



September
and October
2023

In Touch

The magazine of the URC congregations in
Maidenhead and Marlow



'Records' – Thoughts From our Minister

Not a sprint or long-distance running record, nor a high jump record. But music records, or vinyl. You may have heard of the 'vinyl revival'. People are buying records again – and I'm one of them! My record collection shrank when we 'had' to buy CDs but thankfully neither Jo nor I got rid of all our records. We have some great old records; and I've been given some more... and I'm buying some new ones. 33s and 45s... back in fashion!

I think that one of the reasons why records sales are growing is because music became invisible... everyone was downloading music from somewhere. But we wanted to touch music! We wanted something tangible.

Records, of course, are different now. They may play at the same speed, but they are now heavier, and some are fantastic colours – it's not just black vinyl records! What have you still got lurking from previous years?

Perhaps there is a message for the church here. Records are still basically the same, just updated. They carry the same music; they have just been made more relevant. Maybe that's our challenge: to work out what we need to leave basically the same, but to think also about how we become more relevant.

That's why we are trying to promote our Facebook page, update our web page etc. it's just part of what we need to do. If church isn't tangible, or relevant we will go the way of 78s! Lovely history... but fairly rubbish in this day and age. We don't want the church to ever be just history. What would that say about God? What would that say about us?

Later in the magazine is an article that I have written that reflects on the church being less or more relevant and it gives us reasons why people leave/don't attend church or stay/join a church. If it gives you any ideas, let me know.

Anyway... let's get an original Pink Floyd record on...

God bless,

David Downing

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
3 September	Rev David Downing Communion	Colin Ferguson
10 September	Linda Jackson	Rev David Downing Communion Church meeting
17 September	Rev David Downing Zoom	
24 September	Rev Michael Hodgson Joint service at Marlow	
1 October	tbc	Rev Maggie Hindley
8 October	Bob Robertson Church Anniversary	Rev Bradley Croucher Communion
15 October	Rev David Downing Zoom	
22 October	Rev David Downing Harvest	Geoff Cronin Harvest
29 October	Vivien Gerhold Joint service in Maidenhead	
5 November	Elders Communion	Rev David Downing Communion

Marlow diary dates

Ukraine collection days

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

Coffee mornings

Every Tuesday, 10.30 at the Ark Café at Marlow Methodist Church.

House Group

House Group will resume on Tuesday 19 September at 10.30 at Doreen's house. This means there will be no house group on Tuesday 4 September. For further information please contact David.

Marlow Elders

Our meetings are currently planned for:

Mondays, September 11 and October 9 – both at 7.30pm

Maidenhead diary dates

Ukraine collection days

Saturdays from 10am -12 noon

Coffee Mornings

From September 13 these will be at the Deli in the town centre at 11am

Maidenhead Elders

Our meetings are currently planned for:

Tuesdays, September 5 and October 3 – both at 4pm

Maidenhead Elders for 2024

As you know, in the United Reformed Church Elders are elected at the church AGM to work alongside the Minister to maintain a pastoral oversight for the church members. They also take on the position of a Trustee and have a responsibility for the management and care of the church fabric and finances.

It can be difficult to find new Elders, and every three years some of the serving ones have to put themselves forward for re-election if they wish to continue.

The process of finding Elders for 2024 will begin towards the end of September in time for new names to be put forward at the church AGM on 26 November.

If someone suggests that YOU might be a good Elder, I would ask you to give this prayerful consideration and if you have any queries or questions about anything please speak to either David or myself.

John Holton, Maidenhead Church Secretary

Don't forget to find and follow Marlow and Maidenhead URCs on Facebook:

@maidenheadurc @ChristChurchMarlow

YouTube: Maidenhead and Marlow URC

Christ Church URC, Marlow celebration

On Sunday October 15 we will be celebrating the 20th anniversary of the renovation and upgrade of our building.



We would be delighted if you were able to join our celebrations to mark this moment. We are inviting representatives of various organisations in Marlow, including those who meet in our building and, of course, members of both

congregations. We are ever so pleased to see the upgraded building used by a wide variety of local organisations and we are proud to be playing our role in supporting the Marlow community.

Our celebration will begin at 5pm with an introduction, a reflection of our history, photos and recent activities (in the worship area), followed by a wine and cheese reception in the Hall.

We do hope you can all come, and if you can... it would help with our preparations if you could let us know if you plan to join us!

