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Silent Visitor



Woodland Snowdrops

February 2021

Who's Who at Bradleigh Avenue

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Treasurer: Mr Alan Beckley

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

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Groundhog Month



The Groundhog day tradition, which only reached British shores through the Bill Murray film, is the 2nd February. It derives from the Pennsylvania Dutch superstition that if a groundhog emerging from its burrow on this day sees its shadow due to clear weather, it will retreat to its den and winter will persist for six more weeks; but if it does not see its shadow because of cloudiness, spring will arrive early. The activities of the rodent haven't seeped that deeply into our collective consciousness, but the premise of the film has.

In the film Bill Murray plays a cynical television weather man who keeps reliving the 2nd February until he has a change of heart and the cycle is broken.

Sadly, our lives are not controlled by a script and director, and the Groundhog feelings Covid-19 has produced will not disappear after a montage of helpful and life-enhancing actions. Amidst the complexity and beauty of Creation a virus sprung forth, and governments around the world, to greater or lesser degrees of success, have struggled to keep their citizens and economies safe.

In years to come, lessons will hopefully be learned, but at this point I just want to assure you that it is understandable and appropriate to vent your frustrations. We all want a magic wand to be waved and for everything to be back to 'normal', but that is not how life works. A whole set of interconnected variables led to the pandemic, and a just as complicated set are at work to get us out the other side. All of this complexity evolved into the lives we are blessed with and, as climate change illustrates, shifting the balance can have disastrous effects.

It is the blessing of life that drew humanity to look beyond survival to wonder if there was deeper meaning to it all, and in this faith began. Having faith, trusting that beyond our senses and comprehension life has greater purpose, drew people together to explore how selfless, equitable and just actions could mould a world fit for the description of being divine. This theme runs through the Bible, and the Psalms give us plenty of examples of the anger and despair voiced to God when life runs counter to faith's dream of how it could be. God is with us, within it all. God, ground of our being, in whom we live and move and have our being, is present in all of life.

God isn't like Santa, with a list of naughty and nice, and arbitrary gift giving. God isn't an angry super villain causing devastation at whim. God isn't just the refuge of the forsaken, desperate and bewildered. God isn't an illusion to mask life's realities. God isn't a weapon for us to use against each other to polish our egos and to control others.

The revelation of God in Jesus of Nazareth, the incarnation of God in Jesus the Christ, is the call to love God, and to love each other as you'd wish to be loved. And before a rosy and warm glow descends, think of the most shocking event, the crankiest person you know, the thing you are most ashamed of, and try to see the love?

Love isn't easy or straightforward. It isn't being nice. Real love faces us with hard choices, calls upon our time and resources, real engagement with other people to test our individual and collective desires, and placing God, and not ourselves, at the centre of it all.

As we enter another period of lockdown we can be forgiven for our sense of déjà vu, of Groundhog day, but as the days' pass look for the love. Embrace the tiny mercies of neighbours, family and friends. Enjoy the beauty as nature moves through winter to spring. Grasp the opportunity to engage with other people by phone, video and safe distances. Try to concentrate on what is possible, rather than dwell on what isn't.

This isn't going to be easy or enjoyable, but when clouds descend look for the silver lining and be consoled that God can cope when you vent your frustrations, share your burdens, and fail to make the best of choices. Your brothers and sisters in Christ are in the same boat, and we all strive to hold on to God and each other through it all. It won't be easy, but it can be better if we all model the forgiveness, mercy and love of God in our lives and life together.

God is with us, within it all. God, ground of our being, in whom we live and move and have our being, is present in all of life.

The revelation of God in Jesus of Nazareth, the incarnation of God in Jesus the Christ, is the call to love God, and to love each other as you'd wish to be loved.

Look for, and strive to be, the love.

With every blessing, Rev'd David R Coaker

Re-opening Update

Just to confirm the elders' decision that while we are under Lockdown or Tier 4 restrictions, in-person worship is cancelled.

