



FOCUS

April 2024

Includes London Street's
Annual Report for 2023



London Street United Reformed Church

Basingstoke, Hants, RG21 7NU

Tadley (Old Meeting) United Reformed Church

Malthouse Ln, Hants, RG26 3NY

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

This month Joy Williams explores the challenges and rewards of God's love for us.



Christ Jesus is risen! He Lives! He has conquered sin and death! He has completed what he came into this world to do! Alleluia!

As the writer of the old Easter morning hymn puts it:

"Welcome, happy morning!" age to age shall say: "Hell, today is vanquished; Heaven is won today!"

As a young person in the 1940s and 50s the memory of the joy I felt at singing these triumphant words to a rousing tune on Easter Sunday has never left me. The hymn is not in our hymn book now, and after Googling it I can understand why, but in our present 'age' these particular words are as true as ever they were and It's good to proclaim them. To speak it out. "Come on you saints" can have two meanings for some of us but it is good for all of us, Christians and sports fans, to praise and encourage one another, the team, with true and positive words in this time of so much negativity. It IS true that Hell is vanquished. Hell is death separated from Love, God is Love.

Love cannot be forced it has to be freely given and received. The circumstances of our lives may change but God doesn't change and once we have known Him - truly received Him into our lives - we will want to proclaim it, not only in the good times, but always.

When we love we make ourselves vulnerable. We suffer deeply when love is lost. We know this in our own experience but, for most, it is worth any sacrifice or suffering it might bring for the joy, peace, and hope that comes with it. Binge watching the first three series of 'The Chosen' on YouTube emphasised to me even more than reading the Gospels how frequently Jesus told His followers that he had not come to make life comfortable and easy. On the contrary life would be more challenging for Him and for them in the future because they had a different outlook on life from the world around them; a different vision with different values and they had an eternal timescale. They did not begin to understand what he was saying for a long time. Perhaps they didn't want to! It turned their current beliefs upside down but, praise God, they stuck with Jesus to the end of His ministry and beyond,

receiving the full gift of the Holy Spirit.

Today, we are challenged to walk in their footsteps, trusting when we do not see; believing our Lord's promises that all our needs are met in Him and therefore we are equipped to serve others when and where He leads. We are God in action, Love in action, enforcing Christ's victory over all the dark powers of evil still at work in this world. Alleluia!

May our prayer be another hymn based on verses from Psalm 34:

Through all the changing scenes of life, in trouble or in joy, the praises of my God shall still my heart and tongue employ.

Of His deliverance I will boast, till all who are distressed from mine example comfort take, and soothe their griefs to rest.

O magnify the Lord with me, with me exalt His name; when in distress to him I called, He to my rescue came.

O make but trial of His love; experience will decide how blest are they, and only they, who in His truth confide.

Fear Him, ye saints, and you will then have nothing else to fear; make you His service your delight, your wants shall be His care. (R & S 685)

THE NOTICEBOARD

Information, updates, tips and more.



A Message of Thanks from Synod



A huge thank you to the team at Basingstoke for all the organisation that went into making Michael Hopkins' Induction (as Moderator of Wessex Synod) such a wonderful occasion. I will admit it was nice to be a guest for the day rather than part of the organising team! As always, your team worked so hard to make sure everything ran smoothly.

Deborah Walker, Synod Secretary and Moderator's PA



Church Flowers

The Flower Committee would like to thank Christine Robertson for donating the April Flowers.

Can you help to make sure
that no one in our local
community goes hungry?



Items **urgently** needed: Cleaning Spray, Coffee, Custard, Deodorant, Hot/Cold Desserts (Not Rice Pudding), Long Life Fruit Juice, Savoury Spreads (Marmite, Peanut Butter, Meat Paste etc.), Shampoo, Tinned Tomatoes, UHT Milk.

Items needed: Cat Food, Cooking Sauces, Hair Conditioner, Loo Roll, Nappies (Size 5 & Above), Savoury Crackers, Savoury Snacks/ Crisps, Squash, Sweet Spreads (Jam, Marmalade etc.), Tinned Fruit, Tinned Meat (e.g. Chilli, Stewing Steak, Ham), Tinned Ravioli, Tinned Vegetables, Toothpaste, Washing Up Liquid.

Please **do not** give Baby Food, Hand Soap, Hot/Cold Cereal, Men's Shampoo, Nappies (Size 4 & Below), Non-Dairy Milk, Pasta, Pet Food, Pulses, Rice, Sanitary Pads, Tinned Beans, Tinned Rice Pudding, Tinned Soup, as these are already in surplus.

Donations can be left at London Street URC in the container provided. For up to date lists, or to find other donation points, go to:

<https://basingstoke.foodbank.org.uk/give-help/donate-food/>



Happy Birthday to the following
member of our church family:

Doina Rasnita

Jean Rae Young

Chris Ayland

FOCUS: Next Issue

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to this edition of Focus magazine. If you would like to contribute to the May magazine, please contact the editor by **18th of April**.

Eco Tip

God's Gift -- Our World

The Environment -- Our Responsibility



Online streaming

A report by researchers at a French think tank "The Shift Project" has found that the energy required to stream online videos is responsible for the emission of 300 million tonnes of CO2 a year -- almost 1% of total global emissions.

