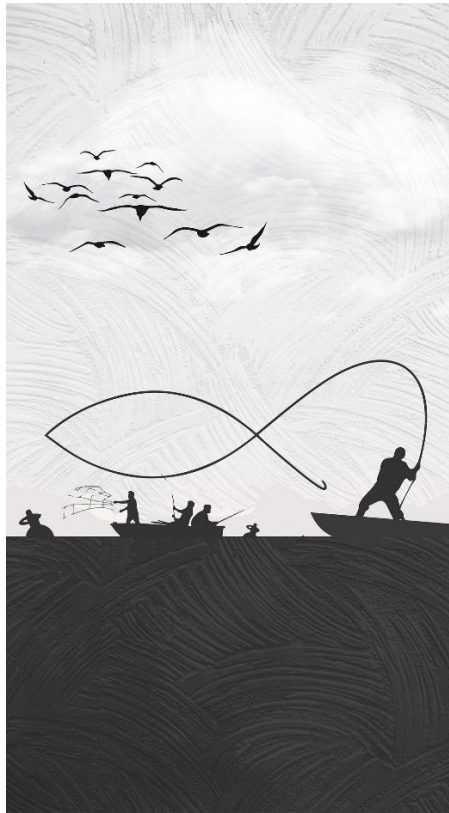
 URCGrays
www.graysurc.org.uk

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

Silent Visitor



February 2022

A WAY THROUGH THE WILDERNESS

During the time of Lent, as we prepare for Easter, we will explore Isaiah 40 and together reflect on how it expresses comfort and wilderness.

Wednesdays 1.00-2.30pm

Embracing Comfort	Stepping Out	Becoming Messengers	Encountering God	Receiving Fresh Strength
2 Mar	9 Mar	16 Mar	23 Mar	30 Mar

Grays United Reformed Church

Bradleigh Avenue, RM17 5XD

When faced with times of crisis or challenge, many turn to self-help for support. But what about Christians - how can we find strength not merely in self-help but in God's help?

A Way through the Wilderness is a five-session course which explores God's promise to comfort us as we struggle through life's wildernesses.

Copies of the books will be available on the worship space table.

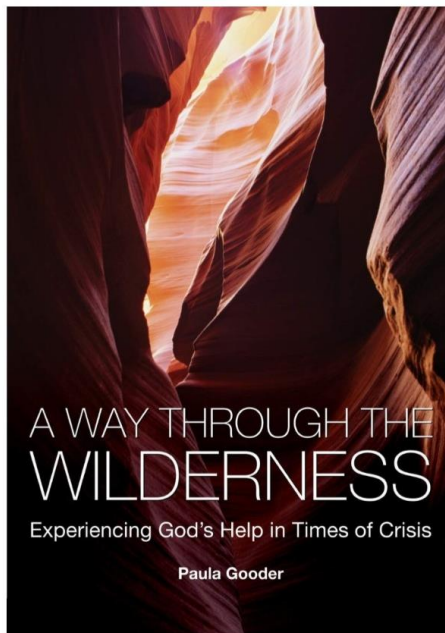
We will begin each session with refreshments and will then work through the material together.

User-friendly, undaunting and profound. The author is an experienced and trustworthy guide on our journey through Lent.

Jane Williams

Paula Gooder is a first-rate teacher of the Bible. This creative, thoughtful and sensitive course will be a rich resource for groups and individuals wanting to explore God's purpose in difficult times.

Graham Tomlin



Grays United Reformed Church - Worship Plan

Date	Lead by	Time	Notes
13.02.22	Alf Pryer	10.30am	
20.02.22	Denise Beckley	10.30am	
27.02.22	George Semain	10.30am	Church Meeting
02.03.22	David Coaker	11.00am	Dementia Friendly
06.03.22	David Coaker	9.30am	Young Families
	David Coaker	10.30am	Communion
13.03.22	Kathryn Taylor	10.30am	
20.03.22	David Coaker	10.30am	Parade
27.03.22	George Semain	10.30am	
03.04.22	David Coaker	9.30am	Young Families
	David Coaker	10.30am	Communion
06.04.22	David Coaker	11.00am	Dementia Friendly
10.04.22	Alf Pryer	10.30am	Palm Sunday
14.04.22	David Coaker	6.30pm	Maundy Thursday Communion
15.04.22	David Coaker	2.00pm	Good Friday

Community Café: Wednesdays between 10am-12noon – all are welcome! (Will not be running **16th Feb**)

Refreshments: there is a signup sheet for those able to organise and help with Sunday morning refreshments on the noticeboard by the worship space door.