Valerie Brownridge, Marlow Church Secretary

Rev Peter Grimshaw

Just as we were going to press, we heard the news that Peter Grimshaw, former Minister of Maidenhead URC, has died. Many of us will have known him for many years, and although he has not enjoyed the best of health recently this may be unexpected news.

Information about the funeral will be circulated when it is known. There will be more in the next church magazine. Do you have any stories or memories of Peter that you would like to share?

Please hold Susan and family in your prayers.

God bless, *David Downing*

Maidenhead and Marlow URC Churches away day

Join us for a day as we reflect on some key questions for our churches:

What is God asking us to do?

What could we be doing better?

Who are our neighbours?

10am morning coffee

1pm lunch (*cost to be confirmed)

Closing with a cup of tea (approx 4:30pm)

There will be time for worship and discussion!

30th October 2023



St. Katharine's Parmoor

Frieth, Henley-on-Thames, RG9 6NN

Anyone can come.

Please register your interest with

Valerie, John or David

'Should I stay or should I go now?'

This is the title of a song released in 1982 by *The Clash*. But it's been clear that people have been thinking about this question more and more in relation to their church experience.

People have left churches, especially in the last three years. Many congregations have found themselves an average of 25% smaller than pre-Covid. Even churches that haven't shrunk may find themselves older and with higher running costs.

Although this article came from the US, much of it is true for us here in the UK:

Not in any particular order, the reasons why people left church or don't go to church now include:

- We do not align theologically anymore with the church.
- We don't want to be part of a church that does not welcome and include everyone.
- We just got out of the habit during COVID and haven't mustered up the will to return.
- Our lives are busy, and so Sunday mornings are too precious to spend waking early, getting dressed up and driving to go somewhere to be around people.
- We were too hurt by church to ever heal enough to return again.
- The pastor we loved is gone and the new one isn't to our liking.
- When COVID hit we were deeply disappointed in the church's response.
- We find connection with God in other places and ways.

There are some things in this list that we may feel powerless about. But there may be some things that we can do something about. Do any of these resonate with you? Or those you know? What can we do about any of these points?

But, as I mentioned, it's not all doom and gloom. There are churches that are growing. Why? Or, more importantly, why haven't you left? Well, it could be because of one of these reasons:

Not in any particular order, the reasons why people are still part of a church or have started going to church now include:

- We have a feeling of belonging there and the community is welcoming and inclusive, cares about loving your neighbour, and cares for those on the margins.
- Worshipping with others is an important part of our faith.
- We are paid to be there (staff and clergy).

Now... that last point is applicable only to a very small minority!

But it's a bit frightening how there are only two main reasons for coming to church! Especially compared to the number of reasons why you might want to leave a church!

The first list doesn't make it really clear as to what we can do about things. But this short list of positive reasons gives us a clear agenda of what we can be a part of and what we can do to make a difference.

So... what are your thoughts? Again, what connects with where you are in your faith/church going habits. I'd love to hear from you!

David Downing

Faith-filled Life: spiritual keep fit!

September is traditionally a time of change and renewal: starting school, heading off to college, going back to a favourite Keep Fit class with renewed enthusiasm, or taking up astronomy, painting or even dragon-boat racing. Whatever you choose to do, it is because you are interested in keeping mind and body healthy and fulfilled. But what about mind and spirit?

The first of five Stepwise 'streams' is called 'Faith-filled Life' and is an opportunity created by the URC to renew and build on your own knowledge and understanding of our faith and see what it would mean to start to change your everyday life to follow Christ's teaching more closely.



"Faith-filled Life" will be on Zoom from 2 October 2023 to 1 April 2024. There will be nine 2-hour sessions from 7 to 9pm, one every three weeks, to give time

to read and think between sessions. Do not worry if you cannot manage every session. Why not add this course to whatever else you plan this autumn – you will still be able to fit in the dragon boat racing!

For more information and a booking form visit

www.urcwessex.org.uk/discipleship

Bob Robertson

Piano and Cello Concert

At Maidenhead we were recently treated, at short notice, to a delightful evening of piano and cello playing by Mateusz Rettner, our Music Director, and Sarah Gait. The theme of the evening was Brazilian music, a programme to be performed at the Brazilian Embassy in London the following week. What a talented cello player Sarah is and her first solo items were indeed her improvisations on Brazilian folk tunes!

An additional treat was the world premiere of a very contemporary piece for piano and cello ... and the Brazilian composer, Rafael Marino Arcaro, was there with us too! He later explained that Sarah, the cellist, had commissioned him to compose this very challenging half-hour Sonata and she had chosen Mateusz to accompany her. Inspiring! Thank you!

