

**Churches Together in Harborough (CTH)**  
**Forum Meeting, 26<sup>th</sup> September 2022,**  
**7.15pm (refreshments) for 7.30pm start**  
**at Market Harborough Baptist Church**



CTH is part of *Churches Together in England*, and has the following 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.

**Chair's note:** CTH is made up of member and associate churches and organisation. Member churches should have nominated representatives, according to our constitution. We encourage all representatives to discuss the items on this agenda *before the meeting*, if possible, with their ministers or church leaders (and their trustee bodies or church councils when necessary) to enable us to better make decisions on the night which are representative of the views of our churches.

We also welcome members of all local churches and Christian organisations, whether or not they are reps, so that they can hear and be part of the ecumenical work of Market Harborough. However, only recognised church leaders and representatives of member churches present at the meeting are entitled to vote.

**AGENDA:**

1. Welcome
2. Opening Devotions
3. Guest Speaker: Mary Ann Lund – helping refugees
4. Appointment of minutes secretary – Jan Turner (Congregational Church)
5. Minutes of previous meeting
6. Financial update
7. Matters Arising:
  - a. Good Friday act of witness on the Square (7 Apr 2023)
    - Hire of the screen
    - Formation of organising group
  - b. Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (18 -25 Jan 2023)
    - *From Exec:* We would like to suggest holding a united service in the *afternoon* of Sunday 22 Jan. Would the Forum agree to this, and would a church be prepared to host it?
    - *Do we want to hold weekday prayer meetings in person, on Zoom, or not at all?*
  - c. Lent 2023 (beginning 22 Feb 2023)
    - *From Exec:* In the past we have organised ecumenical Lent house groups following a particular course (alternate years), and also a weekly lunchtime service with soup. During the pandemic, this was replaced by Zoom services. We would like to suggest this year we choose *either* a Lent Course, or the weekly lunchtime services. *Which would you prefer?*
8. Action for Justice & Peace group – **SEE NOTE A**
9. Street Pastors and social action / mission on the streets – **SEE NOTE B**
10. Jubilee Foodbank – venues and volunteers – **SEE NOTE C**
11. Cost of living crisis – **SEE NOTE D**
12. Tea at Three – ministry to the elderly
13. Any news from churches or associated organisations?
14. Any other business
15. Future dates – **SEE NOTE E**
16. Date and venue of next meeting: 24<sup>th</sup> November 2022 (venue TBC)
17. Closing prayer

## **NOTES:**

### **A) Justice & Peace**

Andy Murphy met with some of the key people from the *Harborough Action for Justice & Peace* group. Here is a summary of the conversation.

1. We are aware of the increasing a pressing need for action and prayer for justice on a whole range of issues - e.g. economic justice, trade justice, environmental justice, refugees and asylum seekers, homelessness, etc. We are aware too that presently these needs are going to increase. And, of course, there is the ongoing war in Ukraine, which is a great cause for concern and prayer.
2. We note that since the formation of *Harborough Action for Justice & Peace* (HAJP) many other groups have emerged in our town to encourage social action on various subjects.
3. We note too that many from our churches are involved in various ways in several of these groups in Harborough. And that these groups also include members who are not Christian, therefore widening the involvement in these causes outside of the churches.
4. We therefore questioned the *need* for HAJP its current form, especially given that attendances have been very low at meetings in the last few years.
5. Furthermore, we recognise that many of the "Justice and Peace" issues have become intensely politicized, and we question whether a body like CTH would be right to take a political stance one way or another, while trying to be a vehicle for unity. Having said this, we support the right of individual members to freely engage in political action as their faith and conscience dictates.
6. We note that there are also useful guidance notes and suggestions for action from national and denominational bodies such as *JPIT* (Joint Public Issues Team of the Methodist, Baptist, URC and Church of Scotland) for example.
7. We asked, therefore, "*What might CTH uniquely be able offer?*"
8. The outline of what emerged is as follows:
  - a. We could provide a regular place to meet for discussion and prayer about the subjects, with the aim of giving people a place to discuss these things safely and without prejudice or bias;
  - b. This event/group could follow a pattern of NAMING, TALKING, and PRAYING: Naming the issues; respectfully discussing them, with appropriate information and theological reflection; and then bringing the matters to God in prayer. (Thus supporting and covering all of the social action groups and activities in prayer.);
  - c. We could be a place of information of how to be involved in the various initiatives;
  - d. We could make a point always of praying for our elected representatives, those in government and local leadership, and could let the elected representatives know that we are praying for them, as a way of reaching out to them. (And could even invite them to the group.)
9. This would not be a committee meeting, but rather an open gathering focussing on the issues, shared theological reflection, worship and prayer. Perhaps meeting monthly or six-weekly, and possibly moving around the different churches.

