

**BEXLEY UNITED
REFORMED
CHURCH**



**SPRING
APRIL 2024**

50p

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Disclaimer

This Magazine is published by Bexley United Reformed Church but the views expressed are not necessarily those of the Church.

Deadline for the next Magazine will be
Sunday 22nd April 2024

BEXLEY URC CHURCH HALL
& RUXLEY ROOM
Junction Bexley High Street and Hurst Road
Facilities include a Stage and a Fitted Kitchen
Reasonable rates include Heating and Lighting

Inquiries to: Letting Secretary 07702 185702
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Rodolphe Blanchard-Kowal
Minister's Pastoral Letter for April

Dear Friends,

This Easter season I would like to share with you some good news. But before the positive message, it's important to start with an observation that we all know well, and which is not very cheerful: the old Church that we all love is not doing well today, and we sometimes find it hard to hope for progress. There are fewer and fewer Christians in our society, and we see ourselves growing old without new generations of committed members coming forward. We see the old Temple falling into ruin. We find this metaphor of the Temple in the Gospels, particularly in Mark 14, where Jesus is quoted as announcing the destruction of the temple: "I will destroy this temple made with hands, and in three days I will build another not made with hands." (Mark 14:58) So, according to the Gospel, the demolished temple can be rebuilt in three days. The New Testament uses the symbol of the Temple several times to bear witness to the faith of Christ. The true Temple is in fact the Body of Christ, the assembly of Christians united in communion, the "living stones" (1 Peter 2:5) of the Spiritual House, another term for the Temple. This Temple can be rebuilt in three days. It resurrects. So, even if material, human, artificial and institutional constructions disappear, that which is at the heart of the Christian faith does not disappear; better still, it always comes back to life. What is this ever-living part of faith? It is the witness of faith that comes from each one of us. This Easter season, when you see your family and friends, especially children and young people, I encourage you to talk about your faith – and especially about that essential part of our religion that does not die and always rises again.

I note that people often stumble over the materiality of the resurrection: how did Jesus disappear from the tomb? How could he live again after dying on the cross? Although these poetic images are simple to grab, these things are hard to believe. We have to dig deeper to talk about them properly with those around us. Before the four Gospels became a kind of staged story, easy to hear and remember, the disciples of Jesus

were brought together by the power of God's Spirit. They realized that Christ was always with them, that something invincible remained of Jesus' movement. They shared a common vision, a common understanding, and it was only later that this was put into narrative form in the Gospels. So it's passed on to younger generations what's really important.

I wish you all a Happy Easter!

Rev Rodolphe Blanchard-Kowal
Minister of Emmanuel United Church Sidcup, Bexley URC & Geddes Place URC

Thank you

You will see from the front page of the magazine, the wonderful response we had from the Rainbows, Brownies, Guides, Rangers and members and friends of the Church to our appeal for Easter Eggs for children in need at this joyous time.

We were overwhelmed by the response from you all and were able to distribute eggs to the Children's Wards at Darenth Valley Hospital and Queen Elizabeth Hospital, and to Demelza House. In addition we had sufficient to donate some to Bexley Food Bank, who were surprised but delighted that some families with children would be able to receive an egg because of your generosity. Easter Eggs would not have been a priority when trying to feed a family.

So thank you again, we hope to receive letters of thanks which we will put in the next magazine. *Mavis*

Services for April 2024 at 10.30am except when stated

	<u>Minister</u>	<u>Elder</u>
Sunday 7 th April	Tony Ball	Ann
Sunday 14 th April	Valerie Loader	Mavis
Sunday 21 st April	Tony Ball and Mavis Wilson	Keith
Sunday 28 th April	Communion Rev. Rodolph Blanchard- Kowal – Baptism	Tony

Communion Fund

The Communion Fund is for those who are known to us who are in need. Gifts may be placed in the box near the entrance of the church on any Sunday whether or not there is a Communion Service.
Philip Shepherd

Family News – on our prayer calendar for April are:-

Sunday 7 th April	Gill Brooks, Jackie and Fred Benson
Sunday 14 th April	Barbara Anderson and Peggy Simmonds
Sunday 21 st April	Margaret Hunt (FCL) and Philip Shepherd
Sunday 28 th April	Sandy Lewis and Sue Clark

Please also remember in your prayers – Jan and Alan Kienlen,
David Jackson's Family.

