

Minister Rev'd David Coaker
drcoaker@gmail.com
07378 348191

Silent Visitor



A park in Autumn

October 2020

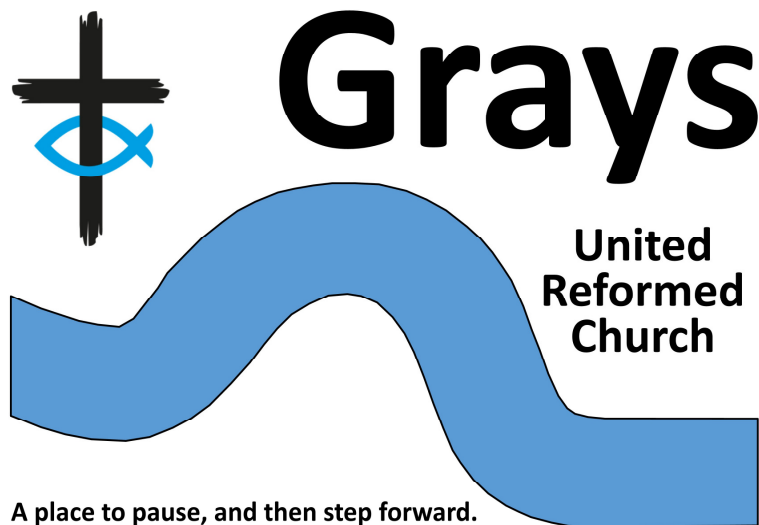
Reopening for Worship

The elders' decision is that we will take all necessary steps for a limited reopening of our building and then review our position. Grays URC will be open for public worship on:

Sunday 18th October between 10.15 – 11.15 am

Wednesday 11th November between 10.45 – 11.15 am

Sunday 15th November between 10.15 – 11.15 am



This will be very different from what we usually did both in form and content, as we comply with the necessary restrictions to safeguard each other's health and wellbeing.

- Each opening will start and finish with an informal time of worship.
- You will be required to wear a face covering and maintain social distancing.
- As you arrive you will be asked for Track and Trace information; to sanitise your hands and to follow the one way system.
- We will have stewards to maintain social distancing and to help us. So please follow what they say.
- If you are suffering from COVID-19 symptoms, please remain at home. (if you have tested positive you should be isolating, as per government advice.)
- We do not wish to put anyone under any undue pressure to attend, so please consider your circumstances beforehand.

Different but the same ...

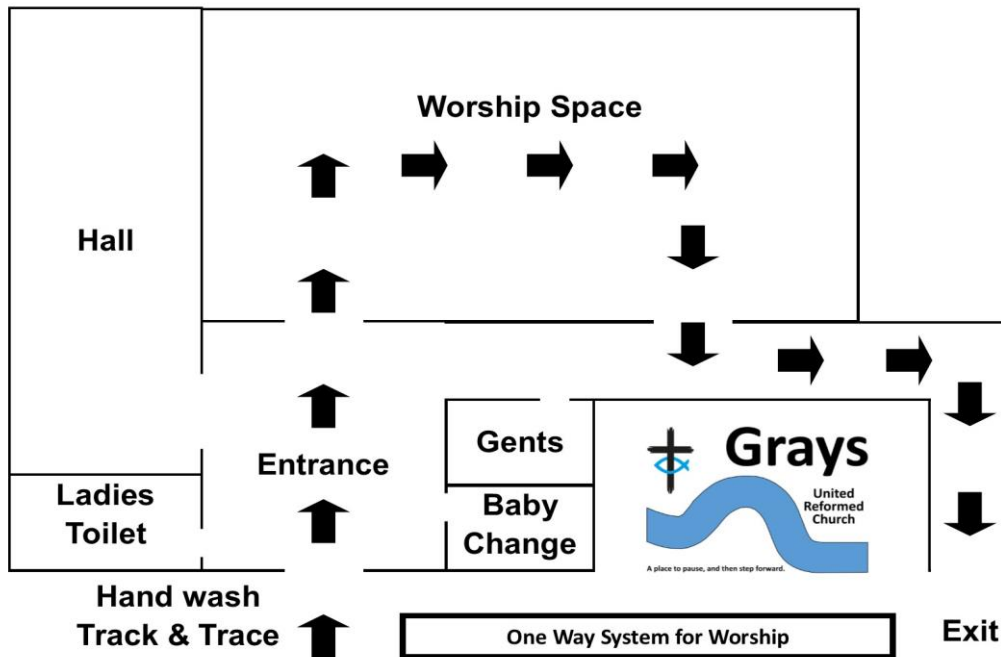
The elders have agreed to a limited reopening of our building for worship. The details of this, and the process they followed, you'll find later in SV. It will be a very different experience of coming to church, and you are asked to give prayerful consideration for how you will choose to respond to it.

