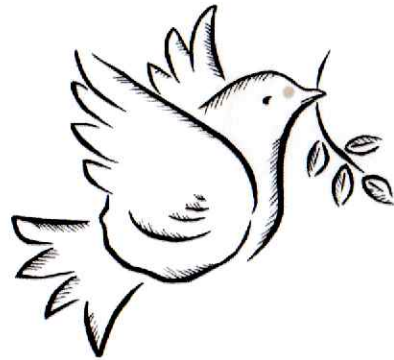


Proclaiming the Gospel Growing in Faith
Reaching out in Service



CONNECT NEWSLETTER for Abbey Lane URC *incorporating* Saffron Walden Methodist Church



July/August 2025



From the Rev. Mark Hayes -

Dear Friends,

The process to form the new Four Rivers Mission Partnership continues to move forward. We are fortunate that Eastern Synod has agreed to scope the partnership with one and a half stipendiary ministers and myself as non-stipendiary at Thaxted. In effect, there will be two full time stipendiary ministers with half of one minister's time being used on duties directed by Synod.

Phil Nevard, currently minister at Sawston Free Church and Whittlesford LEP will continue in this role together with oversight of Clare and will be joined by a new minister who will be called to the partnership with the intention that they have pastoral oversight of Abbey Lane and Water Lane in Bishops Stortford. Initially it is intended that the new minister will be focussed full time on the two churches, so they have the time to make connections and put down roots in Saffron Walden and Bishop's Stortford.

Assuming everything goes to plan, this will be very good news for the two churches!

The process is being coordinated by the Four Rivers "Vacancy Call Group" which comprises representatives from the six churches involved in the partnership; Abbey Lane, Water Lane, Sawston Free Church, Whittlesford LEP, Clare URC and Thaxted URC. We are currently finalising the Mission Partnership Profile and other arrangements for ministry going forward.

In June the Call Group had a very helpful meeting with Revd Anne Sardeson, Convener of Eastern Synod's Pastoral Committee when she outlined the process:

- Once the Mission Partnership Profile is completed, agreement is sought by Synod Pastoral Committee. If it is agreed, the vacancy is brought to the URC Moderators Meeting to agree the vacancy going on the list of available posts.
- The vacancy will then be put on that month's list for consideration by URC Ministers or, in certain circumstances, shown to particular Ministers.

- *Continued*

From the Rev. Mark Hayes

Continued (i)

The following month the Moderators will seek to put a name or names to the vacancy.

- The full Mission Partnership Profile is then sent to each prospective Minister.
- The profile or profiles of interested Ministers are shared with the Vacancy Call Group.
- At this stage the Vacancy Call Group can only continue the introduction process with one Minister. If there is agreement to do so, the Minister then meets the Group, visits the churches, the Manse and meets other Ministers who are part of the Mission Partnership.
- The Vacancy Call Group decides if they want to ask the Minister to preach with a view.
- If both the Vacancy Group and the Minister want to proceed, a "preach with a view weekend" is organised.

Continued

Heritage Open Day at Abbey Lane

Sat. 13th Sept.

10a.m.-4p.m.

Stephen has offered to organise this event, and is happy to be on site all day: however, he would be grateful for a few volunteers to join him! Please speak to Val or any of the Elders if you would be willing to offer an hour or so.

'Welcome' Cards

There are some new 'Welcome' cards at the back of the church. If you see visitors in church, please offer them a card...

From the Rev. Mark Hayes

Continued (ii)

Finally, it's time for the big decision: all the churches will have meetings to consider making a call to the candidate. There will be thresholds for the votes to meet in order for a call to be made, and the process will be weighted towards Abbey and Water Lane as the churches for which the Minister will have oversight.

All of this may sound complicated, but we trust that if we follow the process prayerfully, the Holy Spirit will guide us in the work we are doing.

I hope the following prayer might be helpful:

Creator God, no matter the church, no matter its size or circumstance, looking for a new Minister is challenging.

We pray for the unity of our churches. There are many potential areas for disagreement, both small and big.

May we avoid unnecessary discord and focus on being united in our task.

May we seek Christ in the midst of the many discussions and challenges.

May we set aside distractions and secondary issues and focus on what is important.

