

The Magazine

Of Hall Green United Community Church



September 2026

Issue 57

Do you recognise this place?
Answer on back page.

The fear of long words is called **Hippopotomonstrosesquippedaliophobia**. The 36-letter word was first used by the Roman poet Horace in the first century BC to criticise those writers with an unreasonable penchant for long words. - but don't worry there are none in this publication!

DID YOU KNOW?

I think that I shall never see
A poem lovely as a tree.
A tree whose hungry mouth is prest
Against the earth's sweet flowing breast;
A tree that looks at God all day,
And lifts her leafy arms to pray;
A tree that may in summer wear
A nest of robins in her hair;
Upon whose bosom snow has lain;
Who intimately lives with rain.
Poems are made by fools like me,
But only God can make a tree.

Written by Joyce Kilmer who was born in 1886, in New Jersey. He was killed while fighting in World War I.
Submitted by Linda.

You can't stop rain from falling down,
Prevent the sun from shining,
You can't stop spring from coming in,
Or winter from resigning,
Or still the waves or stay the winds,
Or keep the day from dawning,
You can't stop God from loving you,
His love is new each morning.
You can't stop ice from being cold,
You can't stop fire from burning,
Or hold the tide that's going out,
Delay its sure returning,
Or halt the progress of the years,
The flight of fame or fashion,
You can't stop God from loving you,
His nature is compassion.
You can't stop God from loving you
Though you may disobey Him,
You can't stop God from loving you,
However you betray Him;
From love like this no power on earth
The human heart can sever,
You can't stop God from loving you,
Not God—not now, nor ever.

John Gowans
from the Salvation Army Song Book.

Wise Words from a wise person!

Everyone has a photographic memory, some just don't have film.
It's not hard to meet expenses, they are everywhere
Alcohol doesn't solve any problems, but then again, neither does Milk.
In order to get a Loan, you first need to prove that you don't need it.

A quarter of all the bones in your body are located in your feet.

Polar bears aren't actually white.
Surprisingly, underneath all their white fur, polar bears actually have jet-black skin.

A shrimp's heart is located in its head.

Venus is the only planet in our solar system that spins clockwise.

You can see stars as they were 4,000 years ago with the naked eye. Without a telescope, all the stars we can see lie within about 4,000 light-years of us. That means at most you're seeing stars as they were 4,000 years ago, around when the pyramids were being built in Egypt.



Apologies from the editor. I've had some technical difficulties preparing this magazine. My computer is very poorly and very slow. I think it's old age! Anyway I may have omitted some items that you have sent me. If so I'm sorry. I hope you enjoy what is included. Thank you to everyone who has contributed.

June's dingbats

ECABT

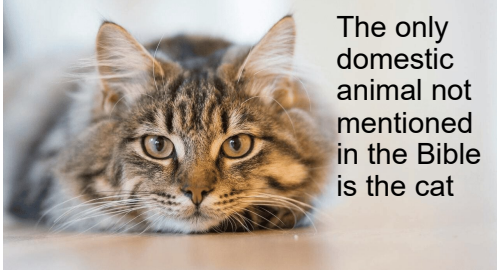
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Do you know that you should never put batteries in your rubbish bin? Last year there were over **1,200 fires across the UK caused by binned vapes and electricals.**
Take them to a supermarket or large store. If they sell over 32 kg of batteries a year they will have a battery recycling point.



The only domestic animal not mentioned in the Bible is the cat

MESSAGE FROM OUR MINISTER

Included – or excluded?



What does it feel like to be included or excluded in any activity?

I have recently found myself thinking about whether we are truly a welcoming church, whether I really do welcome everybody, and whether we sometimes discriminate against certain people or people groups. It is something that is a hot topic of conversation in some of our political discussions at present and has been present in some of the conversations I have been involved in both inside and outside of church. How do we speak about “travellers”, asylum seekers, the homeless, those with a different sexual orientation to our own, neuro-diverse people, those whose ethnic background is different to ours? Do we treat everyone equally, or is there a pecking order in the way we think of others? The challenge for me is constantly one of thinking about how Jesus might view another person, and compare that to how I am reacting. Difference is something that I think needs to be valued and appreciated, and we cannot really appreciate another person by making a judgement about them from a distance. We have to get to know them, and that often takes time, time that many in the world today don't seem to want to spend, or “waste” on others.

Mary Lathrap wrote the following in 1895 about identifying with others;



*Just walk a mile in his moccasins
Before you abuse, criticise and accuse.
If just for one hour, you could find a way
To see through his eyes, instead of your own muse.*

I constantly find myself thinking how sad it is that we don't really know some people until we are present at their funeral listening to the tributes spoken of them after they have died – and wonder whether we should have “life services” while people are still alive, testimonies shared of their life experiences which might help us to relate better as human beings to one another as we learn to understand what people are living through.

It's the sort of thing that the London Institute of Contemporary Christianity have been trying to promote through some of their published material, asking us to consider having time in a Sunday service to ask people occasionally “this time tomorrow, what will you be doing?”

There is an encouragement there for us to relate our faith to what we do during the week and not just on Sundays. How does our faith impact our whole life? But perhaps I am drifting from where I started, and should get back to inclusion?

If the church is to be relevant it needs to be inclusive, not exclusive, in its outlook. How do we do this?

I wonder if we begin by thinking of those who may be excluded?

Donald Hilton considered this in his book on holy communion, published by the United Reformed Church in 1998 and penned the words on page 5 which I would like to leave with you for thinking about.

Mark

(From the editor -Also see Ann's poem on page 5)

Cartoon by Chris Bambrrough, used with permission. Chris's website is <https://artist-chris.co.uk/>

Who shall we exclude?

And who shall we exclude
from this our table feast?
Let's keep out men:
their reputation for aggression ill fits this gentle meal.
But Jesus was a man
who turned the other cheek,
washed feet and served,
showed the nature of true manhood,
and taught and lived that strength in weakness is combined.
so men must be invited.

