

The Link



April 2024



Shanklin United Reformed Church www.shanklinurc.co.uk

View From Number 10



He's Alive!

The resurrection of Jesus is perhaps the event that most changed human history. The women who went to the tomb were amazed and frightened to find the stone rolled away and were then told by an angelic messenger *“Don’t be alarmed – you are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him.”* (Mark 16:6).

Once they had come to realise that this was true, it totally changed their lives; despair and hopelessness gave way to joy and anticipation as the good news of his resurrection began to impact them. The New Testament goes on to tell us about that first generation of disciples who began to turn the world upside down; a small band of nobodies began a movement that has encircled the globe.

It all hinged around the resurrection. If Jesus had remained dead, then the powers of darkness would have won. But Peter declares in his sermon on the Day of Pentecost - *“God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.”* (Acts 2:24).

The cross was an essential part of God’s saving plan as Jesus gave himself as a sacrifice for our sins and took it all to the grave - his lifeblood was shed so that we might find forgiveness and the offer of new life. Hallelujah, what a saviour!

People around Jerusalem knew about the death of Jesus – it was the talk of the town, as we discover from the Emmaus Road story in Luke 24:18. His resurrection was the controversial issue that divided everyone and was central to the message of Peter, Paul and the early church. This claim confounded the religious leaders, but they saw the boldness and courage of the disciples who were empowered by the Holy Spirit – God’s gift through the risen Christ.

This month we will be running a short series on a Wednesday evening called ALIVE. This has been developed by the Bible Society and Hope Together as a resource to help people explore the impact of Jesus’ resurrection. It began its life as a course in a local church

in Peterborough – rather like Alpha did before it went global.

Each of the five sessions has a short engaging video looking at one of Jesus' appearances after he had risen from the dead. These are superbly produced and are very thought provoking. They each focus on a theme – Love, Hope, Peace, Freedom, and Purpose. There is also a book available that follows the series.

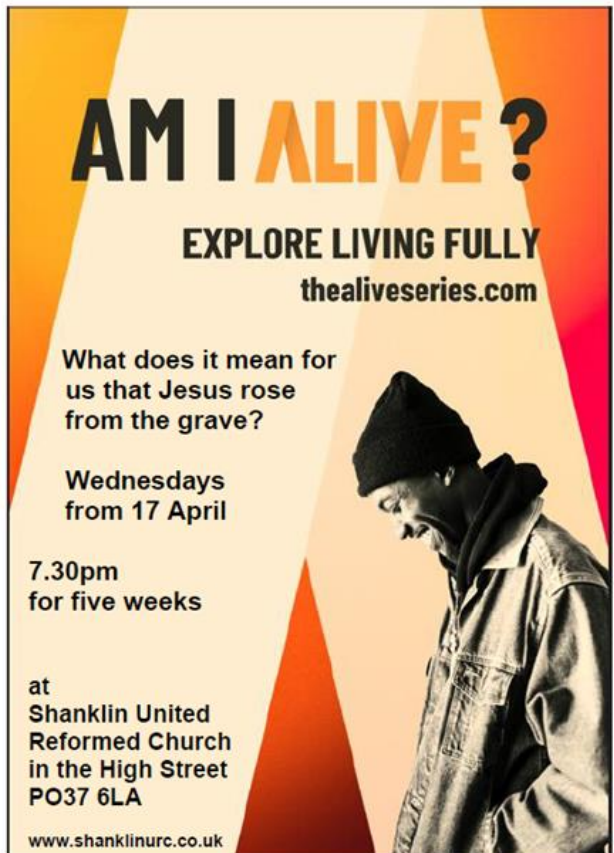
We are inviting people in the community to come and look into this amazing story and its implications for our lives today. This will be an interactive session at the church with time for questions and discussion over drinks. One or two of our small groups may also use it in the post-Easter season when resurrection is a central focus for us all.

Do please use the invitation cards to invite a friend or neighbour to come along with you. Now is the time to act while Easter is in focus,

Every blessing,



“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...” 1 Peter 1:3



AM I ALIVE?

EXPLORE LIVING FULLY
thealiveseries.com


What does it mean for us that Jesus rose from the grave?

Wednesdays
from 17 April

7.30pm
for five weeks

at
Shanklin United
Reformed Church
in the High Street
PO37 6LA

www.shanklinurc.co.uk



Prayer



Prayer Sabbath Friday 19th – Saturday 20th April

We are planning to have another special 24-hour prayer event this month with three opportunities to gather together and spend time with the Lord, beginning with some corporate worship and prayer and then allowing free time for personal devotion:

Meeting times:

Friday 18:30 - 20:30

Saturday 08:30 - 10:30 starting with breakfast

15:30 - 17:30 concluding with communion at about 17:00

Please mark this period in your diary and reserve time for prayer and do try and join us for one or more of the times together.

Tuesday Prayer at 19:30 - Continues each week via Zoom using the same account as for other activities and groups :

[https://us04web.zoom.us/j/3242665584?](https://us04web.zoom.us/j/3242665584?pwd=ZTlXZzBLWnkrWTNBY2JBK1o0K2ZXdz09)

[pwd=ZTlXZzBLWnkrWTNBY2JBK1o0K2ZXdz09](https://us04web.zoom.us/j/3242665584?pwd=ZTlXZzBLWnkrWTNBY2JBK1o0K2ZXdz09)

Meeting ID: 324 266 5584 Password: 936536.

Text Prayer Network - this has proved a really efficient method of getting prayer needs around. So, if you have an urgent and important issue that needs immediate cover, please text Lou on **07474 273119** (or, as a back-up, Jean Cunningham on: 07854 324809) with your prayer request and she will mobilise a team of over 30 intercessors by forwarding the message to the group. Each of the team will pray and then delete the message.

If you'd like to be added to this network, please get in touch with Lou and she will brief you on the protocols.

Prayer for Israel - is held each Monday at 14:30 at Roy, Melodie and Carol's home. Should you wish to know more details about the prayer meeting, please contact Melodie or Roy on 📞 866912 or melodieroywilson@gmail.com.

ENCOUNTER

Usually on the last Sunday of each month
at 10:30

A café style meeting place to drop in
and enjoy some refreshments



...a relaxed time of Friendship, Fun, Food
and exploring Faith...
with craft, songs, challenges, prayers...

EVERYONE is welcome
– why not bring a friend?