Don't forget, you can recycle the following items at London Street:

Empty Printer Cartridges, Aluminium Containers and Foil, Batteries, and Plastic Milk Bottle Tops.

A FELLOWSHIP TOUR OF LONDON STREET URC

Josh and the Elders are inviting all members of the congregation to come along to the church on Saturday April 20th at 2.30pm for fellowship, a tour of the building and finishing with tea and cake.

The idea behind having a Fellowship, Tour and Tea at London St. is twofold. Sunday after morning worship is not always ideal to spend time together in a social setting. This is particularly true for Josh as he only preaches at London St. once a month. This time together on a Saturday would be an ideal opportunity to meet together; for Josh to get to know you better and for you to get to know one another better. It is also an opportunity for you all to take a tour of the building and we can explain what goes on in each of the rooms during the week.

London Street church offers a focus for us to be a Christian witness in the centre of Basingstoke and meet the challenges of those in our community, in particular those less fortunate than ourselves. You will be surprised at how our buildings are currently used in meeting some of the demands we currently face.

The afternoon will commence at 2.30pm when we gather in the concourse for the beginning of our tour of the building. We shall finish the tour in the church sanctuary when Josh will lead us in a short period of prayer. We shall then return to the concourse for tea and cake finishing at approximately 4.30pm.

For those of you who have joined the church from 2018 onwards when we had our last Fellowship Tour, you will receive a personal invitation from Josh. For the remainder of the congregation please take this as an open invitation for you to attend. Either way please RSVP to me by no later than Sunday April 7th.

Thank you.

Blessings Owen



BIG day out '24

Hollycombe
STEAM IN THE COUNTRY
hollycombe.co.uk

Children £5
Adults £8

BRASS
BAND

FOREST
CHURCH

STORY
STORY
STORY

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

Book via:



ON THE ROAD TO EMMAUS

Revd. Josh Thomas discusses the transformative power of Christ's love



It is a unique month to be writing an article for Focus. As I write, we are not even in Holy Week yet, but by the time it is printed and distributed, it will be Easter Sunday! Often, we think of Easter Sunday as the end of the journey, we've come through Lent, endured the suffering of Holy Week and Easter Sunday represents the conclusion of the drama. However, Easter Sunday is just the beginning.

One of my favourite parts of Scripture is the account of the Emmaus Road encounter. Luke 24:13-17 says this:

Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him.

He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?"

I recently read a compelling article in the Church Times from back in 2010. It was written by Paula Gooder, and she argued that perhaps the two met by Jesus on the road to Emmaus were in fact a married couple.

"One of the disciples is named Cleopas, an abbreviation of the longer name Cleopatros, and this may also be the Greek version of the Hebrew name Clopas. We know of a Clopas from John's Gospel, where one of the women standing near the cross is revealed to be Mary, wife of Clopas." - <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2010/26-march/faith/jesus-is-recognised-by-his-actions>

We do not find out the name of the companion on the road but the fact that Luke tells us that they were passionately discussing together the events that had gone on, we could well imagine that these were people who had been first hand witnesses of all that happened.

In my household, we too interpret things that have occurred in different ways and this at times can lead us into 'spirited discussions'. Whether you agree with Gooder or not, we can well imagine how the events of Good Friday would have caused disagreement and tension amongst those closest to Jesus. He said this, and yet... Jesus knew this. These two were so engaged in their discussion that anything could have happened around them and they would have been oblivious to it, I think.

The risen Christ stepped into the midst of their argument and transformed everything. This is what Christ can do for us as well. A few weeks ago, I spoke a little about the transformative action of forgiveness. It's not easy to 'forgive and forget' but Jesus here, models what it means to be a peacemaker. This kind of conflict resolution is so desperately needed in our world and as believers, we are called to mirror Christ in our actions and behaviour. We have a hope to share with this world, a hope for a better world where conflict is no more and we all live at peace, one with another.

So, let's see Easter Sunday as just the start of this, let's speak out against injustice, be bridge builders instead of fence builders and let's do what we can to love brothers and sisters, even those whom we disagree with because Christ came to show us a better way, a way of love, forgiveness and we can start to build this kind of environment in our communities today, it is in our small actions that the Kingdom of God starts to break through and transform our world.

A very happy Easter to you all.



A Quiet Thought...

*The best portion of a good man's life, - his
little nameless, unremembered acts of
kindness and of love.*

William Wordsworth

THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS - LUST

Stan Marut discusses our definition of, and response to, the temptation of lust.



When the former editor of Focus, the late Neil Davis, asked me to write an article on one of the Seven Deadly Sins and that Lust might be an interesting starting point, I thought that this subject might be best left alone considering the make-up of the Church congregation at London Street. To this end Neil loaned me a book entitled “The Seven Deadly Sins” by Kenneth Slack ¹ a minister in the URC at the time of writing. Not being one to pass on difficult subjects I decided to give it a go but felt that I might necessarily have to be circumspect as I did not wish to shock or offend any Church members.

With age there comes an understanding of the world and how behaviour has changed over recent times. We are no longer shocked at the way people carry on and the media thrusts down our throat all manner of tales of infidelity and shenanigans between celebrities and people who might be expected to be role models for the younger generation. Even in popular television soaps sexual impropriety is seen as normal in any of its manifestations. But is lust a sinful passion?

