Minutes of the Churches Together in Harborough AGM and Forum,
Monday 22nd May 2023, 7.15 for 7.30 p.m.
at the Congregational Church

Our objectives:

- **to be a visible sign of the churches' commitment to one another.**
- **to facilitate common witness to Christ**.
- **to respond to the needs of the community in shared service and outreach where this is possible**.

Attendees (16)
Andy Murphy (MHMC), Maureen Douglas (OLOV), Derek Williams (Anglican), Stephen Haward (MHCC), Jane Haward (MHCC) Jackie Melhuish (MHMC), Angela Zemlak (MHBC), Jan Turner (MHCC), Janet Smith (MHBC), Sharron Brannen (MHCC and Foodbank), Jeannie Brightwell (Anglican), Christine Pierce (Anglican/Holiday at Home), Vicky Bryson (Anglican), Andy Giles (Anglican), Fr Chris O'Conner (OLOV), Christopher Brown (MHBC).

The meeting took place in two parts. First, the Churches Together AGM, followed by a regular Forum meeting.

a) Welcome
Andy opened the meeting by welcoming everyone on behalf of the executive and thanking people for coming to the AGM. Thanks were expressed to Stephen, who is retiring from ministry in July, for his eight years' service, four of these serving as Vice - chair and then Chair of Churches Together.

b) Opening Devotions: Stephen led the devotions on Psalm 24 – a responsive psalm, inviting us to take the King of Glory into every situation. This was followed by prayer.

c) **Apologies for absence**
Apologies: Peter Arnold (MHMC), Stephen Jack (HCC), Theresa Kendrick OLOV), Tom Grant (Anglican), Dave Tomlin (Methodist).

d) Minutes of the CTH AGM held on Monday 16th May 2022: these had been circulated prior to the meeting. They were received and unanimously accepted as a correct record of the meeting.

e) Reports had been circulated in advance of the meeting. Paper copies of these reports could be obtained from Maureen Douglas if required. These reports represented a lot of hard work in this town with people working together in different ways. Opportunity would be given later in the meeting for people to add further comments.

See Appendix A for the full reports from the various organisations and charities.

f) Chair's Address – "Moving Forward Together." Andy presented his Chair's address and then invited questions and comments. **See Appendix B for the full address.**

Questions and comments arising in response to the Chair's address.
It was noted that the 'Elephant in the room' was that the post of Vice-Chair is still vacant and requires a person with the right attributes, experience, and knowledge. It was suggested that perhaps one of the church leaders/ ministers could fulfil this role, as there is no strict necessity to alternate lay and ordained. Stephen Haward felt the current pattern and constitution to be of great value, stating that it defines what we are about to other Christian organisations. It was agreed, however, that without a Vice-chair, and therefore no Chair for next year, we cannot continue within our current constitution. It was agreed that if we have not got the required officers by the deadline of the AGM 2024, we will have to disband CTH in its current form. Questions were raised about the need for the constitution and legal status, and whether we could not better exist as a less formal organisation or fellowship. This was felt to be a valid question, as the ecumenical feeling and fellowship has not diminished, but it is often the formal structures that people find off-putting. It was queried whether, if we did

get rid of the existing constitution and structures, we would ever get started again, since some sort of constitution would be necessary to have the same status and hold a bank account. Andy Murphy felt that what was needed was a greater level of commitment to the current structure, and to engage and enthuse our congregations to get more involved too, because with greater participation might come greater vision, purpose, and variety of talents. Vicky Bryson suggested simple, regular prayer meetings and suggested that we might meet once a month to pray and worship together. When we worship together, and pray together, it has a positive effect and draws us together. It was agreed that this discussion should continue in Ministers' Fellowship, especially how we worship and pray together for the next year, and all representatives are urged to continue to think and pray about the issues - not only about the post of Vice - Chair but about the nature and future of CTH.

g) Treasurer's Report Jackie had sent out accounts and asked for any questions. There being no questions, Jacky presented the proposed budget for the year 2023 – 2024. **See Appendix C**