Then women:
they surely will not mind, so long rejected from the central place,
grown used to living in the margins of the Church; they need not come.
Keep Mary out, and Martha too, both full of Bethany welcome?
Exclude Priscilla, so generous in her hospitality,
and Magdala, freely forgiven, and Phoebe, herself a minister,
and more than half, two-thirds or mote, of every church we know?
No, women must be invited.

What then of those who stumble to the feast?
They never would be missed;
the lame or blind, or those who walk with sticks,
the elderly who take too long, or soon forget they ever came,
Or foreigners who speak in alien tongues,
and wear peculiar clothes?
Or strangers who have not learned our ways
and fail to sit, or rise, or sing?
But pause before you raise the warning hand.
Would he invite the woman by the well?
Were lepers so readily dismissed,
or the beggar who could not see Jericho but recognised the Lord?

Then children; there we draw the line;
the table's not for them;
too young to understand the truth,
inclined to noise and scuffling feet,
half-people, not yet ready for full life,
with no experience yet worthwhile,
and lacking words to speak the pain they feel when doors are shut.
But down the ages sounds an ageless plea,
And is there anger in the echoing cry?
'Let the children come to me;
do not try to stop them;
for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.'

So throw the table open wide;
no barriers raised, no fence, no moat.
It is the Lord's; it is not ours.

"All are welcomein this place"

But are they really?

"Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God."
Romans 15:7

The baby who is crying...

The toddler who needs to roam and play...

The children who question constantly....

Those with additional needs who 'don't conform'....

The person who doesn't know when to stand or sit...

Those who speak a different language...

The visitor who is used to another way of worship who may be confused....

Someone who may make 'inappropriate' sounds and could be classed as disruptive...

Those who need help to engage in the service and fellowship...

The person who struggles to see or hear...

"I was a stranger and you welcomed me."
Matthew 25:35

Maybe we all need to look through the eyes of Christ???

Written by Ann Ford



At Hall Green United Community Church

Praying With..

On Saturday 12th September, at Hall Green United Community Church, our minister will be leading a workshop/training session on Prayer and, more specifically, Praying with, and for, others.

Leading Worship

On **Saturday 10th October**, at Hall Green United Community Church, our minister will be leading a workshop/training session on Leading Worship.



Both of these events will be from 10 am until 12 noon and will begin with a light breakfast.

We would like to invite the other churches in the pastorate to join in this workshop, but if you are interested in coming along then please do let Mark know that you intend to attend (for catering purposes) and please also arrive in good time so that we can be served breakfast and then start the workshop on time.

A police officer called the station on his radio. "I need back up here. The minister's wife just shot her husband for stepping on the floor that she had just mopped."

"Have you arrested the woman?"

"Not yet, Sarge. The floor's still wet!"

Bob's summer

Oh my goodness, just how hot it has been! I was glad to have my hat on to shade my eyes and stop my fur from burning.

I have been to the Isle of Wight with Linda and Ram for a few days, and it was lovely to see the sea. Mind you, the coach journey took for ever with so many road works, we missed the ferry at Southampton and had to get to Portsmouth in a hurry!

Anyway, we had a lovely room overlooking the beach, and I was able to watch all that was going on from the window.

At night, we could just hear the waves lapping the shore, and it helped me to sleep.

We had a trip to Osbourne House. We have been there before, but I didn't remember going to the nursery last time. The cradle was so full of drapes, it would have been hard to find the baby! Queen Victoria had a lot of children and they all enjoyed spending time there. Poor Ram was so tired he had to keep sitting down. In the dining room there were very posh cake stands – but no cakes. (If you want cake, go to the Friendly Corner Café) I had my picture taken on top of the Post Box where there was a doll to look like the Queen.



One day we went for a cruise around the Solent .



Everyone seemed very excited to see the Needles, but quite honestly, I didn't think they looked anything like the needles that Linda knits with. I enjoyed watching the sailors walk around without falling over as the boat rocked, and they thought I was cute and wanted to have a picture of me. Linda and I spent some time by

the beach, and lots of people stopped to talk to us. I loved the post box by the pier with all the bees – oohh, lovely honey!

When we came home there was another surprise. I went to the sunflower fields at Becketts Farm with Abigail, Grace and Elias. It was very hot and the sunflowers weren't very tall, but they were all taller than me. I love exploring, and I don't ask for much, just company and the excitement of learning about new people and places, and I would love to travel with you, if you could BEAR it x x



OUR YESTERDAYS

We met and we married a long time ago,
We worked long hours when wages were low.
No TV, no wireless, no bath, times were hard,
Just a cold water tap and a walk in the yard.
No holidays abroad, no carpet on floor.
We had coal on the fire and didn't lock doors.
Our children arrived – no pill in those days.
We brought them up without state aids.
They were safe to go out and play in the park,
Old folk could go out for a walk in the dark.
No Valium, no drugs, no LSD.
We cured all our ills with a good cup of tea.
No vandals, no muggings, there was nothing to rob,
We felt very rich with a couple of bob.
People were happier in those far-off days,
Kind and caring in many ways.
Milkman ad paper boys would whistle and sing.
A night at the pictures was our mad fling.
We all got our trouble and strife,
We all had to face it, it was the pattern of life.
When I'm alone and look back on those years,
I don't think of bad things, troubles and tears.
I remember the blessings, our home and our love.
We shared them together

When my grandmother was ill in the late 1940's, her doctor said it would be better if she stayed in her cottage to be nursed. "Old roots should not be moved" he said. I believe this is a very old saying. My mother went to nurse her and it was a very big culture shock. She lived in a small cottage just outside Hereford with no modern conveniences laid on.

