



**Minutes of the Churches Together in Harbourough (CTH)
Forum Meeting, Monday 27th November 2023, 7.15 for 7.30 p.m.
At Market Harbourough Methodist 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 (14)

Andy Murphy (MHMC), Maureen Douglas (OLOV), Jackie Melhuish (MHMC), Janet Smith (MHBC), Peter Arnold (MHMC), David Nixon (MHMC), Dave Tomlin (MHMC), Chris O'Connor (OLOV), Tom Grant (CE), Angela Zemlak (MHBC), Stephen Jack (HCC), Christopher Brown (MHBC), Teresa Kendrick (OLOV), Sharron Brennan (CC)

Apologies for absence

Apologies: Jan Turner (CC), Alison Ilife (CE)

1. Welcome

Andy welcomed everyone to the meeting and then led us in prayer for peace and wellbeing for individuals, for our local schools, especially those facing challenges with their buildings, for families facing hardship in current economic circumstances and for local clergy and church leaders as they lead their churches through the busy – ness of the Advent and Christmas season.

2. Opening Devotions

Andy led devotions offering us food for thought around John 17 v. 20 onwards, recalling the nervousness with which he had read it as a new lay preacher some twenty or so years ago. These precious words from Jesus came at a time of personal crisis and trial for our Lord as he contemplated the future and made a call to unity, not only for His disciples, but for the universal Church in centuries to come, 'not that we would be right, but that we would be one. Not that we would agree, but that we would be one.' God has worked and continues to work through the Church's often fragmented history, with the Holy Spirit providing and working through a wonderful variety of gifts that enriches the Church and ensures that needs are met. Our local task as churches together is to continue that unity as we work together and pray for each other as the body of Christ. Following this we then sang, 'There is a Redeemer.'

3. Minutes of the previous Forum meeting held on Thursday 14th September

The minutes of the September 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 subscriptions for full and associate member churches had been paid promptly. Jackie informed the Forum that there were sufficient funds to enable The Easter Event to happen on Good Friday, 29th March 2024 with around £2000 being available, with £1500 of that paying for the screen with the remainder for administration, insurance, and sundries. There was unanimous agreement that the £2000 be used for the Good Friday/Easter Event.

5. Matters Arising

a. Plans for Good Friday act of witness on the Square (29th March 2024)

- **Update from Christopher Brown**

Since the last Forum meeting, and the agreement that the lead for the event should come from the Ministers' Fellowship, Christopher had agreed to oversee the Easter Event and a small steering group consisting of Christopher,

Stephen Jack, Alison Iliffe and Phil Chapman had met to begin to plan the event. Christopher shared the vision he believes God has placed on his heart to share the full Easter story with the public on the Square on Good Friday. This would be done in an accessible way, utilising the range of creative gifts within the body of Christ. This would not be a service - churches would still be holding their own services on Good Friday, but rather an opportunity to share the good news of Easter with the local community, whilst connecting with the community.

Local churches would be involved in worship and prayer and in seeking God in the event leading up to it through three worship and prayer evenings from January to March at three different locations. The united service planned for 21st January and the Week of prayer for Christian Unity would see the launch of the Easter Event with strategic advertising for it during February and March.

The three key elements to the event would be:

1. **Live music to draw the crowd** - to open and close the event. A blend of Christian music would be played.
2. **Live Street drama** - working with local Christians to write, prepare and rehearse to tell the story of Easter. As the story unfolds, it would be projected on the screen.
3. **Snappy testimonies** - projected on the screen telling how Jesus has impacted lives.

Around the edge of the Square would be prayer stations, food, children's activities, and an opportunity for organisations associated with CTH to be showcased. In the coming weeks, Christopher will bring more people in to work on the drama and the music.

Following the setting out of the vision for the event, people were invited to comment and ask questions. Comments were positive with an acknowledgement that we must trust God to proclaim the gospel story however nervous we may feel about how it all comes together. A question was asked concerning, 'what happens after Good Friday?' It is envisaged that people will be given follow up contacts for the town's churches. It was acknowledged that the vision could easily be broadened beyond Easter, to include carnival day and Christmas 2024. It was unanimously agreed to give the Forum's blessing to the Easter Event. The Forum had caught hold of the vision. It now needs to be caught by our churches and congregations in the coming weeks.

- **Quote for Big Screen:** This quote of £1500 from the same company as in 2022 had seen an increase in price of about £300. There is an agreed budget to cover this. It was anticipated that the additional cost of cameras and technical equipment might well mean that the £2000 budget would be exceeded. It was suggested that if additional monies are needed then churches could be asked to give a 'love gift' as confirmation of them sharing the vision.
- **Admin and insurance:** the Executive is overseeing the administration and insurance for the event. Initial contact had been made with the Council who has booked the Good Friday date out to CTH. Negotiation with Gail Bates, the new Market and Events Manager is ongoing as the Executive negotiates a rate for the hiring of the Square, which CTH has not been presented with before. It is hoped that if any charge is made it will be at the charity rate of £50. It was suggested that CTH, while not a charity itself use its affiliation to Churches Together in England (CTE), quoting CTE's charity number in any communication with the council.

Action: at the February Forum there will be an informed discussion around a more realistic budget once costs have been investigated and confirmed in the coming weeks.

b) Christian Unity Service at the Congregational Church, Sunday 21st January 2024, 3.00 p.m.

- Led by ministers (to be arranged by the Ministers' Fellowship)
- Refreshments to follow by Congregational Church

As already mentioned, the service would be when the Easter Event was launched.