Our worship space will look very different and the content will be adapted to suit the restrictions.



We will be wearing masks, sitting and moving around observing social distancing. We will not be giving out hymn books or Bibles. (So please bring your own.) We will be listening to or reading the words of hymns, but not singing. We will be able to talk to each other, but from a distance and maybe needing to speak a little louder. We will not be sharing in refreshments together afterwards. We will not be passing around the offertory bags, but the plate will be at the back of the worship space. We will be praying, listening for God's word, and worshipping together.

Our gathering will be stewarded and you'll be asked to follow a one-way system. (So remember to go to the toilet when you arrive!)



We will also be learning as we go. We may well adapt how we organise coming together and the content of it, as we discover what works, what could be better, and what didn't work at all. But of course this may well be limited as we comply with the necessary restrictions to safeguard each other's health and wellbeing.

It will be very different, but the underlying reasons for doing it remain the same. We gather together to share in purposefully drawing closer to God. To engage with insights from the Bible, the history of the Church, the world around us, and each other. Opening ourselves up to the Spirit moving within, around and beyond us. To open up questions, explore answers, to challenge our preconceptions, and advocate, accompany and act for the living out of the way of Christ.

You are warmly encouraged to focus on the ways it will be the same rather than on the differences from what went before. None of us has been through this before and we are relying upon each other to see us through. Please place all of this before God in prayer.

With every blessing, Rev'd David R. Coaker

Towards Recovery and Resumption Plan for Grays URC

Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer.

Romans 12:12 (NRSV)

Summary:

The elders' decision is that we will take all necessary steps for a limited reopening of our building and then review our position. Grays URC will be open for public worship on:

Sunday 18th October between 10.15 – 11.15 am

Wednesday 11th November between 10.45 – 11.15 am

Sunday 15th November between 10.15 – 11.15 am

This will be very different from what we usually did both in form and content, as we comply with the necessary restrictions to safeguard each other's health and wellbeing.

- Each opening will start and finish with an informal time of worship. This is to allow people to arrive and exit gradually. So please arrive in the first ten minutes or so, and there is no rush to exit at the end. The middle section of each opening will be a structured time of worship. (Note there will be no refreshments).
- You will be required to wear a face covering and maintain social distancing.
- As you arrive you will be asked for Track and Trace information; to sanitise your hands and to follow the one way system.
- We will have stewards to maintain social distancing and to help us. So please follow what they say.
- We will not be actively advertising these dates beyond our existing contacts.
- If you are suffering from COVID-19 symptoms, please remain at home. (if you have tested positive you should be isolating, as per government advice.)
- We do not wish to put anyone under any undue pressure to attend, so please consider your circumstances beforehand.

The following sections are adapted from a discussion document the elders used, to think through our approach to reopening our building. It is here for background.

Introduction:

Taking the formal decision to reopen our premises was both straightforward and complicated, It is straightforward as we have clear guidance, a draft risk assessment, a list of jobs to do, rules to follow and procedures to define.

It is also complicated given the demographics of our membership, the unknown response from our wider community and our ability to effectively respond to it without risking being overwhelmed. We also need to be careful not to place too much pressure upon each other to prepare and implement reopening, and also to then attend. Complications enough without the underlying reality of COVID-19 and the recent tightening of restrictions.