Sunday 27th February – following worship we will gather together as church meeting. Papers on table in worship space.

March SV - If you could please email or phone through your contributions for March SV by **Friday 4th March** to David.

Sunday 24th April – following worship we will gather as church meeting for our ACM to review the past year and look ahead to the next. Reports to David by **Friday 1st April** please.

How does the Bible connect to today?

The Bible was written by people living 2-3 thousand years ago and takes us from the dawn of time, to the beginning of recorded history and the rise of empires. Within it are the stories of nations, their wars and achievements, and the stories of individuals and families.

Lots of things have changed since it was written, but at its core are our fellow human beings, our ancestors, with whom we have much in common. Yes, we understand how life works differently now. There are billions more of us, and our perspective reaches to the ends of the earth and into the universe rather than just to our neighbouring village. We have access to much more knowledge, but we are still as haphazard in our application of it and are driven by the same basic desires, and for safety, love, esteem and fulfilment.

The Bible is full of stories of family disputes, selfish choices, farcical situations, anger, hatred, violence; and of forgiveness, sacrificial acts, everyday activity, peace and love. These we can also see played out all around us. In our soaps and on the news, in our families and on our streets. People are people, whether they lived 2-3 thousand years ago or are from a different part of the world. We have much in common whatever our geography or place in history. So for me the Bible is important because it connects me to my fellow human beings. As they struggled for meaning and to share their stories, they have given me a gift to help me. Our ancestors, inspired by God, wrote down these words and they were valued by the community that shared them.

Over time texts from different communities came together, the Torah came into being (the first five books of the Bible), books of history, prophecy, poems and proverbs were written – all which later were drawn together as the Old Testament. Then in response to the life of Jesus of Nazareth letters were written by his first followers, and four different stories of his life and teaching were written to declare who he was, which with the

addition of a bit more prophecy, became the New Testament. These words have been held sacred for thousands of years, and remain so because they still speak to us. They still speak to us because it could be us speaking them. The Bible loses its wonder and power when we treat it as if the words were carved in stone. The individual words have the power to leap off the page and inform, inspire, and interrogate us.

Books have been written about every word in the Bible, and those insights can broaden our understanding, raise questions, and show us something new. There are connections within and between books, passages we read often and seldom, and always something we hadn't noticed before. The Bible draws together human talent and divine inspiration, opens a window into the past, and shines light on our own lives and draws us closer to God. So for me the Bible connects to today through the human hands that have passed it to me. My ancestors who wrote it, valued it, and shared it. Through to my grandparents, parents, teachers, friends and colleagues who shared their love of it with me.

We see this understanding exemplified in the Jewish celebration of Passover; the festival meal which remembers their escape from slavery in Egypt. At Passover the Exodus story isn't a tale from the distant past, it is remembered, relived as if it were something that happened to them. We were slaves in Egypt. For me the same holds true when we share in Communion, the Passover meal that Jesus took and exploded it's meaning to include all people. When we share we relive that first celebration as if we were there. So for me the Bible connects to today because of our shared story, our common humanity, and our mutual search for meaning.

The past is relived in today. We see the characters from the Bible echoed through the people around us. It has the ability to concentrate our minds, inspire our hearts, and leave us resting in the peace of God.

With every blessing, Rev'd David R. Coaker



Children's and Youth
Eastern Synod Event



Come and celebrate

Transfiguration Sunday

Can we see Jesus
High on the mountain
Brighter than sunlight
Whiter than white?

Yes. We see Jesus
Unmasking for us
God in such wonder,
Boundless in light.

Can we see Jesus
Eating with outcasts,
Touching the lepers,
Friends with the poor?

Yes. We see Jesus
Unmasking for us
God as compassion,
Gracious and more.

Can we see Jesus
Dying so slowly
Speaking no malice
With his last breath?
Yes. We see Jesus
Unmasking for us
God as forgiveness
In life and death.

I can see Jesus
On my faith journey
Dazzling charisma,
Humble and meek.

