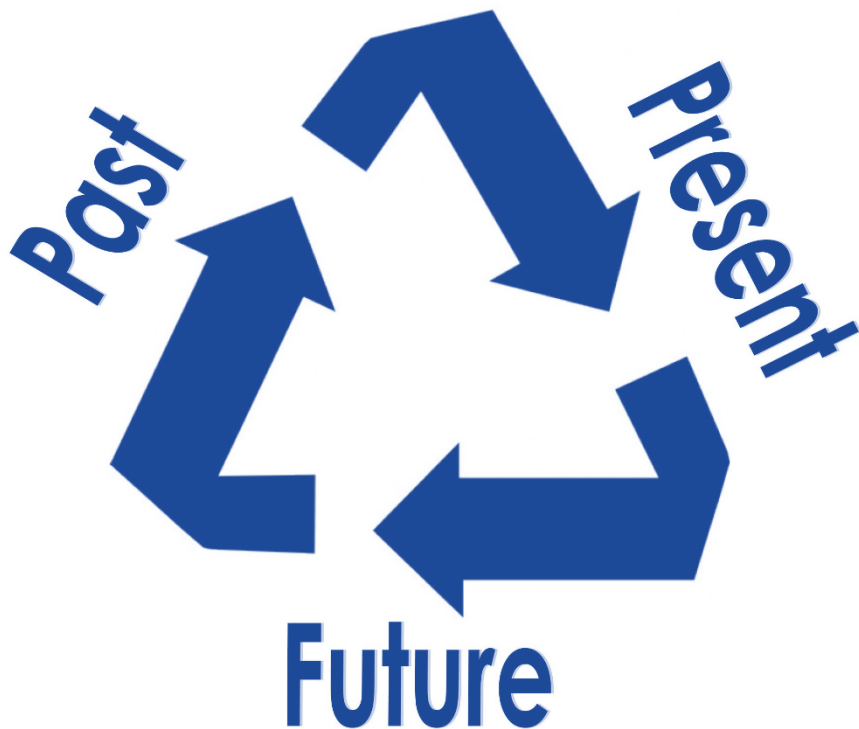
 URCGrays  
[www.graysurc.org.uk](http://www.graysurc.org.uk)

Minister: Rev'd David Coaker  
07378 348191  
[drcoaker@gmail.com](mailto:drcoaker@gmail.com)

# Silent Visitor



**October 2021**

# Coming Together

**Grays URC, Bradleigh Avenue, RM17 5XD**

**10.30 - 12noon, Sun 7<sup>th</sup> November**

The last couple of years have not been easy for anyone.

Most of us will have mixed emotions when we look back.

**Covid-19 has not left us but, as its effects lessen, we offer an invitation to come together to mark its impact on our lives.**

We intend to hold together grief and thanksgiving, and ask for contributions about loved ones who died or people who helped you through (a digital image and some words (50-500)).

If you could please register to help us plan how to structure the time:

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/coming-together-tickets-171141126717>

## Grays United Reformed Church - Worship Plan

Date	Lead by	Time	Notes
03.10.21	David Coaker	9.30am	Young Families
	David Coaker	10.30am	'Harvest'
10.10.21	David Coaker	10.30am	Church Meeting
17.10.21	Alf Pryer	10.30am	
24.10.21	Denise Beckley	10.30am	
31.10.21	Alf Pryer	10.30am	Communion
07.11.21	David Coaker	9.30am	Young Families
	David Coaker	10.30am	Coming Together
14.11.21	David Coaker	10.30am	Remembrance Parade
21.11.21	David Coaker	10.30am	Communion Church Meeting

**Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> October** – our worship will include collections of non-perishable goods for the Refuge and money for Christians Against Poverty

**Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> October** – we will gather in worship as church meeting to mainly consider the papers included here about church meetings, but also other aspects of our life together.

**November SV** - If you could please email or phone through your contributions for the Nov SV by **Friday 29<sup>th</sup> Oct** to David.

**Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> November** – we are inviting the community to mark the impact on Covid-19 – see poster.

**Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> November – Remembrance Sunday** – we welcome back our Scouts and Guides as together we remember past and current conflicts, honour those who suffered, and pray for peace.

**Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> November** – we will hopefully be able to respond to our discussions from the 10<sup>th</sup> Oct and try a new format for gathering for worship and church meeting.

# **A place to pause, and then step forward**

In case you've forgotten, this is the tag line we agreed for our church logo. It is apt as Church life, and life in general, has mainly been on pause for the last couple of years and now, with varying levels of confidence, we are stepping forward.

Grays URC is a place. We can point to it on a map and give directions for how to get there. But it is also, and more importantly, the people who gather there, relate to one another, and create the atmosphere that welcomes others through its doors. The people who name Grays URC as their place, also hold within them the memories of past events, decisions, and those who have died. Those memories make up the breadth of human experience and some are remembered fondly, at times painfully, occasionally awkwardly, or in a whole variety of other ways. It is our place, passed on to us by those that went before, and held in trust for those who will come after us. We owe obligations to the past, to the future, but mainly to God as we live Christ's way as Church.

As such we seek to create an atmosphere in this place for everyone to be able to pause. To take a metaphorical, or actual, deep, considered breath in the midst of life and relax, re-centre, and reflect in an open, inclusive and accepting place. Creating this atmosphere has to be our priority. We owe that to ourselves, so that we may ground ourselves in God, but also to better create an honest and attractive place for others to join us. Only after this do we move to the end of the tag-line.

In the pause, in the space where we are centred in God, is where we discern forward steps. We step, we shift from the stability of both feet being on the floor and risk becoming unbalanced as we lift one leg and step forward. A step of faith. A step forward, towards God's future and not a nostalgic past.

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



The calendar on my phone had been reminding me in vain for seventeen months that 'Open the Book' (a Bible Society initiative) required action each Monday morning, until at last we were back in Woodside School on September 6.

There we were, a small but happy band of retirees, invited once a week to read a Bible story, sometimes acting it in token outfits of tunics and scarves. There are a few children's garments too, so no doubt in a few weeks we'll be recruiting some brothers for Joseph.

We've been cheerily greeted at the gate, and recently, as we left a small boy who was arriving late exclaimed "Oh no, is it over?"

Of course the routine has differed. All adults wear masks when not speaking directly to the children, and just three classes of one year group are seated in the hall, but the Head has broadcast assemblies to all the classes since they have been back in school, so we are using a fixed mic and a radio mic (handy for the voice of God from behind the piano). Our movements are limited by the span of the camera, but on the first week we had a little scenery, and some interaction between Eve and the snake. It's quite a while since we last did that story, when the snake was a couple of green stripy socks. I had since then acquired an IKEA python puppet, which did the job very well, to my delight.

Some of the stories over the three-year span are more obscure, but when we told the tale of Noah's Ark, with the

children making pitter patter rain noises (their participation is always very effective). Mr Caines, the Head, took a moment to remind the children about the forthcoming climate conference and recent flooding events. They fly the flag as an eco-school. We are so fortunate to have such an opportunity.

**Elaine B**

Just to say **THANK YOU**, (to Denise and all the members) for the gift for our wedding anniversary. It was a great surprise, and very welcome. It was a jigsaw puzzle.

**Alf & Margaret**

## **Refreshments**

We are tentatively restarting refreshments on a Sunday morning. On the first Sunday of the month they will be at 10.15am, shared with members of the young family's service, and following the 10.30am service other Sundays when possible.

Our thanks to Beryl, Rita, Inger and Bill for taking this forward.



Progress continues with the exciting extension to foodbank premises, and training for Pathfinder foodbank status is going well. There is a great sense of community amongst all the volunteers.

Currently deficiencies include: Cooking Sauces; Pasta sauces; Long Life Milk; Sponge Puddings; Jam

Do check the 'Thurrock foodbank' Facebook page and website [Thurrock.foodbank.co.uk](http://Thurrock.foodbank.co.uk), and remember financial donations are always welcome.

# Membership?

A central part of who we are as a United Reformed Church is membership. It is members who gather together to make decisions affecting our life together. It is members who call their fellows to serve as elders. It is members who decide who will come alongside them as a minister. It is elders, members called to serve, who represent the local to the wider URC.

