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Taunton United Reformed Church



JANUARY 2021
Magazine



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TAUNTON UNITED REFORMED CHURCH MAGAZINE

NO. 580

January 2021

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From the Editor



January - a new year! - but, for the first few days, also Christmas.

Joy to the world - the Lord is come!

So the theme for this issue is **joy**. So joy features in the prayer diary and in words and pictures sent in by readers.

There are nativity pictures from Paul Street and a Christmas quiz.

We look forward to the new year with a song of hope on page 18 and, with some suggested resolutions as bookends, exhortations to rejoice (in the Minister's letter) and to stand up for democracy (on page 23).

I have written some more tips for using Zoom, this time with users of tablets in mind. If you have a question about using Zoom, it is likely someone else has the same question; so do tell me, and I will find the answer and print it.

Once again, I am grateful to readers who have contributed articles, photographs, or even simply a sentence. If you like this issue, it is because of this. It makes this a magazine by the church for the church, and even maybe the wider world.

So, you may like to know now that the theme for the February issue will be **Light**. What might you contribute on this theme? With what words or pictures do you respond to the phrase 'seeing the light'?

Peter Henderson

*Words for challenging times from Psalm 126,
used in our worship on 13th December:*

When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream. Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then it was said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them." The LORD has done great things for us, and we rejoiced.

Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like the watercourses in the Negeb.

May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy.

Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves.

Forthcoming Church Services

Regular Sunday worship takes place at 10:30am.

These will be 'hybrid' services in that you can attend either
- in person at the church in Paul Street (if regulations permit)
- bring a face covering - or
- via Zoom using an online or telephone connection.
To attend via Zoom you need an invitation from the Minister.

- 3 January United Covenant Service - see page 9
(includes The Lord's Supper)
- 10 January Morning worship led by the Revd Dr Susan Durber
- 17 January Morning worship led by the Revd Ken Marsh
(with Clare Callanan in reserve)
- 24 January Morning worship led by the Revd Dr Susan Durber
followed by a Church Meeting
- 31 January Morning worship led by the Revd Dr Susan Durber

Weekly Activities

if and when regulations permit

What, when & where	Notes
Midweek Worship on Tuesdays Most Tuesdays from 11:30am to 12 noon in the church OR Private prayer from 11am to 12 noon	A face covering is required
Work-Wise in the URC Lecture Hall Wednesdays, 9:30am 12:30 & 1:30-4:00pm Offering support with all aspects of job seeking	Contact the manager (details on page 1) to volunteer or just turn up

Other Notable Dates

- Thursday 7 January Elders' meeting
- Monday 11 January Magazine deadline
- See page 9 for more calendar information

From your minister:



Dear friends,

The conventional greeting at this time of year is, of course, 'A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!'.

I know of one person who always disliked 'merry' because of its associations with tipsiness, but I tend to think that it's just that it's now a rather antique word that we have forgotten how to use. 'Happy' of course is rather different, though we might still debate exactly what it means. There are those, social

scientists, who have tried to work out precisely what things make people most 'happy' and even which is the happiest country in the world. There is, I gather, an annual World Happiness Report. I seem to remember all the way up to earning about £25,000 a year makes people increasingly happy, but when your salary rises above that level it doesn't make much difference to your happiness at all. And I think the happiest country right now is said to be Finland.

And Jesus had a lot to say about what made people 'blessed' (which some English translators think is really about being happy).

St Paul had more to say about joy. In fact he had a great deal to say about joy, particularly in one of his letters, the one he wrote to the Christians in Philippi. It's very short letter and I've listed most of the relevant quotations below.



- 1: 18 What does it matter? Just this, that Christ is proclaimed in every way, whether out of false motives or true; and in that I rejoice.
- 1: 23-25 I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better; but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you. Since I am convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for your progress and joy in faith,
- 2: 1-2 If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.

- 2: 17-18 But even if I am being poured out as a libation over the sacrifice and the offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you— and in the same way you also must be glad and rejoice with me.
- 2: 25, 29-30 Still, I think it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus— Welcome him then in the Lord with all joy, and honour such people, because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for those services that you could not give me.
- 3: 1 Finally, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord.
- 4: 1 Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.
- 4: 4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.
- 4:10 I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me;

You might say, if you were editing this text of Paul's, that he's a little repetitive. But what's more striking still is that he is writing this letter from captivity, a captivity from which, reading between the lines, he doesn't really ever expect to escape (except in death). So it's all the more amazing that he is writing about joy.