My Bible searches produced a small number of passages from both the Old and New Testament relating to the use of lust as a keyword. The first example which relates in some way to lust was in Exodus 20:13,14 where the sin of murder is seen as coming before adultery and therefore more severe; lust necessarily having some kind of relevance in relation to this. In 2 Kings chapter 2, Elijah is taken up to heaven and according to the Biblical commentary in the Study Bible I was referring to, it stated that he had kept his body under control and the hidden force of lust did not rule him and since he had subdued on earth the lust of the flesh he went up there where holiness dwells and is at peace. Of course, this was the commentator’s understanding of events.

Proverbs 7:7-27 gives a wonderful rendition of the sexual entrapment of a young man by a married woman whose husband is away from

home; an example of lust? The passage is quite graphic (not explicit) and the unawares young man is likened to an ox being led to slaughter; as a dog being tied; as a deer being struck with an arrow; as a bird in a snare. The final result is the road to Hades leading to the chambers of death. Strong words, indeed. Our URC Minister/author, however, thinks we are too condemnatory about lust as such and believes we should re-evaluate its meaning. No doubt lust has certain “after-shocks” in terms of its effect on people, but the consideration of lust as grave sin might just be an overstatement, he says. Those who might be considered guilty of lust and therefore tarnished as sinners sometimes appear in the Bible as sympathetic. For example, the woman who kisses and anoints Jesus’ feet (Luke 7:36-47) and the woman taken in adultery (John 8:1-11); Jesus forgives their sins.

The Christian Church in some of its manifestations has become almost Pharisaic says Reverend Slack and gives an example of Scottish Calvinist Christianity (possibly some time ago) where those who were guilty of adultery or getting a woman with child outside of wedlock, no doubt as a by product of lust, were condemned and disciplined by the Kirk session and excluded from Communion. He contrasts their plight and relates to the elders of the Church whose work people were underpaid and ill housed, the shrewish tongue of the bitterly moral woman or the harsh words of the self consciously righteous. In other words, who among us should cast the first stone?

The main argument is that Reverend Slack believes that Christian teaching has been perverted and deprecated the sexual instinct. Certain Christian denominations have held that sexual congress even within marriage is intrinsically sinful. Indeed, he claims that the judgement that makes “lust” the equivalent of sin is contradicted by the foundations of the Christian faith. He gives an example in that it was the proud Pharisee and not the flaunting harlot who worked for the destruction of Jesus and the High Priest Caiaphas who condemned him and Mary Magdalene, out of whom had come seven demons, who responded to Him. He continues and tells that the harshest words that Jesus spoke were not against lust per se, but against pride and covetousness.

Ah, you might say, Jesus would not condone the illicit sexual activities of our modern society. You may be right, but according to our URC

minister, Kenneth Slack the real problem appears to be in covetousness and how this relates to the need for being valued. He quotes a former Chaplain of Trinity College, Cambridge who states that, “lust arises because it is impossible for me to live without a sense of my value... the attempt to snatch value for myself from somebody else is the essence of lust”. Lust is located he says where pride and covetousness are, that is in the human spirit and psyche. This is all very deep stuff but suffice it to say that lust leads to all sorts of difficulties. The one-off moment of lust can ruin a previously happy relationship which now becomes one of mistrust and uncertainty. There is quite a lot more that Reverend Slack has to say but that is, perhaps, for another time.

We live in a modern age, but this does not justify participating in activities which destroy relationships and are a manifestation of pride and covetousness. Paul in Ephesians 5:3-7 gives us a kind of guide and whilst he might be considered a spoil sport, we know as Christians that what he says is right. This passage provides a paradigm for the way we should conduct ourselves. This means that all uncleanness or covetousness is not fitting, neither filthiness, nor course jesting. In all these acts we put at jeopardy the inheritance of the Kingdom of Christ and God. As Christians we should be mindful that it is the promise of this inheritance that provides the motivation for our lives. Lust is probably not a signpost to the Kingdom.

¹ The Seven Deadly Sins by Kenneth Slack - SCM Press (1985)

CHURCH SECRETARY'S REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDING DECEMBER 2023



London Street
United Reformed Church

This is my report as Church Secretary of the events and activities during 2023, celebrating what God has done with us here at London St. and presenting a challenge to prayer and action for the future.

Basingstoke URC registered as a Charity (number 1130801) with the Charity Commission in July 2009. We are known as London Street (Basingstoke) United Reformed Church and we take our structure, governance and management from the Scheme of Union of the URC which is set out in a document known as 'The Manual'. Our objective as a Charity is the advancement of the Christian faith for the benefit of the public in accordance with the Scheme of Union. We achieve that through our activities and facilities offered to the community by our building.

Church Meeting

The Church Meeting of the local church shall consist of those persons who have been admitted to the full privileges and responsibilities of membership of the URC and whose names are included in the membership roll of such local church. (Item 2(1) of the Manual)

Church Meeting of London St. met on 6 occasions during 2023. Our quorum for the year was set at 12, the same as 2022.

January: I informed the meeting that we were to baptise 6 Iranian refugees on Sunday 5th February, the service being led by Revd Josh Thomas with the services of an interpreter. Gill Miller reported on the review of pastoral care. A survey would be undertaken to gauge the concerns raised.

