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TAUNTON UNITED REFORMED CHURCH MAGAZINE

NO. 603

Feb 2023

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Vacant

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Taunton United Reformed Church



FEB 2023
Magazine



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From the Editor



Here we are in 2023 and it is February already. I am not getting any younger and, in hindsight, I notice two mistakes in the last issue of this magazine: a spelling mistake in the editorial and confusion over the lectionary readings. Perhaps you did not notice, but I did. (If I am going to give up something for Lent, being so hard on myself is a good option; maybe that is true for you, too.) What this shows - thank God - is that the editor does not need to be perfect for the product to be worthwhile. So that might encourage you to think about the forthcoming vacancy.

The theme for this issue is Love and I mentioned that I was hoping you can brighten our lives and heal our cynicism by telling us about the true nature of love, that the Bible mentions it a bit. What an interesting response we've had!

In her pastoral letter Sue Ingham reviews a film and give some background about St Valentine. A regular reader in Wellington offers a meditation on the word 'love'. And Clare Callanan reflects on the book *Love Means Love*.

It might seem a long time since Christmas but, because of printing deadlines, this is the first opportunity to include photographs from the carol service; so these are on page 9.

For the benefit of those who chose not to venture too far in January, there are photos showing how wise that may have been. (Returning from Norfolk, I was pleased to get to Taunton having seen floodwater close the the railway embankment.)

Finally, there are some images relating to the theme.

As I receive the *Stories for Change* from the Commitment for Life office only every other month, I have given details of the latest Christian Aid appeal. The drought in east Africa is the latest of many emergencies so, if you have a bad case of compassion fatigue, you may wish to turn the page; but at least look at the prayer before doing so.

With one eye on the church's Vision Statement and another on the BBC Radio 4 resources for Lent, I suggest that the theme for the March issue should be a Passion for Hospitality. Interpret that as you will, or not.

Peter Henderson

Cover image by John Hain, from Pixabay

Forthcoming Church Services

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

- 5 Feb Morning worship led by the Revd Phillip Jones (includes The Lord's Supper)
- 12 Feb Morning worship led by the Revd Phillip Jones
- 19 Feb Morning worship led by the Revd Michael Diffey
- 26 Feb Morning worship led by the Revd Clare Callanan
- 5 March Morning worship led by the Revd Ruth Dillon (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

Other Notable Dates

- Monday 13 February Magazine deadline
- Friday 17 February *Random Acts of Kindness Day*
- Tuesday 21 February *Shrove Tuesday*
Fair Trade Fortnight begins
- Wednesday 22 February *Ash Wednesday - Lent begins*
- Looking ahead
 - Wednesday 1 March *St David's Day*
 - Friday 17 March *St Patrick's Day*
 - Sunday 19 March *Mothering Sunday (a mid point in Lent)*
 - Sunday 26 March *British Summer Time begins*
 - Sunday 9 April *Easter Day*

Pastoral letter



Dear Friends

Over the New Year a number of my family of all ages sat and watched the film *The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse*. A film based on the book of the same name written by Charlie Mackesy. During the film you could have heard a pin drop in the room, the silence of the watchers was profound. When it had finished the silence continued, nobody could find words to express themselves. Powerful was the only word that was eventually said. The film touched us all. Recently I bought the book, and found that the story in it had been little altered for the film. And as Charlie Mackesy said in his postscript 'love is all around us in its many forms and is for everyone, people and the natural world. If you get the chance do watch the film and/or read the book.

Love is all around us, it is expressed in many ways, some we recognise and some we don't, offered and given by friends and strangers.

Valentine's Day is celebrated on the 14th February. Valentine was a common name during Late Antiquity, and as far as it is known St Valentine of Valentine's Day was one of two men preaching the good news in Rome in the 3rd century. One of them was martyred on February 14th, 269. It was declared a Christian feast day by Pope Gelasius I in the late 5th century, in order to replace the ancient Roman festival of Lupercalia, a celebration of fertility dedicated to the Roman god of agricultural, Faunas. Though popular culture makes one believe that Valentine's Day is for love struck couples, it is a day of love, and that love can be for anyone. Thus all kinds of love should be celebrated.



Martyrdom of St Valentine.
Print of etching by Jacques
Callot in the National
Gallery of Art in
Washington

Love is for everyone, and with this there is the relationships of same sex couples who wish to get married in a church. Following our church meeting, the congregation agreed to hold in-depth discussions about same sex marriages being held in our church. This is part of the church's Vision Statement, we profess that we are a church who welcomes, whoever you are.

We have opened our doors to people as part of the Warm Space scheme, though at present with few people coming in, but we will carry on until it gets warmer, and Spring arrives.

But before we get there, Lent starts at the end of this month and the churches move towards Easter.