And then, Paul does that thing with 'joy' that Jesus does with 'love'; he commands his readers to do it. This shows, I think, that he is not thinking of joy solely as that kind of emotion that creeps upon you unexpectedly or that might overwhelm you are after some unforeseen moment. It's not so much a response to what life brings, but a decision that you make about life before anything happens at all. It's a determination to practise joy, to choose it, to live it. Perhaps we might need some help with that, but what a thought...

So, I do wish you a 'Happy New Year', and I do hope that lovely things do happen to you, BUT I would encourage you to learn from Paul, so that, whatever happens, whatever befalls us all, you will be able, nonetheless, to rejoice in the sense that Paul seems to mean. Paul clearly believed that faith could make that possible and who are we to argue?

Your minister,

Susan

Picture from: <https://www.pexels.com - brush-happiness-joy-22221.jpg>

A prayer for each day of the week: seven joys

Monday:

Loving and gracious God,
I pray for the gift of joy,
as I open my heart
to receive the fulness of life
with you.

Tuesday:

Tender God,
who cares so deeply for all your creation,
and for each of us uniquely made,

I pray that the people I love
and whose joy I long for,
may know your love for them
and find peace.

Wednesday:

I thank you God for all who bring joy to our lives:
for children and infants,
for comedians and singers,
for writers and for carers,
for those I will meet or hear from today,
and all who are truly joy-bringers.
Thank you.

Thursday:

O God, who is with us,
to listen and to be beside each one,
I pray today for those who are empty of joy
and full of heartache and pain.

When my days, and any of our days,
are like this,
come, God, into the place where we are,
and stay with us.
We follow one who once knew himself forsaken,
but whom you brought to life again.
Come, God, and be with us.

Friday:

God, who came to us in Jesus the healer,
I pray today, with thanksgiving,
for those who bring us healing
of our bodies, of our minds and our spirits.
When physical pain is fierce,
may there be something to ease it.
When we are stressed and anxious,
may there be peace.
When our spirits are troubled,
may joy be your gift to each one.

Saturday:

I pray today that joy may return
to the most troubled places in our world;
to the refugee camps in Palestine, the Yemen and Syria,
to the areas of deprivation in our towns and cities,
to the crowded favelas, townships and tented cities of our world,
among the poorest and the desperate and the exploited.
May joy come among the suffering,
and may hope find a new future.

Sunday:

On this day, when we come together for worship,
to hear the good news again,
may we hear every word that your Word offers to us;
and may 'joy' be among them.
We will repent, believe and proclaim,
and we will, if you give us grace, always rejoice. Amen.

Revised Common Lectionary for forthcoming Sundays		
3 January	10 January	17 January
Jeremiah 31:7-14 Psalm 147:12-20 Ephesians 1:3-14 John 1:1-18	Genesis 1:1-5 Psalm 29 Acts 19:1-7 Mark 1:4-11	1 Samuel 3:1-20 Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 John 1:43-51
24 January	31 January	7 February
Jonah 3:1-5, 10 Psalm 62:5-12 1 Corinthians 7:29-31 Mark 1:14-20	Deuteronomy 18:15-20 Psalm 111 1 Corinthians 8:1-13 Mark 1:21-28	Isaiah 40:21-31 Psalm 147:1-11, 20c 1 Corinthians 9:16-23 Mark 1:29-39

Daily devotions and Sundays too

There are still regular posts of worship resources from the URC - through the Daily Devotions link: <https://devotions.urb.org.uk>

From 10am each Sunday (now well into next year), 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.

Church Family News

Calendar: Dates for your diary

Sunday 3rd January: Whether physically together or in our separate churches we will share in marking a Covenant service with Temple Methodist Church and St John's Parish Church. We will share the covenant words that originate with one of our first ministers here at Taunton URC and that John Wesley developed into a Methodist tradition. This is a Sunday to renew our covenant with God and with each other.

14th - 20th January: The minister will be much involved with chairing an online meeting of the World Council of Churches Faith and Order Commission, so won't be quite so responsive to e-mails etc. We hope and pray that the connection keeps working, with a group of about 50 people from all over the world. She would have been in Armenia for this meeting (but for Covid-19), and will be praying for people there who are at the moment immersed in conflict with Azerbaijan.

