

March 21 Newsletter

In March we have two anniversaries: one year since we closed the church on the 15th and then on the 23rd, one year since the first pandemic lockdown. Grim reminders of a very difficult time, over the past twelve months, having our normal activities and freedom of movement restricted. And then witnessing, on an almost daily basis, the distressing toll of people who have died from Covid 19 and the great grief and sorrow this has been for their relatives and friends.

At the present time the programme to vaccinate everyone in the country gives us hope for the future when normal conditions can be restored. For ourselves, in the United Reformed Church, the first Lockdown anniversary has been designated a 'day of reflection' a moment in time when we may think about our experiences of the past year and use this knowledge to imagine ideas for the future. This will be a difficult process, but if we face it with faith and determination we can discover a refreshed, new way forward for us as fellowship.

The government's decision to begin lifting lockdown restrictions, a four stage plan that starts with the reopening of schools, offers us hope that we may soon be able to meet together in fellowship. The situation will be closely monitored by Synod, who will advise the elders when it is safe to open our building.

Ray Tunnicliffe, Group News Coordinator.

Community

The Guisborough Town Hall Project

Thanks to the hard work and commitment of the Guisborough Town Hall Community Group, since 2016, construction work to transform the Town Hall has started. The grade II listed building is to be restored and adapted into visitor accommodation on the top two floors, as well as housing, heritage and visitor information and retail facilities on the ground floor.

The project has been funded by a £1.1 million grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund and £300,000 from the Tees Valley Mayor and Combined Authority. The town is fortunate to have such an investment, which is scheduled to be completed by the autumn. The Guisborough Town Hall Gateway Project was formed in 2016 as a partnership between the community and the council to secure the future of the Town Hall. The community group involved have formed a Community Interest Company to operate the information centre on the ground floor.

This project offers some exciting opportunities for the town and also for ourselves as a church fellowship. Being so central in Guisborough, and with a mission to attract the public and visitors, it should be possible to advertise our presence as part of the community and present occasional activities there. Time now to

think of how this facility can be used to advantage.

Where Do We Stand?

In the news section of the February edition of Reform, the United Reformed Church's national magazine, there appeared an article entitled: Christians call for fairer tax system. It was one of several several such calls for Christians or the church to support various good causes. Other issues raised were: Divestment win for climate activists, led by Christian Aid, welcoming the UK's government's decision to divest from fossil fuel projects overseas - and then an Interfaith Coalition supporting LGBTQ people in attaining fair treatment in society. These are but a few examples of Christians or other people of faith taking a moral stand to support a cause where people need help to get justice or fair treatment or simply to be able to survive. As a fellowship should we take up such a cause to help others, which will give us the opportunity to put our Christian beliefs to the test in the difficult area of practical action?

In 2003, with the prospect of the UK being drawn into the invasion of Iraq, a proposal for our fellowship to send an objection, to this military action, be sent to the government. The proposal was not accepted by the church meeting. Some years later another

proposal to send a letter to the Indian government objecting to their poor treatment of the survivors of the 1984 Bhopal gas leak disaster, received partial approval, with individual members given the opportunity to sign the letter of protest. However, we have for years supported Commitment for Life and the Fair Trade movement through the coffee we use for the coffee mornings. In addition, the Bridge Association, who do good works in the local community, have an office based on our premises. Whilst support for these projects is commendable could we do more? As we move to seek to offer outreach into the community a clear positive identity would be helpful in creating a worthwhile public response. Put another way: what do we stand for?

Stephen Cottrell, the newly enthroned Archbishop of York has recently published a book: *Dear England: Finding Hope, Taking Heart and Changing the World*. It was written partly as a letter to a divided and uncertain country that no longer sees the relevance of Christianity. In it he makes the point that he wanted the church to have a louder political voice. This is seen as a part of the purpose of the of faith, which is reinforced by Christ's saying of love your neighbour as you love yourself being a 'profoundly political statement.' The difficulty with this concept is the problem of confusing such a mission with the existing party politics, which has a clear message to religion: keep out!

A way forward on this issue is to envisage the ideal of political action as being: the art of the possible. If this is the case we can follow

another old saying: 'if you want something badly enough then you can usually get it.' The archbishop's call for a clearer political message from the church can seem like a formidable challenge, but it can be approached by beginning with small steps. But we need ideas upon which we can build a mission that can attract the support of the local community. In this time of Lent, as we wait for some form of normality to return, now is the opportunity to think and prayer for a worthwhile vision for us to follow.

R. T.

April Newsletter: Please send any news of the fellowship or articles to raytunncliffe@yahoo.co.uk by the 31st, March.

GUISBOROUGH UNITED REFORMED CHURCH



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