



Cheltenham United Reformed Church

www.urcic.org.uk

Bulletin 31st January 2021

From the Editors:

Due to the current lockdown all three churches have on-line arrangements for Sunday worship. Church buildings are closed.

This issue includes a biography of Rev Iain. We are still getting the new phone systems set up but we can now contact Iain on revdiain@urcic.org.uk. However, please respect Iain's day off on Monday's.

St Andrew's Church Meeting will be by Zoom after worship on 31st January. All Members of St Andrew's should have received the meeting Agenda by email earlier in the week.

Janet, Fiona and Brian

The Pulpit at St Andrew's

All Sunday Services are 11.00am, broadcast on YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC0gso0uzwPJq-Onhf6fN2TA>

31 st January	Rev Iain McLaren	
7 th February	Rev Iain McLaren	(Communion)
14 th February	Mr Bob Alger	
21 st February	Rev Iain McLaren	

St Andrew's Charity for January/February

Save the Children



The Pulpit at Prestbury

All Sunday Services are 10.30am

7 th February	Rev Dee Brierley-Jones	via Zoom
28 th February	Rev Iain McLaren	(Communion) via Zoom

The Pulpit at The Church in Warden Hill

Details of Services can be found in 'Lantern', available at <http://www.tciwh.org.uk>

14 th February	South Cheltenham Churches United Communion (Rev Nick Davies presiding and Rev Iain McLaren preaching)
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Letter from Rev Iain

Dear Friends,

Last week the UK passed the grim milestone of 100,000 deaths from covid-19. There was much coverage of this in the media. Many people have been asking whether the government should take the blame for such a high death toll. As people of faith, we are bound to find ourselves asking whether God is to blame. We find ourselves in sympathy with the psalmist who wrote, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, but find no rest' (Psalm 22: 1-2).

The so-called 'Problem of Evil' – why does a good God allow bad things to happen to good people? – is as old as the Bible itself, if not older. However, the Bible does not supply an answer to this question. That bad things happen is taken as a given and there is no suggestion in the Bible that people of faith will be spared suffering. On the contrary, the Bible includes many stories about people of faith suffering hardship: Joseph sold into captivity by his brothers; the Israelites enduring slavery in Egypt; the Temple destroyed and the leading citizens of Judah sent into exile in Babylonia; John the Baptist imprisoned and then beheaded on the orders of King Herod Antipas; Stephen, the first Christian martyr, stoned to death. Central to all four of the New Testament Gospels is the story of how Jesus, the Son of God, was arrested, unjustly condemned and executed by crucifixion.

However, the Good News of the Gospels is that God can transform suffering. By his resurrection, Jesus gained victory over death and the power of sin. We can therefore have faith that good will triumph over evil, love will triumph over hate, hope will triumph over despair. With this faith, the first generations of Christians were able to endure centuries of persecution until finally Christianity conquered the Roman Empire. With this same faith, we can endure the current pandemic, trusting that, by means of the vaccines, God will eventually grant us victory over the virus. Then might we say with the psalmist, 'Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning' (Psalm 30: 5).

Yours in Christ, Iain

Prayer Requests this week:



Joan and Ian Thomson
All those with Covid 19

Iain McLaren and family

If you know of anyone who would like to be added to the prayer list, please let us know and they will be included in the next bulletin.

(painting by Bill Cowie)

Lectionary Readings

Deuteronomy 18 v15-20
Mark 1 v21-28

Psalm 111
1 Corinthians 8 v1-13

Zoom on Sunday 12.00noon

On Sunday 31st January this will be St Andrew's Church Meeting.

All Members of St Andrew's should have received the meeting Agenda by email earlier in the week.

<https://zoom.us/j/98202381446?pwd=WklrdnhGN2lwNUZ6dGd2WXVwMjgrdz09>

Meeting ID: 982 0238 1446

Passcode: 734960

Prayers on Mondays at 8.00pm Please note time

<https://zoom.us/j/96204565714?pwd=Rm1iZ01ZWkpYnMvVbXZScFJISWgyUT09>

Meeting ID: 962 0456 5714 Passcode: 108557

Tea Time on Tuesdays

EVERYONE is invited to enjoy friendly conversation at 3pm on Zoom. Bring your own cup of tea and join the party.

