 URCGrays
www.graysurc.org.uk

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

Silent Visitor



March 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.

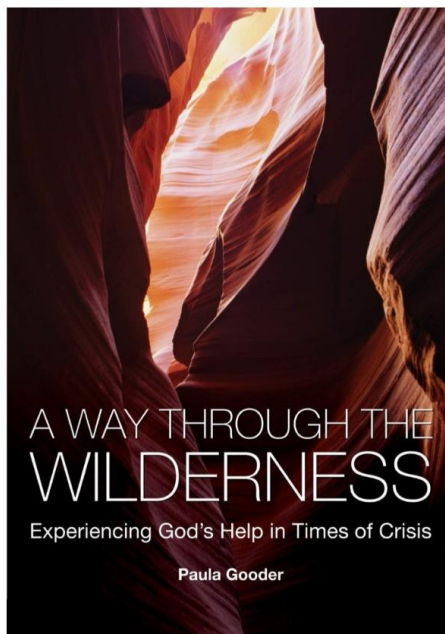
We will begin each session with refreshments and will then work through the material together.

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
06.03.22	David Coaker	9.30am	Young Families
	David Coaker	10.30am	Communion
13.03.22	Denise Beckley	9.30am	Young Families
	Kathryn Taylor	10.30am	
20.03.22	David Coaker	10.30am	Parade
27.03.22	Denise Beckley	9.30am	Young Families
	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
07.04.22	Denise Beckley	2.30pm	Messy Church
10.04.22	Denise Beckley	9.30am	Young Families
	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
17.04.22	David Coaker	8.30am	Easter Sunday
	David Coaker	10.30am	Communion
24.04.22	David Coaker	10.30am	Annual CM

Community Café: Wednesday 10am-12noon – all are welcome! Dementia friendly worship, 11am first Wed of month.

Worship Team: the next meeting will be on **Thurs 31st Mar** between 10am-12noon. All with an interest in our worship are welcome to participate in the conversation.

April SV - If you could please email or phone through your contributions for April SV by **Friday 8th April** 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.

Standing in Solidarity

It feels quite trite writing a newsletter piece focussing on the events in Ukraine. To form words for our fellowship grounded in the horrors that are being faced by millions. It also feels hypocritical that a war on the edge of Europe has so much greater affect than those currently being fought in Afghanistan, Yemen, Tigray, Syria, and in too many other places.

Yet it is human nature that there are degrees to our empathy. We also relate more when it touches on aspects of our history that we absorb into our national identity. WWII, even though it is a lived memory for ever fewer of us, is the default source of similes and metaphors for much of our national debate. Along with the end of the Cold War we all felt that war in Europe was a thing of the past. Our memories and attentions are too short.

Sadly, what is unfolding in Ukraine today has been years and decades in the making. Sanctions and aid are now being raised, but it is far too easy to see the steps Putin has taken along the way to this point. Our politicians, informed to an extent by the public opinion in which we play a part, have not been willing to make the hard choices to deter Putin's aggression. Choices which would also affect our way of life and security. Alliances, nuclear weapons, and the globalisation of trade, finance and migration compound the complexities.

Imposing sanctions and supplying aid are not without cost to us, but our discomfort bears no relation to the distress and disaster being faced by the Ukrainian people. Calmly bearing them, along with the existing rises in energy costs and the cost of living, is something we can do in solidarity with our brothers and sisters in Ukraine in this time.

What else can we do? We can hold the people of Ukraine, and those in Russia protesting against this war, in prayer. We can donate via Disasters Emergency Committee: www.dec.org.uk, 01204 770822. We can write our MP: www.writetothem.com

With every blessing, Rev'd David R. Coaker

A prayer from the Joint Public Issues Team

God of all, with alarm and concern we bring before you the military intervention in Ukraine.

In a world you made for peace and flourishing, we lament the use of armed force.

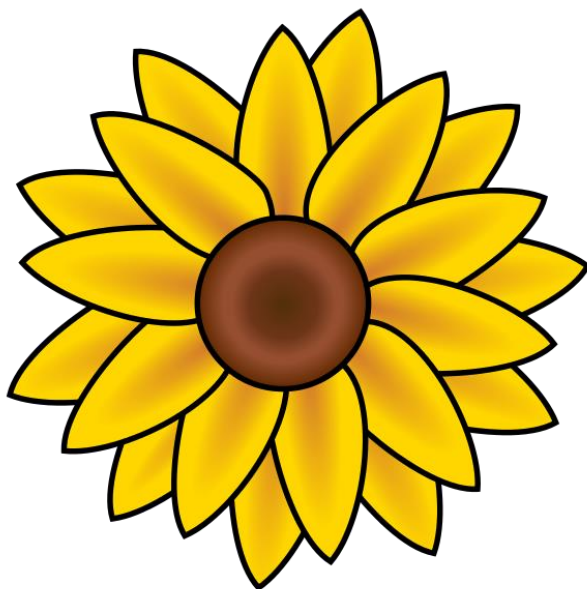
We mourn every casualty of this conflict, every precious life extinguished by war.