A question was raised as to whether the subscriptions charged to churches are fair. It was felt that churches were happy with the subscriptions they paid, and it was felt that at the present time there is no reason to request or implement any increase to subscriptions.
Charities: Churches Together wanted to continue show their support to the charities with which we are involved. We have donated additionally £150 each to Jubilee Food Bank, The Cube and The Bower House.
Screen: We were expecting to use the screen in 2022 but this had not happened. The churches had contributed the cost of the screen in 2020. We were given a credit note to use the screen and we used it in 2022. We did not pay anything this year, but we are hoping that next year that we would do something to use the screen. The cost of using the screen had been detailed in the budget. We would not be asking churches for more money although it was felt useful for churches to own the cost of the screen.
After discussing the above, the budget was accepted.

f) Election of officers: All officers were willing to continue serving Churches Together. They were all unanimously elected. Thanks were expressed on the Forum's behalf for work undertaken.
Officers for 2023 - 2024
Chair: Revd Andy Murphy
Vice Chair: Vacant
Treasurer: Jackie Melhuish
Secretary: Maureen Douglas.
Communications Officer: Derek Williams
Minutes Secretary: Jan Turner
Christian Aid Co-ordinator: Peter Arnold
Accounts Examiner: K.E. Bentley

Andy ended the AGM with prayer.

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Forum Meeting

Main Business
a) Holiday at Home: A report on Holiday at Home was presented by Christine Pearse (see Appendix A for full report) This is a Churches Together project, which used to be run by Brian Kennard and Barry Osbourne. Christine has taken on the leadership of Holiday at Home which is maintained as a Churches Together activity. Christine galvanised more support from each of the churches. Volunteers served morning coffee each day. It was suggested that we should publicise Holiday at Home through the churches. The Forum was thanked for the donation of £150 to Holiday at Home.
Action: We are going to make flyers to distribute to the churches. Christine also asked for help with posters.

b) It's Your Move Books: These books have previously been given out to Year 6 pupils in the schools. The books were produced by Scripture Union. We don't know if the children read these books. It was suggested that these books should be more pastoral, they did not have an Evangelical emphasis. It was suggested that children's Bibles could be placed into school libraries in addition to the It's Your Move books.

Action: Andy will purchase the It's Your Move books for distribution to the Year 6s in June/July with a note saying that they are a gift from CTH and following this to see what monies might be available for Bibles in the next school, year.

c) Christian Aid: Peter sent a report on the activities of Christian Aid. Many of the churches were holding their own Christian Aid activities. Further details will be available later in the year once all the monies have been collected and counted.

d) Jubilee Food Bank and Homelessness: The Jubilee Foodbank has now become an independent charity.
Homelessness: Sharen gave out carrier bags of emergency food supplies which could be given with recommended contents to people who were homeless. She had prepared six emergency homeless bags along with instructions for churches to re - fill more bags for distribution.

e) Communications: Nothing to report

f) Any Other business; There was none

The executive would meet on 6th July.

g) Dates for future CTH meetings in 2023-24 are confirmed as:
i. Thursday 14th September – focus on Worship together, planning the year.
ii. Monday 27th November – focus on Evangelism and Witness.
iii. Thursday 1st February – focus on Social Action and Outreach.
iv. Monday 20th May – AGM and Forum.
All meetings 7.15pm (for refreshments) for 7.30pm start. Venues to be confirmed.

Andy closed the Forum with prayer.

Appendix A.
Reports for the CTH AGM 2022 - 2023

The Homelessness/ Asking for Help Group

The group has continued to meet regularly during the year when discussion has often centred around the most effective ways to respond to requests from those in need locally, including requests for food parcels, which have been largely managed through the Jubilee Foodbank. Other occasional requests for items such as clothing have also been met.

The local council continues to house individuals and families, (sometimes from outside the local area), in the Travelodge as a temporary measure, where there is nothing more than a kettle with which to 'cook' food in the rooms. The group has continued with the help of the Foodbank to distribute meal vouchers where appropriate. The closure of Cod's Scallops fish and chip shop has not impacted the group's ability to provide vouchers as two new hot food outlets have recently come on board to provide a small hot meal in a voucher exchange scheme. We continue to purchase Greggs vouchers for distribution too.

