

The Messenger

and Mayflower Hall News

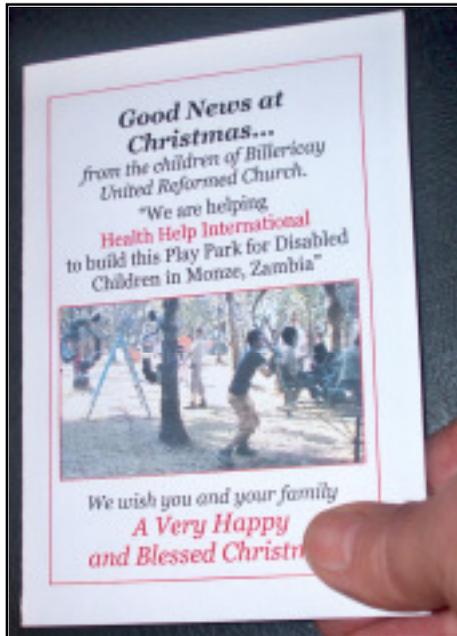
Billericay United Reformed Church

Joint Pastorate with Brentwood and Ingatestone URCs

MEMBER OF CHURCHES TOGETHER IN BILLERICAY



*ARK greets our
neighbours with
HHI news from
Zambia*



December 2008 – January 2009

The Minister: Christmas Celebrations can peak too early

Notes on an important Church Meeting

Report from Zimbabwe

Pictures from our Musical Bazaar

Pictures of the Month



A Nativity Crib with a difference!

Easy to remove the wall on the model – but the real wall is 27 feet high, and the 110,000 Palestinians in Bethlehem and the surrounding villages are trapped and live under occupation by the Israeli Defence Force.

At Christmas we do well to think of the reality of Bethlehem at present, rather than the idealised picture.

The Christian community which has been in Bethlehem since the first Pentecost, is rapidly dwindling. It plays a central role in promoting non-violence. The Christian and Muslim communities work well together and Muslims too are heavily involved in non-violent actions.



***Approaching Christmas,
Trevor writes,
Patience is a Virtue***

It was a surprise to see the tree that lay abandoned, its useful life at an end. Lying in front of the house, water glistening on its branches from winter drizzle that was falling steadily from a grey sky, it was now ready for collection. A line of string, tied roughly around the tree, held branches in check, preventing them from spreading too far and causing any inconvenience. I could just make out an irregular circle of green pine needles that had dropped to the ground around it. No doubt green would soon turn to brown, visible to all unless gathered up and taken away as rubbish or for recycling. It was a sad sight. Something that had once been living and valued now was dead and discarded. Out for an afternoon walk on Boxing Day, only one day after the big event, I had spotted the first ex-Christmas tree of the year.

Perhaps I am too sentimental. Perhaps disposing of the tree by Boxing Day is just the action of someone prepared to follow through on the logic of the Western Christmas. After all, Christmas, it seems, starts early, long before Christmas Day itself comes along. Driven by consumer demand, itself driven by corporate advertising, we are all encouraged to get into the Christmas spirit as soon as possible. Boxes of Christmas crackers and festive fare line the supermarket shelves from months ahead and the bombardment of perfume and toy advertisements issues from our television screens for what seems like an eternity. My personal favourite (congratulations to M&S here) was the display of pork pies, adorned by the signage proclaiming, “Essential Christmas Eating” whilst the date on the packaging informed us, “Use by 23rd December at the latest”.

This drive to celebrate Christmas early (and then to declare it over by the December 26th or soon after) is at odds with Christian tradition. For us, the period prior to Christmas Day is called Advent. It is a time of

preparation, pondering and awaiting the coming of the Lord to a world in need of help. Christmas, in

Christian tradition, only really begins on Christmas Day, or perhaps when the sun has gone down on Christmas Eve, marking the end of that day and the beginning of the next.