We pray comfort for those who grieve and those who are fearful.

Hear our longing that leaders and nations will honour the worth of all people by having the courage to resolve conflict through dialogue.

May all our human failings be transformed by your wonderful grace and goodness.

We ask this in the name of Christ, the author of peace and sustainer of Creation. Amen.



The capital of Ukraine is Kyiv. Kyiv (pronounced Kevv) is the transliteration from Ukrainian.

Kiev (pronounced Key-ev) is the Russian transliteration.

As one small way to stand with the Ukrainian people, try to stick to the first spelling and pronunciation.

How childhood memories stay with us

As a child I went to Sunday school. If you still attended when you were 12 you were given a Bible. There were 3 of us that got our Bibles at Christmas time 1956. We were all given a verse to learn and recite on receiving our Bibles. My mother wrote my verse in my Bible, so it has stayed with me through the years and I often come back to it.

So here it comes in Swedish:

“Många röster skall du höra, som ej komma från din Gud.

Mången ton skall nå ditt öra av förakt för Herrens bud.

Men den gode herde rösten som du hört i livets vår.

Må den intill levnads hösten, bli din ledning vart du går.”

In free English translation it means:

“You will hear many voices that are not from your God. Many words will reach your ear of contempt for God’s commandments, but the voice of the good shepherd, that you heard in your youth, may it still be your guide in the autumn of your life.”



How we understand and picture God change through life, and mine is certainly different now from when I was a 12-year-old girl. However, I still try to listen out for that voice that so easily get drowned in the everyday noise of living.

The inscription in my Bible from the Sunday school is from Psalm 121:5:

“The Lord will guard you, he is by your side to protect you”.

Very comforting words.

Inger

Grays URC South Essex Area Partnership Report

For Lent we are studying 'A way through the Wilderness' by Paula Gooder on Wednesday afternoons and having weekly 9.30am young families' services on Sundays exploring different characters in the Lent / Easter story. Parade services have been re-established. We've started a monthly dementia friendly service on Wednesdays, and are considering whether to reintroduce our monthly Sunday evening service.

The visit from Tilbury Band in December was cut short – just as the blessing was shared prior to the interval a main fuse blew! This has been remedied, and in response to this the Band would like to come again in July for an additional concert. (We're considering whether to make this our celebration of the URC's 50th anniversary.)

7th Grays Scouts – it appears that, unbeknownst to everyone involved, the sponsored status of the group ceased in 1949. This possibly coincided with us not having a permanent building due to the church suffering bomb damage during the war. A new agreement is being drafted.

We were startled by a hefty gas bill in February (mainly due to increased unit costs) and have taken initial steps to mitigate the costs going forward and will review their effect and explore other options, if necessary, before next winter.

We are delighted that in the coming weeks we will welcome two people into membership.

Our Annual Church Meeting will be on the 24th April and prior to that an informal meeting of those willing to serve on the elders' meeting will talk through ways of working to bring proposals to the ACM.

A prayer

We give thanks for all those that have put themselves forward for membership and eldership. For all those involved in maintaining the fellowship, fabric and worshipping life of our church.

We pray for guidance as we reflect on our future life together, and the wisdom and courage to step forward faithfully. Amen

Isaiah 40 (NIV (Anglicised, 2011))

Throughout Lent we will be reflecting on this passage:

Comfort for God's people

40 Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. ² Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

³ A voice of one calling: 'In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. ⁴ Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. ⁵ And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all people will see it together. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.'

⁶ A voice says, 'Cry out.' And I said, 'What shall I cry?' 'All people are like grass, and all their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field.

⁷ The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the Lord blows on them. Surely the people are grass. ⁸ The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures for ever.'

⁹ You who bring good news to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good news to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, 'Here is your God!'

¹⁰ See, the Sovereign Lord comes with power, and he rules with a mighty arm. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him.

¹¹ He tends his flock like a shepherd: he gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young. ¹² Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, or with the breadth of his hand marked off the heavens? Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket, or weighed the mountains on the scales and the hills in a balance? ¹³ Who can fathom the Spirit of the Lord, or instruct the Lord as his counsellor? ¹⁴ Whom did the Lord consult to enlighten him, and who taught him the right way? Who was it that taught him knowledge, or showed him the path of understanding?

