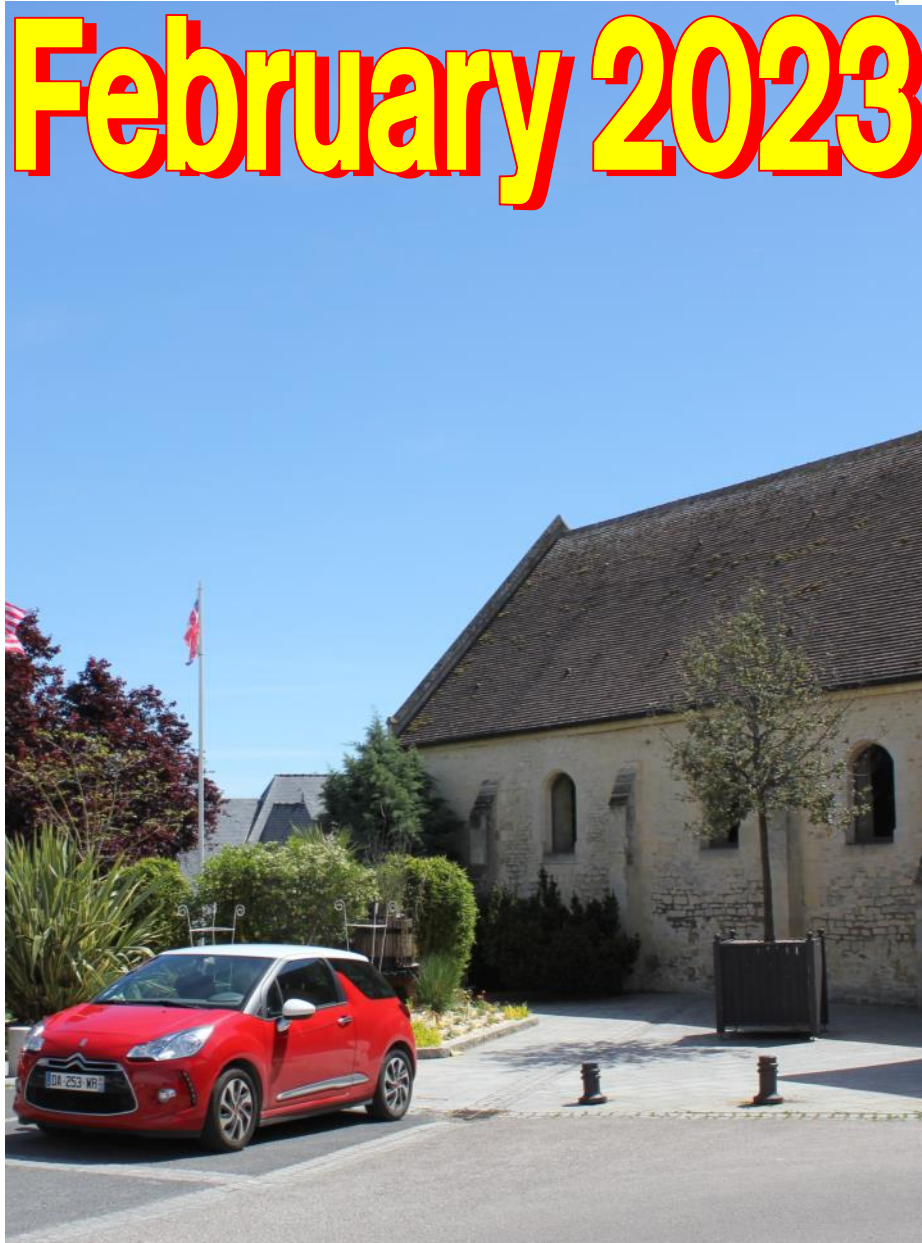


# The Link



## February 2023



Shanklin United Reformed Church [www.shanklinurc.co.uk](http://www.shanklinurc.co.uk)

# View From Number 10



## A Winter of Discontent

This well-worn phrase comes from the opening lines of Shakespeare's *Richard III*, and was memorably used in critical comment on the policies of a Labour government some decades ago. How things have come around full circle with a different government in the driving seat at present!

The current cost-of-living crisis and the recent round of New Year speeches find us revisiting these kinds of sentiments. Times are tough and people are unhappy – many resorting to strike action. Wages and pensions cannot keep up with inflation and countless people are severely stretched, with some in desperate straits. We are all having to tighten our belts for a pretty rough ride this year.

Those of us who are reasonably well-placed must be ready to dig deep and support others around us who are struggling. The Foodbank needs constant supplies as do Aspire in Ryde and the various food pantries. We have been offering an open door with a warm space and refreshments for a few weeks now. We have seen a few people venture in, alongside a good number of our own folk who have shown strong support – thanks. Please pray as this slowly develops and finds its pattern, and that local folk in need will find refreshment and support at The Well.

The launch of the new Island CAP centre is very timely. We as a congregation are partnering with four other churches to get this ministry up and running again on the Island after a gap of a few years. There is a service to celebrate this new beginning on Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> February at Castlehold Baptist Church at 18:30 – with some refreshments to follow. Please come along if you can and do offer lifts to people you know who may want to attend.

There is a biblical mandate to care for the poor in our communities – “There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your fellow Israelites who are poor and needy in your land.” (Deuteronomy 15:11). Jesus commented that they will always be there and needing our care.

"The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. (Mark 14:7).

Let's be very prayerful about our response to the current challenges – not to just moan and groan with everyone else but try to make a positive contribution and make a difference for Christ. We need to be good news people and share what we have with those in need. This is not an optional add-on for super-Christians – it is a very basic expression of our discipleship, The Lord's brother spells this out in his letter – "If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead." (James 2:16-17 NIVUK).

May the Lord lead us onwards and inspire our response to the needs around us. And let's remember what Jesus said – "the Kingdom of God is in your midst." (Luke 17:21).

With very best wishes.



## **Island CAP Launch Service**

**Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> February 18:30**

**at Castlehold Baptist Church,  
High Street, Newport, PO30 1BH**

christians  
against  
poverty

**CAP**

The five churches partnering together are gathering to celebrate the new this new beginning, to commission John Bastin and to pray for the work as it develops.

If you would like to become a Befriender for the CAP Debt Centre to assist the Debt Centre Manager as they visit clients, please contact John Bastin on 521751 or [administrator@castlehold.com](mailto:administrator@castlehold.com)

He can supply more details. Training will be given.

# Prayer



## **Sabbath of Prayer**

***Friday 24<sup>th</sup> – Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> February***

***Friday early evening – time to be confirmed***

***Saturday 10:00 – 12:00***

***and 15:30 – 17:30, closing with communion***

***Theme - Breakthrough***

Each session will begin with some informal worship together and then there will be time for personal prayer, reflection and listening.

Do please make a special effort to join in at least one of these slots as we seek the Lord together as a church family and look for guidance going forward.

**Tuesday Prayer at 19:30** - This is still being held via Zoom using the same account as for other activities and groups :

[https://us04web.zoom.us/j/3242665584?  
pwd=ZTlXZzBLWnkrWTNBZ2JBK1o0K2ZXdz09](https://us04web.zoom.us/j/3242665584?pwd=ZTlXZzBLWnkrWTNBZ2JBK1o0K2ZXdz09)

Meeting ID: 324 266 5584 Password: 936536.

**Prayer Chain** - please make use of this for urgent and important issues that need prayer. Phone Hazel on 865181 – or Jean on 863850 - do consider joining this if you are mostly around at home.

**Text Prayer Network** – this is now operational as an addition to our telephone chain. Please text Lou on **07474 273119** with your prayer request and she will mobilise a team of intercessors. Again, this is for urgent and important issues that need immediate cover:

**Prayer for Israel** – is held each Monday from 10:00-11:00 on the church Zoom. Please contact Roy & Melodie if you are interested in joining: [melodieroywilson@gmail.com](mailto:melodieroywilson@gmail.com) or 866912

## FAIRTRADE Fortnight 2023...

**FAIRTRADE FORTNIGHT**  
**27 FEBRUARY - 12 MARCH**



Shanklin URC has just re-registered as a Fairtrade Church, having fallen off the radar somehow. For many years we have intentionally purchased Fairtrade products such as tea and coffee and have encouraged our members to do the same. The distinctive logo is evidence that the materials have been sourced in a way that gives a fair price to the producer.

At the end of this month, we have opportunity to show solidarity with people in the developing world by focussing on Fairtrade.

Our All-Age worship on 26<sup>th</sup> February will help us think about the issues and help challenge us about our shopping habits.

## Church Spring Clean...

**Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> March – 10:00 - 12:30**

It's been a while since we have done this, so it is long overdue...!!

Please come along with buckets, cloths, polish and dusters to help spruce the whole place up for the year ahead. Though regular cleaning takes place, this does not cover all the corners and surfaces. The more the merrier as we enjoy fellowship working together to look after our house of prayer, worship and service.