Pause for Thought

Sunday 7 th April	Philip	Sunday 21 st April	Essie
Sunday 14 th April	Stephanie	Sunday 28 th April	Linda

Flowers for April

Sunday 7 th April	Ann
Sunday 14 th April	Margaret Hunt (Salis)
Sunday 21 st April	Margaret Hunt (FCL)
Sunday 28 th April	

Letter from a Non-Serving Elder

Easter

I am writing this letter at the time we are celebrating Easter. Easter is the most important religious festival for Christians since it celebrates Jesus' victory over death. Easter traditions vary across the Christian world, and include sunrise services or late-night vigils.

At Easter, people traditionally visit Churches, bake hot cross buns and decorate Easter eggs, which are symbolic of Christ death on the Cross and Resurrection from the tomb.

In Ghana, where Essie and I come from, Easter is a seamless blend of traditional religious observances and cultural festivities, from solemn Church services and community outreach to lively beach parties and thrilling paragliding festival.

Easter is celebrated by Christians as a joyous holiday because it represents the fulfilment of the prophecies of the Old Testament and the revelation of God's plan for all humankind, in commemorating the Resurrection of Jesus. Easter also celebrates the defeat of death and the hope of salvation.

A few years ago, I had a strange experience at home after a Church service. I collapsed in the bedroom. The unusual sound upstairs attracted Essie who was downstairs to check what was going on. Apparently, she found me unresponsive, called the ambulance, administered first aid until help arrived. It was my first admission into a hospital ward, and the Easter story of Jesus came to my mind, because of some of the patients with whom I shared the bay where I was being treated. There was a prisoner guarded constantly and elderly confused patient on frequent watch. The behaviour of the prisoner in the room reminded me of how Christ suffered on the cross out of compassion for the human race. He was crucified between two convicts. He could have asked God to halt the whole process, but Jesus went through the death on the cross and defeated death, so that we can have hope in this life and eternity. I prayed throughout my stay in the hospital and I enjoyed the experience. I was moved to a

sideward eventually, but I missed my days spent with the prisoner in the same bay.

My prayer for the Church as we celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus is to follow His example. He prayed constantly throughout His life on earth. Prayer is essential to the life and growth of the Church because it affects every dimension of growth. When the Church was first formed at Pentecost with addition of three thousand converts, the practice of prayer was one of the basic elements of their instructions. Constant prayer was a hallmark of the Early church and should be a hallmark of any Church that desires growth.

Christ suffered on the cross out of compassion for the human race. Indeed, if he had not suffered, he would not have come to share his life with us. What is this passion that he felt for us? It was the passion of love. Let us follow his example and love each other.

Edward Boateng

SUNDAY AFTERNOON CONCERT

THE SERENADERS

**SUNDAY 14th APRIL
3.00pm – 4.30pm**

All Welcome

WORDPLAY

**SATURDAY 20th APRIL
7.00pm – 9.30pm**

**Tickets: £8.00
Incl. Supper
Quiche
Fruit Jelly**

**Tickets are available
from Social Committee**

Miracles

I have always been fascinated by the stories about the miracles performed by Jesus. Were the stories true or exaggerated? The atheists and sceptics would say they were stories designed to back up the belief that Jesus was the Son of God. Christians believe they occurred because that was exactly the truth of his relationship.

The Gospels contain many stories of Jesus performing unusual actions. He healed sick people, walked on the Sea of Galilee, stilled storms and fed a crowd of 5,000 people. Christians believe that Jesus as the Son of God had the ability to perform such acts.

One of the most remarkable accounts is that of the feeding of the 5,000.

‘Then Jesus took the five loaves and two fish, looked up to heaven and gave thanks to God. He broke the loaves and gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. (Mark 6)

Mark’s Gospel contains the stories of 18 miracles, which is similar to those related in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. In many of the stories Jesus is reported as ‘giving instructions, not to tell anyone who he is’ and ‘see that you don’t tell this to anyone’.