The meeting was informed of the resignation of Revd Clare Downing as Moderator of the Wessex Synod and the impact of Clare's resignation on London St. Arising from the November meeting of 2022, I reported that no one from London St. had come forward to oversee the opening of the sanctuary for prayer during the week. Consequently, this part of our mission would not be taken forward. In regard to social events, I again reminded the meeting that such events can be organised by anyone within the church.

Thanks were conveyed to Sydney Shore who had led worship at London St. on numerous occasions and at the age of 90 had recently retired.

March: In March John Carrick Smith addressed the meeting to report that Traidcraft plc went into administration at the end of January 2023 after 41 years working for trade justice. Thanks were expressed by the meeting to both John and Margaret for running the Traidcraft stall for 36 years.

Scheduled for Saturday 30th September, Revd Josh Thomas addressed the meeting on the arrangements for the Away Day planned for the congregations of Petersfield and Basingstoke. Josh also reported on the arrangements for the farewell service on Saturday 1st April for Revd Clare Downing as Moderator. I then addressed the meeting on setting up a Synod profile for the appointment of a new Moderator, the outcome of which was forwarded to the Wessex Synod.

The meeting were updated on two reviews; one for our Pastoral Care and one for the Alpha Course; and the appointment of Tony Patterson as the Lettings Secretary was agreed following the resignation of Karen Bell.

May: Our May meeting commenced with an update on arrangements for the Away Day, and the disbursement of the remaining money from the Traidcraft Stall account. Leng Ayland was appointed with effect from 1st May as our second church cleaner. On the subject of cleaning, I reported that we were undertaking to remove a large amount of accumulated items and the dais carpet was to be cleaned. Thanks were conveyed to Chris Ayland for repairing and re-varnishing a number of areas within the sanctuary.

Following a breach of security, including finding a person sleeping on the premises, the meeting was reminded of the need to ensure that the building is secure when leaving.

July: In July 2022 I brought welcome news to the meeting of the prospect of securing Revd Josh Thomas as Interim Minister for London St. In July 2023, I reported on the Settlement Agreement in respect of Josh which had been outstanding for a while but was pleased to report that it had now been signed. I went onto explain that the agreement is essentially a contract of the employment terms and conditions pertaining to Josh's ministry at Petersfield and interim ministry at London St. As far as London St. is concerned the salient points in the agreement are:

that the appointment runs from 1st September 2022 to 31st December 2023 with the potential to renew upon review;

for the purposes of expenses, shared costs relating to the Manse, car, and administration, etc. shall be split in the proportion of 75% (Petersfield) and 25% (London St.);

that Josh would help the church continue and develop work on our mission strategy as set out at the church vision day in September 2022;

that he would be an available pastoral presence for the congregation on a regular basis; and

to support the church in our emerging work with the refugee community.

The agreement also makes reference to Sunday worship which Josh has led on one Sunday each month since January 2023.

Gill Miller reported that the review of Pastoral Care had been completed, and thanks given to Gill, the pastoral care team members and Josh.

Having started the meeting with good news, I finished with news that the fabric of the building had been severely damaged. On the afternoon of Sunday 11th June we had a torrential thunder storm resulting in water pouring through the concourse roof, down the stairs from the first floor and into the concourse. More about this later on in my report.

September: I reported on 4 main items. A review of Josh's ministry here at London St., and awaiting approval from the Synod for an extension; the investment of the legacy that we had received from the estate of Joan Flint; an update of the damage to the building as a consequence of the flood; and finishing with the good news that Alastair Cox, Brian Foster and Liz Foster were to be received into membership.

November: This meeting focused as always on the election of Elders.

Church Members

As of 1st January 2023, our membership stood at 77. We gained 3 by welcoming Alastair Cox, Brian Foster and Liz Foster into membership but over the course of 2023 we lost 2 dear friends: Sandy Lindsay and Les Wenham. In addition, Revd Clare Downing moved away from Basingstoke; and of course we remember Eileen Poulter, a former

member who passed away. Taken together with the movement of some members to our associate list, the number of active members by 31st December 2023 dropped to 72.

Elders' Meeting

The Elders' Meeting of the local church shall consist of the minister and the elders elected by the Church Meeting. (Item 2(2) of the Manual)

Elders' Meeting of London St. comprised of 11 serving elders in addition to the church officers and our Interim Minister. They met on 12 occasions during 2023. Attendance: Church Secretary (9), Church Treasurer (5), Margaret Carrick Smith (11), Joyce Cook (8), Alison Jamieson (12), Ian McCloy (11), Jenny McCloy (11), Gill Miller (10), Kengjisu Moavu (5), Tony Patterson (12), Carol Scott (8), Ian Scott (12), and Joy Williams (10). (Numbers in brackets refer to the number of meetings attended, out of the 12.)

January: The elders considered how best to consult with the congregation in respect of the review of the pastoral care system. Josh reported on the commencement of the Alpha Course with sessions in both English and Farsi. It was agreed that the church should send a gift to Sydney Shore who had been preaching at London St. for a number of years, and at the age of 90 had decided to retire.

February: The elders considered the arrangements put forward by Josh for the Away Day for London St. and Petersfield URC to be held in September. Arrangements were finalised for the baptism service of six Iranian refugees on 5th February. I spoke about our legal duties as Trustees and employer under the Pensions Act 2008 and the potential need for new payroll software.

