Minutes of the Churches Together in Harborough AGM, Monday 20th May 2024, 7.15 for 7.30 p.m. at Our Lady of Victories R.C. 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**.

Attendees (20)

Andy Murphy (MHMC), Maureen Douglas (OLOV), Jackie Melhuish (MHMC), Angela Zemlak (MHBC), Jan Turner (MHCC), Janet Smith (MHBC), Jeannie Brightwell (Anglican), Christopher Brown (MHBC), Theresa Kendrick (OLOV), Anita Beer (MHMC), Trevor Thomas (MHMC), Alison Iliffe (Anglican), Barry Osbourne (MHCC), Peter Arnold (MHMC), John Pearse ((MHMC), Christine Hodgson (MHMC), David Nixon (MHMC), Gill and Paul Cooper (MHMC), Tom Grant (Anglican).

The meeting took place in two parts. First, the Churches Together AGM, followed by a regular Forum meeting.

a) Welcome

Andy opened the meeting by welcoming everyone and thanking people for coming to the AGM.

b) Opening Devotions: Andy led the devotions by reading verses from Matthew 28 v. 16 – 20, 'The Great Commission, 'commenting that as churches and individuals we are trying to respond to Jesus ' command to make disciples, and that we all carry the same promise, 'I am with you always. 'Andy then invited us to join together in praying the Lord's Prayer in our preferred way.

c) Apologies for absence

Apologies: Stephen Jack (HCC), Fr. Chris O 'Connor (OLOV), Sharron Brennan (MHCC), Liz Mills (MHCC and Foodbank), Cara Thomson (Bower House), Loraine Tite (Bower House).

d) Minutes of the CTH AGM held on Monday 22nd May 2023: these had been circulated prior to the meeting. They were received and unanimously accepted as a correct record of the meeting.

e) Reports had been circulated in advance of the meeting. Paper copies of these reports could be obtained from Maureen Douglas if required. These reports represented a lot of hard work in this town with people working together in different ways. All the reports were received by the meeting, and thanks offered to all those who had prepared them.

See Appendix A for the full reports from the various organisations and charities.

An opportunity for questions was invited. One was question was raised regarding the Jubilee Foodbank referral system and whether referrals were being made by local GPs.

Action: Liz Mills would be asked if this is the case.

f) Treasurer's Report and accounts: the CTH accounts for 2023 - 24 had been circulated beforehand and copies were available at the meeting. The accounts are in good shape and no adjustment to Churches subscriptions is felt necessary for the coming year.

a) **Any questions?** Jackie invited questions and one was raised about the nature of **'good causes'** named in the accounts. This was explained as money that was handed to CTH when the Market Harborough Steet Pastors closed. Monies from this source are available for any ecumenical 'mission related 'projects.

Katherine Bentley was thanked for her work in auditing the accounts and thanks were expressed to Jackie for acting as treasurer and for her willingness to stand again for a further year.

b) **Approval of audited accounts:** The audited accounts were accepted unanimously by the Forum.

c) **Budget 2024 - 25** (Including subs). The budget had been circulated beforehand. The Forum unanimously accepted the proposed budget for 2024 – 5. See attached.

g) Chair's Address: Andy presented his Chair's address, which included reference to thoughts coming out of the 'Reigniting Vision 'document that he had written in January 2024, and which had been circulated around the churches. Following his address, Andy invited comments and questions.

See Appendix B for the full address.

Comments and questions

Various points were made and are summarised here:

- The yearly cycle of appointing Chair/Vice – chair would simplify the appointment system and would change our expectations and established ways of working. The changes could be clarified further when the CTH Constitution is next reviewed in 2026.
- The yearly cycle reflects where we are now and allows for flexibility and can encourage 'ongoing conversations.'
- CTH should be a 'bottom up' rather than 'top down' organisation.
- A question was asked concerning the extent to which people know about CTH in our churches.
- It was felt that 'good leadership' of CTH would be reflected in the clergy and lay people working together.
- CTH continues to enjoy and benefit from a positive reputation formed over many years both locally and further afield.
- It is important to feedback regularly to our churches and invite discussion about the work of CTH or else there is a danger of only ecumenical enthusiasts knowing what is going on.

