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Taunton United Reformed Church



JANUARY 2022 Magazine



1

TAUNTON UNITED REFORMED CHURCH MAGAZINE

NO. 591

January 2022

MINISTER:

Vacant

Pastoral care

For concerns that go beyond mutual pastoral care, please see the note on page 7.

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From the Editor



With an early deadline and minds focussed on Christmas, there were fewer magazine contributions this month, so this issue is a little thinner than usual.

In the expectation that you will receive this before the Christmas season is over, I have plundered my photographic library to compile a bumper festive quiz in which you are invited to spot the location. Some of the pictures are a lot harder to identify than others, so be relaxed about this!

The theme for this issue is renewal, and you will find a number of different perspectives on this.

As always, I encourage the widest variety of writers so the magazine is by the church for the church and the wider readership. But I will always make the best of what I am given. So, on behalf of the church, I am grateful to regular contributors.

We were expecting to re-introduce Sunday rotas in this issue, but this is only partial. In part this is because of ongoing uncertainty over what will be permitted, or indeed wise, for the church to arrange. Perhaps more significantly, it has been difficult for the organisers of the rotas to find the necessary volunteers.

The theme for the February issue will be Community. Feel free to interpret this as the idea (and benefits) of community, or the church community, or the wider community. All contributions welcome.

Wishing you a (possibly belated) happy Christmas,

Peter Henderson

Cover image: A knitted representation of the magi, visitors to Jesus and his family at the time the Church now celebrates as Epiphany, on or around 6th January.

Forthcoming Church Services

Sundays at 10:30am at the United Reformed Church, Paul Street

- 2 January Morning worship led by the Revd Phillip Jones (includes The Lord's Supper)
- 9 January Morning worship led by Mr Alan Vian
- 16 January Morning worship led by the Revd Phillip Jones followed by CHURCH MEETING
- 23 January United service at Temple Methodist Church
- 30 January Cafe Style Worship led by the Revd Clare Callanan
- 6 February Morning worship led by the Revd Iain McDonald (includes The Lord's Supper)

Weekly Activities

at the time of publication these are:

Wednesdays 9:30am - 12:30 **Work-Wise** in the church hall: offering support with all aspects of job seeking

Tuesday coffee mornings and prayers have been on hold till the new year and will remain on hold while uncertainty over what is wise continues, given the tightening of Covid-related regulations.

The next Social and Arts Group event is planned to be in early March. There will be more details in the next issue.

Other Notable Dates

- Sunday 2 January Deadline for nominations to eldership - see p.8
- Monday 17 January Magazine deadline

Pastoral letter



Dear Friends

I wish everyone a Happy, Safe and Peaceful New Year.

As I look out the window and ponder on thoughts of what to write, the sun is shining on a clear winter day and I can see the trees at the end of the road swaying quite a bit in the wind. The sun is lighting up the beautiful golden colours in the leaves that still remain on some

of the trees. In one of the taller trees are two fairly big black birds, I can't identify them from where I'm sitting, but they and a number of others congregate there each day in the late afternoon. For what reason I don't know.

At times we don't know the reasoning behind what we are asked or expected to do, but for the most part we carry on and do what is requested of us. We have received a number of papers from General Assembly regarding the update of the URC's Safeguarding Policies which churches have been asked to comment on. These will be brought to our January Church Meeting.

Also at our Church Meeting I hope as a church we can elect new Elders as well as Elders willing to serve another term of office. I asked that you pray for the people being nominated.

Since COP26 has ended, very little environmental news has made the headlines, news is still dominated by COVID and especially the new variant omicron. I hear the new daily figures of cases, but what I don't hear is the total number of cases, so I looked it up and found that 8.88m people have had it or have tested positive in England.

One worrying snippet I heard was a report that sea birds in the Pacific are floating on layers of plastic. The earth is still restless, as the eruption on La Palma is still going on and it is now eleven weeks since it began.

Also there has been an eruption on Java which has caused some fatalities; evidently this volcano has been active since 2020.

Life can be like a volcano with its ups and downs, some big and some small. It can be like that in the church, such as the celebrations of Christmas and Epiphany, then all seems to go quiet until we get to Lent when things start to get moving again. Maybe this is the time for our church to take a look at what renewal we can make in its life. Do we go on as before and/or do we look for new ways, new things to engage in? I came across the following words from www.lords-prayer-words.com that ties in with what I just written.

