

Group News



*** 2021 * *November* * 2021 ***

The monthly magazine for:

Guisborough URC

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Part of the URC Northern Synod – www.urc-northernsynod.org.uk

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Pastoral Letter

'He has told you O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God.'

Micah 6: 8

A few years ago the government of the day began a programme that it called 'Back To Basics'. As with so much that's concerned with politics, the public treated it with a healthy dose of scepticism, which was just as well given that the initiative was to backfire in a big way!

Nonetheless, in theory at least, the idea was a good one, for there are times when we become so absorbed in details that we lose sight of the simple principles that underlie our beliefs. As Christians we are not exempt from that danger, - in fact many would say that we are most vulnerable to it since there are so many things that people in the church feel strongly about, to the point of almost making them articles of faith! All too easily we make the gospel more complicated than it really is. Some insist on agreeing with certain creeds, others on a particular style of worship, still others on church structure and organisation, - and so it goes on. Nor are these the only distractions, for we can just as easily become bogged down in questions of doctrine, or over-concerned with the tiny details of faith.

At such times we need to be reminded of what serving God is all about, just as the people in Micah's day needed reminding. Of course, doctrine is important, but we haven't to let it obscure the basics. Of course, fellowship and theology matter, but not if they hinder rather than further the work of God's Kingdom. Sir Herbert Butterfield, a historian and philosopher once wrote, 'Hold fast to Christ, and for the rest be uncommitted.' Or, as Micah puts it 'Do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with your God.'

Grace and peace to you all.

Shalom

Jan

Synod Prayers

7 November 2021:

PCM, their churches of the Central Presbytery and the Presbytery of the North

The Anglican Bishop of Whitby, the Rt Revd Paul Ferguson

International Day of Prayer for Persecuted Christians

14 November 2021:

Remembrance Sunday

Zion URC, Northallerton; Northgate URC, Darlington; Keld and Low Row URC



21 November 2021:

Women Against Violence Sunday

St Paul & St John's URC, South Shields; St Margaret's URC, South Shields; St

Andrew's URC, Hebburn; Revd Helen Drummond

28 November 2021:

World Aids Day - 1 December

St Andrew's LEP (Methodist/URC), Benton; Revd Gavin Hume (Methodist); The Church of the Good Shepherd LEP (Anglican/Methodist/URC), Battle Hill; Revd Julie Mooney (Anglican)

News from Synod

Our Future Ministry

A major piece of the business of the Synod held on 16 October was to receive a report from the Pastoral Committee looking at the future deployment of stipendiary ministers within our Synod. The Synod asked member churches to discuss the paper and submit comments. It is hoped that Pastoral Committee will be able to bring formal motions to the Spring 2022 Synod.

Unfortunately, what is not negotiable is the allocation of ministers to Northern Synod from the National Church. This is set at 12 stipendiary ministers from 2025 with an expectation that one of the pastorates will be in vacancy at any given time. Pastoral Committee has looked at how it might be possible to allocate these twelve pastorates across the Synod such that all our churches receive a fair share of the available ministry. Whilst Synod currently has less than twelve ministers in post; we do have significantly more than twelve pastorates when we look at vacant churches and church groupings that would like to issue a call. The report suggested groupings for our churches to make twelve pastorates. Consideration was given to number of members, number of churches, geography and historic arrangements. It was acknowledged that even since the report was prepared church circumstances have changed and that proposals are likely to need to change to reflect the changing reality.

If we look to the south of the Synod, we currently have ten churches and just over three hundred members within the existing pastorates of Hartlepool & Teesside; East Cleveland Group; and Tees & Swale. Together these pastorates can justify the deployment of two stipendiary ministers. Pastoral Committee suggested that Tees and Swale continues as a single minister pastorate whilst Hartlepool & Teesside and East Cleveland Group merge to form a second pastorate. In strict numerical terms, the Tees and Swale would be a smaller group and could be asked to accept an additional congregation from the larger Teesside Group. However it is difficult to see which of our congregations should move and the disadvantages in upsetting established groupings almost certainly outweighs any advantages from strictly balancing the numbers.

