Minutes of the Churches Together in Harborough Forum,
Thursday, 6th February 2025, 7.15 for 7.30 p.m.
at Market Harborough 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**.

Attendees (20)
Andy Murphy (MHMC), Jeannie Brightwell (Anglican), Maureen Douglas (OLOV), Angela Zemlak (MHBC), Jan Turner (MHCC), Janet Smith (MHBC), Peter Arnold (MHMC), David Nixon (MHMC), Christopher O' Conner (OLOV), Theresa Kendrick (OLOV), Trevor Thomas (MHMC), Julie Fagan (Anglican), Stephen Jack (HCC), Ruth Thomas Twinn (MHMC), Anita Beer (MHMC), Margaret Atkins (OLOV), Dilys Few (Baptist), Brendan O' Malley (OLOV), Vicki Bryson (Torch/Anglican), Sinead Henderson (Grace Communion).

Apologies for absence
Jackie Melhuish (MHMC),), Phil Bryson (Anglican), Christopher Brown (MHBC), Rachel Buckby (Anglican), Liz Mills (MHCC/Jubilee Foodbank), Alison Iliffe (Anglican).

1.Welcome
Jan and Maureen welcomed everyone to the Forum.

2. Opening Devotions: Rev. Andy Murphy shared thoughts around Luke 5 v 1 - 11, the lectionary reading for Sunday 9th February, which recounted the call of the first disciples and the miraculous catch of fish. Andy reflected on the two boats at the water's edge, one belonging to Peter and the other to James and John - used for fishing, but no doubt the fishermen operating their boats in different ways, utilising different methods and traditions for catching the fish and helping each other out when appropriate. Any differences did not matter because they were all called by Jesus, leaving everything to follow him to become partners in the gospel. The universal Church is one Church – Christ's Church, which despite our differences and divisions over many centuries Christ still regards as one body – united and whole, which was his desire and which his prayer for unity reflected. Andy reminded us of the long established logo used to represent ecumenical unity by The World Council of Churches and which Churches Together in England still use of a boat afloat on the sea of the world with the mast in the form of a cross.

Andy then led us in prayer.

3. Minutes of the CTH Forum held on Monday November 25th, 2024: these had been circulated prior to the meeting. They were received, unanimously accepted and signed as a correct record of the meeting.

Welcome and Introductions
This was followed by a time of introductions. Sinead Henderson of Grace Communion International which meets at the Point each Sunday introduced herself and she was welcomed to the Forum. Sinead told the Forum about the church led by her husband Gavin

and herself. The church's focus is outreach, with 4 main events over the year. At Christmas the church hosted another popular Christmas dinner for about 70 people at a local Scout hut. We look forward to working more closely in the coming days with Gavin and Sinead. Everyone then introduced themselves. Vicki Bryson highlighted herself in her new role working at Torch as a Torch Partnership Coordinator as well as her role with the Anglican Team.

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

5.Matters Arising:

a) **Good Friday Act of Witness on the Square (18th April 2025**):
Update from Christopher Brown: Christopher had sent a report to update the Forum on further progress made in organising the Easter Live Event 2025 which Maureen read out. Main points included the following:

- The steering group for the event had decided not to hire the digital screen this year as the cost was prohibitive at £2500, choosing instead to invest the money in other elements that would enhance the event like a weather - proof marquee which can be used in the future for any CTH events, a professional face painter and festival flags.
- Marketing to promote the event would include video testimonies, which are being coordinated by Phil Chapman of Living Rock Church. Posters, postcards and banners will also be used for publicity. Christopher will record a video message for churches describing the festival and its vision.
- Musical preparation is going well.
- The live drama is planned as for 2024, but more actors are needed in addition to the new actors from Great Bowden Church.
- Food outlets are booked – namely Just - Ice an ethical artisan ice cream and waffle company, Penny's Vintage Coffee and a pizza van (there may be some cost implications if sales are low).
- Children's Easter craft activities are planned, but confirmation is needed on helpers. Helpers must hold a current DBS certificate.
- The Ministry Showcase will include the Foodbank, Bower House, Torch Trust with The Cube yet to confirm.
- Prayer ministry will be provided at a prayer tent with trained street pray – ers in attendance.
- 300 copies of Hope' s Mark's Gospel are to be given away along with 200 copies of Hope's I am Alive Magazine.
- The PA system is free as the company we are hiring from wanted to honour the commitment from 2024.
- Teams of 8 volunteers are needed for setting up (we have 8 people for that), 8 to act as stewards and 8 for packing down at the end of the festival.

Actions:

Stephen Jack of HCC will send out an email to church leaders/CTH to highlight the number of volunteers still needed.

- **with the children's activities (volunteers must have current DBS certificates).**
- **for teams of volunteers for stewarding and packing down.**

Please ask in your churches for appropriate people to fill these roles and inform Stephen or Maureen of their names.