If there is a loosening of restrictions in Thurrock, to Tier 3 or lower, dates pencilled in for services are:

- Sunday 21st February between 10.15 – 11.15 am
- Sunday 7th March between 9.30 – 10.15 am – young families
- Sunday 21st March between 10.15 – 11.15 am
- Easter Sunday 4th April (timing(s) to be confirmed)
- Sunday 18th April 10.15 – 11.15 am
- Sunday 2nd May between 9.30 – 10.15 am – young families
- Sunday 16th May between 10.15 – 11.15 am

Welcome to Retirement!

We are delighted to welcome Rev'd Kathryn Taylor back to the locality! In the normal run of things, she'd have received a round of applause on a Sunday morning and probably a cake and a bring-and-share lunch in her honour, but for now her address and email are added to the circulation lists!



Silent Visitor

Would you please submit all items and articles for the March Edition of the Silent Visitor by **Saturday 20th February.**

Many thanks, Janet

Financial Update December

As of 31 December 2010, the church had around £20,000 less in investment accounts and £10,000 less in the bank account, than the same time in 2019. Financially, the church has had a tough year.

Having said that, we have a brand new kitchen (long overdue) and have paid out to have half of the church heating pipes and radiators replaced. We must keep in mind however, that the remainder of the church heating pipes and radiators will also need replacing at some stage in the near future.

We just managed to get to the end of 2020 without selling any more investments, with a bank balance of around £8,500, which is still below my preferred balance of £10,000. Also, there will be an invoice for the new fire doors due within the next few weeks. For now we are just "keeping our heads above water".

I have also been going through the somewhat prolonged and at times frustrating job of changing bank details, as Colin is unavailable at present to sign documents. This has not been made any easier by the Covid restrictions, anti-fraud legislation and the delay in the postal service. Many thanks for the assistance and help received from Denise, Bob Datlen and Alf. Usual thanks to all of you who continue to give your offerings each month by cheque, or electronically by bank transfer and standing orders. Without these offerings, the church would have no alternative other than regularly sell investments, which obviously cannot continue for long.

Hopefully, our regular annex and hall users will be able to restart at some time, which will help. 'Little Roos' plan to reopen on the 18th January, which will be wonderful, not just for the church, but also for the many children who will benefit – not least my grandson, Owen – who loves it!

I will be happy and do my best to answer any queries you may have; just e-mail or telephone me.

Alan Beckley, Treasurer

World Day of Prayer 5 March 2021

A women-led, global, ecumenical movement.



This year's service has been prepared by Christian women of Vanuatu. The Theme is "Build on a Strong Foundation" with a reading from Matthew 7:24 – 27.

Vanuatu consists of a cluster of islands just over 1100 miles to the east of Australia.

Due to the Covid-19 situation we feel unable to have a service in Grays on the 5th March. We hope to have the service sometime later in the year.

However, it is on 5th March when the whole world should be praying together. We therefore suggest that we can all take part in this in some way from home on that day.

I have plenty of copies of the order of service. If you would like one please let me know (telephone 01375 379143) and I will pass one on to you before the date.

You can also find plenty of information on the World Day of Prayer website. Some groups will arrange to livestream the service on the day. You will be able to find information about how to connect to these on the website if you want to follow the service then.

Another concern is that the only income the organisation has is from donations from the service. A number of congregations benefit from grants from WDP and there is also the cost of producing the service booklets etc. This year we know that many services will not take place, however, if you like to contribute, donations can be made via the Website; direct to the WDP office; or Text message to 70085 using the phrase 2021WDP and then adding the amount you wish to donate i.e. 2021WDP5.

Let us try to remember the first Friday in March.

*Inger Collier,
Secretary for the WDP Committee in Grays.*

Prayers on Friday



Each Friday evening, our small group meets in spirit for a short while.

We are privileged to take your prayer requests and feel the promise of Jesus. "For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them." Matthew 18:20 is powerful and true.

Unable to meet in person, we know each of the group is committed in prayer together.

Do contact either myself or Alf if you would like a prayer, for yourself or others, which remains confidential within the group.

Denise

Lateral Flow Testing Site

Thurrock Council have made contact with us asking if we would be willing to let the hall for use as a Lateral Flow (Covid) testing site.

