



**Minutes of the Churches Together in Harbourough (CTH)  
Forum Meeting, Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2023, 7.15 for 7.30 p.m.  
At Our Lady of Victories, Roman Catholic 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.

**Abbreviations:** OLOV = Our Lady of Victories Roman Catholic; CE = Church of England; MC = Methodist Church; BC = Baptist Church; CC = Congregational Church; HCC = Harbourough Community Church.

**Attendees (13)**

Andy Murphy (MHMC), Maureen Douglas (OLOV), Trevor Thomas (Methodist), Jackie Melhuish (MHMC), Janet Smith (MHBC/The Cube), Peter Arnold (MHMC), Jan Turner (MHCC), David Nixon (MHMC), Dave Tomlin (MHMC), Chris O'Connor (OLOV), Phil Bryson (CE), Derek Williams, Angela Zemplak (MHBC).

**Apologies for absence**

Apologies: John Sparks, Jeannie Brightwell, Barry Osborne (MHCC), Sharron Brannon (MHCC), Barry Hill (CE), Christopher Brown (MHBC).

**1. Welcome**

Andy welcomed everyone to the meeting.

**2. Opening Devotions**

Father Chris led devotions offering us food for thought around the Feast of Candlemas (2/2/2023) and providing insight into how the Feast Day had been commemorated during Mass that morning. **Candlemas**, also known as the **Feast of the Presentation of Jesus Christ** commemorates the presentation of Jesus at the Temple. It is based upon the account of the presentation of Jesus in Luke 2:22–40.

**3. Minutes of the previous Forum meeting held on Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> November 2022**

The minutes of the November Forum having been previously circulated were accepted unanimously as a true record of the meeting and were signed by Andy.

**4. Financial Update**

Jackie brought a financial update to the meeting stating that the CTH finances were in good order and informing the Forum that the fees and invoices for full and associate member churches, ministries and organisations for the next financial year were to be decided upon by the Executive and brought to the May Forum for approval. Jackie informed the meeting that the Bower House, The Cube, and the Jubilee Foodbank would be receiving monies from the collections taken at the Christmas Day Free Church service held at the Congregational Church and the recent United Service held on 22<sup>nd</sup> January during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

**5. Matters Arising**

**a. Review of Events: Week of Prayer for Christian Unity**

Positive feedback was shared about events during the recent Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. The approach to hold a mix of prayer events both in person and online was well received and saw a variety of approaches which were enjoyed by all, led by Fr Chris at OLOV, Catholic Church, Rev. Stephen Haward at the Congregational Church and an online prayer time led by Helen Trotter of St Peter and St Paul, Great Bowden. The United Service (our first in person service since January 2020), on the afternoon of Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> January at the Baptist Church was well attended. Thanks were expressed to all those involved in organising the events across the week.

**b. Lent Lunches and services – confirmation of arrangements**

The arrangements for Lent 2023 were confirmed as follows:

Soup-and-cake lunches at Our Lady of Victories Catholic Church, preceded by 30-minute service prepared by the following churches will take place on the following dates:

- a. 3rd March – Harborough Anglican Team.
- b. 10th March – Baptist Church.
- c. 17th March – Congregational Church.
- d. 24th March – Harborough Community Church.
- e. 31st March – Methodist Church.

**Action: Following a question about a theme for this year's services, the Executive will decide upon one and send it out to the churches.**

**c. Plans for Good Friday – sharing information and good news:** With no Good Friday CTH event or service this year on the Square, churches are preparing to hold their own services and events on Good Friday. Requests for information about planned services and events over the Easter weekend should be sent to Maureen in order that the information can be collated on a flyer that can be distributed around the town. Rev. Phil Bryson informed the Forum that St Di's were planning various activities on Good Friday.

**d. Action for Justice & Peace group:** Janet reported that the annual Peace Vigil had taken place as planned on Friday January 13<sup>th</sup> January. It was well attended with more people gradually joining the vigil, so that by the end of the half hour at 5.30 there were around 20 people, including some of our Ukrainian friends.