Alison Holton



On Saturday evening a small number of us were privileged to listen to our supremely talented music director and his long-standing cellist colleague Sarah entertain us, both individually and then followed by two duets.

With our beautiful grand piano sounding magnificent and repositioned centrally at an angle on the dais, it was possible to

watch Mathias's stunning display of virtuosity. However, I have to admit to having had a certain anxiety as to the order of the loose sheets of music, as the pages had to be turned in such quick succession!

Alison Rose

Congratulations to Mateusz!

I am delighted to report that Mateusz Rettner, Music Director at Maidenhead, recently got engaged to Monica. As she lives in Warsaw, he will be taking a three-month sabbatical with her there during October through to December.

I'm sure you will all wish to join me in offering them both our heartiest congratulations and every good wish for their future together.

John Holton, Church Secretary

Commitment for Life

Once again we are looking at the work that the URC does through Commitment for Life. We work through partners in several countries. Church partners focus on food security, nutrition, HIV, health and gender equality.

We operate in Bangladesh, Israel and the occupied Palestinian Territories and in Zimbabwe.

We also give 5% of the income to Global Justice Now as the principles of social and economic justice are central to the teachings of Jesus Christ. It seems unfair that Zambia spends almost 50% of its national budget on foreign debt repayments. Increasingly it seems that climate change mostly affects those who can least afford it.

Our own Focus is on Zimbabwe.

Political instability is an ongoing concern in Zimbabwe. Most Zimbabweans face socio-economic crises and every year millions rely on food aid. Drought, floods and erratic rainfall patterns are costly. Ruined infrastructure and a broken economy means many cannot grow enough food.

Through Christian Aid we run programmes to help with water supplies, better use of drought resistant crops, better animal husbandry and funding for small businesses. This is particularly useful for women who have often had little say in what happens.

Your support means a lot to the people of Zimbabwe. It improves gender equality and enables people to help themselves and others in the community.

Commitment for Life grew out of the 1% appeal. We raise about £2500 each year. Please give generously to help us reach that target or beat it.

Gordon Campbell

Ukraine needs – more of the same

That's the tragedy of what we are involved in. What's needed is still more of the same: all the basic items again.

As I write, Ewa is preparing for another trip to Kherson.

While there, she will deliver food and first aid items. It's what they need.

So what can we do to help? We can do what we have always tried to do, which is give what is needed. It feels just like... more of the same – and it is.

If you or anyone you know wants to help us, please use the following list as a guide for what is needed. We do sometimes have to turn down donations because they aren't what is needed. So this list is hopefully helpful to you, to our friends in Poland who have to store our boxes, and most importantly it is what is needed in Ukraine right now. We need:



- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Food – canned/tinned and instant Breakfast cereals• Drink – tea and coffee• First Aid items and household medication | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sleeping bags• Toiletries• Household cleaning items |
|--|---|

David Downing

Ride and stride for churches

The annual event for Bucks Historic Churches, *Ride and Stride*, takes place on **9 September** 2023. Participants ride, walk or cycle between churches with sponsorship to raise funds to give grants for urgent repair and maintenance. This event attracts both church-goers and non-church-goers, some of whom will call at Marlow URC. If you are interested and would like further details, please contact me via Marlow church.

Sheila Blair

A new adventure

On August 26 Maidenhead's former Youth and Family Worker, Alice Gilbert, was inducted into Priesthill United Reformed Church and the wider Synod in Glasgow as Church Related Community Worker.

We send her our prayerful support in her new life.

On behalf of Maidenhead URC some of us were able to send Alice a card and a gift voucher as she starts her new chapter.



Jo Greengrass attended the service and supplied the photo for us.

Greenbelt

Some of you will know that every year I go to the Greenbelt Festival – a festival about Belief, Activism, and Art. This year will be my 30th Greenbelt, and it will be the 50th in total! Happy Birthday Greenbelt!

If you want to discover some of what I experienced, check out our YouTube and Facebook pages where there will be some short videos.

David

Ruth and Naomi – find out more

Windsor and Maidenhead Community Forum Women's Group

Ladies of all beliefs and none are warmly invited to our next meeting from 7.30 - 9.00pm

Monday 2nd October 2023

Grenfell Lodge (synagogue)

Ray Park Road, Maidenhead SL6 8QX



Rosalind Luper will present an illustrated talk around the story of Ruth & Naomi.