- ♦ Water was drawn from a well shared by several cottages and the blacksmith. It was brilliant water!
- ♦ She had an old black grate which she lit to keep warm and to cook. The first job in the morning was to clean it and if you wanted a hot meal later it had to be lit quite early.
- ♦ She had a row of lamps on a shelf in the hall to be lit for light in the evenings. There was one for each room.
- ♦ Washing water was collected in a very large barrel outside the kitchen.



I stayed there for a while during the Second World War and after a while you adapt yourself to a different way of living which almost seemed primitive.

Edna White

Could you open your home to refugees?

"As Christians, we believe in sharing what we have with those in need and offering a welcome.

Hosting comes out of our deeply held beliefs, not just our faith but also our beliefs about humans and how we should live as decent people.

We have had almost two dozen people through our doors, some for just a weekend, some for almost a year. We have hosted guests from Sudan, Eritrea, Chad, Iran, Nigeria, Syria, Afghanistan, and Ukraine. It has been a brilliant experience hosting alongside bringing up our five children.

They have danced to music from round the world, learned a smattering of different languages, given English lessons, learned to share their kitchen and tested people to see if they like Marmite!

Some people have expressed surprise that we are happy to host young men in our home, particularly with our young children. We have never found this to be an issue. Our guests have been polite, tidy and helpful.



"When I'm done, I can rest in peace knowing I've done my best,"

During her life, Dolly Parton raised millions for numerous good causes, including the American Red Cross and several HIV/AIDS-related charities, and was involved in charitable campaigns ranging from relief from wildfires in the Great Smoky Mountains to several HIV/AIDS charities to the preservation of the American Eagle. Her Dollywood amusement park became home to the largest sanctuary for non-releasable bald eagles in the world and they are no longer on the endangered species list..

She was born one of 12 children in a small log cabin. She said that they were 'dirt poor' but happy. Her 1971 classic Coat of Many Colours tells the moving story of Parton as a child being proud of the ragged, hand-sewn clothes her mother had made for her.

"My own father didn't get a chance to go to school. He couldn't read and write, and that hindered him a great deal because he was so smart. It really bothered him a lot. Her background led her to establish, in 1995, the Dollywood Foundation's Imagination Library, a

Refugees at Home take referrals from organisations who have already taken the time to get to know the potential guest, and so we have felt happy that we wouldn't be asked to take anyone who would not fit in with our family.

Hosting has been so good for my children, for all of us, to really see that what we have in common across the world is far bigger than that which divides us.

Refugees at Home is the UK's largest independent hosting charity, matching people with a spare room to refugees and people seeking asylum in need of a temporary place to stay. They are working towards a future where nobody coming to the UK seeking safety ends up sleeping on the streets. Since 2016, they've placed nearly 8,000 guests with their community of hosts and are looking for more volunteers to join them. Hosting is only ever **temporary**; it can last anywhere from a few days to several months.

Feeling inspired? Visit refugeesathome.org.uk to find out more or request a callback from a member of their team.

Refugees at Home host, Rachel Summers, has been hosting for over 10 years.

On 10th November Mark will be hosting an online Zoom session where there will be the opportunity to hear more about the work of Refugees at Home

program which she described as her proudest achievement. The program mails a new, free book to children from around the world, from their birth until they begin kindergarten. It currently mails books to almost 850,000 children each month in 1,600 communities across the U.S., Canada, the U.K., Australia and the Republic of Ireland. She also offered \$500 to students who completed their further education. This had a dramatic effect on dropout numbers which fell from 35% to 6%. In 2022 she went even further and, her charity work to improve education was extended to adults, when it was announced that any Dollywood employee whether they were seasonal, part-time or full-time, would have 100% of their tuition and books paid for if they furthered their education.

Dolly Parton 19/1/1946 - 25/8/2026

"The way I see it, if you want the rainbow, you gotta put up with the rain."





WALK THROUGH THE BIBLE


SEE IT


READ IT


LIVE IT

SYNOD LEARNING DAY FOR PREACHERS & ELDERS

Tuesday 22nd September 10.00 – 4.30pm
Bring your own lunch/Drinks provided
Weoley Hill URC
Green Meadow Rd, Selly Oak, B29 4DE

register your interest:
admin@urcwestmidlands.org.uk



The
United
Reformed
Church
West Midlands
Synod

An interactive and engaging teaching event that uncovers the Big Picture of the Old Testament - Genesis to Malachi.

An encouraging way to consolidate prior Bible knowledge and help fill in gaps.

Knowle Male Voice Choir

Want to join the choir?

We meet every Wednesday at 7:30pm at Dorridge Methodist Church

Call Haydn on 01564 782873 or 07597 077464 or email at kmvc14@gmail.com.

You will be made very welcome.

For more information

www.knowlemalevoicechoir.org.uk

www.facebook.com/knowlemalevoicechoir

www.youtube.com/@davidgamble4952




Lots of
events to
choose
from!

Also
see
back
page

ENVIRONMENTAL LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME

OCT 2026 – JULY 2027

18-25, West Mids based, and want to have your voice heard?

Join us on our FREE programme!





LEADERSHIP

Build real-world, transferable skills that boost your CV and your confidence

ACTIVISM

Learn how to spark positive change in your local area and beyond

COMMUNITY

Create a network that doesn't fade when the programme ends - it grows

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ROB HALLIGAN HOW DID WE GET HERE?

an itinerant's musical

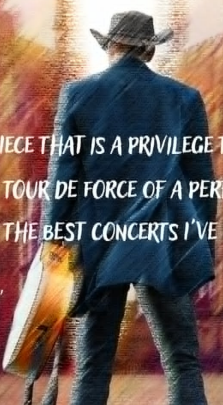
BIRMINGHAM

DIGBETH-IN-THE-FIELD URC

MOAT LN, YARDLEY, B26 1TW

FRIDAY 18TH SEPTEMBER 2026

7:30PM - TICKETS £5



"A MASTERPIECE THAT IS A PRIVILEGE TO EXPERIENCE"

"A REAL TOUR DE FORCE OF A PERFORMANCE"

"...ONE OF THE BEST CONCERTS I'VE EVER BEEN TO!"