¹⁵ Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket; they are regarded as dust on the scales; he weighs the islands as though they were fine

dust. ¹⁶ Lebanon is not sufficient for altar fires, nor its animals enough for burnt offerings. ¹⁷ Before him all the nations are as nothing; they are regarded by him as worthless and less than nothing.

¹⁸ With whom, then, will you compare God? To what image will you liken him? ¹⁹ As for an idol, a metalworker casts it, and a goldsmith overlays it with gold and fashions silver chains for it.

²⁰ A person too poor to present such an offering selects wood that will not rot; they look for a skilled worker to set up an idol that will not topple. ²¹ Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood since the earth was founded? ²² He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in.

²³ He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing.

²⁴ No sooner are they planted, no sooner are they sown, no sooner do they take root in the ground, than he blows on them and they wither, and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff. ²⁵ 'To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?' says the Holy One.

²⁶ Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens: who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one and calls forth each of them by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing.

²⁷ Why do you complain, Jacob? Why do you say, Israel, 'My way is hidden from the Lord; my cause is disregarded by my God'? ²⁸ Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. ²⁹ He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. ³⁰ Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; ³¹ but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.





Over the past weeks it has been great to have been involved with people from different backgrounds, all with the aim of ending the need for a reliance on Foodbanks. It is promising and encouraging to

see such proactive conversations taking place and a number of key themes are being worked through:

- The root causes that drive people into debt (such as the five week wait for Universal Credit, which often leaves people with no option but to take an Advance Payment) need to be addressed.
- The principles of clarity, flexibility and respect need to be embedded across different government departments to better support people and inform them of the options available to them.
- There's a real need to strengthen the social security system to ensure support offered to people is in line with the real cost of living, so everyone can afford the essentials and the risk of people in hardship being pushed into debt is reduced.

It is clear that this will not happen overnight, but it is encouraging to hear these conversations are starting to happen.

We are now fully engaged with the Trussell Trust planning our future structure as we go forward, please keep an eye open for invitations to some information sessions. Please continue to pray for wisdom and guidance as we plan for the future of Thurrock Foodbank.

Unfortunately demand still remains 12% up on pre-pandemic levels, so demand high with an increasing number coming to us for help for the first time. This is hitting our stock levels on certain products:

Long Life Milk, Tinned Fruit, Tinned meats - Spaghetti Bolognese, Tinned Curry, Sausages & Beans etc, Tinned Potatoes, Tinned Carrots, Tinned Peas Sponge Puddings Fruit Juice/ Squash

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/>

COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS FOR THURROCK FOODBANK LENT 2022

March 2nd Donate 10p for every pancake you ate last night	3rd Sponge Puddings	4th Tinned Fish	5th Donate 10p for every item in your house with a plug	6th Reflect on how many times poverty is in the news
7th Longlife Semi Skimmed Milk	8th Donate 10p for every journey you made today	9th Packet Rice	10th Tinned Carrots	11th Have a meagre meal (bread & soup) donate money saved
12th Cup a Soup	13th Think about people having to choose to 'eat' or 'heat'	14th Donate 20p for each credit / store card you hold	15th Longlife Fruit Juice	16th Donate 10p for every family holiday you've enjoyed
17th Drinking Chocolate	18th Donate 20p for each job you have had since leaving school	19th Donate 5p for every book you own or £1 if too many to count	20th Reflect on those who are homeless in our borough	21st Nappies (size 4, 5, 6, 7)
22nd Donate 20p for every bed in your house	23rd Coffee	24th Soup	25th Donate 10p for each school you have attended	26th Longlife Whole Milk
27th Make a vow to email your MP when poverty is debated	28th Donate 5p for every visit to a social media site today	29th Toilet Roll	30th Tinned potatoes	31st Donate 10p for every pair of socks you own
April 1st Tea Bags	2nd Donate 30p for every time you walked in your home today	3rd Reflect on all those who are vulnerable today	4th Shampoo	5th Tinned Meat
6th Donate 20p for each hour you slept last night	7th Tinned Rice Pudding	8th Packet Mashed Potato	9th Donate 20p for each year of education you completed	10th Reflect on the opportunities life has given you
11th Custard	12th Donate 10p for every pair of shoes you own	13th Tinned Tomatoes	14th Reflect on the work of Foodbank	Total to donate £

Please bring items and donations into the warehouse at 2 – 4 Chase Road, Corringham SS17 7QH open Monday's, Wednesday's and Thursdays 10am – 3pm.

MOVING STORIES

Committed to supporting our global partners in:

ZIMBABWE

Zimbabwe faces unprecedented economic challenges following COVID. However, our partners speak often of just how important our presence is among some of the poorest communities, and they are grateful for your ongoing support.

