminds us of the Christian hope that we are more than our years. I was very struck by it.

“Lord, It belongs not to my care  
Whether I die or live;  
To love and serve Thee is my share,  
And this Thy grace must give.

If life be long, I will be glad  
That I may long obey;  
If short, yet why should I be sad  
To soar to endless day?

Christ leads me through no darker rooms  
Than He went through before;  
He that into God's kingdom comes  
Must enter by this door.

Come, Lord, when grace hath made me meet  
Thy blessed Face to see;  
For, if Thy work on earth be sweet,  
What will Thy glory be?

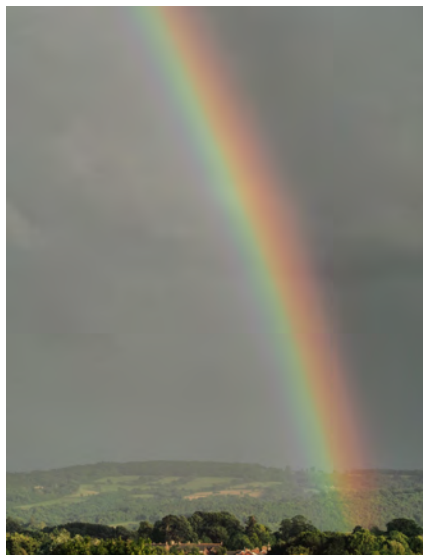
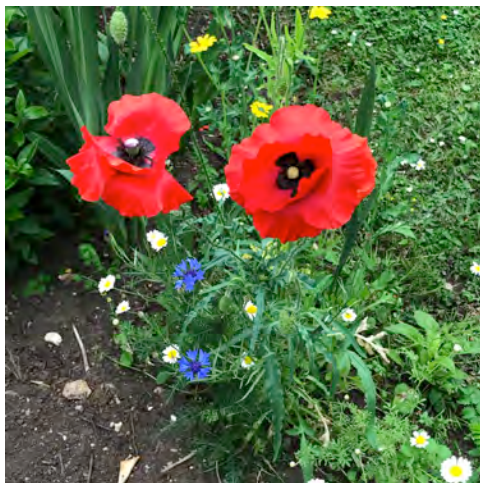
My knowledge of that Life is small;  
The eye of faith is dim;  
But 'tis enough that Christ knows all,  
And I shall be with Him.”

*Susan Durber*

# Signs of hope

*Right:  
Rainbow over the motorway with the  
Blackdown Hills behind*

*Below:  
Wild flowers grown from seeds given  
to mourners at the burial of Gwyneth  
Jones in January*

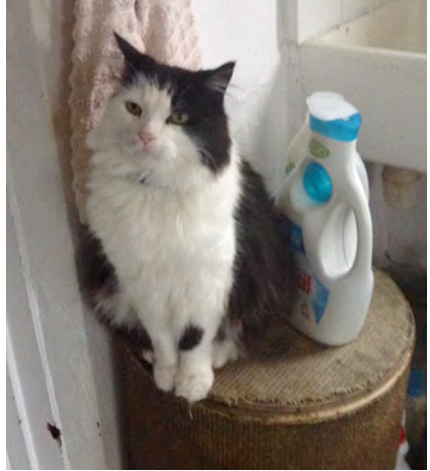


*Below: A DEC-funded doctor supported by Christian Aid in the Rohingya refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, waits for his next patient.*

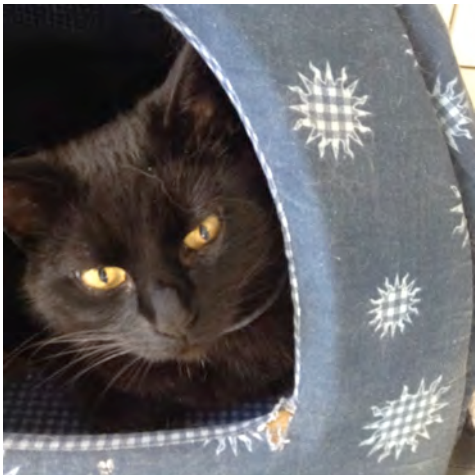


# Pets

For many, pets provide important companionship and contribute to a sense of wellbeing. Some of these animals have made impromptu appearances at Sundays services on Zoom. We asked for photos.



At the home of Maralyn and Sam, Dandy (above) enjoys the outside world and occasionally bring gifts of wild life home. He is quite talkative and friendly at times. He also appears to like supervising the cleaning. Also resident is Nibbler (below), the ex farm cat who prefers to be inside.





Here is Lucy, who won her place into Meg's heart and home.

Below is Lee's dog, Jasper, who wants to play.



Or maybe not.



