



**Minutes of the Churches Together in Harborough (CTH)
Forum Meeting, Thursday 1st February 2024, 7.15 for 7.30 p.m.
At Harborough Community 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 = Harborough Community Church.

Attendees (14)

Rev. Andy Murphy (MHMC), Maureen Douglas (OLOV), Jackie Melhuish (MHMC), Jan Turner (CC), Janet Smith (MHBC), Peter Arnold (MHMC), David Nixon (MHMC), Father Chris O'Connor (OLOV), Angela Zemlak (MHBC), Rev. Stephen Jack (HCC), Rev. Christopher Brown (MHBC), Sharron Brannen (CC), Jeannie Brightwell (CE), Rev. Alison Iliffe (CE), Luke (HCC).

Apologies for absence

Apologies: Vicky & Phil Bryson, Theresa Kendrick, John Pierce, Dave Tomlin.

Welcome. Andy Murphy welcomed everyone to the meeting and invited Stephen Jack to lead the opening devotions.

1. Opening Devotions

Stephen led devotions, offering us food for thought around his reading for the day, **John 12 v. 20 -22 "Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the festival. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. "Sir," they said, "we would like to see Jesus." Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus." (NIV)**, focusing on 2 aspects from those verses. Firstly, **'we want to see Jesus'** in the everyday – the school assemblies, fellowship lunches, in counselling others, in everyday conversations and even in life's less-positive experiences. Sometimes we miss Jesus in our busyness. Secondly, the Greeks came to Philip – distinct among the disciples because of his Greek, rather than Hebrew name. Stephen reminded us that as churches together we celebrate both our distinctiveness as well as our unity. It is pertinent that each church is a conduit through which people come because, **'they want to see Jesus.'** Following this Stephen led us in prayer, then we sang, **'How Great Thou Art.'**

2. Minutes of the previous Forum meeting held on Monday November 27th, 2023

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.

3. Financial Update

Jackie Melhuish brought a financial update to the meeting stating that there was nothing to report but that CTH finances were in good order.

4. Matters Arising:

- a) **Easter Live on the Square** (Good Friday, 29th March 2024 starting at 10.30am)

Update from Christopher Brown

Christopher brought an update by firstly re – sharing the vision for the ‘Easter Live’ Event i.e. to share the full Easter story with the public on the Square on Good Friday in an accessible way, utilizing the range of creative gifts within the body of Christ. The three key elements to the event will be:

1. **Live music to draw the crowd.** The band is rehearsing and has played at the first prayer and worship night. It has been decided that they will perform worship music in slots throughout the event.
2. **Live Street drama which will be projected on the screen.** Abby Baird-Smith from HCC is heading this up. It will consist of monologues.
3. **Snappy testimonies,** projected on the screen telling how Jesus has impacted lives. Living Rock Church is involved with creating and recording the testimonies.

Children’s activities will be overseen by HCC, and a range of some of town’s Christian ministries will be invited to ‘showcase creatively’ in gazebos around the Square.

Prayer - People will be invited to write any prayer requests on a card, which can then be put into a box and churches will commit to praying for people and the prayer concerns in the week/s following.

As a show of our unity there will be copies of St Mark’s Gospel, produced by Hope in attractive A4 format to give away.

Huge thanks were expressed to Christopher for taking the lead for Easter Live 2024.

Update from Exec: Admin, risk assessments and insurance: the Executive is overseeing the administration and insurance for the event. Janet and Maureen met with Gail Bates (HDC’s Market and Events Manager) before Christmas. The Events Notification Form has been submitted, cancellation insurance obtained, and public liability insurance and employers liability insurances confirmed by Jackie. Ongoing liaising with Gail and the council will see a risk assessment and walk through of the proposed lay out of the Square completed in due course, as well as taking letters to local shops and businesses around the Square to keep them fully informed of plans for the event.

Stewarding and other personnel and the wider involvement of churches: although the event’s Steering Group will remain small, for the vision to become a reality the biggest need is for the event to be underpinned with and by prayer, which **ALL** churches can engage with. There will also be jobs and tasks that churches can get involved with nearer the time. Watch this space!