I can see Jesus
God's revelation,
Close and inviting
Each time I seek.

George Stuart

Tune: Bunesan, 55 54 D

Copyright free hymns for each week of the
Revised Common Lectionary.

<https://sites.google.com/view/george-stuart/home>



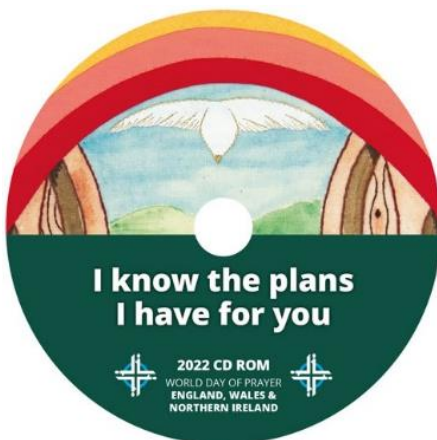
World Day of Prayer

4th March 2022

2 pm at St John's Church,
8A Victoria Ave Grays RM16 2RP

This Ecumenical Day of Prayer is celebrated in more than 120 countries on the same day. The service has this year been prepared by Christian women of England, Wales & Northern Ireland.

The theme is "I know the plans I have for you" with the Bible reading from Jeremiah 29:1-14. Covid restrictions allowing there will be refreshments afterwards. Everybody is welcome.



Inger Collier



Yesterday we had a series of meetings with various representatives of the Trussell Trust. It was great to talk with them and receive encouragement from them on what we are doing and how we are doing it, as well as

continuing to make strategic plans for the future.

As a Pathfinder Foodbank we are finding new and innovative ways to support those in need across our community at our sites across Thurrock. If you want any further information regarding this or would like to get involved, please do not hesitate to reach out.

We were also delighted yesterday to receive new tabards and polo shirts for our warehouse volunteers and van crew, so you should see them around Thurrock looking very smart.

Today is Time to Talk day, the nation's biggest mental health conversation, run in partnership by Mind, Rethink Mental Illness and Co-op. The Trussell Trust is highlighting it on social media all day. It is clear why this is important – we know just how many people who need food banks are also experiencing poor mental health. In mid-2020, 72% of people who were referred to a food bank had a mental health problem and as we go into this year with the cost of living rising, we know people are under huge amounts of pressure.

That's why it's good to be working with partner charities like Mind – not just today for Time to Talk, but as part of a longer-term partnership. The Trussell Trust have also confirmed that Mind are being added to the Help through Hardship helpline with Citizens Advice and exploring opportunities to deepen the partnership, to be able facilitate specialist mental health support for people struggling to afford the essentials.

It's also extremely important to recognise the huge pressure that we have all been under during the last two years. As well as developing new ways of supporting people who need to use foodbanks, we also need to care for ourselves and our teams. Please keep all those that work at Thurrock Foodbank in your prayers, that they keep safe and well, as we continue to work hard to provide essentials for those struggling at this time.

We give thanks that the building work is almost completed and we look to start taking up residency in the refurbished warehouse in the next two weeks. The new floor scales were fitted today.

We are so grateful for a number of companies that have offered their manpower to help us with the move. Please pray that this will go smoothly and that our team stays free from injury whilst the move into the refurbished warehouse takes place.

Items that we have less stock of this week includes:

Cereals; Tinned Fruit; Tinned Sweetcorn; Tinned Potatoes; Tinned Meat in sauce; Long Life Milk

Many thanks for your prayers and support, we really do appreciate it. If you would like any clarification or further information on our work please do not hesitate to contact me.

Best regards, Pete Newall, Operations Manager Thurrock Foodbank
01375 416200 <https://thurrock.foodbank.org.uk/>

Our kind of Church?

What kind of church is Grays URC? Well we're United Reformed, which raises more questions than answers, but have our roots in Congregationalism. I would suggest that we are small, friendly, traditional but open to new things (within reason), enjoy singing hymns, prayer and reflection, and being together. We hold a variety of opinions and stances on life, faith and worship and try to strike a balance when making a decision. Does that sound about right?

But how do we share that with other people? Primarily, of course, that is down to you. How you talk about Grays URC is the surest way people get an impression of us and from whom they are invited to come along to find out for themselves. So that covers family, friends and neighbours, but how to we reach beyond our circles?

