



Minutes of the Churches Together in Harborough (CTH)
Forum Meeting, Thursday 24th November 2022, 7.15 for 7.30 p.m.
at St Nicholas, Little Bowden

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.

Abbreviations: OLOV = Our Lady of Victories Roman Catholic; CE = Church of England; MC = Methodist Church; BC = Baptist Church; CC = Congregational Church; HCC = Harborough Community Church; MHSP = Street Pastors. BC

Attendees (20):

Representatives: Rev. Andy Murphy (Chair, MC), Maureen Douglas (Secretary, OLOV), Jackie Melhuish (Treasurer, MC), Janet Smith (Minutes, BC), Peter Arnold (MC), Jan Turner (CC), David Nixon (MC), Jeannie Brightwell (CE), Fr Chris O'Connor (OLOV), Rev. Alison Iliffe (CE), Sharron Brannen (CC/Jubilee Foodbank). Non-voting: Rev. Trevor Thomas (MC), Rev. Dave Tomlin (MC). Guest Speaker: Mary Ann Lund (CE).

Apologies for absence:

Stephen Haward (CC), Barry Hill (HAT), Elizabeth Tubb (CE), Barry Osborne (CC), Christopher Brown (BC), Angela Zemlak (BC), Keith Rugg (BC), Derek Williams (Communications, CE), Theresa Kendrick (OLOV), Liz Mills (CC/Jubilee Foodbank), Stephen Jack (HCC), Mandy Gays (MHSP) and Ceriann Kelly (The Cube)

1. Welcome

Andy welcomed everyone to the meeting reiterating the three objectives of Churches Together in Harborough above.

2. Opening Devotions

Alison Iliffe led devotions offering the evening prayer for 24th November, which was aptly fitting at the start of our time together with the opening words from Psalm 133, "**How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity! It is like precious oil poured on the head.**" In the prayers that followed, Alison prayed for the "ointment of healing and the dew of blessing" to be upon us all.

3. Guest Speaker: Mary Ann Lund – Helping Refugees

Andy introduced the guest speaker, Mary Ann who spoke to the Forum about her involvement with refugees. Mary Ann began by referring to three snapshots of references to refugees in the previous 24 hours, which she had personally experienced - namely an internet clip of the present Home Secretary responding to questions put to her by MPs about seeking asylum, a news bulletin highlighting how bombing by Russian forces had affected Moldova's electricity supply, noting that Moldova has recently welcomed many Ukrainian refugees and a phone call from a Syrian woman who was brought here with her family under the government's Community Sponsorship Scheme three years ago and which CTH had been part of. Mary Ann's involvement goes back to 2015 when she was part of a group responding to the situation in France and Greece who responded by collecting items of clothing, bedding, etc. for refugees. This saw people and communities energised to help, but often with well-meaning intentions alongside mistakes coming to the fore. A gradual change in approach now sees help for refugees slimmed down with a more targeted focus for helping. No more ball gowns or stiletto heels!

Mary Ann highlighted the difference between the two main schemes that had brought refugees to our town and locality from Syria - namely the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) and Community Sponsorship Scheme.

Mary Ann encouraged the Forum when she said that churches are an important voice to be heard morally, ethically, and politically too, where we must not be afraid to speak out and which is borne out of the unique calling of our faith to be the limbs of Christ, while recognising Christ in others.

In a question-and-answer session that followed, Mary Ann assured the Forum that the best way for us to continue to facilitate helping refugees was to:

- acknowledge the fine balance between wanting to help financially, while fostering their increasing independence. This can be best achieved by targeting financial help through for example, courses and certification which would help facilitate pathways to employment.
- Connect with charitable organisations that are supporting small projects where the results of the support can be clearly seen.

Andy thanked Mary Ann for providing the Forum with a “ray of light against the national picture,” concerning refugees.

4. Minutes of the previous Forum meeting held on Monday 22nd September

The minutes of the September Forum having been previously circulated were accepted unanimously as a true record of the meeting, with one amendment which was to rectify the venue of the November meeting, which had been minuted as at the Congregational Church, but which was at St. Nicholas’ Church, Little Bowden.