We have sometimes ended this with a soup and bread snack lunch - does anyone feel able to organise this...?

## New Year All Island Worship Event



**Friday 10<sup>th</sup> February**

**19:15**

**at Christ the King College,**  
Wellington Road, Carisbrooke



**Guest Speaker – Rachel Jordan-Wolf,**  
CEO, Hope Together

...the focus is on the church's response to the cost-of-living crisis and seeking to reach out in practical ways in Jesus' name



Join the united  
year of mission



[www.hope2324.com](http://www.hope2324.com)

### **Christians Working Together in The Bay**

**Shared Afternoon Worship** continues each Sunday at 16:00 moving around various churches.

The venues for February are as follows:

**5<sup>th</sup> Church of the Good Shepherd,** Sandown Road, Lake

**12<sup>th</sup> URC** Shanklin

**19<sup>th</sup> Sandown Baptist Church,** Station Avenue

**26<sup>th</sup> Church of the Sacred Heart,** Atherley Road

**There is a meeting on Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> February at URC at 19:00 -** to discuss plans going forward and how we could work together to serve and witness to the local community. All are welcome to attend.



# Church Members Directory 2023

It is 4 years since the current **Directory of Church Members** was published. During Covid, we all found it more difficult to communicate within the fellowship and the Elders now feel that it is time to update our Directory to aid such communication.

After all, **WE ARE FAMILY!**

I recently sent out a form (email/printed) for members to complete to have their details included in the directory ~ if you have returned it THANK YOU VERY MUCH ~ if not, could I please ask you to get it back to me **AS SOON AS POSSIBLE**.

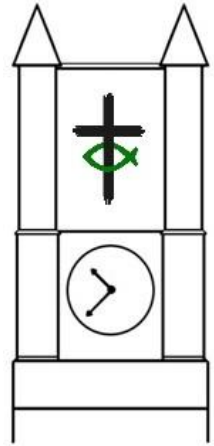
I have plenty of spare blank forms, so if you would like one, please just ask me ...

However, **PLEASE NOTE THAT:**

- ~ Directories will be issued in **PRINTED FORM**, to church members **ONLY** and will include an instruction to only pass on information to others with the **PERMISSION** of the member involved.
- ~ To compile the directory permission for your details to be included is required by law. If no reply is received or you do not want your details included, your **NAME** will be included but your details will **NOT**.
- ~ Please make a note on the form if you have an **ex-directory** telephone number.
- ~ If you would prefer your **details not to appear**, rather than complete the form, you could just telephone me.

*Thanks for helping me out,*

*Robin*



## **Acts: The Third Missionary Journey**

At the end of Chapter 18, we saw Paul embarking on his third and longest missionary journey:

*“After spending some time in Antioch, Paul set out from there and travelled from place to place throughout the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.” (Acts 18:23)*

In chapter 19 Paul once again begins by strengthening the fledgling churches; this time in Cilicia and Galatia, before travelling on to Ephesus.

*For reference, I have reproduced a map of this journey (by permission) at the end. Unfortunately, we are not allowed to include this in the online version but you can see the journey on the back cover of the Church Bibles. I do have a copy of the publication which you are welcome to view at any time.*

\*\*\*

### **Acts 19: 1-22 Paul in Ephesus**

Ephesus was a city of great influence situated on key trading routes, we might call it cosmopolitan. Paul immediately encounters a group of Christians, who like Apollos in the last chapter, have not heard of the Holy Spirit, only having received John's baptism (*this partial faith had likely come directly from Apollos, and they were perhaps not Jewish*).

Paul quickly sets matters right and they experience a “mini-Pentecost”.

*“Paul said, ‘John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus.’ On hearing this, they were baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied.” (vv 4-6)*

Paul spends much time in Ephesus. As usual, he begins in the synagogue, but after opposition, he moves further afield to a gentile lecture hall, and we are told by the end of this period, *“that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord. God did extraordinary miracles through Paul” (vv 10b&11)*



Luke emphasises the special nature of this time in Paul's ministry.

Next, we encounter some Jews invoking *"the name of Jesus who Paul preaches"* (v 13) to drive out demons but their attempt backfires, they are unmasked by an evil spirit and the Jews and Greeks of Ephesus are seized with fear, resulting in the name of the Lord Jesus being held in high honour!

*"In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power" (v20)*

## **God Again Uses That Which Is Intended For Evil To Glorify His Name!**

### **Jesus Cannot Be Used To Suit Our Purposes When We Walk With Him Great Things Can Happen**

We should be asking ourselves, are we clinging onto things that prevent this and are we confident of our place in God's family?

We Must Be Expectant And Ready For The Power Of God Paul Experienced To Be Experienced Also By Us

As Paul prays in his letter to the Ephesians:

*"I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms" (Ephesians 1:18-20)*

## **It Is All About Christ In Us!**

\*\*\*

## **Acts 19: 23-41 The riot in Ephesus**

Luke begins by describing this episode as *"a great disturbance in the way"* (v23) and Brian asked us all to consider if our Christian faith might cause a riot or if it is more likely to cause a coffee morning!

Paul has been in Ephesus for more than 2 years and has generally been well received by the locals, but as is usual in Acts, opposition arises, this time over livelihoods. The people are led to believe that Artemis, their god and focal point of their culture, is being

undermined and a riot ensues, one which we today may recognise more readily from the football terraces!

### **Conflict Is Inevitable When We Preach God's Economy**

*“Soon the whole city was in an uproar. The people seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's travelling companions from Macedonia, and all of them rushed into the theatre together.” (v29)*

The amphitheatre likely held about 25,000 people ~ the scene is chaotic and Paul wants to intervene but is advised to stay out of it.

*“Paul wanted to appear before the crowd, but the disciples would not let him. Even some of the officials of the province, friends of Paul, sent him a message begging him not to venture into the theatre. The assembly was in confusion: some were shouting one thing, some another. Most of the people did not even know why they were there.”(vv 30-32)*

After 2 hours of riotous shouting and chanting a civic leader emerges and is now able to quieten the ugly crowd. He points out that:

- Nothing is at risk ~ the whole world knows who Artemis is.
- No crime has been committed.
- Grievances must be aired through the proper legal channels.
- If this behaviour continues, they will be charged with riot!

His message gets through, the crowds settle and he dismisses them. We see that even when vested interests cause delay to the spread of the word of God,

### **God Defends His Gospel And His Will Will Be Done!**

Going back to Brian's original question ~ how do we ensure that the radical message of Jesus is heard amongst the cacophony of “noise” today?

**We Must Keep Our Eyes Focused On Jesus**

**We Must Speak The Truth In Love**

**We Must Live The Truth In Our Lives**

... and sometimes,

## **We Must Be Prepared To Rock The Boat!**

\*\*\*

### **Acts 20: 1-12 Through Macedonia and Greece, Eutychus raised from the dead at Troas**

After nearly 3 years in Ephesus Paul sets out north towards Macedonia; no doubt he wanted to drop in on the churches in Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea. Luke gives little detail of the route but Paul himself gives us clues in his letters. During this period he wrote letters to the church in Corinth and also the book of Romans.

In verse 1 Luke uses the word “*disciples*” by which he means followers of the way of Jesus Christ. In many ways, this description suits us better than the word “*Christian*”, which tends to mean a follower of “*religion*” to our world today.

We should also note that in verse 2 Luke uses the Greek word “*paraklesis*” which is translated as *encouragement*. This is the same word that Jesus uses to describe the Holy Spirit as “*our comforter*”. Paul is strengthening the believers in any way he can ~ encouragement, comfort, exhortation, consolation ...

Paul then heads south to Greece (Achaia) and almost certainly goes to Corinth, spending 3 months there before returning to Macedonia on his way back to Jerusalem. The party stops for a week in Troas, where something extraordinary happens; Luke sets the scene,

*“On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight” (v7)*

The first day of the week was Sunday which suggests that these early “disciples of Christ” were already celebrating resurrection day ~ just as Jesus told them to do until His return. We know that Paul can talk and he wanted to impart all he could to them and we should note that Sunday was a working day and therefore Eutychus (whose name means lucky) was probably tired and hungry and the atmosphere was stuffy. Luke tells us, with a touch of comedy, that he fell to his death from the third-floor window seat. Extraordinarily, Paul throws himself on the body and miraculously resuscitates the

dead young man. It seems that Eutychus really was lucky! (*although seemingly bizarre, such things took place in the time of Elijah (1 Kings 17) and Elisha (2 Kings 4)*)

Paul immediately returns to the upstairs room and continues his discourse while they break bread and eat. Speaking until daybreak, he leaves the people greatly comforted.

What can we take from this passage into our walk with Jesus?