Well our website, Facebook and noticeboards can give people an indication, but how can we highlight who we are? For better or worse, that comes down to labels. Labels have their limitations, but at least they give people a general idea. If someone is looking for a URC in Grays then they look at us first, so that is one label we own. We may well have other labels that our fellow Christians in Grays place on us, but are there others we should claim or adopt?

For that to be worthwhile we need to be sure that they fit, and be open to the challenge to live up to them. One way is to find ones we can align ourselves with, such as:

The Inclusive Church vision: www.inclusive-church.org

We believe in inclusive Church – a church which celebrates and affirms every person and does not discriminate.

We will continue to challenge the church where it continues to discriminate against people on the grounds of disability, economic power, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, learning disability, mental health, neurodiversity, or sexuality.

We believe in Church which welcomes and serves all people in the name of Jesus Christ; which is scripturally faithful; which seeks to proclaim the Gospel afresh for each generation; and which, in the power of the Holy Spirit, allows all people to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Jesus Christ.

Is Grays URC an Inclusive Church?

With every blessing, Rev'd David R. Coaker

MOVING STORIES

Committed to supporting our global partners in:

HONDURAS

The United Reformed Church supports a campaign by The Council for World Mission's calling for a much stronger global taxation regime to tackle inequality. You can download the #ZacTax toolkit that covers the theology of taxation and the Zacchaeus story. It equips and empowers churches to encourage national and international systems of taxation to reward work and redistribute gains, promote gender justice and ecological sustainability, and to penalise 'public bads' such as speculative, polluting, and resource-depleting activities. There are practical suggestions and resources for churches to raise awareness and design a nation-wide campaign. Also included are bible studies, liturgical resources, and a reflection story for children to encourage reflection and discussion.

Similarly, Commitment for Life partner ICEFI is a regional institute for research and advocacy. It monitors Honduras' tax system. It also works to raise the profile of tax justice in the region.

Among its main success is the creation of the fiscal covenant for Honduras. This is a joint effort between civil society and academics to create a new and more just tax system in Honduras.

Your much appreciated support for Commitment for Life ensures that organisations like ICEFI can continue their work.



Life-giving Faith

Defiant Hope

Generous Love

BANGLADESH

Traidcraft has shared Kamal Gazi's story, a farmer living in Bangladesh. Kamal summarises the struggles of his community in just one sentence: "Our children's education is in peril; their books have been washed away."

Just imagine a school in Norfolk or Tenby having all its books washed away in a flood... These books represent hope to people like Kamal – an education, the chance of a bright future for his children.

Not only climate disruption, but COVID has also impacted on communities like Kamal's. These hardships make ordinary life more difficult, and poverty less escapable. Kamal continues:

"Before, I used to work and earn a living only by farming but now I have to work as a day labourer in addition to my agricultural work. Climate change has turned a farmer into a day labourer."

By supporting programmes like Commitment for Life and through your purchase of Traidcraft products, you can make a difference.

Easter Sunday – 17th April

In the past on Easter Sunday we have offered an early service, followed by a light breakfast, and then gathered for worship at 10.30am. Are we going to do this, or a variation of it, this year?

To do it we need people willing to attend and to organise it for us?

If we have neither, then we shall look to concentrating on coming together for a communion service at 10.30am.

Please share your thoughts with Denise or David. (We will raise it at CM if a conclusion hasn't been come to by then.)

It's coming home?

Browsing on Facebook this morning, while my son Mark was eating his breakfast, I came across the advert for the Synod's youth and children's event in March, 'Jubilee': Celebrating Faith, Hope and Love - 50 years of the United Reformed Church. Unfortunately, other plans mean it isn't straightforward for Mark to attend it, but as it percolated through my brain on my way home from dropping him off at school, I started humming 'Three Lions'. The song by David Baddiel, Frank Skinner and the Lightning Seeds that was again revived last summer during the UEFA European Championship.

A song that was first released during the 1996 Euros. A song of hope in the face of defeat. A song affirming England's place in football history. A song pining for the glory days of 1966 and lamenting the lows, false dawns and agonies since.