5. Financial Update

Jackie brought to the meeting the good news that a sum of over £3 000 had been gifted to CTH by the Street Pastors, which was the final balance in their accounts upon closing. This was presented by Jeannie Brightwell (Chair of MHSP) the previous evening at a Thanksgiving Service for MHSP.

Andy brought a proposal to the meeting *‘that we ring-fence that money for the purpose of supporting ecumenical initiatives among our member churches which have a focus on reaching people out in the community.’* This was seconded by Jeannie Brightwell. This was accepted unanimously.

The Forum agreed that any applications from churches or groups to access this money should be made to the Exec and approved by the Forum, who will assess whether the proposed activity is in the missional spirit of the Street Pastors and meets the description above.

Andy read out a card from the Street Pastors that had been given when the money was handed over, expressing their thanks and appreciation for all the help received from CTH over the last thirteen years of Street Pastor ministry.

6. Matters Arising

a. Revisiting Plans Good Friday Act of Witness on the Square (7 April 2023)

Andy reported that we were no nearer than September in organising an event on the Square on Good Friday 2023. At the September Forum, Stephen Jack of HCC had agreed to enquire with some of the creative people at his church regarding their availability to lead and organise an event on Good Friday 2023, before getting back to the Executive to arrange a wider meeting. Stephen had recently contacted the Executive to inform them that regrettably nobody from HCC was available to organise an event for Good Friday 2023.

Given the shortage of time and the pressures on ministers, Andy brought a proposal to the meeting that we do not have a CTH Event on the Square in 2023 but would aim for its return in 2024. There could instead be an emphasis on promoting and support each other in planned Good Friday/Easter events and activities, and doing other things like giving out Easter gifts to people on the streets. This proposal was unanimously accepted.

Action: Jan Turner will coordinate a team of lay people to give out appropriate gifts and literature, including information promoting our Easter services and activities across the churches as suggested above. Any further ideas to the Executive please!

b. Action for Justice & Peace group – no further news at this stage about its moving forward in a different format, but Andy reported that he would be seeking to meet with the current members of the group in due course. Janet Smith informed the meeting that **on Friday January 13th, 2023**, there would be the annual Peace Vigil on the Square, 5.00pm – 5.30pm.

Action: Andy will promote the Peace Vigil at the Methodist Ukrainian Café and further information will be sent out by Alison Tomlin and Janet Smith in due course through CTH about final plans for the Vigil.

c. Social Action / mission on the streets – no ideas have been suggested to the Exec or the Forum for ways of reaching out together. But we note that such activities would now be able to apply for funding through the Street Pastors' financial legacy.

d. Jubilee Foodbank: Sharon Brennan reported that the Jubilee Foodbank since Liz Mills' last update at the September Forum had seen plentiful donations from harvest services and events and financial contributions too. At present there are various drop off points for food parcels, such as CAB, the Medical Centre, certain schools and for the Southern Estate only, Harborough Community Church. Further drop off points were still being sought and in the longer term, to enable greater engagement with clients, the Jubilee Foodbank continues to look for new premises which would serve as a hub where people could collect food themselves and maybe access other services. Sharron had been to see such a hub working at Melton Mowbray. Nothing suitable has been found to date.

e. Cost of living crisis – communicating and co-ordinating our efforts: The Executive is keen for all information regarding 'warm spaces' (or similar events or groups) in our churches to be available centrally on the CTH website and to be able to share any information with the District Council. Individual churches will have their own missional outlook, but it would be useful to share as much information as possible to avoid duplication of personnel and resources. Churches might also wish to register any such scheme is registered with an appropriate charity or overseeing body. Harborough District Council will be offering warm places too, including the leisure centres across the district. Dave Tomlin raised the point that many older people or people on benefits might struggle to afford to get to local leisure centres. Dave reported that lobbyists continue to hope to move the interim CEO of the Council to offer places and resources locally.