Not for the first time in life there is a gap between Christian theory and Christians' practice. My first service of Christmas carols this year kicks off on December 7th. Previously, I have participated in a church Christmas bazaar (with Santa) that took place in November, on the distinctly un-ecumenical basis that "we have to get in ahead of the others". I have, in my time as a church attender and member, grumbled about ministers who refuse to pick many Christmas carols on Sundays in December, despite the fact that they must know that most of us won't be in church on Christmas Day itself. Like most people, I'll be busily out and about in the run-up to Christmas Day this year, present-buying and making other preparations.

As Christians, we want to share the good news about Jesus with others. We would be foolish to reject the opportunities that this time provides, when people who seldom have time for things to do with church want to be involved in a Christian festival, however peripherally. Let's face reality: a lot of this activity is fun for us as well. What we want to avoid is placing so much emphasis on Christmas celebration in the days ahead of Christmas that we arrive there, exhausted, jaded or bored. We want to be able to celebrate Christmas as the **beginning** of a season, not as its end, for we want to celebrate the birth of Jesus as a new beginning for the world that God loves.

Trevor



The Editors would like to wish all Readers of the Messenger and their families a Very Happy and Blessed Christmas, and a Good New Year

CHURCH CALENDAR FOR December 2008

Monday	1	8.00pm	Churches Together Prayer Group at St Mary Magdalen, High Street
Wednesday	3	Evening	Family Fayre in the High Street
Wednesday	3	7.45pm	Elders' Meeting in the Kathleen Martin Room
Saturday	6	9.15am	Prayer Fellowship in the Kathleen Martin Room, until 9.45am
Saturday	6	8.00pm	Cantabile concert in Mayflower Hall
SUNDAY	7	11.00am	Gift Day Service, led by the Revd John Hickmore (No Communion)
SUNDAY	7	3.00pm	British Legion Carol Service
Wednesday	10	6.30pm	Carol Service at Mountnessing Court, led by Revd Colin Hunt
Thursday	11	11.00am	Worship at Hillhouse Court
Thursday	11	12.00 for 12.30pm	Fellowship Group lunch in the Mayflower Hall
SUNDAY	14	11.00am	Sacrament of Holy Communion, led by Revd Trevor Jamison Note - children not in for Communion (Christmas postbox closed afterwards)
SUNDAY	14	4.00pm	Carol Service, led by the Revd Trevor Jamison (mincepies afterwards)
SUNDAY	21	11.00am	Festival Service led by ARK, (mincepies at the hall afterwards) (Christmas cards distributed)
Wednesday	24	5.00pm	Christingle Service led by Mr Simon Houlton
Wednesday	24	11.15pm	Midnight Communion Service led by Revd Trevor Jamison
Thursday	25	10.30am	Christmas Day worship led by Mr Simon Houlton

Saturday 27 3.00pm ARK Christmas party
SUNDAY 28 11.00am Morning Worship led by Mrs Muriel Lodemore

CHURCH CALENDAR FOR January 2009

Saturday 3 9.15am Prayer Fellowship in the Kathleen Martin Room, until 9.45am
SUNDAY 4 11.00am All-age Sacrament of Holy Communion, led by Revd Colin Hunt
 Wednesday 7 7.45pm Elders' Meeting in the Kathleen Martin Room 5.
 Thursday 8 11.00am Worship at Hillhouse Court
 Thursday 8 2.30pm Fellowship Group informal AGM in the Mayflower Hall
 Saturday 10 5.00pm New Year Party for all
SUNDAY 11 11.00am Morning Worship, led by Revd John Hickmore
 Tuesday 13 8.00pm Churches Together meeting
 Wednesday 14 8.00pm Church Weekend Committee meets in the Kathleen Martin Room
SUNDAY 18 11.00am Sacrament of Holy Communion, led by Revd Trevor Jamison
 SUNDAY 18 5.00pm Afternoon Worship at Brentwood URC, to which we are invited 'Christianity and politics'
 SUNDAY 18 6.30pm United Service at ChristChurch, Perry St
 Thursday 22 11.00am Worship at Hillhouse Court
 Thursday 22 7.45pm World Focus Committee meets at Great Blunts - home of Peggy Nisbet
SUNDAY 25 11.00am Morning Worship led by Ms Kate Hackett

NOTES FROM THE CHURCH SECRETARY

Recently, our church meetings have been taking stock and then looking forward. The 9th November Special Church Meeting set out a vision for the next few years.