- Paul was prepared to “dig in”:

### **How Good Are We At Encouraging One Another?**

- Sometimes Christian worship gets interrupted:

### **We Must Not Lose Focus, We Must Persevere**

- Paul drew from Scripture:

### **We Must Continue To Feed On The Word Of God, Expectantly**

\*\*\*

## **Acts 20: 13-38 Paul’s farewell to the Ephesian elders**

Paul begins his journey back to Jerusalem by “island hopping” along the coast of western Asia, stopping off at Miletus where he calls the Elders of the Ephesian church to join him.

- He addresses the Elders, and recaps his ministry:
- He has served the Lord with great humility (v19)
- He has not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to them (v20)
- He calls Jews and Greeks alike to repent and to believe in the Lord (v21)
- He has spoken of the Kingdom ~ proclaiming the whole will of God (vv25&27)

*“And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me –*

*the task of testifying to the good news of God's grace. Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again. Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of any of you" (vv 22-26)*

Surely they must have been sad at the prospect of never seeing Paul again and he leaves them with a warning:

*"Savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth" (vv29b & 30a)*

Paul is speaking about what will happen after he has gone ~ he is speaking to us!

### **We Must Be On Our Guard**

Paul presents several other challenges to us ...

Paul considers his life to be worth nothing

- **Is Our Life Too Important To Us ~ Is Our Goal To Know Jesus?**

Paul always helps those in need

- **Are We Experiencing The Joy Of Giving?**

Paul works hard

- **Do We Apply Ourselves Wholeheartedly To The Call Of Jesus?**

Paul considers himself a shepherd of Jesus' flock

- **Are We Concerned With Looking After His Flock?**

### **Have We Done Everything That We Can To Promote God's Kingdom?**

### **Being A Christian Is A Way Of Life ~ The Way Of Christlikeness!**

Paul sets sail into the sunset. In the next chapter, we see both his return to Jerusalem at the end of this third journey and the beginning of his last journey to Rome.

All Bible verses quoted are from the NIVUK (UK): Holy Bible, New

The image below is taken from the Rose Publishing booklet “Then and Now Bible Maps Insert” (ISBN 978-159636-293-2) and is used with permission of Tynedale House Publishers



*Robin (thanks Brian)*

## Bible Bite

I would like to encourage as many as possible to join us on a Tuesday for **Bible Bite**.



It is amazing how Brian gleans so much, often from very few verses - currently from the Book of Acts, which must involve a tremendous amount of study.

Our visiting speakers are also much appreciated for their insight into scriptural passages.

Please come if you can.

Eileen

# Good News for All!

'Good News' is a contemporary outreach newspaper used by churches and missions to take the good news about Jesus Christ into communities across the UK.

Every month, Good News reaches thousands of readers with true stories of how God is changing the lives of those who put their trust in his Son, Jesus. Using jargon-free language, it also explains how everyone can find a personal relationship with Jesus.

This such a great resource for people to read and then share with others!!

This month's edition (available to read online at [www.goodnews-paper.org.uk/viewlatesteditionpage.htm](http://www.goodnews-paper.org.uk/viewlatesteditionpage.htm)) has several great articles, including the headline article '**Heart-Warming!** - Churches' warm spaces help vulnerable through winter heating crisis

Other contributions include:

- **Love Conquers All** - Why a pastor has married a prisoner, and how God restored a war veteran's marriage
- **Stormzy Looks For Love** - Rap star asks God to lead him to the right lady
- **Miss Universe Finds Her Star** - Former beauty queen is glad her boyfriend shares her faith
- **My Sweet Lord** - George Harrison's friends say he found Jesus in the end
- **Tackling Motor Neurone Disease** - Ex-football chaplain says: 'I'm living life to its fullest - with Christ'
- **Mental Health Crisis** - Social scientists blame West's loss of faith for crisis among young





## Open the Book – God’s Gift to Schools.

Last year, The Bible Society brought out a lovely Christmas booklet called ‘Amazing Days’. The Open the Book teams in The Bay area and Ryde decided to give a copy to each of the 780 children we serve in Godshill, The Bay and Dover Park primary schools. But by November they had sold out! Instead, we were offered other booklets and advised to purchase 800 because the price per copy would be discounted from £2 to 30p.



We did so, with assistance from Brian, and so were also able to give a booklet to all eleven children then attending Chillerton and Rookley School, which is run by the same foundation as Godshill.



From ‘Amazing Days’ we presented the stories of ‘The Shepherds’ in December. With Roy and Melodie away, we really struggled after Christmas. Bill and Julie, who arrange the assemblies and transport the props and costumes, will be away for a month in the Autumn. How will the team manage then, especially as the others arrive by bus? Then Bob White preached about Gifts on Jan 8<sup>th</sup>. Bob said that, if God was appointing us to something, He would always provide the resources needed. If the resources are lacking, could this be an indication that what we are doing is not of God, or has accomplished what He intended and it is time to celebrate its completion? Even with assistance from temporary helpers, we were barely able to present ‘The Star Watchers’. We decided that,

unless a minimum of three more people (and transportation!) joined by Easter, The Bay team would have to cease.

In the hall of The Bay School on Jan 10<sup>th</sup>, more than 400 children, gazed up at us expectantly. Thankfully, one of the gifts the Lord has given Julie is the ability to project her voice. Whist narrating the story, she spoke the lines of Herod in a nasal accent.



Assembly ended. We were clearing away when the support worker of a child who is blind wanted to introduce the child to us. To protect identity, we will call the child Jo. She said that Jo had laughed out loud whenever 'Herod' spoke. Jo then repeatedly asked to hear the voice again, and gave a delighted laugh each time. Claire carried some of the props to Jo. Two of the gifts are in beautifully shaped containers which we encouraged Jo to feel. Jesus was a toddler by



the time the Star Watchers arrived in Bethlehem. Jo joyfully ran hands over the doll's hair, fingers and toes, laughing all the time.

On returning home, we emailed Diane, our contact at The Bay, and asked whether the support worker would have time to read 'Amazing Days' to Jo. If so, we had a copy we could drop off at the school. Diane responded: 'I saw Jo after your assembly and Jo was still laughing about it. That would be fantastic. I am sure Jo would enjoy hearing (the

Christmas stories) again.' We then remembered that The Lion Storyteller Bible, which was chosen when Open the Book began 23 years ago, came with four CDs. They contained all the stories. We played some of them and discovered that the storyteller uses numerous different voices. Into the bag containing 'Amazing Days' we put the CDs and a copy of The Lion Storyteller Bible; a gift to the school. How amazing that Jo, and possibly other children who are visually impaired, may be listening to more than 70 Bible stories. How can we possibly stop?

We decided to contact other congregations in the hope of recruiting more storytellers and Brian agreed for us to present Open the Book during shared worship on 29<sup>th</sup> January. If you know anyone who might be interested in this ministry, please encourage them to contact any of the team. Children love it, the schools love it, and the Ofsted inspectors who watched an assembly at Dover Park told the Head Teacher they loved it! Training is provided, it's terrific fun, takes up one morning a week and there are no lines to learn.

Julie

### **Connection Quiz**

1. What colour was the engine 'James' in the Thomas the Tank Engine stories?
2. Which British group had a hit with 'You Spin Me Round' in 1985? ?
3. What was the second book published, of seven novels, in The Chronicles of Narnia series?
4. What was the nationality of the singer Johnny Logan?
5. So, what is the **connection** between the answers to questions 1 - 4?
6. And bonus question... where was the cover photo taken? Hint: it was taken in Normandie, France



Answers are on [page 47](#)



## SAFEGUARDING TRAINING

**Part 1 - Thurs 16 March 2023**

**Part 2 - Thurs 23 March 2023**

**Part 3 - Thurs 30 March 2023**

**Virtual sessions on Zoom  
16:00 - 17:30**

A full day's training for all individuals working with children, young people and adults at risk. Also important for Ministers and Elders of the Church. The course covers:

- **Policy and Programme**
- **Premises** (risk assessments, security, accidents and first aid, fire safety, Transport)
- **People** (recruitment, working together culture, communication online & phones)
- **Protecting Children and Adults at Risk** (forms of abuse, recognising signs of abuse, responding to concern or disclosures, reporting structures)
- **Paper Trails** (forms, records, registers,)
- **Safer Church Culture**

Certificates are presented to those completing this training course.

*Trainers - Phil Ray and Ruth White, Children's & Youth Development Officers*

**For more information and to book your place please contact:  
[bookings@urcwessex.org.uk](mailto:bookings@urcwessex.org.uk) / 023 8067 4513**

## **Thy Kingdom Come ... Pentecost 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2022 ... (Day 8)**

We are continuing to look at Peter's first letter during the devotionals associated with Thy Kingdom Come (2022) ~ a global initiative that invites Christians around the world to pray for more people to come to know Jesus.



These reflections were delivered through a voice recording, try to imagine as you read them that you are listening and responding ...

The overall purpose is to ask God to empower us to become effective witnesses for Jesus each day.