Practicalities:

We have a clear list of questions to address. There are things to move, clean and purchase, signs to create and display, roles to define and rotas to fill. Some of these have already been dealt with through Charlotte's preparation for Weight Watchers letting the hall on Wednesday evenings, which does give us a head start.

Decision 1: After a review of the draft risk assessment, elders agreed to form a working party to implement the mitigation and procedures required. Starting off in the church building (with masks, social distancing and ventilation) to walk it through, undertake immediate tasks, and then decide upon and delegate subsequent ones. (This has been completed and the risk assessment is with elders for a final view.)

Purpose: Our reasoning for reopening is for public worship and secondary to that is for lettings. So any church activities would be limited to only public worship e.g. not coffee morning, bowls etc. Lettings would be for users that have confidence in the existence of their own COVID-19 procedures and implementation of them e.g. Little Roos and Weight Watchers.

Even with those restrictions, public worship can be defined in many ways and would also include weddings, funerals and baptisms.

Public Worship: If after mitigating the risk assessment and implementing the necessary procedures, we decide to reopen, any public worship we undertake would require stewarding, social distancing, the wearing of masks, and include no refreshments or singing. So before we even thought about content, it will be a very different experience for everyone.

Decision 2: We decided to reopen as above.

We acknowledged that if we decided to reopen for public worship on a Sunday morning that would immediately create a whole series of expectations, on those attending and delivering, grounded in what we did previously. That would, of course, give great comfort, but it could also mean we miss the opportunity of discovering something new which could both nourish us and also those previously untouched by our times together. It would also mean that we would all be arriving and leaving at the same times and the pressure that could place on social distancing and stewarding. The other option we discussed was to initially open mid-week as this would be something new to us, and therefore remove any expectations. It would mean that people would be free to come and go within the times specified and be easier to steward and maintain social distancing.

Decision 3: We decided to reopen for an initial two Sundays, a month apart, and to create the opportunity for a mid-week gathering on Armistice Day.

Another aspect of our existing mission is our engagement with young families. The guidelines for this are contained in "URC guidance for children's and youth work coming out of lockdown". They are based on those of the National Youth Agency, as are those for Scouting. The regulations are based on a colour coded system which is currently Amber which allows small group sessions indoors and outdoors with social distancing. Restarting Play-Den or Messy Church would not be practical or permissible at this time, but possibly the young families service could be?

Decision 4: It was agreed that this is worth pursuing, so we formed a working party to confirm the possibility of a separate young families' activity, and implement alongside the decision to reopen for public worship.

Timing: Given the circumstances our decision, and any implementation of it, must not be rushed. If we decide to reopen we must take all diligent steps to ensure our confidence in being 'COVID secure'. We also need to give time to consult and/or inform the membership and advertise to the wider community.

Decision 5: The draft building risk assessment was accepted by the elders and we are confident that the dates set would give adequate time to implement the necessary mitigation.

Review: When we reopen there will naturally be lessons learned and tweaks made. We will also be guided by the general circumstances and any change in guidance. It would also be prudent for the elders to periodically review our activity and decide on any additions or alterations as we go forward. We will also need to bear in mind those of our fellowship who remain shielded or cautious, and ensure that everyone feels connected, cared for and communicated with.

Conclusion: All of this activity needs to be grounded in prayer and compassion for each other. There is risk involved in all of this which can be stressful but which can also be transformational. Reopening in present circumstances may create tensions. We need to endeavour to do all we can to be open about them, considerate to each other, and engaged to whatever degree we are able to be.

We need to support each other in prayer, offer encouragement, and model, share and express God's love for us all. We need to trust in God, in each other, and be held together in Christ as we step forward in His way.

