

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

Silent Visitor



May 2021

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. Alf Pryer;
Mr George Semain; Mrs Janet Semain;
Co-opted: 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

So far, so good ...

We have completed the hop and a skip of Step 1, taken Step 2 and, as this issue of SV is circulated, whether we are ready for Step 3 will be under review by the government. Social distancing and mask wearing remain, but the extent of what we are allowed to do is becoming wider. We can start planning visits, day trips, time away and choosing what we would like our new routines to be.

For most of us, prior to the last year, our lives had fallen into familiar routines. We'd have set days for certain activities, places we'd go and people we'd see. Apart from holidays, surprises and unavoidable appointments, life could be fairly predictable. For some of us returning to those routines fills us with a warm and comforting glow, and we can't wait for everything to be exactly as it was before. For others the break from routines has, within the constraints of restrictions, opened up a breadth of new opportunities and interests.

Whatever we feel, the lessening and removal of restrictions changes things. To greater and lesser extents, each of us has been changed by this pandemic. Our circumstances, priorities, interests and preferences have all been affected.

So where do we, as Grays URC, go from here?

On one hand it would be incredibly consoling if, by the autumn, everything that was in place before this time last year was seamlessly reinstated. However much we would wish that, it is impossible. We are not in the same place, and we are not the same fellowship as we were then.

We are now in a period of transition. As restrictions lessen we face choices. At the same time, we have both the pattern that went before and also a blank piece of paper. We can choose what we cut and paste from before, what to tweak, what to try in a different way, and what new things to explore. Change is inevitable, but in the coming weeks and months we have the opportunity to explore, experiment and decide what our new 'normal' will be going forward.

With Christ as our guide, trusting in the Spirit, let us step forward in faith towards God's future.

With every blessing, *Rev'd David R. Coaker*

Where we start from ...

Congregations each have their own histories, stories, personalities, and are shaped by their localities, events and the people who have journeyed together within them. As people are involved in them they will also be viewed through different perspectives, preferences, and interpretations. Written church histories often try to draw together this complexity into a single narrative which can be factual, but tend to leave whole chapters to be read between the lines.

Congregations also accumulate a whole storage unit full of baggage under the heading of 'how we do things'. Such baggage is given the weight of Tradition, but often its roots can be found in the whims, preferences or circumstances that faced our forebears in simply trying to get the job done.

The roles people have performed can take on a legendary status which, quite rightly, gives a great sense of foreboding to any who are encouraged to succeed them. Whilst we are thankful for those who have been members, elders, deacons, treasurers, and church secretaries before us, it will help us to better comprehend the tasks by first considering the minimum requirements.

As part of the United Reformed Church we have resources to draw upon. Our denomination's website has a whole host of information leaflets (<https://urc.org.uk/church-info-guides.html>) and early versions were the starting point for our own on membership and eldership. (They used to live on the table in the entrance to the worship space - copies can be made available to you?)

As well as definitions of particular roles our denomination gives us a structure for how we organize ourselves. This is the Basis of Union, which defines what it means to be the United Reformed Church (<https://urc.org.uk/the-urc-manual>).

So as preparation for us reforming ourselves as Grays URC, you are warmly invited to reflect upon the composition and functions of the URC Church and Elders' Meetings, in an abbreviated form:

The Church Meeting shall consist of those persons who have been admitted to the full privileges and responsibilities of membership of the URC. Others may attend and speak, but are not eligible to vote. They shall meet at least once a quarter.

