

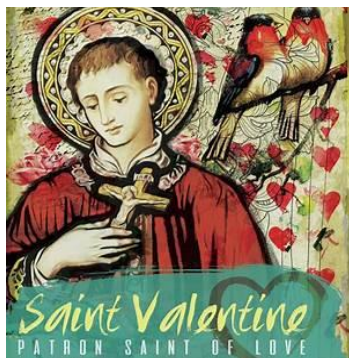


# MAGAZINE OF UNITING CHURCH SKETTY FEBRUARY 2024



*'Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions.'*

*'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son... Since God so loved us, we should also love one another.'*



**This year, Ash Wednesday and St Valentine's Day, Repentance and Love, are marked on the same day – AMAZING GRACE!**

## Uniting together - Caring for all - Seeking God

**Minister:** The Revd Louise Gough

**Senior Elder:** Pat D

**Senior Steward:** Jan C

**Church Related Community Worker:** Adella Pritchard  
(Swansea Region of URC Churches)

**MARCH 2024 MAGAZINE:** All items for inclusion in the March 2024 edition of the Magazine to be sent to Noel D by 13 February at the latest, but sooner if possible. Issue date: Sunday, 25 February.

*NB We have stopped producing audio recordings of this church magazine due to a lack of demand. This is under continuous appraisal and if you think such recordings could benefit you, please let Les W know. If you would like to receive the weekly notices and/or monthly magazine via email (.pdf file) please contact Lynne W.*

**Contacting us:** Uniting Church Sketty, Dillwyn Road, Sketty, Swansea SA2 9AH. Website: [www.unitingchurchsketty.org.uk](http://www.unitingchurchsketty.org.uk)

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The building development was funded by the following



The refurbished hall was funded from the sale of the Bethel building

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## LETTER FROM THE MANSE

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### Dear friends

Sunday nights mean two things to me at this time of year – Evening Prayer, followed by “The Great Pottery Throwdown”. It is another of those elimination programmes with judges (these are unusually positive and affirming), before the winner is proclaimed – but along the way we are treated to the most delightful creativity in clay. Before I started watching the various series, I had no idea what went into making pottery, but now I have a fresh appreciation. Which is perhaps how a ceramic puffin came to make a home on the manse kitchen window-ledge! It’s wonderful to get to know the potters and to see their personalities and style emerge in their colourful creations.

In Jeremiah 18, we read what happens when the prophet Jeremiah goes down to the Potter’s House. There’s an incredible vision of God shaping and reshaping the clay. In case you all rush to check the reference, be aware that the passage goes on to remind the nation that it is in God’s hands, but also that there will be destruction if the stubborn people continue with their own plans, instead of following God’s good ways. Sadly, this has a contemporary ring, because we seem to be the agents of our own destruction (war, climate change). Jesus came to give us life, but so much seems to be dragging us down the opposite path.

The real focus for this letter is the invitation to linger with the image of being clay in God’s hands. Psalm 139 also tells us that God’s hand is upon us. To me, these pictures bring comfort and peace – the authentic experience is that God is never forceful or damaging, and God’s Spirit at work brings light and life. So I imagine God’s hands lovingly shaping my life on the wheel, keeping me from flying off and hitting the wall, and building me back up when I start to wobble and become misshapen. All I need to do is keep returning, so God can shape me into what I most need to be, and so I can be remade in divine love.



In Jeremiah 18, there's also the initial invitation to "go down to the Potter's House" to receive God's message. I love the idea of entering God's dwelling to listen to God and imagine it to be a wonderful place. Resting silently with God is the most profound form of prayer we can engage in – simply being with God and being attentive. I'm reminded of the wonderful words of Psalm 62: "For God alone my soul waits in silence, for my hope is from him." Words worth reflecting and meditating on (while we're in the Potter's House!).

Later this month (February) we will begin the season of Lent – strangely enough, on Valentine's Day! This year, Valentine's Day happens to be Ash Wednesday, when we remember that we are dust and when we repent (turn to God) – a far cry from sentimental romance and roses! But we turn to God in ashes knowing that God loves us, even with all our faults and failings. Lent is the season where we traditionally give ourselves to the things that strengthen our relationship with God (prayer, Bible study, self-examination, loving actions...) so that we are ready to follow Jesus to the cross during Holy Week, and experience the joy and hope of the resurrection. Lent is our admittance to the Potter's House to hear God's message of love in the silence. Silence in prayer is very important – but any prayer is good prayer! For the last few months there has been a new opportunity to pray at UCS. Evening Prayer takes place on zoom each Sunday evening from 7.00pm to 7.30pm (we keep to time). (Please check the notices as sometimes the occasional evening service or circuit event means we can't meet.) Evening Prayer is designed to be stress-free, so you can relish spending time with God without having to say a word out loud (though we always say hello at the beginning and goodbye at the end!). All you have to do is access zoom (using the usual UCS log-in), and you will be led in prayer with some Bible readings included. There is a focus on intercession, and prayers are said for our church and our world, along with traditional reassuring night prayers.