March: The Pastoral Care Team (PCT) reported on the outcome of the survey with members of the congregation on changes to the current pastoral care system. It was clear that further work was required to some of the issues arising from the survey. Josh agreed to meet with the PCT on recommending a way forward.

April: Josh updated the meeting on arrangements for the Away Day in September. I reported on two serious breaches of security. Firstly,

when a person forced their way onto the premises when the 8th Basingstoke Scouts were meeting; and a second incident when someone had been found sleeping on the premises.

May: Elders' Meeting considered how best to invest the legacy received from the estate of Joan Flint. Arrangements were put in place to dispose of unwanted articles in the church. Leng Ayland was employed as our second cleaner.

June: Work started on revising a number of policies. Arrangements were finalised for a second baptism service of a further three Iranian refugees on 30th July. A leaflet explaining the pastoral care system had been finalised by Josh. It was agreed that this should now be distributed to the congregation.

July: With only 26 members from Petersfield URC and 22 from London St. responding positively to attending the Away Day in September, both churches agreed that the numbers were insufficient to justify the cost, time and effort. It was therefore agreed that the event should be cancelled. I reported on the work to be undertaken as a consequence of the flood in the Concourse with a second meeting taking place in July to consider a number of quotes. The Settlement Agreement in respect of Revd Josh Thomas serving as our Interim Minister was duly signed.

September: New white goods had been installed in the kitchen. The main items on the agenda focused on the work required following the flood in the Concourse. A request to operate the Night Light Winter Shelter from London St. two nights a week was debated but turned down. It was a pleasure to recommend Alastair Cox, Brian Foster and Liz Foster into membership.

October: October saw, once again, a debate on the work required following the flood in the Concourse. Arrangements for the Elders' election were finalised. The Health and Safety Policy and the Safeguarding Policy were agreed.

November: In my absence, it was agreed that any further discussion as to the investment of the legacy from the estate of Joan Flint should

be postponed. Issues with the roofing in the Concourse were noted. Options regarding the provision of a service on 31st December were debated with church meeting to make a decision.

December: In my absence, Margaret provided rotas and guidance notes to the Elders at the December meeting as well as a schedule for Elders' Meetings in the first quarter of 2024.

Trustees

The serving Elders at London St. are appointed as Trustees of the London Street (Basingstoke) United Reformed Church Charity. The role, responsibilities and training of Trustees is dictated by the Charity Commission:

Charity Trustees are responsible for the general control and management of the administration of a Charity. Trustees have and must accept ultimate responsibility for directing the affairs of a Charity, and ensuring that it is solvent, well run, and meeting the needs to which it has been set up.

The Trustees here at London St. have paid due regard to the guidance issued by the Charity Commission on public benefit.

The Basis of Union states that the functions of Church Meeting and Elders' Meeting (Trustees) (as Interim Minister Revd Josh Thomas is not considered as a Trustee) collectively share the duties and responsibilities outlined for the Elders' Meeting along with accepting the ultimate responsibility for directing the affairs of the Charity as laid down by the Charity Commission. The general control and management of the administration of the Charity is further exercised by representative Elders being members of the Church's' four main committees:

- Finance – managing all the day to day financial responsibilities and the preparation of the accounts. Thank you to Julia Burrows as Chair and Karen Bell as Treasurer;
- Property – managing the maintenance of the Church (the Church building is vested in The United Reformed Church (Wessex) Trust Limited as trustees and held for the benefit of London St. in accordance with the trusts applicable to URC properties). Thank you

to Joy Williams, Chris Ayland and Rob Williams in particular;

- **Children and Youth Work** – instituting and overseeing the work with children and young people. Thank you to May Honeyball as our co-ordinator, to Carol Scott and Jenny McCloy as Junior Church leaders, and to Gill Craft as leader of the 8th Basingstoke Scouts;
- **Mission** – ensuring that the Church demonstrates its concern for the local community and the world. Thank you to Alison Jamieson who chairs the World Mission Group.

Not all serving Elders have undergone formal training for their duties specifically as Trustees, other than to acquaint themselves with their responsibilities when required to do so, for example in connection with the safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults, and health and safety generally. Those nominated to serve as Elders from 2023 are now required to declare their intention to undertake such training as dictated by the General Assembly Executive and it is incumbent on those already serving to do the same.

Disclosure and Barring Service, Safeguarding, Health and Safety, and GDPR

On-line Disclosure and Barring Service is administered by myself and Joy Williams for those at London St. who will work with children, young persons and vulnerable adults. All serving Elders are required to be DBS checked and in accordance with policy set by the URC, every 5 years.

In relation to safeguarding, all Trustees are required to undertake formal safeguarding training every 3 years and some attended courses during the year via Zoom. There were no safeguarding incidents to report to the Charity Commission in 2023.

The Safeguarding Policy drafted by the URC has been adopted by London St. with modifications implemented to reflect the nature of our work with children, young people and vulnerable adults. It's important that we provide a caring and safe environment, not just on a Sunday morning for our church family, but during the week too with all those we meet at activities such as Memory Tree and of course during pastoral visits. This structured approach helps us to achieve that. Thank you to May Honeyball and Joyce Cook as our safeguarding co-

ordinators.