Andy responded to the above by saying that sometimes things are developed for a season and then we wait while we discern what God would have us do. There are younger people coming through in our church congregations who face their own pressures. It is our task to enthuse the next generation for ecumenical activities so that going forward we have a mix of old and new, young, and old. Minutes of every Forum and the AGM can and should be shared with our wider church congregations.

h) Election of officers: following the discussion and proposals for an annual appointing of Executive Officers the following structure was proposed by Andy Murphy and seconded by Angela Zemlak and unanimously accepted for the coming year:

a) Executive 2024- 2025

(i) Chair: Jan Turner is the named Chair. Vice Chair: Maureen Douglas who would Co – chair CTH with Jan

(ii) Secretary: Maureen Douglas

(iii) Treasurer: Jackie Melhuish

(iv) Other members of the Executive: Jeannie Brightwell and Janet Smith

b) Other Officers

(i) Minutes Secretary: Janet Smith

(ii) Christian Aid Co-ordinator: Peter Arnold

(iii) Accounts Examiner: K.E. Bentley

(iv) Holiday at Home Organiser: Christine Pierce

Thanks were expressed and a card and gift presented to Andy Murphy on behalf of Churches Together for his diligence and commitment to CTH over the past 4 years. Thanks, were also expressed to Janet Smith for taking the Minutes.

i) Prayer for newly appointed officers: Andy ended the AGM by leading the Forum in prayer for the newly appointed officers, for Derek Williams, for Tom Grant as he moves on to pastures new in July and for Churches Together in Harborough as it moves forward.

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<u>Forum Meeting</u>

a) **Introduction of new Chair and Vice – Chair:** Jan Turner expressed her pleasure and privilege in being elected to serve as chair and said she looked forward to working with Maureen in a strong partnership alongside the newly appointed Executive. Maureen expressed the importance of the unity of the body of Christ and pledged that the executive would pray regularly for our church leaders. Maureen also read out a message from Sharron Brennen of the Congregational Church who expressed the church's real desire to share resources and friendship with fellow Christians in Market Harborough and its support for CTH going forward.

b) **Easter Live Event**

(i) Summary of events: Jan Turner summarised the reasons why the Easter Live Event could not go ahead this year.

(ii) Positive aspects and learning points: there were many positive things to be taken forward to 2025 and beyond. Decisions would need to be made in the coming months about the hiring of a 'Digivan'/screen and the importance of having a Plan B for another year if it was to be an outside event. Jan felt it important to maintain the good relationship and contacts that CTH has with the shops and businesses around The Square.

(iii) Update on cancellation Insurance: Jackie reported that the cancellation insurance monies had been paid into the CTH bank account.

Christopher Brown was invited to comment about the Easter Live Event, saying that there was a team of around 50 people involved in the execution of the event on the Square. Going forward there is much thought needed around the future of the event and we can take forward of a number of positive things. The securing of an indoor venue would obviously mitigate against bad weather going forward.

c) Holiday at Home 2024: The Forum unanimously approved the running of the Holiday at Home event, which this year will be from 29th July – 2nd August and held again at the Methodist Church.

d) It's Your Move Books: These books have previously been given out to Year 6 pupils in the schools. The books are produced by Scripture Union. Feedback on the books from several of the clergy confirmed that the books are well received. For example, teachers at Little Bowden School thought the books were great and online activities in addition to the books could be accessed, which worked well. There were also positive comments about the books from the C of E Academy. The Forum unanimously agreed that books should be purchased for this year's Year 6 students and distributed across the primary schools.

