

# THE HADLEIGH MESSENGER

April & May 2026



The Magazine of the  
United Reformed Church, Hadleigh, Essex

SUNDAY WORSHIP  
10.30am every Sunday  
with Holy Communion on 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of the month

## PREACHING ARRANGEMENTS FOR APRIL 2026

Sun 5 <sup>th</sup> Apr	10.30am	Easter Day	Mrs Heather Brown
Sun 12 <sup>th</sup> Apr	10.30am	Morning Service	Mr John Amos
Sun 19 <sup>th</sup> Apr	10.30am	Morning Service with Holy Communion	Mrs Heather Brown
Sun 26 <sup>th</sup> Apr	10.30am	Morning Service	Rev. Dr Jim Tarrant MA MTh

## PREACHING ARRANGEMENTS FOR MAY 2026

Sun 3 <sup>rd</sup> May	10.30am	Morning Service	The Elders
Sun 10 <sup>th</sup> May	10.30am	Morning Service	Mr Ian Miller
Sun 17 <sup>th</sup> May	10.30am	Morning Service with Holy Communion	Rev. Dr Jim Tarrant MA MTh
Sun 24 <sup>th</sup> May	10.30am	Morning Service	Mrs Heather Brown
Sun 31 <sup>st</sup> May	10.30am	Morning Service	Rev. Dan Pratt

## PREACHING ARRANGEMENTS FOR JUNE 2026

Sun 7 <sup>th</sup> Jun	10.30am	Morning Service	Mr John Simmons
Sun 14 <sup>th</sup> Jun	10.30am	Morning Service	Mr John Amos
Sun 21 <sup>st</sup> Jun	10.30am	Morning Service with Holy Communion	Mr Keith Berry
Sun 28 <sup>th</sup> Jun	<b>18.00pm</b>	Anniversary Service	Rev. Dr Jim Tarrant MA MTh

### CHURCH AGM

Thu 28<sup>th</sup> May 1.15pm

### ELDERS' MEETING

Thu 18<sup>th</sup> Jun 1.15pm

## CHURCH FLOWERS

Sun 3 <sup>rd</sup> May	Heather Brown
Sun 17 <sup>th</sup> May	Jean Reeve
Sun 24 <sup>th</sup> May	June Gargrave - remembering Noah
Sun 31 <sup>st</sup> May	Pamela George - wedding anniversary
Sun 14 <sup>th</sup> Jun	Doreen Churchill
Sun 21 <sup>st</sup> Jun	Marion Fidell - for her father's and daughter Elaine's birthdays
Sun 28 <sup>th</sup> Jun	Jean Reeve - in memory of her father



Note: If you'd like to make a donation towards the cost of the church flowers on a particular Sunday, perhaps to celebrate a special event or remember a loved one, then please speak to Heather Brown. Heather phone number is 01702 557678.

# Meeting Jesus

On Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> April 2017, Rev. Celia Whitman led our morning worship and we had a wonderful sermon about the meaning of Easter, how Jesus's disciples and others met him after his resurrection and ways in which we can meet with him today. Celia kindly allowed part of her sermon to be used as a pastoral letter and it is well worth another airing.

In Paul's epistle to the Corinthians, he says, "I delivered to you of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins." Christ didn't die from some disease, some accident or a miscarriage of justice. He died for us, for our sins, because though God had tried through that long salvation history to save the world, he'd been unsuccessful and the last resort was to send Jesus. And, by sending Jesus, God gave the clearest message possible that he wished to set aside our sins and reconcile us to himself.

The life of Jesus, the whole life of Jesus, actually brings everything together. Jesus came to prove the height and depth and width and length of God's love for us. In the Cross and resurrection, God's purpose for us is accomplished, so much so that we can say with Isaiah, "God will swallow death for ever and will remove the reproach of his people," and with Paul, "O death, where is thy victory, O death, where is thy sting."

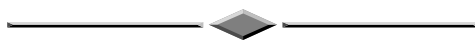
We ourselves can accept the promises of Jesus, like Paul did, and we can believe also that He will take us where He is for in his Father's house are many mansions, or dwelling places, where we, too, will be able to dwell with Him. Easter releases us because, through Easter, all things are made new. It offers new life and an indescribable joy that we never know without it.

