Minutes of the Churches Together in Harborough,
Thursday 5th February 2026, 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 respond to the needs of the community in shared service and outreach where this is possible**.

Attendees (15)
Jackie Melhuish (MHMC), Jan Turner (MHCC), Janet Smith (MHBC), Peter Arnold (MHMC), David Nixon (MHMC), Jeannie Brightwell (Anglican), Fr. Chris O' Connor (OLOV), Julie Fagan (Anglican), Christine Hodgson (MHMC), Sarah Pyne (Anglican), Anita Beer (MHMC), Sinead Henderson (Grace CC), Theresa Kendrick (OLOV), Margaret Atkins (OLOV).

1.Welcome and opening devotions

Jan opened the meeting by welcoming everyone to the Forum and committing the meeting to the Lord in prayer.

2.Opening Devotions: Christine Hodgson led the Forum in our devotions, reading **Matthew 5 v. 13 – 16** from **The Message:** ***13*** *"Let me tell you why you are here. You're here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavours of this earth. If you lose your saltiness, how will people taste godliness? You've lost your usefulness and will end up in the garbage.* ***14-16*** *"Here's another way to put it: You're here to be light, bringing out the God-colours in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We're going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don't think I'm going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I'm putting you on a light stand. Now that I've put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you'll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven."*

Challenging words for us all as churches together, Christine then led us in prayer followed by the singing of a hymn, 'Community of Christ, who makes the cross our own.' We then prayed the Lord's Prayer.

Apologies for absence: Maureen Douglas (OLOV), Christopher Brown (MHBC), Angela Zemlak (MHBC), Andy Murphy (MHCC), Alison Iliffe (Anglican), Stephen Jack (HCC), Nicki Beacher (MHCC), Roo MacRae (MHCC)

3.Minutes of the CTH Forum held on 12th November 2025 at St. Dionysisus' Church: these had been circulated prior to the meeting. The minutes were accepted unanimously as a correct record of the meeting and duly signed.

4.Financial update: Jackie reported that the accounts are in good shape. We have just under £3000 in the Good Causes Fund, The Cube has received a donation from it to replace the battery and pads on the defibrillator at The Cube. The application from Market Harborough Baptist Church for refurbishing an area of the café space as a crafting area for the Renew Wellbeing Café has been put on hold whilst the church building remains closed. The Congregational Church is obtaining the views of relevant people to establish whether the idea of providing community cooking classes and facilities is wanted before they go ahead with this project. £574 remains in the CTH account, dedicated monies for the Homelessness Project, whereby regular donations are given to the Jubilee Foodbank and there is £1700 in the Good Friday budget.

5.Matters Arising:
a) Easter Live on the Square Good Friday, 3rd April 2026 – an update: Christopher sent an update on the Easter Live Event which was read out:

"Preparations for Easter Live on the Square are in full swing. The team have met twice so far to plan and prepare our CTH community Easter festival. We have booked the Emmanuel Apostolic Gospel Choir (as seen on TV) who will be singing three sets of Christian Gospel music, they will be a huge draw. We will have a more powerful PA and more speakers so everyone can hear. The script for the street drama has been written.
We've secured Daisy Jane the face painter, the coffee barista and pizza shack. We will have another fantastic range of children's activities as well as the ministry showcase. Prayer will again be offered but in a slightly more ordered way this year. The administration is getting done and so we are on track. Advertising is underway with fresh posters and flyers and a short video that will be circulated around the churches. We do need volunteers from the churches for our street drama, children's activities (must be DBS checked), for setting up and packing down, for stewarding, and a few other roles, so please spread the word. More info to follow here."
Please continue to pray for this special and significant event in our town.
Every blessing, Christopher.

Action: Christopher and the team will send out relevant promotional material and requests for help for various things as described above.

Watch out for and respond to this year's publicity and publicise it in our churches through our usual range of media communications.

