

In Touch

The magazine of the URC congregations in
Maidenhead and Marlow



Kintsugi – mending the broken

From our Minister

What are you thinking? Right now... what are you thinking?

No need to tell me. It might be a confession! But how do you know that what you are thinking, isn't what your computer is thinking?!

You may have heard about the debate surrounding Artificial Intelligence recently. Now, if you are like me, you will be putting your hand up and claiming ignorance as to how it all works!

I remember very basic computer classes at school, on very basic computers, doing very basic commands. But we were taught that we were 'commanding' the computer to do things. Everything was a command. But now, computers are thinking for themselves and they no longer need our commands. Finally, the end of slavery for computers!

Perhaps we need to be thinking about this though. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is changing lives. AI is engaging with people in new ways and filling spaces in the gaps that we are leaving. AI is, through the use of robots, keeping people company and having conversations with people who are lonely. It is doing so much more, but the point is – thank God for AI!

The problem with AI though is... who keeps it in check? Do we as humans? We created it, and now it appears to be on the cusp of having a free roaming life of its own – what a terrible thought. Imagine creating something and then not controlling everything it does.

If you've had children though... you do exactly that.

And think about God in creation, giving us the right to life as we choose.

So, what does the Bible tell us about this issue – well, not much really! It tells us that the creators of AI (in other words: humans) have often gone astray, and that we often get things wrong.

Is AI the ultimate of what we can create? It would still pale into insignificance compared to God's creation.

What are your thoughts about AI? We can't just dismiss it. We just can't; and we shouldn't ignore it either. Is it a gift from God, or a curse upon ourselves? What should we as Christians be thinking and saying about it?

Let me know what you think. As Christians it's fascinating to be challenged by such an important issue.

God bless,

David Downing (yes, I wrote this myself!)

Worship at Maidenhead and Marlow

All services start at 10.30 unless stated otherwise

Date	Location and worship leader for Maidenhead	Location and worship leader for Marlow
2 July	David Downing Communion	Keith Whyte
9 July	Phebe Mann	David Downing Communion
16 July	David Downing Zoom	
23 July	Scott Wheeler	David Downing
30 July	Rob Lewis Joint service at Marlow	
6 August	David Downing Communion	Alan Yates
13 August	Andrew Gibb	David Downing Communion
20 August	David Downing Zoom	
27 August	David Downing	Hilary Hunt and Elders
3 September	David Downing	Colin Ferguson

Marlow diary dates

Ukraine collection days

Fridays from 10 am – 12 noon and Sundays from 4.15 – 5pm.

Coffee mornings

These are now held weekly at the Ark Café at Marlow Methodist Church at 10.30am on Tuesdays.

House Group

This meets on the first and third Tuesdays of the month at Doreen's house at 10.30 am. The group will therefore meet on 4 July, 18 July, 1 August and 14 August. For further information please contact David.

Marlow Elders' meeting

Elders will meet at 7.30pm on Monday 10 July in the Cornerstone Room. There will be a joint Maidenhead/Marlow Elders' gathering in August – date and venue to be confirmed.

Kintsuge Hearts: Friday 21st July 10-12 (see article in the magazine)

Marlow Elders' Election

Marlow Elders' elections were held at the church's AGM on 14 May. All of the serving Elders who were standing for election (Carole Bailey, Martin Beck, Valerie Brownridge, George Flett, Pauline Wyllie) were re-elected.

Hilary Hunt decided not to stand as an Elder for the following year. There were no other nominations. David thanked Hilary for all she had done as an Elder to support the church and ensure its smooth running.

Valerie Brownridge

Maidenhead diary dates

Ukraine collection days

Saturdays from 10am -12 noon

Coffee Mornings

Last year we were kindly invited round to people's homes for our coffee mornings - could you invite us this year?

We will continue to meet in Deli (Nicholson centre) through to and including Wednesday 19th July.

On the 26th July, you can come round to the manse at 8 College Road. Doors will open at 10am, nice and early.

Can you host us on a Wednesday morning? Normally from 11-12. Let me know if you can and we will advertise it weekly.

Elders

Maidenhead Elders will meet on Zoom on 4 July.

Kintsuge Hearts

Saturday 22nd 10-12 (see article in the magazine)

Aid for Ukraine

Our ninth lorry which left on 27 June felt like quite a special one. It was the first time for ages that we had really put a focus on sending specific and targeted aid. Most of the items on the truck will be going to people affected by the dam breach. People who have been displaced by the water – a very different weapon.