Action: Andy will purchase the It's Your Move books in the next few days and arrange distribution with the clergy to the various schools to which they have a connection. Each book will have a sticker in saying that they are a gift from CTH.

e) **Christian Aid:** Peter Arnold informed the Forum there was little to report as Christian Aid 2024 had only just finished. Many of the churches (including 3 of the surrounding villages) held their own Christian Aid activities and collections. The Big Brekkie on 11th May organised by the Congregational Church had been well attended. Thanks were expressed to the church for organising this once again. Further details will be available later in the year once all the monies have been collected and counted.

Action: Any church wanting to display a Christian Aid banner next year is invited to contact Peter.

f) Moving Forward – the shape of the year to come: Maureen and Jan emphasised that the Executive would be working on behalf of all the churches and extended an invitation to anyone to send any suggestions, ideas for speakers or Forum themes through to the Executive.

g) Any Other Business: There was none.

There was a request at the end of the meeting for microphones to be used at future Forum meetings.

h) Future dates and venues of CTH meetings in 2024 - 25 are confirmed as:

i. Thursday 12th September, at Baptist Church

ii. Monday 25th November - venue to be confirmed.

iii. Thursday 6th February, at Methodist Church

iv. Monday 19th May – AGM and Forum – venue to be confirmed.

All meetings 7.15pm (for refreshments) for 7.30pm start.

i) Closing prayer: The Forum closed with the saying of the Grace together.

Appendix A.

Reports for the CTH AGM 2023 - 2024

Homelessness/Asking for Help Group Report

The CTH Homelessness/Asking for Help Group has not met during these last months but has been involved with information gathering and engaging with services who are involved with helping the homeless and vulnerable in our local community.

Last summer the group requested a meeting with the council to find out what it is doing to help and support homeless people and to provide the council with a summary of the group's activities as local churches working together. Representatives of the group met with Steve Nash, Harborough District Council's (HDC) Housing Service Manager and Rachael Felts, Head of Customer Services and Community Partnerships, who gave us a snapshot of the local picture on homelessness. The headline statistics were then reported to the CTH Forum.

Steve also mentioned the **Hope into Action** charity https://www.hopeintoaction.org.uk/ based in Peterborough and one with which Oakham Churches Together are involved. This charity provides accommodation for the homeless and aims to empower the Church to respond to homelessness. Two members of the group investigated the charity further and attended a service at Langham Church to find out more.

It is true to say that the group has experienced some ongoing frustration and challenge about how best to help homeless people and those who ask for help locally. Hot food vouchers continue to be distributed through the Jubilee Foodbank and most churches hold emergency food bags. Going forward it seems logical that the group continues to work ever more closely with the Jubilee Foodbank and other local organisations 'on the ground 'to meet the needs of the homeless and vulnerable in our town.

Janet Smith

Bower House Report – AGM Report 2024

The journey over the last year has been both joyful and busy. Since returning to the house after the completion of building work, it has been an opportunity to settle in, take stock and prayerfully consider next steps. The team remains as committed and sacrificial as ever and we are so grateful for the 70 - person 'job share 'that facilitates the smooth running of the working week. Support workers remain the backbone of the service, acting as the first point of contact for new client referrals and queries whilst managing diary bookings and liaising with the counselling and supervision team. We would very much like to grow this part of the team and always welcome fresh enquiries. New Associate support worker roles have also been created to attend to discrete tasks and better address house needs (e.g. our house 'handyman 'has proven himself invaluable).

Counselling supervision, an essential component of client and counsellor care, remains a pinch point for us, but we are in the process of extending our supervision team through 'home growth'. One of our counsellors is coming to the end of their supervision training and we hope to develop others in this way over the next few years. Students continue to pursue placement opportunities with us as they complete the final stages of qualification, some travelling from as far as London (!) to do so. It's a privilege to welcome them at induction and see them flourish and develop. We've introduced a new induction booklet and refreshed our safeguarding training to better serve them as they begin their counselling journey. Our new online 'Counsellor Forum', led by our counselling team representative, also enables new starters to connect and embed into the team. It is a place to chat,

celebrate good practice but also enables any Bower House issues to be raised in a supportive environment and can be anonymously fed back to Service Coordinators.