Action: Christopher asked for time to consider the location and the time of the service on 21st January, which will be confirmed in due course.

c) Worship and prayer nights (Christopher)

The dates for the further two prayer and worship nights would be confirmed by Christopher in due course.

d) Future of CTH and future Chair

Andy brought to the Forum some thoughts and ideas around plans for the future. There seemed to be emerging from thoughts and discussions, from both the Ministers' Fellowship and the Forum that the way forward was to work with

vision and to then see how CTH could facilitate that, rather than pursue the potential restrictions of traditional calendar events, which had been the modus operandi of CTH in recent years. This would allow and enable new things to be explored and an opportunity to build up CTH for a new generation. Andy posed the question around whether God has been saying that the current model on which CTH operates needs to change to enable CTH to grow in a different direction.

It had been obvious in discussion with church leaders that the present four year commitment on which CTH is currently modelled (two years serving as vice – chair followed by two further years as Chair with alternating clergy and lay people) was not set in stone and was clearly a barrier now to people putting themselves forward to serve in these roles. Andy shared some initial thoughts about how to enable the ministers to be part of the driving force of CTH without the present four year commitment. This would necessarily require key lay involvement and leadership. This suggestion would not require a constitutional change as the current model of CTH leadership is not set in stone but stated as preference. Andy's comments were received favourably by the Forum as, 'a definite step in the right direction.'

Action: Andy will prepare a written document to enable further discussion at the February Forum.

6. Evangelism and Outreach: This had been discussed already under the Easter Event.

Peace Vigil: It was thought important to have a Peace Vigil in January 2024. The date of Friday 12th January was proposed. As in previous years it would be a silent candlelit vigil on the Square from 5.00 – 5.30 p.m. It was suggested that it might be pertinent to follow the outdoor vigil with an opportunity for continued prayer, reflection, and hot drinks from 5.30 – 6.30 and so the Baptist Church's Café space in Manor walk will be used for this purpose.

Action: Janet Smith and Alison Tomlin will arrange and publicise the vigil through CTH and Janet will arrange with folks at the Baptist Church the hot drinks and continued prayer opportunity.

7. Communications: Andy is now overseeing the rota and submission of the articles for the Harborough Mail's weekly churches' column

Christmas services and events publicity: Maureen will collate the information and send out to contacts.

Action: each church needs to ensure that information about services is sent to Maureen as soon as possible.

8. Any news from churches or associated organisations?

- **Christian Aid week 2024 is 14th - 20th May.** Peter Arnold encouraged churches to start thinking about events that could be organised to raise money for Christian Aid and other ways of encouraging people to donate.
- **The Congregational Church** continues to seek to call a new minister. Their time without one has brought them closer together as a fellowship, whilst recognising the hard work being necessarily done by the steering group during this time of interregnum.
- **The CUBE** is looking for extra staff to work in a team with young people up until Christmas. It is for 6 hours each Wednesday 3-9pm at £10.90 per hour. If you know anyone who might be interested, please ask them to contact us on admin@thecubeyouth.uk or **01858 437650**.
- **Jubilee Foodbank** that it is as busy as ever and that 'Cook' in St Mary's place is still keen to offer frozen meals (up to 30 a week) to those who need them. To date there has not emerged a fair, safe way that such meals could be stored and distributed and because the meals are frozen, this adds potential difficulties with food hygiene. One possibility might be to distribute through the Renew Wellbeing Café at the Baptist Church. Another might be through the community fridge. All options would need to be carefully supervised. This will be explored further.
- **Household Support Fund** - Tom Grant shared information regarding this fund run through the County Council. Further information about it, how it works and who is eligible can be accessed on <https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2023-05/Household-Support-Fund-Policy-2023-24.pdf>

9) Making sure our list of reps is up to date

Action: All churches to inform Maureen of the names of their reps. as soon as possible

10) Future CTH Events:

- a) Week of Prayer for Christian Unity: - see **NOTE A**
- b) Lent 2024 – services and lunches at the Methodist Church - see **NOTE B**
- c) Good Friday on the Square, 29th March 2024

11) Date of next meetings (venues to be confirmed)

- a) Thursday 1st February 2024 Harborough Community Church
- b) Monday 20th May 2024 (AGM)
- c) Thursday 12th September 2024 at the Baptist Church
- d) Monday 25th November 2024

12)Any Other Business: there was none.

13) Closing Prayer: Maureen closed the meeting with prayer

NOTES:

A) Arrangements for Week of Prayer for Christian Unity:

- a. **Friday 19th January 2024** – prayer meeting at 12.30pm at Baptist Church
- b. **Sunday 21st Jan – United service at Congregational Church at 3.00pm.** (Time and venue to be confirmed)
- c. **Monday 22nd January** – prayer meeting at 7.00pm at Our Lady of Victories.
- d. **Wednesday 24th January** – Zoom prayer meeting led by Harborough Anglican Team at 7.00pm.

B) Arrangements for Lent 2024:

30-minute services (12.30pm) followed by soup-and-cake lunches (1.00pm) at Methodist Church. Services prepared and led by the following churches:

- a. **23rd February – Congregational Church.**
- b. **1st March – Harborough Community Church.**
- c. **8th March – Harborough Anglican Team.**
- d. **15th March – Our Lady of Victories.**
- e. **22nd March – Baptist Church.**

Services are typically (but not necessarily) led by lay members of the churches. The usual format is: Welcome, hymn, prayer, reading, short reflection, prayer, hymn, blessing. Or something similar. Please feel free to vary style and structure. We welcome variety and a flavour of each denomination. The Methodist Church can provide musicians to accompany, or you are welcome to bring your own. Please notify Andy Murphy of music requirements and choice of hymns, one week in advance.