Sunday 24th January: The morning service will be followed by a Church Meeting (very likely with a mix of in-person and Zoom, depending on how things are at the time).

Future Church Meeting dates for 2021:

18th April (annual meeting), 18th July and 17th October
(and possibly on other occasions as needed)

Birthday Corner

We rejoice those in our wider fellowship who have a birthday in January. May God bless you all happiness.



- 7 Heather Parsons
- 17 John Cohen
- 18 Sue Ingham

Social and Arts News

Let's try some talks using zoom. Please join us once a month on zoom for the following talks. They will all be on a **Thursday afternoon at 2pm**

January 28th 'A legacy of slavery in my white British life' given by Susan Durber.

February 25th Weather forecasting - a glimpse of the working life of Frank Callanan

March 25th The story behind some of the older monasteries in Somerset by Sheena Hellier

This looks like a fascinating start to our SAG programme.

Of course if any on you would like to offer a topic we would be delighted to hear from you.

Further precise details about Zoom later.

Janet & Sheila

Christmas was different

Christmas was different this year, for a number of reasons.

The uncertainty in the service arrangements would have made Mary, the soon-to-be mother of Jesus, smile knowingly.

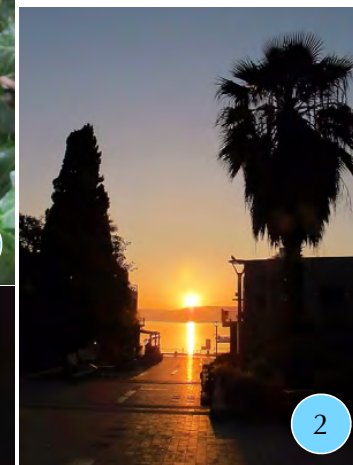
The Normal Steel nativity installation was back but under the new canopy (see photo on page 14), offering even more shelter to the holy family and also to the socially-distanced choir of carol singers on two Saturday afternoon before Christmas.

Gift Time

The astonishing generosity of church members is shown in the amount contributed at Gift Time in November. When Gift Aid tax reimbursements from last year are added, the total comes to about £4300.

Christmas quiz

What Christmas carol or hymn is represented by each of these five images? Some are more obvious, others obtuse. The disputable answers are on page 21.



Photos that spark joy



Photographic credits go to:
Clare Calannan (for most of these),
Viv Henderson,
and the editor



Nativity inside and out



MAGAZINE DEADLINE

Contributions for the February 2021 magazine should be with the Editor

Peter Henderson - 14 Somerset Avenue, Taunton, TA1 5HU

Telephone: 01823 254668 - e-mail: tauntonurc.mag@gmail.com
by MONDAY 11th JANUARY 2021 (or earlier) please.

Index of pictures opposite:

Top half of page, clockwise from top left

- The Normal Steel nativity installation under the canopy.
- Peruvian carved figures
- Olive wood by Palestinian craftsmen; note the fence to keep visitors out.
- A fairly-traded set from Vietnam, made from recycled newspapers

The seven nativity sets were displayed on window sills in church during Advent and Christmas.

Top half of page, clockwise from top left

- Felt figures from the Nepalese fair-trade group "Felt so Good"
- 'Bethlehem', a set of wooden figures made by St Michael's Workshop near Norwich, who provide training for people with learning difficulties and other disabilities and conditions, for the Godly Play collection.
- Wool felt set with mice; note how large the baby is compared to sheep.
- Painted figures from Guatemala; this set is a "posada", designed to be carried from home to home to represent the journey of Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem.

Joys without number

Just recently when we were sharing worship in Taunton U.R.C. and the Reverend Susan was painting a very black picture of our present situation living through this pandemic, she went on to say that we should store up the joys that come into our life. Well I thought I could write a book about them and perhaps a follow on. There is the wonderful assurance that God will never forsake us and he will forgive us our sins and forget them. I remind myself of that joy in the morning and the end of the day and several times in between.

Colour always gives me such joy. I have four different fans which represent my season and help me choose the right colours to wear. I love looking at them, they are so beautiful!

What joy nature bring us! The sighting of a bird in the garden that maybe you haven't seen for some time. Looking in the garden being surprised by a flourishing plant that you thought you had lost. The excitement of seeing foxes and badgers at night. The exquisite Little Egret that frequents the streams around the town.