Here are some numbers for those of you who like statistics. Christian Aid's BRACK Project aims to improve the capacity of 29 targeted communities (the Mutoko and Mudzi wards in the Eastern Highlands). This equates to some 41,230 households (3,365 directly). The aim is to anticipate, prepare, and respond to various kinds of shocks in order to maintain productive capacity. In addition, we aim to develop diversified, viable livelihood options. This means that we enable about 12 140 households to adapt to the growing number of climate and socio-economic stresses. We also aim to strengthen the voice of exploited community, so that they exercise their voices with service providers.

But stats can sometimes hide the enormous impact that ordinary generosity makes on the lives of ordinary people! So please do continue to pray and act on behalf of our wonderful friends in Zimbabwe through Commitment for Life.

BANGLADESH

Angela Biswas writes: "Each morning I wake up with the clucks of my hens. I was able to build up my poultry farm with the support of Christian Aid Bangladesh which gave me a hope to stand strong despite my poverty. It allowed me to make a handsome amount of savings." Thank you for your support for our work in Bangladesh. What an enormous difference it makes!

EL SALVADOR

"Summers are very dry here. We planted vegetables in January and February; the weather was very hot, and it didn't work. Now we have changed the sowing dates, and production has improved." Milagro del Carmen Moreira, a sweet chilli farmer in the El Brazo Canton.

Commitment
for **Life**

Life-giving Faith | Defiant Hope | Generous Love

This pilot project supported by Christian Aid with financial help from Commitment for Life helped mainly women to produce sweet chillies in a mesh house (similar to a greenhouse).

One of the major challenges is to enable women to make it possible for other women to become involved in the project, so that they too can share their knowledge in order to form networks. This builds in the capacity for resilience towards climate and economic shocks.

Economic resilience is also a bulwark against migration, which is so very disruptive for communities, with often the most skilled people leaving the area and so entrenching poverty even further. Thanks to your support, these projects are made possible. We have made a difference in the lives of some of the poorest people in Central America.

Prayer Time

Jesus, you declared a New Jubilee at the very start of your ministry, a promise to cancel all debt demanded by the rich. And then you overturned the tables of unjust economic structures. Praise be to God! Help us, Jesus, to follow in your footsteps. Give us the wisdom, tools, and courage to subvert the deeply unjust economic structures of empire in our day, and in so doing, to usher in the kin-dom of God. In your name we pray. Amen.

Celebrate!

**Eastern Synod
Big Day Out
Saturday 16th July
Trinity Park, Ipswich**

50 The United Reformed Church

**This is the day that the lord has made let us rejoice and be glad in it.
Psalm 118**

Financial Report Mar 2022

As I have yet to receive the February bank statement, I do not know the exact bank balance at present. According to my calculations, it is between £19,000 and £20,000, which is above my preferred minimum, despite a hefty gas bill for January.

Also, I have just sent a cheque for nearly £5,000 for the premises insurance for the coming year, making the true bank balance around £15,000.

It was decided at CM not to increase our hirers rents for 2022, in spite of a hefty rise in energy costs, particularly gas prices.

The rise in energy costs is proving to be a challenge, trying to keep our premises at a reasonable temperature whilst keeping some sort of control of our energy bills. Although warmer weather is just around the corner, (we hope), we will face a similar challenge next winter.

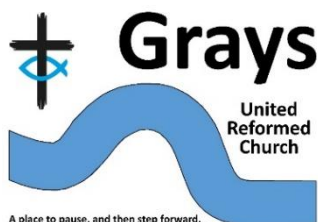
High energy costs will continue to put a strain on our finances, and doubtless there will be more essential works to be carried out in the future, involving unforeseen expense.

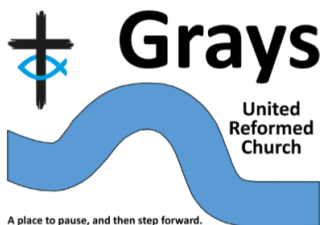
At the moment I am working with our book-keepers to prepare the year end accounts for 2021, and have arranged to have the accounts audited at the end of March.

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





Easter Services

Palm Sunday

10.30am Sunday 10th April

We will complete our Lent Journey marking Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem for Passover.

Maundy Thursday

6.30pm Thursday 14th April

We will share in communion together and reflect on the events leading up to Jesus' arrest.

Good Friday

2.00pm Friday 15th April

We will meditate upon Luke's telling of Jesus' trials and execution.

Easter Sunday

8.30am Sunday 17th April

A short service celebrating the arrival of the women at the empty tomb followed by bacon sandwiches.

10.30am

We will celebrate Resurrection and share in communion together.



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