Through Elders' Meeting, as Church Secretary I ensure that the Church complies with GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation).

An overview of the Church's life and work during the year

Worship, prayer and study

At the start of 2022 people remained cautious about returning as numbers initially averaged only 45. Gradually numbers increased with the average attendance by December 2022 of 55 to 60. In 2023 average attendance remained fairly constant at 60.

We are grateful to all our visiting preachers, including Peter Bentall and Joy Williams our two lay preachers. Thank you to Alison Jamieson and Joy Williams for organising and running Take Time meditation and bible study on Zoom. Thank you also to Josh for organising the Alpha Course and study courses for the Iranian lads wanting to be baptised.

Children and Young People

Thank you to Carol Scott and Jenny McCloy who organise worship for Junior Church and to the adults who support them. Thank you to Gill Craft and Annmarie Smith Browne for leading the 8th Basingstoke Scouts.

Community Work

We continued to serve the community here in Basingstoke. During the week on a Monday, Tuesday and Thursday lunch times, we ran our hot food table utilizing food from the supermarkets and serving it to those in need who came to the table. On a Saturday at lunchtime we open our food table to distribute food from the supermarkets. Thank you to Carol Tooke our Kitchen Supervisor and the volunteers who help in the kitchen; to Joy Williams who organises the rota of volunteers for the table and those who help; to Alison Jamieson, Karen Bell and Leng Ayland and volunteers for helping on a Saturday. Congratulations to Peter and Julia Burrows, Alison Jamieson, Leng Ayland and myself who achieved a Level 2 in Food Safety.

The Memory Tree Social Club meets every week on a Wednesday in the Hook Room from 10.30am to 12.00pm. It is an opportunity for people diagnosed with Alzheimers and other types of dementia and their carers, to relax, enjoy themselves and make new friends. We have a wonderful team of volunteers who look after our visitors with love, kindness and laughter. We have an average of 25-30 visitors every week, and their feedback is that we provide a unique and special place where they can relax and talk to other carers and people with dementia. Thank you to Jenny and Ian McCloy, Isobel and Ted Martin, Joyce Cook and the volunteers who bake cakes for Memory Tree.

The Craft Club met every Monday morning in the Concourse. The Club grew out of the interest expressed by a few of the carers who come to Memory Tree. They were interested in learning a new craft and it was easier to do this at a dedicated time and place rather than taking time away from the normal activities on a Wednesday morning at the Memory Tree. Isobel Martin was the driving force behind the group which began in September 2015. The members cover a wide spectrum of crafts and are happy to share news, patterns and skills. It is interesting to note that the Club continues to welcome people who don't have any other connection with London St.. Thank you to Isobel and Carol Scott for running the Club.

Iranian Refugees

One of the biggest changes we witnessed in our worship, our mission and serving the community in 2022, were the number of Iranian refugees we supported. This continued into 2023. The Lord clearly steered us towards embracing the Iranian lads who came not just to worship at London St., but take a proactive role in our mission.

At the beginning of 2023, we had 6 Iranian refugees regularly worshipping with us on a Sunday: R, M, A, H, MP, and AF. We have been blessed with their contribution in serving the community by helping in the kitchen, and in worship by reading the scriptures in Farsi. As a congregation you continued to donate money, toiletries and clothing for them. I know that they are extremely grateful for the love and support which has been shown to them. Thank you. Tony Patterson, Jenny and Ian McCloy, Peter and Julia Burrows and I have spent a lot of time supporting them through their spiritual journey as well as their welfare. Thank you Lord for your presence and comfort to

us in our support for your Iranian children. Your Son became a refugee Lord and had no place to call His own, we ask that you look with mercy on all who are fleeing from danger and seek a safe haven in countries like ours.

R, M, A, H, MP, and AF successfully completed the Alpha Course and were baptised by Josh on Sunday 5th February. Thank you to Josh for organising that service which included a Farsi interpreter, and thank you also to John Carrick Smith for recording the service for the lads, and to Jenny and Tony for organising the gifts. Not having family in the UK other than their family here at London St., it was a delight to be able to provide a meal for them after the service. Thank you to Gill Miller for helping me prepare and cook an Iranian fellowship meal for them and the 52 members of the congregation who stayed to celebrate.

At the end of February, M and AF were transferred to Folkestone. The following month two more refugees joined us for worship, HZ and AJ. In May they expressed an interest in being baptised. Josh, Jenny and I embarked on sharing with them the Farsi version of the Alpha Course centred around the Holy Spirit and Baptism. We also conducted some bible study with them in preparation for their baptism which took place on Sunday 30th July. Again led by Josh and thank you again to John for recording the service and to those who helped with the service and the meal afterwards.

In November, Church Meeting were notified that RY had been granted leave to stay in the UK but this good news was tempered by the fact that H, MP, HZ and AJ would have to vacate the Apollo Hotel. H was successful in his appeal to stay with A in London on medical grounds. HZ was not so fortunate in his appeal and was moved to the Bibby Stockholm. MP was transferred to Broadstairs and AJ to Eastbourne. Tony, Jenny, Ian, Peter, Julia and I keep in touch with all of them and support them through prayer and visit them when we can.