I love to watch our cats, Dandy and Nibbler. They are so beautiful and funny at times. Nibbler likes to spend much of her time in the evenings in the front room. She enjoys a certain amount of attention on her terms of course! She doesn't like us to concentrate too much on the television and tries to get the attention on to her, usually by being naughty!

My daughter has suffered with severe depression for practically all her life. However, underneath the misery of her life she can be quite funny, and when she laughs it's a real joy.

I expect like me during the last few months other people too have been clearing out cupboards and drawers. When you're going through various items there's so much joy in finding an old letter, photos and even money you didn't know you had if you're really lucky.

It's a dull, damp day - not much to lift the spirits - and you decide to phone a friend. Sharing a phone call with a friend can bring so much joy!

Cooking a tasty, nourishing meal, or baking biscuits and cakes is a good way of lifting your mood.

Sunday evenings going out with Sam and Lulu - Lulu is a Jack Russell dog that we take for our neighbours Rosemary and Alan - makes the three of us joyful.

Then there's the joy of getting into a much loved comfortable bed at night, especially when there's fresh bedding on the bed!

It's a case of "Count Your Blessing one by one and it will surprise you what the Lord has done," as the hymn encourages us to do.

Maralyn Bickham

How we have found joy

Others offer their thoughts and reflections

Joy is waking up in the morning after a peaceful and undisturbed nights sleep.

Sue Ingham

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Listening to Susan's sermon this morning [6th December], we were encouraged to think about COMFORT, perhaps a word not truly appreciated for its deeper meaning - *so* needed with all the many problems we are experiencing throughout this Covid-19 pandemic. Also mentioned was a reminder that the subject for the January issue of the church magazine was joy.

To me, 'JOY' is particularly relevant in my life. It is nearly three years since my darling husband, Geoff, died from a nasty cancer. We shared 58 years of a truly joyous marriage with all the 'ups and downs' of a true relationship. After the initial despair, heartbreak and deep sense of loss, I was supported throughout by the joy of our two children, their families, my relations, many friends and my church family. I now have JOY again in my life with a dear man, whose beloved wife died very suddenly four years ago. We now share the joy of a new relationship, something we NEVER thought possible. I truly believe God's Spirit was there for us both when we perhaps didn't realise. Now we look forward to the JOY of a new partnership and for this we thank God, and also for the joy of Advent.

Carole Dabbs

I believe... a song of hope

Those who were present at the Advent Sunday service on Zoom will have heard a rendition of a new hymn, inspired by the words written by a Jewish prisoner and found on the walls of a cellar in the Cologne concentration camp.

The original reads:

I believe in the sun
even when it is not shining
And I believe in love,
even when there's no one there.
And I believe in God,
even when he is silent.

I believe through any trial,
there is always a way
But sometimes in this suffering
and hopeless despair
My heart cries for shelter,
to know someone's there
But a voice rises within me, saying hold on
my child, I'll give you strength,
I'll give you hope. Just stay a little while.

Susan was trying to find a hymn about hope for the service, and feeling that this had an almost hymn-like quality already, I played around with the words until it fitted the metre of 'Love came down at Christmas' (6767). There are a few tunes to that metre - the one I chose for the video used in worship was 'Gartan'. My version is:

I believe in sunlight even when it does not shine.
In the midst of suffering certain hope is always mine

I believe in love's truth even when there's no-one there.
When my heart is lonely I can feel another's care.

I believe in God's reign even when God's voice is still
Hope is deep within me: I surrender to God's will.

I thought the words of hope might help us as we step into 2021. With best wishes for a hopeful New Year.

Ruth Whitehead

A Spark of Joy

A few years ago I came across Marie Kondo's book 'The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up'. As someone who has moved house six times in the last eleven years, and as someone who likes to be organised and tidy, it was a book that confirmed a number of things for me. However, there was one phrase which stayed with me... "spark joy." Kondo invited people, whilst decluttering and re-organising to put each item through a test; to ask whether the item gives you a spark of happiness or joy? If not, then it is time to let it go from your life.

This is also about the quality and intensity of the feeling. What do you think of when you reflect on what gives you a 'spark of joy'? Is it the smile from a loved one, opening a gift, watching a sunrise? Are you actually feeling that as something physical in your body even? It might make you smile, or laugh, or tingle...or even bring tears to your eyes (that's always a strange one...).