Some of the town's churches continue to respond to requests, particularly St. Di's in its central location, where the team has recently reported a 'significant increase,' in those presenting themselves as homeless and requesting help.

We continue to work out the best way to enable individual churches to respond to ad hoc requests for food. At our last meeting it was decided that one way forward would be to prepare emergency food bags that the churches, who would like could hold, and for those churches to have a named person who would have access to the bags with appropriate instructions on how to distribute and replenish.

We were reminded at a recent meeting that the group was set up in conjunction with the council yet contact with the council has been minimal of late due to various factors, including changes in personnel and the closure of some of the services that had operated during the pandemic. We are therefore seeking to re- establish contact and closer links with the council in the future.

Overall, the group continues to help the homeless locally in ways that are appropriate in a town that does not have many visible rough sleepers. The generosity of people through CTH continues to enable this, so thank you.

The Homelessness/Asking for Help Group

Harborough Action for Justice and Peace

This year we have continued to discuss how best to move forward with the group, while continuing to highlight issues of justice and peace. At the March Forum it was decided after discussion that we rest/disband Harborough Action for Justice & Peace for the time being, with a thought that we may (in God's time) start up something new in the future. It was also decided that CTH adopts the Peace Vigil as a permanent fixture and keeps justice and peace issues on the Forum agenda as a standing item, to give people the opportunity to bring issues for discussion, response, and action. This would also give us an opportunity to hold ad hoc events where appropriate.

Individuals have continued to campaign on a range of peace and justice issues by writing to Neil O'Brien and others in local and national government and by supporting other local groups that have issues of justice and peace at their heart.

The Peace Vigil held in January was well attended by a range of people, including some of the Ukrainian community. The first anniversary of the Russian invasion of Ukraine was marked by holding an event on 24th February at the Methodist Church. The event which was coordinated by Andy Murphy and led by the Ukrainian community was a moving and fitting occasion of remembrance.

Janet Smith

The Cube

This year has seen the Cube continuing to provide a range of valuable services for the town's young people, enabling them to thrive. The youth workers continue to go into Welland Park and Robert Smyth Academies, running lunchtime drop - ins and after school sessions, which provide valuable, safe spaces for often some of the most vulnerable students to discuss things which affect their lives, from relationships to wellbeing and mental health.

Other regular groups continue to run at The Cube, including the open access 'Oasis' group which is well attended by young people in years 7 - 10, who enjoy a full programme of exciting weekly activities. With recent new staff appointments there are plans to run a group for older young people in Years 10 and above.

The counselling service continues to grow. In its first year it has supported fifty young people, with counselling taking place at both The Cube and local schools throughout the working week. The Cube has recently run grief support sessions in Brooke House College and are now opening discussion on other ways to work together to support their students. The caravan continues in its refurbishment, which once completed will provide a much needed additional counselling space. Youth workers attended the Careers' Fair at Welland Park Academy this last academic year to promote youth work and are taking on Year 10 work experience students at The Cube for the second year in a row.

The Cube continues to seek to engage in ever closer ways with the town's churches. It is good to be reminded that the Cube is available as a great space for churches to use and there are a range of volunteering opportunities for people to get involved with, from sharing skills with young people to gardening, becoming a Friend of the Cube to offering prayer support. The Cube would be delighted to hear from you if you would like to get involved. https://thecubeyouth.uk/ Janet Smith, Trustee

Communications report 2023

Local media (Harborough FM and Harborough Mail) continue to be very willing to mention major events or activities as they have me/space, for which we are grateful. The Mail "Church talk" weekly column, which began in the first lockdown, continues to be published using contributions from a variety of church and charity leaders across the area (not all members of CTH) and which I co-ordinate as an extension of the CTH Communications Officer role. This is a rare feature in commercial newspapers, seems to be well received, and deserves on-going support. We are grateful for this opportunity to keep Christian thoughts and values before the wider public.