I pray that Lent will be a rich time for you, as you enter the Potter's House to be with God. I pray that you will find much strength in God's presence as you wait in silence and allow God to gently and lovingly hold and shape your life.

Blessings

Louise

*[Photo free from Wiki Commons at [Potter at wheel.jpg \(267×384\) \(wikimedia.org\)](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Potter_at_wheel.jpg)]*

## WORSHIP SERVICES IN UCS FOR FEBRUARY

(ALL AT 10.30am UNLESS OTHERWISE INDICATED)

February 4	Revd Louise Gough (Communion)
11	Heather Coleman
14	Ash Wednesday service at 10.30am
18	Revd Louise Gough and Adella Pritchard
22 (Thursday)	Revd Linda Woollacott (Communion)
25	Revd Beti McNiven

**NB** There will be a short service of led prayer on Zoom every Sunday evening from 7.00 to 7.30pm, led by Revd Louise, unless otherwise notified.



### OUR FEBRUARY COMMUNION COLLECTION

will be for Maggie's. Maggie's is a cancer support charity which receives no NHS funding for the work they do. Anne and Mike W have

received excellent support from the centre at Singleton Hospital and I expect most people know others who have benefitted from their services.

See [https://www.maggies.org/our-centres/maggies-swanseal/](https://www.maggies.org/our-centres/maggies-swanseal)

Susan G



On Tuesday, 13th February, at 4pm pancakes will be served! This will mark Shrove Tuesday, the day before the beginning of Lent. Many thanks to Ian and

Gaynor B and their friends and helpers for organizing this again!

There will be a service for Ash Wednesday, led by Revd Louise, on Wednesday 14th February at 10.30am - a reflective service to mark the start of Lent, with the opportunity to receive the sign of the cross in ashes (optional!).



**Faith and Fellowship** returns for Lent – led by Revd Louise – on Tuesday 20th February for four consecutive sessions at 10am at UCS - all welcome!

## IN MEMORIAM: RENA G

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Rena died at the age of 97 on the 30<sup>th</sup> of December. She was brought up in rural Fife by her grandmother and life for her and her siblings was quite hard. Eventually after school she made her way to Glasgow and then to Edinburgh, where she worked for the railways as a clerk. This gave her access to cheaper travel, of which she took full advantage, going on many holidays. The most momentous trip was one to Ireland where she and a friend took out a boat and got into trouble. They were saved by Jasper and friend and thus began a life-long commitment as Jasper gave up plans to go to America, to marry Rena. After Grant was born in Northern Ireland, Rena felt they would be safer if they left and so they moved to Swansea where Jasper worked for BP Llandarcy.

Rena was always Scottish. I recall her going to see the GP who asked what part of Scotland she came from. This surprised her as she asked me "How did he know I was Scottish?" She never lost her Scottish accent. When she had to move to the West Cross Nursing Home after her stroke, she always said that they made the best porridge she had ever tasted!

Rena and Jasper attended the local Antique Society, the Gardening Club and Rena took a Cordon Bleu cookery course. They were both faithful church members, initially in St. Andrew's URC in Swansea which had a Scottish connection through its former Presbyterian heritage, but they later moved to Bethel URC where they had Scottish friends. Rena contributed her cooking to the Thursday Circle's wonderful teas and to other social occasions.

She found life very difficult after the death of Jasper but sometimes surprised us by succeeding in carrying out some necessary bit of DIY which was right out of her experience, as Jasper always did everything of that nature for her. When we became a Uniting Church, Rena continued her faithful attendance and commitment. Before she had her stroke, she lent Noel a collection of sermons by a Church of Scotland minister, Dr James Stewart, who had influenced her deeply as a young woman. She was very keen for Noel to read it, a collection of sermons which were biblical, deeply theological, socially aware and applied the Gospel in a very powerful way to the issues of the day. The book was still important to her.

Rena spoke very often of her son Grant, his wife Esther and her two grandchildren, who all visited regularly. Grant made regular long trips from Yorkshire when she was in the West Cross Nursing Home and it was very important for him that he was with her the morning she died.

I, as her Pastoral Elder, and Hazel, one of her very good friends, were able to visit Rena regularly towards the end of her life and we have many memories of our visits.

We give thanks for her friendship and her faithfulness and give thanks that we knew her. Her funeral service was held in UCS on January 19<sup>th</sup>.

**Pat D**

## **CHRISTMAS CELEBRATIONS AT UCS**

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Although it seems a long time since the Adventurers and Messy church brought us their nativity production "Round the Back" I thought you might like to see a photo to remind us of the essence of the story.