So Marie Kondo maintains that the point of decluttering is to get rid of things, thereby creating space and a feeling of freedom. Would it surprise you to know that I got rid of boxes of old photos? That they had stayed in that box for years and that though some made me smile, they did not create any intense feelings. My brain was saying that I SHOULD keep them.... But really? So they went. Have I missed them? No.

Perhaps it is more a changing of mindset? What is TRULY important? Part of Marie Kondo's method is to invite you to thank the item for its service, to honour it, to respect it, before throwing it away or donating it because it no longer brings you joy. Everything is treated with respect. And that makes it easier to let go.

It is normal for many of us to form attachments to material possessions, especially sentimental things. And I certainly had/have a number of objects like that. But when put to the 'test' I was able to realise that many of them no longer gave me a spark joy. So why did I keep it just to move to another attic or garage...?

So, as we move into this new year of 2021, with all that has been part of 2020 and its difficulties, can we look around our houses, our possessions and our lives and ask "...does this give me a spark of joy?" Can we look to the future and wonder what joy awaits us? What will spark us this year?

Clare Callanan

Missed connections

An issue of *New Scientist* magazine back in August contained an article called 'Missed connections'. This was about how the pandemic has had a detrimental effect on our social networks, the (once) everyday series of human interactions that contribute to our quality of life and sense of who we are.

Researchers from a number of universities had experimental evidence for what most of us know 'in our bones' that, despite the undoubted benefits of internet communication - via Zoom, WhatsApp, or whatever - we are missing out a dimension in our engagement. By identifying some of these factors, the article hopes to equip us to make the most of what we have.

Three areas of social life were mentioned in the article that are important to our welfare but currently diminished. These are:

- Shared experiences: activities with others create unspoken bonds and - yes - research confirms that these especially important for men (some men anyway). These involve more than just words.
- Non-verbal communication, such as a reassuring touch. As someone who preaches, though only occasionally now, I know how important it is to see the faces of those who may be listening, to know that they are listening and to receive hints of what my words might mean to them; in a congregation with face-coverings, smiles go unseen and raised eyebrows hardly noticed.
- So-called 'weak ties', the brief encounters we have with people in a queue or at a coffee shop, all of which add up to something, are not to be underestimated.



Of course, it is just these activities which contribute to our 'social capital' - the richness of our life together - which have become dangerous in spreading infection. It is wonder there is a great tension between maintaining public physical health and mental health. So how might we safely improve our quality of life and that of others?

To a degree we have maintained shared experience in our gathering for worship each Sunday. The article recommends translating less essential joint activities so they work within the current regulations. So a group that would have gone to the cinema together could arrange to watch a film at the same time and then discuss it by video link afterwards. Although not everyone likes or is equipped for Zoom, there is scope for online Bible study or Reform discussions, so long as we not expect the Minister to organise it all.

I have found that it helps to exaggerate non-verbal gestures, to communicate better over video or get round the face-mask. At online leaving do's for colleagues I have attended people's visible hand-clapping, even when muted, says a lot. (For more ideas about silent online communication, see overleaf.) If we could overcome our traditional British reserve, we might even utter "Amen! Alleluia!" as encouragements to the preacher. On the subject of touch, research confirms the experience of my regular walks that, even without a pet of my own, watching other dogs being stroked has a vicariously beneficial effect; and some of them want to be stroked by me.

Those regular walks have also built up my stock of 'weak ties' such that many dog-walkers now recognise me and initiate the conversation. Perhaps stating the obvious, there are opportunities also with the post-and parcel delivery people, refuse collectors, and shop workers. Such simple ways of building social capital are mutually advantageous, but it might need you to make it happen. Christmas and New Year are convenient pretexts for talking to strangers...

Peace on earth - goodwill to all!

