

Group News



**** 2021 * September * 2021 ****

The monthly magazine for:

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Pastoral Letter

‘What woman having 10 silver coins if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? When she has found it she calls together her friends and neighbours, saying ‘Rejoice with me., for I have found the coin that I lost’

Luke 15, 8-9

There was a time when I tried to learn the game of golf, with a very patient teacher, - but I didn't continue with it, and haven't played for many years. The fact is that I found it more expensive than I had bargained for. It wasn't the green fees, or the golf club subscription that was so prohibitive, but the cost of replacing lost balls. I was such a poor player that my drives invariably ended up in the rough, the nearest water hazard, or out of bounds in some jungle or other. At first I used to hunt carefully for the missing ball, waving players past as I continued my search, but eventually, since I was always way over par, I scarcely bothered to look at all ... just a quick glance into the undergrowth before taking out another ball and moving on.

Few of us are willing to look for anything for too long, even if something is valuable to us. That is not how God sees things! As Jesus so tellingly puts it, in His parable about the lost coin, He is like the woman who searches carefully, *‘until she finds it’*.

When we go astray, God doesn't just look for a moment before losing interest; He goes on looking for as long as it takes, never resting until He finds us. Whoever we are, and whatever we may have done, we matter to God, enough for Him never to abandon His search; enough even to rescue and redeem us through the offering of His son.

Grace and peace to you all.

Shalom

Jan

Synod Prayers

5 September: Climate Sunday

Green Apostle Revd Trevor Jamison and the congregation he serves – St Columba's, North Shields

The work of the URC (Northern Province Trust Ltd) and Convenor, Revd David Grosch-Miller, and Trust Secretary Mr Willie Duncan

12 September: Education Sunday.

St James's URC, Newcastle; St Andrew's URC, Kenton; Jesmond URC, West End URC

19 September:

Longframlington URC; Rothbury URC; St Andrew's URC, Glanton; Revd Ed Butlin

26 September: Peacemaking Sunday;

PCM, Lay training and evening classes at Khovo in Maputo
Northern Baptist Regional Minister, Revd Dr John Claydon.

Ken Harris - Forty Years of Ministry

On 29th February 1948, Ken and three friends were baptised by total immersion in their church – Dronfield Baptist Church in Derbyshire. This could be said to be the beginning of a Christian journey which has brought us to this fortieth anniversary of Ken's ordination on 20th June 1981. The service took place at Steep Lane Baptist church in the Calder Valley, near Halifax, but where did the journey really begin?

Ken's journey with God has been a lifetime experience. Ken was born in 1931 in Eyam, Derbyshire, often called the Plague Village, because of the marvellous way the people of the village isolated themselves to ensure the devastating plague did not spread to outlying villages. We may think isolating ourselves is something new in this pandemic – but it was certainly seen in Eyam in 1665. Ken is naturally very proud of this connection, and it was here that he first attended Sunday school at the Wesleyan Reform church, which

sadly is now closed. When the family moved to Dronfield in 1938, Ken began to attend the Baptist church there. At the age of 18, Ken was called to do National Service. He travelled to Munster in Germany, where he became a special wireless operator, in the Royal Corps of Signals.

Those two years were very important to Ken. He was able to gain extra educational qualifications that he had been denied at his local school because of war restrictions, and it became clear to him that a new spirituality was growing deep within him. On the way to Germany, he passed through Holland, and also saw the devastation of Dresden, which made him think about war and its consequences. Told that he was part of a conquering army, who had won the war – he saw the effects on the people of Germany, and this was a difficult thing to see and lesson to learn. He believed then and now that all the nations of the world needed to find ways to bring peace – a world at one with God and with each other.

Returning home in 1950, Ken tried to return to his 'old' life, but this was difficult knowing all he had learned and experienced. In 1956 he and Dorothy were married and he moved to Dorothy's home town of Swallow Nest, near Sheffield, becoming part of her own church. Soon they were blessed with children, as Elizabeth, Robin, Timothy and Simon were born. As time passed, Ken was asked to take on the role of Lay Pastor at his home church. In 1976, under the auspices of Reverend Michael Taylor, Ken took the Certificate of Bible Knowledge in one year - and passed with flying colours! This led Michael Taylor to urge Ken to begin a course of ministerial training at Northern Baptist College (now Luther King House). He had to give up his working life in the steelworks in Sheffield, which for a man with a young family was quite a step. The course itself was breaking the mould of training, and while five people undertook the training – only two completed it: Ken and one lady who now lives in Leicester. During his training, Ken became a student pastor at Steep Lane Baptist Church near Halifax, and had to drive from his home into studies at Manchester, three days a week. It was there at Steep Lane, that Ken was ordained in June 1981.

He then accepted a position at Hyde Baptist / United Reformed Church as part of a team alongside young ministers, Paul Weller and his wife, Jan Berry, the now famous author and poet. This ministry also encompassed churches within the area known as Thameside. Industrial chaplaincy was, from the beginning, a great part of Ken's ministry, from his time as a lay chaplain to

British Steel in Sheffield. In Selby, North Yorkshire, the United Reformed Church was looking for a minister who would not only be theirs, but also be part of the large coalfield and power stations which dominated most of the area. So as Tony Burnham, the Moderator of the North West Province realised, this was a perfect role for Ken, just as Ken was also thinking the same! So Ken became a URC minister and thus began a happy ministry there which lasted nine years! As chaplain, Ken also became part of Cochrane's shipyard, and Thorpe Marsh and Eggborough Power Stations - a large ministry of almost 800 people, as well as the congregation at the church. Ken became a colleague of the Bishop of Selby, and was authorised by the Archbishop of York to preside at Anglican services in the diocese.

