

Churches Together in Harborough
Minutes of the Forum Meeting on Thursday 18 November 2021
7.15 for 7.30 pm at Our Lady of Victories Church

Our Objectives are:

- 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 appropriate.

Attendees (21):

Janet Smith, Angela Zemlak, Fr Chris O'Connor, Theresa Kendrick, Keith Rugg, Maureen Douglas, Jill Mann, Cara Thompson, Dee Quinn, Jackie Melhuish, David Nixon, David Palmer, John Pearse, Elizabeth Tubbs, Mandy Gays, Derek Williams, Peter Arnold, Andy Murphy, Dave Tomlin, Jeannie Brightwell, Barry Osborne

Welcome and Opening Devotions:

Janet welcomed everyone to the meeting and especially Cara Thompson as the new Supervisor at the Bower House.

Fr Chris then led the opening devotions based on John 18 vv33 – 37. Next Sunday is Christ the King, nominally the last Sunday in the year as Advent follows. The Lord is the King, and both the Jews and Pilate felt threatened. Jesus is the only power we can't rely on anything else. Jesus came as witness to the truth and the language is of invitation. Christ is the truth which we must live out; have faith in His power; victory is love.

Winter Warmer Lunches Sharon Shannon and Sharon McCall (who sent their apologies, having been delayed at a function)

In their absence, Janet provided some information about their business. During lockdown they started and continue to deliver individual meals to mainly older people who many they discovered only had face to face contact when they were delivering meals and they would like to provide 'winter warmer lunches' where people can meet together perhaps using church facilities. There would be a charge of £5 per main hot meal. For more information, please contact them at themothercooker@hotmail.com or 0787 163 2938

Relaunch of Tea @ Three David Palmer

David talked about how the churches should honour the elderly and remember and hold their stories. The work is to be alongside people who are isolated, lonely and feel detached. Tea @ 3 is a monthly meeting on Sunday afternoons now meeting in St Dionysius Community Hall on Coventry Road. Originally around 8 people now around 35 attending. Funding for teapots, tablecloths, cutlery and cake stands have made it feel special. Since starting, 9 people have attended a short form of the Alpha course and now meet for a Bible study. It is hoped that they might look at moving to 2 groups in the future. They currently have 9 volunteers and work with the Harborough Community Bus.

They are looking for people:

- With a creative flair for preparing activities
- With an ability to work on publicity and looking after the website
- Who can provide support for the teaching ministry at Saxon Close
- Who can be a speaker giving talks / reflection about their life, work or hobbies.

At the end, David showed a film about the work.

Apologies for Absence (9):

Barry Hill, Stephen Haward, Tom Grant, Christopher Brown, Dawn O'Connell, Ceriann Kelly, Alison Iliffe, Andy Giles, Stephen Jack

1. Minutes of Forum 6 September 2021

The minutes had been circulated previously and were accepted by the meeting and signed by Janet.

2. Matters Arising: none

3. Main Business

a. Review of the Constitution

The review group, Andy Murphy, Derek Williams, Stephen Haward, Alison Iliffe, Keith Rugg, Janet Smith met twice to review the Constitution. Overall, it was a useful exercise. The aim was never to totally change it but as set out in the present Constitution point 12 to 'reflect the life of the Christian churches as they continue their pilgrimage together'. One useful thing the group was able to do was to re-establish our links with the Churches Together in Leicestershire through Canon Vic Allsop, the County Ecumenical Development Officer. The Executive asked that after the Forum, reps take back the proposed changes in the wording to church leaders and congregations for discussion. Any questions that may arise should be sent to Janet by 31st December 2021 at chair@harboroughchurches.org.uk, a vote will be taken on the proposals at the Forum on 10th January 2022. To pass the proposals 75% of the full member churches need to approve the changes.

b. News of new members and associates

Father Tom Reece and Father Matthew Pitham were being contacted.

c. Youth Survey Andy Murphy

There are a lot of children's and youth activities going on throughout CTH: The CUBE, Street Pastors, in Churches and Schools.

The survey is providing a snapshot of what is available. The aim is to:

- Provide details of which churches have activities / groups for children/young people and list them on the CTH website.
- Ensure that all schools are covered
- Look to see where there might be gaps

Some churches with a number of young people might want to do discipleship courses in-house but for others they might be looking for a joint group.

Andy thanked the churches for completing the survey.

4. The Welcome Directory:

<https://www.welcomedirectory.org.uk/> is a Christian based charity helping faith communities become places where people who leave prison find acceptance. Currently there are just over 200 faith communities registered as welcoming churches. The Baptist church has been contacted by the local area contact for the charity about becoming a welcoming church. Maureen and Janet have been aware of the directory for some time in relation to the prison ministry that they are involved in. Janet asked if this was something that churches in the town and area would like to consider. There is training available in 3 sessions from the charity, which interested churches could do together. If churches are interested in completing training to register for the directory as a welcoming church, please contact Janet.