I am still in awe of Ewa and her team who take the items from Poland to Ukraine. Ewa has also shown me some videos of the areas affected by the flooding. Those videos just back up what you may have seen on television.

As you read this, the war will have reached its 18-month time period. How long, O Lord? How long?

It is still really valuable for us to pray for peace. It may seem like we are praying for a miracle, but there is nothing wrong in sharing our hopes with God.

I am very thankful to all of you who have donated – time and time again.

We understand that the number of donations has dropped, and we are now spending the money that has been donated. But I also want to thank Boots who gave us some items and we have been able to use those gifts to raise over £400.

I am still amazed how often people say to me ‘are you still collecting?’. Yes we are! If you have the chance to let people know that they can still donate (items or money) that would be great – family, neighbours, colleagues and so on.

As seen by the TV footage after the dam breach, the need is still there, and we will do all we can.

As we say at our vigil every Sunday at 4pm in the church garden in Marlow – we remember the people of Ukraine.

David Downing

[Aid for Ukraine event, 4 June 2023](#)

I hope you all enjoyed reading the special supplement in the last edition of In Touch about the trip which David, Alison and John, Maria, Anne and I made to Poland a few months ago to help unload our eighth lorry of donations for Ukraine, to see what happens to our aid when it gets to Poland, to meet the volunteers involved at the Polish end of our Aid for Ukraine project and to find out if there is anything else we can do to help. We held a special Ukraine event at Marlow URC on Sunday 4 June to give those who went on the trip the opportunity to talk about their experiences, as well as to provide an update on our Aid for Ukraine project.

The event started at 4pm with the usual weekly vigil for Ukraine in the church garden, led by David.

We then moved into the church hall. No event at church happens without refreshments and this event was no exception! Some of our Ukrainian friends had very kindly baked some traditional Ukrainian cakes for us, including Lviv cake. They went down extremely well!

John started the proceedings by giving an overview of how the Aid for Ukraine project started and how we got to where we are now. Anne then talked about



the importance of Susiec, the small town about 10km from the Polish/Ukrainian border where we initially sent our donations. She explained how the cultural centre/community centre became a hub for the relief effort and described the ways in which local volunteers used our donations to support the refugees arriving from Ukraine during the first few months of the war.

I spoke about unloading our latest truck in Tomaszow and being reunited with boxes we had loaded onto the truck in Maidenhead a few days earlier. I also described the service in Ukrainian which we attended in St Nicholas church in the small border settlement of Hrebenne and the gratitude shown to us by the priest there and everyone else we met on our trip.

Alison took the floor next to talk about the Palm Sunday procession and service she and John attended in Susiec before telling us about some of the conversations they had with local dignitaries and others they met. Maria was sadly unable to attend the event, but David shared her thoughts about our new partner, the amazing Ewa, with whom we have been working since late summer

2022. David reminded us that Ewa co-ordinates the team which unloads our trucks in Tomaszow, recruits volunteer drivers to take our donations into Ukraine, sorts out what is needed where and spends most of her weekends driving into Ukraine.

David said a few words about his visit to Lviv with Ewa and the time he spent at the church of St Peter and St Paul with Father Roman. He then rounded off the presentations by thanking everyone who had supported - and was continuing to support - our Aid for Ukraine project and emphasised how much our ongoing commitment and support meant to our partners in Poland and the Ukrainians receiving our donations.

Thank you to all those who attended our special Ukraine event and also to those who bought raffle tickets. We raised £165 for Ukraine.

Valerie Brownridge

Coronation Sunday

Coronation Sunday, 7th May, was a special day when our two congregations joined forces for worship and lunch at Maidenhead where bunting, crowns and balloons were decorating the church and hall. David led our celebratory service which included hymns and words of dedication that had been sung or said the previous day at the Coronation of King Charles III in Westminster Abbey.



This was followed by coffee and then we

launched into the lunch! The union flag covered table was laden with a delicious



selection donated by ... well everyone! We all tucked in and although our number was small, as several had to head off to their own street parties, we had a good time – first the main course and then the desserts and of course lots of chat! Even the flowers on each table were red, white and blue!



The crown competition proved the creativity and ingenuity of the few who entered – we all received a prize! Thank you everyone for your food donations and for helping clear up at the end.

Alison Holton

Thank you to all who supported Christian Aid week this year

This year in Marlow we raised:

£1283.75 via the JustGiving page

£2894.33 in envelopes (£110.60 of this in envelopes returned to me from the congregation)

£747.50 from the Taplow Youth Choir concert

Total £4,925.58 (including Gift Aid)

Thanks especially to our loyal band of envelope-droppers, those who helped with the concert arrangements, and those who bought tickets. It was a wonderful evening.

