

**BEXLEY UNITED
REFORMED
CHURCH**



**WINTER
JANUARY 2025**

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 19th January 2025

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

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HAPPY NEW YEAR

FROM THE MINISTER,
ELDERS AND NON-SERVING ELDERS
WHO WRITE THE ELDER'S LETTER

To Members and Friends and all who have supported us
throughout the year.

Rodolphe

Rodolphe Blanchard-Kowal

Keith

Keith Thomson

Mavis

Mavis Wilson

Tony

Tony Ball

John

John Twidale

Edward

Edward Boateng

Ann

Ann Markey

John

John Johnstone

Barbara

Barbara Johnstone

Philip

Philip Shepherd

Suzanne

Suzanne Whitnall

A New Year Message from Southern Synod



As we enter the beautiful season of Advent, we are reminded of Mary's song in the Gospel of Luke, often called the Magnificat. Mary's song of praise reminds us of the joy and hope that comes from faith in God's promises.

In her moment of awe, Mary proclaims, "My soul glorifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour." These words echo through the ages, inviting us to reflect on the miracle of the Incarnation. Mary's song is both deeply personal and universally hopeful. It reflects her humility and gratitude to God, who chose her to bear His Son, Jesus.

This Christmas, let us join Mary in glorifying the Lord for the gift of Jesus, who brings light into our darkness and hope into our despair. Mary's hymn also calls us to recognise the transformative power of God's love. She sings of the mighty being scattered, the proud being brought low, and the humble being filled with good things. In a world often marked by division and strife, we are reminded that God's kingdom upends worldly values and lifts up the marginalised.

As we celebrate Christ's birth, let us embody this spirit of humility and service in our Church and community. Additionally, the Magnificat encourages us to remember God's faithfulness throughout all generations. Just as God fulfilled His promise to Mary, we can trust that God is at work in our lives today.

In this season, let us share the good news of God's love and grace with those around us, being containers of hope and joy. As we gather for worship and fellowship in the coming Advent weeks, may our hearts be filled with gratitude and our spirits renewed.

Let us celebrate the miracle of Christmas together, proclaiming with Mary the greatness of our God.

Thank you to all who participate in the life and witness of God's church. We are the visible face of Christ.

Wishing you all a blessed and joyous Christmas.

Bridget

Moderator for Southern Synod
United Reformed Church

Charity cards

Well Done. You've made it a bumper year this year!

Thanks to your generosity we have collected £721.13 from the sale of the cards at the Bexley and Geddes Place United Reformed Churches. This is the most we have ever raised! Demelza and Bexley Mencap have each been sent £360, with the remaining £1.13 going into a charity box.

Once again, on behalf of the charities, may I thank you for your continued support in buying the cards.

I would also like to express my gratitude to several friends who made and donate cards for us to sell. I appreciate the time and money they commit, without which there would be nowhere near the number and range of cards for you to choose from.

I look forward with hope, to reporting another exceptional result next year!

Suzanne Whitnall



South London Synod Area

2 December 2024

Dear Friends

It was humbling to be asked and then elected as the new Area Leader back in June, but as a relatively new face in the Synod, I thought I should introduce myself to the churches.

I was called to serve in South London during the summer of 2020 at the height of the COVID pandemic. This meant I did not move until May 2021, when I was inducted into the pastorate of Bromley United Reformed Church and St Mark's United Church, Greenwich. (Since the end of August, I have moved to only serving Bromley URC and in addition doing some transitional and explorative work on behalf of Synod within this Synod Area.) Previously, I was in Eastern Synod, serving the United Reformed Churches of West Suffolk. This was a rural ministry covering three market towns and, at one point, four villages. It was my first pastorate, having been ordained in 2015. It taught me a lot about serving in multi-church pastorates and churches that have a heritage that spans centuries, not just decades! During this time, I also had the privilege to serve as Revd Nigel Uden's chaplain when he was one of the Moderators of General Assembly.

My passion in ministry is worship. It was the subject of my PhD thesis, and I have just published a book on the subject! It is one of the defining features of the life of the church, and so I do believe we need to take it seriously. However, the kingdom of God is not built on singing psalms and spiritual songs alone. As followers of Christ, we need to have the confidence to share Christ with all who we meet and encounter. In the past couple of years, it has been heartening to hear how we are doing that in different ways across the Synod Area. Yet, I am aware that this is hard work and with the decrease in stipendiary



South London Synod Area

ministry, it is making some of our churches feel very vulnerable and is giving us all a concern about the future.