After confirming the details, the elders agreed and the intention is that from 1st February until the end of March this will be happening 7 days a week.

Elders were happy to support this activity and agreed a lower than our usual rent for this essential activity.

Tribute to Anne French

An independent and caring person to the nth degree, Anne, having been unwilling to 'bother' anyone when she was unwell a couple of years back, was equally reluctant to be helped, during last summer's lockdown. Inger Collier had the contact numbers, and Margaret Crowe and Denise Beckley both kept in touch with her, to see that she was cared for, and persuade her to eat. Denise, calling Anne 'born polite', reports that during one visit, Anne said, "Denise, you are a very annoying person. But thank you".

Another comment from someone who grew up knowing Anne through the church, but who hasn't lived in Grays for 20 years. . . 'Oh yes, Anne, busy and bubbly, and always smiling'.

Anne was a member of Grays URC for 66 years. She grew up in, and served as a Deacon in the days of the Grays Congregational Church, just as her father had. I believe her parents were instrumental in the purchase of the land for the Manse in the 1930s, but have no details.

The name plate on the large table under the stained glass window is a dedication to her parents, and she was delighted when we moved it forward to be a proper communion table.

She totally ran the Women's Fellowship group, which met for coffee on Wednesdays, and once a month held an afternoon meeting, usually with speakers. It was Anne who prepared a cooked lunch on those days.

She also took over the kitchen organisation for many years, and especially for the Tilbury Band December concerts, when numbers were very large. She ran her troupe of helpers with military precision to provide tea, coffee and mince pies in a brief space of interval time.

Anne took an active and talented part for many years in working with the children in Sunday School life, Pilots, and most recently Messy Church. Denise recalls that when Pilots visited the Millennium Dome, she was concerned that Anne was nowhere to be seen, but found her with young Ashton, reclining blissfully on the cushions in the meditation room.

Having studied at the Royal School of Needlework, Anne created many of her own clothes. I remember a stunning red Courrèges-style dress. She made the original pulpit drop for the 'new' church building, and replaced it with another beautifully embroidered one

when the sun both faded and shredded it. Those talents were also shared with some other local churches. An earlier memory of mine is of the church hall filled with an amazing graduation display of sewing and embroidery tasks from her time at the Royal School, where she went on to teach, before working for the Crafts Council.

There was also the collaboration on the South Essex Churches' embroidered screen. In her inimitably modest way, Anne told me with a smile that the Grays group was asked to provide evidence of their abilities. So that is how we acquired the beautiful panel used behind the Nativity scene each year. The Grays section, designed by Anne, included symbols of the church and the area.



And the flowers. Anne attended the flower arranging club which met at the church, and organised a rota, especially drumming up contributions to the Harvest Festival displays, always an amazing sight. She herself, who did so much, so beautifully, took time to take photos of our efforts, and to thank and praise us all.

And Barnardo's, of course. The Grays Barnardo support group ran for over 100 years, and was set up by Anne's parents. They held fund-raising garden parties for the church and Barnardo's, in a huge space behind their home which is now part of Woodward Close. Those were days of great excitement for the children of the church, when they explored the intriguingly landscaped garden, and beyond, taking part in all sorts of fund-raising games.

Involved almost from birth, Anne eventually took over from her mother and was the driving force behind the group, raising significant sums of money by holding an annual fair and box-opening event (at the church), continuing an annual coffee morning in her home, and running an impressive autumn lunch every year, even when the saucepans were too heavy for the team to handle and caterers were involved. There was much more besides, so it was with great sadness that the local team decided they were unable to continue because of their own advancing years. Anne was very proud of the fact that the Grays group had been the longest-running in the whole country.

So this sweet, caring, gentle, lovely lady had a will of steel, was much appreciated in her many roles, and has already been sorely missed.