As we move through these last weeks of winter and look ahead to the warmth and colours of spring, may we be aware of the love of God portrayed in the dark, the cold and the dismal days we may yet encounter.

May the love of God be with you.

Sue

The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse

The book was published by Ebury Publishing in 2019.

The film is available on BBC iPlayer for at least this year.



Praying through the week

Sunday	I desire to love you, my God, with all my heart, all my mind, all my soul, and all my strength. Help me fulfil my desire by showing me which aspect to work on next.
Monday	I wish to love my neighbour as I love myself. Please show me when someone is my neighbour, as you showed the good Samaritan, and how I may love them.
Tuesday	Jesus teaches us to love our enemies. Help me to see how much you love those who are different from me and to be aware of your goodness even in those who have wronged me.
Wednesday	You require me to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with you. Increase my sense of empathy, rekindle in me a passion for mercy, and show me where to make a stand for justice.
Thursday	I love the beauty of nature and I am grateful for the restorative effects of dwelling with it. Guide me in ways to nurture your creation and to protect it from the excesses of human consumption and greed.
Friday	Give me a deeper love for members of my family, so that I may support those who need me, respect the freedom of those who think differently, and tolerant of those who annoy me.
Saturday	Give me a thorough appreciation of what it means to be a child of God, a deep awareness of your love for me, and a greater ability to love myself for who I am.

Revised Common Lectionary for forthcoming Sundays

5 Feb	12 Feb	19 Feb
Isaiah 58:1-12 Psalm 112:1-9 1 Corinthians 2:1-12 Matthew 5:13-20	Deuteronomy 30:15-20 Psalm 119:1-8 1 Corinthians 3:1-9 Matthew 5:21-37	Leviticus 19:1-2, 9-18 Psalm 119:33-40 1 Corinthians 3:10-11, 16-23 Matthew 5:38-48
26 Feb First Sunday in Lent	5 March	12 March
Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7 Psalm 32 Romans 5:12-19 Matthew 4:1-11	Genesis 12:1-4a Psalm 121 Romans 4:1-5, 13-17 John 3:1-17 or Matthew 17:1-9	Exodus 17:1-7 Psalm 95 Romans 5:1-11 John 4:5-42

PASTORAL TEAM

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

However, if you have an 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 Helliard, Miss Sue Ingham, and Revd. Janet Sowerbutts.

Church Family News

Social and Arts

As some of you will have heard at the recent church meeting, Janet and I have decided to take a break from arranging social and arts events. We know many of you have taken part and enjoyed a variety of activities especially the snack lunches. It has been great fun to arrange a varied programme and we would like to encourage someone else to follow on. Of course styles change and ideas would be different. We found, as we have become less able in our mobility, that activities work best with a team of helpers. We are more than happy to share ideas with anyone who might like to explore arranging social and arts events.

Sheila and Janet

Our church magazine

Sheila Rudofsky has written a note about the church magazine which you can find on page 18.

Birthday Corner

Birthday greetings this month go to our magazine distributor, Dawn Wright who celebrates hers on 3rd February. May God bless you, Dawn.



QUOTE

We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us – and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help? Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.

1 John 3:16-18

Looking back to Christmas

On Saturday 17th December members of the church sang carols to passers by from the covered forecourt. We were joined in this by our Companion Minister Tim, our previous Minister Susan, our Moderator Ruth and a mystery guest.



At the carol service the following day, led by Clare Callanan, members of the congregation were invited to lay strips of cloth on the manger to represent prayers. “The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.”



The service began with Anastasya from Ukraine playing the piano; her grandmother Valentyna provided a cake for eating afterwards. The family is so grateful for the housing that the church is providing.



More weather

It is winter. It seems to have rained rather more than for a few years. Here are some scenes that Peter and Viv noticed.



Curry Moor on the Somerset Levels, seen from just below Burrow Mump at Burrowbridge

Curry Moor flooding seen through the gate that Western Power drove their 8x8 amphibious vehicle to fix a power line a mile away



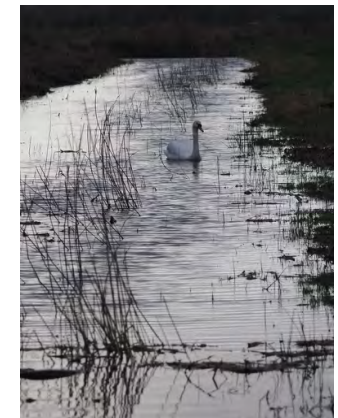
Flooding on the Somerset Levels viewed from a train

Rain falling on the Blackdown Hills



Water high on the River Tone in Taunton by the new riverside development, near the Brewhouse theatre

Swan on a rhyne at Greylake



Q U O T E	<p>Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Matthew 5:44-45</i></p>
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Images of love



St Valentine baptises St Lucilla by Jacopo dal Ponte called Bassano (ca. 1510-1592)



Return of the prodigal son by Guercino (1591-1666), Diocesan Museum in Włocławek

'Christian_Charity' by Guercino (1591-1666), Dayton Art Institute



(by reader's request) Alexander, the editor's grandson



Love: what an amazing word

One of our readers in Wellington offers a meditation on the word.