"Songwriting Gold!"

★★★★★

MAVERICK MAGAZINE

★★★★★

"Breathtaking!"

★★★★★

WILDY'S WORLD REVIEWS

X-plore Faith



An opportunity to meet together
to explore The Sermon on the Mount

Monday evenings Sep 14th - Oct 19th
6.30pm–8.00pm Russell Room
Hall Green United Community Church



HALL GREEN
UNITED
COMMUNITY CHURCH



The United
Reformed
Church



The Methodist Church

Long Service (Anna)

Luke 2: 36 – 40

There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. At that moment she came and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom, and the favor of God was upon him.

There are some things that only the very old can see. A lifetime of experience – of enchantment and disappointment; of simple pleasures and complex conundrums; of challenge and change – can hone one's vision, and teach one to look with eyes of love and possibility.

When we retire (if we are so lucky), we may be tempted to think that our work is done. We take the gold watch, receive the 'Well done, good and faithful servant' (again, if we are lucky), and retire to the easy chair, good books and Netflix. But nothing could be farther from the truth. Our usefulness to God's great project never ends. The river of love that is God never abates and always seeks to sweep us into its movement.

Friendly Corner café celebrated its 40th anniversary in August with a record 82 diners. What started as tea and biscuits on the lawn in 1986 has grown to become a welcoming place for so many people who enjoy making new friends and eating together. Some of our diners loved being there so much that they now volunteer!

Just this year FCC has donated over £4000 to various charities and yet only charges £1.30 for homemade cake and a hot drink! Or homemade soup, roll and butter £1.50. More substantial hot meals are £2.50. If you've never been, give it a go.

Tuesdays 10.30 to 1.30.



Of course we need to heed the lessons of the week: that humility is the means of grace and godliness the fruit of intention, that love is truth and love is listening.

Yes, our bodies are no longer strong or flexible, and maybe we walk, think or talk more slowly. But those diminishment may bring with them patience, wisdom and integrity. We can – even from our easy chairs – be prayer warriors, whose vision is sharpened and whose commitment is unwavering. We can notice, proclaim and celebrate the coming of love into the world in new ways. That is the fulfilment of being that can be ours in the chapter of our lives on the Earth.

+ May my last chapter tell the story of your redeeming love and justice to any who may read it. May your praise be on my lips, always. Amen.

For further thought

A wise older woman told me: focus not on what you can no longer do, but what you can.

Carla A Grosch-Miller

Published in Fresh From the Word 2026 © International Bible Reading Association.

Used with permission and suggested by Revd. Mark



Equipping believers to advance the Kingdom of God through Holy Spirit empowered ministry.



Dear Mark,

Did you hear we are once again running our two-part ONLINE course "Listening to God" this autumn?



Have you considered that God wants to talk to you?

We all know and accept that prayer can be powerful, that the Lord loves to hear from his children and that Jesus modelled prayer perfectly. But have you considered that God wants to talk to you?

This short but powerful course is designed to start you on the journey to a two-way conversation with God that can impact your personal life and make you more effective for his Kingdom.

Come and join us for short teachings, small group exercises, and space to listen to God both individually and corporately.



Listening to God:

The Zoom calls will be on these two evenings:
Wednesdays 21st and 28th October 2026

Both will be from 7:00 - 8.45 pm (GMT - please adjust for your timezone if you are outside the UK)

REGISTRATION

You must register for **Listening to God** to receive your personal Zoom link for the calls. *Please note: The calls will not be recorded due to their interactive nature.*

Go to Listening to God webpage for more info and registration

Race for Change!

In June this year, I had the pleasure of taking part in a charity event organised by the company I work for. Our CEO had spent several years applying to appear on the TV show Race Across the World, but unfortunately had been unsuccessful each time. However, those setbacks ultimately led to the creation of Race for Change; an event where teams from across the construction sector came together to compete in a unique challenge while raising money for charity.

The concept was simple, but daunting. We arrived at Birmingham Airport, handed over our mobile phones, received £600 in cash between four team members (provided by our companies), a basic "dumb" phone for receiving instructions, and then boarded a flight to an unknown location. Our objective was straightforward: get back to Birmingham within three days, using no electronic devices, sticking to a cash-only budget, and travelling by any means other than air.

There were a few additional challenges. Teams had to be in their overnight accommodation by 10pm each evening. Missing the curfew resulted in time penalties, often meaning you could not leave at the earliest permitted time of 6am the following morning. We also had to document parts of our journey and record messages explaining the purpose of the event: to raise as much money as possible for charities focused on water scarcity and social issues around the world.

Each team was able to choose its own charities, and ours supported two fantastic causes. The first was Kids' Village, an incredible initiative in Derbyshire that is creating a purpose-built holiday village for children with critical and life-limiting illnesses. It aims to give families precious time together outside of the hospital environment, making special memories when they need them most. It is a truly inspiring project, and I would encourage everyone to learn more about it and support it if possible. The second was The Cycle, a charity focused on tackling water scarcity in some of the most remote parts of India. The organisation recognises that women are often disproportionately affected by water shortages and also addresses related issues such as period poverty by providing essential support and supplies. Another fantastic cause doing life-changing work.

Budapest Beckons

Once we'd surrendered our phones and received our care package, we were finally told our destination: Budapest. Excitement levels were high. Sixteen teams gathered at the airport, all eager to get started. The flight was exactly as you'd expect, full of laughter and speculation about where our first checkpoint might be. The truth was that nobody had a clue.