But what does membership mean to us? In the day-to-day life of our congregation, the meat on the idealistic bones of the Basis of Union if you will, what does it boil down to?

Is it turning up on a Sunday? Maybe, but I've met devoted members who are housebound and folk who attend at other times who I can't see why they couldn't become members. Is it contributing to the fellowship? Maybe, but we all have different constraints on our time and finances and can serve God's Kingdom beyond church walls. (In the past the number of members was used to calculate the local contribution to the URC (M&M), now the calculation uses the total number attending. So not being a member doesn't 'save' the church money.) Is it believing certain things? Maybe, some congregations will be very specific about what members should think about certain issues or church doctrine, but I've always been more interested in exploring the right questions than enforcing a specific set of opinions.

In practise membership does revolve around Sunday morning. It is there that we invite people to think about membership, hold meetings where we decide to invite them to be members, and at times question whether they still want be members if we haven't seen them for a while. Are we limiting our life together by centring membership around Sunday morning? How could we expand what it means to be a member?

Part of becoming a URC member is agreeing to a set of declarations. They are very important words that define us as part of the universal Church, but they are not straightforward.

My sense is that many of us will have said them because we were expected to, and possibly the depth, breadth, and the personal meaning of them only came later or is still evolving. Whole libraries have been written teasing out the meaning of the words, but for me the essence of them is acknowledging God's presence, committing to following Christ's example, and to live in community within the congregation. Even this simplification opens up many lines of conversation but, if nothing else, take from this that there is space to explore, interpret and make the words your own. Also note the three-word prayer that follows the second reply, 'with God's help':

N, do you confess anew your faith and trust in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, maker of heaven and earth, giver of life, redeemer of the world? **I do.**

Do you promise to continue in the worship and fellowship of the Church in this congregation, accepting the gift and cost of following Christ, and proclaiming by word and action the good news of God in Christ? **I do, with God's help.**

The membership then responds with a promise and welcome. In these words, the existing members reaffirm their own promises and declare what congregational life should be like:

In welcoming N as a fellow-member in the life of this church, do you promise your friendship in the Lord, and will you give her/him your support in prayer and service, so that she/he, with us, may continue to grow in the knowledge and love of God and witness to Jesus Christ our risen Lord?

**We do, and with God's help, we will. In the name of Christ we welcome you. May we grow together in unity, and be built up into the body of Christ in love, to the glory of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.**

The membership is promising to live together in such a way that is mutually supportive, loving, and friendly. Holding each other in prayer. Seeking the good for each other. Being open to learning more about God, how to express God's love, and the Way of Christ, through each other. Relying upon God to see equal value in each other to be united in love and service



to the glory of God. How would our life together, let alone the nature of our church meetings, be transformed if our reality became even slightly in tune with this way of being?

Too many congregations never really discuss crucial issues or situations together. They are left to fester, are ignored, or if faced too often lead to division and separation.

We have fallen into the trap of treating URC membership like a club. We decide we want to join, go through the expected process, pay our dues, and want to be on the winning side in any decisions. The URC is not a democracy. We gather together, through prayer and discussion, to discern the will of God. What does trying to get our own way have to do with this? Church life should be where we can speak honestly, compassionately and openly together, and then come to some sort of consensus about the way forward. It shouldn't be the place where we duck issues, ignore elephants in the worship space, gloss over concerns, or place our personal opinions above God's Spirit moving within the membership.

How can we transform our life together? We all have our part in the shared history of Grays URC and new comers will have had their own experiences, encounters, arguments and misunderstandings in other places. We all have our own, and shared, baggage. But wouldn't it be a relief if we set some of it down? If we made a conscious effort to move on, to forgive, and try to behave as if we're meeting for the first time in the way our calling as members of the URC urges us?

Denial is not a healthy approach, and we may not be ready for some very real conversations, but we can take some little steps along the way. We may also not be aware of any hurt we have caused, so we should try to be open to that possibility.

We can turn a new page as we rediscover church life post-Covid and it is a great opportunity for renewal. I pray that we will have the trust, compassion and courage to walk this path.