Our team 'Away Day 'in March was well attended. This year's theme was 'Hope', a fitting topic for our 25th Anniversary year, marking the support of more than 4,500 clients over the 25 year period. Beautiful 'hope stones 'were created by the team on the Away day. These were later distributed around the streets of Harborough for residents to find during the night of April 19th —the anniversary of the opening of Bower House. This was a special occasion which warranted closing the house to clients to enable a day (and night) of prayer. The rooms contained prayer themes and prompts, hope stones, a prayer tree, flowers, and pertinent scriptures. Visitors scribed their prayers of thanksgiving and hopes for the future on the walls of the upstairs office before 5 of the team stayed overnight to continue the prayer vigil. It was a precious and blessed time.

We have also been busy fundraising. In March 2023 6 intrepid swimmers participated in the Market Harborough Rotary Club's Swimarathon in total we swam 91 lengths in 50minutes, which we felt was a great achievement and we won an award for most sponsorship money raised. In July we were delighted to support the Orchestra at the Congregational Church by helping to provide refreshments for the interval. You might recall in November 2023, Cara and Loraine had signed up for a sponsored Fire Walk. We arrived at the venue and had a very thorough debrief on how to complete the task – basically walk quickly but not too fast so you don't churn up any hot coals. We were also encouraged to look at our destination – the other side of the coals and not down at the coals once we had reached the other side to stamp our feet so any loose embers would be knocked off! We were told that if anyone does get warm (hot) feet to use aloe vera gel on them as it will sooth any blisters or burns which were referred to as 'fire kisses. 'All participants – there were around 30 firewalkers there - were offered a choice of walking 12meters or 20meters, of course Cara and Loraine went straight to the 20meter walk and did it twice! We are very pleased to report we escaped with very few 'kisses 'and managed to raise over £1,200.00 for the Bower House.

We also held our annual Christmas Coffee morning at the theatre, which had a good turnout despite various other fundraising activities happening in Market Harborough on the same day. In January 2024, we were able to go to Café Onyx in Lubenham and speak to the people there about the Bower House and the service we provide. It was a lovely morning and they have supported the Bower House by donating a percentage of the sales to us from the coffee morning. We are also very grateful to our clients who are still supporting us even after they have finished using our service. One of our 'ex 'clients ran the London marathon for us in 2023 and have asked if they can represent us again this year. Several people also raise funds for us at craft stalls and other such events and we are very blessed by their generosity.

Cara and Loraine were invited to go to the Methodist Church in October 2023 and give a talk about the service. We are very thankful to have been nominated their Church of the Year. We are also very thankful for the support of Churches Together in Market Harborough both for the financial support offered and prayer coverage.

We are delighted to report we have been able to recommence offering continued professional development (CPD) to our team of counsellors and other similar services in the area. Since June 2023, we have been able to offer 3 CPD events. Topics have been working with survivors of sexual trauma, domestic violence, and the tree of life, we have another in June 2024 on sudden bereavement and more planned in the coming months. This not only helps our counsellors by having the opportunity to receive continued learning, but we are also able to fund raise by making a small charge for these events. Friends of the Bower House are very important to us, and we have been looking at ways to strengthen these relationships.

We have created a 'Friends 'newsletter, which goes out via email on a quarterly basis and by holding 'Friends 'events during the year, our most recent event was a breakfast which was well attended.

We also want to strengthen our connection with the local community and have enhanced this through setting up a social media Facebook page and Instagram accounts. We close this report by giving praise, glory and thanks to God for the past 25 years and the steady upward growth of the service and for the next 25years. We know the Bower House is in His very safe hands and we continue to seek His guidance and ask for His wisdom as we have the honour of overseeing the Bower House into the next phase of its journey. We humbly ask for continued prayer in matters of the house especially for more student counsellors, qualified counsellors, and support workers.

We offer thanks to God as we induct new student counsellors to the service and a support worker. If anyone would like to volunteer as a support worker for 3hours one day a week (9am-12pm, 12pm-3pm or 3pm to 6pm) please do get in contact with us. Full training is given. We also ask if you can continue to pray for our clients and funding. We give thanks to God for His continued provision and always meeting our needs. As always, 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 pray for God's blessing on you and all that you do.