Elaine Barcz

Anne French and Barnados

Following on from Elaine's tribute, many of us will remember Anne's connection with Barnardos over the years and I asked Anne a while ago how she had become involved with the organisation. She gave me the attached which details how the Grays Barnardo's Helpers Group (1908 – 2008) was established and its connection with the Grays Congregational Church:-

"On 26th November 1908 the Young Helpers' League, in connection with Dr. Barnardo's Homes, awarded a Warrant for a Habitation to twenty-four Companions in Grays. Rev'd H Davis Bull who was Minister of the Grays Congregational Church (now the United Reformed Church) from 1898 – 1906 was early attracted to the work of Dr Barnardo, who he had assisted for several years and Rev'd Bull encourage Mrs Wall to start a fundraising group in Grays and this was continued until the present day.

Among the Companions listed on the original Warrant are Erica Wall (later to be Mrs Erica Hall who was the Chair of the Group for many years), Agnes Turner (who was Secretary of the Group for forty years) and Vernon French, my parents, together with my aunt Norah French and a cousin of my mother, Norah Thurgood.

Over the one hundred years the group, now Grays Barnardo's Helpers' Group, has raised more than £150,000 (records from 1908 – 1916 were destroyed) in amounts ranging for 12s.6d in 1918 to £8,000 in 2004/05. A second Warrant was awarded in 1910 again listing twenty four Companions, a number being children of well-known families living and working in Grays at that time such as Baird, Boatman, Woodgate and Baxendale. For many years the members collected their money in Barnado boxes but in latter years, although we still maintain nearly sixty collecting boxes, most of our fundraising is done through organising events such as coffee mornings, garden parties, barbecues, Bridge tournaments, concerts, lunches, fairs and afternoon teas with entertainment.

We are very grateful for all the kind friends and relations who support our fundraising, especially the Minister and Members of the United Reformed Church in Grays, who allow us to use the church premises for many of our events.

Anne French – Secretary – Grays BHG"

At the bottom of the page in Anne's handwriting are a couple of notes:

"I was made a member in 1935 at 5 weeks.
I became a member of the Committee in 1969 and Secretary in 1971.
In 2014 – 2015 we raised £6,500"

On the 12th May 2016, the Duchess of Cornwall, as President of Barnardo's, hosted a 150th Anniversary Royal Garden Party. Anne says "5 of the Committee went to the Garden Party and had a lovely day."

Anne certainly had a life-time involvement with Barnardo's and I can't help wondering if she was the youngest member of the Group in her time!

Janet Semain

The Southend District Embroidery

Celebrating 25 years of the United Reformed Church 1972 – 1997
and embroidered between 1975 and 1997

In case you have forgotten, or knew little about, the project referred to at Anne French's committal service, here is a reminder.

Groups from nine churches in the Southend District (now Area Partnership) contributed to five panels representing the life, faith and work of the URC. The original theme and design came from Angela Cotton, a non-stipendiary minister with an Art Ministry, the embroidery being directed by Celia Wood who, like our own Anne, had studied and then taught at the Royal School of Needlework. Celia held classes at her home, and every few months everyone involved joined an Embroidery Service, reminding themselves of the spiritual purpose of the project.

The Billericay Church and Grays contributed to the fifth panel of a series of five. The representation of Easter was the work of the Billericay group, with a Good Friday walk of witness, a resurrection flag, and daffodils springing with new life.

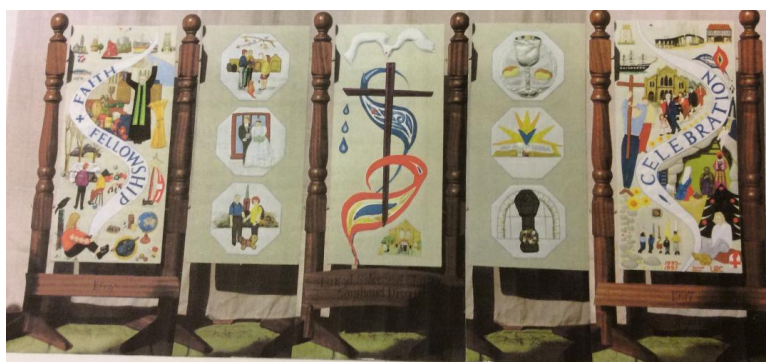
The Grays group, led by Anne, included Gladys Southwick, Maureen Overland, Joyce Goldsmith, June Seymour and Pauline Whately. (Pauline, now with James in Dorset, was pleased to have the details of the web-cast for Anne's committal via Sallie Marshall. Thank you Ben and Sallie.)