On arrival, all teams checked into the same hostel in the city centre. The first day consisted of a series of challenges around Budapest. We were given photographs of specific locations and had to identify them, get there as quickly as possible, and record content at each stop. The first team back would earn the advantage of leaving first

the next morning. We made a strong start and finished second. That evening would be the last time all the teams were together for a while. We enjoyed a meal and a few drinks at a lively restaurant, kindly funded by our companies. Looking back, none of us realised just how much conditions would change over the next few days. Luxury, it turned out, would be in very short supply.

The Challenge Begins

The following morning, we gathered in the lobby and were given the location of our first checkpoint: Wiesbaden. I'd never heard of it. My immediate thought was, "I'll just check Google Maps." Then reality hit. No smartphone. No laptop. No internet. Suddenly, the paper map of Europe came out of the backpack and the scale of the challenge became very real.

First, we had to locate Wiesbaden. Then we had to figure out how to get there without spending all our money on transport and leaving nothing for food and accommodation. Turns out, it's in North Germany. After some discussion, we opted to travel from Budapest to Munich by train to start off our adventure. As it happened, several other teams made the same choice, so despite setting off separately, we kept bumping into familiar faces during the six-hour journey.

One of the most surprising aspects of the trip was how quickly the absence of a smartphone changed things. You realise just how dependent we've all become on these little devices. Yet the digital detox was genuinely refreshing. It encouraged conversations that simply wouldn't have happened otherwise.

My team consisted of me, Maria, a colleague from Latvia, and Humzah, a young man from Bristol. Prior to the event, I'd barely spoken to either of them. During those long journeys, however, we talked for hours. One conversation that particularly stayed with me was discussing faith with Humzah. As a practising Muslim and me being someone who still considers himself a Christian, despite not always being the most disciplined practitioner, we found ourselves exploring both the similarities and differences between our beliefs. More importantly, we discovered how much common ground we shared in wanting what is good and right for the world. In a world where we're constantly distracted, it was wonderful simply to talk, listen and connect.

Munich, Wiesbaden and a Race Against Time

We arrived in Munich at 9:10pm, leaving very little time to find accommodation. Money was tight and available beds were even tighter. Germany happened to be playing that evening during the football tournament, and the city was packed! Three hostels later, we finally found somewhere to stay, just in time to avoid a time penalty. That evening was spent studying maps and planning routes. Eventually, we settled on a train to Frankfurt followed by a coach to Wiesbaden. Upon arrival, we were instructed to text our contact for rendezvous details. The reply was wonderfully

Three Days, Three People, No Smartphones.

brief: "Marktplatz." Without Google Maps, however, that small piece of information created quite a challenge. We found ourselves approaching local residents and showing them the message. More than a few suggested, "Just use Google Maps!" Explaining that we couldn't wasn't always easy when their first language wasn't English and our German was hardly fantastic! Eventually, a taxi driver pointed us in the right direction and off we raced.

We arrived at the checkpoint in second place, just fifteen minutes behind the leaders. Another excellent result! Wiesbaden itself was beautiful. The architecture was stunning, the people incredibly welcoming, and after a hot day's travel, the hotel and shower provided by our companies felt like absolute luxury. The evening was spent sharing stories with the other teams, comparing successes, disasters and near misses. There was plenty of laughter.

The Long Journey Home

The final stage was simple in theory: get back to Birmingham. Our finish line was the Installer show at Birmingham's NEC, where many of our companies were exhibiting. Due to disruptions affecting Eurostar services, the rules were adjusted and overnight travel was now permitted. With funds running critically low, trains were no longer a realistic option.

We travelled by coach back to Frankfurt, then onwards to Maastricht in the Netherlands. While we initially saw the lengthy stopover there as an inconvenience, Maastricht proved to be one of the highlights of the entire trip. What a beautiful place. The city felt like something from a fairytale, with historic buildings, picturesque streets and a river running through its heart. The atmosphere was wonderful, and the few hours we spent there passed far too quickly.

From Maastricht we travelled overnight towards Calais, eventually reaching the ferry terminal after almost nine hours on coaches. By this point the excitement had started to wear thin. We were hot, tired and thoroughly fed up with bus travel. Nevertheless, we believed we were in a strong position. Our contact informed us that we were effectively neck-and-neck with another team and had a genuine chance of winning.

Then disaster struck. A passenger on our coach encountered issues with their travel documentation during French border checks. As a result, our coach was held for six hours while the situation was resolved. During that time, we watched ferry after ferry depart without us. Our race was over. By the time we finally boarded, our optimism had disappeared.

We slept in the ferry seating areas and barely spoke. Things didn't improve much after arriving in Dover, where our coach was selected for a random inspection, adding yet another delay. At that point, though, all we could do was laugh. The pressure was gone. We were back in England. Home suddenly felt within reach.

The Finish Line

From London

Victoria we made our way to Euston and used the last of our money to buy rail tickets to Birmingham International. In fact, by this stage we had less than £10 left.

Our final purchase was a Boots meal deal before boarding the train.



One challenge I haven't yet mentioned was managing currency exchange. We started with British pounds, then converted money into Hungarian Forint, later into Euros, while still keeping enough pounds for our return to the UK. Every exchange came with fees and less-than-ideal rates, creating yet another obstacle to overcome.

The train journey home was memorable for another reason. To put it delicately, we absolutely stank. Thankfully, I still had one clean pair of socks, one clean pair of pants and a fresh T-shirt buried in my bag. I can confidently say that I have never before, nor will I ever again, completely change clothes inside a tiny train toilet cubicle. The feeling afterwards was glorious.

Eventually, we arrived at Birmingham International, crossed over to the NEC and walked towards the finish line. I was over the moon to find my wife there, waiting to see me get back (and bless her for being there all day expecting me home much sooner - 5 hours she spent there)! After spending much of the race among the front-runners, we ultimately finished 14th out of 16 teams. But honestly? This is one of those rare occasions where taking part mattered far more than winning.