We can't meet Jesus in the same way as the disciples did but we can still meet Him in our lives in other ways. We can meet Him in our prayers, our worship, our hymns and praises, in the words that come to us, sometimes from unexpected quarters. We can meet Him in baptisms, weddings and funerals. We can meet Him in Creation and the wonderment of Creation. We can meet Him in love and warmth and laughter. And we can meet Him in a hand held out towards us or our hand held out towards another.

We can remember the words of Jesus on his third resurrection appearance when He appeared to Thomas, the disciple who doubted, and who said, "I will not believe unless I can feel the wounds in Jesus's hands and feet". And we can remember that in response to that, when Jesus did meet Thomas, He said, "Thomas because you have seen, you have believed, but blessed are they who have not seen but believe.

"Blessed are they who have not seen but believe" – what encouraging words these are for us because, when Jesus speaks these words, he could be talking to you and to me, and to everyone who claims today that Jesus Christ is risen and alive for evermore.

*Rev. Celia Whitman*



## From the Bible

Then they gathered round him and asked him, 'Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?'

He said to them: 'It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.'

After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. 'Men of Galilee,' they said, 'why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.'

Acts 1:6-11 (NIV)

Editor's note: In 2026, Ascension Day falls on Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> May and Pentecost on Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> May.

## From the Editor

Welcome to the April & May edition of the Hadleigh Messenger.

Despite it being published on the last day of May, I'd still rather not include June in the title of this edition because I am hoping to produce the magazine on at least a bi-monthly basis going forwards. This would fit in to some extent with the old days when there was a July & Aug edition and a December & January edition. Fingers crossed that I can stick to that schedule

Thanks and well done go to Sue Horton who has written about her third London Marathon. Despite a knee issue, she completed the course and raised more money for Little Havens Hospice.

Finally, if you're going on holiday, please consider writing something about your trip for inclusion in the magazine. The Editor's role would be somewhat easier with more reader contributions!

*Malcolm Brown*

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## Did you know? – Belisha beacons

David Hurrell, one of my colleagues in the Hadleigh & Thundersley Community Archive group, was recently trying to assess when the scene on one of our old Hadleigh postcards was photographed. The postcard in question was one showing shops and businesses at the entrance to Rectory Road, including CJ Keddies & Sons, W. Norton's Depository, Ruggins, Barclays Bank and the E & S Garage with petrol pumps, together with cars and people, plus a traffic island to help people cross the road and a Belisha beacon (but no zebra crossing).



David had used AI to help him with the task and it had suggested a date of 1936, give or take a year. This was based heavily on the design of the cars in the photo, but as David pointed out, AI had ignored an obvious

clue – the presence of the Belisha beacon.

Although you can't seemingly trust any source these days, the following information is taken from Wikipedia...

Belisha beacons are named after Leslie Hore-Belisha (1893–1957), the Minister of Transport who, in 1934, added beacons to pedestrian crossings marked by large metal studs in the road surface. The first Belisha beacons were erected in the London authorities' areas and, following the Road Traffic Act 1934, were rolled out nationally in 1935.

Nowadays, Belisha beacons provide additional visibility to zebra crossings for motorists, primarily at night. The UK flash rate is 750 ms on, 750 ms off. Some crossings are set so that each beacon flashes alternately to the other side, but they often fall out of synchronization over time. Beacons with an outer ring of flashing yellow LED lights, preferred for their brightness and low electricity consumption, are replacing traditional incandescent bulbs in many areas.

Some of the crossings have plastic poles that are translucent and lit internally. This is immediately apparent in dull weather and at night. The clearly illuminated white sections announce the presence of the poles carrying the yellow globes, increasing the visibility of the crossings to all road users. These illuminated white sections can, however, obscure the presence of a pedestrian waiting to cross, as a driver cannot see the dark shape behind the brighter light coming from the pole.

To be legally compliant in the UK, every zebra crossing must be equipped with two Belisha beacons. In cases where there is a traffic island or central reservation in the road, the traffic authority can opt whether to place one or more beacons centrally. An exception is crossings over cycle paths, which do not need beacons.

Despite the above information, it still came as a surprise to me to learn that the first official permanent zebra crossing was not installed until 31<sup>st</sup> October 1951, after a trial in 1949 at 1,000 sites!