Publicity: ‘buzz and momentum’ are the order of the day as the event is promoted in the local broadcast and print media and through individual church communications, on noticeboards etc. There was a suggestion that local schools be informed about the event, and this would be done through the clergy and ministers who have contacts with local schools through assemblies etc.

It is envisaged that this will be the first of other such ‘Easter Live’ events in the years to come and that it was useful to think of this first year as ‘a gift to Market Harborough’, rather than, ‘something for us.’

Costs to be confirmed:

1. **The ‘Digivan’** (big screen) which is costing £1500 is being paid for in a series of agreed instalments after liaising with the company.
2. **Hire of sound equipment:** it is hoped that technical equipment from Tresham College can be utilised for the filming of the drama. A PA and sound system will be hired. Estimated cost for sound system is £500.
3. **Insurance** – public liability and cancellation insurance. CTH’s insurance includes public liability insurance and cancellation insurance has been obtained at a cost of £68.
4. **Catering:** Re-worked ideas around hospitality and catering will now see a hired barista coffee van recommended by the council. In addition, *Just-Ice*, a Christian ice cream company who raise money for and work with survivors of trafficking will be selling ice-creams, waffles etc. Cost for the event £150. No additional licenses are required for these to operate if they are situated within the boundary of the Square.

Action: various things will be actioned by the Steering Group in liaison with the Executive, as planning continues with the local council to enable the event to happen.

b) Worship and Prayer nights – update

The first worship and prayer night had taken place at the Baptist Church during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. It had been well attended and was both 'powerful and passionate'. The band is rehearsing regularly and had played for the first time in public at the event. Two further nights are planned for 18th February and 24th March. Venues are to be confirmed.

c) Lent 2024 – services and lunches at the Methodist Church

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

- **23rd February – Congregational Church.**
- **1st March – Harborough Community Church**
- **8th March – Harborough Anglican Team**
- **15th March – Our Lady of Victories.**
- **22nd March – Methodist 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.

This year we would like to suggest a theme of HOPE. Of course, if you would like to reflect on a different theme, or give a personal testimony, that will be fine too. Suggested Bible verses are Isaiah 40: 28-31, Jeremiah 29:11-13, Romans 5:3-5, Romans 15:13, Ephesians 4:1-6, Matthew 12:15-21, Luke 24:17-24 (or any of your own choice).

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.

6. Consultation and discernment on the future of CTH:

Andy had previously circulated a document entitled *Reigniting Vision?*

The document realistically sets out where CTH finds itself at present, whilst acknowledging the value of CTH's past and looks forward to what we might be in the future with its endless possibilities and ongoing challenges. It was agreed that reps and churches need more time to circulate and digest the document's contents and to feed back any responses to Andy before the AGM in May.

It was suggested that dates when the Ministers' Fellowship meet be put in the CTH diary so that people could be aware of their happening and pray for the meetings. A discussion around how to attract more people, especially younger adults, to the Forum and to increase general interest and involvement in CTH in our churches concluded that there is no easy answer, but maybe a way forward is to look at the way CTH sends out communication, knowing that the younger generation does not respond necessarily to leaflets and emails but looks out for posts and alerts on social media. We could make more of our peripheral church groups being made aware of the existence and purpose of CTH, for example the parents and carers who attend preschool groups in our churches.

Andy informed the meeting that **Maureen Douglas has agreed to be nominated and stand for the position of CTH Chair at the AGM in May.** This means that the positions of Secretary will be vacant, alongside the Vice Chair and Communications Officer positions. Please inform Andy of any nominations for these posts. It is envisaged going forward that the Executive will include a wider range of people, not only the elected officials.