This month the café service will be held on
28th April - He's Alive

Café serving from 10.15

The Good Shepherd

2,000 years ago a special morn
Our saviour Jesus Christ was born
He to save the world from sin,
Then all his flock to gather in
On the first Palm Sunday the crowd went wild,
As they cheered this good shepherd so meek and mild
A few days later the crowd that had cheered,
Turned on Jesus oh how they jeered
Good Friday they nailed him on a cross at Calvary
He died to set the whole world free
On the third day after His blood was shed,
The disciples found the tomb empty
He's Risen, **He's** Risen, **He's** Risen
He's done what he said,
He came to save the world from sin
Then all his flock to gather in

Mary Fryatt

Connection Quiz

1. What was Gabriel, who visited Mary
2. What were contestants supposed to say on the BBC programme The Weakest Link to add funds to the prize pot?
3. Which London men's football team was managed by Arsène Wenger?
4. What was the 1978 - 2008 BBC children's drama programme that was set in a school?
5. So, what is the **connection** between the answers to questions 1 - 4?
6. And bonus question... where was the cover photo taken? Hint: it was taken in Normandie, France

Answers are on [page 35](#)



Shared Worship in The Bay



Share Sunday evenings with friends from various local congregations across The Bay

7th April	18:30	Church of the Sacred Heart Atherley Road, Shanklin
14th April	18:30	St Blasius Church Church Road, Shanklin
21st April	18:30	Sandown Baptist Church Station Avenue, Sandown
28th April	19:30	Shanklin URC High Street, Shanklin

Good News for All!

'Good News' is a contemporary outreach newspaper used by churches and missions to take the good news about Jesus Christ into communities across the UK.

Every month, Good News reaches thousands of readers with true stories of how God is changing the lives of those who put their trust in his Son, Jesus. Using jargon-free language, it also explains how everyone can find a personal relationship with Jesus.

This such a great resource for people to read and then share with others!!



This month's edition (available in church and to read online at www.goodnews-paper.org.uk/viewlatesteditionspage.htm) has several great articles, including the headline article 'Amazing Recovery- Boy injured in nightmare accident defies all the odds'.

Other contributions include:

- **Usher On God** - R&B icon reveals his relationship with God
- **I Know Him So Well** - Barbara Dickson's big hit describes her faith in Jesus
- **Actress Outs Herself** - Oscar nominee Carey Mulligan happy to be known as a Christian
- **Arsenal Coach** - Academy 'coach of the coaches' finds greatest Coach of all
- **Columbine 25 Years On** - The mum who forgave her daughter's killers
- **Scientists Astonished** - Biologists find amazing clocks in so-called 'simple' bacteria

Good News... for a change

**Come to
'The Well'**

a place for

Living Well Together

A safe place for friendship, support and a refreshing time – here at Shanklin URC:

Wednesdays 11:00 – 13:00

Free refreshments and craft activities

Just drop in at any point



Getting Together

Thank you to all those who attended the gathering on Thursday 14th March. It was a wonderful time of fellowship and friendship!



In May we have arranged for a party of folk to go to Wessex Synod's Big Day Out at Hollycombe Steam Fair (near Petersfield) on Saturday the 4th. We plan to leave from Shanklin at about 08:00 and return before 19:30.

Please see the advert on the opposite page or visit the website:

www.urcwessex.org.uk/synod-big-day-out/ for more details.

We need to book fair tickets and ferries **SOON** so please let Dave or Robin know if you would like one by **Sunday 7th April** at the latest ~ lifts for individuals will be available from folk within the fellowship.

Dave & Rob

BIG day out '24

Hollycombe
STEAM IN THE COUNTRY
hollycombe.co.uk



**Children £5
Adults £8**



Were you at the Wessex Synod Big Day Out in 2022?
Big Day Out '24 will be **Bigger and Better** with many **more rides** and additional programme activities provided by the Wessex Synod.
Open to all church groups, user groups, and community links



**SATURDAY 4TH MAY 2024
10AM - 5PM**



Synod Big Day Out 2024 – bookings needed now!

Please let Robin Wightman or Dave White know by 7th April if you'd like to attend this day out so we can plan transport.

Following the success of the last Synod Big Day out at **Hollycombe Steam in the country** (in 2022), Wessex Synod have booked the site again for their exclusive use on **Saturday 4th May 2024**, 10:00 – 17:00.

There will be more steam rides open this year and additional programme activities provided by Wessex Synod.

We invite all churches, church user groups and community groups with links to URCs and LEPs in Wessex Synod to come and enjoy a day of fellowship, fun and worship.

Ticket prices are the same as in 2022:

£8 per adult, £5 per child - for up to 10 rides on the attractions

New this year are tickets for unlimited rides on the attractions:

Adult £10.50 Child £7.50

A free ticket can be booked for an accompanying carer.

Hollycombe's fabulous new café will be open this time and there will be other food and refreshment outlets. You are welcome to bring your own picnic.

We have listened to feedback and so this time the layout for the Synod activities will be more central and accessible for all. Synod activities include a large marquee with worship, stories and entertainment, as well as a marketplace with crafts, Synod Youth Executive, and church connections, forest church and a nature walk.

We look forward to seeing you there.



Testimony

Julie & I want to give Jesus all the glory for Julie's miraculous healing.

It was a very traumatic time for me, but, I praise God for the sense of peace I experienced throughout. From the minute I found Julie collapsed on the floor, right through to her coming round, I struggled at times to hold it together but still felt peace.

It's times like this when thank you just doesn't seem to be sufficient.

We both would like to thank all those who prayed for Julie, especially Lou and her prayer warriors. It didn't look good for several days, but glory to God Julie is now well and gaining her strength.

We are also reminded that there are many people in our church and beyond who are praying for a miracle, some have lost loved ones despite prayers being offered on their behalf.

As grateful as we are for Julie's healing, we pray there will be more miraculous healing for others.

We are also thankful for the wave of love that has been poured out not just for Julie, but me too. As I have already said, thank you just isn't enough.

We truly are an amazing family.

George Port

Christians Working Together in The Bay

There has been a monthly prayer meeting at the home of Grace McKenzie from Christ Church, Sandown since November. Something that has emerged from listening to God is an initiative to pray blessings over the businesses along the seafront. This will happen in late April and if anyone would like to be a part of this, she would be pleased to hear from them....

Grace McKenzie gamck2015@gmail.com

Methodist Minister Retiring

The stewards and congregation at Shanklin Methodist Church extend an invitation to us to their special service on Sunday 14th April at 15:00, which will be Rev Frances Belham's last service in the town.

Refreshments will follow.