May we have endurance to find the minister that you need. **Amen**

**Revd Mark Hayes,
Thaxted URC**

Special Event - Saturday 27th September

Fairtrade Fortnight takes place between 22nd September and 5th October. The Season of Creation, 1st September to 4th October, is a time for Christians to come together in prayer and take action for Creation. Our harvest service is on Sunday 28th September and we continue to support Christian Aid, Uttlesford Foodbank and people living in Ukraine. Linking these together, Julia and Alison are planning a joint SA/URC event on Saturday 27th September. There will be the opportunity to come together to pray, as well as a coffee morning and the launch of "**Soup on Saturday**" a new Abbey Lane initiative.

Why Pride Matters

In the early nineties, I was working for the London Housing Advice Centre (later part of Shelter) on a project that aimed to help people who were living on the streets find suitable accommodation. On one occasion, we had a phone call for a trans woman called Rita. She was having trouble finding accommodation because of her situation and the need for a single room. The women only hostels would not accept her because they considered her to be a man. Whilst the men only hostels would not take her because she was transgender. In addition, the men's hostels were places in which Rita did not feel safe, especially as most of the beds were in dormitories. My colleague and I spent hours trying to find her somewhere, keeping her on the phone talking to her so we didn't lose her. Eventually we found a B&B that had a single room for her. Rita was one of many who found themselves living on the streets because of who they are and the lack of suitable accommodation for trans people.

Fast forward to 2025 and it saddens me that, 30 years later, Rita would still be experiencing problems finding accommodation, the situation being made worse as this time trans women are being told they do benefit from the same human rights as everyone else. Most of us have never had the experience of being verbally abused, physically attacked, denied access to basic services or been deemed to be less than human because of how we identify. But that is the reality for people who identify as LGBTQA+ and in particular people who are transgender.

I know that the issue of LGBTQA+ identity is not straightforward, but when a section of the community is being unjustly discriminated against and vilified, then I believe that our Christian response should be to stand with them and show them that despite what they may hear to the contrary, God loves them for who they are and that they are welcome. This is reason why I felt it was important to be part of Saffron Walden's first Pride March and it was a privilege to walk alongside so many wonderful people.

Continued



Why Pride Matters

Continued

As a follow up to the LGBTQA+ Identities session we had in May, you may find it useful to read an article written by Walter Brueggemann (who died recently). Walter is one of the world's most renowned biblical scholars and in 2022 he wrote a helpful and easy to read article entitled "how to read the bible on homosexuality". In it he talks about how the Bible was written by many voices over a long period of time and that on the issue around LGBTQA+ we often hear only one voice, the judgemental one. In the article he explores the other voices, in particular the voice of love and inclusion. Hard copies of the article will be available at the back of the church or you can find it at <https://outreach.faith/2022/09/walter-brueggemann-how-to-read-the-bible-on-homosexuality/>

Alison



**Board Games
Afternoon!**

**Sunday, 20th July
2.30-5**

Abbey Lane Hall

**Drop-in Session
Refreshments
All ages: all welcome!**

CALENDAR FOR JULY/AUGUST

Wed. 2nd	Book Group in the Vestry	2.30-4
Sat. 5th	Coffee Morning for David Nott Foundation	10-12.30
Sun. 6th	Morning Worship at Abbey Lane led by Tricia Troughton	10.30a.m.
Sun. 13th	Morning Worship with Communion at Abbey Lane, led by Alison Messy Church at Abbey Lane	10.30a.m. 4.00p.m.
Mon. 14th	Bible Study in Vestry	10.00a.m.
Sat. 19th	5th SW Scouts Cake Stall outside Waitrose	morning
Sun. 20th	Prayer Meeting in Vestry Morning Worship at Abbey Lane, led by Rev. Mark Hayes Board Games Afternoon in the Abbey Lane Hall	9.15a.m. 10.30a.m. 2.30-5
Mon. 21st	Knit & Natter in the Abbey Lane Hall	2-4
Sun. 27th	Morning Worship at Abbey Lane led by Elders, followed by Church Meeting	10.30a.m.
Mon. 28th	Bible Study in Vestry	10.00a.m.