**P**, pausing to be still ...

**R**, rejoicing with a Psalm and reflecting on the early church ...

**A**, asking God to help us and others ...

**Y**, yielding to His will in our lives, come what may...

\*\*\*

### **Suffering (Phil Togwell)**

As I enter prayer now, I pause to be still; to breathe slowly, to re-centre my scattered senses upon the presence of God.

***Creator God, who formed humanity from dust, breathe in me again. Revive me and sanctify me by the power of Your Spirit. Set my heart on fire with the good news of Your gospel.***

I choose to rejoice in God's presence today, joining with the ancient praises of all God's people in the words of Psalm 71:

***"In you, LORD, I have taken refuge;  
let me never be put to shame.  
In your righteousness, rescue me and deliver me;  
turn your ear to me and save me.  
Be my rock of refuge,  
to which I can always go"  
(Psalm 71:1-3a)***



Today I am continuing to reflect on the Apostle Peter's first letter, which was written to believers living across the region of Asia Minor, who were suffering persecution because of their faith in Jesus.

***"For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit." (1 Peter 2:9&10)***

Archbishop Justin Welby comments on the passage as follows:

"In this passage, Peter places suffering on a whole new, cosmic axis. What God has done for us reverberates around the whole universe, and yet is centred on one beaten, broken man. Later, Peter writes: "You are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed". Our sufferings are not trivial to the God who intimately knows suffering. But they are not final either. On the other side of suffering is victory. For what took place in Jesus takes place in us – death in the body but being made alive in the Spirit."\*

In what ways am I suffering right now?

***Father God, I bring my suffering - my struggling, my pain - to You. Where it is ongoing, I ask You for the grace and strength to endure. And help me to remember that suffering is not final, that there is victory on the other side.***

Peter's letter was written to believers in the region of Asia Minor, which is roughly what we now know as Turkey. Today, only 0.2% of the population there are Christians, and it isn't easy for them to practise their faith.

***Lord Jesus, I pray for my sisters and brothers in Turkey - protect them, and give them strength and courage to share their faith with others.***

As I return to the passage, I open my ears to hear Your word, and my heart to yield to Your will once again.

***"For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit." (1 Peter 2:9&10)***

## **The Link** - February 2023

Being a Christian doesn't give me a free pass to avoid suffering or an instant solution to it. It doesn't stop bad things from happening to me. I will feel pain. I will grieve the loss of those I love. I may experience hostility and even violence because of my faith. But I will do none of this alone, says Peter. Christ brings me to the God who suffers, who comforts me, and ultimately delivers me.

**Lord Jesus, I surrender my suffering and my struggling to You. I'd much prefer an easier life, but I trust You in the times and the places where things aren't easy. Let Your will be done, and Your kingdom come, in me and through me.**

And now, as I prepare to take this time of prayer into the coming day, the Lord who loves me says in John's gospel:

**"Very truly I tell you, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy."  
(John 16:20)**

**Father,  
help me to live this day to the full,  
being true to You in every way.  
Jesus,  
help me to give myself away to others,  
being kind to everyone I meet.  
Spirit,  
help me to love the lost,  
proclaiming Christ in all I do and say.  
Amen.**

*\*The extract from the thoughts of the Most Reverend Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury, is from the Thy Kingdom Come Novena 2022 (page 18), which can be downloaded and read in full at: [www.thykingdomcome.global/resources/new-2022](http://www.thykingdomcome.global/resources/new-2022)*

These Thy Kingdom Come devotionals were included in a much wider prayer initiative ~ 24/7 Prayer (Peter Grieg) ~ which provides Bible reflection and prayer twice daily (morning and evening). You can access these through an app, **Lectio 365** ~ for more details go to: [www.24-7prayer.com/dailydevotional](http://www.24-7prayer.com/dailydevotional)

*Robin*



*All Bible verses quoted are from NIVUK (UK): Holy Bible, New International Version® Anglicised, NIVUK® Copyright © 1979, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.*

## **Changes to 'Every Day With Jesus' and 'Inspiring Women Every Day' daily Bible reading notes.**

From January 2023 the publisher of these two series of Bible reading notes has made several changes. The two publications have been combined into a single publication with the title 'Every Day With Jesus'.

In addition to the daily Bible reading notes the publication now also includes....

- What some other readers from around the world think
- How the notes have made an impact in prisons and places where hope has been given through reading the devotional
- Prayer Track - suggested ways in which you can pray for your community, the UK and the world.

A variety of authors have been invited to contribute to the Bible reading notes. Access to the notes is free and is available in a choice of formats;

- printed copies
- via daily emails
- as an eBook
- a PDF download
- daily listening via a podcast

The notes, via your preferred option, can be requested through the website [www.waverleyabbeytrust.org](http://www.waverleyabbeytrust.org) or by telephoning 01252 784700



## Unconditional Love

**As we start a new year let us look at two constants in our walk with Christ ~ namely that God's love for us is the great eternal constant and that nothing is impossible for and with Him. This is what Neil has to say about these things:**

### **The Great Eternal Constant**

**“See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!”  
(1 John 3:1)**

Have you ever felt that God is ready to give up on you because, instead of walking confidently in faith, you sometimes stumble and fall?

Do you ever fear that there is a limit to God's tolerance of your failure and that you are walking dangerously near that outer barrier or have already crossed it?

I have met a lot of Christians like that. They think that God is upset with them, that He is ready to dump them, or that He has already given up on them because their daily performance is less than perfect. It's true that the walk of faith can sometimes be interrupted by moments of personal unbelief or rebellion, or even satanic deception. It's during those moments when we think that God has surely lost His patience with us and is ready to give up on us. The temptation is to give up, stop walking by faith altogether, slump dejectedly by the side of the road, and wonder, "what's the use?" We feel defeated, God's work for us is suspended, and Satan is elated.

The primary truth you need to know about God for your faith to remain strong is that His love and acceptance are unconditional. When your walk of faith is strong, God loves you. When your walk of faith is weak, God loves you. When you're strong one moment and weak the next,

strong one day and weak the next, God loves you. God's love for you is the great eternal constant amid all the inconsistencies of your daily walk.

God wants us to do good, of course. The apostle John wrote, **"My dear children I write this to you so that you will not sin" (1 John 2:1a)**

But John continued by reminding us that God has already made provision for our failure so His love continues constant despite what we do:

**"But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:1b&2)**

**Lord, by Your Grace, give me strength to overcome my failures; strength to see Your unconditional love in my life and strength to meet the needs of others.**

## **Nothing Is Impossible With God**

**"I am the Lord's servant, Mary answered. May your word to me be fulfilled. Then the angel left her." (Luke 1:38)**

If God wants something done, can it be done? In other words, if God has a goal for your life, can it be blocked, or is its fulfilment uncertain or impossible? I am personally convinced that no goal God has for my life is impossible or uncertain, nor can it be blocked.

Imagine God saying, "I've called you into existence, I've made you My child, and I have something for you to do. I know you won't be able to do it but give it your best shot." That's ludicrous! It's like saying to your child, "I want you to mow the lawn. Unfortunately, the lawn is full of rocks, the mower doesn't work, and there's no gas. But give it your best shot." Even secular scholars say that issuing a command that cannot be obeyed will undermine authority.

God had a staggering goal for a little maiden named Mary. An angel told her that she would bear a son while still a virgin and that her son would be the Saviour of the world. When she inquired about this seemingly impossible feat, the angel simply said:

**"For no word from God will ever fail." (Luke 1:37)**

You wouldn't give your child a task he couldn't complete, and God doesn't assign to you goals you can't achieve. His goals for you are possible, certain and achievable. When God's will for us appears impossible, let's say with Mary: *'May your word to me be fulfilled.'*

Imagine the overwhelming assignment that confronted Mary. She was to have a baby without being with a man. She was to raise the child who would save the world. The entire course of history would be altered, and the eternal destiny of believers would be changed. The fact that today we celebrate Christmas is proof that Mary's child Jesus was indeed the world-changing Son of God.

Despite the staggering nature of the task announced by the angel, Mary gave herself to accomplish God's will. God is still looking for a few willing servants who will dare to believe that nothing is impossible with God.

**Lord, I yield to You as Your servant. I choose to believe that whatever You want me to do I can do.**

*Neil Anderson*

***Freedom in Christ Ministries***

*Used by permission*

Let us all seek to know our Lord more clearly, to love our Lord more dearly and to follow Him more nearly every day of 2023!

**Lord, thank You that Your love is an ever-present constant in my life and that with You nothing is impossible.**

**May Your Word guide me in all things, may I immerse myself in it daily, and may I persevere in doing Your Will today, and in all my days to come.**

**I ask this in the name of Your Son, our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.**

*Robin*

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# Helpful Resources

The **CARE Prayer Diary** from **22<sup>nd</sup> January - April 2023** is now available at the back of church.






For those unfamiliar with **CARE's** ministry, the following gives a brief snapshot:

**FOR MORE THAN 35 YEARS, CARE HAS BEEN A VOICE FOR TRUTH IN THE PUBLIC SQUARE.**

Our mission is to bring a uniquely Christian insight to the policies and laws that affect our lives.