Looking back, we had an incredible experience. We visited places we would never otherwise have seen, met remarkable people, built lasting friendships and learned a great deal about ourselves. Most importantly of all, the event raised more than £68,000 for charity! There are countless stories I've left out, either because there simply isn't enough space or because some experiences are probably best left on the road. But I'll finish by saying how grateful I am to have been part of such a unique adventure and by once again encouraging you to learn more about the two brilliant charities we supported.

Kids' Village: <https://www.kidsvillage.org.uk/>

The Cycle: <https://www.thecycle.world/>

And finally, after three days of trains, ferries, delays and coaches, I can say with complete certainty: I **never** want to see another coach again. **Lewis Ford**

Summer – Spiritual Grace

A Reflection from Doris

In this Summer reflection, I focus on the theme of spiritual grace. I give thanks to God for His protection, the grace received through baptism, and the courage to overcome life's challenges. Inspired by the sonnet tradition of William Shakespeare, I wrote a fourteen-line poem to express thankful, environmental responsibility, and the healing power of faith.

Summer Sonnet – Grace That Guides My Life

When summer light spreads forward its golden grace,
I lift my heart in thankful above;
Through trials accepted on life's humble race,
God shelters me with baptismal love.
From simple cans once cast in careless way,
My hands reshape new worth from what was waste;
A candle stand now sends its gentle ray,
A sign that hope and care cannot be erased.
I walk the path where poets learn their art,
Fourteen calm lines that shape both thought and voice;
Acceptance heals the burdens of the heart,
And faith in grace gives reason to rejoice.
Through NATEMA my wounded soul finds day,
And God's protection lights my onward way.

Three things will last forever—faith, hope, and love—
and the greatest of these is love. 1 Corinthians 13:13,



Through spiritual grace, environmental stewardship, and poetic reflection, the NATEMA meditation model continues to guide my life journey. It encourages me to transform challenges into hope and to move forward with faith, love and thankfulness.

The NATEMA Meditation Model

- N** – Noble aspiration: A small dream grows quietly in my heart—to become a poet, learning from the fourteen-line sonnets of William Shakespeare.
- A** – Acceptance: I accept life's challenges without guilt, trusting that every difficulty can become a lesson.
- T** – Talent: God-given gifts encourage me to write Chinese poetry and to learn to compose English poems.
- E** – Emotion transformed: Pain and hurt can be transformed into contributions to society and future achievements.
- M** – Meditation: Through re-lection and prayer, I find healing, guidance, and protection for the future.

Fairtrade Fortnight 2026 takes place from Monday, 21 September to Sunday, 4 October 2026.
Buying Fairtrade is easy. There are almost 5,000 Fairtrade products from coffee and tea to flowers and gold.

In 2026, Fairtrade is focusing strongly on people, planet and pay, recognising that farmers face challenges such as climate change, rising production costs and unstable market prices.

A major development in 2026 is Fairtrade's new Global Strategy for 2026–2028, which aims to build stronger and more resilient farming communities. The strategy focuses on sustainable livelihoods, fair and resilient supply chains, and encouraging consumers and businesses to support fair trade.

Fairtrade is also taking action to improve farmers' incomes. For example, new cocoa Living Income Reference Prices for Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire will come into effect in autumn 2026. New Fairtrade coffee prices

will also provide greater protection for farmers from December 2026.

Climate change remains another important issue. Extreme weather can damage crops and threaten farmers' livelihoods, making sustainable farming and climate adaptation increasingly important. By choosing Fairtrade products, consumers can help support farmers and encourage businesses to create fairer supply chains. Overall, Fairtrade in 2026 is about more than paying a fair price. It is about creating fairer pay, safer working conditions and a more sustainable future for the people who produce the goods we enjoy every day.



A Quiet Gift That Became a Blessing

A remarkable story of generosity has recently come to light in Lancashire. An anonymous benefactor, who described himself simply as "James, servant of the living God," quietly donated gold coins worth tens of thousands of pounds to churches, a school and Christian causes.

The donor was believed to be a modest, leather-clad motorcyclist who travelled regularly along his favourite routes. Rather than seeking recognition, he chose to remain anonymous. His gifts were often accompanied by simple words of encouragement and a desire to "do good."

One of the churches that benefited was St Wilfrid's Church in Melling where he signed the visitor book and quoted Phillipians "I can do all things in Christ which strengtheneth me" The church had been facing a £750,000 repair bill and raised £30,000 by selling nine gold coins that he had hidden beneath the altar. Other churches and a primary school also received coins. At one school, ten gold coins were used to provide interactive whiteboards, benefiting around 100 children.

The story is especially inspiring because the donor did not give in order to receive praise. His concern was simply that the money should be used well. One teacher described the gift as life-changing, while a churchwarden said that the money had helped churches in many different ways.

We may never know the full identity of this generous man, but his actions have left a lasting testimony. His gifts helped churches with urgent repairs, supported Christian ministry and improved education for children. His story reminds us that generosity does not have to be loud or public to make a difference.

As Christians, we are called not only to receive God's blessings but also to become a blessing to others. We may not have gold coins to give, but we all have something to offer—our time, skills, encouragement, prayers, possessions and financial support. May this mystery benefactor's example encourage us to give freely, humbly and joyfully. Let us ask ourselves: What has God placed in my hands that I can use to bless someone else?

A quiet act of kindness, offered in faith and love, may become a blessing far greater than we could imagine
Taken from The Times and submitted by Nina



*For those off us who may never
own gold coins this one sells for
£3610 but if you buy 100 it
would only be £3,561!*

Have you Heard of The Mission to Seafarers?