Peter Henderson

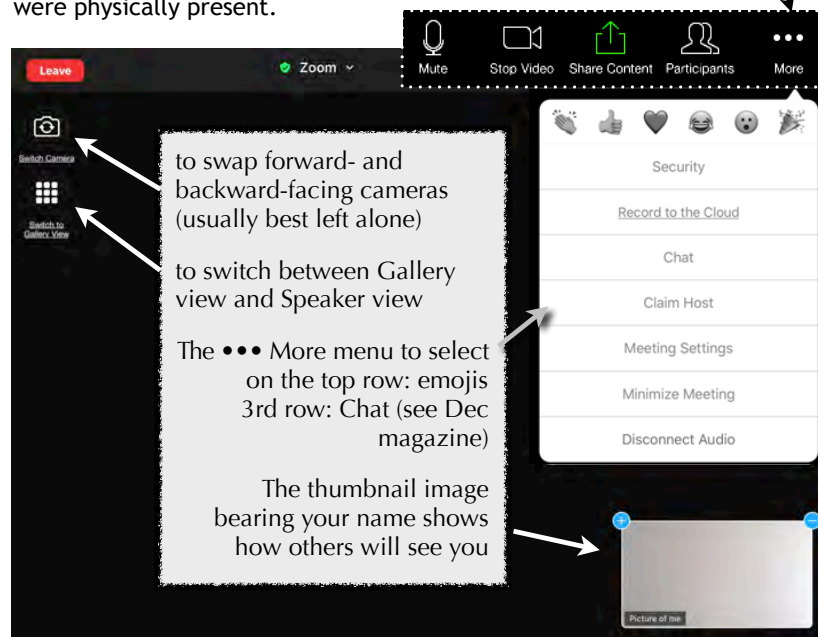
Answers to Christmas carol quiz

1. The holy and the ivy
2. O little town of Bethlehem
3. Of the Father's love begotten
4. Ding dong! merrily on high
5. Lo, how a rose is growing / e'er blooming

More tips for using Zoom

Zoom is trickier to use on a tablet because the screen is smaller and touch-sensitive; so it is useful to know your way around it. The picture below is based on an iPad, though an Android tablet will be very similar.

Gallery and Speaker views were mentioned in the December issue. The top-right row of icons/buttons has been enlarged here for clarity. Pressing the ... More button opens a menu which allows you to choose the Chat facility (also Dec issue) and, on the top row, some emoji. By selecting one carefully, you can indicate applause, approval, love, laughter, surprise and celebration; an extra dimension of non-verbal communication to be deployed with the same etiquette as if you were physically present.



The thumbnail image of oneself, showing how much others can see of you, can be removed by pressing on the top left corner with the blue (-).

If all the icons/buttons obscure your view, you can switch off *Always Show Meeting Controls*: press the cog to get to Settings then choose the list of Meeting Settings. Pressing the screen will always reveal them.

Democracy under threat

Do Christians believe in democracy? Not all of us, it seems.

It was good to see this subject touched on in the December *Reform* magazine. Editor Stephen Tomkins was pleased that Donald Trump lost the US election because of his “sustained assault on democracy”, and in a separate piece Donald Norwood noted that millions of American Christians had none-the-less voted for Trump, with many of them viewing support for Israel and their opposition to abortion as more important than upholding democracy.

Democracy is a tender plant that needs constant nourishing. Common features of democratic nations are their ‘checks and balances’ which ensure that potential destroyers such as totalitarian regimes and dictatorships are kept at bay. The checks and balances usually involve regular independently-monitored elections, distributed decision-making such as through second chambers, equal rights for all elected representatives, plus independent judges, civil servants and media.

We live in dangerous times, when even the leaders of some western nations show scant regard for such checks. We’ve seen our own government illegally attempt to shut down parliament, illegally break binding international agreements, dismiss civil servants for doing their job, threaten independent judges and lawyers, renege on its overseas aid commitment, and illegally by-pass parliamentary scrutiny when awarding lucrative contracts to friends and financial supporters.

Readers may be twitching at the thought of party politics besmirching a Christian magazine so it’s worth stressing here that none of this is party-political. Far-left and far-right governments are equally culpable.

We Christians surely have a duty to oppose such dangerous trends. Sadly I’ve seen very little of this in the media. And not a squeak when Israeli forces totally destroyed a Palestinian hamlet last November. Shouldn’t we be shouting our protests from the rooftops? Thankfully there are a few prepared to make a noise. Some Scottish church leaders, including the URC Moderator there, have spoken out against the Government’s disregard for international treaties. And, as so often, the Quakers have shown that they know right from wrong.

Jesus proclaimed peace and love and told us to love our enemies. But he also angrily overturned the tables of money-dealers in the temple.

Alan Bamber

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 Synod Representative Sue Ingham
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Meg Cardy
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Stuart Trott
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DUTY ELDERS ROTA FOR JANUARY

3 Jan Stuart Trott
 10 Jan Eryl Harris
 17 Jan Meg Cardy
 24 Jan Sue Ingham
 31 Jan Stuart Trott

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