<https://zoom.us/j/95570544462?pwd=QOVHQQVvUWHB1QmpBd2ZDcEZJNlIXUT09>

Meeting ID: 955 7054 4462 Passcode 686988

Reading Group

The Reading Group will be have a Zoom meeting at 7.30pm on Wednesday 10th February. We will be discussing 'The Salt Path' by Raynor Winn. A middle aged couple, Raynor and Moth have lost everything including house and business. When Moth is diagnosed with a terminal illness they decide to undertake an adventure to wild camp and walk the 630 miles of the South-West Coast Path from Somerset to Dorset via Devon and Cornwall. A remarkable journey with its set backs and encounters, some sad and many showing the funny sides of life, which helps them to come to terms with the grief and the healing power of the natural world.

<https://zoom.us/j/95365354431?pwd=dGGrZG5UK0FXTW9Ud1piVTZkNkNldz09>

Meeting ID: 953 6535 4431 Passcode: 764734

Whilst we are locked down may a good time to read a life affirming book. New members of the Group are always welcome. Contact **Mary Cummings 01242 243216.**

Presentation

Janet presenting Tim's retirement Rose bush on a very cold afternoon.



Introducing Iain McLaren

Despite my Scottish name, I have spent most of my life living in the Thames Valley. I was born in 1963 in Windsor. When I was 4 my family moved to Wokingham, where my mother and sister still reside (my brother has since moved to Worcester).



A major influence on my Christian upbringing came from my Scottish grandmother. She was a founder member of Trinity Presbyterian Church (now Trinity URC) in Slough and she passed on her Christian faith to my mother, who in turn used to take us children to church every Sunday. I was part of the junior church at St Paul's URC in Bracknell and was received into full church membership at the age of 17.

Shortly afterwards I gained a place at St Catherine's College, Oxford, where I read History and French – the first person from my family to go to university, and one of the first pupils from my school to go to Oxbridge. My degree course included a year spent working as an English language assistant in a school in a village in northern France, during which time I became friendly with the local pastor and his family. After university I trained as an accountant and embarked upon a career in local government finance, working for Hampshire County Council and the London Boroughs of Ealing, Hounslow and Hackney. All this time I remained active in church life, becoming an elder, lay preacher and church secretary.

Between 2000 and 2002 I took a career break to work with Voluntary Service Overseas in Zambia. Prior to my departure, my then minister advised me to use this time to reflect upon whether God was calling me to ministry.

My time in Zambia was both challenging and rewarding. I learnt how to survive without electricity, gas and running water and also witnessed first-hand the effects of the HIV/ AIDS pandemic. The greatest reward was finding my wife, Keke. Keke accompanied me to the UK with her two children, Gift and Diana, then aged 8 and 4 respectively. We were married in September 2002 and settled in west London, where I took a job working as a bursar for a large comprehensive school in Southall, while beginning the process of testing my call to ministry.

Our happiness was short-lived, however, for at the end of 2003 Keke was killed in a road accident. Overnight I became a widower and single parent. It was a difficult time and I am grateful for the many people who supported me through it.

By 2005 I was ready to resume testing my call to ministry and so I moved the family to Oxford so that I could begin theological training at Mansfield College, where I gained the dubious distinction of being the last ever URC ordinand to be trained by the college. I received a call to a pastorate in south London, but delayed moving until after my son had completed his GCSE's. During this time of waiting, I again worked as a school bursar, this time for an independent school in the Cotswolds.

In 2010 I was ordained and inducted to serve the Trinity group of Dulwich Grove URC, Camberwell Green URC and the Copleston Centre Church (URC/C of E). My ministry with these churches has been a happy one, though, as you would expect, not without occasional challenges.

Gift and Diana are now young adults and in 2017 I became a grandfather when my granddaughter Keke was born. Little Keke had a difficult start in life for she was born with multiple disabilities, including a hole in the heart, and she spent the first seven and a half months of her life in hospital. I am happy to report she has since made good progress and celebrated her 4th birthday on the day I moved to Cheltenham. I'm looking forward to inviting Gift, his partner Kimberley, Diana and Keke, and my friends from London, to visit my new home in Cheltenham as soon as circumstances permit.

Iain McLaren