Further details from: sally514@btinternet.com www.wamcf.org



URC Ministry and Mission Fund – Annual Letter To Local Churches

Dear Friends,

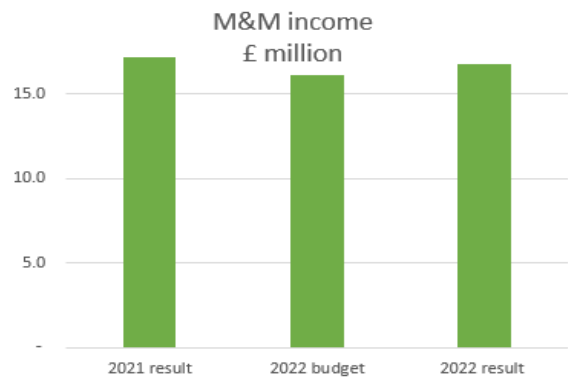
When will normal service be resumed?

As we are writing this letter and closing off the URC's accounts for 2022, the country is still torn with industrial disputes, mostly notably with Health Service workers, rail industry workers, teachers etc. etc. Whatever your view as to the wisdom or justice of such action, we suspect all of us are affected by the disruption to some degree.

In church life too, are we back to "normal life"? Some churches no doubt have returned to something like their pre-Covid level of activity and attendance numbers. Quite a few have recommenced their activity but find their numbers have reduced. Some churches have found re-opening too difficult and have decided to close.

Whatever the “new normal” was to be, we suggest its arrival has (like many trains) been disrupted, delayed, or cancelled all together.

The URC’s finance officers had concerns that the late arrival of the return to normality would impact very significantly on the giving to the M&M Fund in 2022. However, the churches responded magnificently and the giving to M&M was £600,000 ahead of budget. It was also only 2.5% down on 2021’s result.



So, thank you to all who continued to contribute to your local church, thank you to all those churches who met their commitment for 2022 in full, and thank you to all those who, in adversity, continued to treat the M&M Fund as the first priority and paid what they could.

With normal service not yet resumed, 2023 is not going to be an easy year either. We now have the added disruption of high inflation, pushing up wages and overhead costs. As the Spirit directs and as our means allow, can the churches once more respond to the call of our gracious, loving and ever-generous God? Again, thank you all!

If you have any questions or comments arising from this letter, please speak to your church treasurer who has been provided with more detailed information. If they are not able to help directly then they can get in touch with the finance team at Church House.

*Yours in Christ,
Ian Hardie (Immediate Past Treasurer)
Vaughan Griffiths (Deputy Treasurer)*

Safeguarding training

Refresher safeguarding training is available this autumn: ask David

Scout Group Family Camp



The third weekend in July saw 25 of us camping - it was our annual Scout Group Family Camp at Paccars Scout campsite, near Chalfont St Peter. The young people, mainly Beavers this year, brought their mums and/or dads and we all had a good time despite the wet start and winds which succeeded in blowing over one of the tents.



Once again Pedal Carts and Shooting were on the programme but the highlights seemed to be the Tomahawk Throwing and Laser Tag and of course the Rabbit Run which was all muddy this time.



It was a joy to see everyone getting on so well together and the clearing up at the end didn't seem to be the usual chore – even the youngest chipped in to help willingly!

On the Saturday we held our brief Annual General Meeting for which we had prepared a Review of the past year, with lots of photos.



Copies are on the table in the Link so feel free to pick up a copy and read about an action-packed year for our young people, thanks to the time, energy and enthusiasm of our brilliant team of volunteers.

Alison Holton, Assistant Group Scout Leader

Colin Ferguson's last service in Marlow (September 3)

Christchurch Marlow has enjoyed Colin Ferguson's preaching for many years. His background work as a probation officer provided many examples to give us

pause for thought and inspiration. His wife, Janet, to whom he has been married for over sixty years hasn't joined us for several years and we have missed her company.

Colin has written poetry since the 1950s and this soon found an outlet in writing hymns. Many of these have been included in the five books of hymns he has published as well as in other collections. He always brings at least one of his hymns with him for us to enjoy and think about. September 3 is his last planned visit to us.

Earlier this month I received the following message from Colin when asking him for possible preaching dates:

“At 86, my expectations of being able to preach in 6 months’ time have to be realistic, however optimistic I might like to be.

I have a fondness for Marlow as you were one of the first churches in the area that called me to preach. I knew Cyril Lowden from Presbyterian committees and of course Arthur Macarthur was a great inspiration.