We note too that it was performed after only one rehearsal, with the youngest performer being just four years old and the oldest – can't say! Then a reminder that our Carols by Candlelight in the evening was shared with a full church all

appreciating the very meaningful service of carols, readings and meditations, put together by our own Rev Louise. **Jan C**

## **A CHRISTMAS CAROL**

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Just a thank you from me, and everyone associated with this production, to every one of you who supported us. The feedback we have received has all been really positive which is always encour-aging, and I know I can honestly say that as group we all enjoyed, the ups and the downs, and we did have both in the weeks and even days before the first

night. As always, the delight of these events is that they can encompass all ages of both our church family and community and bring together those who might not normally be involved with one another. As a bonus, we made a profit of £1400. This means that with the £1000 the church is holding for Madcaps, we have enough to complete the purchase of new chairs for our Wesley Room. Something to be first on the agenda when Mr Jones returns from his sojourn in OZ. **Jan C**





PS For those of you not able to attend, you may like to know you can view the show on YouTube.

### A NEW YEAR'S HONOUR FOR LES W



It is typical of our lovely self-effacing Les that his delight at receiving a BEM in the King's New Year's Honours list was not the Award itself, but that so many people thought him worthy of the Award. It is indicative of the high regard with which he is held by his church family that everyone, without exception, spoke of its being so very well deserved. And, of course, far outside our church circle, Les' Award is being celebrated and commended by all who know him. We who are fortunate enough to know him as

we do, do not need a list of all he does in our church, our circuit, Talking Magazine and the community as a whole. However, it is our pleasure to celebrate with him and Lynne, because as we all know Lynne is always there by his side, supporting and encouraging him. Se are happy that his vision, his exemplary service over so many years, always given quietly and solely for the benefit of others which has been such a huge and lasting benefit to his church family and the community as a whole, has been recognized. So, we join together as we say 'Many, many congratulations, Les, for an Award much deserved, with love and thanks from us all.' **Jan C**

*(See also p23 for more family news! Ed)*

### WESLEY CLUB LUNCH AT NORTON HOUSE



Just to prove Wesley Club do move out of their room in the church – here you see members and friends enjoying their annual lunch at Norton House. **Jan C**



## **WESLEY CLUB 70 YEARS ON....**

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In the 1950s, the then minister of Sketty Methodist Church started a social meeting which was inter and non-denominational. It was named Wesley Club and was open to men and women of all ages. It included a tennis group, drama group, craft, darts and snooker. Eventually the numbers dwindled, until just a few women met in the (old) kitchen.

But all was not lost and as “a Phoenix rose from the ashes” the numbers grew again. Speakers were invited to talk on a variety of subjects, which continues to this day, as well as many hilarious members’ evenings. Wesley Club has always included women who do not attend worship at UCS, but together share a special bond of friendship and care.

It has become a tradition to meet for a new year lunch in early January. This year 30 women enjoyed each other’s company at lunch in Norton House. We were delighted that Louise was able to join us for her first Wesley Club lunch. PS Many years ago one woman was forced to leave Wesley Club when her priest (Catholic) found out and forbade her to attend any longer.

**Janet N**

**FROM MURIEL H, WOKINGHAM:** Revd Linda always sends us a copy of the Magazine and the weekly notices which we enjoy reading. We have a monthly meeting at our church here in Wokingham entitled “Creative Spirit” where, after a time of fellowship, we split into groups to deploy our various personal talents, to express our abilities by craft work and writing etc on the day’s subject. Recent subjects have been Light (Advent), Silence (January), Fresh Air (November). I usually write a poem!! Here is one of them.

### **Fresh Air**

It’s a wonderful gift enjoyed by all:  
The rich, the poor, the young, the old.  
It’s the air God’s given us; the breath of life.  
Not to be seen or felt or to hold.

Yet we use it, inhale it, all the time.  
We would die without it, that is true.  
We thank you God for the air we breathe  
We just have to have it; we also need You.

So please guide our lives in the year ahead.  
We fill our lungs to sing your praise  
As we seek to serve You  
All our days.

*[We're pleased to include this poem/reflection from Muriel. She and Jim have been attending our zoom worship services and evening meetings for prayer regularly and are now very good friends of UCS. Our love and best wishes to you both. ed.]*

## **ACROSS THE GENERATIONS: RONIA AND ALICE MEET TO TALK ABOUT FIJI**

Back in October Ronia E, Alice R and I joined up to have a chat about all



things "Fiji". Ronia will be volunteering out in Fiji, as from March, for several months, and YPF had several events last year to raise money to help her to fund this amazing work. Many years ago, Alice visited Fiji and was able to tell Ronia about the customs and culture of the area, and of Fiji's link with the Methodist Church. They discovered

that the area Ronia will be working in was not that far from where Alice stayed. Alice was able to tell us of some of the history of the area and some of the issues that have caused conflict in the past. Ronia was able to give Alice lots of information about what she will be doing. Ronia will be undertaking an internship with Global Vision International which aims to promote health and well-being in local communities, working with the Community Health Workers. It was so lovely to see young and "not so young" get together and share their experiences.