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

# Financial Update

Further to church meeting, I have been asked to confirm my thoughts on the current giving by the church to its chosen charity.

Due to various reasons, not least the method of collections during Covid, the amount of money collected specifically for the church's chosen charity has dwindled to almost nothing. I would like to rectify this situation.

My idea is to calculate how much is given each year by the congregation, and then donate a percentage of this at the end of the year to the chosen charity.

At the moment the total congregation giving is approximately £12,000 per annum. If we, as a church, gave 5% of this to our chosen charity, it would mean we donated around £600 per annum. This equates broadly to the amount donated pre-covid.

Obviously, this percentage can be changed, depending on circumstances. The greater the percentage, the greater the amount donated. I would suggest that we start with 5% and see how we get on.

Please give this matter some thought, so that a decision can be made before the end of the year. Thank you.

As for the money to be spent on overdue works required around the church premises, I am confident that we have sufficient funds and regular income to meet the costs involved. We cannot keep putting off spending money on essential works; it only makes things more difficult (and expensive) in the future.

Also, we are blessed with having some worthy and long term hirers making full use of the wonderful premises we have.

If anyone has a question or query regarding finances, please let me know and I will do my best to answer.

**Alan.**

# Lettings Update

While at last church services have returned on a regular basis, and the Little Roos Preschool is going from strength to strength in the Annex, there is plenty more activity on the premises.

Weight Watchers are here on Wednesdays, and the dancing school too, while on Monday there is a fitness class.

Den's Playden for carers and children is thriving on Tuesday mornings, with Mature Movers in the afternoons.

The Wednesday morning Community Cafe has started well, with high numbers. We look forward to continued success, and thank the refreshment providers and suppliers of cake.

The church continues to host blood donation sessions, and has been available for the Thurrock adoption support group and also Thurrock SEND (Special Needs and Disability).

Let us not forget the care and concern of the Friday evening prayer group.

**Elaine B**

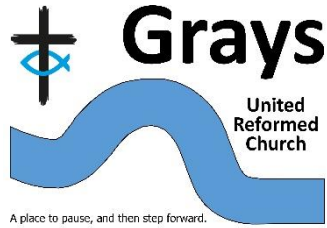


# **Church Meeting update:**

**Re-opening for Worship:** (Meet: Fri 15th Oct, 10-12noon)

- Return to 1 hour i.e. 5 hymns approx.
- Hymn books – left on table for people to collect
- Ventilation – phase out as weather gets colder
- Track & Trace – stop doing paperwork, but if you do contract Covid please let David know so this can be shared with the congregation and pass on his contact details if you're asked by contact tracers.
- Readings - volunteers on arrival. For specific Sundays get in touch with the leader of worship beforehand.
- Flowers: Sign up for particular Sundays, otherwise we will have plants or artificial flowers.
- Communion first Sunday of the month at 10.30am (volunteers – see rota)
- We should invite guest speakers
- 3rd Oct – tinned goods for Refuge and retiring collection for Christians Against Poverty. 'Harvest'
- 7th Nov – Coming Together – community post-Covid thanksgiving (seeking to hold together grief, thanksgiving and relief.) Invite photos of loved ones to include as a memorial. (Including members as part of wider event)
  - Other memorial services upon requests from families
- Refreshments - Rita, Beryl Inger and Bill are going to explore a way forward.
- Christmas Day on a Saturday, so no service on 25<sup>th</sup> and then Sunday service on 26th Dec
- Tilbury Band / Carol service on either – 5th, 12th or 19th
- Do we want a Watchnight service on Christmas Eve?
- Young Families Christmas Eve afternoon (or shift to week before at start of school holiday)?

The following is a diagram about church life and worship →



Pie Lunch  
Tuesday Monthly

People never been to church  
before



Notes: need to be more openly, friendly,  
approachable, warmly, to change with society.