In a nutshell, the vision might read ‘enabling growth without compromising who we are’. We value what we stand for; the challenge is to be strengthened so that our church can be fully involved in God’s future. At the recent Area Partnership meeting, our Minister Trevor commented that being a loving and welcoming church means taking opportunities as they present themselves – not big projects. A kind word here, a call for justice there.

Who we are - our September discussions concluded that we have valuable distinctive features. Not unique features, but sufficiently distinctive to make a difference in our setting here in Billericay.

In our worship of God we treasure a traditional pattern for services, balanced between head, heart and spiritual; balanced between challenge and reassurance. We seek what God expects of us through our Church Meetings – seeking the mind of Christ together.

We have arrangements for pastoral care that are both formal (with Elders’ districts) and informal. We stress equality before God, and are willing to relate to other World Faiths. We are accepting of people wherever they are in their spiritual pilgrimage.

We join in campaigns for justice in God’s world, such as for Palestine, Fair Trade and against poverty. We try to be ecologically aware, such as by planting trees at Hyde Hall and Stockbrook Manor.

Of course, we do not always live up to our aspirations, but valuing what seems to make us distinctive can help us to make a difference.

Enabling growth - in a sense, we are a bit like an athlete whose natural technique is OK, but she still needs to be sustained by food and exercise. We respond to opportunities that fit our distinctive features. But the 9th November Church Meeting set out some priorities to help sustain us. These are to be pursued initially as follows:

1. Worship - a small task group led by our Minister, supported by our pulpit supply secretary Robin Derbyshire, will work with our preachers to foster continuity and consistency in Sunday worship.
2. Vision4Life – acknowledging that lives are transformed by the Bible, prayer, and evangelism, another small task group led by our Minister is looking at how we can use the Vision4Life material – initially on the Bible. In the meantime, you will have received the Vision4Advent booklet for your personal use during this Advent.
3. Communication and ‘green’ issues - the Future Review Task Group has been asked to explore further what we need to do so that others might know us better, and how we can be more active in ‘green’ matters (the World Focus Committee is also pressing for more ‘green’ initiatives).
4. Small groups for all - the Elders will be looking at possible ways for people to be part of these informal forums. The groups might pray together, discuss together, study together, or just share experiences. They might meet in each other’s homes, the Kathleen Martin Room, or in pubs. But most important, they would be a haven for newcomers and a place for everybody to talk with others in a way that is not possible at Sunday worship.

May we receive God’s guidance as we seek to strengthen the church that God has entrusted us with.

The Musical Bazaar – a success!

Thank you everyone for your hard work and support at the Bazaar. I hope everyone enjoyed themselves and enjoyed the singing too – didn't Simon do well! We raised a little less money this year than last, but the final total is approximately £950 – extra money keeps coming in. A special thanks to Maureen and Barbara from the Tuesday Coffee morning, and the Mayflower Ladies who have run stalls for us to raise money over the years. Special thanks too to our very welcome visitor, Mary Young, who helped out on the Handicraft stall.

Margaret Dunn



Royal British Legion Carol Service

The Legion is holding its Carol Service at our church on 7 December at 3.00pm, to which you are invited. To open the service there will be a parade of Legion Standards, followed by carols and lessons, and the service will be led by our minister. After the service there will be refreshments in the Rose Hall. The Royal British Legion Essex D Group holds a carol service every year, and this year's the Billericay Branch was invited to host it. It will be attended by members from all over Essex, and invitations have been sent to Lord Petre, the Lord Lieutenant, Councillor Peter Bowditch, Chairman of Billericay Town Council, and other Legion Officers.

Our Christmas Gift Service, 7 December

As usual we are appealing for you to bring to the service gifts to go to the Southend Night Shelter, and to the residents of Mountnessing Court.