The great thing about having a friendship with God is that there is always the opportunity to start anew – God always offers us a new day and a new dawn. Why not start the New Year asking for his forgiveness for where you have failed, and dedicate 2022 to Him – to serve and love the Lord afresh.

With love and best wishes for 2022.

Sue

Praying through the week

This month Sue Ingham offers seven suggestions for what we might pray for based on the word RENEWAL. One way to use these is to follow them in order through the days of each week; but you can, of course, use them differently.

Renewal Altering things in our lives that are causing us problems, reinvigorating our faith, our conversations our companionship with God and those around us.

Earth and the environment praying for the earth and its place in the universe . Our care for it and all its inhabitants and its protection.

New Opportunities that await us in all areas of our lives and the lives of others.

Everyday things that go on around us and in the world, the good and the not so good

Wealth not just things of monetary value that we enjoy, but the wealth of sharing with others, the gifts that we have been given, the wealth of our prayers and actions.

Actions for the good of everyone however small or large, locally, nationally, internationally.

Love, that God has given us, and that He asks us to share with others.

Revised Common Lectionary for forthcoming Sundays

2 January	9 January	16 January
Jeremiah 31:7-14 Psalm 147:12-20 Ephesians 1:3-14 John 1:10-18	Isaiah 43:1-7 Psalm 29 Acts 8:14-17 Luke 3:15-17, 21-22	Isaiah 62:1-5 Psalm 36:5-10 1 Corinthians 12:1-11 John 2:1-11
23 January	30 January	6 February
Nehemiah 8:1-10 Psalm 19 1 Corinthians 12:12-31a Luke 4:14-21	Jeremiah 1:4-10 Psalm 71:1-6 1 Corinthians 13:1-13 Luke 4:21-30	Isaiah 6:1-13 Psalm 138 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 Luke 5:1-11

PASTORAL TEAM

Our aim is to foster care and concern for each other in the congregation.

However, If you have a emergency and need help or concern, do not hesitate to contact a member of the Pastoral Team.

Mrs Isobel Tosh Robb, Mrs Meg Cardy, Dr Eryl Harris,
Mrs Sheena Helliart, Miss Sue Ingham, and Revd. Janet Sowerbutts.

Church Family News

Election of Elders

Nominations are invited for the election of Elders. Please give thought and prayer to whom you might nominate for this important role. The current serving eldership is small in number, so further Elders would welcome.

Nomination forms can be obtained from the Church Secretary, Sue Ingham. The deadline for nominations is Sunday 2nd January.

The election of Elders will take place at the Church Meeting on Sunday 16th January.

Viv shares a little of her ministry

If you are reading this in December, Viv Henderson invites you to watch the Langley House Trust Carol Service online. See Page 18.

Birthday Corner

We offer greetings to those in our wider fellowship who have a birthday in January. May God bless you all ...

7 Heather Parsons

17 John Cohen

18 Sue Ingham



Seasons greetings

Stuart Trott photographed these roses in full bloom in the church car park. Such has been the mild autumn that a hebe, a summer-flowering shrub, is also still impressive near to the editor's house (below right).



In December the church was decked out with more familiar signs of the season.

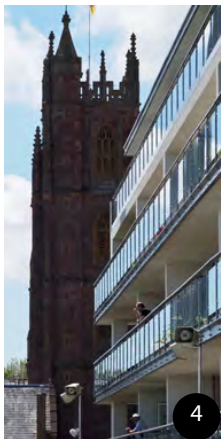


Bumper festive quiz

On the next three pages are twenty photographs of locations in Somerset and neighbouring counties. All you have to do is to **identify the location**. Each photograph has a number, and the distance of the locations from the Paul Street increases with higher numbers; but they are not in numerical order on the pages (that might make it too easy!). Beware: some photographs are a few years' old. Answers are on page 17. Have fun.