We believe in a better story for our society and culture, one where the life of every human being, from conception to natural end, is respected and upheld.

## WHAT WE DO

 <p><b>Equip individuals</b> and the local church for prayer and action</p>	 <p><b>Impact</b> the political world</p>	 <p><b>Provide research</b> briefings for parliamentarians</p>	 <p><b>Train Christian graduates</b> through the CARE Leadership Programme</p>	 <p><b>Support the vulnerable</b> through advocacy</p>
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The new issue of the **Prayer Diary** has the following, giving a prayer for each day, which covers many aspects of our national life and further afield and enabling informed prayer:

- Overcoming Discrimination
- Healing and Health
- To Love and to Cherish
- Caring for Children
- Ministries of Mercy
- Integrity in Trade

## ***The Link*** - February 2023

- Equality and Equity
- World Politics
- Protecting the Planet
- Older People
- Persecuted Christians
- Future Hope Responding to Poverty

**Do help yourself to a copy** (or download a pdf version from [care.org.uk/our-publications/prayer-diary](https://care.org.uk/our-publications/prayer-diary)) - it can truly inform and strengthen our prayer lives.

**Secondly**, the **winter issue** of **Christian Institute's** newsletter is also now available at the back of church (and [www.christian.org.uk/resource/newsletter-winter-2022/](https://www.christian.org.uk/resource/newsletter-winter-2022/)).

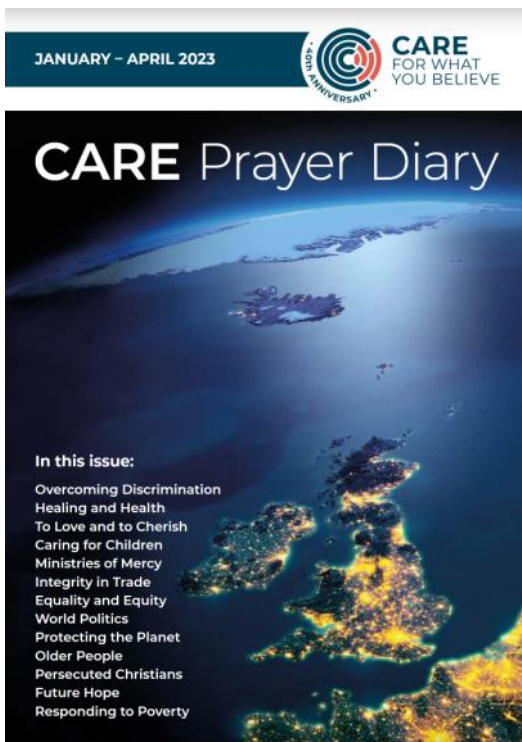
The **Christian Institute** fulfils a vital ministry of monitoring the laws and policies that affect our lives as Christians and the life of the nation as a whole and providing support and advocacy where needed.

**Again, do please take or download a copy** - this is another vital 'tool' in enabling us to care and be informed, to pray and if necessary take action by making our voices heard by supporting this ministry.

Prayer is a very vital part of the **Christian Institute's** calling - for our national leaders, religious liberty, our schools, sanctity of life, gender ideology and many other aspects of our society's life.

Their regular newsletters and briefings are therefore also so helpful alongside **CARE's Prayer Diary**.

PS Another helpful leaflet - '**Ten Ways to Pray about the Cost of Living Crisis**' has recently been published by **CARE** - we hope to have copies of these shortly at the back of church, or visit



[care.org.uk/prayer/ten-ways-to-pray](https://care.org.uk/prayer/ten-ways-to-pray).

### **‘Be faithful in prayer,’ Romans 12:12**

Do ask if you’d like to know more about these ministries and how to get their latest news and resources.

Every blessing

Jane

*Sources: CARE and Christian Institute - Used by permission*

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## **2023 Winter News**



### **Street Pastors**

A few of our faithful Street Pastors have recently stepped down but patrols in Newport and Ryde have continued. Winter can be a tough time to be out in the night, walking the streets, but this has not stopped our amazing Volunteers. New opportunities are becoming very apparent, and ‘where God guides, He provides’.

We have made some good connections with door staff at venues, which is always encouraging as they now ask us to watch out for certain people who need some help getting home or for safety reasons as they are too intoxicated to realise what they are doing. Changes in the ‘night-time economy’ and issues around anti social behaviour with youth earlier in the evenings are challenging



## ***The Link*** - February 2023

us to look again at the when and where of our patrols, the aim being always to walk with Jesus in the times and places of greatest needs.

Please give thanks to God and pray for:

- Patrols in Newport currently planned for 10<sup>th</sup> & 25<sup>th</sup> February and 3<sup>rd</sup> & 18<sup>th</sup> March
- Patrols in Ryde currently planned for 3<sup>rd</sup> February and 3<sup>rd</sup> March
- Improved communication with the Police so that patrols match their priorities
- Complete, Spirit-prompted obedience and anticipation of more volunteers

Thank you for reading our news and supporting us in prayer. Together, we put a smile on God's face!

## **School Pastors**

Although unsettling for some, the current reorganisation is an exciting opportunity to see what the Father is doing and follow the Holy Spirit's lead.

2022 was an exciting year of School Pastor growth and immense challenge. So many school staff members have suffered with their mental health, but our positive relationships with them are developing in line with those with students.

With 14 School Pastors and 13 dedicated Prayer Pastors serving 4 schools there is so much for which to be thankful. And the gift of a Year 11 student "With thanks for the School Pastor Team" touches the heart.

Please give thanks to God, and pray for:

- Wisdom and vision as we take IoWSP forward and seek to recruit more volunteers
- New and improved partnerships, especially with other youth organisations

- Continued favour in our 4 schools
- Growth in faith and anointing among those keeping in step with the Holy Spirit

## **Prayer Pastors**

Prayer Pastors support every patrol and mentoring session in Jesus' name. Will you join our team?

## **Restructuring**

With Andrew stepping down as Street Coordinator, we are looking for God's guidance on our structure.

## **Finance**

Please give thanks for all donations and grants.

## **Meet the Team**

We have over forty wonderful Volunteers. Sally and Suzanne are our lovely staff members, caring and coordinating as we look to reshape. Andrew, Bob, Emma, Georgie, Kevin, Ian and Tracey make up our truly ecumenical Board of Trustees.

## **Coming Soon and More Info**

Check out our website and Facebook pages:

<http://iowstreetpastors.org.uk/>

<https://www.facebook.com/iowstreetpastors>

<https://www.facebook.com/iowschoolpastors>

for new videos aimed at recruiting new volunteers and keeping people informed

*Isle of Wight Street Pastors (including School and Prayer Pastors)  
c/o Castlehold Baptist Church, High Street, Newport, PO30 1BH*

[sp@iowstreetpastors.co.uk](mailto:sp@iowstreetpastors.co.uk)

## World Watch List 2023 - Where has life got easier and harder for Christians?

Every year, the release of the Open Doors World Watch List shows that Christian persecution has got worse in some countries – while believers in other countries have seen a change for the better. This year, why not ask God to put a country from the World Watch List on your heart to pray for throughout 2023?

### **Countries Where Persecution Has Got Worse**

Overall, persecution has intensified against Christians across the world. The number of Christians facing persecution and discrimination has remained approximately the same –

360 million, which is 1 in 7 Christians worldwide – but the level of persecution has worsened. That only happens because the church is growing and active, and Jesus knew it would happen: *“Remember what I told you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.”* (John 15:20). Let’s keep praying for our brothers and sisters to be resilient, faithful and even joyful in the face of extraordinary risks, dangers and persecution.

Below are some of the countries that have risen on this year’s World Watch List:

### **North Korea (1)**

North Korea is again number one on the World Watch List: the place where Christians face the most persecution for following Jesus. It had been number one since 2002 – last year, even though the nation fell a place, persecution was worse than ever. This year, the persecution score of 98/100 is the highest a country has ever received in 30 years of World Watch List research.



## **Latin America**

The region that has seen the sharpest increase in persecution is Latin America, with four countries rising substantially. Mexico (38, up five places), Colombia (22, up eight places), Cuba (27, up ten places) have all risen, and Nicaragua (50, up 11 places) is in the top 50 for the first time.

Corrupt and ineffective governments, particularly in the rural areas of Mexico and Colombia, have created space for criminal groups and ethnic leaders to grow in influence and persecution.

In Cuba and Nicaragua, repressive governments are intensifying efforts to suppress those they deem opponents to their rule. In Nicaragua, especially, the silencing of Christians has become increasingly apparent, with churches that speak out against injustice and human rights violations by the government viewed as troublemakers.

### **Comoros (42)**

Along with Nicaragua, the other country entering the top 50 is Comoros – which has risen 11 places on the World Watch List. The nation has seen a rise in incidents of violence, and increased pressure from government and in local communities.