To the north of our area there are URC pastorates suggested that centre around Durham and around Sunderland. These build on existing church groupings and ministers but as in the south of Synod require mergers in order to reduce the number of pastorates. It seems unlikely that they could be persuaded to extend their patches to their south.

As elders we met with the Tees & Swale group some time ago to consider whether we could work together. At the time their group had ministry from Steven and Hilary Collinson and it became clear that they felt that the distances involved were too great to allow joint working. Combining Tees & Swale with East Cleveland would result in a grouping that was rather large for a single minister but unable to justify taking both the posts available for the south of the Synod effectively leaving Hartlepool & Tees without a route to ministry.

With the geography and membership numbers involved, I believe that the Synod suggestion of forming a joint pastorate between the four churches in Hartlepool & Tees and the three churches in East Cleveland is the only route we have to securing future stipendiary ministry. This proposal gives us a realistic share of the stipendiary ministry available within Synod although it is a long way away from what members may have hoped would be on offer; and indeed what was previously offered.

The future deployment of ministers in the Synod has been an open discussion for some time now. As group elders, we met with the Synod Moderator, Rev David Herbert, to look at future ministry for the group.

The Church Secretaries from the seven churches in the proposed new grouping have also met and agreed to meet formally again in the new year. Synod recognises that churches that group together to share ministry can do so in differing ways. In a joint pastorate the minister is shared but the churches are otherwise independent. In a group pastorate the minister is shared but the constituent churches also actively co-operate and support each other with joint working. Historically the Hartlepool & Tees churches are best described as a joint pastorate whilst the East Cleveland group is more of a group pastorate. Going forwards it would appear that all the church secretaries accepted that we had to find a way of making shared ministry work across a large pastorate. There did not appear to be a belief that all the churches would accept joint working as might be expected in a group pastorate model. In subsequent discussions, the East Cleveland Group elders

have suggested that we accept the position of the churches north of the river and negotiate to form a joint pastorate between our churches but retaining the East Cleveland Group as an identifiable unit within the pastorate.

In such a joint pastorate the East Cleveland Group would be valued at about 40% of the pastorate. We could possibly have four minister led services a quarter in our churches, say one service in each church and one joint service. When the minister was not on leave, they could realistically spend one session (ie morning, afternoon or evening) a week for pastoral work and one session a week for meetings across the East Cleveland Group.

Group Elders believe that our three church meetings now need to be given the opportunity to discuss these proposals. We will be bringing and enabling motion to our December church meetings seeking consent to formally open negotiations with the URC churches in Stockton-on-Tees including the Thornaby Mission, Billingham and Hartlepool with a view to forming a joint pastorate and in due course obtaining permission from Synod to declare a vacancy.

If church members can see an alternative route to ministry that they believe is viable and potentially acceptable to the whole church community then it would be appropriate that they are brought to the notice of elders so that they can be formally included in these discussions. Synod have made it clear that they are open to considering other options but they would need to work for the church both at local and Synod level. I would encourage church meetings not to reject the proposals without offering an alternative way ahead.

Whilst I concur with those who feel that what is currently on offer is far from ideal, I would also caution that many of our aspirations around ministry are unrealistic. It does however form a basis for supporting all the churches in Synod in a way which gives everyone a share of the available stipendiary ministry. Failure to engage constructively with what is on offer, or seeking more than a reasonable share of the available resources is ultimately likely to end with us receiving nothing.

Roger Wheeler

Guisborough

The year 2010 is the last occasion when the anniversary of Guisborough Church, 31st October, has coincided with a Sunday, and so as a fellowship we have taken the opportunity to celebrate the 210 years since the present building was opened. So much has happened and changed over more than two centuries as the following short history shows:

Our Church began its life of witness as a result of the long process of the Dissenters Evangelical Revival of the 18th Century. This in turn had its roots in the 17th century when many clergymen, who spoke out against the disreputable practices of the established church, lost their 'livings' and were thrown out of their parishes for refusing to conform and accept the existing conditions of service.