Every Blessing, Cara, and Loraine

Annual Report Jubilee Foodbank, Churches Together Harborough

New Premises

This year we have been looking for new premises, the foodbank needs more space, better facilities and would particularly like to be able to invite people to collect their own food. With the right building there would be potential for better engagement and provision of services. We had put in an offer on a building but have had a disappointing response from the sellers who failed to contact us following our bid. We are still actively looking and if anyone from CTH knows of any suitable buildings for rent we would be very grateful. Charitable Status Early this year after much hard work from our Chair, Liz Mills and the team we obtained Charitable Status this will give us many financial and organisational advantages, such as tax exemptions and use of gift aid. Trussell Trust Throughout the year Jubilee have been researching the possibilities of joining the National Foodbank organisation Trussell Trust, we have met with our regional coordinator and visited other foodbanks who work with the TT including local groups and one in Lambeth London. We are still in the process of ensuring that volunteers and Trustees have been given an opportunity to voice their views and will decide soon.

Referral Agencies

We have been adding to our bank of referral agencies this year and have included some excellent organisations, although sadly we have recently learned that Falcon who are based in Loughborough have reduced their services in Harborough, a great loss to the local community. They are seeking more funding for staff.

Social Media & Publicity

Our website is managed and updated very professionally and in September one of our Trustees gave an interview on Radio Leicester which was excellent publicity and also produced a generous response of donations of food and funds. Our newest Trustee has produced a useful and informative newsletter for our Referral Agencies. Donations Success and Needs As well as shoppers donating food into the supermarket donation baskets, we have nearly 100 organisations ranging from sports and social clubs to schools and churches, businesses and building societies who regularly organise collections or contribute financially to the foodbank for which we are very grateful. However, earlier in the year our foodbank found that due to a big drop off in donations to the supermarket baskets we were running short of particular foodstuffs. People still love to buy tins of beans and soup, but we were running short of jam and marmalade, tins of vegetables and legumes, tinned meat, and

pies as well as some other essential items. Despite our publicity, signage, 'Bank the food 'App and website advice we are finding it difficult to get this information to the public. We have resorted to requests for help from South Leicestershire foodbank and buying in resources to complete donations. If any Churches for CTH would like to contribute any of these items, we would really appreciate it.

AGM

Father Chris was kind enough to loan us the Catholic Church Hall and in June we held our AGM inviting all volunteers, referral agencies and other stakeholders to visit for a feast of Indian Snacks from Everest Lounge, one of regular supporters. Presentations were given by our Trustees and there was an opportunity for conversation, socialising, and networking.

The Village (formerly Eco Village)

This month we have held another social to say thank you to our hard working volunteers, this meal and socialising opportunity was held at The Village who as a Community Business enterprise often engage with Jubilee over a variety of local issues. Blood Brothers One of our volunteers with connections at Market Harborough Theatre has managed to book us a Gala Monday night for the play 'Blood Brothers'. The Monday night spot will mean that after expenses all the profits will go to Jubilee, we have sold all tickets already and hope to make even more funds through refreshments and tombola. Vouchers Vouchers are useful for particular needs. We continue to supply hot food vouchers from Everest Lounge, Greggs, Blue Wave and Masterfry. As well as fresh food vouchers for the market. We will shortly be trialling Aldi shopping cards. Welcome Event We tried to reach out to the community with a welcome event in October, which was intended to be information sharing and support for those in food poverty, we also had some bags of food to distribute; but sadly, the occasion was not well attended. Community Collections We are planning on a new campaign to encourage community groups to collect food and we are always looking for new ideas, any welcome! Christmas 2023 We were happy that during this time when many referral agencies and collections points were closed, we support in the community we managed to have cover for emergency support. During the cold weather volunteers were knitting fingerless gloves to put into parcels. **The VAL Awards Celebrating volunteers, charities, and community group in Leicestershire**.