## **Sub-Saharan Africa**

Violence against Christians in sub-Saharan Africa has hit new heights as jihadists seek to make Africa the first Islamic continent. This is already having catastrophic consequences for the church.

Countries in this region which have risen on the World Watch List include Nigeria (6, up one place) Mali (17, up seven places), Burkina Faso (23, up nine places), Central African Republic (23, up seven places), Niger (28, up five places), Mozambique (32, up nine places) and Democratic Republic of Congo (37, up three places). The trend of Islamic militant violence in sub-Saharan Africa has been seen over several years, and continues to worsen.

### **Sudan (10)**

Sudan was one of the good news stories a couple of years ago, with steps taken towards religious freedom including the end of apostasy

laws. Sadly, though, Sudan has re-entered the top ten on the World Watch List after dropping out from 2020-2022.

In October 2021, the military effectively conducted a coup that ended the power-sharing agreement with the civilian members of the transitional government. In August 2022, the government established a community police which resembles the disbanded morality police. Power is now firmly held in the hands of the military. Many believe that Sudan will return to the authoritarian years of ousted leader Omar al-Bashir; this could undo the positive steps made towards religious freedom under the transitional government. In general, persecution of Christians has intensified, both in terms of violence and in the pressures they face.

### **Syria (12)**

Syria has risen three places on the World Watch List mainly because of an increase in violence. Last year, three Christians were killed because of their faith and at least five were kidnapped. Dozens of churches, monasteries, Christian cemeteries and other buildings vital to the Christian community were attacked, damaged or looted in the west and northeast of the country, mostly due to intense shelling by Turkish forces, or by criminals.

### **Countries That Fell on the World Watch List**

There are a number of countries which have dropped in the ranks on this year's World Watch List. In some countries this shows a real answer to prayer – sadly, in others, it's not necessarily because levels of persecution have decreased.

### **Afghanistan (9)**

Afghanistan was number one on the World Watch List 2022, and has fallen eight places. This is largely because, in the past year, the Taliban has turned their attention to consolidating power and have not been explicitly targeting non-Muslims. This means there have been fewer violent incidents against Christians that can be clearly linked to their faith. In this complex situation, persecution is affecting almost everyone in many different ways. Sadly, life has not become easier for the small number of Christians who remain in Afghanistan – but it's harder to clearly associate the persecution they experience

with their faith.

### **Qatar (34)**

Qatar fell 16 places on the World Watch list, from number 18. The country has seen a reduction in opposition towards Christians, which is largely due to no churches being closed in 2022. This may be linked to the FIFA World Cup and the spotlight it put on the country's human rights record – and it was also a time when many Christians around the world, including Open Doors supporters, were faithfully praying for our Qatari brothers and sisters.

That said, a significant number of churches closed during the pandemic have not been allowed to reopen, and pressure on Christians – especially converts from Islam to Christianity – remains at an extremely high level. Our church family in Qatar still need our prayers.

### **Egypt (35)**

Egypt has dropped 15 places on the World Watch List, mainly because there have been fewer reports of violence against Christians, including fewer faith-based killings and instances of properties being attacked. While violence against Christians remains high, this is still an encouraging answer to prayer – and we can join in praying that this trend continues.

### **Sri Lanka (62)**

A couple of years ago, Sri Lanka was at number 30 on the World Watch List – because of the Easter church bombings in which more than 250 people were killed. The nation has continued to fall down the World Watch List, and is now outside of the top 50 at number 62. This is an encouraging answer to the prayers of Sri Lankan believers and those who support them.

### **Every prayer counts**

There were smaller drops in position on the World Watch List, and persecution score, for Libya (5), Saudi Arabia (13), Iraq (18), Vietnam (25), Laos (31), Oman (47) and Jordan (49). While these numbers aren't enormous, each change for the better represents answers to prayer – and Christians who were able to follow Jesus a little more freely than the previous

year. We join with believers from these nations in praising God for these changes.

### **God's church is growing!**

Despite persecution, God is still in control – and more and more people are choosing to follow Him. Even in countries where persecution is rife, people are coming to faith and taking extraordinary risks to be Christians. We know that churches that actively share the gospel are often targets for attack and discrimination, but that God has the ultimate victory, and He says, “I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand” (Isaiah 41:10).

### **Please Pray**

Father God, thank You for loving all Your children so deeply and eternally. We rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn – giving thanks for countries where persecution has eased, and asking for Your help and strength for Christians facing worsening situations. Speak Your words of love to these courageous believers, we pray.

Amen.

*Source: [Open Doors](#) - used by permission*

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## **Prayers requested for the 2024 URC Prayer Handbook**

Your prayers for the 2024 Prayer Handbook, with the theme Full to the Brim, are now invited.

Prayer Handbook Editors, the Rev Susan McCoan and the Rev Stephen Ansa-Addo, URC Ministers at Ealing and Wembley Park, Reading and Hungerford respectively, invite you to consider the theme and the ways it relates to the church and its life and work, as well as your personal experiences.

As well as the usual Lectionary-based prayers, there are prayers for everyday and extraordinary use.





Wherever you are, wherever you have been, whatever the journey which moves you to write, we would love to hear from you.

You are invited to write as you would pray – no special words or format is needed – to allow us the privilege of sharing your prayers with others in the URC and beyond.

You can submit a maximum of four prayers to be considered, which must be your own – original work for which you have copyright. Materials you have written for local church use, or prayers for private or corporate use can also be submitted for consideration.

While the prayers can draw on any relevant and topical theme, you are asked to avoid direct reference to specific/immediate events which may cause the prayers to become quickly dated.

You don't have to fit your prayers to the Lectionary, but if you wish to do so, please indicate what week or readings you have used.

To help with formatting, prayers should be a maximum length of 20 lines, each line having no more than 60 characters including spaces and punctuation. Please give each prayer a title.

The editors look forward to receiving and reading all submissions but cannot guarantee that every prayer will be included in the final handbook. Copyright for any prayers used will be held jointly between the author and the URC.

**The deadline for submissions is 24<sup>th</sup> February 2023**, and you will be informed by late March whether your prayer(s) will be included. If your prayer is to be used, we will engage with you as follows:

- The first edit of your writing and its return to you will be made to by mid to late April for you to accept, consider and address any suggested changes or rewrites. Submitting prayers for consideration includes your permission for them to be edited.
- Your final re-worked version will be expected by early May so the Editors can have the final text ready by the end of June.

We thank you in advance for your thoughtful and prayerful writing.

Please submit your prayers, or any questions about the prayer handbook or the process, by email to: [phb@urc.org.uk](mailto:phb@urc.org.uk).

# Focus

**on our Christian Brothers and Sisters being persecuted for their faith**

***Church bombing, pastor killed and kidnappings: four attacks in sub-Saharan Africa***



Four separate attacks in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria and Burkina Faso demonstrate escalating violence in sub-Saharan Africa. Please pray for all affected.

## **DRC: At least 17 killed in church bombing**

Believers were gathered as normal for their Sunday service on 15<sup>th</sup> January in Kasindi-Lubirigha, North Kivu province, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). During the service, an explosive device was detonated – at least 17 people were killed, and around 20 others were seriously injured.

So-called Islamic State (IS) have claimed responsibility for the bomb attack, according to a report from Reuters, and the military have reported that a Kenyan national has been arrested in connection with the attack. In the aftermath of the attack, Congolese military spokesperson Antony Mualushayi blamed the Allied Democratic Forces (also known as ADF; this rebel group is affiliated with IS).

“Despite the security measures put in place, the first indications

show that it is the ADF which is behind this bomb attack,” said Mualushayi. “It is clear that this is a terrorist act perpetrated by the ADF terrorists who have suffered casualties in several battlefields by the armed forces of the Democratic Republic of Congo.”

The ADF, which first began as rebel group in Uganda, has been based in the DRC since the late 1990s. The group pledged allegiance to IS in mid-2019. The ADF is suspected of widespread attack on villages in north-eastern DRC, targeting Christian villages, clinics and pastors. Many areas have been emptied of Christians as a result.

"Open Doors condemns this attack in the strongest terms possible and express our deepest sympathies to those affected," says Dorcas Moussi (name changed), an Open Doors spokesperson for Central Africa. "It is horrendous that people who had gathered to worship the Lord were targeted in this way, though sadly, not surprising. For years now the jihadist violence against the mostly Christian population in North Kivu and its surrounding areas in DRC's east have been on the rise, killing thousands and leaving hundreds of thousands trapped in cycles of displacement.

"We call on the government to do all in its power to protect people's freedom to gather and to worship and to ensure that the affected receive relief and rehabilitation. We call on the international community to do all in its power to offer all appropriate support to the government to ensure that there is no repeat of such incidents. We also call on the global church to pray for God's comfort to the bereaved and His provision to His Church in these circumstances."

### **Nigeria: Church leader murdered and worshippers kidnapped**

In two separate Islamic militant attacks in Nigeria, a pastor has been brutally killed while, at another church, a number of worshippers have been kidnapped.