Update from exec, Admin and insurance: Maureen is overseeing the administration of the event and Jackie will be able to advise on insurance for the event.
Stewarding and other personnel
Costs (to be confirmed)

1. **Hire of the sound system**
2. **Insurance – public liability and cancellation insurance**
3. **Catering expenses**

Action: See previous minute relating to Christopher's update for answers to the above points.

b. **Worship and Prayer nights:** The first of the three worship and prayer evenings leading up to Easter Live had been held on February 2nd at the Baptist Church. This was well attended and a time of blessing. A further two evenings are planned for:
2nd March at St Di's at 6 p.m.
6th April at Harborough Community Church at 6 p.m.

c. Lent 2025 – services and lunches – see Note A

6. Reflection on recent Events: Peace Vigil and WPCU
Peace Vigil
The annual Peace Vigil held on 10th January on an extremely cold evening was attended by a few brave people. The banner and candles demonstrated to the public the reason for the vigil, and people crossing the Square and at the bus stops were offered a prayer card for peace.
Thanks to the Baptist Church for providing very welcome hot drinks afterwards in their café space.
Comments were made about the low profile publicity, which probably got 'lost' in all the notices around Christmas. Another comment was about time of year for the Vigil. Maybe a change to a different/lighter time of year would be pertinent.
A question was asked about the possibility of running a parallel vigil in the future in the Baptist café space so that people who find it difficult to stand for 30 minutes could feel more involved.

Action: The Executive will discuss the points made and get back to the Forum with their thoughts.

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (WPCU): positive comments were received about the joint service on 19th January at the Methodist Church. It was well attended, and thanks expressed to Andy M for putting the service together. Other prayer events during the week were shared in person at the Congregational (prayer breakfast), Catholic (evening prayer time) and Baptist Churches (lunch time prayer time) and a Zoom prayer time led by the Anglican Team mid - week in the evening. Thanks to all involved with leading and organising these events.

7. Future CTH Events

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

The venue for this year's Lent lunchtime services (12.30 – 1 p.m.) is the Baptist Church followed by a simple soup and bread lunch upstairs in their New Horizons Hall.

Margaret Atkins from OLOV, who has coordinated the soup making group for some time for the Lent lunches was at the Forum. Margaret set out what was required to make the soup each week. A summary of the process is as follows:
"We normally offer two flavours of vegetable soup each week, 2 gallons of each (4 x 4 pint milk bottles), home-made with natural ingredients. It is up to the maker what flavour; if they know of something a bit different that adds to the variety. I try to pair contrasts as much as possible. Delivery by 11.30 so we can reheat in time. If transport is a problem we could probably collect. I am still in the process of asking my usual helpers if they are available so the soup-maker will probably not need to come behind the counter unless she/he wants to."
Margaret also gave out some further guidance sheets for those making soup and has recipes should anyone wish to use them.
The idea would be for a small group of people from a different church to offer to make the soup for each of the five weeks. The host church usually provides the drinks and cakes but other offers of cake making would be very welcome (HCC and Jeannie Brightwell have already offered to make cakes – thank you).

Action: CTH reps to ask around their churches for willing soup makers and let Maureen have any names by the end of February to ensure enough time for implementation.

Maureen will be in regular contact with Margaret concerning 'soup progress.'

8. Any news from churches or associated organisations? Harborough Action for Justice and Peace (HAJP) Proposal

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

Harborough Action for Justice and Peace: Janet Smith (the current chair of HAJP) presented a report (**see Appendix 1**) setting out the work of the HAJP Group over many years as an associated group of CTH. Janet then brought the following two part proposal to the Forum:

1. That the Harborough Action for Justice and Peace Group is formally closed.
2. That the group's building society account with the Market Harborough Building Society (MHBS) is also closed by the present signatories who are Maureen and Janet and the monies given to a suitable charity to be decided by the Executive.

Action: the two part proposal was unanimously accepted by the Forum. Janet and Maureen will now take steps to close the HAJP building society account with MHBS.

Andy M offered a prayer of thanksgiving for the HAJP Group and its work which has been a blessing to many over the years and thanked all those involved with its activities.

Christian Aid: Peter Arnold reminded the Forum about Christian Aid Week 2025, which this year runs from **May 11–17**. Peter also reiterated the need for fundraising ideas from the churches. This seemed ever more pertinent this year as cuts to international aid budgets had been announced following the US Presidential Election, which could see aid agencies expecting to receive up to 40% less in aid donations, meaning financial challenges for many charities.

Comment was made about taking note of the different ways now available for people to make charitable donations, with different generations having preferences in their methods of giving. Since the pandemic, the 'old' ways of collecting cash through street collections had in many ways been superceded by other methods of giving, reflecting the digital age in which we now live.

Actions: Any fundraising ideas or definite plans to raise money during Christian Aid Week to Peter please!

Church News: The Congregational Church is looking forward to welcoming Rev Roo McCrae and family during a service of Induction at 3 p.m. on Saturday 22nd February 2025. All are welcome to attend the service.

The Cube: Janet read a report from the charity's Trustee Board given by Dawn o' Connell at the Cube's recent AGM. This report had been previously circulated, but it was felt important that the Forum heard the report which outlines how the Cube has decided to move forward this year with the help of The Cranfield Trust who will help the charity conduct a feasibility study to discover the best way for the charity to move forward making optimum use of its varied resources.