John Ashley was an Anglican priest. In 1835 he was on the shore at Clevedon with his son who asked him how the people on Flat Holm could go to church. For the next three months Ashley voluntarily ministered to the population of the island. From there he recognised the needs of the seafarers on the four hundred sailing vessels in the Bristol Channel and created the Bristol Channel Mission. He raised funds and in 1839 a specially designed mission cutter was built with a main cabin which could be converted into a chapel for 100 people. This became the Mission to Seamen which in 2000 changed its name to the Mission to Seafarers and which remains A Church of England charity. Today, the Mission serves 1.89 merchant seafarers in more than 200 ports worldwide, strengthened through collaboration with fellow welfare organisations and maritime authorities.



Again and again throughout its history, the Mission has adapted to whatever challenge the world placed before it without ever losing sight of the individual sailor. This network of support stretches much further to the shipping companies, international bodies, insurers, marine colleges and other charities who recognise the vital contribution made by seafarers. But however large the machine behind the Mission, what matters most is that moment of human interaction: the conversation in a seafarers' centre, the hug on a gangway, the Christmas care package, the simple reassurance that someone cares. For 170 years, that unwavering commitment has never changed.

Even during wartime occupation, natural disasters and catastrophic accidents, the work continued. After the San Francisco earthquake and fire of 1906, the Mission operated from an 18-by-12-foot shack on wheels in the street. In Yokohama, after the earthquake of 1923 destroyed the Mission's club, workers erected a tent over the ruins and carried on serving seafarers. During the Second World War, Swansea's Mission building was devastated by bombing. Yet within three days, the Flying Angel flag was flying once more above temporary premises, and support for crews had resumed. Today As conflict in the Middle East disrupts key shipping routes, The Mission to Seafarers is stepping in to provide critical support to thousands of seafarers who remain stranded especially by hostile activity in the Strait of Hormuz which has affected tens of thousands of seafarers in the region.

From an article suggested by a member of HGUCC

I asked my minister to pray for my hearing.
He covered my ears with his hands and spoke calmly.
When he asked if it had helped I told him I wouldn't know until I appeared in court on Monday.

VOLUNTEERS

It was a pleasant Sunday morning when Tommy started his journey into church by entering through the black wrought iron gates which formed part of the long perimeter fencing. He walked along the path between two well mowed grassy areas to the double doors marking the entrance to the church, stopping to admire the tastefully planted flower beds each side of the entrance. People were around moving in the same direction. A door was pushed open and Tommy was warmly greeted then invited into a bright clean lobby area plus another pair of glass doors with a wooden stand supporting a vase of colourful flowers.

He passed through this second pair of glass doors and was welcomed by another person who gave him the Order of Service. For a while he paused to take in the atmosphere of the large worship area with its supported arched roof and again very tasteful decoration, plus a row of stained glass windows mimicking the large, elaborately designed stained glass window on the balcony for more than a century. He continued his journey along the green carpet which was flanked by rows of neat comfortable chairs and which led to the stepped area. Again another larger arrangement of beautifully coloured flowers adorned the top of the font. The organ and band played music promoting a deep feeling of peace.

People sat quietly talking to each other who possibly only meet once a week.

Tommy sat down and started to speak to the person next to him enquiring who looked after the gardens, the flower beds and the lovely flower arrangements? VOLUNTEERS came the reply- and the happy people who welcomed me? VOLUNTEERS – and the musicians who set the scene for peace? Again came the reply VOLUNTEERS.

The Service began.....A visitor was escorted along the green carpet to the front and up the three steps into what is known as the chancel. The escort then



introduced the visitor to all present and left him to speak. He spoke to all present then welcomed people on something called 'zoom', who could not attend in person.

Two others joined him separately, who were 'readers', plus one more who gave him money on a tray. Songs were sung and stories told. Children engaged in their own activities. Later the children were invited to say what they had been doing, and did so. The last song was being sung whilst the children walked up and down playing a selection of musical instruments in a lively fashion. After which all present were invited to stay for refreshments in the large room across a corridor. Some stayed and some acknowledged the visitor and left. The tray of money was taken to be counted and the flowers were taken to be distributed appropriately. Near the exit doors, Tommy noticed large containers of stored food donated by people present, the food was later taken to a Food Bank to support people less fortunate. Who took the food? It was a VOLUNTEER – of course – a Friend of the Church

Wow! What a busy morning Tommy (over a coffee). Who were the busy people 'doing things'? You guessed it Tommy, they were VOLUNTEERS And what was 'zoom' all about. Well Tommy! Some of the members of this church have grown too frail or simply cannot make it to church therefore the zoom link was set up because it would be unthinkable not

to include members who have given decades of loyal service to the church, only to be excluded in their hour of need. Makes good sense said Tommy but who works the controls?. You know the answer to that Tommy VOLUNTEERS on the balcony..... of course!

Tommy arrived at the 'café' on Tuesday (as advised) to a large crowd of excited people in couples and singles in the large hall which was full almost to capacity. The Minister quietened the diners with the announcement of a group of children from a local nursery who wanted to sing two songs to us – which earned them a loud ovation before they left. Later he made another announcement to a 'birthday girl' giving us a chance to sing too.



What an exciting Lunchtime it turned out to be.

The large quantity of café staff were going about their jobs quickly and efficiently. "so many" claimed Tommy. Who are they he enquired and was told ... VOLUNTEERS and from where asked Tommy. From the congregation and the community was the reply. And the meals so affordable – how can they do it? Food costs enough but labour costs so much more and volunteers are never paid. All done for love.

At the end of the hall were tables of 'bring and buy' items, again managed by VOLUNTEERS plus a place for food stuff donated by a local supermarket and the money gained being donated to the café's chosen charities with amazing results.

What else does the church do? enquired Tommy and was told that a weekly Baby & co time is set aside for local guardians and their children from the community are welcomed into a play group where children can safely play and their guardians (usually mums) can meet and socialise in comfort.