On 15<sup>th</sup> January, suspected members of Islamic militant group Boko Haram attacked a church in Paikoro, northern Nigeria. They set fire to the parish building – a priest, Isaac Achi, was trapped inside and died in the fire. Another priest, Collins Omeh, managed to escape but was shot, and is being treated in hospital.

Father Achi was the first indigenous Catholic priest from Gbagyi/Koro land when he was ordained in 1995. This was not the first time he and his congregations had been victims of attack. At previous parishes, he was the priest of a church bombed by Boko Haram militants on Christmas Day in 2011, an attack in which 44 people died. He also sustained a gunshot wound to his jaw when he went to bless a child during a naming ceremony in 2012 and, the following year, was kidnapped by Boko Haram and rescued by police. Despite the violent persecution he experienced, Father Achi continued to faithfully serve God and Nigerian believers.

Meanwhile, suspected Fulani militants attacked New Life for All Church in Katsina State, also in Nigeria. “The bandits came to the church riding on nine motorcycles and surrounded the church,” a source (who wished to remain anonymous) told Vanguard. “Then they started forcing the members out of the church but the pastor tried to prevent them. So, they beat him up and broke his leg before disappearing with the six married women and two single ladies from the church premises.” Other reports have suggested that an even larger number of women may have been kidnapped.

### **Burkina Faso: More than 50 women abducted by suspected jihadists**

Suspected jihadists have abducted more than 50 women in two incidents in northern Burkina Faso. According to the Guardian, attackers first seized around 40 women on Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> January. “The women got together to go and gather leaves and wild fruits in the bush because there is nothing left to eat,” one resident told media. “On Thursday evening, when they didn’t come back, we thought that their carts had had a problem,” another resident said. “But three survivors came back to tell us what happened.”

Then, on Friday 13<sup>th</sup> January, about 20 further women were abducted from another town in the region. “In both groups, some women managed to escape and returned to the village on foot,” the local resident added. “We believe that the kidnappers took them to their bases.”

Local officials confirmed the abductions but said the army and its civilian auxiliaries have carried out unsuccessful sweeps of the area.

Both attacks took place in the Sahel region of northern Burkina Faso, an area under blockade by jihadist groups and with limited food supplies. The town and surrounding areas are regularly beset by jihadist attacks that often target civilians. It's not yet known if the attacks were religiously motivated – but it is an indication of the vulnerability and risks faced by Christians in the area.

### **Please Pray**

- For God's loving care and healing on all those mourning their loved ones, and those who are scared about future attacks
- For the swift return of all who have been abducted, and speedy recovery for Father Collins
- That the tide of violence in sub-Saharan Africa would be halted and reversed, and for peace to come to the region.

*Source: [Open Doors](#) - used by permission*



**14<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> July 2023**

**County Show Ground, Northwood**

The Lionheart Team are pleased to announce that, following the success of the 2022 Festival and the massive encouragement we have received, we shall gather again in 2023 with a wonderful line-up of Worship Bands and Speakers to be announced in due course.

Tickets are now available via the website:

<https://lionheartfestival.co.uk>

Are you able to volunteer in some way to help with the event...?

## **Around the URC and beyond in seven days:**

### **Reform Editor marks 100<sup>th</sup> edition**

Congratulations to Stephen Tomkins, Editor of Reform, on reaching his 100<sup>th</sup> issue on 18<sup>th</sup> January! Church House colleagues helped Steve celebrate with a cuppa and lots of cake donated by Andy Jackson, Head of Communications.

Steve said of all the issues he's worked on, the URC's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition was one of his favourites and his dream interview would be with singer, songwriter and activist Billy Bragg.

### **New ministers welcomed at Church House**



Church House welcomed seven new ministers on 19<sup>th</sup> January, who were ordained and commissioned last autumn.

The new ministers were due to visit Church House in November but this was postponed due to a national rail strike. When they were

finally able to visit Church House in person the group benefited from networking, staff presentations and met all the different teams.

### **Holy Land's first woman pastor ordained**

Congratulations to the Rev Sally Azar, a Palestinian from Jerusalem, who was ordained at an event at the Lutheran church in the heart of the Old City, becoming the Holy Land's first woman pastor.

Kevin Snyman, The URC's Commitment for Life Programme Officer, said he was delighted to hear about Sally's ordination.



The long running programme offers a wide range of congregational support from local URCs to the Church's global partners. Read the full story here: [bit.ly/holylandpastor](https://bit.ly/holylandpastor).

### **Synod administrator retires after 46 years' service**

Patricia 'Patsi' Dickie, Administrator for the URC National Synod of



Scotland, retired at the end of December after 46 years of supporting Congregational and United Reformed Church local churches and people across the country.

Patsi is wished many good wishes for the next chapter of her life and gratitude has been expressed across the Synod for all her support. Gemma Walker is now the Synod's new administrator.

### **Seasonal superhero returns lost Christmas presents**

A seasonal superhero delivered a true Christmas miracle after returning a package of festive gifts to a retired United Reformed Church minister who dropped them in a river.

The Rev Martin Camroux was walking to Colchester's city centre on 14<sup>th</sup> December to post Christmas presents to his mother-in-law and do some festive shopping, but disaster struck when he slipped on ice and hit his head while making his way across a Bridge, dropping his gifts into the River Colne in the process.



The gifts, which included photographs, a photo calendar and handmade book, floated away while Martin watched on dejectedly. He thought he would never see them again.

But, the following day he was left dumbstruck when he received a visit from Good Samaritan Sue Hyett, who had retrieved his soggy presents from the river.

"The absolutely wonderful Sue knocked on my door and returned the presents," Martin said. "There was a calendar made by my daughter with a photo of family members on each page, which is slightly damp in one corner, a hand-made notebook sent by my son's family, and some photos of our granddaughter. Someday this will be a sermon story and it will be true. It is a story to restore faith in human goodness."

In the true spirit of Christmas, Sue tracked down Martin after embarking on a mission to find him. She knocked on doors and searched all over social media.

Against the odds, she found the owner of the gifts.

## Do You Remember?

A few years ago **Release International** started a campaign of prayer for the country of **Eritrea** and specifically for the **173 Christians** who had been imprisoned for their faith for 10 years or more.

News has recently come through (from [releaseinternational.org/persecution-watch/](https://releaseinternational.org/persecution-watch/)) of the detention of more believers over the New Year period, as follows:

### ***Prayer Alert - Eritrean Christians Arrested***

*17 Jan 2023*

*Please pray for a group of Eritrean Christians who have been arrested by the authorities.*

*Our partner reports that 44 believers – 39 women and 5 men – were seized while gathering in two private homes at new year.*



*The group are being held at Mai Serwa prison on the outskirts of the capital, Asmara.*

*Source:*

[releaseinternational.org/about-release-international/latest-news/](https://releaseinternational.org/about-release-international/latest-news/)

In the current **Voice** magazine, **Release International** has listed persecution hotspot trends in 2023, among them **Eritrea**. Also in this issue, there is the very inspiring testimony of **Twen**, a very courageous believer who has spent 16 years in prison and although severely treated herself, was a tower of strength to fellow believers imprisoned with her, among them Helen Berhane, the Gospel singer.

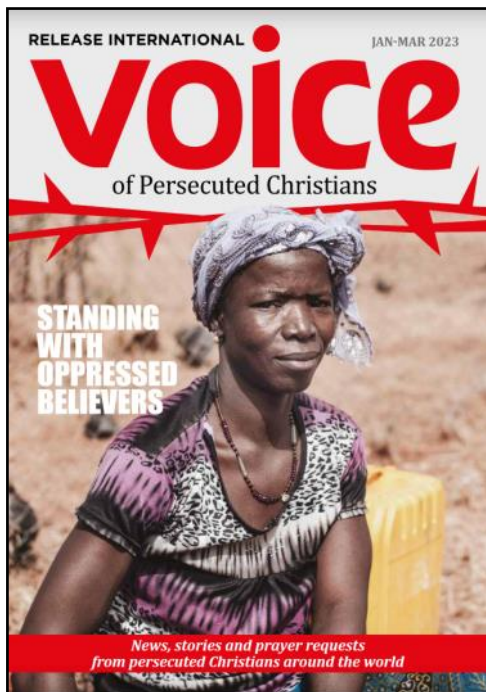
Do read her story - **so very inspiring** - the following is part of how when she reflects on her time in prison and all the suffering she endured and witnessed, she has this message for Christians in the 'free' world.

*'Your prayers saved me. This victory is a victory for all of us.'*

*'The grace of God made everything possible. I feel so blessed to participate in Christ's suffering. Even now I do not have any grudge or hatred against those who put me in prison and tried to make my life miserable. I cannot think anything against them but love them.'*

Persecution is not going away - rather, it is increasing, but the gates of hell will not prevail against the Church of God and the growth of the Kingdom.