*With all humility and gentleness, with patience,
bearing with one another in love (Ephesians 4:2 (NRSV))*

With every blessing,

Rev'd David R Coaker, on behalf of the Elders' Meeting 28.09.2020

Finance Report September 2020

During September I had to sell more investments to meet our outgoings. However, now that the building and repair works at the church are almost completed, and some hirers are returning, including Little Roos, the situation will hopefully now slowly improve.

I have just received our proposed M & M (Ministries and Mission) contribution for 2021 which shows an increase from our present figure of £24,000 p.a. to £24,700 p.a. The new figure has now been agreed by the elders.

Also, the Church 2020 accounts have now been audited by the Scouts Treasurer, Steve Morgan, and thanks to Steve for doing this job. In return, I was pleased to audit the 7th Grays accounts. If anyone would like to receive a copy of the audited 2020 Church accounts please let me know. They are available electronically which will be easier for me to send. However, if you need a paper copy this can be arranged. I can either deliver or post them.

Not much more to report, other than to thank all those who have kept their regular giving up to date by either cheques, or by bank transfers/standing orders. As I have said previously, I can now bank cheques more easily, so anyone who has not kept their giving up to date, and would like to use a cheque, that would be most welcome.

I am pleased that more people are choosing to give via bank transfers and standing orders.

Whilst an offertory plate will be available at the back of the Church for services restarting on the 18th October, in line with COVID guidelines, any donations should not be made in cash.

If anyone has any questions about the accounts or finances please contact me and I will do my best to answer.

Alan Beckley, Treasure



Doreen Thomas

It is with sadness that we note the passing of Doreen on the 29 September.

Doreen must have been our oldest and longest member of the Grays Congregational and United Reformed Church – she was 98 years old. Doreen would have originally worshipped in the Argent Street Church as a young girl.

Over the years she served the church in many roles and these included Minute Secretary (Dan Meyrick took responsibility for the Minutes and passed these on to Doreen for typing and duplicating). She also spent many years as Lettings Secretary for our buildings but left the problem solving to the Secretary to deal with. She aptly used her administrative skills which she had gained over the years as an employee with Thurrock Council.

Doreen was particularly proud of her appearance and always enjoyed a compliment about her hairstyle and her clothes.

Doreen was very much a part of church life and until very recently liked to feel she was being kept up to date with what was happening.

Sadly, when Doreen had a stroke she was no longer able to attend church. Many members visited her and kept in touch and on a few occasions she received Holy Communion at home.

Her family will be arranging her funeral. Details will be given out in due course.

Below is a photograph of Doreen with the late Dr Beryl Chalkley and Dan Meyrick - who were all made Elders Emeritus.



QUIZ



Here is a short quiz from Alf to get you thinking :-

1. Who wrote the 1st world war song "Keep the Home Fires Burning"?
2. Who was created a Baron in 1970 – the first Theatrical Lord?
3. Who kissed the girls and made them cry?
4. Which Apostle was known as "The Twin"?
5. Who, in the first 'Talking Picture' said "You ain't heard nothing yet folks"?
6. What is the main ingredient of Junket?
7. Song "You'll Never Walk Alone"; who had a No: 1 hit in 1963?
8. Regarding Premium Bonds - what do the initials ERNIE stand for?
9. What is the oldest, and only surviving Wonder of the World?
10. Who said "I am a bear with very little brain, and long words bother me"?

Alf Pryer

The answers will be in the November edition of the Silent Visitor.

The Mayflower

We live in very unusual times! Apart from living in the shadow of the corona virus, we have also witnessed the contradictions of our country's history, one in particular being its expressed revulsion of the slave trade in which we, including several notable people, were involved. Their statues have been toppled and landmarks named after them have been renamed. Some historians have been criticised for giving a biased account of our history.



This September saw the 400th anniversary of the sailing of the ship Mayflower from Plymouth in the UK to what became Plymouth in North America. October was a whole month that they were at sea. They dropped anchor on November 11th 1620. The Mayflower was a tiny ship by today's standards and even too small for the task assigned to it. It was only about 130 tons with habitable decks only five feet high, most uncomfortable for the 135 people on board.