*Malcolm Brown*

Articles for the magazine can be e-mailed to the Editor, Malcolm Brown, at [mgbrownmail@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:mgbrownmail@yahoo.co.uk). Opinions expressed in any published articles do not necessarily reflect the view of the Editor or the policy of the United Reformed Church, either locally or nationally.

## Easter in Hadleigh

On Good Friday, 3<sup>rd</sup> April, the traditional united service was held at Hadleigh Methodist Church, starting at 10.30am. We were welcomed by Claire Gunn from the church and the service was led for the first time by Rev. Pete Moorhouse, the Circuit Superintendent of the Southend and Leigh Methodist Circuit. Pete was at one time the minister of Hadleigh Methodist Church and will become the minister again when current minister, Rev. Zena Smith, departs later in the year.

There was a good congregation, who contributed to a collection for Christian Aid during the service. The offertory, together with a small amount donated towards the refreshments later, amounted to £283.95.

The Walk of Witness after the service followed what is becoming the standard route since the walk to our church ceased. We again crossed the London Road near Cleves Court flats and walked along the north side of the road past Morrisons. We returned along the same route turning around by walking into Rectory Road, through the car park and re-emerging back onto London Road through the 'snicket' between the shops.

There were not as many people on the Walk as there were in the service but for quite a number nowadays, the distance is just a little too far.

One man who was not deterred by the distance was Ron Hurrell, from the Methodist Church, who accompanied the Walk on his tricycle. I think at his age (in his nineties) Ron is entitled to a little assistance! On our return to the Methodist Church, tea, coffee and hot cross buns were served in the big hall.

The Good Friday service and the Walk of Witness are our main acts of united witness during the year and the events help to foster our unity in Christ. We thank the Methodist Church once again for hosting our Good Friday once again.

Easter Day, Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> April, saw the usual Sunrise Service at Hadleigh Castle, this time starting at an alarm-requiring 5.50am. I had missed the event for the last two years but made an extra effort this year. What never fails to amaze me when walking along the path to the Castle at that time of day is the sheer loudness of the birdsong, which is something I don't normally get to hear!

The service at the Castle was led by Major Mark Cozens from the Salvation Army Hadleigh Temple whilst several members of the Hadleigh Temple Band provided musical accompaniment. The following day, Major Mark started a three-month sabbatical so we haven't seen him for a while.

### Walk of Witness photos



Pastor Ade carrying the Cross



Ron Hurrell riding along



Rev. Pete carrying the Cross

*Malcolm Brown*

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### Brief report on the Churches Together in Hadleigh AGM

The AGM was held at Hadleigh URC on Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> May. There had been no Leader elected last year so there was no Leader's Report on the agenda. We were fortunate that Rev. Mark Smeed, who has oversight of St James the Less and St Barnabas Churches, kindly 'volunteered' to be Leader for 2026/27. I agreed to continue as Secretary on the original basis, i.e. that I didn't have to write meeting minutes, and Claire Littlejohn kindly agreed to continue as Minutes Secretary. There is no Treasurer but fortunately there are hardly any financial transactions. The balance of funds amount to £311.11, unchanged from the last AGM. – *Malcolm Brown*

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## Family News

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Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am languishing;  
heal me, O Lord, for my bones are troubled.

*Psalm 6:2*

**Please remember those associated with our fellowship in need of prayer...**



# Harvesting the Harvest

## A Christian Aid Pentecost reflection

So very often we think of Pentecost as being the day the Holy Spirit came. The reality is that the Holy Spirit came on Pentecost. Pentecost was actually the Jewish 'Spring Harvest'. A time to look forward and pray for God's provision for the rest of the year. It was a day to celebrate and to pray. A day to look forward to the rich harvest that God willing, was in store. This explains why Acts chapter two tells us that 'there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven'. They were there for the festival and it was on that very day that God chose to send the Holy Spirit on the disciples.

The day that was set aside to celebrate the forthcoming harvest, was the day the harvest of souls for Gods kingdom began in earnest. God certainly knows how to time things. That very day about 3000 people were brought home. No wonder Jesus had earlier said to the disciples:

"The Harvest is plentiful... Pray the Lord of the Harvest to send workers in the harvest field."