The people involved in this 'dissent' were committed to the notion of 'free thought' and the practical use of reason in understanding the will of God. Dissenters felt that their advocacy of the reign of reason was directed by God alone. Hence, to go against the dictates of reason was to violate the will of God. For them it was an article of faith that any man – high or low, rich or poor - had the means to communicate directly with his 'Lord and Maker.' without the need for the help or intervention of any member of the clergy. It was a challenging doctrine at the time and many of these 'dissenters' suffered greatly for their beliefs. This changed when the Act of Tolerance, of 1689, gave such people some limited scope to practice their faith.

In 1796 the Evangelical Society of London, on being informed of the poor state of religious observance in Cleveland, sent William Norris, an evangelist, as a revivalist preacher for our area. His fervent oratory attracted many people back to faith in Jesus - and so by 1798 a new church fellowship appeared in Guisborough. In October of the following year the Protestant Dissenting Meeting House was opened in Westgate - funded by a wealthy local widow, Elizabeth Dunn.

"In 1802 he left twenty members in the care of Mr. James Scott, a lay preacher, admitted to the church by him." An early baptismal register shows that the first entry is for a James Scott, son of James and Mary Scott - with the ceremony being performed by William Norris on 9th June 1799 – the evangelist baptising the son of the future lay pastor of the church.

In 1805 the Rev. William Hinners, an Independent Minister from Edinburgh, having failed to be included in a mission to India, became interested in the Guisborough cause – declaring “If I can’t convert heathens, abroad, then I will do it at home,” Within a few years he built up the congregation, revived the fellowship in Great Ayton and, under his direction, a church was built and named *The Ebenezer Chapel*.

It was opened on Thursday 31st October 1811. The event is described in an account taken from the *Evangelical Magazine* of the time. Here, the writer reveals what took place on that memorable day.

“A neat and commodious Chapel was opened at Guisborough, a respectable market town in Cleveland, Yorkshire. In the morning Mr Jackson, of Green Hammerton, supplicated the divine blessing, and preached from Isaiah chapter 55, verse 11 – (“So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.”).

William Hinners served as minister until 1824 when he accepted the pastorate of the Great Ayton Independent Chapel and then went onto found a church in Stokesley in 1826. He died, aged 72, in 1846 and is buried in the Great Ayton churchyard.

Beginning with his successor, Samuel Blair, (1826) the church continued to serve as an independent place of worship under a succession of nine pastors until in 1871 the building had its first refurbishment – and perhaps a small change of direction.

A new floor was laid, new seats and pulpit installed and a minister’s house bought. Plans dated 1875 show a proposal to build a new church with a spire. These ideas were never implemented – but perhaps are symbolic of a move away from the simple puritanical, dissenting beliefs of the founders to a more conventional view of faith in line with that self-confident Victorian image. The later alterations, to the front of the church, do tend to give that impression - with the bolder red brick frontage and stained glass windows – of an inclination to compete visually with other local church buildings – a move, perhaps, towards consensus rather than the strongly guarded independence of former years.

During the Rev. Robert Roberts ministry (1876 -1882) children’s religious education became an important issue - for at that time a sum of money was

raised to build a Sunday School – but his removal to the Unitarian Church arrested any further progress.

This project was delayed for some years, with several failed attempts to revive the idea, until the Rev. Wardle Ridley accepted a call to the pastorate in 1901. He was a man of great drive and energy and came to Guisborough on the condition that the proposed building plans were pushed through. On arrival he visited towns throughout Yorkshire, on behalf of the project, and in six months raised sufficient money to build a Sunday School, vestry and effect other alterations.