UCS has been amazing in their support for the YPF fundraising for Ronia and the cheque will be presented to her on 21<sup>st</sup> January, and the total, including gift aid, will be over £1100. A very sincere thanks to all who supported the events and particularly to Alice who was so helpful in giving Ronia so much information. We all wish Ronia the very best of luck in her venture and can't wait to hear all about it when she returns!

**Jackie C**

## ECO (EARTH CRIES OUT) NEWS

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Climate change is a serious and growing concern for all Christians, according to a detailed inter-denominational 'Net Zero' survey carried out by Methodist Insurance via the Bible Society, last summer. The figures clearly show that environmental damage and potential mitigation efforts are the key issues for a significant majority surveyed.



More than 4 out of 5 people surveyed felt a biblical imperative to act, while nearly 95% agreed that “it’s part of the duty of the Church to protect the planet”. Almost 40% had an additional, more practical motivation – the opportunity to reduce costs.

Over 90% felt it was “extremely important” or “quite important” for their church to reduce its climate impact.

The survey makes it clear that there is plenty of room for improvement with more than 80% feeling their church could do more, but that a lack of funds, skills or understanding were among the issues holding them back. Only 20% said that their church was currently measuring its carbon footprint.

There is some encouraging progress in grasping easier environmental solutions – switching to LED lights, reducing paper wastage and training volunteers to ensure that lights and electrical devices are turned off when not in use.

Looking to the future, nearly 70% felt a failure to act on climate change would “alienate younger generations”.

**Janet N**

## COFFEE AND CHAT

Our January Coffee and Chat was planned as OUR FRAMEWORK FOR THE FUTURE, including our Land Management Plan, measuring the carbon footprint of our church and our individual carbon footprints and holding a Hustings before the next general election. More information will be available about these matters in the near future.

**Janet N**

## WALKING GROUP

Haven't we had wonderful weather in December and January! It's with fear and trepidation that a definite date for any walks is published at the moment.



Our next walk will be in February, walking from Langland to Caswell (date tbc). On the other hand we are planning to have a subsidiary group to the walking group which will be a canoeing group. We have in our midst an expert canoeist who can teach us the ropes, so that if it rains, we have an alternate form of exercise!

**WE PRAY**.....with The Bible Society.....for **the Church in China** which is growing fast and needs leaders trained in teaching the Bible....**in Africa** we give thanks that the Bible Society is funding literacy and translation programmes and helping to train a new generation of leaders. We continue to pray for the unfolding tragedies in **Israel/Gaza** and **Ukraine**. We pray for healing for broken lives and peace in those troubled regions.

**Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. AMEN.**

**Janet N**

## NEWS ABOUT JOAN P.

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During the second weekend in December, my aunt, Joan P, moved from her home at Willow Court on Clyne Common, to a care home in Lisvane in Cardiff. Naturally, Joan has been feeling very lonely since John passed away in November 2022, just four months after mum, Joan's sister, passed away. Over the last few months, Joan has had a number of falls in the flat, and she has had to rely a lot more on carers coming in to help her out, as well as having a couple of spells of respite care in Campion Gardens.

For many years, Joan and John were very faithful members at Bethel and they were one of the main reasons for mum and myself joining Bethel URC when we moved to Swansea in 1988. Although they have not been able to attend very regularly over recent years, I know that Joan and John were always very grateful for the very kind and warm welcome they received in UCS, (including occasional church lunches at Yr Hen Dderwen. ed.)

Joan will now be just a short distance from her brother, David, and her son. Tim, and a lot closer to her daughter, Helen. The family are hoping that

friends would like to keep in touch with Joan via letter or card or perhaps by visiting her, if you are in the Cardiff area. Please contact me for more information. Her new home is in a brand-new complex which only opened towards the end of last year.