5. Reports on recent events

Saturday 6 November: Local afternoon of action as part of COP 26 Day of Global Action. Several faith and secular groups were represented including Sustainable Harborough, Harborough Eco Church, Oxfam and the Justice and Peace group. People driving past honked their horns in support and a report of the event appeared in the Harborough Mail.

6. Communications

Derek reminded Forum members that the information discussed at the meeting must be shared with the churches, particularly about the constitution.

7. Remembering Liz Howe – a moment to reflect and give thanks

Many people who knew and loved Liz gathered in St Di's on 22 October to remember her and give thanks for her life. At our September Forum we had just heard the news that Liz was seriously ill in hospital. Sadly, Liz died on 4 October. Liz knew what a privilege it was to serve as a Steet Pastor, writing in one of her emails about the '**amazing task that God has given us.**' In April this year as we began to emerge from the effects of the pandemic to a different world, both locally and nationally, Liz was the first to acknowledge, '**It is a different world and the Harborough night - time economy will be different. But I am convinced that there is a job for us to do - Caring, Listening, helping in some way.**'

She urged and challenged us all to look carefully for new places and opportunities in which the SP could operate and she was sad at times that SP could not have done more. In her final report to CTH back in the summer for the September Forum Liz said **‘There are so many folks, often hidden, with problems that we do not reach. I try to point out that we are being seen doing menial acts and that we do not know who is seeing us do Our Lord’s work or indeed when we will be needed.’** Liz was seen in a different light when she went into Welland Park Academy to tell the Religious Studies GCSE students about the work of Street Pastors as part of their learning about how the Church impacts the local community. The gifted teacher that she was, took over, with the students hanging on to her every word and with her friend and fellow street pastor Ellen beside her Liz told them with passion of what Street Pastors do to make a difference in the community. On the back of Liz’s service sheet was a picture of her in recent days and underneath the quotation, **“she will live on in everything she helped to grow”** and so she will. Liz - may you rest in peace.

Peter Arnold the prayer coordinator for the MH Street Pastors then led the Forum in prayer giving thanks for Liz’s life and work. Please pray for the continued work of SP, for Mandy and Claire as they go into Welland Park and for Jeannie who has stepped into the role of acting Chair of MHSP.

8. Brief Headlines from our organisations

a. Bower House

As we edge towards the end of another challenging year, we are reflecting on the service we offer, the team that enables it to happen and the privilege it is to work with the clients who come to the Bower House. The Bower House continues to provide a safe, accepting space where clients can share their story without judgement. This is part of the original mission of the Bower House and is still upheld over 20 years later.

Our work is mostly face to face but we are now resourced to work by phone and on-line. Our counsellors, all volunteers paid for and trained to enable the Bower House to offer this service. In the last year we identified the need to have more supervisors on the team. Clinical supervision is a requirement for every therapist and the Bower House offers one hour a month and we were down to just five supervisors. We are now delighted to report that we have doubled the number of supervisors by supporting qualified counsellors to train in clinical supervision. Again, an incredible demonstration of commitment shown by our team of volunteers.

We have a client waiting list, but we feel this is to be expected in the current climate. Our counselling team numbers almost 40 and we have 18 support workers. We have received expressions of interest from Counsellors and trainee Counsellors wishing to join the team monthly.

A small team of volunteers have looked at how we can improve the access to the building. Plans have been drawn up and submitted for planning permission to make access to the Bower House equal to all by providing level access and a disabled toilet. We are currently looking at funding for this to happen next summer. We look forward to updating you on these plans at the next forum. In a nod to ‘normal’ the Bower House is organising a community Christmas event at the theatre on 4 December 2021, this will be our first event for two years and we are looking forward to getting out of the house and re connecting with people from the community. While our work is very much centred in the house, we acknowledge that we are part of something much bigger and we look forward to greater interaction in 2022. Thank you for the prayer and support the Bower House receives.

b. Street Pastors

Whilst there are only 8 active Street Pastors, we still managing to go out on alternate Fridays and Saturdays. There is still a need with reports of drinks being spiked.

We are now looking for a new Treasurer.

Having spent some months using a car as our base we are very grateful to the Bower House for re-opening as our base.

c. The CUBE

The Cube has increased the work that we are doing and now runs 6 sessions per week with youth workers going into both RSA and WPA as well as groups at the Cube, including our Wednesday group that is open to all year 7-9s. We now have an average of 30 individuals attending each week with some cross over between groups.