Pastoral Care

Our objective as a Charity cannot be achieved if we don't look after one another. Knowing Jesus and making Jesus known is perhaps a key foundation stone of our church family. By His love and care for us we reach out to one another and in the wider community through our

words and actions. It may be in a practical way by shopping or giving a lift for a medical appointment or to worship on a Sunday. It may be by listening or encouraging with a comforting word, smile or hug or praying for one another. We are thankful to God for His love shown to so many during the last 12 months.

A new pastoral care system with two components: a care chain and a pastoral care team, was introduced in January 2022. A review was undertaken in 2023 and the congregation consulted for their views. In our July Church Meeting, Gill Miller reported that the review had been completed and a leaflet accompanied with a letter was sent to every member of the congregation. Thank you to Josh who was consulted about the changes and made recommendations as to the content of the leaflet. Thank you also to members of the pastoral care team; Gill Miller, Alison Jamieson, Jenny and Ian McCloy, and Rob Williams

Premises

The building continued to be maintained and lettings managed. We fell short of building an Ark during the summer. On the afternoon of Sunday 11th June we had a torrential thunder storm resulting in water pouring through the concourse roof, down the stairs from from the first floor into the concourse. The leaders of the Hub Church cancelled their worship and phoned me. I immediately came to the church to assess the damage. Fortunately there wasn't a need to commission the building of an Ark, but there was an immediate need to examine the electrics and fire alarm system. An initial inspection of both cost almost £3,000. To comply with current building regulations we had to spend a further £10.5k on the electrical work and £27k on the fire alarm system which included installing a new alarm system. We also had a fire safety risk assessment undertaken. The total cost of the work undertaken in 2023 is approximately £52k. Having done all that we still have work to do arising from the fire risk assessment including the testing of all electrical equipment on the premises and the installation of emergency lighting. With work still to do in 2024 the total cost is estimated to be around £65k.

Prior to my prolonged absence I was very much taking the lead in co-ordinating what needed to be done. I'd like to convey my thanks to Joy, Margaret and Gill for helping in my absence but my biggest thanks go to Tony Patterson who has done a considerable amount of work in contacting contractors and co-ordinating what needed to be

done and drafting requisite paperwork. Thank you Tony.

As for the day to day maintenance, thank you to Joy Williams, Chris Ayland and Rob Williams; to Lou Waller and Leng Ayland for cleaning the premises; and to Tony Patterson for overseeing the lettings.

I'd like to return briefly to the works undertaken following the flood. The financial cost of putting right the damage caused by the flood has been huge and we still have further work to do. Going forward we also need to ensure that we have appropriate mechanisms in place to ensure that the building and those worshipping and working within the building are cared for. Excluding the ongoing annual costs we will have spent approximately £52k. This has eaten into our reserves so much so that by 31st December 2023 our Accounts are likely to show an estimated deficit of £73k if we strip out the legacy and monies we have in our restricted funds. If we are to keep the bulk of the legacy for future mission and maintenance we must consider ways of raising additional funds. I will be asking our Treasurer when she gives her report to ensure that she documents how much it costs to run the church on a monthly basis against our outgoings. We simply cannot sustain our spend at current rates with or without the legacy. Earlier in my report I mentioned that it is the Charity Trustees (i.e. serving Elders) who are responsible for the general control and management of the administration of London St. as a Charity. They have and must accept ultimate responsibility for directing the affairs of London St. to ensure that it is solvent, well run, and meeting the objective as a Charity within the URC of advancing the Christian faith for the benefit of the public in accordance with the Scheme of Union.

Thank you

In concluding my report, on behalf of the congregation, my thanks go to all who contribute to the life of London St. week by week through faithful witness serving God in many ways. In addition to those I have already named, there are the stewards and greeters supporting the second elder on a Sunday morning; those who arrange flowers organised by Liz Lindsay; those who serve refreshments after worship organised by Jenny and Ian McCloy; those who clean the communion glasses organised by Elspeth Anthony; our musicians Peter Dixon, Alex Macro, Mark Best and Joyce Cook; those who count the offertory organised by Julia Burrows; our Worship Group: myself, Jenny McCloy, Alison Jamieson, Tony Patterson, Lou Waller, Joyce Cook and

Rita Kahdoh; John and Margaret Carrick Smith for the Traidcraft stall prior to its closure; Matthew Dumbleton as editor of Focus and Ali Grant who distributes it by post; John Hollands who has helped as archivist; Alison Jamieson for our shop window and also co-ordinator of the Foodbank; Emily Scott for our Facebook 'window'; our audio rota organised by Alex Macro; Tony Patterson, John Carrick Smith and Matthew Dumbleton for the PowerPoint on a Sunday morning; Gill Miller and Alison Jamieson for organising our fellowship meals; Margaret Carrick Smith and Liz Lindsay for drafting the minutes of Church Meeting and Tony Patterson for the minutes of Elders' Meeting; to Gill Miller for organising our Christmas party and to John and Elaine Coakes for distributing Reform. Apologies to anyone who I might have missed.

Having spent the last four months of 2023 either in hospital or recuperating at home, I would like to express my thanks to the congregation for your love and prayers and practical support. Thank you in particular to Alison and Jenny for taking on the task of securing preachers and musicians for Sunday Worship; to Tony who has done a considerable amount of work, particularly in maintaining the momentum of ensuring that work proceeds on projects relating to the damage caused by the flood; to Margaret for taking on the role of Church Secretary; and finally to Josh for co-ordinating everything.