The design evolved in the course of its execution, so in the accompanying picture you can see Anne's designs for the 15th century St Clement's Church, the 16th century Horndon-on-the-Hill Woolmarket, the training ship Exmouth (moored in the Thames at the beginning of the 20th century), the Queen Elizabeth II bridge, and a fighter aircraft overhead.

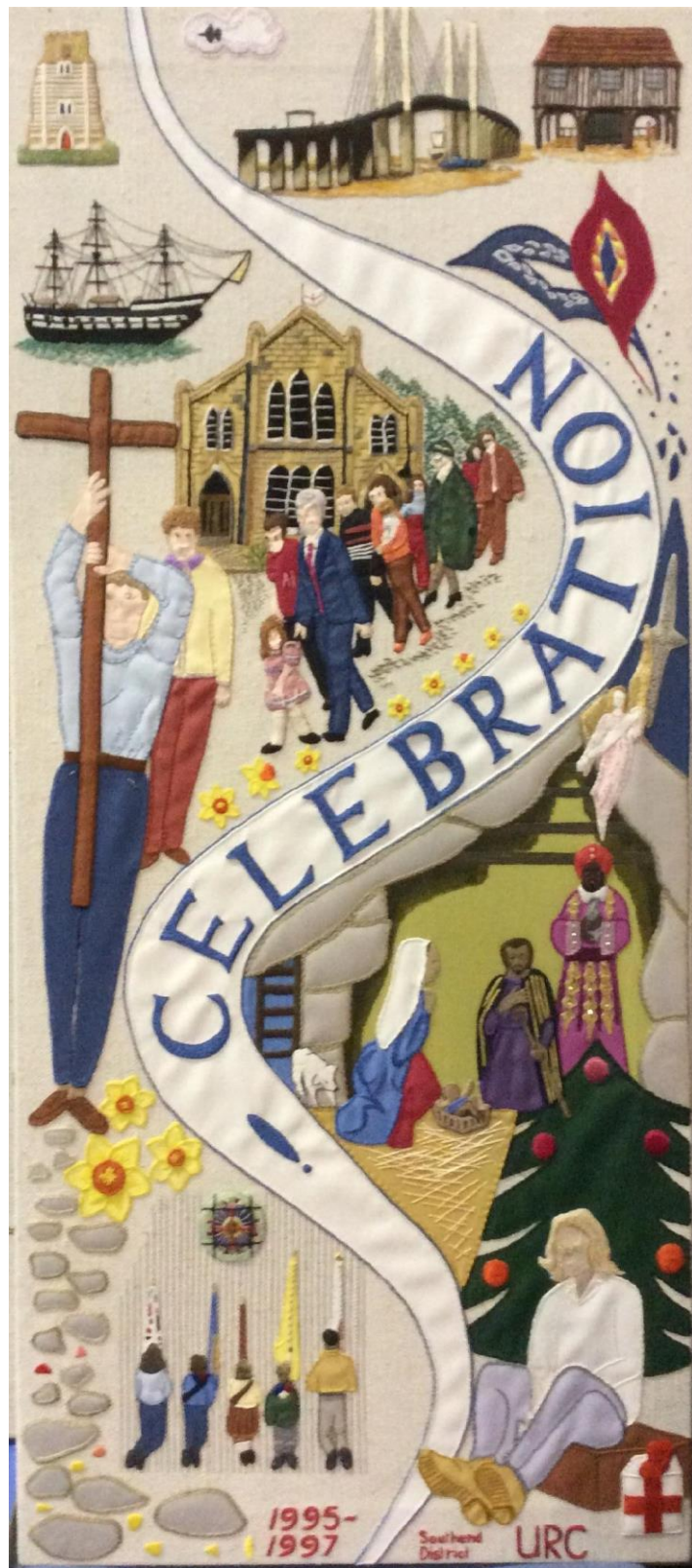
The lower section shows Christmas as most importantly a spiritual festival but also a time of good cheer. The crib set had particular significance for our group, while the young man in the corner echoes a young woman on the first panel of the series, symbolising the church of the future. Anne was delighted with her photo of Dominique, but June Seymour was less thrilled with the task of embroidering the wavy surf bleached hair. (I did my best to apologise). More young people are in the bottom left-hand corner, at a Parade Service, and there above them is the stained-glass window.

