Minutes of the Churches Together in Harborough Forum,
Monday, 25th November 2024, 7.15 for 7.30 p.m.
at Market Harborough Congregational 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 (14)
Andy Murphy (MHMC), Jeannie Brightwell (Anglican), Maureen Douglas (OLOV), Angela Zemlak (MHBC), Jan Turner (MHCC), Janet Smith (MHBC), Christopher Brown (MHBC), Peter Arnold (MHMC), David Nixon (MHMC), Rachel Buckby (Anglican), Christopher O' Conner (OLOV), Barry Osbourne (MHCC), Liz Mills (MHCC/jubilee Foodbank), Helen Knight (Jubilee Foodbank).

Apologies for absence
Jackie Melhuish (MHMC), Theresa Kendrick (OLOV), Trevor Thomas (MHMC), Julie Fagan (Anglican), Stephen Jack (HCC), Phil Bryson (Anglican).

1.Welcome
Maureen opened the meeting by welcoming everyone to the Forum.

2. Opening Devotions: Rev. Jan Turner led the Forum in prayer and then shared thoughts around a story of an old man who over many years had collected many paintings. After his young soldier son was killed in war, he was visited by a friend of his son's - a fellow soldier whose life it transpired his son had saved. He brought with him a large picture. The picture was of his son, which the old man treasured, giving it pride of place in his home. When the old man died the man's entire art collection was duly put up for auction with little interest shown in the large painting of his son and rather more interest in the smaller more famous paintings. There was a modest bid of £50 for the large painting. The auctioneer's hammer fell, with bidders asking if they could now get on with the job of selling all the other smaller paintings. The auctioneer, however announced the auction was over explaining that the father's will stipulated that whoever bought the large painting of his son should take all the other paintings too, 'whoever takes the son gets it all.
As Christians, our Father's will is that we can expect to experience many good things through His Son such as peace, joy, fellowship and the many other gifts that He bestows upon us, and we can take encouragement from this story.

3. Minutes of the CTH Forum held on Thursday September 12th, 2024: these had been circulated prior to the meeting. They were received, unanimously accepted and signed as a correct record of the meeting.

4. Financial Update: In Jackie's absence Jan reported that CTH funds are sound.

5.Matters Arising:

a) Christian Unity Service at Methodist Church, Sunday 19th January 2025, 3.00 p.m.

- **Rev Andy Murphy** has agreed to put together a united service at the start of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (WPCU 18 – 25th January 2025). A range of ideas

were shared by the Forum as to the possible content of the service around themes, music, readings, preaching and the like. The theme for 2025 is based on a text from the Gospel of John: **"Do you believe this?" (John 11:26).** The prayers and reflections for 2025 have been prepared by the brothers and sisters of the monastic community of Bose in northern Italy. https://ctbi.org.uk/week-of-prayer-for-christian-unity-2025/

- **Refreshments –** the Methodist Church will kindly provide refreshments after the service.

Action: Andy, with plenty of ideas to work with will put together an order of service involving the town's church leaders and congregations as appropriate. Andy will also liaise with appropriate people at the Methodist Church to organise refreshments after the service.

b) **Good Friday Act of Witness on the Square (18th April 2025**):

• **Update from Christopher Brown**: Christopher updated the Forum on progress made in organising the Easter Live Event 2025. The planning team had attended their first meeting. The Square is booked as is the screen, the sound system, and several food and drink outlets. The programme for the event will run much the same as it was planned for in 2024 with some modifications, like additional use being made of the screen and nothing being hired from the council, but instead with CTH sourcing 3 large marquees, which WILL be weather proofed against wind, rain and foul weather, two of which can be borrowed from the Community Church.

Actions:

- **Christopher will liaise with Jackie over the budget available for 2025 and the hiring of one remaining large marquee.**
- **Janet to send Christopher the risk assessment written for the 2024 event for modification in 2025.**
- **A request will be sent to church leaders about further volunteer help needed with the children's activities (ideally people who have current DBS certificates).**
- **Prayer Box and street praying. There will be a prayer box available for prayer requests and there will be a training evening for people who are experienced in praying with others and would like to be able to offer live prayer with people who request it at the event.**
  (Date, time and place of training to be confirmed).

• **Admin and insurance:** Maureen is overseeing the administration of the event and Jackie will be able to advise on insurance for the event.

c. **Worship and Prayer nights:** Christopher confirmed that the three worship and prayer evenings leading up to Easter Live 2025 would be on the first Sunday evening during February, March and April.
2nd February at the Baptist Church
2nd March at St Di's - this venue is to be confirmed
6th April at Harborough Community Church

d) **The St. Vincent de Paul Society**: Following Joe Gasan's talk at the September Forum on the work of the St. Vincent de Paul Society (SVP) and the request for any interested

parties to become volunteers and form a local Conference, Maureen confirmed there had been no names sent to date.

Action: Maureen on behalf of the Executive will contact Joe to let him know that at this time there is not sufficient interest from across the churches to form a local Committee.

6.Main Business:
Speaker: Rev Barry Osborne representing Rural Missions https://ruralmissions.org.uk

The Forum welcomed Barry who shared key moments in his early faith journey in the 1960s which culminated in his coming to faith on Hastings Pier during Easter1963 and how he felt called to become involved in rural mission work.