The members have the opportunity, through discussion, responsible decision and care for one another, to strengthen each other's faith and to foster the life, work and mission of the Church. Functions:

- (i) to further the Church's mission in the locality;
- (ii) to develop local ecumenical relationships;
- (iii) to further compassionate ministry in the locality and the world;
- (iv) to consider and support the wider work of the Church;
- (v) to consider public questions in relation to the Christian faith;
- (vi) to bring concerns for consideration by the elders' meeting and wider councils of the church.
- (vii) to call a minister;
- (viii) to elect elders and officers, determining their number and period of service, and representatives to wider councils;
- (ix) to admit and transfer members, to maintain standards of membership, and to suspend or remove names from the membership roll, always on advice from the elders' meeting;
- (x) to consider, always on advice from the elders' meeting, any application for recognition as a candidate for ministry;
- (xi) to adopt financial reports;
- (xii) to receive reports and proposals from the elders' meeting, synod and General Assembly and to authorise appropriate action;
- (xiii) on the recommendation of the elders to make or provide for the making of arrangements for the proper maintenance of buildings and the general oversight of all financial responsibilities.
- (xiv) to do such other things as may be necessary in pursuance of its responsibility for the common life of the Church.

The elders' meeting shall exercise oversight of the spiritual life of the congregation. The elders' meeting shall serve the congregation and by its relation to the wider councils of the URC represent the whole Church to the local Church. Functions:

- (i) to foster in the congregation concern for witness and service to the community, evangelism at home and abroad, Christian education, ecumenical action, local inter-church relations and the wider responsibilities of the whole Church;
- (ii) to see that public worship is regularly offered, the sacraments are duly administered, and to promote the welfare of the congregation;
- (iii) to ensure pastoral care of the congregation;
- (iv) to nominate from among its members a Church secretary (or secretaries), to be elected by the Church Meeting, to serve both the Church Meeting and the elders' meeting;
- (v) to arrange for pulpit supply in a vacancy;
- (vi) to keep the roll of members, lists of names of adherents and children attached to the congregation, and consulting with the Church Meeting maintain standards of membership and advise on the admission of members on profession of faith and by transfer, on the suspension of members, and on removal from the roll;
- (vii) to be responsible for the institution and oversight of work among children and young people and of all organisations within the congregation;
- (viii) to call for the election of elders and advise on the number required;
- (ix) to consider the suitability of any applicant for recognition as a candidate for the ministry or for service as a CRCW and to advise the Church Meeting about its recommendation to the synod;
- (x) to recommend to the Church Meeting arrangements for the proper maintenance of buildings and the general oversight of all the financial responsibilities of the Local Church;
- (xi) to act on behalf of the Church Meeting and bring concerns to the wider councils of the United Reformed Church;
- (xii) to do such other things as may be necessary in pursuance of its responsibility for the common life of the Church.

- How does this correspond to your memories of eldership or church meetings?
- Which took up most of the effort / time?
- Did any never seem to come up?

- What should our priorities be?
- Did how we used to do things, enhance or constrain our efforts?
- What could we do differently to improve things?

Zooming from your telephone

If you would like to join in our coffee mornings or worship using your telephone you can do so.

At the appropriate time you will need to dial a London number and then be ready to enter some further numbers when prompted.

Wednesday coffee mornings – from 10.30am

Dial **0 2 0 3 4 8 1 5 2 3 7** (*ignore spaces*)

When prompted enter meeting ID: **7 9 2 7 9 6 0 9 7 0 4 #**

When asked to enter participant ID press **#** to skip

When prompted enter meeting passcode: **4 8 7 9 9 4 #**

Zoom worship – as advertised

Dial **0 2 0 3 4 8 1 5 2 3 7**

When prompted enter meeting ID: **7 7 1 4 9 1 4 0 7 8 5 #**

When asked to enter participant ID press **#** to skip

When prompted enter meeting passcode: **7 2 1 5 1 9 #**

Then the host will enable you to join and you'll be able to hear everyone and contribute to the conversation.

They'll also run through the names of everyone who is there as you won't be able to see them.

This is all new to us, so please be prepared for some teething problems and to learn as we go.

Reopening for Worship

Family Worship

Sunday 16th May

between 10.15 – 11.15 am

Sunday 20th June

between 10.15 – 11.15 am

Sunday 18th July

between 10.15 – 11.15 am

Young Families

Sunday 2nd May

between 9.30 – 10.15 am

Sunday 6th June

between 9.30 – 10.15 am

Sunday 4th July

between 9.30 – 10.15 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.