Andy had met with Janet Smith and consulted with Alison and Dave Tomlin to continue discussing the way forward for the Harborough Action for Justice and Peace Group. The conclusion to these discussions was that we rest/disband Harborough Action for Justice & Peace for the time being, with a thought that we may (in God's time) start something new up in the future. It was proposed that CTH adopts the Peace Vigil as a permanent fixture, and that this could be open to different times of day (and even different times of year) as we get into discussions with the secondary schools about getting the students involved. Also, we would like to propose that CTH keeps Justice and Peace issues on the agenda as a standing item, to give people the opportunity to raise issues (local, national, or international), and discuss whether and how we can respond as CTH. This would also give us an opportunity to hold ad hoc events where appropriate. These proposals were unanimously accepted by the Forum.

Andy had also been in touch with some of the Ukrainian community about whether they would like CTH to stand with them or arrange something to mark the anniversary of the Russian invasion on Friday 24<sup>th</sup> Feb.

**Action: Andy will oversee and coordinate this, with any event requested, planned and led by the Ukrainian community.**

**e. Website update:** This is a work in progress.

**f. Cost of living crisis – communicating and co-ordinating our efforts:** warm spaces have been set up and are operating at various local churches during the week. Phil Bryson informed the Forum that St Di's warm space is confirmed as being open on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Fridays from 10 – 12 noon.

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

**6. Christian Aid:** Peter Arnold requested that Christian Aid representatives and churches think about fundraising activities that they could participate in during Christian Aid Week 2023 (14<sup>th</sup> - 20<sup>th</sup> May). As reported at the November Forum, Peter reiterated last year's idea to return delivered Christian Aid envelopes to a central location this year had not really worked, with only 54 envelopes being returned. New fundraising ideas were required!

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

## **7. Any news or points for prayer from churches or associated organisations?**

### **Bower House Report**

We send our apologies for not being able to join you in person. The past few months have gone by in a flurry of activity. We are so pleased with how the house is looking now with most of the renovation work completed. We are just waiting on a few final actions to be scheduled, these include a new back door and some exterior painting. We do now have a bin store, the handrail leading to the front door has been erected, external lighting has been fitted and signage to the front door and the extension (conveying our working name and logo) is in place. We think it maintains the balance of the discreteness and accessibility of the house – an essential combination for any counselling agency. We are planning a 'grand re-opening' on April 15th 2023 and we would love to see you there.

We were so pleased to welcome Loraine to the team as joint service co-ordinator in November 2022. Loraine has volunteered at the house for a number of years as a counsellor/supervisor. Loraine is now getting to know about the service from all angles which continues to provide a lot of learning opportunities. As we welcomed Loraine, we had to say goodbye to our administrator, Andrea, in December. Andrea oversaw a number of jobs in the house and this departure is now providing opportunities for our support workers to pick up some additional tasks in addition to the generic support worker role. Reviewing volunteer roles and the needs of the house has given us the fortuity to create a different kind of volunteer role – house caretaker. This role would not necessarily be 'client' facing but would help with painting, gardening, or general maintenance. We would very much appreciate your prayers regarding support worker recruitment as we want to ensure the needs of the service are addressed and covered amongst a spread of volunteers. We are so thankful for our current support worker team, without whom the house would not function as smoothly as it does.

We had a very successful coffee morning in December but as with many charities, churches, and the population in general, the rising cost of living is challenging. God is providing in many ways and for this we are extremely grateful. We have other events planned throughout the year with a 'Coronation' coffee morning on May 13th and a CPD event on June 10th, our first since COVID halted large gatherings for a while. These events benefit our volunteers and forge links with other local services and organisations, as well as providing an opportunity to fundraise. We have also entered a team of six into the Rotary club sponsored Swimathon which is to be held on March 4th and are looking forward to having some fun and building links with the community whilst supporting the event.

We were able to start another Bereavement group on January 20th and this is going well. These groups provide a safe, empathic space to share feelings and it has also enabled connection and relationship. We are pleased that another group is planned to commence in the spring. This year our team 'Away Day' is on April 29th and will focus on the theme of 'Compassion' which feels fitting since the world around us is still recovering from the effects of COVID, war outbreaks and the cost of living crisis. We trust it will be an opportunity for the team to connect, relax and enjoy being together.