Blue and Cassie, at the home of Ron and Rita

Finally, Gerasimos and a big cat (see pages 14-15)

# Sacred art



*The apostle Peter rescued from 'lockdown' by an angel (see Acts 12:5-11) by Jacopo di Cione (1370-1371) part of the high altarpiece of the now-destroyed Florentine Church of San Pier Maggiore*

*Icon of St Gerasimos of the Jordan*



# The story of Gerasimos and the lion

The Desert Fathers (and Mothers) were saints of the 4th and 5th centuries who chose lives of poverty and distanced themselves from the compromises of life under Roman rule in what were the forerunners of monastic communities. A story is told about one of these, an abbot called Gerasimos, who, while walking by the Jordan, came across a lion roaring in pain. Gerasimos removed a splinter from the lion's paw [*don't try this at home*], and cleaned and dressed the wound. He expected lion to return to its cave in the desert but instead it followed him back to the monastery and became the abbot's devoted pet, adopting the monks' vegetarian diet.

The lion was given the task of guarding the community's donkey in its pasture by the Jordan. However, one day, while the lion took a nap, a passing trader stole the donkey. When the lion returned to the monastery with its head hanging low, it was assumed that it had been overcome by its appetite for meat. As a punishment, the lion was given the donkey's job of carrying earthenware jars of water from the river each day.

Some months after this, the trader passed by with the donkey and three camels in tow. The lion recognised the donkey and let out a terrifying roar causing the trader to run away and abandon the animals. With its rope between its jaws the lion brought the donkey back to the monastery, with the camels following. It was then that the monks realised that they had misjudged the lion, which they called Jordanes.

The lion remained a part of the monastic community for five years, until Gerasimos died. After the abbot had been buried the lion laid down upon the grave, roared with grief and beat its head upon the ground. Then it rolled over and died.

## Taunton Foodbank use

	June 2019	June 2020
Clients fed	354	494
Parcels out	172	194





# What happens next?

I have recently been listening to some of the Radio 4 “ReThink” programmes, in which different thinkers have talked about how they would like to see the world change as we ‘open up’ again from the Covid-19 lockdown.

The first of these was an essay by Pope Francis, re-thinking poverty.

The Pope reminds us of the time when Jesus was anointed by the woman at Bethany, just before he died (Matthew 26: 6-13).

The woman is criticised for spending money on the ointment she uses to honour Jesus, when she could have helped the poor. Jesus says ‘you will always have the poor with you’. Far from telling his followers to forget the poor, Jesus tells them to remember the poor - to see the poor.

The Pope makes the point that ‘poverty is bashful’ - that people may feel ashamed of being poor and may not want to speak out. The church needs to notice the poor and to speak out for them - to ‘amplify their voices’

Hearing the Pope’s words and looking again at the story of the anointing of Jesus made me wonder how I might live differently and how we might ‘rethink’ who we are as a church, as we move forward into the post-pandemic world.

The church needs to do things which build the kingdom of God - so what should our priorities be?

Do we want to spend our time **honouring Jesus**, as the woman with the ointment did?

For me, I think this means continuing daily prayers at home with Susan at 7pm a top priority, even as the diary starts to fill up with other things.

How good are we at **remembering the poor** - and seeing poor people as people, beloved children of God, not just an issue or a problem?

I am going to look again at my regular charitable giving, especially in the light of having extra disposable income now I don’t eat or drink out at all. Also through, Citizens Somerset, we are trying to keep people in housing.

Are there ways in which we could be **serving others** that we have somehow overlooked in the past?

I have been doing a few small errands for people in Bishop's Hull, but I also want to give some more of my time to helping wider concerns, such as care for the environment, and thinking about how Black Lives Matter impacts on me.

I wonder how God is challenging each of us, individually and as a church, to rethink?

*Ruth Whitehead*



## News from the Listening Chaplaincy Phoneline

The Listening Chaplaincy Phoneline, launched on Monday 27 April, was closed in late June having received 90 calls.

Areas covered: Faith (35) Prayer (50) Bereavement (9) Relationships (37) Health (40) Work (40) Covid (10) Other (46)

13 callers were signposted to: Silverline, CAB, Open Doors, Arc Inspire, Somerset Mind, Cruse, Assist Trauma Care, local prayer group, Mental Health service, and Somerset Anxiety Support Group.

There have been lighter moments. One caller from London rang under the mistaken impression that we were a service providing Hymn Singing to listen to!

The High Sheriff of Somerset, Mrs Mary-Clare Rodwell, has added her appreciation of the phoneline; she says:

"I am so pleased that this new initiative has had such a good response. The loss of our churches has caused much angst. The Listening Chaplaincy goes a long way to providing the connection so many need. Thank you for setting this up for all of Somerset to use."

*Viv Henderson*

# Commitment for Life

Life-giving Faith | Defiant Hope | Generous Love

Helping United Reformed Churches work for a fairer world and for peace with justice, recognising that change and response starts with each one of us.