Regular Giving to the Church

Brian spoke on Stewardship on 17th March and mentioned the general giving to church funds, which Colin also highlighted at our Annual Church Meeting.



We have been blessed to meet our expenses over the years, but it was pointed out that our general giving, including reclaimed tax from Gift Aid donations, has fallen a couple of thousand pounds short of our payments every year for the last eight years. Thankfully we have had a few large one-off donations and a couple of legacies that have kept us on track and helped meet some additional costs. There have also been gifts of around £7,500 in the last year to the Maintenance Fund to help cover secondary glazing and a/v upgrades - big thanks to everyone who helped there! (We do set aside £200 per month from our general income to help cover on-going maintenance).

One more challenge - we had not up to now been hit by increased utility prices, but this year our energy bills may well double, so we'll need to find an extra few thousand pounds per annum.

The Elders are now asking all our regular worshippers to prayerfully consider their financial commitment to the work and witness of our church family so that we can go forward with greater confidence, not relying on those extra gifts which have kept us afloat. If you are a taxpayer, please do fill in a Gift Aid declaration so we can get an extra 25% on everything you give – this amounted to around £11,000 of the £64,000 that came in during 2023.

Our General Funds only stand at around £16,000 so we don't have much in hand, so we are very reliant on everyone's faithfulness in this area. Please take it to the Lord and see if you are able to contribute a little more to the family pot. We have no other sources of income for our general work and don't believe in fundraising except in support of other good causes.

Any questions please do speak to our treasurer – Colin Tamcken

A **HUGE** Thank You To Everyone!

Sue and I would like to express our gratitude for all the kind wishes, offers of practical help and, of course, your prayers during the past 6 or 7 weeks.

Here is a recent photo of Sue as she begins to get on with her knitting... and more good news... soon after I took this the external oxygen feed and the chest drain were removed!



Sue is now regularly sitting up in a chair and her appetite is gradually returning ~ she is looking forward to being back at church and is determined to make that happen as soon as possible.

We have both been buoyed up enormously and completely bowled over by the outpouring of love from the fellowship!

God has been so good to us; his faithfulness knows no bounds and his people have shown their true worth...

THANKS AGAIN

Robin and Sue

Michael Hopkins Inducted as Wessex Synod Moderator

On Saturday 23rd March, 2024, the Rev Dr Michael Hopkins was inducted as Moderator of the URC Wessex Synod at London Street United Reformed Church in Basingstoke.

Michael was appointed following the move by the Revd Clare Downing to be Moderator of the North Western Synod.

Introduced by the Rev Josh Thomas, acting Minister at the church, himself the grandson of the late George Thomas, who served Wessex Synod as Clerk for many years, the service was led by the Rev Dr Tessa Henry-Robinson, Moderator of the URC General Assembly 2023-2024.

Hymns and anthems included *O for a thousand tongues to sing, Not far beyond the sea, nor high; Brother, Sister, Let me serve you; Give to me, Lord, a thankful heart; Take this moment, sign and space*; finishing with *And can it be that I should gain*.

Ecumenical and international guests included the Rev Andrew de Ville, Chair of the Methodist Southampton District, the Rev David Barrett, Deputy Chaplain General of the Army, Bishop Lordwell Siame from the Lusaka Presbytery of the United Church of Zambia and Pasteur Charles Klagba of the region Nord-Normandie of the Église protestant unie de France.

In his sermon, the Rev Dr John P Bradbury, General Secretary of the United Reformed Church, used Jeremiah 29 as the principal text.

“The words ... mark out the words of our text today as being the words of a true prophet – not the words of the false prophets whose message is being contrasted with the words of the true prophet. There is often a choice of voices to heed, so how does one discern which voices might be the voices of wisdom, and which the voices that might lead one astray?

“Many were listening to those whose message they liked, those who they wanted to believe. What were these voices saying? ‘it will soon be over’, and ‘vengeance will be yours’, and ‘resist your enemy – destroy them from within’. How we like to pay heed to the voices that say the things we want to hear. To follow the people on X, formerly Twitter, and Tik-Tok who chime with the way we see the world. To

vote for those who promise us the earth because we want it to be true. “Such voices are false prophets. They lie. To be a true prophet is to be realistic.

So when your new Moderator tells you that of course every congregation can have its own minister, that of course every new minister he inducts will restore the Sunday School to many scores or hundreds of children, will visit everyone in need every day, and magic an army of Elders, Secretaries, Treasurers and people for the tea-rota out of nowhere....well...you might be just a little sceptical.

“Part of the prophetic ministry of the Moderator is precisely to help congregations face reality as it is. And much of our reality is currently extremely challenging. Pretending otherwise and that there are easy solutions gets us nowhere. We are required to face reality squarely, name it, and engage with it. That is the task of the truly prophetic Moderator.

“A Moderator who is a true prophet will help you spot the seeds that you can plant today, that might never feed you – but stand the possibility of feeding those who come after you. A prophetic Moderator will be hopeful – not naively optimistic, or living in fantasy land, but a prophet who will help you see something in a different light, and spot the possibility within it.

“Even as churches reach the end of their mission and close, as realistically we know many will in the next few years – they can do so in a way that plants a seed for something new to emerge. As Christians, we are called to die hopefully. “For unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”

In his personal statement to the congregation, Michael Hopkins described a Moderator as “a Minister to Ministers and a friend of churches.” He also discovered that there was Wessex Gin and Wessex black pudding, so his appointment “was meant to be.”

“The challenge is to see where God is at work in Wessex, and to join in with that.”

You can look at photos and videos from the service by following the link at: urc.org.uk/michael-hopkins-inducted-as-wessex-synod-moderator/

Source: urc.org.uk/our-news-stories/latest-news/



Wessex Synod

120 Alma Road,
Southampton,
SO14 6UW

Synod Moderator:
The Rev Dr Michael Hopkins

Moderator's PA:
Mrs Deborah Walker

26 March 2024

Dear friends,

Thank you to everyone who attended, viewed online, took part in, supported and organised, and prayed for my Induction Service last Saturday. I cannot find words to express quite how welcomed, loved, supported and prayed for I feel as I begin this ministry. Thank you to one and all. If you missed the service, a recording is available on the URC's YouTube channel.