AUGUST 3rd	Morning Worship at Abbey Lane, leader tbc	10.30a.m.
Wed. 6th	Book Group in Vestry	2.30-4
Sun. 10th	Morning Worship with Communion at Abbey Lane, led by Rev. Dr. Janet Tollington	10.30a.m.
Sun. 17th	Prayer Meeting Morning Worship led by Alison	9.15a.m. 10.30a.m.
Sun. 24th	Morning Worship at Abbey Lane, led by Alison	10.30a.m.
Sun. 31st	Morning Worship at Abbey Lane led by Rev. Stuart Veitch	10.30a.m.
SEPT. Wed. 3rd	Book Group in Vestry	2.30-4
Sat. 6th	Ride & Stride Coffee Morning at Abbey Lane	10-12
Sun. 7th	Songs of Praise at Abbey Lane	10.30a.m.
Mon. 8th	Bible Study in Vestry	10.00a.m.
Sat. 13th	Heritage Open Day at Abbey Lane	
Sun. 14th	Morning Worship at Abbey Lane led by Rev. Dr. Janet Tollington	10.30a.m.

Assisted Dying Debate

The House of Commons has passed a Bill which would allow assisted dying in England and Wales. This Bill has now passed to the House of Lords for scrutiny. The United Reformed Church's General Assembly last discussed this in 2007, resolving:

General Assembly affirms the report Assisted Dying, as encapsulated in the following statements:

As Christians, we regard all human life as being God given, and therefore precious; we believe death is not the end and we have faith that there is a more perfect life to follow.

We recognise that there is a time to die and that there are circumstances in which it would be wrong to continue to provide treatment designed to prolong life.

We recognise that some palliative treatment for the terminally ill makes the patient more comfortable and pain free, but can also hasten death. We believe this to be acceptable, as long as the intention of the treatment is pain relief and comfort of the patient.

We could not support legislation that would empower medical staff to intervene in ways which deliberately seek to assist a patient to die. We would therefore oppose any change in the law to permit voluntary euthanasia or assisted suicide.

We believe that a Living Will or Advanced Directive which has been prepared by a patient of sound mind can be helpful for carers and relatives; however, we do not believe such a document should be used to facilitate a person's death.

We believe that additional resources are needed to provide more uniformly available and more high quality palliative care.

Continued

Assisted Dying Debate

Continued

We recognise the valuable contribution made by carers. We express our prayerful support for those who work in, and promote, hospices and others who care, befriend and provide support for the dying.

And a Prayer from URC Daily Devotions:

A Fuller Life Awaits

Eternal One,

we pray for our legislators,

faced with complex lives, situations and finances,
and trying to discern right from wrong
in the face of high powered campaigns.

Suffering Lord,

walk with us in our pain, bewilderment and grief,
Give grace to those who approach the end of life,
Wisdom to clinical staff who care for them,
And time for loving farewells.

Renewing Spirit,

Remind us that death is not the end,
That a new, fuller life awaits us,

Where there will be no more death, sorrow, mourning or crying.

Amen

Songs of Praise

Morning Worship on Sun. 7th September will be a 'Songs of Praise' Service - please can you let Val or any of the Elders know if you have a particular hymn or hymns that you would like to be included. At this time of year, perhaps there might be something amongst either traditional or newer Harvest hymns or, alternatively, do you have a favourite hymn that never seems to be chosen Now's the chance!

And speaking of Harvest, Is this Autumn edging its Way In?!



From Val and
Ken's camp
site in June

And looking even further ahead ...

The Winter Fair! Yes, this is getting a mention even before the shops are displaying Christmas cards! This year's event will be held on Saturday, **15th November**. Make a note in your diary and tell your friends

5th SW Scouts are holding a

Cake Stall

morning of

Sat. 19th July

outside Waitrose

raising funds for their trip to Ypres.

Please support them!

Coffee Morning for David Nott Foundation

Thank you to everyone who in any way supported this recent Coffee Morning. In all, £728.80 was raised - an excellent result, considering we were up against Carnival preparations! The money will go towards the Foundation's work of training doctors, surgeons and health professionals working in areas of war and catastrophe throughout the world.



Facebook

Abbey Lane URC is now on Facebook!

RIDE & STRIDE

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Sat. 6th Sept.

10-12

Abbey Lane URC Hall
Cakes...Books...Raffle

ABBAY LANE
UNITED REFORMED CHURCH
incorporating
SAFFRON WALDEN METHODIST CHURCH

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Bible Study:

Mondays 14th and 28th July, 10am in the Vestry.

We will be spending these 2 sessions talking about the Beatitudes as found in Matthew 5:1-12. As part of our discussion, we will be comparing what it says in Matthew with Luke's account in Luke 6:17-26. We are taking a break in August, returning on Monday 8th September when we will be spending a few weeks reflecting on the parables of Jesus.