On the day of Pentecost those workers were equipped by the Spirit, went out into the field and reaped an incredible harvest.

Today – nothing has changed. The harvest is still plentiful, the labourers are still too few, and the same Holy Spirit is still ours! All we need to do is to allow the Holy Spirit to fill us, then to go out into the field and who knows what the result will be for the Kingdom of God.

We may not be able to literally 'go out into the field' at the moment, but we can still pray, we can still be generous with our time and money, we can still speak out for justice.

In Galatians chapter six, Paul makes a statement which seems particularly appropriate and apt for the strange times we find ourselves living in. He says 'Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.'

Thank God that we can count on the indwelling Holy Spirit to keep us going.

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## Pentecost

Unless the eye catch fire,  
The God will not be seen.  
Unless the ear catch fire  
The God will not be heard.  
Unless the tongue catch fire  
The God will not be named.  
Unless the heart catch fire,  
The God will not be loved.  
Unless the mind catch fire,  
The God will not be known.

*William Blake (1757-1827)*

# Summary of the Eastern Synod Meeting held 16<sup>th</sup> March 2026

The latest Eastern Synod Meeting was held on Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> March at Braintree URC. This summary is based on the draft minutes that have recently been issued.

**Constitution of Synod:** The Moderator, Rev. Lythan Nevard, welcomed all and introduced both herself and the Synod Clerk, Rev. Dave Coaker. She announced that due notice of the meeting had been given and the meeting was now constituted.

**New Minister:** Lythan announced a newly inducted minister Rev. Alison Davis (not present), and paid tribute to Eddie Morley, a lay preacher who is now standing down after serving for many decades at Halstead and a great number of other churches.

**New Mission Partnerships:** Two new Partnerships have been created since the last Synod – Mid-Cambridgeshire and South East Essex.

**Personnel changes:** Gil Heathcote who was the Synod Treasurer for many years before stepping down last year has now also stepped down from The Synod Trust. He was thanked for his service by the Moderator. She then reported that a new Synod Treasurer has been appointed – Mrs Kathryn Pickering.

**New Staff Members:** Graham Smith is the new Property officer; Helen Bell is the new Mission Practitioner (Children) and Will Willmott is the new Mission Practitioner (Youth).

**Minutes of the Previous Synod Meeting** – These were accepted as a true record.

## **Pastoral Committee Report**

The Committee Convenor, Anne Sardeson spoke to the report and make a few additions including two additional church closures – Trinity, Burwell, which closed on 18 October 2025 and Monks Eleigh, which will also close in May 2026. Anne then asked all present to pray with her for those churches and the people who worship in those places.

Synod is now formally saying that Area Partnerships will cease to exist. Anne has emailed all of them to thank them for the work that they had done. The decision taken was marked with a round of applause.

Anne went on to say that a list of Mission Partnerships that have formally constituted and where they are at the present time, was included in the report, and she gave thanks for the work involved in setting them up.

She gave thanks to Alex Jacob, the Synod Transitional Minister for the work that he has done in helping some of them to discover how they will work together, in addition to those who have worked in the background to reach the point where we are now. She also asked for our prayers for encouragement and support going forward, especially for those Mission Partnerships that do not find it an easy road to travel and for those churches that are not yet part of a Mission Partnership.

She went on to reflect, relate and learn from multi-church settings in her own experience and in her previous roles. Anne concluded the Pastoral Committee report by showing a video of the experience so far of Route 31 Mission Partnership of which Anne herself is the minister of four churches – Danbury, Maldon, Burnham on Crouch and Southminster.

## **Mission and Discipleship Committee report**

Thanks were offered to Trevor Hahn who has now stepped back, leaving the Convenorship as ‘vacant’.

‘Vital signs’ – When the last meeting took place, Rev. Gillian Thomson (Bramerton Road Community Church, The Hive Basildon, Hockley and Billericay URC) told the meeting of what is happening in her church about one on the London Institute of Contemporary Christianity resources table called ‘Vital Signs’, and she was asked to speak to Synod about it. She presented a slide of a plate of sausage rolls and went on to say that if you’ve ever been to a faith meal – sausage rolls seem to be the thing that everyone brings! The tendency is to leave the sausage rolls as you don’t know which one to choose.