With grateful thanks, Paul E

## **TWO MESSAGES ON FAIR-TRADE FROM JACKY C:**

1. **Coffee Cupboard.** I purchase the tea and coffee for UCS and there are a few jars and packets of tea and coffee in the cupboard that I do not recognize. It is no problem to keep them in the cupboard but if you have items in there, can I just ask that you label them just so I know who they belong to, and can you check every so often that they have not passed the sell by date. The church has regained its Fair-Trade status and all tea and coffee purchased by myself is Fair Trade, so can I politely ask you to try to use Fairly Traded products whenever possible as this is part of our Commitment as a Fair-Trade Church. There are often spare boxes of tea and coffee in our Fair-Trade cupboard by the stairs so please ask me if you need anything. If anyone notices that we are running low on stock for the Church coffee, please let me know Thank you!
2. **Fair Trade Stalls** over coming months are February 18<sup>th</sup>, March 17<sup>th</sup>, April 21<sup>st</sup>. This year Fair Trade Fortnight is in September (and not February as usual)

## **CHRISTMAS BAGS**

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Photo shows the hand-over to the Unity in Diversity team of the last of the Christmas bags. Many thanks to so many people for help in achieving the number of bags – 90 adult bags and 80 bags/stockings for children. The end result is one UCS can be very proud of. Thank you again!

Linda (all the way from Australia!) (and thanks to Linda and all her helpers. ed)

## BENEVOLENCE PAYMENTS MADE SINCE JANUARY 2024 EDITION

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<b>CRISIS at Christmas</b> (Communion Collection)	£599.55
<b>Alzheimer's Research UK</b> (Coffee Morning)	£537.13
Proceeds collected and taken by ARUK on morning	
<b>Wales Air Ambulance</b> (Communion Collection )	£390.00

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS/THANK YOU

#### **British Red Cross- Turkey/Morocco Earthquake appeal**

Thanks to all at Uniting Church Sketty for your donation (£426.42) which will help us provide lifesaving humanitarian assistance across the region, providing individual support for the most vulnerable, and those who fall through the gaps, making a real difference to people in their hour of need. The Red Cross and the local Moroccan Red Crescent are working together providing emergency first aid to those injured and emotional support to people in shock.

#### **Alzheimer's Research UK**

A very big thank you to everyone at Uniting Church Sketty at our Coffee Morning, which raised £537.13, with £319.15 going to Alzheimer's Research and £218.97 going to the Old Mill.

Both Charities are extremely grateful and your help is very much appreciated.

**Jon D**

### COFFEE MORNING

There will be a coffee morning in the Wesley Room from 10.00am -12.00 noon on Saturday, 3<sup>rd</sup> February, to mark Les and Lynne's Golden Wedding Anniversary. Les and Lynne have selected Alzheimer's Research UK (ARUK) as their charity of choice and all funds raised will go towards their work.

#### **ALZHEIMER'S RESEARCH UK**



ARUK is a dementia research charity in the United Kingdom, founded in 1992 as the Alzheimer's Research Trust. ARUK funds scientific studies to find ways to treat, cure or prevent all forms of dementia, including Alzheimer's disease, vascular dementia, dementia with Lewy bodies and frontotemporal dementia.

## NEW BOOKINGS IN THE BUILDING

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By the time of publication, two new groups are anticipated to have started using our building:

1. A U3A group called 'Armchair Travel' is meeting on the first Friday of the month, 2pm to 4pm in the Wesley Room. Sandra C is a member of the group. More details if you are interested from Richard B or see information about the group at <https://swanseau3a.wildapricot.org/page-18106>
2. An established exercise/dance class is moving to use our Hall on Tuesday evenings 7pm to 8.30pm. The organiser/instructor is Poh-Eng T, Poh-Eng T says this about herself and her experience: *'I have an MA in Dance and Somatic Movement Wellbeing (UCLAN), am a Freelance Dancer, an Environmental Movement Artist and a Somatic Movement Practitioner. It is my heartfelt passion and prayer to facilitate a safe space where healing, creativity and magic can happen. As a buqi energy healer with 23 years' experience, I see movement as vital for our sanity, health and wellbeing. It is our birthright to move and I invite you to take back the agency of your bodily knowing through your unique free movement impulses and kinaesthetic awareness. My long association with Helen Poynor's Walk of Life Programme and completing her Mentorship training last year, has been influential in how I have developed my own teaching practice alongside many years of being a taijiwuxigong (a complete powerful self-healing qi gong system), and Taiji 37 teacher.'*

Cost for 9 weekly classes is £135, £117 or £90 low income. [No class February 13<sup>th</sup>]

Please contact Poh-Eng for enquiries to reserve your place.

3. In February, a new U3A group should be starting, weekly on Friday mornings 10am to 12pm, provisionally called 'Maths for the terrified'. Details from Tony H This is planned as 5 weekly sessions 16<sup>th</sup> February to 22<sup>nd</sup> March.  
<https://swanseau3a.wildapricot.org/page-18114> gives details.

Jeff C

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## BANGLADESH: OUR CHURCH MISSION PROJECT FOR 2024





Rabbir Hossain Bhuyain, 2018

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Greener Bangladesh proposed map.gif](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Greener_Bangladesh_proposed_map.gif)

Our 2024 mission project will be looking at Bangladesh. Rather than having a Methodist project and a URC project this year we will look at one country and how both churches offer help.