Mountnessing Court has sent a list of suggested presents for the 28 residents, several of whom are men. They include general toiletries and chocolates, but if you would like to see the list and specify what you would like to give, please find it on the vestibule table. We'll be taking these gifts on our *Christmas visit to Mountnessing Court for our service of carols and readings on Wednesday 10 December at 6.30pm*. Your support to sing, read or chat with the residents will be much appreciated. There will be a list on the vestibule table later for those coming and for those needing transport.

Also on Gift Sunday we bring gifts in kind for the *Southend Night Shelter*. When you are doing your weekly shop, can you please pick up extra items such as tinned meat or veg, pasta, cereals, rice pudding, tinned custard, soft drinks, etc. These enable the Shelter, which relies on voluntary giving, to provide evening meals for the guests.

Gifts of toiletries, new socks, gloves and scarves, towels, etc are also very welcome. We aim to fill at least one car with your gifts!

Robin Derbyshire



It's Beetles for the New Year!

The entertainment at our New Year Party on Saturday 10th January, beginning at 5.00pm, will take the form of a Beetle Drive, courtesy of Margaret Hatchard who will organise (referee?) it. We bring and pool our food; any queries about this side, and offers of kitchen help to Margaret Derbyshire, please. Make a note of the dates in your new 2009 diaries!!

Something Slightly Mad?

Your church is looking for people who are energised by the idea of doing something out of the ordinary in 2010. Following a suggestion from our Minister, Trevor Jamison, at the annual Joint Elders Meeting for the three congregations in the pastorate, we are looking for two people from each congregation. The suggestion is that in 2010 we have an event where some people from the pastorate churches participate in an imaginative, out of the usual event that involves elements of pilgrimage and travel. This could be a visit to Taize, Iona or the Holy Land. It might involve walking St Cuthbert's Way to Holy Island in the North of England or trekking across Spain to Santiago de Compostela. We might visit and work with sister churches in the Netherlands, India or Zimbabwe. Or we might ... [your own dream event goes here]. Whatever we choose to do, it should aim to be an event that people look back upon as a life-changing, significant faith building experience.

We want two people from each congregation to join with Trevor and the others to talk, dream, speculate and then produce an imaginative suggestion or two to put to the congregations. If you get excited about the prospect of taking part in such an enterprise and have ideas to share please talk to Trevor, face to face, by phone (01277 653707) or email (tjamisonurc@tiscali.co.uk).

Notes on a Church Meeting, looking for the Vision

An 'Evangelical' Church?

..Listening to what God wants...How to make sure that the Good News is heard, and finds a response

Think of a Business Meeting...The Chairman announces a motion, and speakers from the two sides seek to persuade the meeting to their point of view. We argue from our own interests and a vote is taken. The majority wins.

But Trevor reminded us, as we met to put into practice our Five Year Vision that this is *not* how a Church Meeting reaches decisions. Decision making in Church Meeting is finding what God wants, not what we want, or what the majority wants. So we must listen for the voice of God in everything that is said, and so discover the mind of Christ. Through discussion God is heard, if we listen. We can draw on our experience of church life, and our memory of scripture, and in prayer find the word of God for today. We are not aiming to win an argument, but seek one voice. With a common view we can enthuse each other.

We formed a circle, so we could hear and see each other better. Very important. We are seeking growth and better witness, and we need to promote more understanding and more spirituality in our worship. There has been a call for continuity in the theme of worship from week to week, a progression based of course on scripture. We will look to provide this.

What should be the style of our worship? The outward signs, the gestures, the language are not so important as the spirit behind them. An 'Evangelical' service is not the same as a charismatic service: it simply means a service where good news is shared, and finds a response. The right word, the right picture (visually or in words) at the right time are the most important thing. Do preachers sometimes go on a bit longer than we can really take it in, adding another point when we are still digesting the last one? Do they sometimes seek to move us with words that don't get through to us? Perhaps the congregation can guide the preacher through feedback.