(Sadly, problems of logistics prevented the screen from being circulated round the churches).

Elaine Barcz



The five panels of the screen



Billericay and Grays URC Panel



Answers to the Quiz Questions in the December / January Silent Visitor

1. Spoon;
2. Germaine Greer;
3. Three times;
4. Aviemore;
5. Evita;
6. Paint your wagon (the film) The song Lee Marvin sung was "Wandrin' Star".
7. Eight
8. Tennis
9. Prince Albert, Queen Victoria's husband
10. Orson Welles
11. Wisden
12. Robert Louis Stevenson

How did you do? Thanks Alf for keeping our minds working.

Arthur Sullivan

Richard Wade writes:

In my article on Arthur Sullivan, I aired the thought that the Overture to the Yeomen of the Guard – and incidentally it is Yeomen (plural) – might work well on the organ. I have since discovered that there is a CD recording of it played by John Kitchen on the organ of The Usher Hall in Edinburgh, together with some other numbers from the Gilbert and Sullivan operas, and music by Michael Thomson.

Incidentally, I should also have mentioned that, though written in 2018, my article was published in 2019.

Thurrock Food-bank



Good afternoon to you all, I hope you are able to start 2021 in a positive light.

From the perspective of the Food-bank, we have started in a productive vein and have made some adjustments to our operating system. This will enable us to lessen the demands on our volunteers and van crew.

They have all worked so incredibly hard, packing and moving food parcels, and now all have bulging muscles! The new system will enable us to operate with a level of stock ensuring that we are able to meet any ad hoc requirements of our referring agencies and meet the demands of our distribution centres.

We continue to give thanks for the health and fitness of our volunteers, and that they may maintain good health throughout these times.

We are grateful for the continued generosity of businesses and individuals that continue to donate to the Food-bank either in food donations or financially and for the continued interest in the work of the Food-banks and the offers of help in practical ways.

We pray for our clients, a few this week have been identified as not having any heating, and those working with them to ensure they are looking after themselves properly. Some are struggling due to interrupted benefit payments.

Although we are blessed with a good stock of food, items that we have lower stocks are : Milk, Sponge Puddings, Fruit Juice/Squash.

As always if you have any questions regarding this mail, or would like further information on our work please do not hesitate to contact me.

Best regards,
Pete Newall, Operations Manager. Thurrock Food-bank
Mobile: 07544834034
Office: 01375 416200

Aimee Semple McPherson

In this month's edition is a letter from the Trussell Trust, an organisation which aims to help build a hunger free future, recognising that it isn't right that anyone should need to use a food bank. In the first six months of the current pandemic the trust arranged for the issuing of one food parcel every thirteen seconds. But that is still not good enough. So far the Trust has raised £4,000,000 but even that is not good enough. How can individuals help in a project of this scale?

This sort of issue is, of course, nothing new. For example, a young lady in North America, Aimee Semple McPherson, in the dark days of the 1920s, was considering the same problem. As a child she had early exposure to religion and charity work through her mother, who worked with the poor in Salvation Army soup kitchens.

Aimee attended revival meetings and met her first husband, Robert Semple, at one. She decided to dedicate her life to Jesus and converted to Pentecostalism, moving to Chicago. She found she was a gifted preacher and soon embarked on an evangelistic tour of China. Robert died there of dysentery. Aimee also contracted the disease but recovered. On the ship back to the USA she held religious services and gave classes. Back home she joined her mother working with the Salvation army. She met her second husband, Roger McPherson in New York, with whom she had a son. They later divorced. She remarried in 1931 to an actor but they also later divorced.