The same is true when you are looking for a new resource to take back to your church. There are so many on offer, how can you know which one will suit your setting best? One could ask around a bit; ask someone who has experience with one; pick up the one that hits the spot and attracts you – and then enjoy!

The report on ‘Vital Signs’ is on page 14 of the Synod Papers. It begins with an online assessment tool of 20 questions. The answers show you three ‘vital signs’ of how you are doing,

what you are doing well and areas to work on. It is for everyday people in grassroots churches and encompasses encouragement and practical ideas. They now spend time at every meeting dedicated to 'vital signs'. She volunteered to discuss with anyone interested during the lunch break.

### **Synod Clerk's Report**

Dave Coaker explained that he had hoped to bring firm proposals about the reorganisation of some of the Synod Committees but it has just not been possible to reach that point. There are still areas of overlap and confusion and so this work will continue.

Support for the Grant process – to enable grants to be dealt with in a more timely manner, other than when the Task Group meets, and to make sure that it ties in with the Church Life Fund, so that a quicker decision can be made as to which fund should be accessed i.e. a Synod Fund or Church Life Fund, a Grants Task Group will be set up. It will be set up for a trial period until such time as General Assembly has clarified where the advocates field of responsibility lies.

### **Pastoral Committee**

The Synod Officers offered a vote of thanks for the dedicated service of all those who have supported the life of our local churches and Synod through the roles of Pastoral and M&M advocates.

The Synod Officers, considering the move to working together through Mission Partnerships, put forward amended Fields of responsibility and membership of the Pastoral Committee before Synod. These were discussed and agreed.

The main Fields of responsibility are:

- to hold five meetings a year;
- to sustain and develop an overall vision for the way the ministry of the Church serves the cause of the gospel in the Synod, and in particular, always asking what the ecumenical implications are:
- to co-ordinate the work of those responsible for specific aspects of ministry in the Synod, including lay preaching, other lay leadership, training and care of retired ministers, their spouses or widows/widowers;
- to approve on behalf of Synod of candidates and ordinands for the Ministry of Word and Sacraments and of candidates for CRCW ministry;
- to make strategic decisions in consultation with pastorates, and give advice on constitutional

and/or resource aspects of local situations, including commendation of Special Ministries, LEPs and Ecumenical Areas and deployment aspects of new church developments;

- to handle related matters that are passed for comment or action by a Mission Partnership/Area of Ecumenical Cooperation, Synod or General Assembly;
- to decide ministerial deployment within the target agreed with Assembly and to manage the ministerial vacancy process, including giving (or pastorally necessary – withholding) concurrence to a call;
- to exercise oversight and care of local churches by: (a) establishing Mission Partnerships and Areas of Ecumenical Cooperation; and (b) giving concurrence to proposed church groupings;
- overseeing of the implications of safeguarding and good practice with children, young people and vulnerable adults;
- to act on behalf of Synod to concur with local church decisions regarding closure and support the process working in conjunction with the Trust.

### **District Council**

The Synod Officers, considering the move to working together through Mission Partnerships, put forward amended Fields of responsibility and membership of the District Council. These were agreed.

Fields of responsibility:

- will only meet when required, the default status being 'there is no business for the Council to transact';
- Those matters which are the responsibility of the District Council under the United Reformed Church Acts of 1972, 1981 and 2000 (including the Schedules to those Acts);
- Such other matters as may be delegated to it by the General Assembly.

### **United Reformed Church (Eastern Province) Trust**

Synod confirmed the following as directors of the Synod Trust: Andrew East (Chair), David Bird, Rev. Dr Rick Mearkle, Ian Miller, Rev. Lythan Nevard, Clifford Patten, Rev. Dr Janet Tollington.

### **Next Synod Meeting**

The Synod will next meet at Lion Walk URC, Colchester, on 10<sup>th</sup> October 2026.

*Malcolm Brown*

# From ancient kings to Trump and Xi: when did humans start shaking hands? And why?

On 19<sup>th</sup> May, United States President Donald Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping shook hands outside China's Great Hall of the People, in Beijing, for 14 seconds. Almost immediately, we saw various pundits trying to interpret the meaning of the interaction.