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

Action: all churches to check that they have given the names of their current reps to Maureen.

10, **World Day of Prayer** – Friday 7th March at 2 p.m. at the Congregational Church. This year's resources have been prepared by women from the Cook Islands. All are welcome to attend.

11. Date of next meetings

Dates of next Forum meetings:

Thursday 1st May 2025- AGM and Forum (venue TBC)

September 2025 – Baptist Church? AZ and JS to ask admin and bookings.

November 2025

February 2026

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

12**. Any other Business: Big Brew Event on 8th March 2025**. Anita Beer reported that the Harborough Fairtrade Town Group and Eco Church Group would be working together to organise a Big Brew on the morning of 8th March at St. Di's. This would include them leading the regular Thought for the Day slot at 11 a.m. Publicity to follow.

11. Closing prayer: Maureen closed the meeting with prayer

NOTES:

A) 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 people from across the churches to prepare a mass batch of soup for each of the 5 Friday lunchtime services. Margaret was at the Forum meeting to set out exactly what is required to provide soup.

Action: Notify Maureen of any willing soup makers from across the churches.

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. **Theme - Journeys of Faith.**

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.

Appendix 1

Report on the activities of Harborough Action for Justice and Peace (HAJP) and a proposal to the CTH Forum to formally close the group.

No one is exactly sure when the Harborough Action for Justice and Peace Group (HAJP) was established. but it must be the best part of 30 years ago. Donald and Doreen Clinton - Smith of the Methodist Church were instrumental in setting it up as a sub - group of Churches Together in Harborough to promote and raise awareness of issues of justice and peace and to take appropriate action on such issues whether they be local, national or international.

Meeting every three months or so, the group was formally organised with a Chair and Secretary and with representatives from each of the town's churches encouraged to attend, although the meetings were always open to all. Regular reports outlining the group's activities were brought to the CTH Forum.

This was the group's usual way of working until just before lockdown when the group had started to think about a new direction for the group and its style of meeting, whilst keeping issues of justice and peace at its heart. Sadly, the pandemic prevented this happening, and the group has not met formally since then.

To name all the issues it has raised awareness of, campaigned on and written to our local MP about are too many to name, however it feels right to mention some of the highlights over many years to acknowledge the part the group has played in the life of Churches Together in Harborough.

An annual event established by the group and which still takes place is the Peace Vigil on the Square. A silent half hour candle - lit vigil in January serving as a poignant and powerful reminder that we live in a world which lacks peace, but longs for it. The group also met on the Square around August for some years around Hiroshima Day, to remember that event and to invite people to make origami cranes as a symbol of peace.
Other events and campaigns have included:

- Remembering Bhopal as it commemorated its 30th anniversary by showing the powerful film 'Bhopali' and to raise money for the Bhopal Medical Appeal. It is now just over 40 years since that devastating event on the night of December 2–3, 1984 and justice is still denied to those still living with the effects of that unforgettable night.
- To raise awareness of issues around child labour globally, with specific focus on the fashion and tobacco industries, and including a more local focus in more recent times on the clothing and textile supply chains and practices in some of the textile factories in Leicester.
- The fashion industry more generally and the effects of fast fashion on the environment.
- The international arms trade.
- Climate justice.
- Fairtrade - out of this came Harborough Fairtrade Town Group which is still going strong. Market Harborough has been a Fairtrade Town for the last 18 years.
- More locally the group got involved in campaigning against the demolition of the houses in Naseby Square, with members of the group advocating for some of the individuals who would be affected by this and with several people from CTH speaking at the Council meeting before the vote was taken.
- Meeting the CEO of St Andrew's Hospital in Northampton following media reports that certain vulnerable individuals were living and receiving treatment in unacceptable conditions.
- The setting up of a local Credit Union based at the Citizen's Advice Bureau in association with Clockwise based in Leicester.
- Issues around tax inequality.
- The Israel/Palestine situation.
- The local Traveller Community and the work being done by local Catholic sisters in preparing the young people of the travelling community for their first communion and confirmation and arranging trips including a memorable one to the Vatican.

Whilst we give thanks for its wide remit and involvement in many things over the years, the group has not met formally since before lockdown. That doesn't mean to say that as individuals we have stopped exchanging emails and thinking about or campaigning on issues that we remain passionate about. Be assured that Neil o' Brien's inbox continues to receive regular correspondence from some of our members on a variety of issues!

In recent months conversations have been had at CTH Executive meetings and between Alison Tomlin the current secretary and Janet as the current Chair about this now being the right time to formally propose that the group is closed but that issues of justice and peace remain on the agenda at the CTH Forum and are discussed and actioned accordingly as they have been since the pandemic.

The group does have its own building society account with MHBS which currently has around £40 in it.

I am therefore proposing this evening two things:

1. That the Harborough Action for Justice and Peace Group is formally closed.
2. That the group's building society account is also closed by the present signatories who are Maureen and Janet and the monies given to a suitable charity to be decided by the Executive.

Janet Smith