She turned to evangelising, holding tent revivals across the US and quickly amassed a large following, causing her to relocate to large buildings to accommodate growing crowds. She often preached sermons over a megaphone from the back seat of her convertible. In Los Angeles her mother rented the 3,500 seat Philharmonic Auditorium but still crowds had to wait for hours in order to get in to one of her services. She raised enough money to construct a large domed church named Angelus Temple. During construction this was changed into a 'mega-church' which was said to have the largest single Christian congregation in the world. It enrolled over ten thousand members.

Aimee realised that fulfilling spiritual needs was not enough and developed an organisation to provide physical help to people, saying that "true Christianity is not only to be good but to do good".

Her church was able to provide relief funds for major emergencies. Drawing from her childhood experiences with the Salvation Army she opened what was called a commissary at the Angelus Temple, creating soup kitchens, free clinics and other charitable activities during the great depression. It fed an estimated 1.5 million people. When the government shut down the free school lunch programme, she took it over, alleviating suffering "on an epic scale". During this time she also became acknowledged as a faith healer. One of her main aims was to get Christianity to occupy a central place in national life.

Aimee died on 26 September 1944, having been taking sleeping pills for a number of health complaints. The coroner said she most likely died of an accidental overdose. 45,000 people waited in long lines to file past her body whilst it lay in state, including a thousand ministers. Her son took over the leadership of her church. She has become inspirational as 'just a farm girl who loved the Lord'.

The Trussell Trust doesn't expect us to go as far as Aimee. They suggest that in a much smaller but just as important way, there are many opportunities people can show their support for the needy. One can always visit their web site to find out how!

George Semain



Aimee Semple



The Commissary

The Angelus Temple



Al Khan al Ahmar Village, Palestine

In 2019 representatives of the URC visited the village of Al Khan al Ahmar. The URC was warmly welcomed, thanked, and fed. We learned about the vital importance of the village to the feasibility of the two-state solution.

Very recently, The Israeli High Court heard a petition calling for the immediate demolition of Al Khan al Ahmar and its celebrated "car tyres" school. The court imposed a four-month period of delay for the demolition, but with no injunction against the demolition orders. This means that the bulldozers may move in at any moment. Due to this emergency, the Bedouin has asked for international support. Jahalin Solidarity has been working tirelessly on the issue.

Ordinary people who are concerned can do a number of things. Firstly, we can sign the online petition, at <https://www.icc.jahalin.org>. Over 24,200 people have joined Jahalin Solidarity in calling on the ICC judges to uphold Palestinian rights. They believe that the forcible displacement of Al Khan al Ahmar and other villages in Area C is a war crime.

Secondly, we can speak to our representatives and ask what they can do to call the Israeli State to account for its actions.

Thank you for your support for **Commitment for Life** as we work together for justice, peace and equity in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories.



News in from Diana Paulding: 2019 URC Youth Representative on the URC IOPT trip & Commitment for Life supporter

*Thank you so much to **Commitment for Life** for your support this past year of the Christian Aid Prophetic Activists' 'Stop Fuelling the Fire' campaign.*

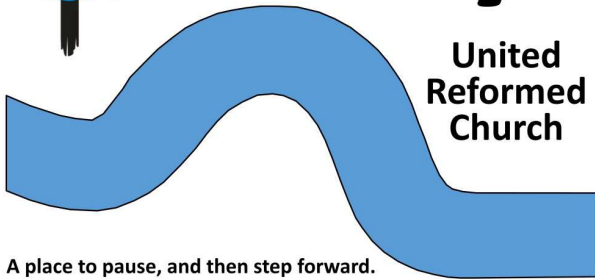
We petitioned the government to end the use of UK Export Finance to fund fossil fuel projects overseas. Over a thousand people signed the petition and many people contacted their MPs to raise their concerns about the issue. We went to Downing Street on Friday 4th December 2020 with a coalition of organisations for a socially distanced 'hand-in' event of all of our petitions.

Thank you for everything you have done to help the campaign!"