8



4



17



11



1



12



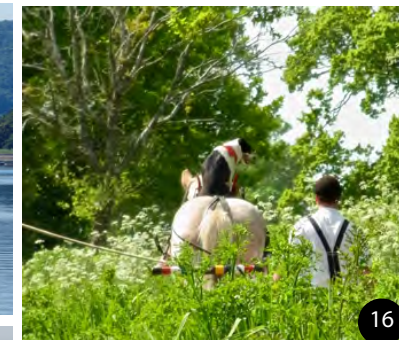
2



18



19



16



13



6



5



With image 10 we want to know where is the viewpoint



Who was Theophilus?

Those who were in church or on zoom on Sunday 21st November will remember Jo Morling telling us about the Three Year Revised Common Lectionary Years A,B,C, and how from Sunday 28th November (Advent Sunday) we begin a new year in the life of the Church. This year, Year C, the Gospel reading will be mainly from Luke’s Gospel and, as I began to read through this gospel of renewal and salvation I was struck by to whom it is addressed.

So who was Theophilus? The frustrating feature of this is that beyond his name we know nothing at all! Some think that he might have been a wealthy patron who, as often happened in Rome, had commissioned Luke to write a gospel of renewal and hope for him. Perhaps he had heard the story of Jesus and wanted to know more? If this is true, then Luke’s telling of the story as an **“old, old story”** that found its roots deep in the Old Testament would have been significant, since in Roman culture the more ancient something was, the more reliable it was perceived to be. The best aristocratic families in Rome all traced their roots back to the founding of the city as a sign of their standing and trustworthiness.

There is, however, another option which may or may not be true, but I must admit it is an option to which I warm and I warm to it because Luke’s Gospel would have possibly been written during a time of persecution of Christians, a time when it would have been dangerous for a named person. Some people suggest that Theophilus in Greek means simply **“lover of God”** and therefore Luke might have been writing to anyone for whom the title **“lover of God”** was accurate. If this is true, the title is an invitation to anyone who loved God to read his story and decide for themselves about the truth that he was telling.

The person to who Luke addresses his Gospel known as Theophilus remains elusive but, in my opinion that is not important, what is important is the message, good news, this Gospel brought and still brings today, for it is the good news of Jesus, Son God, who brings RENEWAL and salvation.

Phillip Jones

QUOTE	<p>Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God--what is good and acceptable and perfect.</p> <p>Apostle Paul in Romans 12:2</p>
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Renewal

"Each night, when I go to sleep, I die. And the next morning, when I wake up, I am reborn." *Mahatma Gandhi*

Let's think through language first. As always! What other words connect with the idea of renewal? I invite you to explore these synonyms: rebirth, regeneration, rejuvenation, restoration, revitalisation, revival, awakening, recommencement, refilling, reformation, replenishment, resurrection, recharging, reopening.

What is needed for renewal? I invite you to savour these ideas: sometimes renewal requires remembering and reconnecting with pieces and parts of ourselves long forgotten, mending what has been broken, retrieving what has been lost, moving forward without losing touch with all we hold dear.

How can we bring about renewal? I invite you to ponder these thoughts: renewal often comes through return. We get halfway down the road not realising we have left precious pieces behind. What's missing when you look around? What have you let fall from your life? And how can you help it return... fun, forgiveness, quiet, time for yourself, a weekly visit to the cinema, theatre, art gallery, library, Saturday walk in the woods, study, photography? Try naming something precious that you want to return to your life... how can you make that happen this month?

"In order to understand the world, one has to turn away from it on occasion." *Albert Camus*

Every religious tradition reminds us that renewal sometimes requires removing ourselves from the normal ways of the world. Often we have to remove something from our life to make room for renewal to return. Consider these thoughts: remove speed and 'busy-ness' from your life by trying out the practice of Sabbath, remove distraction and disconnection by deciding to have a break from your smartphone, internet or TV, free yourself from the stereotypes about "senior citizens" and dye your hair purple or parachute out of a plane (PS. I take no responsibility for any accidents of either activity!). This culture of ours offers many gifts, but it can also lead us astray and leave us lost. Is your way back home going to be to find a way to turn away... how can you make that happen this month?

"The care of the Earth is our most ancient and most worthy, ... our most pleasing responsibility. To cherish what remains of it and to foster its renewal is our only hope." *Wendell Berry*

Renewing the world is often the best path to renewing oneself. Whether it is working for justice or finding a way to bring a bit more beauty to our little corner of the town, helping the world regularly helps us. What could you contribute... how can you make that happen this month?