Again ... VOLUNTEERS Many of whom cover more than one job. Tommy was told that there are other ideas under review to help the community just 'watch this space'.... Plus prayer groups etc. which support the ethos of the church and which are open to ALL.

Tommy's simple conclusion is that this church, like so many other community based establishments, only functions because of the time generously and selflessly given to serve others..... where have we seen this before?.....

TO WORSHIP GOD – TO KNOW JESUS

And TO SERVE OTHERS

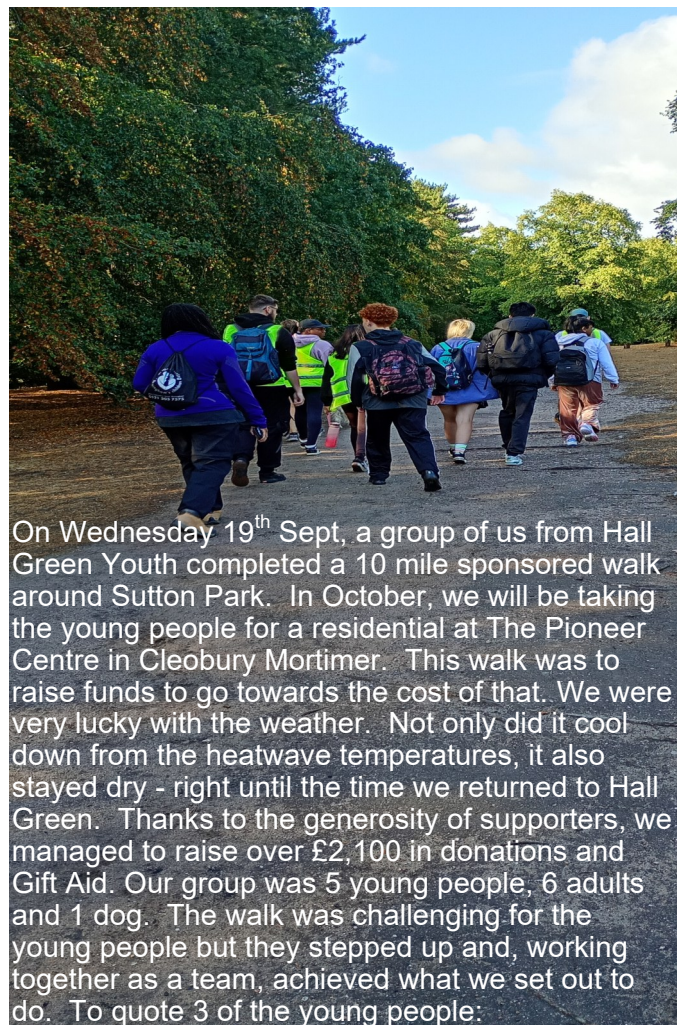
- Our strapline.

More volunteers needed for a forward thinking church

Dorrie (.....who cannot help as she used to, but washes, dries and beautifully irons Friendly Corner's tea towels every week– and there are usually lots! (Pam)

VOLUNTEERS DON'T GET PAID, NOT BECAUSE THEY'RE WORTHLESS, BUT BECAUSE THEY'RE PRICELESS.

– SHERRY ANDERSON



On Wednesday 19th Sept, a group of us from Hall Green Youth completed a 10 mile sponsored walk around Sutton Park. In October, we will be taking the young people for a residential at The Pioneer Centre in Cleobury Mortimer. This walk was to raise funds to go towards the cost of that. We were very lucky with the weather. Not only did it cool down from the heatwave temperatures, it also stayed dry - right until the time we returned to Hall Green. Thanks to the generosity of supporters, we managed to raise over £2,100 in donations and Gift Aid. Our group was 5 young people, 6 adults and 1 dog. The walk was challenging for the young people but they stepped up and, working together as a team, achieved what we set out to do. To quote 3 of the young people:

Z: "The walk was good. Tiring but we pushed through and reached our goal."

A: "The walk was really delightful and fun - it was good to see everyone and talk with them all - especially being able to reach our fundraising goals."

M: "The walk was a unique experience. I loved exploring a new atmosphere surrounded by nature and animals. It was a great time being able to detox and push ourselves together with positivity."

Jyoti Minhas



The Moravian Synod attended by Mark, Blair and Norma went very well but what on earth is Blair saying here?



Looking ahead

Saturday 12th September

Breakfast Training Morning on Praying with Others
10 am to 12 noon (approx.)

Sunday 27th September

Harvest Service followed by Bring and Share Harvest Lunch

Saturday 10th October

Breakfast Training Session on Worship leading
10 am to 12 noon (approx.)

Saturday 5th December

Christmas Open Day
2pm to 4pm

Friday 11th December

Christmas Lunch

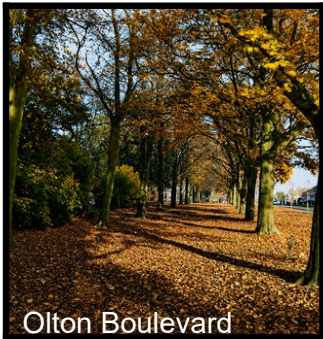
Friday 18th December 6pm

Carols outside Church



Almighty God,

We lift up the farming families across the UK who have endured months of scorching heat and parched earth. As they move combines into fields of stunted or dried crops, grant them mental peace and physical stamina. Quiet the anxieties over lost income, high feed costs, and empty silage pits. We pray for immediate, practical relief—fair market prices, supportive communities, and government wisdom to aid agricultural recovery. Wrap them in Your peace, reminding them that their worth is not measured by the yield of a single difficult season. Amen.



Olton Boulevard

dingbats

cabinet; ambiguous; cross eyed; upside down; backgammon



 **The Methodist Church**



 **The United Reformed Church**

**To worship God
To know Jesus
To serve others**

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