Feelings:-

fondness, tenderness, warmth, deep affection, intimacy, worship, passion, attachment, desire, yearning, infatuation, besottedness.

For the love of:-

appreciation, taste, liking, delight, relish, passion, enthusiasm, zeal, keenness, inclination, "soft spot".

Love for fellow human beings:-

care, compassion, concern, friendliness, friendship, kindness, charity, goodwill, sympathy and understanding, unselfishness, benevolence and humanity.

One true love:-

beloved, dearest, darling, loved one, love of one's life, sweetheart.

Sending love:-

best wishes, greetings, kindest regards, prayers.

Pray with love

If love is the greatest force in the world, and prayer is the mightiest force in the world, then when we pray in love we are working with a power that can move the world.

Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective. *James 5:16*

Love - such a beautiful word

God's love for us all - our love for each other
We are *all* his children, bound by love.

Carole Dabbs

Love Means Love

My thoughts this month are based on book I recently read called 'Love Means Love' by David Runcorn (SPCK 2020) The title is sufficient in itself really but the subtitle is Same-sex relationships and the Bible. The author's articulate and flowing style, his warmth, empathy and insightfulness is a delight. In this short article I hope to bring to the fore some of his thoughts and ideas as an offering of a viewpoint that may affirm your views or challenge your views. You may find yourself agreeing, you may find yourself uncomfortable, you may find you are not so sure. Whatever you notice... it is OK.

In an early chapter, Runcorn refers to a theologian called Howard Marshall who 'argues that living obedient faith always requires the willingness to go beyond the Bible text.' (p.21) There are risks in this but the emphasis is on the fact that the Spirit communicates through God's word to the church. The church must then interpret and discern. I think we can all be at ease with that? Yet there are a group of people and their stories who are absent from the texts. They happen to be gay.

Runcorn acknowledges the high levels of emotion and anxiety that are present in the church whenever it is trying to discuss sexuality. Such anxiety and division have coloured the response to the subject of homosexuality. He suggests that a deeper self-understanding is a way to begin the task; especially finding ways of being present with one another in a non-judgemental way. (p.32)

I found the examination of the Genesis and creation of man and woman scriptures helpful. Questions about 'one flesh' showed that nowhere in the Bible does 'one flesh' mean sexual love. It actually means a kinship group with the point being about marriage reshaping and renewing primary kinship groups. The aloneness of Adam includes a longing for relationship but again, in a wider context of mutuality and partnership.

God finally creates a partner for Adam '*from within and out of the man.*' (p.89, author's italics) A companion with whom to share your life. Runcorn maintains 'It is the couple who make a marriage, not the Church. The couple minister the sacrament to one another. The Church witnesses and blesses what has *already been chosen.*' (p89, author's italics) The argument that a same sex partnership cannot be a marriage because there can be no children is seen by Runcorn as illogical since that means that heterosexual unions that have no children are not marriages either. Procreation is not found as a marriage requirement anywhere in the Bible.

But how much are we helped by looking back when we are in such new and uncharted territory? Perhaps we should be looking at what such a relationship or marriage points towards. The union may not conceive children but the couple love, honour and care for each other. Runcorn maintains that there is no requirement to change the doctrine of marriage, but to explore 'the extending of this marriage to couples of the same sex.' (p.91) Such an extension involves the 'sacramental richness of what marriage expresses.' Thus, it becomes an expression of the 'vocation to love and belong.' (p.91)

The response found in some communities is that of not talking about it. Yet such exclusion, in whatever sphere of race, disability, gender or sexuality, always brings pain, humiliation and hurt. What happens is an outward language of welcome that in actuality condemns rather than affirms. It is felt. It is known. Some have even taken their own lives. Faithful following of Christ bears good fruit marked by the qualities of 'love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self control.' (Galatians 5:22-23) Such fruit cannot be produced by a bad tree.

The fact that some couples wish to make a public consecration of their love and commitment to one another before God and the world. Is this not something to celebrate, Runcorn asks? Yet this is exactly where the Church and church communities are unable to move. Is that not withholding the blessing of God? Runcorn concludes with the simple three words, Love means love.

Clare Callanan

Editor's note:

As this magazine was being prepared, as part of its *Living in Love and Faith* project, the bishops of the Church of England issued a report on this subject containing a pastoral letter introducing draft prayers for use with same-sex couples in a variety of circumstances, including after they have registered a civil partnership, or entered a civil marriage. They write that they have "not found sufficient consensus to propose a change in doctrine" from that enshrined in its canons and liturgies which is that marriage is "the lifelong union of one man and one woman".