I am aware that many churches are struggling to manage buildings, struggling to find the money to run a church, and struggling to find people willing and able to take on responsibilities. To some it certainly feels like a crisis moment. When we see people struggling in Gaza and Israel, in Haiti, in Russia and Ukraine, in Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Malawi, it certainly seems as if our world is in crisis. But this is not a new story: on Good Friday the disciples had been thrown into a real crisis that looked like it had no possibility of resolution. Jesus had taken on the world, and at that moment it looked very much like he had lost pretty convincingly.

We have read the book, and we know how the story ends. The Easter story is not a story of peace or benign hope, but a story of disruption and grief, disbelief and uncertainty. In the midst of all that, at the moment everything seemed at its worst, Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene, called her by name, and said, "But I am still here - and you cannot hold on to the me that you think you know. Go and tell the others."¹

The United Reformed Church, and the LEPs in which we are part, is filled with God's faithful people, but what does that mean as we try to

follow the risen Christ in 2024? It means that when everything seems hopeless and at its worst, God can still act. The challenge for us is whether we are looking for God alive and at work, and ready to join in, or are we trying to rely on what we can achieve by our own efforts? Even in our deepest grief the risen Christ still comes to us, still calls us by name, and still reminds us that this is not the end of our story. Are we looking and listening for the risen Christ today? Are we alive to the possibilities of the risen Christ in the world, not just the Church?

For 2,000 years Christianity has continued to choose faith, hope, and love. My prayer for us this Easter is that through Good Friday and Easter Day we might be reminded that with God we can believe in a way when there is no way. May it be so. Amen.

I wish you every blessing this Easter.

Yours sincerely,



Michael Hopkins

¹ A version of John 20:17

www.urcwessex.org.uk

email: office@urcwessex.org.uk

Persecuted Church News

Bailed Iranian brothers request prayer

Friends and family of Iranian Alireza and Amir Nourmohammadi are grateful that they were released conditionally following their arrest in December, but request prayer as they face prosecution for their Christian activities.

The brothers were arrested, along with Milad Goodarzi, another

convert, by intelligence agents last December. Milad was released after questioning, but Alireza and Amir remained detained for more than four weeks.

The brothers were released in January after submitting bail of 300 million tomans (about £2,300) each. They face charges of engaging in *'deviant educational or propaganda activities contrary to the holy Islamic law by making false claims in religious fields'*.

Fears over Belarus's new religion law

Christians in Belarus have expressed concern about Belarus's repressive new religion law – now signed by President Aleksandr Lukashenko and which comes into force in July.

The legislation continues to require all religious communities to gain state registration before they are allowed to exist and continues to ban the activity of unregistered religious organisations.

All registered religious communities are required to seek re-registration between 5th July this year and next.

Leonid Mikhovich, the head of the Baptist Union, welcomed several changes in the final version compared with the earlier draft, including the removal of a requirement for religious organisations to report to local executive committees on their religious education of children. However, he expressed concern that no possibility exists for small religious communities without 20 adult founders. He also expressed concern about the extensive information founders need to provide to the authorities.

'We look at the new law with caution,' a Protestant pastor who asked not to be identified for fear of state reprisals told Forum 18 while the new law was in preparation. *'It promises nothing good, but it depends on how formally it will be applied as the wording in some parts is obscure.'* The pastor noted the *'endlessly expanding'* list of reasons the state could use to liquidate religious communities.

'If desired, they may be applied to any religious organisation.'

Source: [Release International](#) - used by permission

Kintsugi Hope Presents...



MENTAL HEALTH FRIENDLY CHURCH TRAINING DAY

*Becoming a Mental Health Friendly
Church and Community*

Join us to explore together how we can elevate our understanding of mental health, eradicate the stigma against mental health issues by naming our position, and encourage a compassionate response through gentle presence.



Lynette Brooks

8TH JUNE - CARISBROOKE PRIORY

[KINTSUGIHOPE.COM/JOINUSAT](https://kintsugihope.com/joinusat)

Tickets Sponsored by Carisbrooke Priory

The day is suitable for small group leaders, pastoral workers, lay leaders and anyone involved in caring or support roles in their church.

Kintsugi Hope is a charity registered in England and Wales
Charity Number: 1175529 | 01245 363 606 | kintsugihope.com

Training is from 10:00 to 16:00

Open the Book – Creation



At St Blasius School, the theme on 20th February was 'Friendship'. Having presented two stories from the beginning of the New Testament last year, this year we started at the very beginning of the Bible. It was quite complicated with all the props and back-drops, and added to that, the one backdrop stand lost a nut and came adrift at the bottom! We practiced at the church (see photos) because we knew we only had 10 minutes to get ready in the school hall. They use the hall up to 14:15 in winter and our presentation is at 14:25 – so it's hectic! Arriving there with some time to spare, one of the team suggested putting up our screen in another room and carrying it through to save time, which was when we discovered the lost bolt and the post coming adrift at the base. But with lots of prayer (including from the Bible Bites group who did not know about our problems) and great teamwork we managed to carry the rickety stand (which held up) into the hall and the presentation went forward without a hitch!

11 children participated – carrying the sun, the moon, three fish and three birds. Three more wore hats representing a Horse, a Hippo and a Hamster (thanks to Carol W who made the appropriate set of ears for each hat)... "And that's just the aitches!" said the Narrator. We do wish that we could show you a picture of the children, who participated so wholeheartedly. And all the children loved following Tracy with animated actions as they repeated God's creative words. And they also answered Roy's narrated questions unhesitatingly.



Above left: You wouldn't want to live in the dark, would you? So, with a word of love God said, 'Light'.

Previous page, right: You like to splash about in water, don't you? And stare up into the sky and to the universe, beyond? So, with a word of love, God said, 'Sea' and 'Sky' and 'Heavens above!'



But you can't live in the sea, can you? So, with a word of love, God said, 'Earth'. And he made a safe space between the sea and the sky.

You like a warm sunny day, don't you? And a bright moonlit night? And stars. Where would we be without stars? So, with a word of love, God said, 'Sun' and 'Moon' and 'Stars'.



And grass and grain and great fruit-bearing trees grew....



We have to have birds. Penguins and parrots....



.... with a word of love, God said, 'People'. People made in his image. To work, to create, to live and to love.



You wouldn't want to live alone, would you? So, with a word of love, God told the first people to make babies, to create families. And you wouldn't want all the beauty God had made to be spoiled, would you? So, with a word of love, God told them to take care of his creation.

Is it any wonder that he called it 'Good!'