For once it isn't that hard to join up the dots! I was a toddler when the URC came into being on a wave of ecumenical enthusiasm. I was a teenager in the heady days of hundreds attending Connects, Yardley Hastings, of Fury National, and well-attended and engaged district councils, Synods and General Assemblies. As we entered the second millennium I became an ordinand and over the last 18 years have served 5 congregations, in 3 different synods, as their minister. The URC is unrecognisable compared to 50 years ago. Most of the buildings remain, our membership is drastically reduced, our structures have been adapted in the face of change but not completely overhauled to face our present and future realities.

50 years is a long time, and recognition is due, but something much more nuanced is required than just celebrating. Maybe after the past two years of Covid we do just need something to cheer us all up, but, as every football fan knows, 'it's the hope that kills you.' If we delude ourselves with just celebrating the glory years and deny our reality by simply hoping for renewal, with no root and branch reform to better enable it, our future as a denomination is uncertain.

Local congregations remain the heart and soul of the URC and they will find their own paths through all of this. For may the wider URC is irrelevant, and at worst, a burden. We need to rediscover how being part of the URC can be an asset, a liberation, and an inspiration.

With every blessing, Rev'd David R. Coaker

Financial Report Feb 2022

As of 31st January the bank balance stood at £22,000 although the remaining £2,000 for the hall flooring works had still to be paid at this point.

I have sent cheques for £760 to CAP, our chosen charity of 2020/1, and to Mite (Unicef) for £75. Letters of thanks are pinned to the notice board in the hall. Our charity for 2022 will be The Alzheimer's Society, as agreed at Jan CM.

I have an appointment with our book-keepers on the 10th February to start preparation of the year end accounts. Steve Morgan has again kindly offered to audit these accounts in due course.

Regarding premises hire costs for 2022; I plan to discuss this item at the next CM.

Otherwise, the accounts are pretty stable at the moment, but doubtless there will be more essential works to be carried out in the future, involving unforeseen expense.

I think that is all for now, other than the usual thanks to those who contribute so generously to Church funds each month, to Alf and Bob for any help required, Charlotte for organising the lettings and Elaine for the invoicing.

If anyone has a query regarding Church finances please contact me and I will do my best to help.

Alan Beckley



Property report

Following the failure of the electrics at the Tilbury Band concert, I have been communicating with UK Power Networks, who need to come and upgrade the current meter so we have enough power for everything to be turned on at once. The meter has probably not been improved since the building was built meaning it has asbestos present, which obviously has made the whole process more difficult and slower. However, UK Power Networks will be in attending on the 17th Feb to unearth the cable in the bungalow garden, then return on the 18th Feb to connect the new meter. So please be aware there will be no power (also meaning no heating) 18th Feb morning. The lighting by the garages and overlooking the large grassed area has now been replaced by LED flood lights. These will automatically turn on when it gets dark, hopefully making the area safer. Whilst the electrician was in attendance I have asked them to investigate why the large cross at front on the building no longer lights up.

PAT testing is being completed next week and all hirers will have the opportunity to have their equipment tested.

The floor in the hall has now been sanded and re sealed, and looks very impressive (in my opinion). I am in the process of ordering new feet for the chairs to prevent damage to the floor. Having this work done has of course highlighted the need to get the worship space floor done, however I would like to get the bi-fold doors serviced first so the bottom doesn't drag on the floor when they are opened (as it currently does) and cause damage to the floor.

The blood donation service will return next week, and have confirmed some future dates. I feel really fortunate to be able to offer the community such a vital service, and to be able to have so many visitors in the church, hopefully increasing our presence in the community. It has also been confirmed that the hall shall be used as a polling station on the 5th May.

Other than that, it is the usual day to day, week to week ongoing.

Thank you to all volunteers that help maintain the building and grounds, their help is invaluable.

Charlotte Webb

Who's Who at Bradleigh Avenue

Minister:	Rev'd David Coaker 07378 348191 drcoaker@gmail.com
Secretary:	Vacant
Treasurer:	Mr Alan Beckley
Elders:	Mrs Janet Semain, Mr George Semain The functions of Elders' Meetings are temporarily combined within church meetings
Organist:	Mr Richard Wade
Facilities Manager:	Mrs Charlotte Webb 0784 3559011 graysurc@gmail.com
Silent Visitor:	Mrs Janet Semain 01375 373532 geojan321@sky.com