Monday  
Bowl Club

Media  
Facebook  
Website  
Silent Visitor

Tuesday  
Dens Play Den  
Mature Movers

Young Family Service  
1<sup>st</sup> Month 9.30am

Events

**Sunday Worship**  
10.30am

Dementia friendly cafe

Friday Prayer Group

Bible Study

Baptism  
Wedding  
Funeral

Tilbury Band  
Christmas

Uniform  
Scouts  
Clubs  
Girl Guide

Fellowship

Be  
yourself

Show  
& Tell

Style  
All Age Service  
Family Service  
Parade Service  
Holy Communion  
Traditional

Little Roo  
Playschool

Rooms Hire



# Church Meetings

The following is a paper shared by George with elders in March, a response to it by Kee, and then some questions for reflection and discussion at our church meeting in October.

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On a number of occasions, when the life of our church has been under discussion, suggestions have been made regarding the future forms of worship and changes that might be made. The tendency has been for such discussions to have a bearing on how the number of members in the congregation might be increased. However, that is only one aspect of church life, and not the only one, to relate to how we might move forward.

Another, and perhaps not less important, aspect is to do with Church Meetings. The importance of this council of the church may be confirmed when looking at its functions as set out in The Manual of the URC which include the following:

- furthering local mission;
- developing local ecumenical relationships;
- furthering the church's compassionate ministry;
- supporting the wider work of the church;
- considering public questions in relation to the Christian faith;
- considering matters raised by Elders' Meeting and wider councils.

By the very nature of how business arrives at Church Meetings and with time constraints, much of the above functions tend to take second place to the resolution of more mundane business matters such as finance, buildings, lettings etc. Also, the way we have normally conducted Church Meetings means they have taken the shape of formal arrangements with Chair and

Secretary facing the members whose seats have been arranged in rows, often with the most popular being at the rear!

This arrangement does not seem to have been conducive to members' readiness to speak at meetings. Some of those who do speak have shown a certain reticence to stand to address the meeting, preferring to speak from their chairs and being satisfied if the chair, rather than the other members can hear them. It has often been the case that some members have turned to each other asking what the speaker has just said because they could not be heard.

Perhaps this could be changed by the meeting's being arranged in a circle or, preferably, at tables arranged as nearly in a circle as possible so that they can be seen as they speak and not have to stand and speak to the backs of members in front of them. Passing a microphone amongst the members has not been very successful.

If members were able to talk with a cup of tea or coffee in front of them then that would lead to a general air of informality although it is appreciated that that would conflict with the idea that the meeting does not start until after refreshments have ended. The fact that this happens means that meetings start later, a fact that does not please those waiting to get home for Sunday dinner. Lunches before the meeting seem to have been popular and these could lead to the situation above, with the meeting commencing over coffee or tea following the lunch.

The objective of making changes is to encourage more members to attend and take part in the business of the church, which may be another element in their taking part in the wider fellowship. It might encourage those who are not members to take up membership, particularly if they are aware that they are welcome to attend and follow what goes on, being also able to speak if invited. The importance of attending Church Meetings needs to be impressed on the congregation. Over the last year or so when meetings were taking place, the

apologies for absence ranged from 6 (2 meetings); 10 (3 meetings); and 12 (1 meeting), a fairly high proportion of the membership.

These are personal views with which the members may not agree but they could, at least, form the basis for some discussion.

## **George**

I have read through George's document trying to understand and see if there any improvements could be made.

### **The most common problems I see are as follows:**

- The person speaking, not be heard properly by others.
- Seating.
- Attendance
- Length of the meeting.
- Some of people maybe hard of hearing.

### **Solutions already tried out:**

- Moving from the Hall into the Church, still having problem with the Sound. (Hearing loop work ok, if person speak through microphone.)
- Try different seating, but people are still seating further back, complaint about larger seat blocking view.
- The agenda has been streamlined, by the number of questions drop and Chairperson keep on track and time.
- Hard to please everyone.