So in 1904/5 the church was substantially reconstructed, given a new front, gable, seats, windows, gas fittings, pipe organ and stained glass window in memory of Joseph Wright 45 years a member and elder. This was all done at a cost of £1,100 – a substantial sum at this time. Needless to say, the congregation were sadly disappointed when the Rev Ridley soon decided to move on to Burley-in Warfedale, Yorkshire in 1906.

By the time of the church's centenary, in 1911, there was still a debt of £200 outstanding on the cost of these extensive alterations. Members decided to use the occasion as an incentive to clear this burden – and included fund raising activities as part of the celebrations. There was a special concert and a sale of work – with Joseph Hinners – grandson of the first minister - invited from Southport as a special guest. Their efforts were rewarded and the debt was paid off.

There are two war memorials in the church commemorating the sacrifices made by the men of Guisborough in the conflict of 1914-1918. During WWI Thomas Stanley, who would later become a minister in the church, (1928-1931), was imprisoned as a conscientious objector. The Rev Stanley was described as a courageous and determined person - with strong principles. His stand against the war would have led to a hostile response from most people at that time – clearly suggesting that he was indeed a man of strong character.

During the Rev. Albert Ore's ministry (1925-1928) the grouping of Guisborough and Great Ayton Churches took place. At one time Lazenby was united with the Guisborough congregation.

The Rev Frederick Gillson (1932-1938) wrote the earliest known history of the Church. In his account he records the size and activities of the congregation as they were in 1937. Church members are listed as 48, with 16 non-resident

and 4 Junior Church. He then goes on to say that there were 90 scholars in all departments of the Sunday School and 10 teachers. Worship was at 10.30am and 6.00pm on Sundays. Activities included: Junior Church – Morning School, Primary Department, Senior's and Young Men's Class; a choir; Guild; Woman's meeting; Prayer Meeting and a Table Tennis club. In fact the church could be described as a very active fellowship.

In 1972 the Congregational Church joined with the Presbyterian Church of England to become the United Reformed Church. This was the first union of Christian denominations since the Reformation and needed to be ratified by Act of Parliament. The Guisborough congregation voted to join the union with only a few 'dissenting' voices speaking against the decision.

This act of ecumenicalism was continued under the ministry of the Rev. David Batchelor (1969-1976) who worked with the Anglicans and Methodists, in the town, to form a combined fellowship. The covenant negotiations unfortunately foundered and the process was formally terminated in the early 80's.

This was the first coming together of separate Christian denominations since the division of the church during the Reformation in the 16th, century. A further change of organisation took place in the 1990's when several United Reformed Churches, in the area, were brought together to form the East Cleveland Group.

In 1991 the church, which was then a joint pastorate with Lingdale United Reformed Church, became vacant along with the other local churches of Redcar and Marton and Nunthorpe.

It was then decided that the best way forward, for the future, was to form a Church grouping. This became known as the East Cleveland Group with its first minister being Tim London, called to serve in 1993 and joined in the following year by Norma Johnson. Linthorpe United Reformed Church became a member of the Group a few years later and the two ministers worked as a team until the Rev. London left in the year 2000.

Around about this time (2000) the Methodist minister, Kathleen Bowes proposed the idea of a church organisation to bring the churches in greater contact with the local community – in an attempt to fulfil the mission of the church to serve people and - in the process - bring a greater awareness of faith in Christ to a wider public. The organisation became known as the 'Bridge.' -

which through a range of activities such as youth work, Soup and Roll Service, Listening Service, Youth Chat Room, Half Century Club, Foodstop and other work, has helped the various volunteers from Guisborough Churches to form closer ties with the local community.

In 2004 the local URC church organisation was changed with the introduction of a Mission Partnership which linked the five churches of the East Cleveland Group with churches in Billingham, Stockton and Thornaby. The aim of the Partnership was to focus more attention on the spiritual life of the churches. In practice this would have the objective of giving support that would encourage the building up of active, lively fellowships - able to reach out into the community in a creative and helpful way.