Zoom Worship

Sunday 2nd May

between 11.00 – 11.45 am

Sunday 6th June

between 11.00 – 11.45 am

Sunday 4th July

between 11.00 – 11.45 am

Join with your computer:

<https://us04web.zoom.us/j/77149140785?pwd=NGI4aGVsbVBZVnNqb0U0d1JBRFVZZz09>

Meeting ID: **771 4914 0785** Passcode: **zpxN3e**

Join with your telephone: Dial **0 2 0 3 4 8 1 5 2 3 7**

When prompted enter meeting ID: **7 7 1 4 9 1 4 0 7 8 5 #**

When asked to enter participant ID press **#** to skip

When prompted enter meeting passcode: **7 2 1 5 1 9 #**

Financial Report

This month has been a bit easier financially, due to receipt of the interim insurance payment of £8,000 and the receipt of the Gift Aid return of £3,000 from HMRC. This means that in the short term I will not have to sell any more investments. I will have to submit another detailed claim form to the insurers when Covid is finally over, to cover the period from 1/1/2021 to the date of reopening of our premises to hirers again.

As reported in Silent Visitor the church accounts have now been audited by Steve Morgan, the Scout District Treasurer. Steve made some constructive comments regarding the presentation of the accounts for auditing purposes going forward.

I am glad to report that after discussions, Brookes Accountancy have taken these comments on board, and future accounts will reflect these changes, which will give more detail on both income and expenditure for the auditor, and indeed anyone else who would like to see them. They will however, not be presented to ACM, a summary of the year end accounts, as in previous years, will be presented to ACM.

This is the first year of using an external company to help prepare the year end accounts, and so far I am very pleased with the way things are progressing with Brookes Accountancy. It has meant a few meetings, discussions and phone calls between myself and Tammy at Brookes in order to establish how best to present the accounts in the future. I am sure that this time has been well spent, and will make the process of compiling the annual church accounts easier and more accurate in future years.

Finally, as always, my usual and heartfelt thanks to all those you continue to support the church financially each month. I endeavour always to ensure that any money spent is spent wisely.

Alan

HANS KÜNG (1928 – 2021)

One of the greatest theologians of our time (in my opinion), died last month. His name was Hans Küng, a Roman Catholic priest. He was Swiss, the oldest of seven siblings. His father managed a shoe store. He studied philosophy and theology and was ordained in 1954, having said his first Mass to the Swiss Guard in St. Peter's Basilica. He taught and preached in several countries including much time in Germany.

Shortly after one of his earlier books (he had about 50 titles to his name), a veteran newsperson writing for the National Catholic Reporter, reported that the Holy Office opened a secret file on him. The Roman church did not like where he was going. No wonder! In the late 1960s, he became the first major Catholic theologian since the late 19th century to publicly reject the doctrine of papal infallibility. So the pope might occasionally be wrong. The Vatican objected to some other writings of his. He had criticised the so called need for Catholic priests to be celibate. More than that, he had the audacity to want to open the clergy to women! Certain Roman Catholic practices, he said, contradicted the gospel. So on 18th December 1979, he was stripped of his license to teach as a Catholic theologian, causing a thousand German students to hold a candlelight vigil in protest. Küng described this as his personal experience of the inquisition, even though he was criticised by many colleague priests.

In order to maintain his teaching status, the University of Tübingen removed the institute in which he taught, along with his professorship, outside the Catholic Faculty's jurisdiction. He was thus able to continue teaching ecumenical theology until he retired in 1996.

The world religions interested Küng and he attempted to describe what they all had in common rather than what separates them. He had a vision of a global ethic. Religious and spiritual leaders from around the world signed a declaration document of his, called, "Towards a Global Ethic".

Notwithstanding much positive publicity surrounding Pope John Paul II, Küng objected to his proposed beatification, his objection being that John Paul was an authoritarian pontiff who suppressed the rights of both women and theologians, a very bold statement to make in the then current circumstances. Janet and I knew the public feeling for that pope, having been down to the basement of St. Peter's where his body lay awaiting his beatification. On over a dozen occasions Pope John Paul

had refused to meet Hans. He had a better, although still critical relationship with Pope Benedict XVI, who, he said, was living intellectually in the middle ages.