With all the building work coming to an end, changes in staff and the beginning of a new year it seemed like an opportune time to administer a data cleanse and to evaluate the service with an eye on the future and where we would like to be in years to come. With all this in mind we have just started to review, re-write, and improve our policies and procedures. Following on from feedback and new legislation working practices, we have started with risk assessments and service need. Finally, 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.

### **The Cube**

The Cube held its AGM on 26<sup>th</sup> January 2023, which provided a great opportunity to learn more about the Cube's continuing work with local young people this past year and to hear of plans and projects that will shape the future. The Cube continues to run several regular sessions, both at the Cube and at the Welland Park and Robert Smyth Academies, where the lunch time drop - in sessions are very much appreciated. The Counselling service at the Cube is now well established and to provide further counselling space, a caravan was purchased last year and is now in - situ in the Cube's Garden. Having been gutted and painted on the outside, the caravan now awaits an interior re – fit. This will be completed in due course after a grant application to enable this was successful. Once operational, the caravan will provide a much needed additional counselling space.

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. Any church wanting to use the space can book through the Cube's administrator. It is also a venue for private hire. Watch out for the monthly newsletter that the Cube sends out! <https://thecubeyouth.uk>

Janet Smith

### **Homelessness/Asking for Help Group**

The Homelessness/Asking for Help Group met on 11th January. Greggs vouchers and hot food vouchers from Cod's Scallops continue to be given out where appropriate, mainly by the Foodbank and the team at St Di's. The group continues to consider how best to streamline and manage the distribution of vouchers amongst the churches generally.

It is apparent that the local council is increasingly placing people in the Travelodge as a temporary measure. This has tended to negate the need there once was for sleeping bags. It also means that once people are placed in the Travelodge they are automatically 'in the system' which will action the appropriate statutory responses.

Overall, it is felt that the group continues to help people who are in need in ways that are appropriate to a town that does not have many visible rough sleepers. The group is next meeting in early May.

The Homelessness/Asking for Help Group

### **Jubilee Foodbank**

The foodbank has been inundated with food donations for the last month, so much so that the front line volunteers have had to operate extra shifts to get the food into the stores. Likewise, there have been some incredibly generous donations of cash from local organisations such as Market Harborough Building Society, for which we are very grateful.

This month we have donated food to over 200 people which amounts to over 4,000 meals. Approx. 60% of recipients include children, and some families are using the foodbank on a regular basis, when this happens, we try to engage with these people to encourage them to find more permanent solutions, but this isn't always possible. The majority of referrals come from CAB and those from HDC are usually requests for Ukrainian refugee families who are in transit from their first placement hosts and having been placed in the Travelodge temporarily.

Our biggest problem currently is finding a more suitable building to house the Jubilee Foodbank, we wish to be able to invite referrals to pick up food bags directly from our premises, this would eliminate the need to find secure drop off points, but more importantly it would enable us to meet with people and offer further support. This is proving very difficult as the rent for premises is very high and there are very limited places – we got close a few weeks ago, the position of the building was good but eventually the state and the price meant that we could not accept it.

Please help us by looking out for suitable premises and through your continuing prayers.

Many thanks,

Sharron

Jubilee Foodbank.

### **Church news and prayer requests**

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

**Market Harborough Baptist Church** is going to be closed for the best part of a fortnight while new boilers are fitted.

Prayer was requested for the warm space open on Monday mornings.

**Market Harborough Congregational Church** is looking to appoint a community/outreach worker.

**St. Di's** has events planned for Shrove Tuesday in the church and underneath the Old Grammar School to which everyone is welcome.

**8. Praying for one another:** Prayer was offered for the above situations and events.

**9. Date of next meetings (venues to be confirmed):**

- a. Monday 22nd May 2023 (AGM) – at Congregational Church**
- b. Thursday 14th September 2023 (venue TBC)**
- c. Monday 27th November 2023 – at Methodist Church**
- d. Thursday 1st February 2024 (venue TBC)**

**10. Any other business**

**a. Request for funds for Ukrainian books** - Andy shared that the Ukrainian community had bought some books for the children living locally, some of whom are continuing their education with Ukrainian teachers and were requesting funds to be able to buy more Ukrainian books. If any church or individual wanted more information about this, Andy would be pleased to provide it.

**11. Closing prayer:** Andy closed the meeting with prayer, after which the Grace was shared.