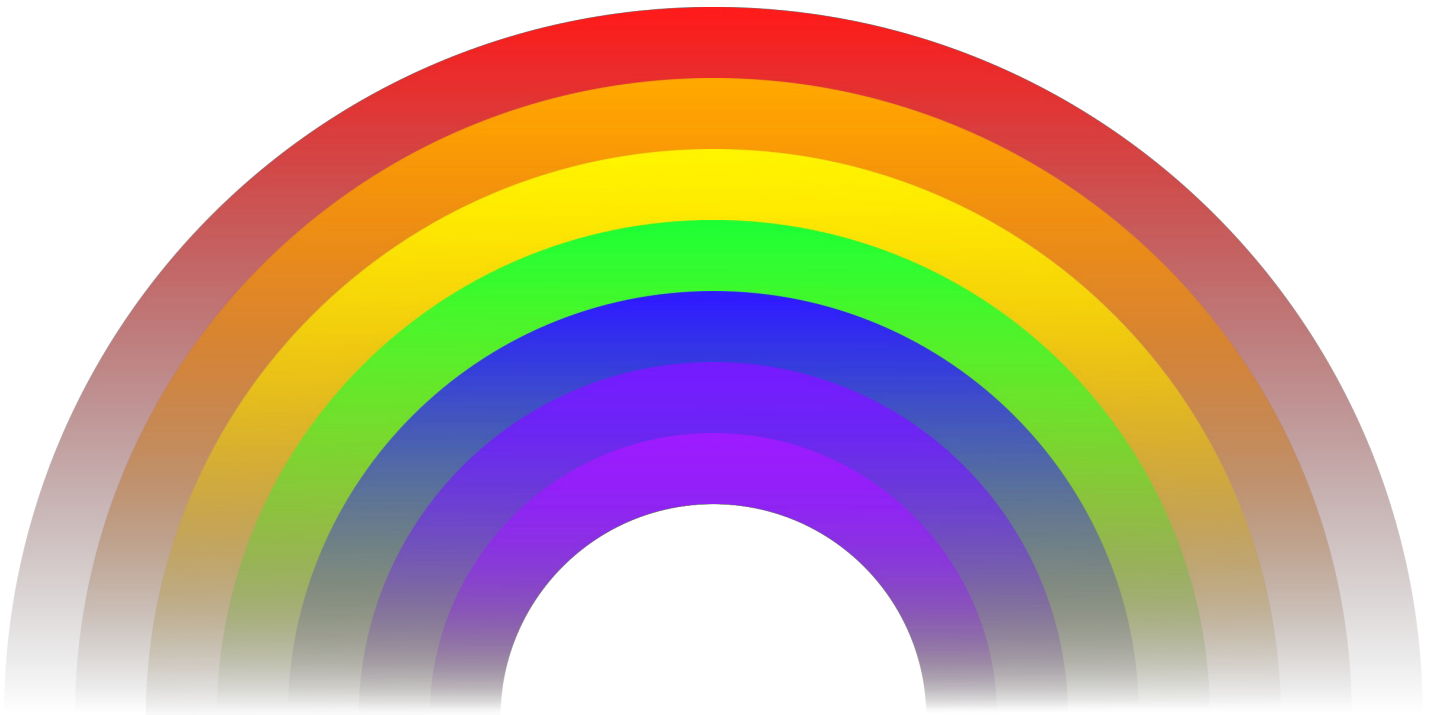
Grays

United
Reformed
Church



A place to pause, and then step forward.

**All activities in
the church building
are suspended until
local restrictions
are Tier 3 or lower.**



Please be assured that you remain in our thoughts and prayers. We will endeavour to do all that we can to remain connected and support each other (both physically and spiritually), in the coming weeks.

Please do not hesitate to get in touch.



URCGrays

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The Church is the people, not the building.

In the New Testament the word translated as church is Ekklesia. It is a noun formed by combining Ek, 'out of' and klesia, 'to call', and means, 'the called out ones' i.e. the people who seek to follow, live, share, and learn from, the way of Christ.