Which reminds us... a good testimony from Godshill (sadly, the school said that there wasn't the time to have Open the Book there anymore). One of our Godshill retired storytellers said that a little boy knocked on her door and asked, "Why don't you come to school and tell us about God anymore?" His father, who is a policeman, then joined his son and said, "These children really need guidance



Why Do We Need To Know Who We Are In Christ? (Part 2)

Having established the importance of knowing who we are, Neil goes on to look at our crucial need to seek, see and know our Father.

If we are certain of our heritage, our hope and our calling, we will naturally **seek our Father's face** and **see Him at work in our everyday lives** ~ for we know that **He is the Source of all Hope**.

Father God, help us to keep our eyes focussed solely on You. Help us to daily seek you and see you in all things.

Robin

Seeking God's Face

"My heart says of you, "Seek His face!" Your face, LORD, I will seek`." (Psalm 27:8)

"If the sun is shining in the morning, I'll do it". "If he's there when I open the door, I'll know he's the one". "If I pass the class on world missions, I'll be a missionary. If not, I'll be a local pastor".

We all know better than this, but it's amazing how often scenarios just like these pop into our minds. Such propositions are referred to as 'laying a fleece' before the Lord or 'seeking a sign'.

The term fleece comes from the account of Gideon. In Judges 6, Gideon is called by God to deliver Israel from the Midianites. Gideon questions whether God is even for Israel (v13), and he doubts his own ability (v15). So, he asks God for a sign (v17). God gives him one, and then tells him to tear down the altar of Baal. Gideon is afraid to go during the day, so he goes at night.

Then he questions again whether God will deliver Israel. This time

he puts a lamb's fleece on the ground. If God will deliver Israel, then the lamb's fleece will be wet in the morning and the ground around it will be dry. The next morning it is so. That ought to satisfy him, right? Wrong! Wanting to be sure, and hoping that God won't get too mad, Gideon asks Him to do it again, but this time with the opposite result (i.e. the fleece dry and the ground wet). Not exactly the stuff heroes are made of. But God answers Gideon's request and then He reduces Gideon's army down to 300 men!

The whole point of the passage is that God, not man, is the deliverer. God chose a man desperately seeking assurance and reduced an army down to nothing so that the victory would clearly be His. The fleece wasn't a means of demonstrating faith; it was just the opposite. And it certainly wasn't used to determine God's will. God had already told Gideon what to do. Gideon was questioning the integrity of God, just as we do if we ask for a fleece when God has already shown us His will. In Matthew 12 verse 39, we read **"An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign"**. As God's people, let's seek the face of God.

Lord, forgive me for the times I have looked for signs instead of seeking Your face. I commit myself today to walk only in the faith revealed in Your Word.

God Works In The Ordinary

"...be content with what you have, because God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you'." (Hebrews 13:5)

A devout Christian heard an urgent news report on his radio that a flash flood was within minutes of entering the peaceful valley where he lived. Immediately he went to his knees and prayed for safety. The words were still on his lips when he became aware that water was gushing under his door. He retreated to the second floor and finally onto the roof of his house.

While he sat on the roof, a helicopter flew by and the pilot asked over the loudspeaker if they could lift him off. "It's not necessary since I have the Lord's protection," he replied.

Moments later the house began to break up and he found himself clinging to a tree. A police boat, braving the waters, approached him for rescue, but he assured them that the Lord would save him. Finally,

the tree gave way and the man went to his death.

Standing before the Lord, he asked, "Lord, I'm glad to be here, but why didn't You answer my prayer for safety?"

The Lord responded, "Son, I told you over the radio to get out of there. Then I sent you a helicopter and a motorboat!"

Nowhere in the Bible are we given the idea that God works only in the extraordinary. Much of the time He supernaturally works through His created order. Many people think God is present only when there is a miracle and that He leads only through signs and wonders.

There are people who always look for a sign. They walk by sight, not by faith. To them, God is only present in the miraculous. God was 'really' at the church service if something unusual happened. Many desire and look for 'visitations' from God.

But how does that square with God's omnipresence and the fact that He will never leave us or forsake us? Isn't God at every church service? Since God created the fixed order of the universe, would you expect Him to work primarily within that fixed order or outside of it? If God gave us a watch, would we be honouring Him more by asking Him what time it is or by simply consulting the watch?

Lord, forgive me for looking for signs when I only need to trust Your Word and live by Your promises.

The Source Of All Hope

***"Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him, the help of my countenance, and my God."* (Psalm 43:5)**

Sometimes the depression resulting from a seemingly impossible situation is related to a wrong concept of God. David wrote: ***"How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long will my enemy triumph over me?"* (Psalm 13:1&2)**. Had God really forgotten David? Was He actually hiding from David? Of course not. David had a wrong concept of God, feeling that He had abandoned him to the enemy. David believed a lie about God, and consequently he lost his focus. His situation seemed hopeless, and hopelessness is the basis for all depression.

But the remarkable thing about David is that he didn't stay in the

dumps. He evaluated his situation and realized, *Hey, I'm a child of God. I'm going to focus on what I know about Him, not on my negative feelings.* From the pit of his depression, he wrote: ***"I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation," (Psalm 13:5).*** Then he decided to make a positive expression of his will: ***"I will sing to the LORD, for he has been good to me," (Psalm 13:6).*** He wilfully moved away from his wrong concept and its accompanying depression and returned to the source of his hope.

If Satan can destroy your belief in God, you will lose your source of hope. But with God, all things are possible. He is the source of all hope. You need to learn to respond to hopeless-appearing situations as David did:

"Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Saviour and my God." (Psalm 43:5).

If Satan can't destroy your concept of God, then he will seek to destroy your concept of who you are as a child of God. He can't do anything about your position in Christ, but if he can get you to believe it's not true, you will live as if it's not, even though it is. The two most important beliefs you possess are who God is and who you are as His child.

Above all, Father, help me focus continually on who You are and who I am in Christ, and to take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.

Neil Anderson
Freedom in Christ Ministries
Used by permission

Lord, thank You that You have revealed Yourself to us, by Your son, in Your word. Help us to seek Your face daily, to see You in every part of our lives and to know that You are the Source of our Hope. Amen

Robin

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The Son was Obedient to the Father

In the week leading up to the remembrance of Jesus' death and resurrection, in the '**Israel Revealed**' course (which I had felt led to do again to refresh my memory of its content), the story of **Abraham** being asked by God to sacrifice his son, **Isaac**, was discussed.

Abraham was called by God, "His Friend," and the one God had chosen to be the father of a great nation, a nation chosen by God to in time bring forth his Son, Jesus – the Messiah, "to the Jew first," and that through them and their Messiah the whole world would be blessed.