By the time this process had started the Rev Johnson was joined by Rev Meg Robb and together they worked with others on the new organisation. Norma Johnson moved from the East Cleveland Group, to accept a call to serve as minister for Clithero URC, Lancashire, in 2005. It was essential at this point, in the development of the Mission Partnership, that we appoint another minister, as soon as possible, to re-establish an effective pastoral team in the East Cleveland area. In 2006 Rev. Catey Morrison accepted our call to service and moved, from a pastorate in Dudley and Langley Green, West Midlands, to be inducted as minister on Saturday, 22nd, July.

In 2009 the United Reformed Church mounted a spiritual revival, with the aim of renewing our faith, called Vision 4Life. This campaign focussed on how we view the Bible, prayer and the call to evangelism in the 21st, century - and ended, in our bicentenary year, with meetings, aimed at promoting evangelism, being organised by the East Cleveland Group. This was followed later by a further national initiative for renewal – Vision 2020.

In 2019 the members of the church decided that if we were to be more accessible to the local community of Guisborough we needed to adapt, our relatively small building, to be more flexible in its use by removing the pews from the sanctuary. The closure of the church in March 2020, to comply with pandemic regulations, created difficulties in doing this work, but when the church was re-opened, by the Reverends Ken and Margaret Harris on 23rd May the congregation were seated in chairs.

Today, the Guisborough is part of a new pastorate all seven URC churches in the Teesside area: Billingham, Hartlepool, Thornaby, Stockton, Guisborough,

Marion and Redcar. Synod has brought us together in order to attract a minister to provide professional spiritual support as we recover from effects of the pandemic.

Recent church meetings have shown that members have hope for the future, with some encouraging new ideas being raised for engaging effectively with the local community. In the absence of a minister, for spiritual guidance, we need to look back at the founding reasons for establishing a fellowship in Guisborough. Way back in 1798 the concept of ordinary people having the ability to find direct access to God, without clergy as an intermediary, was a fundamental belief, which is still relevant today. The ordinary members can carry out the mission of Christ in the local community showing clearly its real, unchanging value in modern society

During this long period, of more than 200 years, the church's presence in the town has been an available source of spiritual support for the people of Guisborough – the ordinary members and a total of 36 successive ministers having served towards this end.

Ray Tunnicliffe

Eulogy for David Houston

David Houston was born in Edinburgh in 1938 but his family soon moved out to Malaysia where he was raised by his Amah until he went to school. He told me a story of how his mother used to try to give Maureen advice on raising their children. Maureen would reply that she was ill qualified to do so. His Mama would then reply “I’ll have you know I would quite often watch David being bathed.”

He started school in Malaysia but this was cruelly interrupted by the advancing Japanese in the Second World War. His father was captured and taken to a prison camp. He escaped with his mother, brother and her sister and family to Singapore and from there to Australia. David would remember the boat being strafed with bullets as they made their escape. They travelled from Australia to South Africa, and eventually arrived back in Edinburgh in November of 1944 when David remembered the intense cold and seeing his breath in the cold air for the first time.

Meanwhile his father was in a POW camp and became very ill after the long march to the River Kwai. He did better than most being more acclimatised to

the tropical climate. It was only in 1946 that the family finally found out he had survived.

Once he was nursed back to fitness David's father and mother went back to Malaysia leaving David and his brother to the privations of an English Boarding School. They were very different these two, with his brother being more outgoing and superficially charming, but David had grit and he had his wits.

It was the habit for the boys to be sent to the dormitory for an afternoon rest. This was really just to give the Masters a break. This was the time for the bullies to come to the fore and give some poor boy a good thrashing, The young David has to think fast. They knew he came from the Far East so he sat on his bed making strange chopping gestures and emitting strange cries. None of them knew he didn't have a clue about Martial Arts or Kung Fu so he remained largely unmolested. It was a tough life with holidays spent with elderly aunts and not much sympathy or shows of affection.