Bangladesh is a country in South Asia, located in the delta of the Padma and Jamuna rivers, sharing borders with India, China and Myanmar. It has a population of about 170 million people, making it the eighth-most populous country in the world. The majority of its people are Muslim and speak Bengali, the official language. Bangladesh has a rich and diverse culture, history, and natural beauty but many problems.

Over 40% of the population is estimated to be living below the poverty line. Due to the low-lying nature of the land, it suffers greatly from climate change with increased flooding and erosion of coastal areas. Climate change has also led to crop failure, soil degradation and food insecurity.

Join us in learning about and praying for Bangladesh this year. We are not fundraising specifically for Bangladesh but there will be a chance, as usual, to give to Methodist Mission and Commitment for Life.

Some of the above text taken from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Text of the GNU Free Documentation License](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Text_of_the_GNU_Free_Documentation_License)

**Susan G**

**The Mission, Outreach & Events Committee suggests ways of responding to the challenge of this project:** At its meeting on 16<sup>th</sup> January, the committee discussed possible initiatives in relation to 'Bangladesh: our church mission project for 2024'. The following are some of our suggestions:

- Look out for a display of the Bangladesh National Emblem
- Mission Church service on 30<sup>th</sup> June
- Coffee Morning in aid of Bangladesh on 6<sup>th</sup> July
- Fair Trade products from Bangladesh available at the September Fair Trade Stall
- Sharing recipes using products from Bangladesh

- Prayers and articles in future magazines
- Gathering resources to share with the Adventurers

As Susan explains, rather than having a Methodist project and a URC project this year, we are focusing on one country and exploring how both the Methodist Church and URC offer help to countries such as Bangladesh.

This fits with the committee's Mission Statement:

- *'We wish to develop mission work demonstrated by our united traditions.'*
- *We aim to care for our local community through our church activities and the relationships we create.*
- *We seek God as we strive for social justice throughout the world and care for God's creation.'*

We pray that you will enjoy supporting our Church Mission Project.

**Adella**

## **REVERSE ADVENT 2023**

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This year, we seemed to have had an exceptional response to this appeal to put something into, rather than take something out of, an Advent box. The photograph shows Ian G as he starts to load the goodies into his car to take to the Sketty Food Bank. Our thanks to Ian for all the work he does with this group on our behalf. Additional to the items brought to church our thanks to Allan and Caroline A for circulating the appeal in Admiral's Close and all the contributions which Allan will be taking to the food bank, again in the name of UCS.



In addition, we were able to pass on £85 given in lieu of goods and a further £58 collected from our church family members in place of sending Christmas Cards to church members.

So, a huge "thank you" to everyone who contributed to this appeal in any way. In the aftermath of Christmas, I am sure every contribution will be really appreciated. Jan C

**WHAT THE EU STANDS FOR ON GAZA AND THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT** *(from Mary J, UCS Commitment for Life co-ordinator)*

*Taken from an article by Josep Borrell, the EU High Representative to the Middle East, on what the EU proposes regarding the dramatic humanitarian crisis currently happening in Gaza and to put an end to the vicious cycle of violence (November 2023).*

On 7 October, war flared up once again in the Middle East. The appalling terrorist attack by Hamas, which we immediately condemned in the strongest possible terms, reignited a cycle of violence that escalated into a humanitarian tragedy in Gaza.

The war in Gaza is the outcome of a collective political and moral failure, for which the Israeli and Palestinian people are paying a high price. This price will continue to increase if we fail to act. It stems from a failure to solve the Israeli-Palestinian issue. For decades, the international community has formally committed to the two-state solution, but without putting in place a roadmap to achieve it.

The substance of the Israeli-Palestinian question is a national problem: that of two peoples who have the right to exist on the same land. There is, therefore, a need to share this land. Thirty years ago, with the Oslo Accords, we had an agreement on how to share it. But it has not been implemented. The illegal settlement in the West Bank and violence against Palestinians have been increasing with impunity - and it has become even more brutal after 7 October. And the Palestinian territory has been divided into an archipelago of unconnected areas, making it much more difficult to implement the two-state solution requested by the international community for 76 years.

The military strategy of Israel has to abide by international law, including the law that seeks to avoid, to every extent possible, the death and suffering of civilians. Cutting off water, food, electricity and fuel to an entire besieged civilian population is not acceptable. The scale of bombing is also extremely concerning. A military strategy that ignores the human costs for civilians is not going to work because it risks making a future peace between Palestinians and Israel almost impossible. Yet peace is the only real long-term guarantee for the security of Israel.