I am acutely aware that some of you I will only ever meet when tough decisions have to be taken. I am sorry about this. However, I would like to encourage you to be honest and open with our Pastoral Committees: the sooner we know, the sooner we may be able to help! We do love to hear the good news, but it is important we hear of the hard times too.

In our Area Meetings during 2025, we are going back to the theme of "Mission". I know we have looked at this in recent times. However, we are going to be looking at this theme from a different perspective. I hope the approach we will be taking will give us other tools for engaging with our communities and for how we share the Gospel.

Every blessing for all you will be doing over Advent and Christmas.

Elaine

Revd Dr Elaine Colechin
Your new Synod Area Leader



The
United
Reformed
Church

Bexley

Letter from a Serving Elder

Corrie ten Boom, a Dutch watchmaker and later a Christian writer and public speaker once said:

"We should never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God."

How often should we just sit back and let things happen and when should we stand up to try to cause change?

I'm sure that this time last year Essie and I were confidently anticipating Liverpool winning four trophies in 2024 and what did we get? The Carabao Cup after a penalty shoot-out. Next year is already looking better.

After the General Election UK politics look as if it may be stable for a few years. There will be surprises, scandals and friends falling out but that's normal. Remember Harold Macmillan comment, "Events Dear Boy". It is the unexpected and unplanned for that will always cause difficulties. The problem with politicians is they take credit for all that goes well and blame others for those that go wrong. ~~problems~~. *P*. Sometime things just happen and cannot be predicted.

On the world stage so much depends on the unpredictable Donald Trump ^{are}. He is not going to deport all the illegal immigrants. There ~~is~~ far too many and it would cost many millions. Tariffs on imports do not make American made products any cheaper for Americans and a tariff war would hit American exporters.

Despite her mistakes there was something reassuring about having Angela Merkle "as leader of the free world" during the last Trump Presidency.

Instability in France, Germany and South Korea are worrying as is the increase in xenophobic politics everywhere.

Climate Change – targets will still be missed. We'll still all do our best but what is the point if China, India and America are not joining in.

It is far too soon to make predictions about the future of Syria but our record of supporting countries after the overthrow of a dictator is pretty pathetic.

Let's not over simplify politics. There are not easy answers and a single person or government cannot fix everything.

Maybe we shouldn't try to predict what is going to happen in the big wide world but are we any better in our local communities or in our own lives.

I've certainly gone into difficult situations full of good intentions and made matters worse. I've volunteered for roles for which I'm totally that unsuited usually because there is no one else.

I've often assumed that everyone sees the world just as I do and become horrified when I find out they don't. Why should I be surprised?

I want to live in a world where we are free to do whatever we want as long as it doesn't do harm to others.

So let us resolve to be tolerant, understanding and forgiving and try to love everyone, even Manchester United supporters.

John Twidale

Services for January 2025 at 10.30am except when stated

	<u>Minister</u>	<u>Elder</u>
Sunday 5 th January	John Twidale	Ann
Sunday 12 th January	Tony Ball	Philip
Sunday 19 th January	The Minister	Keith
	Holy Communion	
Sunday 26 th January	John Twidale	Mavis

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 January are:-

Sunday 5 th January	Margaret Hunt(FCL), John & Bee Twidale
Sunday 12 th January	Peter & Patricia Linder, Martin Robertson and Peggy Simmonds
Sunday 19 th January	Philip Shepherd and Sue Clark
Sunday 26 th January	Tony and Ann Ball

Please also remember in your prayers – Jean Couling and family who sadly passed away on 17th December.

Pause for Thought

Sunday 5 th January	Kathy	Sunday 19 th January	Essie
Sunday 12 th January	Stephanie	Sunday 26 th January	Linda

Flowers for January

Sunday 5 th January	Gill Brooks	Sunday 19 th January	Mavis
Sunday 12 th January	Essie	Sunday 26 th January	

Knit & Natter

Please note that Knit and Natter has been cancelled on Tuesday 21st January. Thank you. *Stephanie Honey*

SCOTTISH SOCIAL

SATURDAY 18th JANUARY
7.00pm-9.30pm

Tickets: £8.00
Incl. Supper

Tickets are available
from Social Committee

SUNDAY AFTERNOON CONCERT

SUNDAY 12th JANUARY
3.00pm-4.30pm

MARK SEDGEWICK
Sings for you

All Welcome

Predictions

January is traditionally the time to look back at the past and forward to the coming year.