He must have worked hard, did his best to stay out of trouble and earned a place at Imperial College, London. He joined the University Air Squadron which took up a lot of his spare time and kept him out of mischief mostly. He did tell me about getting caught up in a protest at the Russian Embassy. He was surprised how easy it was to get caught up in the mood of the mob and be led into acts you would not normally contemplate alone.

He met Maureen through their mothers who lived close to each other at the time and were working for the same women's voluntary organisation. They met at each others parents' houses and hit it off straight away, They were both living and studying in London at the time and made efforts to meet up away from mothers' prying eyes. Their relationship progressed rapidly from there and of course they were married.

David worked for ICL and ESSO for a time then in 1969 he and Maureen moved to Guisborough so he could work for ICI. They have two children, Fiona and Andrew, and while they were still young the whole family were able to go out to Malaysia for 2 years with David's work.

While there David and Maureen spent a lot of time with people of different nationalities and faiths. David was accused by other ex-pats. of "going native".

David often struggled with the ethics of big business and his Christian Faith. He told me a story of his Buddhist colleague who would never sanction any dodgy business and always spoke up about it in meetings. He would often receive a rude put down and would miss out on promotion but David admired his integrity and held him in high esteem.

David was brought up CofE by his boarding school but he and Maureen were regular attenders at churches that became part of the URC in 1972.

Around 1977 David became an Elder at this church and he and Maureen were Church Secretaries for 6 years, They provided a steady hand on the tiller and were often of great help during times of vacancy and during the tenure of some rather original ministers.

It was Ernest Dale who first made me aware of this church but it was Maureen and David who first made me welcome. We formed a lunchtime Bible Study group that met for years with hospitality in each others homes. We learnt so much from each other and those that joined us over the years, Diane, Dorothy Harris, Ray Houghton and others. When I started studying to be a Lay Preacher it was to David and Maureen that I turned for support and guidance and they attended many tutorials with me.

David and Maureen maintained their interest in far off places and are incredibly well travelled. I loved hearing David's experiences and impressions of the places he had visited. I envied him so much his trip to Venezuela to visit the "Lost World" landscape to be found there. Every summer David would hitch up the caravan and he and Maureen would head across Europe to the same campsite in Austria. He was such a keen walker hiking the trails of Nepal as well as taking Junior Church children into the local countryside.

He was fortunate to have grandchildren in Naomi, Alastair, Sam and Alex. If he was as good with them as he was with our Junior Church then I know they will have many happy memories to cherish.

David was a member of the Cleveland Scots for many years, never having forgotten the land of his birth. He enjoyed wearing tartan and was good at addressing the haggis but better at addressing the ladies. I was honoured to sing for my supper on occasions. He was also a Mason for a time but he held to the old values of Masonry as espoused by Robert Burns and left when he felt uncomfortable with the turn they had taken. He joined Probus, a retired

men's organisation for a while but eventually found his home with the University of the Third Age which he could share with Maureen.

David had so many excellent qualities, kindness, hospitality, integrity and thoughtfulness. He and Maureen were a great team and I know she is finding it hard to move forward without her right hand man. He has left his legacy in the family he has created, in the causes he has supported and in the example he has set.

Boarding school made David a reserved man and, though I loved my friend very much, I knew in life I could never give him the hug I so wanted to. You have been warned David, in heaven, that's a different story.

Donna Moore

Redcar

Coffee Afternoon

Thanks to everyone who attended and donated to my Macmillan Coffee Afternoon on September 24th. The final total was £152.

June

St Andrew's

Congratulations

Jan has a new lovely granddaughter, Emma. A sister for Grace. All are doing well. We send our best wishes and prayers to all the family.

Harvest Gifts

Many thanks for the harvest gifts received last month, both the food items and the financial offerings. Both have been gratefully received by the Middlesbrough Food Bank.

Services

Marthon
10.00am

Guisborough
10.00am

Redcar
11.00am

Material for the December/January Magazine to church editors by
Sunday 14th November please

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