This year we started issuing a CTH newsletter roughly once a month to combine all notices of interest to churches into one email instead of forwarding every notice that we are sent. This requires some discipline and planning for churches and charities to ensure they give us plenty of notice of forthcoming activities - ideally several weeks. We cannot usually reproduce posters in the newsletter, not forward them to churches, and ask that all notices are sent to the CTH Secretary as simple Word documents. We continue to be grateful to our web master Dave Kennard who keeps the site up to date and we encourage everyone to check it regularly for updates and news. It continues to draw a steady stream of views.

We had hoped to explore a re-design of the website during the past few months but that has not proved possible yet. You can find it at hps://www.harboroughchurches.org.uk/ Finally, I would like to hand over this role to someone else in the coming year and would be grateful if everyone could consider if there might be someone in their church (ideally but not necessarily with some kind of communications skills or background) who could take it on. It does not take very much me! I can be contacted at
communications@harboroughchurches.org.uk
Derek Williams, Churches Together in Harborough Communications Officer

CTH Financial Report 2023

At the moment, the accounts are with Katherine Bentley (of E T Peirson and Sons Accountants) to be examined. These will be available to view once I get them back.
Please find a summary below:

CTH own funds	£4212.44
Holiday at Home	£606.67
Homeless and asking for help	£546.53

Breakdown of Profit and Loss		
CTH Income	£2374.33	
Less Expenditure	£1070.59	£1303.74
Holiday at Home Income	£1095.49	
Less Expenditure	£850.00	£245.49
Homeless and Asking for Help	£606.53	
Less Expenditure	£47.50	£559.03

The accounts are in good shape and no adjustment to Churches subscriptions is felt necessary for the coming year and the relevant invoices will be sent May/June.

REPORT ON HOLIDAY AT HOME FOR THE HARBOROUGH & BOWDEN CHARITIES 2022

Holiday at Home is run by a group of volunteers under the auspices of Churches Together Harborough at the Methodist Church on Northampton Road. It is aimed at any senior citizens living in Market Harborough and the Bowdens, of any religion or none, who would otherwise not be able to go on holiday because of finance, loneliness, or infirmity. It costs participants £5 per day to help cover the cost of the lunch and refreshments. Free transport is provided for those who need it. This year Holiday at Home took place from the 1 August to 5

August inclusive. There were 32 different participants during the week, some attending each day and others only once or twice. Altogether there were 31 volunteers on a rota basis with some coming each day and 24 volunteer speakers, musicians, and activity leaders.

The programme for the week ran as follows:

• Coffee/tea/biscuits on arrival

• One hour of a choice of three activities per day. This year it included art, carpet bowls, beetle drive, quiz, creative writing, ballroom line dancing, cooking demonstration, flower arranging, craft making, armchair yoga. • One hour talk or music session (Ukulele band, talk on the witch trials of Leicestershire, Musical Memory Box, The Ospreys of Rutland Water, The Old Friends musical group.

• A two course lunch.

The feedback was very positive. One participant told us that she had recently had a stroke and had been feeling isolated. The week had made a huge difference to her and had made her feel happy and part of the community again. It is wonderful to look around the room when the participants are having coffee or their lunch to see them chatting, smiling and laughing together. It makes us, as volunteers, feel it is very worthwhile. A couple of examples: The art class was greatly enjoyed both by those who paint at home, who chatted about different media and artists, therefore sharing their interest, and also by those who hadn't picked up a paint brush since they were at school, who surprised themselves by producing a picture to take home.

New for this year was the ballroom line dancing and those who joined in had lots of fun doing the cha cha cha, waltz and tango. Doing the traditional dances without a partner was a revelation to everyone. We consider Holiday at Home to be an important community initiative which enables senior citizens to come together to make new friends and undertake new experiences which lifts their spirits and confidence. The main cost is the hire of the Methodist centre, as well as meals, fees for two speakers, transport provided to just a few, publicity and miscellaneous expenses incurred by group activities. We are grateful for grants received, principally from the Bowden Charity and Rotary.