Another '**Hotspot**' is **China** and the following news was received on 17<sup>th</sup> January 2023 from [releaseinternational.org/persecution-watch/](https://releaseinternational.org/persecution-watch/):



## **Update**

### **China – Church demolished**

*Armed police pulled down a church in Wenzhou City in China's Zhejiang province last week, according to our partner ChinaAid.*

*On the evening of 11<sup>th</sup> January, the local government of Wenzhou forcibly demolished the Nangang Church without any agreement or compensation plan with the church. Nangang's building and land, which covered an area of eight acres, was worth up to US\$6 million (approximately £4.84 million).*

*Wenzhou City is home to more than one million Christians – one of the densest concentrations of believers in China.*

## **Pray**

- *For the release of all Christians being held in prison for their faith in Eritrea*
- *That God would protect these recently arrested believers and long*

## **The Link** - February 2023

*term prisoners and provide for their needs while using them to share the gospel behind bars*

- *That Nangang Church would receive more than adequate compensation for the loss of its building and land*

### **Praise**

- *For the number of believers in Wenzhou. It is estimated that there are more than a thousand officially registered churches in the city*

It is **so** humbling to read the stories of our fellow Christians - part of our worldwide family of God and of their courage and faith in the face of much pressure and persecution.

**Do please** take a copy of **Voice** (January - March 2023) and **Open Doors** (January/February 2023) - also available to download from [www.opendoorsuk.org/resources/magazine/](http://www.opendoorsuk.org/resources/magazine/).

These magazines are vital 'tools' for prayer and also such an encouragement to see how God sustains His dear children and how the good news of the Kingdom is not bound.

**Thank you** for your prayers and support - gratefully received. Do ask if you'd like to know more of how we can stand alongside our brothers and sisters, as they suffer for their faith.

Blessings in Jesus' Name

Jane H



*Source: Release International (used by permission)*

## The (annual) Christmas Trivia Quiz - answers

- |                   |                             |
|-------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Norway         | 11. Joyeux Noël             |
| 2. King William I | 12. An angel gets its wings |
| 3. Psalm 98       | 13. Germany                 |
| 4. 12             | 14. Take part in a census   |
| 5. Tiny tots      | 15. Lamb mince              |
| 6. 5              | 16. White Christmas         |
| 7. 11             | 17. Before the UK           |
| 8. 359            | 18. 1843 (in London)        |
| 9. His nose       | 19. Canada in 1898          |
| 10. Turkey        | 20. Mistletoe               |

### Last Issue's 'Pot Luck' Quiz Answers

- |                              |                |
|------------------------------|----------------|
| 1. France                    | Milan          |
| 2. 1987                      | 7. 1964        |
| 3. Luxembourg City           | 8. Leo Tolstoy |
| 4. Noviomagus                | 9. Barium      |
| 5. He didn't have a wife     | 10. Fullers    |
| 6. Santa Maria delle Grazie, |                |

### Connection Quiz Answers

1. **Red.**
2. **Dead or Alive.**
3. Prince **Caspian**, Return to Narnia.
4. **Irish.**
5. Connection: They are all **seas**.
6. This issue's cover photo is from:  
Ouistreham in Normandie, France



The Puzzle Pages

Sudoku

A numerical placement puzzle!

To solve it you need to fill the grid so that every column, every row and every 3 x 3 box contains the digits 1 to 9.

Enjoy!

2								
8		3			6			9
			7				6	3
	4			5	8	1		
							5	
	7			4	1	2		
			6				9	2
9		5			2			7
6								

1		2		3					4	5			6
							7						
8					9	10							
					11			12		13			
14													
					15					16		17	
18				19								20	
				21	22	23			24		25		
26		27											
												28	
29						30							



## Last month's sudoku - how did you do?

5	3	8	6	7	9	4	2	1
1	4	6	5	3	2	7	8	9
2	7	9	4	8	1	6	5	3
9	5	1	8	2	7	3	4	6
3	8	4	1	9	6	5	7	2
6	2	7	3	5	4	1	9	8
7	6	2	9	1	5	8	3	4
4	9	3	7	6	8	2	1	5
8	1	5	2	4	3	9	6	7

### Across

- 1 Book of the Bible known for its sayings (8)  
 4 A small fragment of eg bread (5)  
 7 A sheep's bleat (3)  
 8 Reabsorb moisture (9)  
 11 He 'phoned home' (2)  
 12 Not a gas or solid (6)  
 14 Italian sausage (6)  
 15 US aeronautics and space organisation (4)  
 16 Site of St Columba's monastery (4)  
 18 C'est deux, en français (3)  
 20 Sainsbury's clothing range (2)  
 21 Pass another vehicle (8)  
 26 1930 FIFA World Cup winners (7)  
 29 Jewish king at the time of

Jesus' birth (5)

30 Where Saul was heading when he had an encounter (8)

### Down

- 1 The city of love (or *amour*) (5)  
 2 Shakespeare tragedy set in the Ottoman–Venetian War (7)  
 3 BBC puppet duck from the 1980s (3)  
 4 Chemical symbol for Calcium (2)  
 5 Chemical symbol for Radium (2)  
 6 French wine region (8)  
 7 City where the Titanic was built (7)  
 9 Long, narrow strap attached to a horse's bit (4)  
 10 @ (2)  
 13 moving or doing something fast (5)  
 17 Owners of Bembridge Windmill *initials* (2)  
 18 Not lies (5)  
 19 Elvis' song '*You ain't nothing but a - Dog*' (5)  
 22 Abbreviation for the US state Virginia (2)  
 23 Having eyes (4)  
 24 1974 Eurovision winners (4)  
 25 Bananaman's first name (4)

## Can You Guess The Year?

- Open University awarded its first degrees.
- The film *Live and Let Die* was released in the UK.
- The United Kingdom joined the EEC.
- And UK No. 1s included:
  - Donny Osmond with '*Twelfth of Never*'
  - Suzi Quatro with '*Can the Can*'
  - The Sweet with '*Blockbuster*'
  - Wizzard with '*See My Baby Jive*'

*Answer next issue*

## This Issue's 'Pot Luck' Quiz Questions

1. Who won the men's FA Cup in 1998?
2. In what year was the Tower of London opened?
3. What is the capital of Mali?
4. What did the Romans call Chester?
5. Who was King Edward VI's wife?
6. Who is the present Duke of Normandy?
7. When was H G Wells's '*War of the Worlds*' published in the UK?
8. Who wrote the comic strip '*Peanuts*'?
9. On the periodic table, which element is He?
10. When was Mont St Michel, Normandy, founded?

*Answers next issue*

**Please note that the deadline for contributions for the next magazine is:**

**Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> February**

Contributions can be emailed at anytime up to the deadline day to the editor at:

[surc.thelink@btinternet.com](mailto:surc.thelink@btinternet.com)

## Last Issue's Solutions

- Guess the year: it was **1974**

- Last issue's crossword ↓

E	U	R	O	V	I	S	I	O	N	S	O	N	G
N		E		I		T			O				I
T	R	I	E	S	T	E			U		A		B
R		T		I		P	R	E	S	E	N	T	S
E		E		T		H		R			N		O
P	U	R	P	O	S	E		A	E	G	E	A	N
O				R		N	O	S			H		
T	R	E	E		W			E	B	B	I	N	G
	A		A	D	A	M			A		D		
I	D	E	S		R		M	I	G	R	A	N	T
	I		T	E	S	L	A		G		L		H
B	O	A			A		R	E	A		G		O
A		N	O	R	W	A	Y		G		O	H	M
S	U	D				D		S	E	A			A
I		R	E	V	I	V	A	L		N	A	P	S
L		E		E		E		E		I		A	C
D	O	W	N	S		N		D	O	M	I	N	O
O				T	O	T				A			O
N	A	S	C	A	R		O	U	T	L	O	O	K

## **Sunday Service**

### **Morning**

**10:30 Morning Worship** in church

*Broadcast live on YouTube*

➔ **Holy Communion** on 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of each month

➔ **All Age service** on last Sunday of each month

## **Weekday Activities**

**Monday 10:00 Prayer for Israel** on the Church Zoom

**Tuesday 14:00 Bible Bite** ministry in church

*Broadcast live on YouTube*

**19:30 Prayer Meeting** on Zoom

**Wednesday 11:00 The Well**

**Friday 10:00 CatURpillars**

**Saturday 10:30 Coffee Morning** on Zoom

– a chance to catch up and have a chat

Details of any other services/activities that we hold will be posted:

➔ **inside the church**

➔ **on our Facebook page**

➔ **and on our website**

### **Minister:** **Rev Brian Harley**



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01983 862485



[brianharley58@gmail.com](mailto:brianharley58@gmail.com)

*Day off: Monday*

### **Secretary:** **Robin Wightman**



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**Shanklin URC** is a member of the **Evangelical Alliance**

[www.shanklinurc.co.uk](http://www.shanklinurc.co.uk)

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