We are fortunate to have a group of lay preachers in our congregation

who often lead our worship. We thought that our services will improve if they form a team, together with our minister and other ordained ministers. There will be continuity, and there will be fellowship in planning together how they will guide the congregation week by week to seek the voice of God in our worship. People should have very positive expectations when they come to church.

There's room for more people to take part in worship, in leading prayer and reading scripture (perhaps after some training led by our minister). And there is room for more people talented in music and in art to contribute to the worship. There should be a better balance between the presentation by the leader, and the thoughtful response of the people.

There can be more family services, to which parents and children are invited. Our contacts with the community through meetings such as the parenting group and First Steps may strengthen links. Are we using the links we already have to the best advantage? Do we engage enough with those who come to coffee morning, who are often quite lonely and want a chat? Is this in itself what we mean by meeting spiritual needs, rather than aiming just to increase our congregations?

As one member said: 'I'm not into all these systems and statements, structures and visions: I just like to talk to people, I'm good at that!'

A wide ranging Church Meeting! We pray that through all the contributions the voice of God for us today is being heard.

*“It’s easy to tell when
it’s ‘Nativity Play’ time
I can never find a
tea towel!”*



A Musical theme for our Bazaar

I can undercut Amazon on any day!



Wendy Witch waiting for her first customers to arrive!



This car could take off any minute!



Bazaar Manager photographs her favourite stall



Cowboys (Barbara, Janet, Lucy, Maureen)



Social Services employ a new child catcher!

Freshly baked cakes from Pearl of Mayflower Ladies



A very smart pair of witches



Keep Billericay A Fairtrade Town

The Billericay District Residents Association
is sponsoring a competition to

Design a Billericay Fairtrade Tote Bag

Use your imagination - Use a Fairtrade Theme

Design area A4 size.

Your design will be judged in three age categories

1. Ages 5-11: Ages 12-18: Over 18

Entries should be in before 6 January 2009 by post to BDRA FT Bag at 72 Meadow Rise, Billericay CM11 2EF, by hand into the Town Council Offices in Crown Yard by e-mail to fairtrade@bdra.org

Winning entries will be displayed in St Mary Magdalen Church during Fairtrade Fortnight, 23 February – 9 March 2009, and the winners will receive a bag printed with their design and filled with Fairtrade products! Good luck!!

RING OUT, WILD BELLS A Christmas Concert with a difference by The Choir for All Seasons

Sunday 7th December 2008

at 4.00 pm in the Mayflower Hall

Accompanist; Tim Rhys-Morgan who will also play two piano solos.

Guest performers are the South Woodham Ferrers Handbell Team.

Tickets are available from 'Presence' in Billericay High Street, from choir members or ring 656935, and at the Mayflower Hall door.

£6 Adults, £5 Concessionary.



Cantabile Christmas Concert

Saturday 6th December

in the Mayflower Hall from 8.00pm

Tickets include refreshments at £5, available from any choir member or at the door.

“Yea, we can”

Did Obama borrow his slogan from a hymn writer?

'Yes, we can,' was a slogan adopted by supporters of President-elect Obama, familiar to many young people from the 'Bob the Builder' stories. However, one person has pointed out that its origin might have been in the line of a familiar hymn 'Angel voices ever singing.' The 2nd verse, omitted from the version in Rejoice and Sing, asks: *“Can it be that Thou regardest/Songs of sinful man?! Can we know that Thou art near us/And wilt hear us?/Yea, we can.”*

The compilers of our current hymnbook are not alone in leaving out this verse, considering that it strays from biblical correctness. However some will think that it is nearer to what modern Christians believe than many so called more orthodox hymns. The hymn was written in 1861 specifically for the dedication of an organ in the parish church at Wingates, Lancashire, but today is a much loved part of many an act of worship.



Thinking of our friends at Christ Church

The Alternative Christmas Fair at Christ Church on 22nd November helped to raise money for the Dystonia Society and other charities. Rev. Warner Pidgeon, Team Vicar at Christ Church has been suffering for some time from cervical dystonia, which affects the muscles of the face and neck. We remember with our prayers Warner and friends at Christ Church. Ann Mynott (Traidcraft) and Robin Derbyshire (olive wood from Beit Sahour, Bethlehem) both had stalls on that day.