A brief look at the history of the handshake, however, reveals the complexity of this gesture's symbolism. Handshakes can be traced back to ancient societies, but the exact origins are somewhat mysterious. It is often said – although difficult to prove – that the gesture developed as a symbol of good faith, with the participants showing their hands to be empty of weapons.

A further theory is that the shaking was intended to jiggle any hidden weapons loose from the sleeves – somewhat undermining it as a display of trust.

## Assyrian diplomacy

The oldest known depiction of a handshake comes from the 9th century BCE, and represents a diplomatic display of unity.

On a limestone relief found in modern-day Iraq, King Shalmaneser III of Assyria and King Marduk-zakir-shumi I are shown shaking hands, symbolising renewed treaty relations between Babylon and Assyria, and an alliance between the two rulers. Relations between the two great Mesopotamian powers had long been problematic, but the peaceful image of the handshake lingered in this artistic depiction, even as the rivalry grumbled on.



Shalmaneser III greets Marduk-zakir-shumi, King of Babylon, surrounded by guards. This relief was carved in the 9th century BCE, and is on display at the Iraq Museum in Bagdad (Wikimedia, CC BY-SA)

## Hello, but also goodbye

Although more commonly considered a signal of greeting, the handshake has also been used as a powerful farewell gesture.

In Classical Greek art, grave reliefs depict the dead clasping hands with the living. This motif is known as *dexiōsis*, meaning the “joining of the right hands”. It signals the end of the embodied connection between the pair, as well as the continuation of their loving bond in the afterlife.



A *dexiōsis* (handshake) scene in a funeral context, on an ancient Greek jug (Wikimedia)

Handshakes can sometimes also have a religious meaning. In ancient Rome, the right hand was strongly associated with *Fides*, the divine force of trust and good faith, so the hand clasping was a sacred bond.

The “joining of right hands” (known as the *dextrarum iunctio*) was a gesture of unity that could be used to symbolise weddings, as well as other social and political bonds. It was also closely linked with the Roman goddess *Concordia*, who was the divine personification of harmony.

## A misleading symbol?

The image of peace and harmony presented by the handshake shouldn't always be taken at face value; the handshake symbolism can also be used to conceal a union in trouble. The Roman emperors Caracalla and Geta offer a clear example.

After the death of their father, emperor Septimius Severus, in 211 CE, the brothers ruled together. Imperial imagery shows them with right hands extended in harmony.

Yet before the year was out, Caracalla was plotting his brother's murder. He arranged a meeting with Geta under the pretence of reconciliation, where Geta was killed – reportedly in the arms of their mother.

Even among heroes, a handshake didn't guarantee a happy ending. In ancient Greek art, Herakles is depicted shaking hands with the centaur Pholos, symbolising a warm welcome from the hybrid being. Sadly, their greeting ends in tragedy: Herakles is attacked by intoxicated centaurs, and Pholos dies after being struck with a poisoned arrow.

### **Peacocking politicians**

Closer to home, Australian politics has its own (significantly less bloody) version of the doomed handshake. On the eve of the 2004 federal election, the two party leaders, Mark Latham and John Howard, met outside ABC studios. Latham's exaggerated handshake made good political theatre but is generally viewed as a misstep. His party went on to lose the election, with the image looming large in the minds of voters.

In Assyrian art, the handshake is static. But in modern politics, handshakes are filmed in motion, replayed on news bulletins, clipped for social media, and analysed by audiences the world over. In this context, the handshake can become something of a power play.

Donald Trump's handshakes are frequently read as tests of dominance, with long grips and close stances. When Trump and French president Emmanuel Macron met in Brussels in 2017, their handshake was widely described as a white-knuckled contest. Macron later characterised the exchange as a deliberate "moment of truth" designed to show he would not be pushed around.

Macron said he wished to signal he wouldn't make concessions – "not even symbolic ones". Last year, the pair once again clasped hands in front of the cameras, for 26 seconds.

The symbolism attached to handshakes also means the rejection of an offered hand carries a powerful sting. During the 2020 Australian Black Summer bushfires, Prime Minister Scott Morrison tried shaking a firefighter's hand while visiting the fire-ravaged town of Cobargo, New South Wales. "I don't really want to shake your hand," the firefighter said. Morrison took his hand anyway.