Costs - to be confirmed by Christopher and the planning group.

b) Worship and Prayer Nights: the first worship and prayer night had taken place on 1st February, hosted by Living Rock Church at Meadowdale School. A second evening is planned for 29th March at 5 p.m. at Harborough Community Church. All are welcome. Please publicise the second evening in your churches.

c) Lent 2026 services and lunches: - see NOTE A at the end of the minutes. Margaret Atkins (OLOV) informed the Forum that plans were well underway for the churches to provide soup and cakes for this year's lunches and is in the process of contacting relevant people to enable this.

6. Reflection on recent event - Week of Prayer for Christian Unity Service at Our Lady of Victories on 18th January**.** This year's theme was from Paul's letter to the Ephesians, **"There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling" (Ephesians 4:4).** Resources had been prepared by the churches of Armenia. Around 50 people from across the churches gathered for this service. Fr. Chris commented on the richness of the Eastern Church liturgy and how refreshingly different it is compared with the liturgy of the Western Church.Fr. Chris had enjoyed leading the service. Thanks were expressed to him and the congregation at the Catholic Church for their hospitality.

7. CTH Executive Body. Moving Forward – specific and general roles: Janet Smith presented a short paper on this item on behalf of the present Executive. See Appendix 1.

Action: Please prayerfully consider whether you are being called to a role on the Executive. To find out further details of what the roles involve, contact Maureen or Jan.

8. Future CTH Events Peace Vigil? Nothing concrete has been progressed on this and no new ideas fed back to the Executive since the November Forum. Janet had suggested at the November Forum that there could be a sub - group formed to organise a vigil, but to date, no one has come forward to take up the reins. Ideas discussed at this Forum reiterated the idea of doing something to coincide with the UN 's International Day of Peace, which this year is on Monday 21st September. Other ideas included

- to broaden any event to include the idea of unity. The title 'For Love, Hope and Unity Together' was suggested as a title that might engage people.
- to incorporate a Peace Vigil/event into something already in existence within CTH or any of our churches
- the committee involved in organising the World Day of Prayer (WDP) being asked if they would be interested / willing to take on the organisation.

Actions:

- **Continue to feedback any ideas to the Executive.**
- **Jan and Janet to ask Maureen to bring the idea to the WDP organising group.**

9. Any news from churches or associated organisations?

- **Sustainable Harborough,** which includes input from the Eco Churches Group has monthly meetings, often with speakers which are of interest to a wide audience. Look out for publicity about meetings and events.
- **Christian Aid Week: 10th – 16th May 2026.** Peter Arnold informed the Forum that this year's campaign is being officially launched via a Zoom event on 14th March. Anyone interested in attending should contact Peter with their email address in order to receive the Zoom link to do so. Churches are encouraged to organise events for Christian Aid week and to let Peter know of these so that publicity can be maximised.
- **The Cube:** would value prayer as it applies for new funding streams and continues to recruit new trustees and seeks a new Chair. The Trustees' Annual Report had been circulated before the Forum meeting.
- **Prison Fellowship:** the local group meets regularly to pray for our prisons. Several members are involved in local prisons with bereavement counselling and other chaplaincy based work. Fr. Chris – part of the chaplaincy team at HMP Gartree, emphasised the importance of prayer for prisons generally, but especially for our prison chaplains and for the new prison HMP Welland Oaks, currently under construction, which should be operational in 2028/9.

10. Making sure our list of CTH Reps is up to date: Nothing to report, but please inform Maureen of any changes to reps in our churches.

11. World Day of Prayer - Friday 6th March 2026 at Harborough Community Church at 2 p.m. The theme this year is, **"I Will Give You Rest: Come,"** based on Matthew 11:28-30 and has been prepared by the women of Nigeria. Further details about the World Day of Prayer can be found - https://www.wwdp.org.uk

12. It's Your Move Books: The Forum was unanimous in deciding that we purchase the It's Your Move books again this year for the Year 6 leavers across the town's primary schools. Last year, CTH purchased 340 books for the 336 leavers. HCC has a team member who works for Scripture Union who produce the books, so it seems pertinent to order them through this contact.