Who were these people? The central core who provided the main motivation for this odyssey comprised a group of separatist puritans. They were, to put it in the vernacular, fed up with the Church of England, considering that it had not gone far enough in its reformation. They wanted out but this had led to their being persecuted so that some of them had sought refuge in the more tolerant country of the Netherlands. Life was not easy there, however, and there was civil unrest in that country. Many of them returned to England and considered other areas of refuge, one of the main ones being the New World in North America.

They knew there were dangers in this, hundreds of colonists having already made the journey and perished through starvation, cold and attacks by indigenous people. Despite this they felt their proposed journey would be what God wanted, enabling them to build a "Spiritual Jerusalem" in America. Their ship, the Mayflower, actually left London for Southampton in July 1620, having already provisioned at Leigh and taken on board several

puritans from Essex around Billericay, including its captain who was born in Maldon and brought up at Harwich.

A sister ship was supposed to have joined them but it became unseaworthy and had to remain behind. This caused the Mayflower to become overcrowded and left some people to return to Holland. The voyage started well but then became perilous with 100 foot waves, overcrowding, unsanitary conditions and seasickness. But there was only one fatality during the voyage.

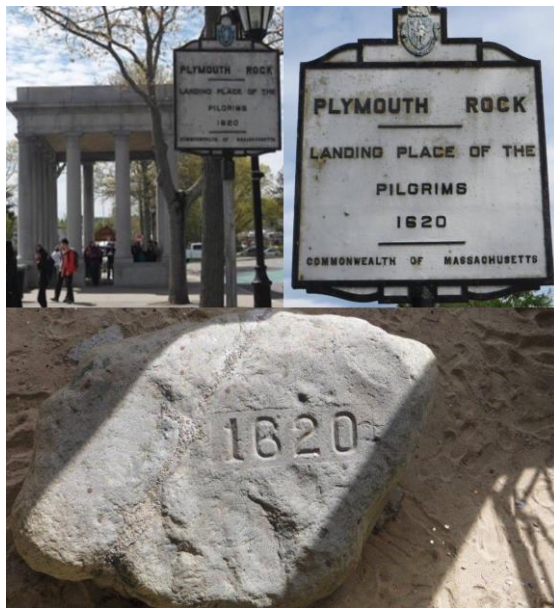
They had been given permission to land at Virginia but sea conditions prevented that and they had to anchor off Cape Cod. Whilst on board they had drawn up a Compact, setting out how their proposed colony was to be run. Their second governor later described their landing in these words: "Being thus arrived in a good harbor (sic) and brought safe to land, they fell upon their knees and blessed the God of Heaven, who had brought them over the vast and furious ocean..."

Their first winter was bitter. The ground froze so that they could not plant crops. They had insufficient clothing and provisions. Many died and the rest could well have perished were it not for the help given to them by the indigenous local Native Americans, later to be shamed as the baddies in western films. Much of the winter had to be spent aboard the Mayflower where contagious diseases broke out. Only about half the passengers and crew survived.

Essex, in particular, shares in this heritage. A meeting of Puritans was held in Billericay prior to the sailing of the Mayflower and four of them boarded. All four died between 1621 and 1640. But others from Billericay followed them. They founded a town in Massachusetts and named it Billerica, after their home town.

Today we suffer a problem of not being able to worship as we would like. But this is nothing compared to the plight of the Puritans who had opted out of traditional worship. Under the Act of Uniformity 1559, it was made illegal not to attend official Church of England services on pain of a fine of one shilling (about £19 today) for each missed Sunday or Holy Day. Unofficial services resulted in larger fines and sometimes imprisonment. Some were executed for sedition.

Those Pilgrims were steadfast Christians who were prepared to suffer for their faith. But not all is as it first seems. An American journalist, writing about the 400th anniversary in the US, compares this version of history to "the baleful legacy of slavery and the systemic racism that grew from it". He refers to the toppling of statues mentioned earlier. Apparently nine US presidents have claimed descent from those who made the journey, yet only an enclosed lump of rock marks the point of disembarkation.