### **COVID almost killed the handshake**

When COVID came, people wondered if the new era might mark the end of the handshake. There were widespread health warnings against shaking hands, resulting in a rise of alternative physical greetings. These included the fist bump – a gesture with complex origins of its own. The fist bump is a type of "dap" greeting associated with Black American soldiers during the Vietnam War.

Yet, from ancient Assyria to modern China, the handshake endures. More than a greeting, it's a deeply symbolic tradition carrying a multitude of meanings.

*Louise Pryke*

Honorary Research Associate,  
Department of Classics and Ancient History,  
University of Sydney

Posted on The Conversation website 19<sup>th</sup> May 2026

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## **Count Your Blessings**

Count your blessings instead of your crosses;  
Count your gains instead of your losses.

Count your joys instead of your woes;  
Count your friends instead of your foes.

Count your smiles instead of your tears;  
Count your courage instead of your fears.

Count your full years instead of your lean;  
Count your kind deeds instead of your mean.

Count your health instead of your wealth;  
Count on God instead of yourself.

*Anonymous*

# News from around the URC

## A day in the life of: Head of Safeguarding

Sharon Barr, Head of Safeguarding for the URC, shares about a day in the life of her working week:



Sharron Barr

No two days as Head of Safeguarding ever look quite the same, but a day earlier this month (14 April) captured the full breadth of the role – from people management to national policy and long-term strategic development.

The morning began, as many do, by working through a busy inbox. I then moved on to a scheduled appraisal with one of the four members of the safeguarding team within the Offices of the General Assembly that I line-manage. Supporting colleagues, recognising their achievements, and helping shape their development is one of the rewarding parts of my job. We have such a strong team, who have been instrumental in the cultural shift towards safeguarding in recent years.

By late morning, I was on a train into London to attend the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Safeguarding in Faith Organisations. These sessions are always energising – a chance to connect with colleagues from across denominations and charities, as well as Members of Parliament who share a commitment to safer practice. We heard important updates on the progress of Mandated Reporting through Parliament, alongside news of a new inquiry into the definition of Regulated Activity – a topic with significant implications for faith settings, given the many nuanced roles within our churches.

During the journey, I was also able to work on papers for General Assembly, including reports for other committees as well as those from the Safeguarding Committee.

The journey home offered time to finalise the agenda for our wider safeguarding team's annual residential. This year's programme is shaping up to be particularly strong, with speakers including Dr Lisa Oakley on her work with survivors of

abuse, Tim Carter, Director of Safeguarding for the Methodist Church, exploring the Dunning–Kruger Effect, and Space to Breathe, who will lead a session on psychological safety.

It was a long and full day – but one that reflects the purpose, partnership and continual learning at the heart of safeguarding. It is also why I feel honoured to be in this role, bringing together my Christian faith and my commitment to helping the Church be a safe place for all.

## Churches encouraged to listen before acting in their communities

Churches were encouraged to listen deeply, build relationships and avoid making assumptions about local need during the second webinar in the URC's "A Church with People at the Margins" webinar series.

Themed "Knowing Your Community", the session, hosted by Roo Stewart, Head of Public Issues, explored how congregations can better understand their neighbourhoods and work with local communities in ways that are practical, respectful and rooted in faith.

Vicky Longbone from Derby Alive2Community, a project attached to Ashbourne Road Church and Mackworth URC in Derby, reflected on Jesus' commandment to love God and love our neighbour. "To truly love your neighbour is to want peace and justice for them," she said. "Community work is not about what we think people need. It is about knowing what the real needs are."

Vicky encouraged churches to carry out community audits before launching new projects. These, she said, help congregations understand local demographics, identify need, discover existing services, build relationships and avoid duplicating work. Using the example of a church setting up a clothes bank without realising similar provision already existed nearby, Vicky warned that good intentions are not enough. Walk and talk, look and listen," she said. "All four of those actions need to be intentional."

The webinar's key message was clear: churches do not need to solve everything alone. By listening carefully, working in partnership and responding rather than reacting, congregations can join in God's mission already at work in their communities.