Liz and a volunteer were invited to a very prestigious event in Leicester where we were very excited to be finalists for County Charity of the Year and although we didn't win, we are able to put this on the banner for our emails. Jubilee Funding We are always looking for ways to help in the community and we are currently looking to finance some small food projects, for instance we are going to provide some funds for an emergency breakfast provision at a primary school and we are hoping to contribute funds to a 'healthy start 'cookery class at Homestart, and similar at the Children and Family Wellbeing Centre. We must always be aware that our conditions as a charity mean that all revenue must be used for those in food poverty. If CTH have any suggestions for other small community projects that help feed people and need support, than please let us have your suggestions. Statistics 2024 In broad terms, this year the number of referrals continues to rise whilst the amount of food donated is falling. Since the start of the year, we have already helped 190 Households and 30 of those families have had 4 or more parcels. Over 900 people have been referred so far with nearly half of those being children meaning that we have provided nearly 20,000 meals to people. In 2023 we were averaging monthly meals of approximately 4,500 and this year it has risen to 5,000. Now that the Falcon section of the Harborough Hub is reducing its services our main referral agents have been once again CAB followed by Churches, and the Renew Wellbeing café. This month the number of referrals is 30% up on April of last year and maintains an average of 5 referrals a day although this can greatly and suddenly increase. Families with children make up over 50 % of our referrals and we have seen a slight increase in Pensioner referrals, and we continue to help an increasing amount of the homeless. As some families are using our services more than

once, we do try to monitor and report to referral agencies in case further support can be given to them. Sadly, we have a projection forecasting that 2024 could see the highest increase in demand for food parcels than since the start of Jubilee Foodbank.

REPORT ON HOLIDAY AT HOME FOR CHURCHES TOGETHER IN HARBOROUGH, AUGUST 2023

Holiday at Home is run by a group of volunteers under the auspices of Churches Together Harborough at the Methodist Church on Northampton Road. It is aimed at any senior citizens living in Market Harborough and the Bowdens of any religion or none who would otherwise not be able to go on holiday because of finance, loneliness, or infirmity. It costs participants £6 per day to help cover the cost of the lunch. Free transport is provided for those who need it. This year Holiday at Home took place from the 7 August to 11 August inclusive. There were 47 participants during the week (an increase on last year). Some attended every day and others just a few days. Altogether there were 25 volunteers on a rota basis with some coming each day and 32 volunteer speakers, musicians, and activity leaders as well as volunteers from the Methodist Church who cooked a meal on two days.

The programme for the week ran as follows:

• Coffee/tea/biscuits on arrival

• One hour of a choice of three activities per day. This year it included art, carpet bowls, beetle drive, quiz, cooking demonstration, craft making, arm - chair yoga, board games, talk by Leicestershire Wildlife Hospital.

• One hour talk or music session ('My Life as an Auctioneer', U3A Ukulele band, The Old Friends musical group and KUPE, a group of local musicians which include flute, ukulele, mandolin, and guitars as well as the human voice.

• A two course lunch with tea/ coffee.

The feedback was very positive. One participant told us it was the highlight of her year and one woman explained that her husband was now too frail to go anywhere and that this really was a 'Holiday at Home 'for them both. He loved the art sessions which gave her the opportunity to take part in other activities. A very popular talk this year was from a local woman about her journey to transition from a man. Those listening treated her with sensitivity and kindness. Participants included those accompanied by a carer or needing a mobility scooter/ walker to get around and those with vision impairments as well as the elderly well and active. It is wonderful to look around the room when the participants are having coffee or their lunch to see them chatting, smiling, and laughing together. At the end of the week, they were exchanging telephone numbers. It makes us, as volunteers, feel it is very worthwhile We consider Holiday at Home to be an important community initiative which enables senior citizens to come together to make new friends and undertake new experiences which lifts their spirits and confidence.

