

Silent Visitor

United Reformed Church
Grays



Harvest 2017

October 2017

Oneness

It looks a funny word when written down, "oneness." The Oxford dictionary defines it as 'the state of being one – unity of opinion'. One might say that's almost the opposite of what we see in today's politics. Party is always against party and even within the same party there seems to be a high level of disagreement. This makes political parties weak and government is the poorer. Most organisations have to contend with internal disagreements and it often falls to a designated leader to bring some semblance of unity.

That makes it all the more surprising that during our harvest and anniversary celebrations last month, everyone involved in organising the event appeared to be at one. There was hardly a voice raised against anyone else and even if there was a slight degree of abrasion this seemed to be for the benefit of the cause. Sometimes a slight abrasion can be designed to make things smoother! So why was this? Why were we so different from other types of organisation?

St. Paul could give us the answer to that. He says, in his letter to the Ephesians (Ch.4 vv 4 – 6) that we are encouraged to walk in unity and he reminds us that there is *one* body, *one* Spirit, *one* faith and *one* baptism. There is only *one* God and Father of us all. Whatever our disagreements we are all saved by the blood of Jesus. But, it might be argued, there was no one in charge of our celebrations, so how is it that they ran so smoothly? Well, that is not exactly true.

It seems that everyone involved recognised the leadership of Jesus. They recognised that Christians should be one, as God is one. That reveals itself when they all walk in the same Spirit.

It's interesting that Paul uses the word 'walk' in this letter, as distinct from run or jump. Walking implies taking things slowly, one step at a time. He wants us to *walk* in humility, the secret of unity. Pride is one of the things that breaks unity. So he encourages us to *walk* in unity and that means being active, not assuming that all will go well just because we attend the same church. We have to work at it.

He wants us to walk in maturity, growing up in Jesus, not squabbling like children. If we believe the same thing then we walk together in the Spirit. Yet all the time we need to recognise that we **are** children of God.

We need to walk in charity with one another; forgiving each other and being tolerant of each other. And we need to walk in purity with one another. If our motives are pure that's when we will please God.

So, having enjoyed a most successful Harvest and Anniversary celebration, when a substantial number of local people visited our church, let us thank all those who contributed to that success, knowing that they must have walked together under the leadership of the Spirit, to bring about a happy and enjoyable weekend.

George Semain

September 17 2017 Constance Coltman celebratory weekend

'Don't lose your identity; follow God's call'

The United Reformed Church has been marking the centenary of Constance Coltman's ordination and its legacy.

Having mentioned this anniversary a number of times at church meetings since January (when the URC poster about so many anniversaries and events went up on the wall) I decided to accept the invitation to attend the thanksgiving service in London, partly, I must admit, because it was held in the American International Church in Tottenham Court Road, which was the Congregational church I attended when I was a student.

So what was it all about? Constance Coltman was the first woman to be ordained, not just in the Congregational Church, but in any mainstream church in the UK. (Just a reminder: the United Reformed Church was formed in 1972 by a union of the Presbyterian Church of England and the majority of churches in the Congregational Church in England and Wales. It was joined later by the Re-formed Association of the Churches of Christ in 1981, and the Congregational Union of Scotland in 2000.) We are heirs to the tradition in which Constance was ordained and served.

It was only because in Congregationalism it is the role of the members, within the church meeting, to invite someone to become their minister that her ordination was possible. She applied to study theology at Mansfield College, Oxford, in 1913, when there was no provision for a woman to study there, let alone an expectation that she could be ordained and enter ministry. There had already been considerable opposition when the Congregational Union had discussed a motion supporting women ministers, so her admission to the college was truly groundbreaking.

The day after her ordination, Constance Todd married Claud Coltman, and together they served a needy community in the East End of London. They served a number of churches together, over a long ministry. Things did not always go smoothly, but she stuck to her principles, having a radical, pacifist and feminist edge, and

caring passionately for the poorest and most disadvantaged of her church members

In the days before the thanksgiving service, leaders in women's ministry from around the world attended the *Women of the Way: Global Pioneers'* conference, discussing and publicising issues affecting women in the Church today, including gender justice and empowerment in the Philippines, from an eco-feminist and economic perspective, and Patricia Sheerattan-Bisnauth's experience as the first woman ordained in Guyana. Dr Kirsty Thorp, a URC minister and historian, concluded 'At the moment, it feels that ministry is a very difficult place to be for women and men but doubly difficult for women.'

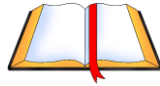
Sunday's service, organised by the URC and the Congregational Federation, and supported by the Council for World Mission, was attended by an international congregation.

The Revd Dr Susan Durber, the first woman to be Principal of Westminster College, recalled her personal experience of being a minister in male dominated environments. She felt that many of her anecdotes would have been duplicated in other women's ministries, but told some lively tales, particularly the memory of making a house call for a funeral, when a man opened the door, only to exclaim, 'Cor blimey, the vicar's pregnant'. Dr Durber empathised with Constance Coltman's desire to be seen less as a campaigner for women's rights and more as a Christian following God's call. But she said: 'I have nonetheless come to see that being the first could be a vital support for someone else still immersed in a struggle for recognition and sometimes the pioneer had to be brave, bold and proud. . . The principles undergirding women's ordination are only fulfilled when women inside and beyond the Church are freed to live lives of full opportunity.'