In the case of restoring Jarius’ daughter to life, ‘he gave strict orders not to tell anyone about this’. However, in the same chapter from Mark which includes the above story, Jesus acts very differently when a woman touches his cloak. The woman had been suffering from severe bleeding for twelve years. As such, she would have, like a leper, been ostracised from normal society. Jesus said to her quite openly in front of the crowd following him, ‘My daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace and be healed of your troubles’. (Mark 5)

The fact that Jesus said this when the people could hear, meant that the woman could be accepted back into society. As with all the accounts of miracles, there will be no interpretation of the events

performed by Jesus, which will satisfy everyone. The sceptics will still challenge whether the stories are authentic. As Christians however, we accept the truth of the stories as recorded in the Gospels.

John Johnstone



Congratulations to Tony Ball **Observer of the Year Award**

On Saturday 9th March Tony was awarded observer of the year for being on 22 crossings of the English Channel.

During the summer he was on call from June to the end of September to observe people attempting to swim the channel. It's a 24 hour shift but he says it is really fulfilling talking to people from all over the world and watching people completing a lifetime ambition. Sometimes supporting them when it is too much for them.

Peter's Easter by Rev Ted Gobledale

While the disciples discuss the resurrection news, Jesus stands among them and says, 'Peace be with you.' Startled and terrified, they think they are seeing a ghost. Jesus asks, 'Why are you frightened and, why do doubts arise in your hearts?'

We join fearful Peter now to listen to his reflections.

Meditation of Peter:

Afraid, me and the other disciples lock ourselves in that upper room. With Jesus dead, all sorts of fears prey on our minds and hearts. Especially afraid that should the authorities find us, we'll all be hanging on crosses.

Then, suddenly a man stands in our midst, inside the locked room! A Roman agent? No... but who?

When he speaks, I jump, startled. I would know that voice anywhere! 'Peace be with you,' he greets us. I figure I am hallucinating or seeing a ghost.

Now I realise I should not have been surprised. After all, Jesus tried to tell us. And then, there are the early morning reports from Mary and Joanna — empty tomb and all. It's just a lot to take in. Truth be told, I am more troubled than happy with the news that Jesus might be alive. Think about it, I'll have a lot to answer for. Oh, yes, I am the one who calls him the Christ. But I am also the one who falls asleep, deserts him, denies him. Not sure how happy he'll be about that.

You've surely had failures and fears. Don't you ever wonder if you are not worthy? Don't you ever worry that you've done one bad thing too many and the love will just stop?

There in that locked room, I realise it is Jesus, the same yet changed. 'Why are you frightened? Why do you doubt so much? Look and see, it is I.' His words release me from my fears and failures. His

presence gives me courage in spite of my fears and assures me that my failures, my sins, are forgiven.

I feel assured that his truth, his power, his love will be mine, will be ours, will be yours. In life's failures and fears, we have a friend in Jesus, steadfast and true. He will lift us up, you and me, and set us on that road to glory.

Contributed by Kathy Shaw

Wanted

Recycle your Inkjet Cartridges

Please continue to save your inkjet cartridges – you can just drop the empty cartridges in the box in the vestibule. I need to have about 15 to make it worthwhile sending them off! *Kathy*

Jewellery Stall at Table Sales

As I have been selling all the lovely jewellery you have given me in the past at our Tables Sales I am now in need of new stock. So could all of you take a look in your jewel box and see if there is anything you can donate to the stall. Please give your gifts to any member of the Social Committee. With many thanks. *Helen*



A Prayer for Gaza's Children

God who clothes us in warm garments of grace; weave this cry for Gaza into the fabric of your peace...

We are ashamed at the depth to which humanity can sink; how eagerly we march to the drumbeat of war; how easily we are seduced by violence – justifying narratives.

Mend our broken ways; challenge our complacency; protect the children of Gaza; grant their families freedom from oppression, and bring Shalom to all who call The Holy Land home. Amen

Commitment for Life – Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory

The persistent failure to secure a lasting solution to the conflict between the Israeli state and Palestinian people deepens inequality and poverty. Violence and despair persist. Christian Aid has been working with the poorest people in the region since the early 1950s.

Today it works with more than twenty Israeli and Palestinian organisations to protect human rights, access services, and build peace based on justice for all. Its development and humanitarian relief reaches Palestinians and Israelis; Jewish, Muslim, Christian and secular.