"There is nothing like returning to a place that remains unchanged to find the ways in which you yourself have altered." *Nelson Mandela*

Sometimes today it is difficult to physically find a place unchanged. But maybe it can be visited in your memory? Hold these thoughts: return to a place or time in your past by physically going there or pulling out the photo album. Often it helps to bring someone along on the journey. Sometimes they can see things we can't. Return to a place or time that once brought you renewal; that path along the river or view out over the town, which helped you feel that life had possibility again after the loss of your job. Find the picture of the dog you had as a child who comforted you when things were tough. Call up that old friend from college or work, the one who was there through so much change and growing up.

Going back does not always mean going backwards. It often can mean gaining back something we need now. Where will your journey take you... how can you wander that path this month?

Clare Callanan

MAGAZINE DEADLINE

Contributions for the February 2022 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 17th JANUARY 2022 (or earlier) please.

The theme will be Community.

The evolution of New Year's resolutions

New Year's resolutions seem to have started with the ancient Babylonians about 20 centuries before Christ. As part of the 12-day religious festival of Akitu, at the start of the sowing season, they would reaffirm their loyalty to the reigning king, or sometimes crown a new one. They would also make pledges to the gods believing that, if they kept these, the gods would look favourably upon them in the coming year; but, if they did not, they would not find favour.

About 46BCE Julius Caesar introduced a new calendar across the Roman Empire, declaring that the new year would begin on 1st January, the month named after Janus, the Roman god of beginnings and transitions. As Phillip Jones told the congregation a few months ago, Janus faced two ways, symbolically looking back into the previous year and forwards into the new year. The Romans would offer sacrifices to Janus and make promises of good behaviour for the year ahead.

In the 17th century the diary of the Scottish religious writer Anne Halkett contains an entry for 2nd January titled "Resolutions" which contains pledges drawn from biblical verses such as "I will not offend any more" (part of Job 34:31). This suggests a practice of making New Year's resolutions at that time, even if they were not given that name.

In 1755 John Wesley created an earliest form of Covenant Renewal Service, using the words of Joseph and Richard Alleine from decades before. (The Puritan Joseph Alleine was one of the founding ministers of what is now our church.) This was a time for the Methodists to gather annually for self-examination, reflection, and dedication, renewing their covenant with God. Although Wesley stated that this could happen on any date, it is now routinely held on the first Sunday of the new year.

It is unclear how much the earliest rituals were based on fear of the gods; it is thought the Babylonian practice was rooted in anxiety about the unknown. The verse in Job quoted above is part of a speech by Elihu, one of Job's so-called comforters, who is implicitly asking, "When have you admitted that your sufferings are the result of your offences?" Often people ask, "What have I done to deserve this?" The message of the ancient book of Job as a whole is that life is not that simple: avoiding misery is not dependent on satisfying the gods or the one true God.

It is not that the two are entirely unconnected either. The message of the gospels is that appropriate repentance - a change of heart or mind - is required for a person to enjoy the fullness of life that Jesus intends for

everyone; otherwise God's hands are tied. But there is just as much emphasis on forgiveness, suggesting that it is never too late to enjoy unmerited peace.

What I understand from this is that God has so designed the cosmos that actions have consequences. But, again, life is complex: only part of our experience is a result of our actions. The gospel-writers show Jesus describing both aspects.

So, what is the point of New Year's resolutions? For those with little religious faith these are often good intentions for personal self-improvement. For Christians engaging in covenant renewal, either by participating in a Methodist Covenant service or in renewing their baptismal vows, they are doing something similar. But the desire to improve themselves is rooted in an allegiance to God, whom they believe is generous in giving quality of life.

What is important, and possibly different from the motivation of the ancients or the superstitious, is that our resolutions are borne out of freedom and love for a gracious God rather than fear of judgemental gods. And, as Wesley noted, we can make these resolutions at any time of the year.