Action: After Easter, Janet will ring around the primary schools to get accurate numbers of Year 6 leavers in 2026 and will liaise with Stephen Jack over purchasing the books.

13. Dates of next Forum meetings (venues to be confirmed):

a) **Monday 15th June 2026 AGM and Forum – in the Octagonal Hall at the Catholic Church.**

b) **September 2026 – The Baptist Church (TBC)**

c) **November 2026**

d) **February 2027**

14. Any other Business: Fr Chris asked us to pray for our young people and for our schools, where budgets are often so very tight.

Jan closed the meeting with prayer and the Gloria and Grace were shared.

NOTES:

A) **Arrangements for Lent 2026: Venue Our Lady of Victories Catholic Church**

20-minute services (12.30pm) followed by soup-and-cake lunches **to be confirmed**. (12.50pm). **Suggested Theme: "God's Word: our greatest treasure and our deepest delight."** Prepared and led by the following churches:

a. **27th February** – led by Congregational Church.

b. **6th March**– led by Harborough Anglican Team

c. **13th March**– led by Our Lady of Victories Roman Catholic Church

d. **20th March** – led by Harborough Community Church

e. **27th March**– led by 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 flavour of each denomination.

Appendix 1: CTH Executive Body. Moving Forward – specific and general roles

Please share this with your churches

Following the publication in January 2024 of the document '**Reigniting Vision,'** written by Andy Murphy, various suggestions were offered for consideration about the future of CTH and our commitment to it as member churches in both prayer and action. In thinking about a way forward for the Forum, the document acknowledged that in recent years it had been "hampered somewhat by a lack of forthcoming volunteers to take up the positions of Chair and Vice-Chair, which in our unwritten convention had been that these roles should alternate between 'lay' and 'ordained' and our inherited understanding had been that these roles should be for 2 years at a time, leading to a person being on the Executive Committee for a total of 4 years, with the Vice-Chair automatically being nominated as Chair after the first two years as Vice-Chair. This was off putting to some, and so in 2024 a more flexible approach was considered. It says in CTH's constitution that that Executive roles are **annual appointments**. It was acknowledged that there was and is therefore, room in our existing constitution for a lot more flexibility to fit the changing needs and commitments of our members."

The CTH Executive in 2026

The Executive Committee is not set in stone! Think of it more as CTH's Steering Group. The current executive positions are that Maureen and Jan co – chair Churches Together, Maureen is also the secretary. Jackie is the treasurer. Janet attends as the Minutes secretary and will be standing down from the Exec at the AGM in June but will continue to take the minutes and Jeannie is a member in a supporting role.

Maureen and Jan as the co – chairs are responsible for leading Churches Together, representing the vision and purpose of CTH, uniting member churches in common witness and service. They are responsible for setting the agenda for each Forum meeting and then chairing it. They act as spokespersons for CTH and will sometimes represent CTH in the community at certain specific events and are usually involved in overseeing any practical elements for specific events or projects like Good Friday's Easter Live on the Square and the Lent Lunchtime services and lunches. Jackie as Treasurer sets and manages the budget and deals with the day to day running of CTH finances. Maureen as Secretary arranges Forum meetings (venue, speaker, agenda, calling notice), acts as a 'point of contact' for the organisation, prepares and circulates a regular monthly newsletter to members.

The current Executive are keen that going forward it operates in a more a more fluid, flexible and dynamic way and are keen to see others put themselves forward to come and be part of the Executive to serve for a year (or more if desired) in a non – specified role or for specific occasions and projects. If you are interested in doing this then please come and speak to Maureen or Jan.

A note on CTH Representatives

Representatives to the Forum (usually two from each member church) attend the CTH Forum meetings, vote on proposals made at the Forum on behalf of their Church. (Note: The charity representatives do not have a vote i.e. Bower House, HYACT (The Cube) and Jubilee Foodbank). They feedback information regarding CTH events and ensure publicity is included in church notices / magazines/social media and offer to help at CTH events as well as encouraging their church family to do so as well.

Janet Smith