Barry was firstly involved in Mission for Christ from 1963 -1988, serving village churches in Kent and Sussex and then further afield across the UK, where revival was seen in three locations. This work typically involved organising and leading missions usually for a week using a Billy Graham style and approach. In any year there were on average six such missions.

After 1988 there was a networking of various charities working in rural areas.

During his talk, Barry quoted some interesting statistics, namely that:

- 1 in 6 people in the UK live in either a village or a county town.
- Most villages have typically had in the past at least two churches, one usually Anglican.
- Today 87% of village churches are Anglican, 24 % are Methodist with the rest being made up of a mixture of denominations.

Through Rural Missions, churches are provided with tailor – made training and resources to help them respond with evangelistic material, thus enabling them to accomplish what God is asking them to do.

Rural Missions has developed over time into a charity whose mission and dream is to see, **'visible, vibrant, credible and caring Christian communities. This might well be the local church, or an informal group of Christians drawn from the local churches. They will be people engaged with and in their local village, and with a heart to serve the local community, rather than self – interest. Their mission will to be to show God's love for all and to share the life changing good news of Jesus Christ.'** (Rural Missions leaflet)

Today Barry is a trustee for Rural Missions, having handed over the reins to Bob Goody as the CEO in March 2024. Barry continues to teach and train, researches and writes, and is an enthusiastic advocate for rural ministry and mission. He still networks and is part of the team that is prepared to work with village churches, helping them to become truly missional with bespoke action plans that grow out of who they are, where they are and what they have. He is rightly what he is often called: *"The Village Mission Man"* https://ruralmissions.org.uk/about-us

7. Any news from churches or associated organisations?

Various reports from organisations had been sent out prior to the meeting.

The Jubilee Foodbank: Liz Mills, chair of the Jubilee Foodbank introduced Helen, a trustee of the foodbank and made some additional comments not contained in her report saying that the foodbank continued to look for another building to enable more contact with clients, whilst continuing to make the most of the many connections the foodbank enjoys with other churches, charities and organisations. Hot food vouchers continue to be given out. Helen has produced a useful digital newsletter which can be accessed by signing up to receive it on the foodbank's website https://www.jubileefoodbankmh.uk/ The Jubilee Foodbank has been a charity since March 2023.

Christian Aid: Peter Arnold asked the meeting to go back to their churches and ask people for fundraising ideas for Christian Aid Week - **May 11–17, 2025**. Peter also requested feedback on whether the churches were prepared to reinstate the street collections, which had not happened town - wide since the COVID pandemic. This would require an army of coordinated volunteers, and it was felt that culturally we are moving on from such door to door collections due to a variety of factors, including households being increasingly reluctant to open the door to strangers, not having cash in the house and the ease with which online/ tap and donate giving can be done.

Actions: Any fundraising ideas to Peter please!

Church News: The Congregational Church has called a new minister. They look forward to welcoming Roo McCrae and family at the end of February 2025.

The Anglican Team continues to advertise the Youth Minister role.

8. Future CTH Events:

a. **Week of Prayer for Christian Unity:** - see **NOTE A.**

b. **Lent 2025 – services and lunches at Church** – see **NOTE B**

c**. Peace Vigil:** Friday 10th January 2025 from 5 – 5.30 p.m. on the Square followed by hot drinks and further thoughts in the Café Space at the Baptist Church, Manor Walk entrance.

d. **World Day of Prayer:** 7th March 2025 - Congregational Church at 2 p.m.

9. Date of next meetings

Dates of next Forum meetings:

Thursday 6th February 2025. Methodist Church.

Monday 19th May 2025- AGM and Forum (venue TBC)

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

10**. Any other Business:** There was none.

11. Closing prayer: the meeting closed with the praying of the Lord's Prayer together.

NOTES:

A) Arrangements for Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

a. Sunday 19th January – United service at Methodist Church at 3.00pm.

b. Monday 20th January – prayer meeting at 7.00pm at Our Lady of Victories

c. Wednesday 22nd January – Harborough Anglican Team Zoom prayer meeting. Time to be confirmed.

d. Friday 24th January 2025 – lunchtime prayer meeting at the Baptist Church in the Café Space at 12.30 p.m.

B) Arrangements for Lent 2025: these have traditionally been 30-minute services from 12.30 – 1 p.m. at one church during Lent followed by simple lunches of soup and bread followed by homemade cakes. However, the group from The Catholic Church who have provided the soup for many years feel that they can no longer do this without help from the other churches. Maureen has been in touch with Margaret Atkins, who thinks that it would be possible to provide the soup if there is a team of at least 5 people, from across the churches to prepare a mass batch of soup for each of the 5 Friday lunchtime services.

If volunteers are not forthcoming, then a suggestion would be to bring our own lunch to share together after the service in the hosting church.

Action:

- **Notify Maureen of any willing soup makers from across the churches.**
- **Christopher Brown to ask the Baptist Church whether the services can be held there during Lent.**

Services prepared and led by the following churches:

a. 14th March– Congregational Church

b. 21st March – Harborough Community Church

c. 28th March– Harborough Anglican Team

d. 4th April – Our Lady of Victories

e. 11th April – Methodist Church.

Please let the Exec know if there are any problems or you would rather not be responsible for a service this year. 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 Church can provide musicians to accompany, or you are welcome to bring your own.