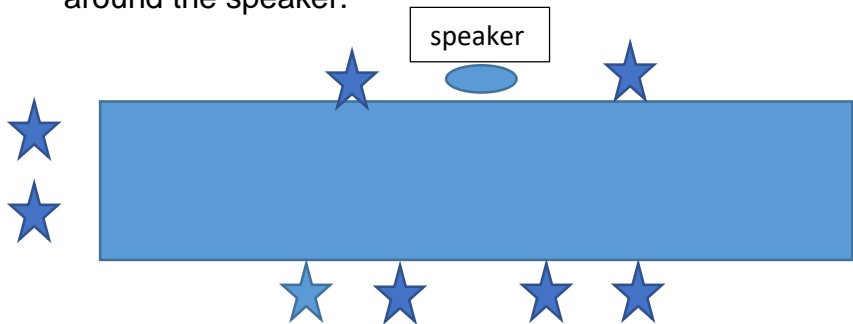
### **Ideas and thoughts:**

- People find it difficult to hear sit at the front.
- Café style – sit around tables - some will not be able see or looking towards the front. (Where is the focus



point looking at the front) Relaying on speaker to talk and listen.

- Curve the rows of seats in and arc.
- Use PowerPoints to make it more understandable.
- Not sure how it would work if all sat around a table setup for 20 people, communicating will be most difficult. Placing the people can't hear in front and around the speaker.



### **Church relationship with community (Before pandemic)**

Messy Church for the younger children and their family, has continue to grow through the years, become very popular, the family have been keeping coming back and bringing their friends as well. Simple fun activities for them to enjoy, and the service with a simple message of God love and family value, plenty of singing and dancing. It is very messy and as life should be.

Tuesday Pie lunch on once a month, has become very popular with family from play den, it's allowing our minster to talk to the families with in the community, to chat over a meal.

This bring to young children service on Sunday first of the month, from messy church the families are attending this service, and it is well attended.

**After pandemic working with community:** Still on-going work in progress, trying to reach out in to community through different approach and ideas, it is finding out which is better suited to needs of the church. (Society and relationship with church has been difficult out of touch with current situation)

**Church Membership:** Need to ask why no new members joining, it is because some of roles within church can be demanding, or it is difficult to make right choices. Maybe the church meeting at the moment maybe putting for new members to join.

**Conclusions:** I still not sure how to improve the church meeting, or making it more productive and engaging for people attending. Will be trying and see what works and what doesn't.

**Kee**

### **Questions for reflection and discussion:**

1. **Timing** – what is the best time for us to meet?
  - a. Is Sunday the only possibility?
  - b. Could we have a mix of regular short Sunday ones and occasional extended ones at another time?
2. **Layout** – how should we arrange ourselves to meet?
  - a. Hall / Worship Space
  - b. Rows / Circle / Around tables
  - c. Refreshments / Lunch
3. **Content** – what should they include?
  - a. How do we seek to ensure church meeting is aware and informed but not overwhelmed or unable to delegate?
  - b. How to we attempt to engage with the actual functions of church meeting (p.4) without ignoring day-to-day concerns or dramatically increasing the duration or number of meetings?

# Dementia Friendly

At our first Community Café we were delighted to welcome 60-70 people for refreshments, cake (and many thanks to all those that donated), chat and to engage with the various agencies / organisations who attended.



It was an incredibly positive time and everyone who filled in a feedback form appreciated coming, would come again, and half of them intend to be there every week.

We were taking a leap of faith with this new activity and it appears that we have tapped into a need in our community.

Our thanks to those who helped welcome and serve everyone.

At our second we had over twenty attend, and we now have a stock of board games, plans for running Dementia Friends Training on 13<sup>th</sup> Oct and exploring Singing for the Brain, and to play bingo in the run up to Christmas.

We could do with some additional helpers, especially if you're willing to open and lock up on the 20<sup>th</sup> or 27<sup>th</sup> Oct?

# Who's Who at Bradleigh Avenue

Minister:	Rev'd David Coaker 07378 348191 drcoaker@gmail.com
Secretary:	Vacant
Treasurer:	Mr Alan Beckley
Elders:	Elders' Meeting temporarily suspended
Organist:	Mr Richard Wade
Facilities Manager:	Mrs Charlotte Webb 0784 3559011 graysurc@gmail.com
Silent Visitor:	Mrs Janet Semain 01375 373532 <a href="mailto:geojan321@sky.com">geojan321@sky.com</a>