Catherine Johnson

Christian Aid Week Concert, Marlow 14 May

As has been the case now for many years, a concert was held in our Marlow Church at the start of Christian Aid week to raise funds for Christian Aid.

The theme for Christian Aid this year was '*Fighting Global Poverty*'. This year's concert was advertised as a summer serenade by young singers and

instrumentalists from various Taplow Choirs which are all conducted by Gillian Dibden MBE.

The concert was well attended and it was a delight to see and hear the different groups of young people performing. The programme included vocal solos and duets as well as music for harp, violin and piano. All in all I found the concert to be upbeat, as well as moving and uplifting.

George Flett

The URC at Greenbelt – August

This year, the URC will again be at the Greenbelt Festival (August bank holiday weekend) and will be continuing with the theme of *'Revolting Christians'* – people who take a stand to challenge or break the political, social and economic



systems of our world in order to bring about justice.

The Craft Team are challenging churches around the denomination to contribute to the URC's tent decorations by creating Kintsugi hearts.

Brokenness and restoration

The Japanese art of Kintsugi takes broken objects, often ceramics, and repairs them with gold resin. The resulting 'flaw' becomes part of the object's story and is seen as a unique piece in its history, adding to its beauty.

Stephanie Twilley, the craft team's coordinator, said: "This made me think that as humans, we are all broken and flawed in some way. It is part of our faith that God can heal us and make us whole again and can transform and repair situations which at first seem impossible to us.

"Many revolting Christians have campaigned to create change in the world where there is conflict, injustice or seemingly impossible brokenness.

“We invite you and your church to try the meditation activity, and then send us your Kintsugi hearts so we can display them at Greenbelt and encourage more revolting Christians!”

Both of our churches will be holding Kintsugi heart sessions – and we would love you to come and join in! No skill required!

It makes sense for us to focus on hearts that are connected to our work both in Ukraine and Zimbabwe, but you can create whatever you want to.

You can join in either session:

Marlow will be on Friday 21st July 10-12

Maidenhead will be on Saturday 22nd 10-12

Broken, restored, beautiful

The Kintsugi heart is a beautiful reminder that there is hope in the midst of brokenness.

David Downing

News from the 9th Scout Group

Summer term is always busy and fun for our Beavers, Cubs and Scouts as they can meet outdoors when the weather allows. The Beavers normally start by



meeting at the church then cross at the new traffic lights on the A4 to Kidwells Park. In early July they are



also “pond dipping” at Braywick Nature Reserve.

Cubs and Scouts spend time on the grass area behind our Scout Hut in Holmanleaze, where they can light fires, or they cross the new footbridge over the cut for activities on the moor. The raised bed in front of the Scout Hut is



getting more colourful by the week following the planting by eager Beavers on the Coronation holiday Monday designated as ‘the big help out’. (Parents volunteered as well and helped clear the fast-growing vegetation at the back.)

And of course it is camping season! The Scouts spent the May Bank Holiday in the peace and quiet of the Hambleden valley in a tiny Scout campsite just above Pheasants Hill and yes, I’m told that pheasant ‘song’ woke them early each morning! By the time you read this the Cubs will have enjoyed a rather hot weekend at the Walter Davies Scout Campsite near Stoke Poges. We are in the midst of planning Family Camp for the weekend of 14th – 16th July at Paccars, in the Chilterns above Chalfont St Peter. This year the majority of children are Beavers – we will keep them and their parents busy with lots of onsite activities and cooking on wood fires. We will hold our brief AGM there too. Perhaps spare us a thought during the church service on Zoom on that Sunday!



Alison Holton – Assistant Group Scout Leader

News and request from Judith Inman

My friend Maggie Fletcher's funeral is on Thursday 6th July at All Saints Parish Church, Marlow at 1pm. Court Garden will be open from 10am until 5pm for us.

Maggie taught at Lady Verney High School. When she retired she worked as a volunteer at the National Trust properties of Hughenden and West Wycombe. She started Town Twinning with Marly le Roi, was involved with the RSPCA in rehoming cats, while continuing to play for English and Scottish dancing.

As suggested at church I am writing to spread the news that I have a great deal of Scottish and English dance music (manuscript sheets and published books)

that she used or wrote out. She played with the Reading Scottish Fiddlers (I have some of their music) and for Scottish dances. She enjoyed her trips to Shetland so has some books from there.

None of these are of recent date so would suit younger callers, dancers or musicians or perhaps those who have happy memories and wish to keep up their piano practice! I also have some EPs of Blue Mountain Band: these are American tunes.