Discussing this enormous 'ask' of Abraham by God, it came to my mind that Isaac by this time would not have been a child, but a young man and that he himself was willing to submit to his father, Abraham, and to allow himself to be bound on the altar, such was his relationship of trust with Abraham.

And indeed, Abraham himself believed that what God had spoken over his life regarding his inheritance would yet come to pass and that God was able to even raise up Isaac from the dead, so great was his trust in his Heavenly Father – see Hebrews 11:17-19.

We might ponder over this story and wonder why God would ask Abraham such a thing? Our God is the Author of Life, in one whose image we have been created. In his eyes, child sacrifice would have been an abomination.

Throughout Scripture, from beginning to end there are clear pointers to God's plan of salvation for mankind.

Indeed, as God – All Wise, All Knowing, He would know that His own dear Son, Jesus, one with Him from the beginning, would lay down His life, "A ransom for many," in obedience and surrender to His Father's plan.

How merciful is our God to show not only in this story of Abraham and Isaac, but throughout the Old Testament – the Jewish scriptures, which Jesus Himself would have known intimately, of the plan of redeeming the world to Himself.

I am sure we are all familiar with the dramatic ending of this story of

Abraham and Isaac and that a voice came from heaven telling Abraham not to harm his son, the son of promise. The Lord had seen his heart and that he was willing to surrender everything he held dear in obedience and with faith in the loving providence of the Lord, believing He would fulfil His word, even if it meant raising Isaac up from death.

And God provided a substitute – a ram caught in a thicket – to be the sacrifice.

There is such rich meaning in this story to explore even more.

Suffice to say that even as I write this, my heart is greatly stirred – our Father God was willing to give His Beloved Son in order that we might be restored back to fellowship with Him.

And our dear Saviour, Jesus, was willing to submit to death – “even death on a cross,” – for the sake of God’s covenant people – the Jews – and then in His mercy that grace being extended to us – the gentile world, Jesus Himself being our substitute – “the Sinless, Spotless Lamb of God,” – paying the price that we should have paid for our sins.

Amazing Grace, Amazing Love – “How can it be that You, my God, should die for me.”

We are living in extremely challenging times and the world is being shaken. As those who have been ‘grafted in’ to the olive tree – to the root, the people of promise – I must ask myself – will I stand with God’s purposes in these days? May God’s Word and the Holy Spirit’s revelation and inspiration be our strength, our compass and God’s Will and Ways our priority.

Antisemitism is increasing alarmingly, at this time – although it has always been there, albeit under the surface – and there is a battle for truth and ultimately for the souls of men and women, boys and girls. May we be those who understand the ‘signs of the times’ and know God’s Word and treasure it, in our hearts – “A lamp to our feet and a light to our paths.”

Blessings to you, dear church family – I do so pray these few thoughts will have been an encouragement to you in your walk with the Lord. It is always so good to talk about our faith and the, “Things of God,” with each other, so that we might all stand strong, “For such a time as this,” (as Queen Esther was called to do and to be used by

God as this instrument in saving the Jewish people from being annihilated centuries ago).

A little thought in conclusion about Abraham, being called the, "Friend of God." The particular word used is the one for 'lover'. God knew that when He chose Abraham, that he would be a man who would love the Lord His God with all his heart, soul and mind. Thank you, dearest Lord, that you are the Lover of our souls...

With so much love in our Precious Lord Jesus,

Jane H

Open the Book Invite

We will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord. (Psalm 78:4). If you would like to see how Open the Book works, or even take part, St Blasius church has asked Melodie, Roy, Julie and Bill to present an assembly during the 10:15 service on 28th April. Please come along if you would like to see Open the Book in action.



Mother and Baby Unit's Needs

The Mother and Baby Unit, has sent a list of their current needs as below and would be most grateful for any help in this regard.

Currently they would greatly appreciate the following:

- Small television for bedroom
- Carpet cleaner
- Vacuum cleaner
- Any small (adult) tub chairs for pram room/office (tub chair is a small wrap around comfortable chair).
- Good condition, clean cushions
- Plastic storage boxes (residents could use to stack and store belongings conveniently in rooms but preferably not large boxes as space is a premium)
- Chest of drawers (always take good quality ones though not urgent currently)
- Long shot but..... leather/wipeable sofas with fire safety label still attached!

Please contact Ann on 07481 596958 or Rod on 07394 044614 if you can help or drop off small items at The Well on Wednesdays from 11:00 to 13:00 at the URC Church in High Street, Shanklin.

Display

I received several positive comments, as well as admiring ones, about our display in the lobby.

It was such a thought provoking display too for our regulars and visitors alike, a job well done.



Today's Significance of the Biblical book of Esther

The Jewish festival of Purim (see Esther 9:26) this year is now, even as we write this article, from the evening of 23rd March until the evening of 25th March. We would encourage you to have a read of this amazing Book of the Bible in which, although God's Name is not mentioned in the Book at all, His Hand is nevertheless very clearly seen throughout!

Those who understand the importance of prayer for Israel in these critical days in which we live, are in fact preparing for our Lord's return – which is something that Paul and the writers of the New Testament even encouraged the early church to do. Scripturally, our Lord can only return when the people of Israel are saying, "Blessed is He Who comes in the Name of the Lord" (Matthew 23:39 and Psalm 118:26). So, we are now closer than ever to this time, with Biblical Prophecies being fulfilled as the nation of Israel was established in 1948.

We believe that Queen Esther symbolically represents the 'True Church' throughout the nations, coming before King Jesus, and petitioning Him on behalf of His blood brothers and sisters, both in their own Land and around the world where antisemitism is rife, praying that the Lord would Sovereignly protect Israel from the threatened annihilation, and at the same time realising that this affects the nations of the world, including our own as well. We also see, in reference to 'The Hunters' of Jeremiah 16:16, that antisemitism is a tool being used of the Lord to impress the Jewish diaspora to return to their Land!

Some of us have been on board a global prayer initiative (see www.tikkunglobal.org/esthersfast), which encourages prayer along the following lines using the acronym, **AVUR – which in Hebrew means "on behalf of"**:

A - Alignment

Do pray that Christian believers from all around the world will understand the times, courageously line up together and rightly position themselves for His Purposes - just as Mordecai and Esther did. And, like Esther, that Christians will not be ashamed to take a stand for their Judeo-Christian identity, faith and values (Esther 4:14-16; Romans 11, Ephesians 2:11-3:10).