In 2011, he was a signatory of Church 2011, "The Need for a New Beginning", a German language memorandum promulgated by Catholic theology professors demanding reform of the Roman Catholic Church.

Küng died on 6 April 2021 at the age of 93, remaining a priest to the end. One Catholic journal said that with his death disappeared a great figure of the last century who made us reflect on the Catholic Church, on churches, on society and its culture. A colleague said that his was the strongest voice for reform in the Catholic Church during the last 60 years. He felt Küng's writings were so prolific that he couldn't think of anyone who was ever able to read all that he had written.

For my own part, one of his books gracing my bookshelves for the last 30 years, "Does God Exist?", probably contains so much good theology that if I were to be the subject of "Desert Island Discs", would be the book I would want with me!

George Semain





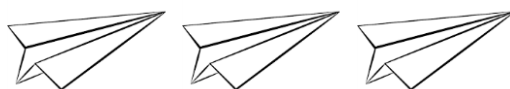
Foodbank News

taken from manager Peter Newall's messages

Times continue to be interesting for the Thurrock Foodbank. They are working, as ever, with many other agencies and organisations to support people in crisis, with the van crew using the splendid new van for collections and deliveries. This very dedicated and hard-working crew deal patiently with delays, mis-directions and unexpected additional tasks.

The changing world of Foodbanks entails not only help for those who are struggling to provide food for themselves, but also working in partnership with other agencies, through the Thurrock Council Local Area Coordinators to help improve their living conditions. Recent additional donations included bedding items for a shop which closed down.

All donations are welcome, but current shortages include tinned fruit, sponge puddings and long-life milk.



Memories of Pentecost Past

Almost twenty years ago, my welcome to my year 7 tutor group one Monday morning was "I wonder if you'll guess what I did in church yesterday? We made paper airplanes and flew them. It was really fun". In a Catholic school, I had the reaction I wanted from my lovely children, gasps of horror.

It took them a while, after I asked them to think really hard, and eventually the light dawned.

I was pleased, and probably a little relieved, to hear a very clear response: "It was Pentecost yesterday, Mrs Barcz. We can't see the power of the Holy Spirit, and we can't see the air supporting the plane".

Job done. (And yes, I did remember to thank our Minister)

May 23 is your date with the Holy Spirit this year.

Elaine



Christian Aid Week

May 10-16

Please don't let it pass you by



Answers to Last Month's Quiz

Easter Trivia Quiz:

1. Bread;
2. Chile;
3. With nails through his hands and feet;
4. Three;
5. Hats;
6. Tax Collector;
7. Cut off his right ear;
8. Charles Wesley

Answers to Anagrams:

1. Thumper;
2. Bugs Bunny;
3. Peter Rabbit;
4. Bucky O'Hare;
5. The White Rabbit;
6. Br'er Rabbit;
7. The Easter Bunny;
8. Roger Rabbit;
9. Harvey;
10. The March Hare



Mark, who spoke on the Zoom training day, pointed out
Dementia Awareness Week
May 17-23

Churches in Cuba

The Central America message made me think of Cuba, still a one-party regime.

Amy and I were first there in 2006, aware that church attendance had been swept away, but on our travels we occasionally saw minute chapels, Baptist and Methodist mostly, on the hillsides. We were struck by the very shiny, very large Russian Orthodox church which was being erected in Havana, for tourists, we were told, but we were also aware that the Cubans did not forget their own heritage. When we later stayed in a (crumbling) art deco hotel whose rooms had not just numbers but names of Old Testament women. "Oh yes" came the reply to my question. The waiter explained "This was once the Jewish quarter. I'm not Jewish, but she is, over there, and so is that guy". No political correctness, just facts!

Eight years later, Good Friday saw us in the centre of a small town centre with a beautifully cared-for Baptist church, and further up the road a new building packed with people singing loudly, drowning the hustle and bustle outside.