Thank you to the Churches Together treasurer, who looks after the money. If Churches Together would like to do more to support us, it would be good to know that Holiday at Home is well publicised in every congregation, so that older people who need company and something to look forward to are aware that these are available to them this August. We would also like to see volunteers from every church contributing to our work. We ask your blessing on **Holiday at Home 2023, which will run from August 7 to 11.**

Jubilee Foodbank Report

The Good News

The good news is that Jubilee has now been granted Charity Status which means that we have access to more support, grants, concessions and eventually gift aided donations. The Trustees and volunteers all want to say a huge congratulations to our Chair Liz Mills who worked tirelessly to put the application together, which was an extremely complicated and longwinded process. There is a downward trend of referrals from this time last year by approximately 30%. However, the daily referral rate is stable with approximately 4 a day. The majority of referrals come from CAB followed by Harborough Churches, HDC and then Homestart.

This year from January – April 2023 we have helped 152 households: with 24 of these receiving 4 or more parcels. In all, we have given parcels to 797 people comprising 468 adults and 329 children. That equals a total of meals provided 7173. We are still receiving referrals from HDC for Ukrainian refugees. Single adult referrals add up to approx. 39%, with multiple adults no children at 18% and Families with children being 44%. There are a few households using the foodbank more regularly which we continue to monitor in case further support can be offered from other agencies. 36 homeless people have been helped so far this year. We have had support from the Lions who are providing some essential toiletries.

Stock levels at the Store are very good, low levels of specific essentials are being managed well by using foodbank apps, social media and the shoppers. A procedure document for the store team has been improved and made even more accessible for those volunteers who work at the store. We have had some new volunteers join the team who have been trained and are settling in well. Collections of donations from stores etc are averaging around 20 trays per week, which is slightly higher than the average of 18 for this time of year.

Charitable status means that Jubilee can approach many more local supermarkets to collect our donations. Jubilee is currently waiting on the purchase of a local building which, if successful, will mean that we can move to a more accommodating property with access for clients, and therefore the potential for better engagement and provision of services. Social Media and Publicity is proving very effective, a recent development of the website created a fresh look, better accessibility and more information. Instagram and Facebook reach is very good with a higher number of followers, with numerous people emailing showing their interest.

One of our Trustees visited Market Harborough Ladies Luncheon group this week and gave a 10minute talk. They were really interested, asked lots of questions and some people made offers of regular monetary donations. Jubilee continues to reach out to local groups and has been involved with United for Warm Homes, the Community Fridge and this year's Big Green Week; as well as trying to find more parcel collection points and connect with foodbanks further afield. Since the loss of The Cod's Scallops for our hot food outlet, we have managed to link with Master Fry and Blue Wave Fish Bar who now take our vouchers to supply hot meals mainly to the homeless and people housed in the Travelodge. Everest Indian restaurant also continues to support us with free hot meal vouchers and fresh food vouchers are still supported by market stalls. Please continue to pray for those who are living in food poverty; as well as all the volunteers who ensure the smooth running of the Jubilee Food bank.

Churches Together Bower House Report May 2023

We send our apologies for not being able to join you in person. We have just come through a busy period for the Bower House and our team. On April 15th, we officially, 're-opened' the house after the completion of building works to improve access to the house. Two of our volunteers worked tirelessly to bring 'Jenny's garden,' now positioned at the front of the house, back to a state of colourful beauty. The exterior painting has been finished, a new notice board erected, and a new back door has been fitted, providing amusement for the team - we are all trying to get used to the soft close rather than the very forceful bang needed to close the old back door. It used to shake the whole house!

On April 29th we held our team 'Away Day' (which was actually, a morning!) at Harborough Methodist Church. It was well attended by 30 of our volunteers, both counsellors and support workers. We focused on the theme of 'Compassion' including self-compassion, compassion for others and the risk of compassion fatigue. This was a very special meeting as it gave an opportunity for volunteers to connect, meet new members of the team, have fellowship and catch-up with those that we may not encounter on a regular basis during the working week.

On May 13th we are having our 'Coronation Coffee Morning' at Harborough Theatre. We hope to have stalls selling cakes, bric-a-brac, a tombola, cards and crafts, tea, coffee, and bacon rolls! We are looking forward to being able to celebrate this very special occasion within the community. Coming up in June, we are delighted to be able to offer a professional development opportunity for counsellors, both within our team and other organisations.