V - Victory

We are praying for victory for the IDF in Gaza over Hamas; to see the Israeli captives set free, and for there to be a government in Gaza that allows for religious freedom and the Gospel to prosper among its citizens - something that is impossible under a radical, Islamic regime like Hamas. God loves the people of Gaza and so do we; we want to see them saved and live peacefully and prosperously (1 Timothy 2:1-8). We pray the same for the Christians and Muslims in Lebanon.

U - Unity

Just as the all the Jews throughout the Kingdom of Persia in Esther's time joined together to fast and pray, we too pray for unity among Messianic Jews and Christian Arabs in the Middle East, and for the worldwide Church and Israel. We know that our unity is a key to releasing the End Times' harvest and seeing more of His Glory in the Body. (John 17:20-24)

R - Revival

Just as the great turn around in the Book of Esther led many gentiles to join the Jews by faith in the God of Israel (Esther 8:17), we are praying to see events in Israel and the Middle East unfold in such a way so as to bring revival, especially to the Muslim world. Let's pray for supernatural dreams and visions, for the gospel going forward in the Middle East, in Israel and around the world.

Melodie

Connection Quiz Answers

1. **Angel.**
2. **Bank.**
3. **Arsenal.**
4. **Grange Hill.**
5. **Connection: they are all London Underground stations.**
6. **This issue's cover photo is of: Chapelle Notre Dame de Grace, Honfleur, Normandie, France (© C Sparks).**



FOCUS

on our Christian Brothers and Sisters being persecuted for their faith

Joy, hope and restoration for persecuted women in Cameroon

Your prayers and support are helping widows from Cameroon heal from their trauma and be restored in God's love.

When Islamic militants attack, the impact of violence extends far beyond just one night. Boko Haram attacks are escalating and expanding in sub-Saharan Africa, and each incident leaves devastation – not just the people murdered, the homes burned down and the churches destroyed. These are horrendous enough. We also know that trauma can last long in the hearts and minds of the survivors. But you're making sure our family finds hope.

Boko Haram attacks

In the Far North of Cameroon, Boko Haram attacks terrify and plague local believers. The militants often target men, with the intention of killing breadwinners and thereby destabilising Christian communities. Many Christian widows are left behind – mourning their husbands, fearful for their future and reliving horrific events. As well as their financial difficulties, these courageous women are left deeply traumatised.

God has other plans for these sisters in Christ, though. He is using Open Doors local partners across the country and the region to help these women restore and heal through trauma care. One group of 111 women gathered in northern Cameroon from 29th - 30th May. Each one has lived in some kind of isolation, unable to grieve or speak out about the pain and suffering they went through.

Self-help groups

One method of trauma care that Open Doors partners use is self-help groups, where women who've been through similar tragedies

can share their painful experiences with each other. Because the women are helping each other, these groups are also designed to facilitate the process of self-empowerment to improve their quality of life.

“On the first day of the seminar, we did not know how to begin the programme because most of the women were sad and cold,” says a local Open Doors partner. “They were not responding to the discussions.”

The facilitators decided to turn to God’s Word as a way of starting conversations. “We decided to minister to them through prayers and Bible verses,” says the partner. “With the help of the Holy Spirit, after this session, the Lord filled the women with a spirit of joy and peace.”

The women were happy when together, many proclaiming prayers of restoration. The pain may not be completely gone, but it was clear that these women had put God at the centre of their lives and counted on Him for comfort, healing, and provision as they face the future.

Trauma seminar

At another gathering later in the year, a group of 43 widows attended trauma care – with the space and time to discuss their ordeals with others who knew exactly what they were going through. One way the local partners try to restore the dignity of these persecuted believers is quite simple: giving them comfortable beds in beautiful rooms, with enough food to eat. These are luxuries for women who are forced to camp out in the mountains and worry each day if there will be enough food to feed their children and themselves.

“Thank you, thank you so much, I’ve been sleeping in the mountains for five years,” says Janice, one of the widows who came to the training. “Now I’ll sleep in a room like this instead? Thank you so much, thank you so much!”

For many of us, this might seem a small gesture – but it is all part of showing persecuted Christian women that they are valued, which is an integral part of the ongoing See. Change. campaign. These courageous women found the whole experience healing. Fatou lost her husband about a year ago. After the trauma care, she says, “I learnt that I should not keep things in my heart because, when we keep things in our hearts, it will choke us and make us physically

and spiritually sick.”

Literacy classes

Aside from cultural contexts impacting girls’ education in the north of Cameroon, the presence of Boko Haram has also severely affected the education of women and girls. Due to frequent attacks, Christian communities in the region are constantly on the move and education sadly can’t take a priority over survival. Some schools function with great difficulties, though others have had to close altogether.

This illiteracy impacts the spiritual growth of Christians as they cannot read their Bibles or participate in other church activities that require basic reading and writing. It also has a practical, financial impact in some areas, as it hinders believers’ ability to set up small businesses or participate in income-generating activities, because they cannot handle basic financial transactions.

In response to the situation, Open Doors partners launched a two-year literacy programme for Christian women in the Far North region – offering classes for women and young girls who cannot attend school, to help them read, write and do basic arithmetic. It’s one more way that your support and prayers can help our persecuted sisters as they count the cost of following Jesus – and continue to follow Him faithfully.

Please Pray

- That each Christian woman would be seen, valued and empowered to fulfil her God-given potential
- For the trauma care and literacy classes to be blessed by the Lord and fruitful
- For God’s protecting love to surround vulnerable believers in the Far North of Cameroon.

How many Christians are there in Cameroon?

There are 17.6 million Christians in Cameroon; they make up around 62% of the population. World Watch ranking: 43

www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution/world-watch-list/cameroon/

Source: [Open Doors](#) - used by permission

Dates For Your Diary



Day	Date	Time	Details
Fri	5 th Apr	19:00	Elders Meeting
Sun	7 th Apr	10:30 18:30	Morning Communion Service with Jonathan Snell Shared Worship at Sacred Heart Church
Tue	9 th Apr	14:00	Bible Bite with Louise Hall from Sandown
Sun	14 th Apr	10:30 18:30	Paul Fryatt speaking Shared Worship at St Blasius
Wed	17 th Apr	19:30	ALIVE course begins
Fri - Sat	19 th - 20 th Apr		Prayer Sabbath (see page 4)
Sun	21 st Apr	18:30	Shared Worship at Sandown Baptist Church
Sun	28 th Apr	10:30 18:30	Encounter Café – He’s Alive! Shared Worship at SURC
Sat	4 th May		Synod Big Day Out
	9 th - 19 th May		Thy Kingdom Come Prayer Initiative
Sun	12 th May	15:00	1 st open-air concert of 2024 in Rylstone Gardens - featuring Shanklin Town Community & Youth Brass Bands
Sun	19 th May	16:00	Pentecost and Free the Wight Prayer event
Thu	23 rd May	19:30	Church Meeting
Sun	26 th May	19:30	Open Air Worship at Rylstone Gardens begins

The Puzzle Pages

Sudoku

A numerical placement puzzle!

