Minutes of the Churches Together in Harborough Forum,
Thursday, 12th September 2024, 7.15 for 7.30 p.m.
at Market Harborough Baptist 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 (17)
Andy Murphy (MHMC), Jackie Melhuish (MHMC), Angela Zemlak (MHBC), Jan Turner (MHCC), Janet Smith (MHBC), Christopher Brown (MHBC), Theresa Kendrick (OLOV), Anita Beer (MHMC), Trevor Thomas (MHMC), Alison Iliffe (Anglican), Peter Arnold (MHMC), David Nixon (MHMC), Racel Buckby (Anglican), Julie Fagan (Anglican), Christopher O' Conner (OLOV), Jeff Bonser (Baptist), Stephen Jack (HCC)

Welcome and devotions
Jan opened the meeting by welcoming everyone to the Forum and opened the meeting with prayer.

Opening Devotions: Rev. Christopher Brown warmly welcomed the Forum to the Renew Wellbeing Café space and shared with the meeting thoughts based on 1 John 4 v 7 – 16, reminding us of the centrality of the Gospel, which is good news for our community and indeed for all. We should therefore strive together to share and live out God's love with those around us. Christopher then read the passage again inviting each of us to respond to it. After leading us in prayer, Christopher led us in the singing of hymn, 'Here is Love vast as the ocean.'

Apologies for absence
Apologies: Jeannie Brightwell (Anglican), Maureen Douglas (OLOV) Phil Bryson (Anglican) Liz Mills (Jubilee Foodbank)

Minutes of the CTH Forum held on Monday 20th May 2024: these had been circulated prior to the meeting. They were received and unanimously accepted as a correct record of the meeting.

1. **Financial Update:** Jackie reported that CTH funds are sound and that all churches had paid their subscriptions for the coming year. A question was asked about the Good Friday budget, which Jackie confirmed as being ring fenced for the 2025 event.

2. **Matters Arising: It's Your Move Booklets:** Andy confirmed that the distribution of the booklets to Year 6 leavers in July across the town's primary schools had gone ahead as planned and they had been well received.

3. **Main Business:**

a) **Speaker:** Mr Joe Gasan was welcomed before making a presentation to the Forum about the St. Vincent de Paul Society (SVP) for which he is a volunteer in Kettering and the Membership Support Officer nationally. The charity, of Roman Catholic origin and firstly named the 'Conference of Charity' was formed in 1833 by a group of university students from the Sorbonne who wanted to share their faith and address social injustice. The Conferences took St Vincent as their patron saint in 1834. It is open to Christians of all denominations and is a lay led organisation. Today there are 8,500 members volunteering in communities across England and Wales. Conferences meet regularly to discuss how to help people in their area. Each group has its own specialisms relevant to the demographics of the area, which may include visiting older people, running a soup run, supporting homeless people, prison leavers, families in need or visiting prisoners. Conference members visit people in their homes, hospitals, or wherever support is being sought. There are 900 Conferences in the UK, which in 2022 – 23 made 200,000 visits. The SVP also runs 44 charity shops across the UK and a mobile unit known as The Vinnie Unit operates in rural Cumbria. The SVP is active in youth work through the Minnie Vinnies and other outreach programmes and runs annual Vinnie Camps for deprived children aged 8 – 13. Locally this summer, 12 young people from Corby were able to spend a holiday at a centre in Mablethorpe. Joe's purpose in making the presentation was to gauge whether there is interest and support in Market Harborough to set up a local Conference. To become a volunteer there is an application process which involves completing a form, supplying the names of two referees, an interview, DBS clearance and safeguarding training. Each local Conference meets fortnightly and is run with people taking on various roles e.g. president, secretary, treasurer and the like. Further information about the SVP Society can be found at www.svp.org.uk

   A question and answer session followed in which Joe confirmed that any local SVP Conference works alongside already existing charities, projects and organisations that are helping people in need in any given area.