Moving Stories

Commitment
for **Life**

Life-giving Faith | Defiant Hope | Generous Love

Committed to supporting our global partners **BANGLADESH**

Begin with silence; or use music as a bed for this prayer.

Living God, who clothes us in garments of gratitude, adorn this prayer with the light of your grace. We bring to mind the many blessings that you so generously give...

Moment of silence...

We pray for those gathered in this place...
those in our churches...
those in our communities...
for those who selflessly serve in making the world a better place.

Forgiving God, we too easily diminish the dignity of others, sowing division when you call for openness and trust.
Lord, have mercy;
Lord, have mercy.

We stand ashamed at the depth to which humanity can sink, how easily we march to the drums of war, how quickly we are swayed and seduced by the savagery of self-justifying narratives.
Christ, have mercy;
Christ, have mercy.

May the Trinity of Love bind our wounds, challenge our complacency, bring freedom from oppression, and lead all to abundance of freedom.

Amen.



Photo: by Khairul Islam, Pixabay

Shumana Akhter Aisha's home in Sylhet was surrounded by a sea of water on a newly formed makeshift island. "The water was sweeping away everything. It was raining heavily along with thunder," said Shumana.

Sylhet normally has 840mm of rain in June. But in June 2022 it was soaked by more than 1,500mm. Erratic weather patterns will get worse in Bangladesh, one of the world's most climate vulnerable nations. The UN estimates that by 2050, 17% of the country will be submerged by rising sea levels. 20 million people will have lost their home.

Our partner Christian Aid is calling on world leaders to commit more to climate finance.

"Governments urgently need to take further action at home and internationally, to cut emissions, and adapt to the effects of climate change. And where the impacts go beyond what people can adapt to, the loss and damage fund must be resourced to compensate the poorest countries for the effects of a crisis that isn't of their making," said Patrick Watt, Chief Executive of Christian Aid.

Commitment for Life supports the call for governments to radically increase their climate budgets and commit to relentless climate action, particularly in support of climate vulnerable nations like Bangladesh.

Volunteers bring change

The Empowering Left Behind Minority Communities programme in Bangladesh is working to help marginalised groups to access rights and services. Volunteers from different groups who have been excluded from the country's development have received training from Christian Aid's partner organisation Nagorik Uddyog. They have been working in the community to help people understand how they can get help for their needs but also advocate for their communities to local government.

Bhabatosh Bairagi is 28 and lives with his father and younger brother and he is a volunteer in his village. He says, 'When the government declares any weather emergency, we announce those in our area and help people to move to safe places. We have done many works in the Covid-19 pandemic. We have distributed masks in the locality and helped people to maintain safe distancing.'

This kind of practical work can really help to get crucial safety information out to communities who might otherwise struggle to access these messages.

Bairagi also helps members of his community to access government services, and this is work that can have a lot of barriers. To start with, people need to apply for government ID cards and Bairagi helps people to apply for these online. Some people are reluctant to give their personal information to the government and can be understandably suspicious. Bairagi explains the benefits of having official ID and the services they can access with this card.

Since his training with Nagorik Uddyog, Bairagi has some really clear stories of how he has helped people



Bhabatosh Bairagi has been volunteering with the Nagorik Uddyog working in dalit communities.

in his community. A child in his village struggles a lot with their vision, especially at night but the family didn't have the financial resources to help. Bairagi was able to help the family to get additional government income from social services to help with any additional needs and this has made a huge difference.

Bairagi has also helped older people to apply for an allowance from the government that they are entitled to but didn't know about or access.

These volunteers are able to help because they are trusted members of the community who have the trust of the people there. They are then able to hear about the problems people experience and feed these back to Christian Aid partners and to the government to help make sure services are appropriate.

Thank you for all of your support through Commitment for Life which helps no community to be left behind in Bangladesh.

Act on Poverty course available now

For churches and individuals who want to learn more about poverty and how to challenge it, we have a six-session course called Act on Poverty which is ideal to use in small groups.

Participants gain a deeper understanding of local and global

poverty, hear stories of faith and activism that challenge the status quo, and learn how we can all take steps to tackle poverty together.