Many people claim that the 16th century French astrologer and seer Nostradamus made predictions such as the Great Fire of London, the French Revolution and even the nuclear destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. What can we less gifted mortals see for the future?

I have previously written about the vast changes that have taken place in my lifetime so what do we think will happen in the next five years? Some changes are already with us, such as the increasing use of robots in manufacturing and driverless cars. There is already technology for driverless trains and this will be common if the railway unions allow.

War is already waged remotely with the use of drones and rockets. How long before armies become fully robotic? We have already experienced in the pandemic what can go wrong when scientists meddle with bacteria. In Salisbury a few years ago, we learned too of the use of nerve agents to eliminate political opponents.

How do we see the future of religion? One newspaper claimed that Britain was already entering its first 'atheistic age'. Figures from 2008 showed 41.8% of Britons believed in God while 35.2% did not. Within a decade, by 2018, this had reversed, with 35.2% believing and 42.9% not. This trend has not been helped by the decline in Sunday Schools and Junior Churches in some places of worship. However, decline in church attendance is not universal and some churches and other religions continue to flourish.

It is not all gloom and doom. Many developments in medicine have prolonged and saved lives. In general, we experience greater leisure, variety of food and comfort than our forebears. There have been revivals in religion in both the past and more recent times. Will God intervene when he sees just what a mess we have made of our planet?

It would be interesting if you could become modern 'Nostradami' and contribute to our magazine with your own ideas about what the future will bring.

John Johnstone



Gift Service – 8th December 2024

On Sundy 8th December we held our Toy Service in support of Bexley Women's Aid.

As you can see from the picture our Uniformed Organisations and members and friends were very generous, and the gifts were much appreciated.

DONATION TO THE AKROPONG SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND
GHANA EDUCATION SERVICE

Dear Friends, Thank you.

On behalf of the Church, we have sent an amount of £520 (Five hundred and twenty pounds) to the above school in December 2024. It has been received and a letter of appreciation sent by the school.

After the covid epidemic, it has not been easy for many people to handle the loose coins. However, members of our Church and visitors have continued their generosity, and have always dropped some coins into the jar.

We are particularly grateful to Mrs Mavis Wilson, who collects the coins and sends them to the bank. We are also grateful to some individuals who have always made sure that enough money is raised for this project.

This school in Ghana helps to educate many blind children and adults along the west Coast of Africa. Our contributions have always been well received and used to improve the lives of the children in the school.

We have attached The Letter of Appreciation, a picture showing the Headmistress of the school, Edward's nephew the Rev Percy Offei-Addo of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana (who delivered the donation) and three students at the presentation.

Essie and I are forever grateful for your kindness. We wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Edward and Essie Boateng





AKROPONG SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND

GHANA EDUCATION SERVICE

P.O.Box 29, Akropong-Akuapem, Ghana, West Africa.
Mobile; +233-501864991 Email:akropongblind@yahoo.com

FOUNDED 1945

Our ref:

Your ref

Date: 13th December, 2024

Bexley United Reformed Church
500 Hurst Road
Bexley. Kent
DA5 3JN

Brethren in the Lord,

LETTER OF APPRECIATION

I write on behalf of the Board of Governors, P. T. A, staff and students to express our profound gratitude to you for the kind gesture.


Management received with joy an amount of Five Hundred and Twenty Pounds (£520) from you Bexley United Reformed Church as donation to support the school.

Your continuous support to the school has been a great help, this indeed shows how dear the school is to Bexley United Reformed Church.

We hope this relationship will be a lasting one.

We are indeed very grateful to members of Bexley United Reformed Church.

Yours faithfully


HEADMISTRESS
SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND
P. O. BOX 29
AKROPONG - AKUAPEM

Veronica Dery

Bankers: GCB Bank, Akropong - Akuapem

Christmas Concert

Our Christmas Sunday Afternoon Concert on 8th December featured the Green Cabin Band, who prepared a programme of Christmas music for us to enjoy and participate in, due to commence at 3pm.

It was not a nice day weather wise, in fact it was miserable afternoon with strong winds, heavy rain and cold, but the Church was nice and warm and ready to welcome visitors. The Band had warmed up their instruments and we were all ready for our 3pm start (Normally with an audience of 40-50 people.)

At 2.30pm nobody had yet appeared and by 2.45pm only two lovely ladies were sitting at the front of the Church waiting – and Ann and I were at the back sending up arrow prayers that some people would come, if only to get out of the wind and rain, and we were asking for a minor miracle. Low and behold at 2.50pm five people came in followed by 30 more, none of whom had been before, plus four of our own members and friends, and so the programme commenced at 3pm.

During the interval we found that most folk had come out of curiosity and wanted to know all about the Church and when the next concert would be (12th January) so hopefully some will come again.

I am a great believer in prayer, either short or long and over a long life I know that prayers have been answered – not always in the way we would wish and not always with the answers we desire, but always with His loving care and guidance to sustain us.

Thanks be to God.

Mavis

Agents of Change

For several years we have supported Agents of Change, a charity which supports people with special needs in Romania. Rev. Fiona Thomas introduced us to this charity when she supported through her preaching fees.

Fiona wrote to us after the invasion of the Ukraine and explained that their work had increased significantly due to the influx of refugees to Romania. We supported through a retiring collection and from our annual distribution from the Communion Fund.

It is with sadness that I learned that Agents of Change UK is closing as a charity. The reasons are that the economic and social situation in Romania has changed over the past 30 years, with improvements in some aspects of national institutions dedicated to the support of the people which Agents of Change seeks to help; access to institutions are not available as pre-Covid, which makes it sways of working unviable; and the agreement of the local partner to take on the management reduced the responsibility of Agents of Change UK.

The work of Agents of Change Romania continues.

Agents of Change UK thank us for our support.

Philip Shepherd

Duckhouse Crafting



CRAFT WORKSHOP

This is a full day craft workshop from 10am until 4pm.

Location: - Bexley United Reform Church Hall, Hurst Road, Bexley, Kent DA5 3JN. (Parking available)

Date: **Wednesday 15th January 2025**

Cost: - £15.00 (All materials will be supplied.)

We will be making 4 cards using different materials and techniques.

To book a place contact Penny: -
duckhousecrafting@gmail.com 07415 138284

(Please ensure you bring a packed lunch - tea/coffee and cake will be provided)



What is *Commitment for Life*?

Commitment for Life

Life-giving Faith | Defiant Hope | Generous Love

'Commitment for Life' encourages churches to take action, pray and give for people in three areas: Bangladesh, Zimbabwe and Israel & the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The programme links congregations with campaigns, partners and projects through **Christian Aid** and **Global Justice Now**.

Commitment for Life is about:

- living out Jesus commandment of loving our neighbour,
- standing beside the poor and marginalised to see justice done,
- bringing God's realm here on earth,
- committing to generous and just stewardship.

Bexley URC supports Bangladesh

Poor governance, debilitating trade deals, global banking are huge issues. Then there is an over-dependency on natural resources. Now the impact of climate disruption is making things far worse.

But we can help local communities for climate disruption, support farmers to improve their harvest, and women participate fully in vital decisions. **Christian Aid partners** are committed to ensuring poor and marginalised people enjoy thriving and dignified lives.

2025 New Year - Begin by doing nothing

Today starts a new year
and as busy, diligent people our inclination
is to get straight down to business.
But perhaps today Your word to us
Is that you would prefer us to do – nothing?
No planning,
no ambitious resolutions,
no gritted teeth to signify
our desire to change the world,
change our church, change ourselves...

Instead, maybe You are inviting us
to take a back seat and simply gaze
at all the wonder and the turmoil
that surrounds us?
That way we might learn to see and watch,
to notice and, above all else, to listen.

At this New Year we'll learn to take
Your time, not ours, and if by doing so
we would become wise, we'll delight
in having learned the holy discipline
of an attentive pause. *Ian Fosten, Immersive Joy 2025*

Joyful Worship

Joyful God,
Worshipping together should be the best time of our week.
Yet often we take worship for granted,
and walk out of churches looking miserable,
while the person walking past to go shopping looks so happy.
Instill in us passion, love and joy as we worship
for we are worshipping the King, the great joy giver.
Help us take that joy from worshipping you into our week
that it may be passed on to all we meet.

Dave Cumbers, Prayer Handbook 2025