Now we are starting to see more faces at the Cube, we are also starting to see the difference it is making to our young people. We have one young lady who started attending some of our school based small group work who is now helping run one of the younger groups. This has made such a difference to her, her self-confidence and given her a sense of pride and belonging. It also helps to show the younger ones they can stick around!

While the national lottery funding is meaning we can now do more it is restricted funding and as such cannot be used against general costs. This, along with reduced regular giving, means that we have a deficit in the budget for this year.

The counselling project is undergoing an overhaul before relaunch, so for the moment we are unable to take on any new clients. However, this will also put the project in a much better position going forward and we will be able to take on both more counsellors and clients.

Ceriann would appreciate the opportunity to attend each church as representative of the Cube to promote what we do and encourage, for those that are able to, consideration of regular giving to the Cube.

Janet noted that because of COVID there had been no CTH services where the offertory was traditionally shared three ways between the Bower House, Street Pastors and the CUBE.

d. Jubilee Foodbank

Things are more than a little hectic at the moment.

Jubilee Foodbank received many, many donations from Harvest celebrations. Harborough schools, churches and organisations thanked God by giving food to us. Referral numbers remain high though they are steadier than during the lockdowns last year. Due to high referral numbers, we still need certain food types so please keep donating.

Charity status paperwork is progressing slowly for various reasons. However, we are making progress and hope to be in a position to invite people to become trustees soon. Prayers are needed for thoughtful decision making and time to get the paperwork right.

All of our volunteers have other responsibilities, whether it's childcare, grandchild care, other voluntary work or paid work. We have needed to take on quite a few new volunteers recently. Prayers for each volunteer and the people they are helping with food are welcome.

We continue to work with VASL who deliver parcels to homes. Their drivers are much appreciated as referral agencies are not open in the same way as they were before the pandemic.

Our website is being updated. Please bear with us if there are any glitches at the moment. Please see Facebook and Instagram too.

The Foodbank base is not advertised but most supermarkets plus churches and the Nationwide have collecting points.

e. Rural Mission Solutions

Barry Osborne reported that having interviewed two people for the role of Operations Manager, one had been appointed and the other had taken on a Chaplain's role. He asked for prayer for the small rural churches who are under tremendous pressure.

9. The Christian Calendar 2022

How do we feel about organising events within the context of the ongoing uncertainties around COVID – 19?

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 18th - 25th January 2022

The Anglican Team, after having been approached by Janet, had offered to hold a service on Sunday 23 January at St Dionysius at 10.30 am. This would take part with face coverings and spacing and would be a Eucharistic service. It could be live streamed on YouTube.

A discussion took place:

- a. Some saying it was too soon with Harborough having one of the highest infection rates in the country
- b. Some saying they wanted to get together
- c. Other areas hold weekday evening services rather than a Sunday service
- d. Last year there had been a ZOOM service led by the Anglican team in the afternoon.

Lent Ecumenical groups / services & lunches –

Do we want Lent Friday services, followed by a simple lunch? 2020 was the last time we were able to do this at The Methodist Church and we were able to have 3 of the 6 services in before lockdown. Do we have a church willing to host these Friday lunchtime services?

What about Ecumenical Lent groups? Are people ready to meet in each other's homes and would it be right to ask people to host home groups?

Further discussion is required about this going forward and a decision made as to the feasibility of some Lenten events in 2022.

Good Friday – a working party is needed to organise, HDC have appointed a new Events Organiser who will need to be contacted for the usual permissions if we go ahead.

Pentecost - If not Good Friday, then we could consider an event at Pentecost but that is the Queen's Platinum Anniversary weekend with many national events planned and local events encouraged.

See <https://www.royal.uk/platinum-jubilee-central-weekend>

Janet agreed to go back to Barry for further discussion about the United Service.

10. Coming Events

- a. Saturday 20 November 10 am to 12 noon: Fairtrade Town Group Coffee Morning, Methodist Church Youth Wing
- b. Saturday 27 November 12.45pm to 1.15 pm: Mothers' Union Global Moment, Old Grammar School against gender-based violence, to include three minutes silence between 1.00 and 1.03 pm and a short prayer time. People are asked to wear something purple if possible. For more information or if you can help produce a banner, contact Jill Mann.
- c. Saturday 4 December 9.30 am to 12 noon: Bower House Coffee Morning, Harborough Theatre

11. Any Other Business

Any Other Business to be sent to Janet by Noon on Monday 10 January 2022

Dates:

Forum meetings – all 7.15 pm for 7.30 pm

Monday 10 January 2022	Methodist Church
Thursday 10 March 2022	tba
Monday 16 May 2022	AGM tba

The meeting closed with the saying of the Grace together.