Dave Chuck: an apology

We're sorry that in our last issue our caption of the picture of Dave Chuck, children's work leader of Billericay Methodist Church, working with our children at the Church Weekend wrongly named him.

Commitment for Life **reports from our Partners in Zimbabwe** ***Father Brian MacGarry writes..***

Here, we are pretty near the end of the queue for help with 9.5 million people facing hunger by the end of the year. Still, I couldn't find much to buy in the supermarkets just now. Only the foreign currency shelves had anything on them, so my Z\$150,000 or so was useless. In case you aren't bored stiff with talk of our record hyperinflation, the biggest banknote is Z\$50k, about today's price of a loaf of bread, if you can find any. Inflation was around 15-16% per day in August, meaning prices multiplied by 10 in that month. If it hasn't accelerated since then, that is only because they can't print Z\$ fast enough, and not for lack of trying.

Still, we try to keep our little food relief scheme going. I know I am repeating myself, but every time I say it, it has been true: the need is greater than ever. The country has something like 2-5% of the grain seed and fertilizer needed to feed us all and it is needed when the rains come. We had the first preliminary showers this week, so we can expect the real rains to start a day or two after the new moon – say end of October.

What Christian Aid is doing to help for the future

Christian Aid has released emergency funds to provide seeds for farmers in Zimbabwe's Midland province. The grant of more than £50,000 will provide 118 families and three primary schools with seed and conservation farming techniques for a year. Midland province is one of the worst affected regions of Zimbabwe: UN assessments show that it is on the brink of a severe food crisis.

'The timing is key', says William Anderson, Christian Aid's country manager in Zimbabwe. 'We are nearing the planting season for the next harvest and unless we seize the window of opportunity people will have no food. We will start to see people dying of starvation'.

The UN has warned that half of the country's population will soon be in need of food aid and medical assistance. John Holmes, the UN's humanitarian chief, called for urgent measures to provide seed and fertiliser for next year's harvest to avoid millions more people

becoming reliant on aid. Christian Aid is providing special drought tolerant seeds. These will be combined with farming techniques that preserve water and improve the soil's capacity to retain water. CA has been using these techniques on Zimbabwe for some years now – in parts of Matabeliland farmers have improved their yields by up to 50%.

'Soil is the main asset of 80% of people in the communal areas so unless proper land management techniques are used, the cycle of poverty will never be broke,' says Mr Anderson. 'That is why this type of intervention is so crucial for the immediate and long term benefit of the farming households we work with.' The funds will also provide nutrition for those living with HIV and alternate sources of income by the sale of surplus produce.

Good news for later, but...A News Item, from November:

The UN Food Agency says it has started cutting rations to four million people in Zimbabwe. The World Food Programme says it has had no response at all to its \$140 million appeal to feed Zimbabwe. WFP warns that food will run out entirely by January, unless fresh support is provided as it takes six weeks to reach rural areas. Up to half the 10 million population will need food before the next harvest is expected in April, donors say.

A Prayer, remembering the people of Zimbabwe

'Hear the Good News of the Kingdom', we say, but there are those who cannot hear because their world is filled with the sounds of suffering and for them there is only bad news.

And so we remember those to whom we are called to bring Good News: those for whom each day brings more bad news; those whose relationships bring not love but misery; those whose work is not an expression of their talent or skill but a battle to provide for themselves and their dependents.

We remember those who are deprived of the essentials of life; who live in poverty so desperate it is hard for us even to imagine; who live with pain and sickness because no medical help is available to them; who have to rely on their children to be their providers.

We have heard Good News; let us share it, and let us work to ensure that the news we bring is truly good.