The Congregational Church has committed to offering a warm space on Thursdays 11am – 3pm. St Di's are considering Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. The Baptist Church is yet to confirm a decision about offering Monday mornings. More information will be collected and shared.

Action: any information regarding churches offering warm spaces should be sent to Andy or Maureen so that it can be collated and publicised.

7. Developing the Website – see NOTE A sent out with the agenda: It was felt that the CTH website would benefit from being updated and streamlined, which is envisaged would take a number of hours. Dave Kennard is the current Webmaster and to date the Executive have informed him of any changes they wish to be made to the website. Andy proposed that Dave Kennard be approached to update the website and to offer to pay Dave £250 for doing this. This was accepted unanimously.

Action: Andy Murphy and Derek Williams will speak to Dave Kennard and negotiate with the Executive the exact nature of the changes accordingly

8. Communications – nothing new to report

Thanks to Derek for his continuing work in publicising our efforts.

9. Making sure our list of reps is up to date: It is important that the CTH Reps list is up to date (and in accordance with the rules of the revised Constitution of Autumn 2021)

Action: Maureen will contact the member churches asking them to send the names of their nominated CTH representatives to her.

10. Any news from churches or associated organisations?

Report from The Bower House

It has been a joy to settle back into our 'new look' house over the last two months. Despite snagging issues and various external elements still to be completed, the main entrance to the house is now properly accessible to disabled visitors. (Welcoming our first wheelchair user since re-opening was a wonderful moment!) In addition to the front entrance and disabled toilet extension, new blinds have been fitted to the Counsellors' Common room and downstairs office windows, a new boundary fence (adjoining the Dry Cleaners) has been erected and the rotten upstairs landing window has been replaced. We are so thankful for God's provision and for those whose skills and expertise have enabled these very necessary improvements to take place.

Since our last report in September, demand for the Service has increased; October was a particularly busy month for new referrals and November followed suit. As people navigate the current economic squeeze, we anticipate an increased impact on mental health and will continue to do our utmost to meet the need. We have recently inducted a returning counsellor and two new students into the Service. They will be offering counselling sessions in the afternoons, filling current gaps in the Bower House diary. We anticipate being open again to student applications in the New Year.

Alongside 1:1 counselling, The Bereavement groups that have been run at the Bower House in the past have always been well attended and received. They offer a valuable opportunity for connection and for clients to be supported in a group context, often towards or at the close of one to one therapy. Our next group, run by three of our dedicated volunteer counsellors, will start in January 2023 and we hope to offer a second group in the Spring. Others within the service have expressed an interest to be trained/involved and so there is potential to further extend this provision in the future.

With Service costs increasing, our fundraising efforts have continued. In October, Cara, Jane M and Joseph Gibbard (Trish Gibbard's son) were sponsored to abseil the National Lift Tower located in Northampton. Our Gala night at Harborough Theatre was very well attended, enjoyable evening – a resounding success. Thanks to all those that supported and gave so generously to these events. Our next fundraiser will be our Christmas Fayre at Market Harborough Theatre on 3rd December, and we are also offering 'I've made a donation in your name' Christmas cards this year.

Finally, we are pleased to have recently welcomed Loraine Tite to the role as Service co-ordinator. Loraine will be job-sharing with Cara after volunteering as a counsellor/supervisor at the Bower House for a number of years. We have no doubt she will be an asset to the service and very much hope she enjoys (and is blessed) in her new role. Thank you, for your continued support of the Bower House. We know that we need God's wisdom in every thought, decision and action and appreciate your ongoing prayers for the whole team. Every Blessing,

Cara and Loraine

Report from The Cube

The Cube continues to offer a range of groups and interventions for the young people of the town. The groups are going well, and youth workers continue to go into both Robert Smyth and Welland Park Academies weekly for lunchtime drop - in sessions. Please pray especially for the schools – based sessions as the youth workers are seeing increases in anxiety levels among the students again.

There has been a recent increase in the numbers attending the Wednesday evening session.

The counselling service is now well established, and volunteer mentors are currently being paired with young people in what is a new venture for The Cube.