Peter Henderson

Bumper festive quiz answers

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. East Street, Taunton | 11. Barrington Court |
| 2. Fore Street, Taunton | 12. Dunkswell Aerodrome war memorial |
| 3. Snappy Snaps, North Street, Taunton | 13. Steart Marshes |
| 4. St James' Church tower, Taunton | 14. Sellicks' wildflower field, Monksilver |
| 5. County Ground, Taunton | 15. Hinkley Point (from Cothelstone Hill) |
| 6. French Barn, Longrun Meadow, Taunton | 16. Tiverton canal barge horse |
| 7. Vivary Park concert (Jools Holland) | 17. Lyme Regis, The Cobb |
| 8. Bishop's Hull playing field, St Peter & St Paul in the distance | 18. Beer village beach |
| 9. Hestercombe Garden | 19. Chew Valley Lake |
| 10. From Staple Hill (on Blackdowns), a view of Taunton Vale | 20. Roman bath, Bath |

News from Taunton churches

St Mary Magdalene church - Afternoon Tea Concerts

- Saturday 22nd January 2022 3pm
John Young (Director of Music, St John's Church, Wellington) organ
- Saturday 12th February 2022 3pm
Matthew Redman (Director of Music, St John's Church, Glastonbury) organ
- Saturday 12th March 2022 3pm The Skylark Wind Quartet
- PALM SUNDAY 10th April 2022 3pm
Charlotte Stus clarinet, Andrew Carter piano
- Saturday 14th May 2022 3pm Jonathan Delbridge piano & organ
- Saturday 18th June 2022 3pm Stephen Bell organ
- Saturday 16th July 2022 3pm
François Cloete (Organ Scholar, Hereford Cathedral) organ
- Saturday 11th September 2022 3pm
Miles Quick (Director of Music, St Mary Magdalene Church, Taunton) organ

You are invited to Langley's second virtual Christmas Carol service

Residents at House of St Martin are among those who have contributed to this years Langley House Trust Carol Service. The service will look at the significance of home.

Their chaplain, Viv Henderson, was hoping to join them on December 16th as they watch the premiere of the service on YouTube. The service will then be available via YouTube until the end of December 2021 from the home page of the Trust website - langleyhousetrust.org/carolservice2021.



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

Moving Stories are not issued monthly. They will appear next month. *Editor*

ROTAS FOR JANUARY

Sunday Morning Coffee Rota

2 Jan	Pamela Elliott & Rita Williams
9 Jan	Pamela Bamber & Isobel Tosh-Robb
16 Jan	Chris Trott & Sheila Rudofsky
23 Jan	Heather Parsons & Maralyn Bickham
30 Jan	Pamela & Alan Bamber

OFFICE HOLDERS AND REPRESENTATIVES OF TAUNTON UNITED REFORMED CHURCH

Car-Park..... Eryl Harris
 Christian Aid..... Maralyn Bickham
 Church Heating Church Administrator (see page 1)
 Church Secretary..... Sue Ingham (07818 637155)
 Commitment for Life Contact..... Sue Ingham
 FINANCE - Treasurer..... Eryl Harris
 FINANCE - Covenant Collections..... Paula Powell
 Flowers Pam Elliott, Sheila Woolvin
 Letting Secretary Church Administrator (see page 1)
 Magazine Distributor..... Dawn Wright (01823 331800)
 Magazine Editor..... Peter Henderson (01823 254668)
 Prayer Handbook.....
 Property Stuart Trott
 Pulpit Supply Church Administrator (see page 1)
 Reform Magazine Pamela Bamber
 Social and Arts Group Janet Sowerbutts, Sheila Rudofsky (01823 617411)
 Sound Paul Cottrill
 Sunday Coffee Organiser Pamela Bamber
 Sunday News-Sheet the Church Secretary
 Synod Representative Sue Ingham
 World Day of Prayer Maralyn Bickham

SERVING ELDERS

Sue Ingham <i>Secretary</i> 07818 637155	Meg Cardy 01823 443245	Stuart Trott 01823 281551
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Sunday duties

	Duty Elder	Communion Elders	Zoom host
2 Jan	Eryl	Stuart Meg	Ron
9 Jan	Meg		Eryl
16 Jan	Stuart	<i>Church Meeting</i>	Peter
23 Jan	<i>United service at Temple Methodist Church</i>		
30 Jan	Sue	<i>Cafe Style Worship</i>	Frank
6 Feb	Meg	Sue Eryl	Ron

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