Action: disseminate information about the SVP in your churches. Anybody interested in becoming volunteers and forming a local Conference, should send names to Maureen in the first instance. The CTH Exec will then make further contact with Joe based on our local response in due course.

b) Forum Meetings to be held in a less formal setting:

Jan and Maureen are to visit local churches to promote CTH. Ongoing comments are invited as to how churches /CTH reps would like Forum meetings to run as we move forward. Suggestions to the Exec for future speakers and/or other activities are welcome to run alongside the business that needs to be discussed. The informality of church halls, and other informal smaller places in church centres seem to be preferred places and spaces to meet. A comment was made about the advantage of being able to sit in a circle enabling us to see each other as we had been able to do at the AGM in the Octagonal Hall at OLOV in May.

Action: Feed any suggestions or requests to Maureen and the Executive.

c) Update on CTH Reps:

The Executive acknowledges that CTH representatives change and that different churches have different ways of appointing them. The list needs to be regularly updated to reflect this for correspondence purposes.

Action: Any churches without current representatives (x 2 per church) are invited to appoint them and forward their names to Maureen. In due course, Maureen will contact churches where we appear to have no named representatives.

4. **Reports of Recent Events:** Hustings and Holiday @ Home
   The pre – election **Hustings** in June went extremely well. Comments were made on how well organised it was and how helpful it was to have heard contributions from all six local candidates. Thanks were expressed to Andy who had chaired the hustings so proficiently and Andy expressed thanks to all volunteers who had enabled the evening to be the success it was.
   This year's **Holiday @ Home** was as popular as ever with good numbers attending each day to participate in a variety of activities. Thanks were expressed to Christine and the Holiday and Home Team, supported by volunteers each day from across the churches who made the week special for so many. We anticipate a fuller report from Christine in due course.
5. **Future Dates and Events:**
   - **Time of prayer and reflection at the Congregational Church on Saturday 21st September** from 11 a.m. – 12 noon to which all are welcome to coincide with a memorial gathering at King Edwards Upper School in Sheffield for Isaac Nockels.
   - **Fairtrade Fortnight, 9th – 22nd September:** Anita updated the Forum with events and information about Fairtrade Fortnight on the theme of 'Be the Change.' This year is special because it is a celebration of 30 years of the Fairtrade movement in the UK. Posters of events and information sheets of where to buy fairtrade products locally at competitive prices were available.
   - **Bower House:** the Bower House invites everyone to their AGM and Service of Thanksgiving to celebrate 25 years of the Counselling service on Thursday 19th September at the Methodist Church. The AGM is at 6 p.m. (coffee and tea from 5.30). The Thanksgiving Service will be at 6.45 followed by the serving of light refreshments from 7.30 – 9 p.m.
   - **Prisons Week 13th – 19th October:** Information and prayer leaflets will be available soon and distributed to the churches. Details of an open event during Prisons Week to be organised by the local Prison Fellowship Prayer Group will be circulated. There are an increasing number of local people from across the churches and beyond involved in prison ministry and employment in various roles at our local prisons, namely HMPs Gartree, Leicester, Fosse Way, Five Wells and Onley. It is important to pray!
   - **Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 18th - 25th January 2025.** Andy requested that any decision to hold a united service be made promptly and circulated so that the date can be included in the Methodist circuit preaching plan.
   - **Lent services and Lent lunches (Ash Wednesday is on 5th March 2025).** Further details to follow at the November Forum.
   - **World Day of Prayer; Friday 7th March 2025 at the Congregational Church**
   - Further details to follow at the November Forum.

- **Good Friday (18th April 2025):** Christopher Brown reported that the Good Friday Live Event 2025 is 'ready to go' based on 'tweaked' 2024 plans that had to be abandoned because of the weather. Christopher sought the support of the Forum to go ahead with this in conjunction with Harborough District Council. A vote of support was unanimous. Christopher will lead on this again and will update the CTH Executive with dates for prayer events in the lead up to it and volunteer help that will be required in due course.
- **Great Big Green Week: 7th – 15th June 2025**

6. **Any Other Business**: There was none.

7. **Future dates and venues of CTH meetings in 2024 - 25 are confirmed as**:
   - **i.** Monday 25th November 2024 at the Congregational Church
   - **ii.** Thursday 6th February 2025, at the Methodist Church
   - **iii.** Monday 19th May – AGM and Forum – venue to be confirmed.

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

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