The United Reformed Church is under no obligation to take any notice of Church of England policy. But readers might find parts of the report interesting reading as they prepare to discuss the matter. It can read at <https://tinyurl.com/3yrkedfc>



East Africa Hunger Crisis Appeal

After the worst drought in 40 years, millions of people across East Africa are facing the threat of famine. The war in Ukraine is causing global food prices to rocket. East Africa is facing a crisis on crisis.

Millions of innocent children, women and men in East Africa are taking desperate measures to survive in the face of extreme hunger, caused by failed harvests, livestock deaths and water shortages.

How it got this way:

The severe conditions are being made worse by the climate crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic. Now, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has amplified an increase in global food prices that has turned a tough situation into a dire crisis.

Our response

The response to humanitarian needs in Ukraine has been remarkable. We must now urgently act in that same spirit for East Africa.

Working through local partners, Christian Aid is responding to the severe drought in Ethiopia and Kenya and helping over 300,000 people by:



- repairing wells
- handing out water purification kits
- providing cash support
- trucking water to drought-affected communities
- providing fodder and medicine to keep valuable livestock alive

It's not too late to save lives and prevent a devastating famine. Donations can be made at www.christianaid.org.uk/appeals/emergencies

These can give lasting hope and can help stop this widespread malnutrition and hunger, and help people build a life free from poverty and injustice.

Prayer for East Africa

Loving and compassionate God,
When famine stalks the land, nothing grows:
Plants cannot, people cannot, ideas and dreams cannot;
everything withers and dies.

It is a violent aberration of your will for the world
and it is multiplied now
by conflict, climate change and Covid.

God of the flourishing field, there is enough to feed us all.
Call us to that sacred sharing,
neighbour to global neighbour,
your gifts of food, water,
a chance to live the life so delicately crafted
by your divine spirit.

We will not turn away but turn towards each other
with generosity and a justice-driven compassion
that searches for solutions.

Famine stalks the land, so may our outrage grow,
may our determination steel itself,
may our solidarity spur us into action.
God of the flourishing field,
help us feed each other.

Amen

We must be clear; we are facing a humanitarian crisis. Poverty and hunger are set to rise exponentially in some of the poorest parts of the world... We need a long-term approach to stabilising global food security and to stop funding fossil fuels and the reliance on Russia, both of which impacts the countries where we work. That means investment in sustainable renewable energy, such as wind and solar power.

- Michael Mosselmans, Head of Humanitarian Division at Christian Aid.

Our church magazine

Apologies to the author of Ecclesiastes - there is a time to be sad and a time to be happy.

With mixed emotions I read we will need to find a new editor for our magazine. The next few months will bring challenging moments of great happiness to Viv and Peter as they seek to move nearer their family. As grandparents they will be part of their grandson's life, growing up.

Viv and Peter have lived in Taunton for many years and participated in activities beyond the church. In addition to sharing their joy of watching cricket we have known them best in the congregation. Viv encouraged us to support fairly traded goods and until Covid changed our lives she always offered a well stocked table of food and household fairly traded goods.

To Peter a huge thank you for editing a first class magazine each month. We have seen many different church magazines countrywide over the years but the skills Peter has shared through articles of faith and information many of topical global interest, are second to none. Thank you for the encouragement you have given us to participate each month. We have been delighted with middle pages of coloured photographs, some thematically taken by Peter himself others contributed by members and friends.

We wish you both much enjoyment in the next step of active retirement.

Sheila Rudofsky

MAGAZINE DEADLINE

Contributions for the March 2023 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 13th FEB 2023 (or earlier) please.

ROTAS FOR FEB

CHURCH FLOWERS

5 Feb Pamela Bamber
 12 Feb -
 19 Feb -
 26 Feb Isobel Tosh-Robb

MORNING COFFEE ROTA

5 Feb Rita Williams & Pamela Elliott
 12 Feb Heather Parsons & Isobel Tosh-Robb
 19 Feb Pamela & Alan Bamber
 26 Feb Pamela Bamber & Carol Rowswell

Sunday duties

	Duty Elder	Communion Elders	Zoom host
5 Feb	Frank	Sue Eryl	Eryl
12 Feb	Meg		Peter
19 Feb	Sheena		Eryl
26 Feb	Eryl		Frank
5 Mar	Frank	Sheena Stuart	Peter

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 Property Stuart Trott
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 Social and Arts Group Janet Sowerbutts, Sheila Rudofsky (01823 617411)
 Sound Frank Callanan
 Sunday Coffee Organiser Pamela Bamber
 Sunday News-Sheet the Church Secretary
 Synod Representative Sue Ingham
 World Day of Prayer

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Sheena Helliard 01823 333382	Stuart Trott 01823 281551	

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