Envelopes for your donations and Information Leaflets are available in the Dora Cox Room. Please feel free to put in what you can, when you can, no amount is too small.

*Revd Dr Kevin Snyman - Commitment for Life Programme Officer,  
Suzanne Pearson - Commitment for Life Administrative Assistant*

## Moving Stories

*News from our Partners around the World*

### News from Bangladesh

#### In the Wake of Cyclone Amphan

Christian Aid and its local partners have been responding to Super Cyclone Amphan. The storm destroyed the homes of millions of poor people in coastal communities near the Bay of Bengal.

Winds reached 120mph, and waves 17ft. Electricity lines and communications are down across affected regions. Communities must cope with both the aftermath of the storm and also the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

Many communities in Bangladesh, including Cox's Bazar (the world's largest refugee camp) were urged to evacuate. Over 2.4 million people made the move according

to official Bangladeshi government reports. The risk of Covid-19 transmission led to many people hesitating to leave early enough.

Christian Aid's Bangladesh Country Director, Pankaj Kumar, said: "We are in a very challenging time. Many people are scared of catching Covid-19 and it has hampered our partners' efforts to get people to safety. Temporary shelters are having to practise social distancing, which is extremely difficult in an emergency evacuation situation.

"Many people are preferring to take shelter in a neighbour's house or on higher land over the official shelters, especially as there are reports of shelters lacking

sufficient facilities.

“Thankfully, community preparedness has led to minimum deaths, but Amphan has left huge devastation in its wake, with homes, communications, crops and livelihoods destroyed. Approximately 80% tin-roofed homes in Satkira district have been blown away and families struggling to find water and food.

“We are also glad to report that initial reports indicate minimal damage to camps in Cox’s Bazar.

The region is experiencing an increased number of intense storms year on year. The poorest and most vulnerable are hit the hardest. Many are still recovering their livelihoods from the previous Cyclone Bulbul, which affected

1.8m people and damaged 70,000 homes in November.”

Commitment for Life, in solidarity with Christian Aid and its partners support long-term programmes in these affected areas. We have worked to prepare communities for disasters; we have established early warning systems. Our partners in Satkira, Khulna and Cox’s Bazar support affected communities with shelter, food and hygiene kits. These include soap, masks and hand sanitiser.

Thank you for your ongoing support for Bangladesh through Commitment for Life. Our prayers, advocacy and sharing make an enormous difference to thousands of people in the region.

## Central America

**Honduras is one of the least developed countries in Central America, and Christian Aid has been working in Honduras since 1997.**

*Commitment for Life* works in partnership with Christian Aid in Central America. Here, we work together with local communities so that they can prepare for disasters, protect what remains of the Honduran rainforest, support small rural businesses to thrive and grow, and advocate for tax reform.

In the early 2000’s, Honduras was making steady progress towards poverty reduction. But a coup in June 2009 led to massive instability. Violence began to escalate particularly directed against women, journalists and human rights defenders. Land issues, economic inequality, corruption and political instability became factors blocking the path to progress, along with environmental and climate change issues.

Honduras has nearly 10,000 confirmed cases of COVID-19. But

testing is limited, and the public health system is operating under great strain. The centre of Honduras' epidemic has been in Cortes, but in recent weeks cases have surged around the capital of Tegucigalpa.

The Honduran President, a close ally of Donald Trump, has tested positive for COVID-19. It has been alleged that he has allowed the free movement of drugs to further his political career.

In spite of these many challenges, Christian Aid continues its work in Honduras, along with Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua. We work with around 25 partner organisations, from community-

based groups to larger organisations operating across the region and beyond.

Our partners include indigenous communities, small farmers' associations, cooperative enterprises, redevelopment organisations, research institutions and faith-based organisations.

Our regional approach works because of the close economic, social and political ties between the four countries. This leads to coherent programming, links between partners and other allies across the region, and shared learning.

## Zimbabwe

### Mining destroys Communities and Eco-Systems

We don't often think about how terribly destructive mining practices can be, not only for the environment, but also for local communities. In their rush to make revenues, governments often overlook these considerations.

Mining is big business in Zimbabwe, with mineral exports responsible for 60% of the country's export earnings, and 16% of national GDP. The government has outlined ambitious plans to quadruple the sector's total value to \$12bn by 2023, particularly focussed on platinum extraction.

However, the country's lax licensing laws permit foreign companies to own 100% of a mine licence for any commodity, save platinum and diamonds, in perpetuity.

Mining also severely impacts on indigenous communities and eco systems. Strip mining is particularly destructive. Coal fires can burn for decades, releasing fly ash, toxic chemical and greenhouse gases, such as methane. Coal dust inhalation causes black lung disease among miners and those living nearby.