Visit [caid.org.uk/actonpoverty](https://www.caid.org.uk/actonpoverty) to download our Act on Poverty course.

Israel and Palestine: Prayer for peace

Sometimes it is difficult to know how to pray in times of crisis. Please pray for a full ceasefire and for a just peace to prevail.

God of justice and compassion,

We cry out to you for the people of Gaza, particularly for the children. We pray for an unequivocal ceasefire and the resumption of aid and food deliveries.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for the unconditional release of all hostages. We pray that those released may find healing and the restoration of hope in the months ahead.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We continue to pray for a safe and prosperous tomorrow for Palestinians and Israelis, a future of equal rights for all and an end to the occupation.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for ourselves, that we may resist hatred, stand for justice, and open ourselves to be channels of your peace.

We ask all of this in Jesus' name. Amen.

From Embrace the Middle East



Weekly Programme

Sunday

Worship Service 10.30am (C)

Afternoon Concert (once a month) 3pm-4.30pm(C)

Monday

Exercise Classes (over 50s) 10am-11.am(H)
(School Term Time only)

Afternoon Teas 2pm-4pm (C)

Tuesday

Whist Drive 2nd Tuesday 2pm-4pm (H)

Knit and Natter 3rd Tuesday 1pm-3pm (H)

Wednesday

Singing for Fun 1st and 4th Wednesday
1.30pm – 2.30pm (H)

Thursday

Exercise Classes (over 50s) 10am-11am
(School Term Time only) (H)

(C) in the Church (H) in the Hall

All Welcome



Meeting weekly in Church Hall during term time as well as
enjoying
outdoor activities

Mondays

4.30-5.30pm Rainbows

5.45 – 7.00pm Brownies

8.00-9.30pm Rangers

Wednesdays

7.30-9pm Guides

Our uniformed groups join the congregation for five parade services each year : Harvest Thanksgiving, Remembrance Sunday, Christmas Gift Service, Renewal of Promises and Easter gifts (eggs)

Children are Welcome

At present we do not have a Junior Church BUT for Young Children we do have a well equipped children's corner in the church where parents are welcome to supervise their little ones whilst being able to participate in worship.

Bexley United Reformed Church complies with The United Reformed Church Good Practice Guidelines for Safeguarding Children and Young People in the Church.

Some useful contact numbers

Age UK – 0800 6781174 – provide information and advice that covers every facet of later life.

Bexley Borough Neighbourhood Watch – 020 8284 5537

Bexley Council – 020 8303 7777 Out of hours service 020 8303 7171

Bexley Crime Hotline – 0208284 9234 – report crimes confidentially and anonymously.

Bexley Voluntary Service Council – 01322 431765 – signposts elderly residents in Bexley to the right support services.

Bexley Borough Pensioner's Forum – 01322 527097 – is a non party-political equal opportunity organisation. Their principal aim is to promote the welfare and interests of pensioners in Bexley Borough.

Contact the Elderly – 0800 716 543 – companionship for older people suffering from loneliness and social isolation.

Crimestoppers – 0800 555111

Crossroads Care South East London – 01322 336086/341983 – provide a variety of services to carers of Children, Adults and Older vulnerable people with a diverse range of care and support needs across the London Boroughs of Bexley, Greenwich and Lewisham. Email: info@ccsel.org

Darent Valley Hospital, Darent – 01322 428100

Evergreen Care Bexley – 01322 431 765 – seek to serve the older vulnerable adults in our community by improving their circumstances through advocacy, friendship and practical support.

London Dial-a-Ride – 0343 222 7777 – a door to door multi-occupancy transport service for people with disabilities who cannot use public transport. It can be used for journeys such as shopping, visits to friends, appointments, and going out at night.

London Fire Brigade – general enquiries 020 8555 1200
Emergency calls **only** 999

Metropolitan Police – general enquiries 101. Emergency calls **only** 999

National Rail Travel – 03457 484950

Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Woolwich – 020 8836 6000

Queen Mary's Hospital, Sidcup – 020 8302 2678

Samaritans – 116 123

Silverline – 0800 4 70 80 90 – is the only confidential, 24 hour, free helpline for older people across the UK open every day and night of the year.