The Cube ask for prayer for the health and wellbeing of the staff.

Watch out for the December newsletter!

Report from Homelessness and Asking for Help Group

The Homelessness/Asking for Help Group met last month to start to discuss the way forward in terms of re – establishing the protocol for each church to be able to provide help in the most effective way to those who are

homeless or who ask for help. This is ongoing and when the group meets again in January, hopes to bring further news to the Forum.

The online Forum convened initially by the local council in April 2021 to help the homeless and vulnerable led by housing and community engagement officers has not (yet) continued/re – started after key staff left the council back in the summer. This was a useful way of bringing statutory, voluntary, charities and religious bodies together to pool resources and information, alongside producing a directory of services available. It is hoped that newly appointed staff at the council will continue this going forward.

Just this week (22/11/22) there was a request via the Jubilee Foodbank to provide items of essential clothing for 2 homeless people who were being housed temporarily in the Travel Lodge. The group continues to work closely with the Foodbank in providing help.

Christian Aid: Peter Arnold reported that the idea to return delivered Christian Aid envelopes to a central location this year had not really worked, with only 54 envelopes being returned. The surrounding villages had raised more money than the town. Peter asked that the churches come up with ideas for raising money for Christian Aid in 2023.

Action: Email any fundraising suggestions to Maureen, who will pass them on to Peter.

Church news and prayer requests

In a time of sharing, the following news and prayer requests were received:

- A team from **Great Bowden Church** is back weekly in the village primary school with 'Open the Book'. This is very well received and is going well.
- **Our Lady of Victories Catholic Church** asked for prayer for the children being prepared for their first Holy Communion and for more people to join the team preparing them as some long-standing volunteers had recently retired from the role.
- **St. Hugh Church** has recently launched the Cygnet Fundraising Project. Alison asked for prayer for the forthcoming Nativity Festival, that God would work in peoples' lives and for other planned fundraising events.
- **The Baptist and Congregational Churches** will both be open on the evening of Friday 2nd December for Late Night Shopping. The Congregational Church will be offering activities on the steps with refreshments and recorded Christmas music inside. The Baptist Church is offering a quiet reflective space from the busy – ness of the evening with mince pies, apple juice and recorded Christmas music.
- **The Methodist Church's** Pizza Club for children in Years 4 - 9 is going well with 22 children currently attending. The Ukrainian Café on a Saturday morning is well attended and is conscious of the feelings that may come to the fore as Christmas approaches.

11. Future Events:

a. Week of Prayer for Christian Unity: The service is being organised and prepared by Christopher Brown of the Baptist Church. We are awaiting confirmation from churches for some of the other proposed prayer meetings:

Suggested Arrangements for Week of Prayer for Christian Unity:

- Wed 18th January – prayer meeting at 7.00pm at Our Lady of Victories Catholic Church;**
- Friday 20th January – prayer meeting at 12.30pm at the Congregational Church;**
- Sunday 22nd Jan – United service at the Baptist Church at 3.00pm.**
- Tuesday 24th January – Zoom prayer meeting organised by Harborough Anglican Team at either 12.30 or 7.00pm**

b. Lent 2023: Our Lady of Victories Catholic Church will host the half hour services, 12.30 – 1.00pm each week on the Fridays during Lent followed by a simple soup and cake lunch in the Octagonal Hall. The services will be led by different churches, all taking place at OLOV.

- 3rd March – Harborough Anglican Team;**
- 10th March – Baptist Church;**

- c. 17th March – Congregational Church;
- d. 24th March – Harborough Community Church;
- e. 31st March – Methodist Church

12. Date of next meetings (venues to be confirmed), all 7.15pm for 7.30pm:

- a. Thursday 2nd February 2023
- b. Monday 22nd May 2023 (AGM)
- c. Thursday 14th September 2023
- d. Monday 27th November 2023

13. Any other business: there was none.

14. Closing Prayer: Andy closed the meeting with prayer for all the things shared from the different churches, after which the Grace was shared.

Signed by:

Date: