Welwyn Garden City, Harpenden and Wheathampstead United Reformed Churches Magazine







February & March 2024

Dear Friends,

Grace and peace to you.

As I write this letter, we are soon to arrive at Shrove Tuesday, or Pancake Day, which is traditionally a day of feasting and partying before Lent begins in earnest with Ash Wednesday on the very next day. In some ways, these two days seem quite separate and disconnected from one another, and yet, they are, of course, very much linked to one another.

Firstly, and perhaps most obviously, they are connected because Shrove Tuesday is the day when there is feasting and frivolity before the season changes to one of fasting and penitence on Ash Wednesday. Shrove Tuesday is that final fling as much that would perish during a season of fasting is used up.

But there is also a further connection. For just as the season of Lent is a penitential season during which the Christian reflects upon their own sinfulness and the challenges that temptation brings, so too Shrove Tuesday is traditionally a day of confession and absolution. The word 'shrove' itself is the past tense of the verb 'shrive,' which means to absolve. Thus, it is that we enter the season of Lent having confessed our sins, and prepare ourselves to journey with Christ towards the events of Holy Week.

Lent also has its traditions and practices that people return to again and again. They are familiar and comforting, though they must never become so comfortable that they lose their power or meaning.

For many people Lent begins with an ashing service on Ash Wednesday. At this service worshippers remember the instructions and commands given by God,

and they reflect on how well they have kept those commandments. This, naturally, leads into a time of confession because we are, as Paul reminds us, all sinners. The culmination of the service is the ashing ceremony itself, carried out with ashes that are traditionally made from the previous year's palm crosses. As each person is marked with the sign of the cross in ash, they hear the words, "Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return. Turn away from sin and be faithful to Christ."

Other Lenten traditions can include sharing in ecumenical Lent groups, fasting, giving something up, or taking something extra on. Each of these activities are meant, in some small way, to focus the heart and mind of the believer on Jesus and his journey towards the cross. It is hoped that by, in some small way, emulating his sacrifice, we also learn the path of sacrificial love and service.

Sometimes our traditions can hinder the life of faith and our spiritual growth because they become nothing more than the "thing we do" at a specific date and time. Sometimes our traditions fail to inspire us because we are overly familiar with them and we simply carry them out without even thinking about what we are doing.

But at their best, our traditions help us to focus on God. At their best, they help us to cut through the noise and distraction of everyday life so that we can spend time with God. And, at their best, the traditions that we lean on enhance our walk of faith, draw us ever closer to Jesus, and enable us to deepen our knowledge of the love that God has for each one of us.

One of the books on my many shelves is entitled, *Eggs and ashes*, which is described as containing 'practical and liturgical resources for Lent and Holy Week.' In it there is a short liturgy for Shrove Tuesday.

That liturgy uses a hymn of John Bell and Graham Maule as an introductory piece, and it seems to me to be an apt one for the beginning of Lent because of how it invites us to follow our Saviour into places where we might not seek to go on our own initiative, to leave behind things that might distract us from the mission that we are called to, and cast aside those things that are no more than a burden to our souls.

This hymn reminds us that we are called to join in the work that Jesus has begun. We are not simply to be observers or spectators, but we are to be participants, fully playing our part in the mission of God. And in playing our part, we have each been given a role and a gift. It is imperative that we do not ignore or gift, and neither should we seek to hide our gift, for God wants us to use our gifts for the building of his Kingdom so that we might bless one another and bless the world around us.

Come with me, come wander, come welcome the world where strangers might smile or where stones may be hurled; come leave what you cling to, lay down what you clutch and find, with hands empty, that hearts can hold much.

Sing hey for the carpenter leaving his tools!
Sing hey for the pharisees leaving their rules!
Sing hey for the fishermen leaving their nets!
Sing hey for the people who leave their regrets!

Come walk in my company, come sleep by my side, come savour a lifestyle with nothing to hide; come sit at my table and eat with my friends, discovering that love which the world never ends. *Chorus*

Come share in my laughter, come close to my fears,

come find yourself washed with the kiss of my tears; come stand close at hand while I suffer and die and find in three days how I never will lie.

Chorus

Come leave your possessions, come share out your treasure, come give and receive without method or measure; come loose every bond that's resisting the Spirit, enabling the earth to be yours to inherit.

Chorus

John L Bell & Graham Maule (1958-2019) © 1987 WGRG

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So, as we journey through this season of Lent, may we be willing to lay down those things that can get in the way; may we be willing to cast aside anything that hinders us; may we use the traditions that we are familiar with to deepen our faith; and may we come to God with empty hands and open hearts, seeking to hear his call upon our lives to follow wherever he may lead us.

In His name,

Marky

Wheathampstead News

Christmas and all its activities seem a long time ago now. We enjoyed singing many carols especially at our Carols of Praise afternoon and then at Harpenden's Candlelit Carol service where Jane sang in a brilliant choir which made the worship very special.

Members enjoyed various services on Christmas Day, wherever they happened to be, and I attended the midnight service at St Helen's Church, absolutely the best thing at Christmas.

Food and friendship, also an important part of Christmas, were very much in evidence at our Christmas Community Kitchen meal and the Christmas Day Dinner held in the Chapel Halls. The kitchen was also used by one of our CK chefs preparing a Christmas meal for a charity called Azalea, a refuge for abused women in Luton.

Looking ahead we will have been part of the Wheathampstead Churches Together event for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, with reflections and prayers produced by the churches in Burkina Faso in West Africa, a very troubled country.

All the churches in the village will be joining in with weekly Lent Courses, usually held at different times in the week enabling people to have a choice of when to attend.

This year we have chosen a York Course 'God has no Favourites' which explores how each of us is called to discover that God is completely inclusive.

Friday 1 March is the date for the World Day of Prayer service at St Thomas More Catholic Church at 10.30. This year's service is prepared by Christian women from Palestine, the land in which Jesus was born, ministered and died, where the Christian faith began and is rooted. The theme is 'I beg you, bear with one another in love'

Wishing you all a belated happy and healthy 2024.

Jackie & Jane Wheathampstead

CHRISTMAS AT HARPENDEN URC



We begin our Christmas celebrations early with our annual "Giving Away Day" when our church family donate gifts for the children and mums at St.Albans Refuge (SAHWR). Every year we wonder if we will exceed the previous year and thanks to the generosity of our

pre-school and congregation we do and the photo. Norman, our treasurer has

given details of the cash donations made over the Christmas period in a separate article.





Our nativity service gave all our congregation the opportunity to dress up, young and old alike, as Kings, shepherds, angels, Martyn made his first appearance as Joseph, Alex and Lynn had a very special sheep, and tea towels were in demand as usual. They all gathered in the stable around

the crib to greet the baby, not a real one of course, and when the Kings had to retrieve their gifts (given too early) and present them for a second time much laughter was heard.



Next came our Carols by
Candlelight service directed
expertly by Don our organist and
choirmaster with an augmented
choir and soloist. Judging by the
volume of the singing this was
clearly enjoyed by a well
attended congregation including

many visitors. Readers from all sections of our church and Wheathamstead participated and we followed the service with mulled wine and mince pies etc. This was a thoroughly enjoyable occasion yet again.



The following Sunday afternoon we had our Crib Service organised by Sharon our Children and Families Minister. Enthusiastic children and parents built the nativity scene, made stars and we all sang more carols. A noisy but enjoyable afternoon.

One innovation this year was our Christmas Eve midnight communion service



led by Martyn and those who attended appreciated the very special meaning of this service.

Christmas Day morning gave the opportunity for those attending to tell us about their Christmas presents with the reasoning behind the gifts.

Socks, ski wear and various other gifts were produced. We were all presented with very special eyewear for the occasion (as you will see from the photo) to make sure we were looking forward to the forthcoming New Year.

We are very grateful for all those who helped in any way to make this year's Christmas celebrations a joyful and meaningful ending to 2023 and it was particularly special for us to have Martyn and his family with us. Our church looked especially festive with some 100 candles and numerous Christmas decorations which shows our church at its best. Many thanks to everyone see you next year!

May 2024 prove to be a year we all move forward together.

Gill & Tony

Harpenden charity collections

Over the Christmas period we collected for two of our main charities and these amounted to £546 for the Rennie Grove Peace Hospice and £1048 for the St Albans Women's Refuge.

This really is a fantastic result on top of all the lovely gifts which were also donated to the Women's Refuge and whilst we are small in numbers with regards to our church membership we have shown ourselves to be extremely generous and it's a big "Thank You" to all concerned.

On top of this we also donated £100 to Crisis at Christmas, £48 to Barnardos and £45 to the Children's Society through collections from Kangaroo Club and Baby Roos.

Treasurer Harpenden

Secretary's Notes

Happy New Year to all my friends who I have not met up with yet in 2024. I can't believe I am sitting here writing my notes for the February March Magazine already.

I need to start with an apology to Hazel and Margaret T. for the misprint in the last magazine both worked so hard at the Christmas Fayre and brought in just over £100 so well done and thank you.

Crisis at Christmas

We raised from our Christmas Card Donations and our retiring collection at Carols By Candlelight a total of £423.72 providing 15 places for homeless over Christmas

Big Build

Fundraising continues and we have raised £ 10,398. This money has been raised from many sources eg from our Sunday talents table, lucky numbers, tea dance, our church groups donations - childminders, children groups, community cafe, our Spring and Christmas fayres and many others. Thanks to everyone who gives so generously towards this fund.

You will be given the opportunity to renew your Lucky Numbers contributions for 2024 or join the draw very soon so please contact Allison.

Please continue to bring your contributions on Sundays for our Talents Table which has Raised to date £ 900.

Thank you everyone for your continued support and I hope you will support the Fundraising events planned for 2024.

Easter

We will be decorating the Church for Easter on Saturday 30th March at 10am and would appreciate your help so do come along we would love to see you. I would also like the groups listed below to Decorate a Windowsill which depicts either the Easter Story or things we associate with Easter.

Saturday Church, Thursday Club, Community Café, Family Games Night, and Chatter & Tots.

You may prefer to decorate a windowsill as a family which will also be very welcome.

On Easter Sunday please bring some daffodils for decorating the cross during worship.

Tea Dance Helpers

Cherylle is appealing for volunteers on the 4th Saturday of every month to serve Teas and Coffees from 2.30pm for an hour.

Please give this some thought as it is a very successful community activity which is enjoyed by many and also contributes to our Big Build Fund. Please give it some thought and talk to Cherylle if you think you could help once a month or even once or twice a year.

2024 Flower Rota

I still have 11 Sundays on the Flower Rota which are available if you would like to contribute. They are in July, September, October, November, and December. Please see me if you think you would like to be included on the rota to insure we have flowers in church every Sunday. They are then taken to members of our church family who are housebound, poorly, bereaved or celebrating a special event.

Your donation can be Gift Aided. Please make cheques payable to me or given as cash to me, and I will take care of the rest. If you prefer you can arrange your own flowers on your chosen Sunday. Please let me know if you enjoy arranging flowers as we would love to have you join our small team.

Thank you all for your support in 2023 and I look forward to your continued support in 2024.

Joyce N WGC

Join us for a

Zoom Event



CRISIS IN GAZA

AN UPDATE FROM CHRISTIAN AID

- O Julie Mehigan
- William Bell

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WED 7 FEB

2 PM - 3PM

REGISTER FOR LINK

commitmentforlife@urc.org.uk







Commitment for Life

Why War?

Father in the sky above
Here are the souls you're supposed to love.
Little one dying in pain.
What have they done that's to blame?
Older ones in misery suffer.
Could you make their lives much tougher?
And what about the in-betweens.
Where is the happiness of their dreams?
Can't you see what 's going on?
Where is your power to right this wrong.

God's Answer.

I the Lord have spoken many years ago.
It's not my fault you've brokenMy commandments by the score.
Thou shalt not kill has been.
My guidelines all these Years
Is it my fault your race has seenIt fit to twist my words?
You fight and kill to conquer lands.
Compassion lost, replaced with Badness,
Suppress objectors, tie their hands.
Retaliation - overwhelming, sadness.
Do not blame me for your warriors crimes.
Your leaders dole out punishment.
They, put out my love, that shines.
Without a moment of repent.

Hazel Thorne

WORLD DAY OF PRAYER - Friday March 1st

10:30am High Street Methodist Church, High Street, Harpenden AL5 2RU (Also available online)

World day of Prayer is an international, inter-church organisation, led by women, which enables us to hear the thoughts the hopes, concerns and prayers from all parts of the world. The day of prayer is celebrated in over 146 countries. It begins in Samoa and prayers travel throughout the world - through Asia, Africa, the Middle East, Europe and the Americas before finishing in American Samoa some 38 hours later. **ALL are welcome. Men and Women.**

The service this year (very movingly) is from Palestine - and this plan was set in motion 2 years ago, well before the current troubles. The service revolves around one of Paul's letters to the Ephesians in which he says ..."I beg you, bear with one another in love' At this time these words could not be more needed.

The Christian woman of Palestine are calling us to connect with the land from where Jesus came; where he was born, ministered and died, and from where the Christian faith began and is rooted. Despite living in an area of the world where there is ongoing conflict and the future in uncertain, the women of Palestine are sharing love and want to give hope to everyone.

Hoping you will join. Any queries, contact Karin scvdd@me.com

Time for Positive Thinking

So ... having binged on mince pies, Christmas cake and chocolate – and having broken your New Year resolutions by the second week of January – it is surely time to make a realistic appraisal of your life!



Rather than making New Year resolutions, I prefer to set myself 'achievable targets'. It's no use pretending I will ever make a 'wing walk' (I read of an 82 year-old lady who did just so!) or run 10k for charity. Having just recovered from a hip fracture I will aim to walk 2k with my walking poles – say in two month's time!? Hopefully that's realistic enough to be going on with.

This year Lent begins on Wednesday 14 February with Ash Wednesday services. Jewish tradition has it that the 'ashes' are a sign of penitence and the for the Catholic Church it is a time of fasting. And for all Christian denominations it is a time to remember the temptations of Christ.

Christ took 'time out' to make an appraisal of his future. He knew he had a mission from his Father, but how to approach and action this mission was something he had to work on. Fasting with a purpose is one way to commune with God, but as Christ fasted in the desert he was waylaid by Satan!

How often have we been sidetracked by an easier option? How often have we put off starting something and adopted 'delaying tactics'? Tempted to make no end of excuses - the time's not right; I'll start when the weather improves; I'll declutter the loft later.

If you've abandoned your list of New Year resolutions — or probably not made any - maybe it is time to do a re-think. We all know our weaknesses, those things which we give into, so now is the time to consider our strengths and build on them. Resolve to think positively about the year ahead — and take the first step! Go on ... you can do it.

Vivienne - Wheathampstead

Loved with everlasting love,
Led by grace that love to know;
Spirit, breathing from above,
Thou hast taught me it is so.
O, this full and perfect peace!
O, this transport so divine!
In a love which cannot cease,
I am His and He is mine.

Heaven above is softer blue,
Earth around is sweeter green;
Something lives in every hue,
Christless eyes have never seen;
Birds with gladder songs o'erflow,
Flow'rs with deeper beauties shine,
Since I know, as now I know,
I am His, and He is mine.

Things that once were wild alarms
Cannot now disturb my rest;
Closed on everlasting arms,
Pillowed on the loving breast.
Oh, to lie forever here,
Doubt and care and self resign,
While He whispers in my ear,
I am His, and He is mine.

His for ever, only His:
Who the Lord and me shall part?
Ah, with what a rest of bliss
Christ can fill the loving heart.
Heaven and earth may fade and flee,
First-born light in gloom decline,
But while God and I shall be,
I am His, and He is mine.

This hymn was a favourite with Gypsy Smith, which he often referred to as 'He is mine.' It was written by Revd Wade Robinson, who was born in 1838 and died at the early age of 39. He wrote a few hymns but is really known only for this lovely one.

Although all conversions are an amazing work of grace, with God touching our lives and our burden of sin falling away at the cross of Christ, some are more remarkably than others. This is the case with Gypsy Rodney Smith. He was born in a tent in Epping Forest. Had no education, and knew nothing about God. However, he remembers his mother having a death-bed experience of God's grace and dying in peace as she surrendered to Him.

Some years later his father, fed-up with his life of petty-crime and periods in prison, went with Rodney to a Mission Hall. During the singing of a couple of hymns his father suddenly collapsed unconscious on the floor. When, after a few moments, he recovered, he shouted to Rodney that he was converted, he believed in Jesus. Rodney thought he'd gone mad and rushed out of the place.

But his father's changed life was having results, and at the age 16 Rodney heard Ira Sankey sing at one of the Missions of Moody and Sankey to Britain. Then, to satisfy his deep spiritual need, he visited the home of John Bunyan, and there surrendered his life to Christ. He taught himself to read and write, having obtained a Bible and a dictionary. Soon he felt the call to sing and preach the Gospel. People laughed at him. They said among themselves: 'he's only a gypsy boy!'

But this boy became a man and soon he was preaching up and down the country. Wherever he went people flocked to hear him. Often during the middle of a sermon, which was extempore, he would break into singing a hymn. The people loved him. He traveled regularly across the Atlantic to America - probably more than any other evangelist had ever done (people said they'd lost count, but it was probably more than forty.) He also traveled to Europe, and other countries around the world.

Graham Neads

CHURCH FAMILY CORNER

How time flies! We're already at the end of January and Spring is hopefully a bit nearer although at the time of writing, the temperature is just below zero!

Several birthdays to mention in February, starting with Penny J. on 2nd, John M. on 12th, Lynn N on 20th, Kirsty A & Jennifer C. on 24th, Margaret Cr. On 25th, Reuben C. who will be 10, also on 25th, Peter K. who will be 97 on 27th and Janet M. on 28th.

Moving on to March, Graham N and I are first on the list on March 3rd, followed by Colin J. on 6th, Brenda B. on 12th, Madison C. who will be 9 on 15th, Lee N. on 17th, Robert H. on 23rd, Jonathan S. who will be 12 on 24th, Sandra R. on 25th and Margaret H. on 27th.

We send our birthday congratulations and best wishes to all these friends and hope they each enjoy a happy day.

If you are feeling left out and would like us to mention your birthday, anniversary or any other news, then please find me on a Sunday morning or contact Allison in the church office on 01707 333326 or email: officewgcurc@gmail.com.

We have 3 Wedding Anniversaries to celebrate this time:-

Alison & Graham Daniels' 54th on 7th February.

Margaret & Brian Richardson's 66th on 15th February.

Jenny & Scott Rayne's 22nd on March 7th.

We send congratulations to all these friends and hope they enjoy their special day when it comes round.

We were very sorry to hear of the death of Rosemary Craig on Christmas Day and send our heartfelt sympathy to Alwyn and their three daughters at this very sad time.

We are all praying for Scott, Jenny, Xander and Howard at this very worrying time but thankful that Scott is receiving the best support possible in the ICU at the Lister, with a nurse looking after him day and night.

Please also keep Roger & Irene Simpson in your prayers as Roger continues to convalesce in a Care Home and also Norma Collie and Margaret Taylor at a challenging time.

Please remember to pass on any other concerns to our minister, Martyn, an Elder or Pastoral Friend so that no one gets forgotten.

We thank God for all the Blessings we receive as members of our Church Family here in Welwyn Garden City.

Thank you on behalf of our Pastoral Teams

Ann Meers WGC

Gift Aid and Giving

As I am sure you are all aware, there are many ways of giving money to the Church. This is something that has changed over the years. Offerings were initially just cash placed into plate or bag as it was passed round the congregation, but another way of giving was, and still is, through the envelope scheme. For many people this was a way of keeping track of what they were giving and, if they were absent on a Sunday, still putting the money in their envelope to bring to Church the following week.

Times have moved on with Covid being one of the factors that have changed people's giving habits. Less of the congregation now use the envelope scheme and more have moved onto payments direct into the Church's bank account. I know that our treasurer, Helen Kaye, is extremely grateful for whichever way the money arrives in her records.

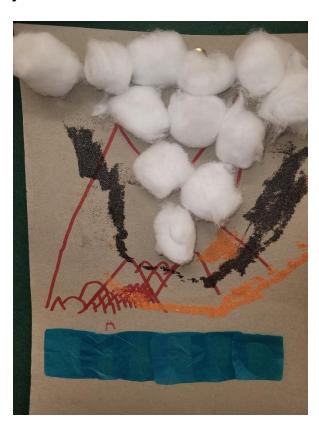
All that said, there is another way of helping to boost the Church's coffers and that is through making a Gift Aid Declaration. Gift Aid means that HMRC gives the Church 25% of whatever has been given. So, for every £10 that is given the church will receive £2.50, for every £100, £25 will be received from HMRC. Firstly, a big thank-you to those of you who already help in this way. The one criteria that you must fulfil is that the amount you are giving to the church each year is less than the total amount of tax you pay. If you are not already doing so and would like to have a form to fill in then please email me on marysartin@yahoo.com

But there is another way of helping boost the finances which is through the Gift Aid Small Donations Scheme (GASD). This allows us to claim 25% on all offerings put in the plate of up to £30 per person. So, even if you are not a taxpayer, cash that is given on a Sunday, be it coins or notes, gives the church another 25% of the amount back from HMRC.

Mary Sartin Confidential Registrar WGC

FamilyWorship@10

January 14th saw our return to a monthly two-tier format with families invited at 10am for a shorter service attended by all ages including 8 Under-18s. The theme was 'God is with us always'. We played sing-along worship music on the big TV and engaged with the story of Joseph taking young Jesus and his Mum to live in Egypt for a few years on the angel's warning to escape from the threat of King Herod. And Rev. Martyn read a psalm which reminds us we can't play hide and seek with God – he is always with us and always wants the best for us. After refreshments, we made collages about Egypt – with various approaches to adding desert sand, the River Nile, pyramids and palm trees. Everyone is welcome at this service – and if you arrive partway through, please do come and join in.



Friday Nights:

Our Friday programme of activities for families is fortnightly this term. So the second Friday was **Bible Heroes**, an evening of learning about a bible character with story, games and crafts and we began a series of 3 about the life of Daniel. One of the dreams Daniel interpreted for the ruler Nebuchadnezzar was a huge statue which got knocked down by a rock. It had body parts made of different materials. Here is a picture of our statue ready to be knocked down by a skittles ball! Although Nebuchadnezzar was very proud of the huge empire he had grown by conquest, the statue told of several future empires which would come after his, and he needed to acknowledge the power of God. And here are some biscuits we iced.



Then the Fourth Friday was Gamesnight with the usual mix of team races such as Flap the Fish, bingo, and a word challenge. Our building challenge was the highest tower made from (uncooked) spaghetti, modelling clay, Sellotape and card. Big thanks to Claire for leading this evening, with support from Janet and John and myself.

The Focolare Centre for Unity (69 Parkway, Welwyn Garden City, AL8 6JG), are exhibiting artworks from the Methodist Modern Art Collection from Saturday 2nd March until Sunday 7th April. Most of these artworks depict scenes from the life and teachings of Christ.

Admission is free and the opening time are Tuesdays - Fridays 11am to 4pm; Saturdays -Sundays 2pm to 5pm. The exhibition will be closed every Monday and on Friday 1st March, Saturday 16th March, Good Friday and Easter Sunday. There will also be a Community Cafe serving refreshments and cakes Tue - Fri 11am to 3.30pm and Sat -Sun 2pm to 4.30pm.

As much of the artwork is of great value, the Focolare Centre are looking for volunteers to sit with the artworks for an hour at a time during visiting hours. If you are interested in volunteering, training sessions are being held on the 13th February at 2pm and on the 15th February at 10.30am at the Focolare Centre. If you cannot make these dates then an extra training session can be provided.

If you are interested in volunteering you can either let me know or contact the Focolare Centre directly at email: art2024@focolare.org.uk.

God Bless,
John Mortimer WGC URC



The Empty Tomb
By
Richard Bavin

Easter Word Search

G S Ν 0 M D Ε J J ĸ R Т х E O Е R ĸ Ε C 0 Ε R ĸ Х G C U U Р C Υ Ν Q W M C K R C R 0 S S Н R Ε D M Е Н F R ١ Α В Q U ı G P Q Ν ı Z S S M C Е т Q M т ı R Α L Е Α 0 R C C ı Е ı ı н R 0 Ν Т Т R C G Ε Υ 0 н S S Н S C R K Ε Р K Н 0 0 Α ı R C S D R R Т O U В Т Ε S F 0 Н т Ν G Ν L Α M ı Р 0 U Q F K S D L D Α Y S Н Z S В Z Z Е Е Е W M D Ε т G Ε G K В S Т R M

APOSTLES CROWN LAMB PRAYER RESURRECTION SON CHURCH FAITH MARY REDEMPTION RISEN SUNDAY

CROSS JESUS MIRACLE REJOICE SAVIOR TOMB



Contact Details for the Magazine

WGC URC Admin /	Allison	01707	allisongiles@hotmail.com
point of contact	Giles	333326	
Harpenden URC Admin / point of	Sarah Connor		shconnor@gmail.com
contact			
Wheathampsted Secretary /point of contact	Jackie Seller	01582 832707	jandjseller@gmail.com
Rev Martyn Neads		01582 354575	revneads@gmail.com

Please can I have any articles for the next magazine by the 18th March 2024. Please send by email or contact me by phone for WGC URC & Wheathampstead articles. For Harpenden URC articles please contact Sarah Connor Many thanks, Allison Giles

I hope you have enjoyed reading this magazine. If you have, please consider sending us an article, I'm sure we would enjoy what you have to say. If you would like to contribute and are not really sure what, please contact one of the people above, who I'm sure could give you some suggestions.

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