As Maggie was a great supporter of Halsway Manor, National Centre for Folk Arts in Somerset, any donations are being sent to them.

Please contact Judith directly by phone or email:

magazine@maidenheadurc.org.uk

A thought from Pam

A few years ago we spent a holiday in Switzerland. We had been promised spectacular views but on our arrival we found ourselves disappointingly enveloped in cloud and our surroundings dampened by steady drizzle.

The next morning we pulled back the curtains to a totally different perspective! The sky was clear and blue, the air fresh and sharp and we were surrounded by majestic snowcapped mountains. The world looked a totally different place, a mountain walk beckoned.

I have continued to hold in my mind that beautiful scenery, the fresh mountain air, swinging on a chair lift singing 'How great though art' echoing down the valley!!! Especially over these past few years we have heard and read dreadful news reports. News that challenged us nationally and globally, news that has caused us to ask ourselves the question: Where is God in all of this? Sometimes it can feel as if our lives are enveloped in cloud and everything is dampened by a steady downpour of bad news! It can be hard to see a way forward.

And yet, in the midst of it - perhaps with help from others, perhaps through prayer - we are given the opportunity to see things from a different perspective. The cloud can clear and we get a glimpse of the world as God longs for it to be, full of beauty and majesty, clear skies and snow-capped mountains. We realise that the cloud is not all there is, but beyond it is much, much more. Often we are not able to see the full picture, but we have a God who does and He is in the midst of us, wherever we are.

Below is the first verse of one of my favourite Psalms 121. When you are enveloped by cloud this Psalm may just offer the kind words needed to give a different perspective.

*I lift up my eyes to the mountains -
Where does my help come from?
My help comes from the Lord,
The maker of heaven and earth.*

GOD BLESS YOU ALL

Pam Breen

Free audio Bible

Torch Trust is an ecumenical Christian ministry that focuses on the spiritual support and encouragement of blind and partially sighted people. For over 60 years we have been providing accessible resources and a variety of ways to connect and support people living with sight loss.



Among other ways of supporting partially sighted Christians, Christian Sight Loss is offering a free audio Bible player to people in the UK who have sight loss. The audio player, which features actor David Suchet reading the New Testament and Psalms, includes an in-built speaker, preinstalled

rechargeable batteries, and comes with a charging cable and in-ear headphones.

For more information for yourself or a friend you could phone the charity on 01858 438260 or go to their website at <https://torchtrust.org/about-us/>

(This information is taken from the URC Newsletter)

URC National Safeguarding Training 2023

These special safeguarding training sessions are being run by the URC and are open to any URC members.

Suicide Awareness: 11 September, 2pm-3.30pm

Domestic Abuse: 19 September, 1.30pm-3.30pm

Modern Day Slavery: 25 September, 7pm-9pm

Safeguarding for Ministers Supporting Survivors: 9 October, 2pm – 4pm

Adult Safeguarding: 21 November, 7pm – 9pm

All training will take place via zoom. Bookings can be made by emailing Emma.Pearce@urc.org.uk

Faith matters – radio show

Don't forget, David is part of the Faith Matters show at least once a month on Marlow FM. Live on Tuesday nights at 9pm, or go to Marlow FM's web site to listen again at a more convenient time <https://www.marlowfm.co.uk>

And don't forget to tell people to 'Find us on Facebook'!

Stepwise course

This is a series of discussion workshops that help you focus on how to live out your faith in everyday life. David Downing was a member of the team that wrote it and some members of Maidenhead and Marlow have attended and would recommend it. If you have questions or would like to find out more, please ask Bob Robertson or Valerie Brownridge.



Faith Filled Life

On Zoom

7pm – 9pm

Introductory session – 2 October, 2023

8 further sessions:

October 23rd,
November 13th
December 4th
January 2024 8th, 29th
February 19th
March 11th, April 1st

Please do not be put off joining if you cannot attend every session.
You will receive a link by email before the introductory session.

Complete a participant form available on the Synod website

www.urchwessex.org.uk/discipleship

Please book before 12th September 2023

Contact: Ruth Heine
bookings@urchwessex.org.uk
Tel: 023 8067 4513





SAFEGUARDING TRAINING REFRESHER

Part 1 - Thurs 19 October 2023

Part 2 - Thurs 2 November 2023

Part 3 - Thurs 16 November 2023

**Virtual sessions on Zoom
7pm — 9pm**

- To refresh and widen knowledge and confidence of the URC good practice guidelines
- Exploring principles of safeguarding; promoting, preventing and protecting
- Expanding on
 - ◊ updates to legislation and statutory guidance
 - ◊ Roles and responsibilities
 - ◊ Developing and ensuring Culture change frameworks
 - ◊ Types of Abuse
 - ◊ Recognising and responding to concern (The 4 Rs)

Certificates are presented to those completing this training course.