We must work on a de-escalation in Gaza and a humanitarian solution. All EU member states back immediate pauses in hostilities and humanitarian pauses to limit the suffering of the Palestinian civilian populations and Israeli hostages.

Once the humanitarian situation is consolidated, it will be necessary to move from humanitarian aid to politics. Our efforts will have to concentrate on a medium- and long-term solution, plan for a permanent stabilization that allows the building of peace between Israelis and Palestinians, and the entire region.

A set of principles was proposed that should guide the EU's actions on Gaza, to be pursued in collaboration with regional and international partners. These can be summarised by: 'No' to the displacement of the Palestinian people. 'No' to the amputation of the territory of Gaza, or its re-occupation by Israel. 'No' to a return of Hamas to govern Gaza. 'No' to the dissociation of Gaza from the overall Palestinian issue. 'Yes' to the installation of an interim Palestinian authority in Gaza. 'Yes' to a stronger involvement of Arab states, if they agree. Finally, 'yes' to a greater involvement of the European Union in the region.

We Europeans, not only out of self-interest, but also out of our moral and political responsibility, have to reinforce our commitment to achieving peace between Israel and Palestine. A significant part of the EU's future global role and, in particular, our relations with many countries of the so-called Global South, will depend on our commitment to help solve this conflict.

[taken from the EU website: [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/what-eu-stands-gaza-and-israeli-palestinian-conflict\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/what-eu-stands-gaza-and-israeli-palestinian-conflict_en)]

### **A JOINT STATEMENT ON POVERTY IN THE UK**

*On January 5<sup>th</sup> church leaders issued the following joint statement. We include it here so that we can be aware that Christian voices (including the Moderator of the URC Assembly and the President and Vice-President of the Methodist Conference) are being raised about the current social and economic issues in our society.*

'We believe that poverty is a scandal, the root causes of which have been neglected by our political leaders in the UK Parliament for too long. As this new year begins, the cost of living scandal is clearly not over for the poorest people in the UK. Around the world, poverty holds too many individuals and communities back from fulfilling their potential.

But we know that poverty is not inevitable – it's a consequence of political choices and priorities. With a General Election on the horizon, we call on our political leaders to make tackling poverty a priority. In line with our existing commitment to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, this should include

setting out clear plans to eradicate extreme poverty and reduce overall poverty by at least half, in both the UK and globally, by 2030.

Whilst our work to tackle poverty in the UK and around the world takes different forms, we are united in our belief that the human cost of failing to take action now is too big and too damaging to ignore. This year must mark the beginning of the end for poverty.

Inspired by our faith, we believe in a future where everyone has an equal share in the world's resources. Where everyone has enough to eat. Where all of us are able to wake up in the morning with hope, opportunities and options for living a fulfilling life.

This year, our Churches and Christian charities are committed to putting poverty on the agenda through practical action, prophetic words and courageous campaigning. Our elected politicians need to take responsibility too. Now is the time for action.'

*Signed by:*

*Christine Allen, Executive Director of CAFOD*

*Bishop John Arnold, Bishop of Salford*

*Niall Cooper, Director of Church Action on Poverty*

*Revd Lynn Green, General Secretary, The Baptist Union of Great Britain*

*Nigel Harris, CEO of Tearfund*

*Revd Dr Tessa Henry-Robinson, Moderator of General Assembly, United Reformed Church*

*Emma Jackson, Public Life and Social Justice Group Convener, The Church of Scotland*

*Revd Gill Newton and Kerry Scarlett, President and Vice-President of the Methodist Conference*

*Kate Nightingale, Deputy CEO, St Vincent de Paul Society*

*Commissioners Jenine and Paul Main, Territorial Leaders, The Salvation Army UK and Ireland*

*Stewart McCulloch, Chief Executive of Christians Against Poverty UK*

*Paul Parker, Recording Clerk, Quakers in Britain*

*Bishop Mike Royal, General Secretary, Churches Together in England*

*Right Revd Mary Stallard, Bishop of Llandaff*

*Most Revd Mark Strange, Bishop of Moray, Ross and Caithness, and Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church.*

*Patrick Watt, CEO, Christian Aid*

Universal Declaration  
of Human Rights



***A note from the editor:** It was suggested that the articles of **THE UNITED NATIONS DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS** that we read in our worship on Human Rights Day, December 10<sup>th</sup>, should be made available in the Magazine. My letter that follows appeared in *The Guardian* on December 14<sup>th</sup>, and grew out of that service of worship.*

**Article 1: Free and equal:** *All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of sisterly and brotherly respect.*

**Article 2: Freedom from discrimination:** *Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.*

**Article 3: Right to life:** *Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.*

**Article 4: Freedom from slavery:** *No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.*

**Article 5: Freedom from torture:** *No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.*

**Article 13: Freedom of movement:**

*1. Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each State.*

*2. Everyone has the right to leave any country, including their own, and to return to their country*