We struggled to think of a suitable name of this. But we would like to bring the idea to the Forum.

### **B) Social Action and Mission on the Streets**

This summer saw the ending of the Market Harborough Street Pastors. They have performed a wonderful service to the town in the years they have been active, given a hugely positive witness for Christ, and shown how people of different churches and perspectives can come together in mission.

Decisions were taken to bring Street Pastors to an end for a variety of reasons, one of the most compelling reasons being that the pastors themselves were not feeling it to be fulfilling the sense of mission and evangelism they once knew. It was sincerely hoped that by Street Pastors 'leaving the stage', it would open up new opportunities for ecumenical mission which might not otherwise have been possible had they still been operating. It gives us as CTH an opportunity to re-think and re-imagine our social action

and mission on the streets. *How can we reach out together, in Jesus' name? What does mission look like in the current climate? Can we involve young and older together? Can we imagine mission activities in the places where people need it, at appropriate times?* All of these questions we would like to bring to the CTH Forum.

There may be already lots of things going on through our churches along these lines. *Are there things we could do better together? And how can we share information about what is already happening?*

### **C) Jubilee Foodbank**

As you are aware, the *Jubilee Foodbank* is a strong ecumenical initiative started by the churches to meet the emergency food needs of people in Harborough living through times of financial hardship. The need for this has grown dramatically over the years, and indeed foodbanks are now seen as an essential service in Market Harborough and every other town in the UK. Several of our churches and the Cube act as referral agencies for the Foodbank.

Things have changed recently regarding the Foodbank's distribution facilities through Harborough District Council (Symington Building) largely due to the council no longer taking public referral interviews.

We been approached by Liz Mills, chair of the Jubilee Foodbank, to ask whether any of our premises might be possibly used as a Foodbank distribution point for one day per week (same day every week) for a couple of hours, on a permanent basis. Places with a car park would be preferable. If you would be interested in discussing this further with Liz and her team, please do get in touch as soon as possible.

In total we need 5 venues for 5 days per week and for these to be regular venues on the same days. There are already cover for 1 or 2 of the days through the CAB.

To run these sessions would also require **volunteers**. It is possible that the volunteer rota could be organised centrally from a pool we could build up, rather than necessarily relying on volunteers from the host venues.

Venues would not have to offer long-term storage space for the food, or sort out the parcels, but rather food parcels in carrier bags would be prepared by the Foodbank team and delivered on the day for the expected number of people, who would be told in advance where they are to pick them up from.

*Please do consider whether your church or venue might be able to offer a room for this purpose, or whether you could encourage volunteers to staff the church venues on a regular basis.*

### **D) Cost of Living Crisis**

We are all very much aware of the 'cost of living crisis' which is predicted to get worse in the autumn and winter. Several people have been in touch with the CTH Exec to ask how our churches could help, and how we can support one another. Various questions and suggestions have been raised:

*Is there scope for a joint project to help people in fuel poverty in Market Harborough?*

*Can we partner with Christians Against Poverty (CAP)?*

*Could we form a credit union (like the one that closed around 6 years ago)?*

*Are our churches able to act as 'warm banks', to open up at certain times when people can come in to keep warm.* For example, see <https://www.warmwelcome.uk/>

In all these things, it would be helpful to have a co-ordinated approach or at least be aware of what each church is doing with this issue. *What is CTH's role in this? Are there ways we could be stronger doing things together, or are we better placed to act as an information hub to enable good awareness?*

## **E) Future Dates**

October 9<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup>: Prisons Week

November 24<sup>th</sup>: CTH Forum, 7.15 for 7.30pm (venue TBC)

December 2<sup>nd</sup>: Town Christmas Fayre

January 18<sup>th</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup>: Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

February 2<sup>nd</sup>: CTH Forum, 7.15 for 7.30pm (venue TBC)

February 22<sup>nd</sup>: Ash Wednesday (Lent begins)

April 7<sup>th</sup>: Good Friday – United act of worship on the Square

May 22<sup>nd</sup>: CTH AGM & Forum, 7.15 for 7.30pm (venue TBC)