Elaine



See also Youtube 'Celebrating 100 Years of Women's Ordination Constance Coltman'



INTERNATIONAL BIBLE READING ASSOCIATION 2018

I should like to remind readers that the order for I.B.R.A. 2016 Bible Readings will be sent off on the 1st November.

Books for present members will be ordered as for 2017 unless I hear to the contrary. New members are always welcome.

Again they are producing just one set of daily bible readings and notes for adults, called **Fresh from the Word: the Bible for a Change.**

It offers a fresh approach to Bible reading and is written to support all readers of the Bible, from new Christians to those seeking to deepen their faith and relationship with God. Bringing together over 50 international writers to give you new insights every day, Fresh From the Word contains Bible verses, notes, prayers and action points. This year the writers include: Holy Island retreat leader **Rachel Poolman** on songs of praise, Jesuit writer **Paul Nicholson** on messengers of God, New Zealand poet and Benedictine solitary **Eric Fairbrother** on work and South African educator **Paul Faller** on the Gospel of Mark.

With a Foreword by Lucy Winkett, Fresh From the Word gives global perspectives on carefully selected passages from the Bible. The writers include theologians and biblical scholars, church leaders and activists for peace from across the world, all of whom share a passion to bring the Bible into conversation with day-to-day concerns. This helps you grow in your knowledge and appreciation of the Bible and carries on the 135-year-old IBRA tradition of encouraging people around the world.

IBRA International Fund

Giving through the International Bible Reading Association (IBRA) International Fund enables you to help spread the Word across the globe.

Our partners are based in 11 countries but benefit flows over borders to at least 32 countries. They work tirelessly, driven by their hope and their passion for distributing good teaching through Fresh From the Word. They organise the translation, printing and distribution of IBRA Bible study notes and lists into many different languages from Ewe, Yoruba and Twi to Portuguese, Samoan and Telugu!

We guarantee that 100% of your donations go to support our international brothers and sisters in Christ.

An envelope will be included with your readings, or you can give your donation to me before 1st November.

The subscription cost is £9.95

If you want to know more please do not hesitate to contact me.

Ruth Hunwick

Harvest and 60th Anniversary Weekend



A big thank you to everybody for playing a part to make the weekend a great success.

There were wonderful flower displays as well as individually displayed areas. It was good that the Chestnut Guild and the Carers' Group joined in and displayed some of their works of art. These were greatly admired. It was appreciated that the scouts provided photographs displaying scouting over the years and the handmade pictures from the guides and brownies decorated the walls of the church.

Many photographs were taken over the two days, and the collection of photographs has been put together in an album. This will become part of the Church history and will remain with the other memorabilia in the vestry. Anyone who wishes to look at this collection will be able to do so.

Elaine has also posted photos on the church Facebook.

We can now look forward to the Christmas Market on Saturday 18th November.

Janet Semain

"CHANGING PATHWAYS"

'Never heard of it!' I hear you cry. That has been the heading for the last year at least for the thank you letters we have received from the women's refuge, and which have been pinned to the notice board.

This harvest weekend was the first time in a good number of years when I didn't stand at the front of the church to ask for help, and explain why we were asking for your continuing support for what happens at the refuge. It was wonderful after the harvest weekend to take a car loaded with dry goods of all sorts, along with a bulging envelope, almost £200, to the manager. I cannot describe adequately how grateful they are at the refuge, close to tears in fact, for our continuing commitment and support, bearing in mind particularly that they cannot advertise their presence or their needs.

And what are those needs? I have personally known only one lady who sought help at the refuge, having been picked up from the road by a neighbour, and arriving with a black eye, one shoe, and no coat. More often it is families who have for many reasons left their home carrying little or nothing. No favourite toy, no favourite cuddly coat.

So Changing Pathways aims to do just what its name says. They provide a secure environment, and try to make things as natural as possible. This means helping with food, (sometimes from the Food Bank), bedding, clothes, and some little extras too. They try to put a small cuddly toy on the pillow of each new child arrival, and supply birthday and Christmas gifts, and of course essential clothing. This is where your treats of toiletries come in, and your cash. The mothers receive Asda vouchers, so they can buy basic school uniform, other items from within the Asda range which the children are happy to wear, and maybe the toy or sweets they know the children would like.

So, from me and from Allyson at the refuge, thank you.

Elaine





SERVICES

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| 10.30 am | SUNDAY FAMILY SERVICE |
| 10.30 am | 1 st SUNDAY EACH MONTH HOLY COMMUNION |
| 6.30 pm | 3 rd SUNDAY EACH MONTH HOLY COMMUNION |
| 10.30 am | 3 rd SUNDAY EACH MONTH PARADE SERVICE |

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