Mine accidents kill thousands every year. Cardiopulmonary disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, hypertension, lung disease, and kidney disease have been found in higher-than-normal rates among residents who live near coal mines.

Toxic levels of arsenic, fluorine, mercury, and selenium are emitted by coal fires, entering the air and the food chain of those living nearby.

Christian Aid in Zimbabwe focusses on creating space for citizen and civil society participation in the mining sector through facilitating the Zimbabwe Alternative Mining Indaba (ZAMI).

This platform was used to advocate for the adoption of a declaration with specific recommendations, which have been presented to the government for adoption in the amendment of the Mines and Minerals Bill.

The programme increased participation of women and men in mining communities in monitoring the environmental impact of mining companies.

Your support for Zimbabwe through *Commitment for Life* helps empower these communities to stand up to exploitation and abuse by the mining sector. Thank you for your support.



Photo: Nicholas leClercq, Unsplash

# Climate: Code Red

The following is an extract of an article, published in *The Biologist*, the journal of the Royal Society of Biology on 5th June 2020, and reproduced with their permission.

*As the need for action on climate change and species loss becomes more urgent, an increasing number of scientists are turning to environmental activism. Emma Wrake AMRSB, the editorial assistant at the Royal Society of Biology, spoke to some of them.*

At a time when United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has declared that the planet is facing a ‘climate emergency’, activism is playing a substantial role in forcing social and political responses to the crisis. Across nations, everyone from schoolchildren to retirees are joining climate activism groups such as Extinction Rebellion [XR] and Fridays for Future to call for radical action to tackle the environmental crisis. Among these people are scientists, who whether it be through outrage, despair or a sense of duty, feel the time has come to do more than just provide society with scientific information.

## Time to take action

These actions have attracted global attention and a spectrum of reactions, ranging from celebrity support to accusations of extremism. Yet as of March this year more than 1,500 scientists have signed a declaration of support for XR’s aims, including hundreds of academics from the life sciences. Many are members of the group or related subgroups such as Scientists for Extinction Rebellion.

One of them is Professor James Bullock, an ecologist at the UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology. With more than 30 years of experience in conservation and management of the natural world, Bullock is particularly interested in restoring habitats and landscapes to benefit biodiversity and increase resilience to environmental change. “I have for a long time been in despair that much too little is being done to save the natural world and to reverse our destruction of the environment. XR’s activities gave me some hope,” he says.

Bullock initially took part in an XR ‘die-in’ (a form of protest where activists lie down and pretend to be dead, disrupting people’s movement). “Meeting up and joining in with XR scientists at the October Rebellion gave me a focus and milieu through which I felt I could use my scientific knowledge to contribute to XR.”

XR protests have divided public opinion. Some in London were criticised as disproportionately disruptive for low-wage workers attempting to get to work, and in early 2020 leaked internal documents from the UK's counter-terrorism unit listed XR as an extremist group. But Bullock says that criticisms of the group as extremists are “hysterical reactions by certain people in authority” and a threat to non-violent protest. He believes that freedom of speech is “central to science and its contribution to society”.

Sarah Peters, a medical student at the University of Oxford, believes that the climate crisis “transcends political opinion”. She feels “a duty to ensure people are aware of the facts of climate change, enabling them to act with full comprehension of the current situation”.

Peters came to the attention of *The Biologist's* editor, Tom Ireland, on a train travelling to London during Storm Ciara in February. “In the middle of a slow, delayed journey, she just stood up, introduced herself to the whole carriage, and explained how climate change was likely to make big storms and flooding more likely in the UK,” says Ireland. “As Brits we find this kind of thing terribly awkward, but everything she said was all perfectly true and it was probably quite affecting for the people who listened.”

Peters says she felt compelled to take direct action by way of a ‘train talk’ to commuters in a bid to “nudge them to channel their frustration into action”. She thinks that scientists are well placed to join groups such as XR, whose aim to communicate environmental facts to the public aligns with researchers’ efforts to communicate the latest findings from the sciences.

For Sarah Peters, the decision to partake in activism is simple: she “cannot in good faith stand by, knowing the current and future effects of the climate crisis, and do nothing”.

## MAGAZINE DEADLINE

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by MONDAY 17th AUGUST 2020 please.

BUT PLEASE SEE NOTE on page 3 about possible change.



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# **Taunton United Reformed Church**

## **Vision Statement**

**For the sake of the Gospel, we will be:**

- ◆ **a church that welcomes, whoever you are**
- ◆ **a church that cares and responds with action**
- ◆ **a church that works with others and plays its part in the community**
- ◆ **a church that knows and shares the love of God**
- ◆ **a church that is growing in faith and knowledge of God**
- ◆ **a church full of hope and joy**