Margaret Hatchard speaks on Scouts, Guides and Brownies in Billericay

Margaret evoked personal memories for a number of people when she spoke to the Fellowship in November. She had more than one story to tell. The first was of the Scouting Movement and its rapid development, the second was of the founding of the sister organisation, the Guides, by Baden Powell's sister, Agnes. The third story was Margaret's own involvement with the younger children, the Brownies, though she had come across the Guides as a 12-year old when a group met in the Mayflower Hall, which Margaret knew well as she went regularly to the Sunday School there at the Congregational Church. Through a series of chance meetings, Margaret was drawn into the Brownie activities in which she was involved for many years. She was able to obtain equipment she needed easily since she worked in London next to the Scout and Guide shop. Kathleen Martin at that time turned her front room into a depot for all the equipment for Guiding that she needed! Both later renewed many friendships in the Trefoil Guild. Margaret shared one funny story of a Brownie Pack holiday. One mother kept enquiring if there was place still on it for her daughter, but didn't put her name down. The girl did come and was overheard admitting that she always wanted to come, but her mother wanted to find the cheapest childminder to look after her! Sadly, nowadays there are not enough leaders for all those who want to join these organisations.

Mrs Marjorie Ferguson – founder of 1st Billericay Girls' Brigade: Margaret Hatchard has since written about seeing announced in the local press the death of Mrs Marjorie Ferguson, who also had a close connection with our church and the Mayflower Hall.

“It was with sadness that I read of the death of Mrs Marjorie Ferguson. The Ferguson family – Richard, Marjorie, David and Elizabeth worshipped at the Billericay Congregational Church in the 1950s. They moved to Stock where their involvement in the Church there was important to them. During their time with Billericay, Mrs Ferguson became the first and founder leader of the 1st Billericay Girls' Brigade. Richard died a few years ago and is remembered as a teacher at the Billericay Sunday School.”

'Reform' Magazine and the Billericay Connections

Three names well known to many members at Billericay URC have recently featured in the national 'Reform' magazine. We give thanks for all they have shared with us.

Craig Bowman was a 'Time for God' volunteer in the 1980s and worked at Greenwoods in Stock, when he came to our church. More recently, he has been a minister in Exmouth, Devon for over 10 years. He and Louise and young Thomas will shortly be moving to the London area, when Craig takes up the important post of Secretary for Ministries in the URC. We pray for Craig and Louise and Thomas as they begin a new chapter of living.

Naomi Young, youngest daughter of our former minister Arthur and his wife Mary, was featured in the November 'Reform' where she wrote about her time in Guatemala with CWM (Council for World Mission). Naomi has written her first novel, *If it Falls*, based on her experiences in Guatemala; it has just been published by Discovered Authors at £8.99, (reviewed in last month's Messenger). Naomi will be celebrating her 40th birthday in November with a 3 week trip to India, her mother Mary says.

Michelle P Brown is a distinguished professor of medieval manuscripts. Some years ago, she shared some of her scholarship and teaching skills at a Church Weekend, and a number of us were shown some of the rare manuscripts in the British Library, with Michelle as our guide – a great privilege. She wrote in the November 'Reform' the first of two articles called 'Creating the Kingdom' on the arrival and first influences of Christianity in Britain.

She wrote: *“This was a time when Christianity was a radical, transforming force: a time when warriors might be induced to adopt pacifism.”*

QUESTIONS TO PONDER?

“As world governments rush to bail out their banks, would this not be an ideal time for the west to write off the debts of developing countries?” (a letter to national newspaper).

On Remembrance Day, on which the sacrifice of countless men and women over the past century was remembered with many tributes, the Christian research group Ekklesia questioned whether the services in the Church of England amounted to a 'political statement' at odds with its teaching and belief (www.ekklesia.co.uk) For many, this comment will be provocative and distressing. But there is a serious point as to whether the 'history' being taught in schools remembers the lessons of war without teaching the lessons of peace.

PRAYING TOGETHER

The following prayer was adapted last year by the Rev Garth Hewitt of the Amos Trust from his own book 'Holy Dreams to Feed the Soul'.

Holy Moments

God of gentleness and humility

Becoming human in simplicity

Bring joy to the world.