**Article 14: Right to asylum:**

*1. Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.*

*2. This right may not be invoked in the case of prosecutions genuinely arising from non-political crimes or from acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.*

**Article 18: Freedom of religion or belief:** *Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change their religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest their religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.*

**Article 19: Freedom of Expression:** *Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.*

**Article 28: Right to a free and fair world:** *Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized.*

**Article 30: Rights are inalienable:** *No one, institution nor individual, should act in any way to destroy the rights enshrined in the UN Declaration of Human Rights.*

*Nothing in this Declaration may be interpreted as implying for any State, group or person, any right to engage in any activity or to perform any act aimed at the destruction of any of the rights and freedoms set forth herein.*

### **LETTER IN THE GUARDIAN, 14 December 2023**

#### **We must not let politics trample on refugees' human rights**

As a retired Christian minister, I very much welcome the powerful and challenging article by Prof Philippe Sands (From Gaza to Ukraine, what would the pioneers of human rights think of our world today?, 13 December). In the service that I led in our uniting church in Swansea last Sunday – international Human Rights Day – I shared some of the key articles of the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights with the congregation. A number commented

afterwards on how powerful and challenging its affirmations are.

We were therefore shocked to see that the UK government is prepared to turn its back on the declaration that has been the foundation of our common humanity and our shared sense of justice and freedom for all over the last 75 years merely to serve party political ends, and to implement an immigration policy that is clearly in contravention of the declaration. It is also a denial



of what we, as Christians, would regard as a universal recognition, founded in the teaching of Jesus, of the dignity, freedom and equality of all people, irrespective of race, religion, sexuality, national identity or political conviction.

We were particularly struck by the constant reiteration of words such as “all” and “no one”, underlining the fact that for those who

developed and signed this declaration on behalf of our nations, 75 years ago, universal meant universal and all meant all. We must not now turn our backs on that vision and conviction for reasons of political expediency.

**Rev Dr Noel Anthony Davies**  
*Swansea*

#### **PASTORAL UPDATE FROM GWEN:**

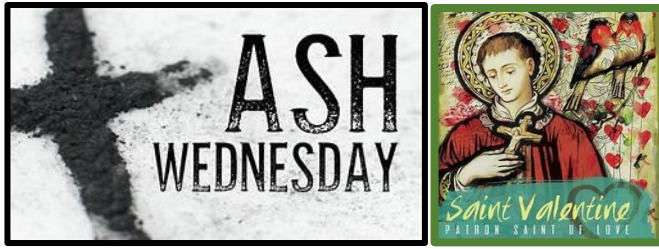
We send our love and prayers to all those who are currently in hospital, in care homes, recovering at home after surgery and treatment or awaiting treatment. We especially remember Hilary who is recovering from knee surgery, and we hope she will have a speedy recovery. We also remember with love those who mourn the loss of those they love and pray for God’s peace and comfort for them and their families.



**Congratulations to Amy C, now (officially!) Doctor of Clinical Psychology of The University of Bath. Amy and her family attended the Degree Ceremony on January 16<sup>th</sup>**



UNIVERSITY OF  
**BATH**



Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent. It is a day of repentance, a day to recognize our failures in faith, obedience and love, a day to kneel 'in sackcloth and ashes' before God and to plead for forgiveness, restoration, and a new beginning. For a moment, during a service for Ash Wednesday, we may be marked with an ash cross as a reminder of our sinfulness, as we take the first tentative steps into Lent. The Taizé Common Prayer describes Lent as 'a period of spiritual retreat for the whole church... We are invited to forty days in the desert, forty days of purification, of stripping down to bare essentials, of discipline, meditation and prayer... A celebration of our joy in the Father's forgiveness.'

But this year, into this painful moment comes St Valentine's Day, celebrated this year on Ash Wednesday. All the fun, frivolity and extravagant celebrations of St Valentine's Day with ash crosses marked on our foreheads! How do we cope with the incongruity of it all? How can all the fun and mystery of human love and all the burden of repentance be brought together in our Christian experience?

It seems to me that the answer lies in the heart of God. No matter how we may imagine and think about God, as Christians we have to begin with that first verse that many of us learned: 'God is love'! We are able to repent 'in sackcloth and ashes' before God because we know that God loves us to the uttermost. There is nothing in what we are or what we do that is beyond the reach of God's free and unconditional love. This is why the Psalmist can pray in Psalm 51, 'Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion, blot out my transgressions.' And that is why we can celebrate human love while we wear our cross of repentance: 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son... And since God so loved us, we should (*and can!*) also love one another.' It is because we are loved that we are forgiven and it's because we are forgiven that we can love. This is truly 'amazing grace'!

**Noel**