A huge thank you to CTH for enabling Holiday at Home to take place this year. The following letter was given to the volunteers by a blind participant. "Thank you all for making this week so good. It has been a great way of bringing those of us who may not have had a holiday together. I have enjoyed meeting old friends and making new ones. The hospitality given by all has been excellent. Hearing a familiar voice event before coming in meant a lot to me. Then just knowing there was always a helping hand available when needed There's more that I could say but hope this sums up everything. Thanking you all again"

Carole Baldam, Hon Treasurer, Holiday at Home.

The Cube: Report 2023- 2024

During the past year the Cube has seen changes within its governance and staffing. Last July saw Rev. Stephen Haward retire and move away with his wife Jane to Yorkshire, thus stepping down from his trustee's role. At the AGM in January, Gary Brown was welcomed as a trustee. There have been changes in staffing too as we said goodbye to youth worker Alice and recently welcomed Jenna to the team.

The Cube continues to successfully run various sessions and groups for young people both after school at the Cube and at the Welland Park and Robert Smyth Academies, where the drop - in sessions are both well attended and much appreciated.

The youth counselling service has now embedded itself into the life of the Cube. The caravan, purchased to provide an additional counselling space is now in - situ in the garden. Having been gutted and painted outside, alongside an interior re – fit, the caravan, named 'Eden 'is a welcome additional space. The area around the caravan has also been developed with special focus on the creation of a wellbeing garden, which was enabled through the generosity of local people and businesses donating plants and other effects and the young people themselves designing things to go into the garden.

The Cube's vision is to see 'young people in Market Harborough thriving in their communities, 'and the Trustees are currently delivering training to staff and volunteers on how we can further embed this vision into the day to day running of the charity through our various roles. The seasonal newsletter now includes a regular feature on a young person in each issue. The latest young person to be interviewed for the Spring newsletter 'Kaya, 'in answer to the question, 'what is the best thing about you? 'answered, 'I am unique and my own person. 'For a young person to feel confident to say this about themselves, I think is testament to how the Cube works alongside young people encouraging self - confidence and thus enabling them to thrive.

The Cube continues to seek to engage in ever closer ways with the town's churches. It is great to see an increasing number of churches hiring the Cube for various activities - both regularly and for one off events. The Cube is a fantastic versatile space. Do contact Jo our administrator if your church or one of its groups is interested in hiring it.

The Cube very much appreciates the ongoing support it receives from Churches Together and it is encouraging to see various churches hiring out the Cube for activities, both regularly and for one – off events. In a recent meeting we discovered that next year, June 2025 will mark 20 years since The Harborough Youth and Community Trust (HYACT) was founded. I am sure there will be celebrations to acknowledge the Lord's gracious provision and blessings over this time and to give thanks as we look ahead in anticipation of what is yet to come.

Janet Smith, Trustee

The CUBE on Symington's

Symington Recreation Ground, St. Marys Road, Market Harborough, Leicestershire, LE16 7DS.

T: 01858 437650 E: jo@thecubeyouth.uk W: www.thecubeyouth.org.uk

Appendix B

Chair's Address for Churches Together in Harborough AGM, May 2024

Being Chair of CTH has been both a privilege and a frustrating task.

I've expressed some of the frustrations of our present situation in the document: *Reigniting Vision* – which was sent out to all the churches, and I urge you to read. Many of these frustrations are not to do with a lack of unity or heart for ecumenical work, but rather the workload and pressures that many ministers and churches are under, which puts a strain on CTH. Ecumenical work, worship, and mission are all seen as luxuries rather than essentials. I understand the predicament.

Last year at the AGM, it was said that if we have not got the required officers in place for this year, then we will have to disband CTH in its current form. That must, of course, still be an option. Now or in the future. This meeting is your opportunity to comment on the proposals we make, and vote on them. If you are not satisfied with the proposals that come up, or would like to question them, please do speak up. As we speak honestly together, please make sure your voice is heard.