Forging links with the local community is important to us and as part of this commitment, we were excited to be able to enter a team into the Market Harborough Rotary Club's Swimarathon under the name 'Sinkers and Swimmers'. We are happy to report no one sank! We managed to complete 92 lengths in 50minutes. It was a fun experience, and we were able to raise funds for the Rotary Club who have generously supported the Bower

House over the years. Our most recent bereavement group was well attended, and we are we are hoping to be able to offer future groups. One piece of feedback we have received is that it would be helpful to have the groups in the evening.

Now that summer is on its way, we are looking into fulfilling this request. It has been a busy but exciting year so far and we are full of anticipation to see what God is calling us to do next. We humbly ask for continued prayer in matters of the house, especially for our current trainees, qualified counsellors, and support workers. We offer thanks to God as we induct new recruits to the service, particularly for our new associate support workers who will focus on house maintenance, our social media presence and strengthening connections and communication with those that support us. However, the search for new support workers remains our greatest current need. If anyone is able to volunteer as a support worker for 3 hours one day a week (9am-12pm, 12pm-3pm or 3pm to 6pm) please do get in contact. Full training is given.

We also ask if you can continue to pray for our clients (the very reason we are here) and funding. We give thanks to God for His continued provision and for always meeting our needs. We are so grateful for the support that you all afford us and thank you for the way you continue to undergird the work, both financially and in prayer. We look forward to being with you again in person soon.
Every Blessing,
Cara and Loraine

Appendix B

Moving Forward Together

Chair's Address for CTH AGM 2023

Friends,

Many of you will feel the disappointment of some of the things we *haven't* managed to do, most notably the act of worship and witness on the Square on Good Friday. I am also sorry that extra pressures on me this year have meant that I have not always been able to respond to the many requests that come my way as chair. Many of these have simply gone unanswered (while I have always intended to reply when I got the chance). But, I would like to start by focussing on some of the positives from the last year. The Lent services and lunches at the Catholic Church were a blessing, and the congregations very encouraging. Our Ministers' fellowships are a constant source of support and reassurance. We have streamlined our communications and now send out a monthly newsletter, rather than a constant barrage of forwarded emails. I'm very grateful for the dedicated and hard-working Exec. And when we met at the Baptist Church in January for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, it was – I felt – a joyful and powerful meeting together, expressing our shared worship and unity in Christ. Worshipping together is always purposeful, and it reminds us of who we are as Churches Together.

Because, contrary to what people might think (when they ask questions like: *What are CTH going to do about it?*), CTH is not limited to "the forum". "The Exec" is not CTH. I am not "CTH"!! We are CTH: All our member churches and associated churches and organisations – *all of us* – if we have signed up to be part of this – all of us and every member – *are Churches Together*.

Of course, as a body that spans several churches and organisations, we need an agreed way of getting things done.

Our 'Churches Together' constitution, which was renewed and agreed quite recently, recognises that we don't all have the same understanding of church authority, leadership, and organisation, but is based on national and

international models of ecumenical engagement, given to us by our parent bodies of *Churches Together in Britain & Ireland*.

So, our churches elect representatives to make decisions, and the ministers or leaders of the churches are automatically included. And we come together as the Forum, now meeting 4 times a year, with the objectives:

- *to be a visible sign of the churches' commitment to one another.*
- *to facilitate common witness to Christ*
- *to respond to the needs of the community in shared service and outreach where this is possible.*

It is therefore up to the churches to send to these meetings people of faith, commitment, talent, and enthusiasm, and people with a willingness to work with other Christians in an attitude of compromise and understanding – understanding that doing things together means not always having things our own way but striving to promote unity and shared Christian witness. It is important that the reps who come feel empowered by their church to make decisions on behalf of that church, with the full support of their minister. It's also important that the reps then have the means to take back to their churches' news and information and requests from the Forum. Because, as I said, *they* are all part of it.