To solve it you need to fill the grid so that every column, every row and every 3 x 3 box contains the digits 1 to 9.

Enjoy!

Difficulty level: easy

	2			5			4	
								8
		3	2					
8			4					
	1	9	8					7
	6		7	1	3	5		
3	8			6		9		
		1	9	7				3
7		2			4			

1		2			3			4		5			6
7	8			9				10					
11						12							
				13						14	15		
16						17			18				
				19				20					
											21	22	
23			24				25		26				
					27						28		
29	30								33				
	31												

Last month's Sudoku - how did you do?

7	1	6	4	2	9	8	5	3
5	2	8	1	3	7	9	6	4
4	3	9	6	5	8	2	7	1
9	5	1	8	6	4	7	3	2
2	6	3	7	1	5	4	8	9
8	4	7	2	9	3	6	1	5
6	7	5	3	4	2	1	9	8
3	8	4	9	7	1	5	2	6
1	9	2	5	8	6	3	4	7

- 25 European country, featured on this month's cover (6)
- 27 'Deux', en anglais (3)
- 28 He phoned home *initials* (2)
- 29 'Of', en français (2)
- 31 'SS -', Brunel ship preserved in Bristol (5 7)

Down

- 1 European country of cuckoo clocks and chocolate (11)
- 2 He sung about sausage rolls (7)
- 3 New, from Greek (3)
- 4 Birthplace of William I (7)
- 5 Tired (5)
- 6 City in S E part of 25 across (8)
- 8 Not Applicable *initials* (2)
- 9 To produce a continuous light and sometimes heat (7)
- 12 Chelsea FC nickname, The - (5)
- 15 Either (2)
- 18 Anno Domini *initials* (2)
- 21 Boudica's tribe (5)
- 22 Central European Time *initials* (3)
- 24 Zero, nothing (4)
- 25 IV, quatre, fünf (4)
- 26 Your father's sister (4)
- 27 Young child (3)
- 30 Exempli Gratia *initials* (2)

Across

- 1 A Dire Straits song (7 2 5)
- 7 6th rainbow colour (6)
- 10 Group of sports clubs which play each other (6)
- 11 Diet Coca Cola drink introduced in 1960s (3)
- 12 Constrictor snake (3)
- 13 Barn, tawny, e.g. (3)
- 14 Toy that goes up & down on a string (2-2)
- 16 Joint in the middle of the arm (5)
- 17 Constellation Major or Minor (4)
- 19 Dwight Eisenhower, aka... (3)
- 20 - the Duck from BBC 'broom cupboard' (3)
- 21 Frozen water (3)
- 23 Moving in a constant direction (5)

Can You Guess The Year?

- The game show 'Catchphrase' starts on ITV.
- France & the UK announce plans to build the Channel Tunnel.
- The film 'Labyrinth' is released in the UK
- Telephone counselling charity Childline begins taking calls
- And UK No. 1s included:
 - Spitting Image with 'Chicken Song'
 - Doctor and the Medics with 'Spirit in the Sky'
 - Chris de Burgh with 'The Lady in Red'
 - Jackie Wilson with 'Reete Petite'

Answer next issue

This Issue's 'Pot Luck' Quiz Questions

1. Who won the FA Cup & League double in 1971?
2. When was English Heritage formed?
3. What's the capital of the Isles of Scilly?
4. Who was the last Tudor monarch?
5. What was the Irish currency before the Euro?
6. Who built Windsor Castle?
7. Who wrote the book 'Animal Farm'?
8. Who was the pilot of Thunderbird 2?
9. On the periodic table, which element is Pa?
10. Who designed the Gherkin, in London?

Answers next issue

Please note that the **deadline** for contributions for the next magazine is:

Sunday 21st April

Contributions can be emailed at anytime up to the deadline day to the editor at:

surc.thelink@btinternet.com

Last Issue's Solutions

- Guess the year: it was **1983**

- Last issue's crossword ↓

C	A	N	C	A	N		R	E	D	H	I	L	L
O	M		A		A	D	O		O				O
T	I	N	T	I	N		U	N	I	O	N		N
E							E		D				G
N	E	V	E	R	L	A	N	D		I			L
T		I		O		D		O		E	L	L	E
I	M	O		U	N	D		V	E				A
N		L	O	G		E	V	E		A	B	E	T
		I		E	L	D	O	R	A	D	O		
B	O	N	E		I		L		I		A	F	T
A			N		M		G		M	E	R		E
T	E	D	D	Y	B	E	A	R			D	E	E

Last Issue's 'Pot Luck' Quiz Answers

- | | |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Mike Hawthorn | Normandie (aka wife of William I) |
| 2. 12 th January 1895 | |
| 3. Douglas | 7. Charles Dickens |
| 4. Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon | 8. Clifton |
| 5. Franc | 9. Rutherfordium |
| 6. Mathilde, Duchesse de | 10. Norman Foster |

Sunday Service

- Morning** **10:30 Morning Worship** in church
Broadcast live on YouTube
- **Holy Communion** on 1st Sunday of each month
- **All Age Café service** on last Sunday of each month

Weekday Activities

- Monday** 14:30 **Prayer for Israel** (see [page 4](#))
- Tuesday** 14:00 **Bible Bite** ministry in church
Broadcast live on YouTube
- 19:30 **Prayer Meeting** on Zoom (see [page 4](#))
- Wednesday** 11:00 **Living Well Together** (*aka 'The Well'*)
- Friday** 10:00 **CatURpillars**
- Saturday** 10:30 **Coffee Morning** on Zoom
 – a chance to catch up and have a chat

Details of any other services/activities that we hold will be posted:

- [inside the church](#)
- [on our Facebook page](#)
- [and on our website](#)

Minister: **Rev Brian Harley**



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Day off: Monday

Secretary: **Robin Wightman**



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Shanklin URC is a member of the **Evangelical Alliance**

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Registered Charity No. 1130459