But now let me focus on the privilege. Market Harborough is a wonderful town, and within it we have many wonderful, diverse, and vibrant churches. It's an honour to represent you. It's always a joy to talk to people from the different churches and notice just how much we have in common. It's a privilege to share in fellowship meals with the other ministers and call them friends, and to go to the CTH events (which, as Chair, I feel I have to… yes, but always feel blessed in the process). It was a privilege to preach on Remembrance Sunday at St. Dionysius 'Church, and to be invited to represent the churches at a special service there when the Queen died. It's a privilege to read every week the contributions from our different churches and organisations in the *Harborough Mail*. It's been a joy to serve on the Exec, with people like Maureen Douglas, Janet Smith, Jackie Melhuish, Jan Turner, and Derek Williams. Thank you all, and for all of you at the Forum, who come along regularly to do the hard and greatly encouraging work of all that we do together. I'm also grateful to all those who planted this thing we call CTH all those years ago, and to those who have nurtured it over the years.

But of course, we didn't invent Churches Together here in Market Harborough! We are part of something much bigger, and I think we have a responsibility to that body too. A responsibility to see beyond ourselves, our churches, our denominations, and our town, and see ourselves as part of what God is doing.

I believe in *Churches Together*. Or perhaps rather, I believe that the ecumenical movement and the encouragement towards Christian unity is the work of the Holy Spirit. '*Churches Together* 'like all of our organisations and denominations will eventually come to an end. I am convinced, with all my heart, that there will be no Churches Together in heaven. No Forum meetings, no agendas, and in fact no need for Churches Together! Because I believe with just as much conviction that there will be no Methodists in heaven, no Anglicans, no Catholics, no Baptists, no Congregationalists, no Free Evangelicals or Pentecostals. The people will be there, but we will leave our labels at the gates. Our churches here on earth are means to find Jesus – who is the Way – and a place to worship him. Our churches are not the destination. And the worship in heaven will be far greater than anything our choirs or worship bands can produce, and yet all our worship here on earth – of whatever style – has value in God's eyes, all the same. He notices only the sincerity of heart, not whether we're in tune or have the latest technology.

Well, that's what I believe. And I need to remind myself of that, over and over again. When I act like my church is all that matters, or my denomination produces the only real Christians, or I get frustrated by the imperfections of worship.

So, if Churches Together is a way of helping us lay aside our labels now, for a foretaste of heaven, then it can only be God's work. And what's all the more beautiful, is when it involves listening to each other, learning from one another, considering the needs of all, and learning to compromise. When we put aside our preferences and learn that love is self-giving, preferring the needs of the other, then I believe God's heart is blessed. And the community watching on will get a sense of heaven at work too.

But now to the immediate future.

My written report gave a few questions or recommendations, which I asked you to prayerfully consider.

a) Can we affirm that CTH is an incredibly valuable expression of the Kingdom of God in Market Harborough? And can we renew our commitment to it, both in prayer and action?

b) I also made some suggestions about the constitution and the Executive Committee:

   I would like to suggest that we forget about any 4-year or 2-year commitments and concentrate year-on-year on making sure we have a good, representative, and willing group of people to deal with administrating and facilitating the work of Churches Together in Harborough.

   I hope that we can build on the progress made this year with the Easter Live event, and the way in which Christopher led with such vision and energy. May we also respectfully learn from that experience, with what was a painful and difficult decision for all involved. I hope that in our forum meetings, we can be focussed in finding similar vision for other events and try to put energy into doing a few things well, rather than necessarily always following the same pattern.

c) Since I'm not planning to leave Market Harborough any time soon, I will continue to encourage the Ministers' Fellowship to be actively thinking about and praying about what our churches can do together, and hope that we can find ways of sharing vision and enabling united ways of working.

d) Finally, I would like to say to my fellow ministers: please consider about what gifts you and your church can offer CTH. There is great reward in overcoming our differences to work together in God's name. Bring suggestions. Bring proposals. Bring change. Be open to the Spirit working through other voices too. We need renewed life, vision and enthusiasm, wisdom and understanding. Together, we can be so much more.

   By Rev. Andy Murphy, 20th May 2024