In the birth of a child

We find meaning and dignity

May we show the love and the humility of Jesus

That brings holy moments to broken places

Healing moments to wounded people

And joy and hope and laughter

To forgotten communities

Teach us to be the meek

Treating this beautiful world with gentleness

Showing love to our neighbours

And studying war no more.

So we bring a blessing of joy to others this Christmas

And throughout the coming year.

ENDPIECE – by a member of the congregation

Let's have a Party at Christmas

“They invited everybody – and everybody came.” Listening to this catchy little jingle on a disc of songs for children, it was hard not to smile. How wonderful... An open invitation to a party; everybody welcome. It might almost be the message of Christmas. Oh no, not the spending splurge that makes many people anxious, nor the round of parties and family gatherings which dominate the Christmas seasonal festivities – even though these may help to bring people together.

This is a different kind of party or “feast”. In the time of Jesus, as is true today, the peoples of the Middle East loved welcoming others to their home, sharing meals and celebrating with food and conversation. One Sabbath, Jesus was invited to have a meal with one of the leading Pharisees, a man steeped in the finer points of Jewish religious observance (Luke 14).

It was quite a dinner party! First, there was a challenging moment. Would Jesus break the rules of the Sabbath to heal the man with dropsy. He did, but he also had some uncomfortable questions for the religious lawyers. Is healing right on the Sabbath? Would you pull your own son or your ox out of a well on the Sabbath? He might have asked: “When do you need to bend your own rules of behaviour so that all can share in God's love?”

Next came the seating arrangements with some of the guests vying for the place of honour. In the 'Feast' of God's kingdom that Jesus had in mind, everyone should aim for the lowest place: not the place of importance, of influence and power, but the one of service.

And then the guest list. Jesus addressed his host directly. Don't invite your family and the rich neighbours. “When you give a party, ask the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind. That is the way to find happiness, because they have no means of repaying you. You will be repaid on the day when the righteous rise from the dead.”

Now what a wonderful party that might be! Improbable economics, one might feel in today's complex world. However, the message of Jesus is about a party, a feast that all can share in – one of God's love

for all, the image of God that exists in each person. As we share in our services and celebrations at Christmas, let us remember the “hope” that is born anew that there is a feast awaiting for all to share in together. Whatever difficulties the world faces, and we may face as individuals: “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” (John 1.v5).

May the joy of Christmas be with us all and in our world.

CHURCH FLOWERS

December	7	Janet Phillips
	14	Anon Donation
	21	Betty Day
	28	Vacant

January see new Rota

The new Church Flower Rota for 2009 is now on the wall in the Vestibule. If you would like a special date, please hurry as there are one or two much sought after days in our Calendar, and in all fairness it's first come first served! There are many more less popular Sundays especially at the beginning of the year January/February and mid-summer July/August.

Thank you for your help and support during 2008. *Janet.*

Mayflower Ladies will meet each Thursday in the Mayflower Hall at 8.00pm, as follows:-

December	4	John and Alma Hickmore with Christmas Carols and Mince Pies
	11	Party Night
January	8	Social Evening
	15	Essex Bee Keeper
	22	Michael Redhouse continues his travels
	29	Janet Saunders - Quiz Evening

Coffee Mornings – 16 December 2008 & 20 January 2009

The Messenger

Please let Dianne Lough have your copy for the February 2009 issue by **Sunday 11 January 2009**. Articles are welcome. Please speak to Robin Derbyshire at any time about any proposal you have.

HAPPY NEW YEAR

We send our good wishes to our Muslim friends, teachers, parents and students who meet on Sunday mornings at Billericay School. The Islamic New Year (Al Hijra) is celebrated worldwide on 29th December 2008.

Public Issues Calendar

1 December World Aids Day www.worldaidsday.org

The Calendar, produced by the Baptist Union, the Methodist Church, and the United Reformed Church, aims to provide Churches with a prayer focus on issues connected in some way with social justice, and gives internet links for further background and material. (www.jointpublicissues.org.uk)