It seems also that many millions of Americans also declare that they come from the gene pool of the Pilgrim Fathers, or more accurately the Pilgrim Mothers. So many have made this claim that one might be forgiven for thinking that the little three-masted Mayflower was the size of an aircraft carrier.

Thanksgiving looms large in the US as a remembrance of when the Pilgrims sat down to a feast with the local Wampanoag Natives who helped them. US historians consider much of that history to be fraudulent. Native Americans became victims of the colonists. Their land was grabbed. Their resources were purloined. They caught European diseases without having any immunity. Wars were the result. When Catholic and Jewish European immigrants challenged the dominance of white Protestantism, the Pilgrim Fathers were co-opted to assert the ascendancy of WASP culture – White Anglo-Saxon and Protestant – to establish a cultural hierarchy. Some consider this was the origination of an American class system.

Perhaps we need to keep in mind that whilst Godly intentions may be good and even holy, those intentions must be maintained as Godly in order to fulfil what we feel God wanted in the first place.

George Semain

Moving Stories

Responding to the crisis in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories

The United Reformed Church is known for its activism in support of justice and equity for the Palestinian people in the occupied territories. In this edition of *Moving Stories*, commend the work of the Sabeel-Kairos URC Action Group, a dedicated gathering of URC activists, working tirelessly for peace in the region.

The Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Centre is a Christian liberation theology organization based in Jerusalem. It was founded in 1989 by former Canon of St. George's Cathedral in Jerusalem, Rev. Naim Ateek. Follow the [Sabeel Wave of Prayer](#).

Each week, the "Kumi Now" initiative (linked to Sabeel) features an organisation making a difference in Israel and Palestine. You can watch the [current month here](#). You can see the archived sessions here, particularly week 38, [Morally Responsible Investment](#). Also, during the lockdown the [Amos Trust](#) has produced a number of interesting programmes. If you have queries or would like to make contact with the Action Group, please email sabeelkairos.urc@gmail.com

Virtual Pilgrimage 22nd Sept

Because Bethlehem is so heavily dependent on tourism, locals have suffered enormously because of the lockdown. Emma Clare Nutbrown-Hughes (pictured below, from Christian Aid & a student for the URC ministry) came up with the idea of a 'virtual pilgrimage to Bethlehem' to help

our friends at the Christmas Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bethlehem. Email kevin.snyman@urc.org.uk for more info.



Pic: Revd Ray Stanyon

World silent as Gaza Bombed

Read more about this [here](#) and [here](#).

The URC's very own Diana Paulding is part of Christian Aid's Prophetic Activist Scheme. These young Christians are working for climate justice. The activists launched the Stop Fuelling the Fire Campaign, which is petitioning the UK government to end using UK Export Finance to fund fossil fuel projects overseas. Diana feels strongly about this issue, and with training from Christian Aid has, in collaboration with other activists, organised a petition to Boris Johnson. Please do sign their important petition at <https://you.38degrees.org.uk/p/SFTF>



Who's Who at Bradleigh Avenue

Minister: Rev'd David Coaker

Mobile No: 07378 348191

E Mail: drcoaker@gmail.com

Secretary: Mr Ben Marshall Mobile No: 078141 06604
e-mail: graysurcsecretary@outlook.com

Treasurer: Mr Alan Beckley

Serving Elders: Mr Ben Marshall; Mr George Semain; Mrs Janet Semain; Co-opted: Mr Alf Pryer, Mrs Denise Beckley

Organist: Mr Richard Wade

Facilities Manager: Mrs Charlotte Webb
& Mobile No: 0784 3559011
Hire of Halls: graysurc@gmail.com

Silent Visitor: Mrs Janet Semain 01375 373532
geojan321@sky.com

Leaders of the Uniformed Organisations:

Group Scout Leader: Mr Tim Webb
Tel: 01375 391031

Guide Leader: Miss Gill Davison
Tel: 01375 384253

Brownie Leader: Ms Madeleine Loin
Mobile No: 07971 139384