I conclude my report with a prayer:

Thank you Lord for our church here at London Street, and for those who have worshipped in it over the years and for those who serve it today. May we continue to know your presence here Lord and open our hearts and minds to all that you have given us and may you in return graciously accept all that we have to offer you. Support and guide us all as we take the light of your Spirit thereby illuminating the path to Christ so that others too become your sunbeams. We ask for this in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

OWEN COLLINS

CHURCH SECRETARY

MARCH 2024

THE PRAYER CIRCLE

Please remember the following people in your prayers...

David Bennett

Linda Hicks

Jim

David & Gill Vickery

Christine Weaver

Zoe

Carol Tooke

David Swain

Owen Collins

Claire Macro

John & Elaine Coakes

Lou & David Waller

Carys Haywood

Hyacinth Ridguard

Doina Rasnita

Mark & Chris Best

David Corfield

Barbara Banbury

Chris & Leng Ayland and his brother & sister in-law

Karen Bell

Beverly Harris

Maggie Morgans and Richard

The Patterson family

Stan & Sandra Marut

Ted and the family of Isobel Martin

Maxine Perkins

Beverly Cantwell

Eric & Christine Clucas

All our Iranian friends as they reach the final stages
of their 'assessment to stay' and start to find



DAILY BIBLE READINGS

This month's assigned readings.



	Psalm	New Testament		Psalm	New Testament
1st	39: 1-6	Luke 6: 1-26	16th	46: 8-11	Luke 12: 22-34
2nd	39: 7-13	Luke 6: 27-49	17th	23	Luke 12: 35-59
3rd	40: 1-10	Luke 7: 1-28	18th	47	Luke 13: 1-21
4th	40: 11-17	Luke 7: 29-50	19th	48: 1-8	Luke 13: 22-35
5th	41: 1-6	Luke 8: 1-25	20th	48: 9-14	Luke 14
6th	41: 7-13	Luke 8: 26-39	21st	49: 1-11	Luke 15: 1-10
7th	42: 1-6	Luke 8: 40-56	22nd	49: 12-20	Luke 15: 11-32
8th	42: 7-11	Luke 9: 1-20	23rd	50: 1-6	Luke 16: 1-15
9th	43	Luke 9: 21-43a	24th	50: 7-15	Luke 16: 16-31
10th	44: 1-7	Luke 9: 43b-62	25th	50: 16-23	Luke 17: 1-19
11th	44: 8-19, 26	Luke 10: 1-24	26th	51: 1-6	Luke 17: 20-37
12th	44: 20-26	Luke 10: 25-42	27th	51: 7-12	Luke 18: 1-17
13th	45: 1-9	Luke 11: 1-28	28th	51: 13-19	Luke 18: 18-43
14th	45: 10-17	Luke 11: 29-54	29th	52	Luke 19: 1-27
15th	46: 1-7	Luke 12: 1-21	30th	53	Luke 19: 28-48

EVENT DIARIES

What's on this month at London St. & Old Meeting URCs.



At London Street URC (unless otherwise specified):

Regular Events

Sunday Worship 10:30am			
Mondays	10:15am	Craft Group	
Tuesdays	5:45-6:45pm	Beavers	In Term Time. All in the Den except Scouts who meet in the Wessex Hall.
	7-8:30pm	Cubs	
	7-9pm	Scouts	
Wednesdays	10:15am	Memory Tree Social Club	
	12:15pm	Lunchtime Prayers	

April Worship Diary

7th	Led by Revd. Josh Thomas; Musician: Dennis Smith.
14th	Led by Vivien Gerhold; Musician: Mark Best.
21st	Service includes Holy Communion. Led by Revd. Kay Blackwell; Musician: Peter Dixon.
28th	Led by David Grant; Musician: Mark Best.

Duty Elder for the month is: Margaret Carrick Smith.

Other Events

Sun 7th, Midday	Fellowship lunch after the service followed by the Annual Church Meeting.
Sat 20th 2:30pm	Fellowship Tour at London Street For more details see page 7.

At Tadley (Old Meeting) URC (unless otherwise specified):

Regular Events

Sunday Worship 10:30am		
Monday Afternoons	Ladies' Cell Group	Contact Penny O'Bee.
Monday Evenings	Cell Group	Contact Mark Ward or Paul Gross.
Tuesday Evenings	Joint Prayer Time with St Paul's	Contact Penny O'Bee.
Wednesday Evenings	Prayer via Zoom	Contact Mark Ward.
Friday Afternoon	Men's Shed	2pm, once a fortnight. Contact Paul Gross.

April Worship Diary

7th	No Service at Old Meeting.
14th	No Service at Old Meeting.
21st	Led by Eve Baker.
28th	Service Includes Holy Communion. Led by Mark Ward.

London Street United Reformed Church

London Street URC, Basingstoke seeks to ensure that all content and information published in this issue of FOCUS is current and accurate. The information included does not in any way constitute legal or professional advice and the church cannot be held liable for actions arising from its use.

London Street United Reformed Church is a working name of
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Church Charity [reg. no. 1130801]