As well as this, we elect an Executive committee, chair, vice chair, secretary, treasurer, etc, because it's important to effectively manage our finances, administration, and communication. The Exec can make recommendations, give guidance or proposals, but shouldn't be taking decisions away from the Forum. Because you are all CTH.

And then we have the Minister's Fellowship, which is a vital source of encouragement and support for church leaders. And this has over the years had different priorities, but it could be – potentially – a place for creative thinking and seeking God's vision for CTH.

And when it comes to organising special events, we don't need to rely purely on the talents of the Forum, or the Exec, but we can seek out from our churches people who have the skills and gifts to make something wonderful. Because we are all part of it.

We also have various projects – such as Holiday at Home, and the homelessness project – where we have separate committees acting on behalf of CTH to do specific things. And then we have important associations with charities and organisations which are Christian at heart, and ecumenical in practice, such as The Bower House, the Jubilee Foodbank, and the Cube. And until very recently, the Street Pastors, who deserved our shared acclaim and thanks for 13 years work on the streets of Harborough, and who took the brave and godly decision to listen to the Spirit and step down. It often takes more faith to *stop* than to carry on regardless, and they have shown faith in God and us – leaving us their money – that CTH will find a way to carry on a missional presence of Christ in our community.

Together, as CTH, we have a great history together, and we have a number of very strong and well-equipped churches, and hundreds of very able people. More than all of that, we have the power of God.

But, as CTH, the past year has felt rather difficult. Especially our Forum meetings. I've been reflecting on some of the possible reasons for this. And without criticism, I would like to suggest the following:

1) That the Pandemic hit us hard as churches and ministers and forced us to retreat to look after our own. We all did this out of a very real pastoral need.

2) That several new ministers have arrived in the 3 years since the Pandemic, who have never seen CTH working at full strength. While the pressures on many ministers is currently immense.

3) Many of our churches are now as busy as they have ever been (if not busier), and our national denominational leaders are not currently prioritising unity or ecumenism.

4) Our Forum is made up largely of lovely people, very committed people, enthusiastic ecumenists, some of whom have been serving CTH and this town for many, many years. But, I wonder, have we been as committed at passing on the flame to the next generation, or seeking to widen the pool of talent and ideas?

Overall, I see the definite need for ***renewal of CTH***. But, within that, remembering that ecumenical work is a precious gift, and can only be done with some compromise, tolerance and awareness of one another and our denominational structures. It can be tempting to say ecumenical work too hard, especially when we think we can do better on our own.

It's then that I'm called back to Jesus' prayer to the Father, on that Maundy Thursday night:

20 "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 21 ***that all of them may be one****, Father, just as you are in me, and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22 I have given them the glory that you gave me,* ***that they may be one as we are one****— 23 I in them and you in me—****so that they may be brought to complete unity****. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.*

And as I read that, knowing that unity doesn't mean uniformity or merger, I reflect how, in recent decades, God has poured out immense blessing on ecumenical mission initiatives across the country and the world: the Hope initiative, the Ascension Trust, Thy Kingdom Come, to name just a few. Through *unity* (which majors on grace, love, and bearing with one another), the world then sees the body of Christ in action and find some renewed hope and belief.

So, wherever possible, I will be talking to the ministers and church leaders over the coming months about restoring the creative drive at the heart of CTH, seeking God's vision, and also calling for renewed commitment and enthusiasm. I say this, profoundly realising the pressures and challenges ministers face. But also knowing that what we do together doesn't necessarily need to be *more* than we are already. Maybe God is calling us to do less. But I am certain that he is not calling us to *be less*.

Finally, and quite boringly, the Exec have discussed that we would like to continue to have 4 meetings every year, but that we have very focussed meetings on particular areas.

September - focussing on our worship together.
November - focussing on our evangelism and outreach.
February - focussing on social issues, justice, and peace, etc.
And the AGM in May for elections and taking all the other bits of business.
We will get the dates out for these meetings at the AGM each year, or sooner if it would be helpful.
Thank you all for being CTH, and now, let's move forward together, with God's help and for God's glory.
A. Murphy, Chair