I am well blessed by still having Janet with me still. It’s a bit startling to think we clock up 170 years between us. And that I have been able to answer God’s call for 65 years since I first was challenged to preach.

I will probably say a farewell on Sunday, but in case I forget (which does happen these days) I have treasured the support your congregation has always shown me.” Colin Ferguson.

Judith Inman

URC General Assembly Digest

A round up of the decisions made at the 2023 General Assembly of the United Reformed Church, which took place at The Hayes Conference Centre from June 30-July 3.



'Spaces of grace' was the theme underpinning worship throughout Assembly. "We need grace in communal life", said the Revd Fiona Bennett, the Moderator of the General Assembly. "It is through God's grace we become able to laugh, cry, to wonder, and through that grace we also have hope for the world and God's community of disciples. In Assembly, let us open our hearts, minds and hands to the ocean of God's grace."

The Moderators' report was received and concluded with key discussion questions for local churches throughout the URC:

Questions for discussion in local churches:

What does being comfortable in our own skin mean in our local context?

What can we let go of to keep us lean, lithe, and fleet of foot as activists and agents in God's economy?

What does it take for us to realise we already have all we need to be the people of God?

How can we carve out the space and time to consider new initiatives?

FACT

Dr Sam Richards, Head of Children's and Youth introduced URC Treasure: Faith Adventures for Children Together (FACT) – a new, free, weekly resource for churches to support children aged from 0-12 years.

Community Project Awards

This year marks the 25th year of the URC's community project awards. The awards are given at each General Assembly to celebrate innovative and transformative work that United Reformed Churches do in their communities.

Three projects won awards at this year's Assembly:

Causeway Community Garden, at St Johns United Reformed Church, Warrington, Cheshire, a garden that offers space for the community to enjoy and to support mental health;

Darwen Asylum Refugee Enterprise, at Central United Reformed Church, Darwen, Lancashire, a drop-in service for the local refugee and asylum seeker community;

Wooler Warm Welcome, at Wooler United Reformed Church, Northumberland, a warm, safe and comfortable place for people to meet informally.

Legacies of Slavery, proposals for repairing justice

General Assembly agreed to give anti-racism training to Church office holders, including all ministers in the URC. This follows from the confession and apology that Assembly passed in 2022 concerning transatlantic slavery and its continuing legacies.

Church Life Review Group – Introducing the story and principles

The Church Life Review Group (CLRG) was established by the 2021 General Assembly to examine the structures, resources, and work of the denomination. “We see the Church as facing a Kairos moment”, the group reported, “where it has an opportunity to try different ways of being the Church and bring new energy to its mission”.

The key question that formed itself for the CLRG was: “What enables local United Reformed Churches to flourish, and how might the United Reformed Church most effectively use the financial resources it has to enable that flourishing?”

The CLRG had not tried to set a Church-wide mission strategy but, instead, produced some resources, research and evidence “to help us shape our discernment here about what we do next”.

One way in which the concept of flourishing was explored was through the URC’s partnership with the think tank Theos, whose report can be seen at

www.urch.org.uk/clrg

Dr Bradbury said the report is a work in progress, containing proposals for future work. Specifically, focussed work needs to be done on sharing of resources, on how local churches can best be equipped by central support functions, and on developing models of employed lay work.

Affirming the human dignity of transgender, non-binary and gender non-conforming people

Following a consultation with its facilitation group, General Assembly: affirmed the human dignity of transgender, non-binary and gender non-conforming (GNC) people and asserts their right, within and beyond the URC, to live without threat of violence and hatred; committed to furthering the church's understanding of, and pastoral care for transgender, non-binary and gender non-conforming people in the church, both locally and across the denomination and requests the Equalities Committee to facilitate this; recognised the church's failure to challenge the assumptions and patterns of behaviour which lead to transphobia and acknowledges that church sometimes perpetuates these patterns; supported the right of all to receive affirming non-directive support and healthcare, and to express their sexuality, gender and identity without coercion or the fear thereof.

A harvest thought from Commitment for Life

We could learn so much from Zimbabwe here in the UK! How can we make our farming and food production more organic, more natural, and less reliant on mechanised, fossil fuel-driven techniques? How can we de-monetise our food production so that even those without money can share in the abundance?

Let this then be our love in action, to share God's abundance with our neighbour in need, and work for a world where there is no such thing as poverty or wealth, only abundance to be shared for free.



Contact us

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