After those nine years and feeling he wanted to explore new ways of ministry, Ken decided to move to Blyth in Northumberland. Some of the congregation at Selby have barely forgiven him yet, but he has retained great friendships there! In Blyth, Ken became minister and chaplain once again, as chaplain to the power station at Cambois, which overlooked the River Blyth. The steeple of the church can be seen from the station and this combined picture graced our church banner. As a young man, Ken had become a authorised youth leader for twenty-four churches in the Sheffield District, and now, at Blyth, there was much work to do with an already active junior church which soon grew. His holiday clubs became legendary!

Ken spent much of his time working closely with Churches together in Blyth, and ecumenical relationships became strong between all the churches for the first time. While his chaplaincy continued and the relationship between the church members and elders grew, they came and re-wired the church for us for nothing! But it was Ken's work in the town and community that brought him into the spotlight. Drugs use was reaching almost epidemic proportions, and his help was vital. Ken worked alongside the Probation service and the local Chemists in the town to create a needle exchange and drug support network which still exists today as 'People and Drugs', supporting addicts and their families. There was a young people's drop in centre and alcohol free bar which was well attended for many years! A fund raising football match was played between Newcastle United and Blyth Spartans football club, which raised £32,500 for the drug rehabilitation work. As minister of the church, many of the congregation who felt they had little to offer now knew what it truly meant to be part of this exciting and passionate ministry.

And then retirement – to Guisborough – but what a retirement! You know the rest of the story – you see it, you hear it, you are part of it. On the 20th June a celebration service was held in Stockton URC, which we thought would not be possible due to the pandemic.

There were good wishes to share – but one from Reverend David Jenkins, past Moderator of Northern Synod, says a lot about Ken’s ministry and what that he has meant to so many people. David writes: -

‘Ken, I send you warmest greetings and congratulations on the occasion of your 40th Anniversary in Christian ministry. If the definition of “ministry” is “serving God’s world in the spirit of Jesus” you have nailed it!

Jesus was able to communicate with human beings of all backgrounds with compassion and directness. Your gifts echo this legacy, for my memory of your ministry is one of down to earth practical love. So many people inside and outside the church have been touched by your wisdom, so on their behalf I say a massive “thank you”. I know you do not know the meaning of retirement, but please make some space to “enjoy” the divine time still gifted to you’.

‘Peace, friend.’

It is only right that this story of Ken’s life contains the love and support of his family during these years. As most of you know, Ken lost two sons, Robin and Simon who died with muscular dystrophy, during this journey, and the tragic death of his daughter, Elizabeth, just before coming to Blyth. Retirement with Dorothy was to bring them both new ways of life, which they enjoyed until Dorothy’s sad death in 2013. Without that love and support they gave him in the early days, his ministry would not have been possible. His son, Tim who lives in York has three children who are a great joy.

And now, with Margaret at his side, retirement continues. Throughout the pandemic they have worked together to create services that have been shared with many people, both outside and inside our churches, even as far as Alnwick !

Congratulations Ken – forty years – a true celebration!

And this is only part of the full story!!

Guisborough

Hello from a 'different' world. The world is changed and so are we. I have no doubt that we all, to varying degree, have travelled through from March of last year to the autumn of 2021 to recognise ourselves as changed/affected/ altered. Our recent experiences may have highlighted just how the many demanding pressures of our pre pandemic lives were leaving us with little firm ground for support in difficult times. We each found ways however to adapt to increasingly lonely days, growing into worrying weeks.

I have mentioned before how much I enjoy working with fabric and thread. I am a member of a group called Random Stitchers. Although not able to physically meet in the usual way once a month, we became competent users of Zoom. We even managed to plan an exhibition of work for these summer months which featured 'lockdown works'. Just as rewarding was the fact that by using our hands in the creating process we agreed that it helped to fill the slow pace of lockdown days and somehow ease the cycle of worrying thoughts – from brain into hands.

Since July's changes to restrictions, we as individuals and as a church are moving by necessity into the present. Some features of our previous routines we are pleased to leave behind. Indeed the pandemic may have shone a light on some dusty habits (both personal and in church) which are best left behind.

How to proceed into the future?

This was the main agenda item for our first church meeting. We held the meeting in our newly refurbished sanctuary after shortened morning worship. I wonder if this change helped us to feel comfortable? Plenty of ideas came from the assembled family since when progress has been made with practical jobs. As important, the meeting brought us face to face with the present realities - continuing as a worshipping community with reduced numbers, no minister not to mention the maintenance of an old building. For the future, we are listening and praying for guidance and direction. Our building is open for different styles of worship, varieties of use by the community, to show God in action in Guisborough.

Revds Ken and Margaret Harris have been supporting us over the past 17 months with Sunday morning worship online or on paper. We are indeed

blessed. Here are closing words from a recent Thursday prayers from Ken and Margaret by Cardinal Basil Hume.

'Some people spend a lot of time looking back on their lives, others spend time daydreaming about the future, but the important moment is 'now'. In any present moment we can meet God. At any moment we can just think about God and send a quick message up to him.

The present moment is always precious.

Like a sacrament, it is a meeting point between God and ourselves.

In hope and love,

Joyce.

St Andrew's

Congratulations

Congratulations to Jonathon and Annmay Etwell on the birth of new baby son Brody Roman; a new brother for Austin, grandson for Grace and nephew for Steven.

All are doing well.



Material for the October Magazine to church editors by
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