Things have moved on even further now. Two years ago, I was in a tiny village, where I visited a school and a workshop for the disabled. The small workshop was minimal and dilapidated, but over the road a building a little like the Methodist Church in Linford was going up. It was a new church, very much approved by the regime, as it was to have a vital secondary function. Every Cuban community, however small, must have a hurricane shelter, which could be the most solid private home, or, in the case of Baracoa, which was heavily damaged in a hurricane which devastated Haiti, the 'Che Guevara' Chocolate Factory. No-one had died in Cuba, as the system worked so well, and the solid build of the church I saw was to be a physical as well as a spiritual refuge.

A couple of days later Berne told our waitress he had missed her. (He tends to do the lead-in, then sits back for me to continue in Spanish). Where had she been? First, she was apologetic, saying she had only one day a week free. Then she told us she had been to a concert. It was a Christian concert, which her husband had attended with her, for the first time. Then came an echo from 2006. "I have a Bible in my locker. She has too, and my friend over there". Good News.

Elaine Barcz

Moving Stories

Central America

In Jinotega, 200 coffee farmers have begun, through the support of Soppexcca, to grow cocoa. The project is being supported by Commitment for Life through Christian Aid, and has been running for five years.

At first, the farmers' attempts to use seeds for growing the cocoa failed. But now farmers source 'grafted' plants. Soppexcca offers one-to-one training for the farmers on how to grow and harvest cocoa: tools, pruning, harvest, fertilisers and the use of saplings to eventually offer shade for the coffee and cocoa plants. The Soppexcca technicians also teach about food security (how to grow food) and good environmental practices.

Technicians like Lilliam also go into schools. They help set up school vegetable gardens and teach about climate change. They introduce practices to help protect against changing weather patterns. Examples include the planting of trees for shade, and green barriers (hedges) planted along steep banks to prevent the heavy rains washing away the soil's nutrients. They also promote the use of natural fertilisers instead of harsh chemicals.

In addition, Lilliam offers workshops to promote gender equality and educate men about domestic violence. They present a report to the cooperative which is then sent to Soppexcca HQ every three months. They are the bridge between farmers, the cooperative and the technicians and Soppexcca.

It is important to state that forest/jungle **cannot** be cleared to make way for new cocoa plantations. Commitment for Life is grateful to the skilled and dedicated workers like Lilliam.

Photo: Esme Allen - Lilliam, a Soppexcca technician, teaching a class about climate change in Santa Rosa school.



Our best chance of ending this pandemic is to ensure that everyone, everywhere has access to COVID-19 vaccines, tests and treatments. But pharmaceutical monopolies and patents threaten everyone as no-one is safe until everyone is safe.

People from around the world are calling for a #PeoplesVaccine – freely available to everyone, everywhere. Learn more here

<https://peoplesvaccine.org>

Just another look at one of the readings chosen by Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, for his funeral. This version is from the NRSV.



Ecclesiasticus 43 verses 11-26

Look at the rainbow, and praise him who made it; it is exceedingly beautiful in its brightness. It encircles the sky with its glorious arc; the hands of the Most High have stretched it out.

By his command he sends the driving snow and speeds the lightnings of his judgement. Therefore the storehouses are opened and the clouds fly out like birds. In his majesty he gives the clouds their strength, and the hailstones are broken in pieces.

The voice of his thunder rebukes the earth; when he appears, the mountains shake. At his will the south wind blows, so do the storm from the north and the whirlwind.

He scatters the snow like birds flying down, and its descent is like locusts alighting. The eye is dazzled by the beauty of its whiteness, and the mind is amazed as it falls. He pours frost over the earth like salt, and icicles form like pointed thorns.

The cold north wind blows, and ice freezes on the water; it settles on every pool of water, and the water puts it on like a breastplate. He consumes the mountains and burns up the wilderness, and withers the tender grass like fire. A mist quickly heals all things; the falling dew gives refreshment from the heat.

By his plan he stilled the deep and planted islands on it. Those who sail the sea tell of its dangers, and we marvel at what we hear. In it are strange and marvellous creatures, all kinds of living things, and huge sea-monsters.

Because of him each of his messengers succeeds, and by his word all things hold together.