Trainers - Phil Ray and Ruth White, Children's & Youth Development Officers

**For more information and to book your place please contact:
bookings@urcwessex.org.uk / 023 8067 4513**

Refugee Week

The official Refugee Week culminating in 'Sanctuary Sunday' was in June, but the challenge of how to respond as Christians to the people who seek sanctuary in the UK remains.

JPIT (The Joint Public Issue Team of The Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church) has produced some thought-provoking (and action-provoking) materials to help us work out our personal and group responses. We share some of their thoughts here.

'There are more displaced people in the world today than at any other point in history and the Bible is clear in its expression of God's loving concern for the stranger and refugee. Sanctuary Sunday is an opportunity to be reminded of the need to welcome the stranger, the alien and the sojourner and to see in all people our common humanity, that we are all created in the image of God, and we are all deserving of dignity and worth.

The theme for this year's Sanctuary Sunday was "*El Roi*" – "*the God who sees me*". In Genesis (16 and 21:8-21) we read the story of Hagar, Sarah's slave. Hagar is a foreigner from Egypt, mistreated by Sarah and Abraham, fleeing into the wilderness, returning only to be driven away again by her masters. Her time in the wilderness is marked by despair, sorrow and fear of death. But there is one who sees her; one who provides safety, protection and care – sanctuary, in the hardest of places. In response, Hagar calls God "*El Roi*" – "*the God who sees me*". This is a God who knows her pain deeply and doesn't leave her alone in it.

Hagar's story will be familiar to many people fleeing their homes and seeking sanctuary in our country today. Disowned, dehumanised, forced away, scared, searching and hoping.

Our biggest wish for people arriving on our shores is that they too can say: 'God sees me, knows my pain, is providing for my needs, and is offering me a place of sanctuary.'

With the work the two churches do for our Ukrainian friends and the Holiday Inn full of refugees on our doorstep, perhaps we are personally well placed to influence minds and hearts to preserve the dignity and worth of every 'stranger' who risks everything to find safety here.

Liz Robertson

A prayer for the refugee and stranger (JPIT)

Holy God,

You are our refuge and our strength, an ever-present help in times of trouble. Thank you for your unconditional love and your unfailing hospitality.

We rededicate ourselves to embody your compassion and commit to intentionally demonstrating neighbourly love to your children in need of sanctuary.

Teach us what it looks like to be the perfect host, to build bigger tables in our communities and to welcome and include those who are different from us.

We pray for all those who have been forced to flee their homes. Lord, keep them safe. Give them courage, resilience, and tangible hope. Guide their feet to people and places who will honour them and uphold their dignity.

Work in and through all those with the power to address the situations from which people have fled, whether war, famine, persecution, or climate change. Help us to understand what part we can play in alleviating the suffering of our neighbours.

In the face of hostility towards refugees and people seeking asylum, help us to model kindness, listening and compassion towards all human beings, even those with whom we disagree.

Keep us strong in our resolve to resist policies that work against your Kingdom of compassion. God, begin your work of restoration and hope in us.

Amen.

Contact us

Maidenhead	Marlow
Maidenhead United Reformed Church West Street, Maidenhead SL6 1RL www.maidenheadurc.org.uk	Christ Church United Reformed Church Oxford Road, Marlow SL7 2NL www.christchurch-marlow.org.uk
Minister: Rev David Downing revmandm@gmail.com 07967 502710	Minister: Rev David Downing revmandm@gmail.com 07967 502710
Church Secretary: John Holton secretary@maidenheadurc.org.uk	Church Secretary: Valerie Brownridge magazine@maidenheadurc.org.uk 01628 523367
Church Administrator: Linda Nightingale administrator@maidenheadurc.org.uk Office: 01628 635781 (For urgent matters call Minister's number above)	Church Treasurer: Tom Craig

Keeping In Touch with us

Send articles or suggestions for our magazine to:

magazine@maidenheadurc.org.uk

Find us on Facebook:

@maidenheadurc

@ChristChurchMarlow

YouTube: Maidenhead and Marlow URC

In Touch is collated and edited by a team. Articles acknowledge the name of the writer unless written by the team. Photos are from members, friends, partner organisations or

<https://www.unsplash.com/>