Actions:

- **Any responses to the document should be fed back to Andy via reps or directly by the end of April.**
- **Future Ministers' Fellowship dates to be included in the CTH diary.**
- **Inform Andy of any nominations for the vacant positions ahead of the AGM in May.**

7. Reflections on recent events:

Peace Vigil and Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. The Peace Vigil took place on Friday 12th January. As in previous years it was a silent candlelit vigil. Around 30 people gathered and stayed for some or all the time. The vigil was

followed with an opportunity for continued prayer, reflection, and hot drinks at the Baptist Church's Café space. Around 12 people took this opportunity and felt it was a thing to repeat in the future. Comments around whether silence is the most effective way to conduct the vigil were made and whether in future we could stand looking outwards to the Square with our lights and invite people to join us to light a candle were discussed. Others felt that a simple act of standing in silence with the CTH banner is a most powerful act of unity and solidarity and speaks volumes to passers-by.

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (18th -25th January) had been celebrated with various opportunities to meet, including the worship and prayer evening, two in-person sessions at the Baptist and Catholic Churches and a Zoom meeting organised by the Anglican team.

8. Future CTH Events:

There are no future events planned beyond Easter.

The World Day of Prayer is on 1st March at St Dionysius at 2.00pm.

9. Communications – Easter services are being planned and Andy will be contacting the Harborough Mail for inclusion in their Easter editions.

Action: churches please send all dates and times of Easter services to Maureen as soon as possible.

10. Any news from churches or associated organisations?

The Cube - The Cube held its AGM recently, which provided a great opportunity to learn more about The Cube's work this past year. The Cube continues to run various sessions and groups for young people at both at the Cube and at the Welland Park and Robert Smyth Academies, where the weekly lunch time drop - in sessions are both popular and much appreciated. This academic year, 100 young people have registered at the 2 schools and attend the sessions, where topics like anger, friendships and how to manage conflict have been amongst the topics for discussion. Sessions at the Cube itself include *Oasis* on a Wednesday evening for Years 7 - 9. *Tribe*, for the older teenagers, is on hold at present while the Cube recruits a new member of staff, so the groups are combined at present. The new Youth Counselling Service has been up and running for a year. During that time, 59 young people have received counselling from a growing team of trained counsellors for varying lengths of time. Some weekly sessions take place at Robert Smyth Academy too. An ageing caravan was purchased some time ago and is now in - situ in the Cube's Garden, having been gutted and painted on the outside and the interior refitted. It is a welcome additional counselling space. The ongoing wider support of the local churches and community is very appreciated. Please pray for the trustees as they seek to recruit a new youth worker, for the counselling service, for continued strong relationships with the schools and for the Cube's continued plans as the team seeks to secure continuing funding, which is never easy for any charity!

Harborough Community Church (HCC) will be introducing an additional morning service at 9.00am from April 14th followed by a further service at 11.00am. These back-to-back services will be identical.

Our Lady of Victories Catholic Church is open all day every day for prayer and reflection. All are welcome to come into the church at any time it is open.

St Peter and St Paul Great Bowden has started a new service at 9.00am on the 4th Sunday of every month for families called *Faith Explorers*. It is a service based on 'Godly Play' and involves various activities around a central Bible story. It lasts around an hour and includes a snack breakfast after the main activities.

Torch Trust has a new CEO, Sarah Dawkins. Tim Jeffreys has now moved on.

Christian Aid Week 2024 is from 12th – 18th May. The Congregational Church is planning to hold a 'Big Brekkie' as usual. Peter Arnold asks that we think of fundraising ideas for this year and inform him of any events happening across the churches.

HMP Gartree is to have a new Anglican Chaplain. Julia will be licensed at the prison on the morning of 11th February. Please pray for Julia as she begins this new role.

11. **Making sure our list of reps is up to date:** please inform Maureen of any changes or new appointments.
12. **World Day of Prayer** is to be held on Friday 1st March at St Dionysius Church at 2.00 p.m. This year's materials have been prepared by the women of Palestine.
13. **Date of next meetings (all 7.15pm for 7.30pm):**
 - a) Monday 20th May 2024 (AGM) at Our Lady of Victories
 - b) Thursday 12th September 2024 at the Baptist Church
 - c) Monday 25th November 2024 at the Anglican Church
 - d) Thursday 6th February 2025 at the Methodist Church
14. **Any Other Business:** there was none.
15. **Closing prayer:** the meeting closed with prayer and the saying of the Grace together.