The webinar can be seen on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ON3OjebNICO>

## Stepwise: Growing in faith and love

Here, Hazel, a member of Helensburgh United Reformed Church in the region of Argyll and Bute in Scotland, shares her experience of completing the taster session for the URC's discipleship programme Stepwise and her participation in Faith Filled Worship. Growing up, Hazel McCorrisken knew Jesus wanted her to speak and share his love in some capacity, but her fears were too great...



**Hazel McCorrisken**

I first enquired about Stepwise programme in 2020 and soon realised the timing was wrong as it seemed God wanted me to wait and embrace other commitments, primarily caring for my lovely mum who journeyed on last June, aged 93.

I took six months to pray and think about what was now important and what Jesus wanted me to do. Applying again to Stepwise seemed important and so, almost five years after that first enquiry, I logged onto a taster Stepwise session. where participants can meet others, reflect briefly on faith experiences, and get a sense of how Stepwise groups work. This helped me feel confident in taking the next step. At the time there were no Stepwise groups running in Scotland, so I was offered the chance to join an online group in Northern Synod.

The group I joined were just starting the Faith Filled Worship stream. It was held online one evening a month, which gave me time to pray, ponder and prepare, with no rush, pressure or time limit. Faith-filled Worship has 12 sessions over three phases. Sessions one to five cover the fundamentals of worship; sessions six to eight look at ways of engaging with God and sessions nine to twelve consider creativity and challenge in worship. There is opportunity to explore worship in different contexts, helping you find ways faith can become more alive and, for you and others, more sincere and inclusive.

I like to imagine Stepwise as a journey, in my case, stepping gingerly into the unknown, with little hidden paths along the way. I get to indulge in the scenery of this journey with every step. I get to breathe in new horizons and my vision

changes, enlightens and uplifts. If you have faith or none, Stepwise enables the sharing of insights and thoughts, with others. I have learned more about what faith is and how to live it out in my own life, Community and Church.

This year two new themes are offered: Faith Filled Environment and Faith Filled Conversations which complement the other themes: Faith filled Life, Community, Leadership and Worship.

To get started or learn more, see the dedicated Stepwise webpage at <https://urc.org.uk/your-faith/developing-your-faith/stepwise/> or contact your Synod Stepwise Contact.

## Service honours lives lost and changed by the infected blood scandal

Rev. Dr Tessa Henry-Robinson, Moderator of the Free Churches Group (FCG), attended a service at St Paul's Cathedral on 19 May, held in recognition, remembrance and reflection for the infected blood community.

The service took place on the eve of the second anniversary of the Infected Blood Inquiry's full report, which examined how men, women and children treated by the NHS across the UK were given infected blood and blood products from the 1970s onwards. It is widely regarded as the biggest treatment disaster in NHS history.

Tessa, a United Reformed Church minister, said: "The service was deeply moving and profoundly painful." The service included symbolic empty chairs which were interspersed among the congregation, representing those who died and those unable to attend. Names were read out in remembrance, and a moment of silence was observed as thousands of white, red and yellow petals fell from the Whispering Gallery. There was also a short address from Sir Brian Langstaff, Chair of the Inquiry, hymns chosen by the community, and more than 50 volunteers who lit candles in remembrance.

Between 1970 and the early 1990s, more than 30,000 NHS patients were given blood transfusions, or treatments made using blood products contaminated with hepatitis C or HIV. More than 3,000 people have since died, and thousands more live with serious health conditions.

"The suffering carried by those affected by the contaminated blood scandal remains visible in the memories of those infected and affected. I pray that such a failure of justice and care never happens again," added Tessa.

## Sue Horton tackles the London Marathon – again!

Intrepid runner, Sue Horton, who attends our coffee morning with her husband Ed, writes about this year's London Marathon – her third...

For this year's London Marathon, I again wanted to fundraise for Havens Hospices, but preparation and training has been dogged with setbacks and so I was not 100% marathon fit. The main setback in the way of training was a torn meniscus causing a painful knee requiring rest from running and physio exercises. The problem was very apparent during the long training runs and the rest required afterwards took up much needed training time.

I was to do my last long training runs of 20 miles, just three weeks before the marathon but I couldn't as my knee was still recovering from the previous week on a 20 miles trail run in Devon. I was at a point where I was concerned I might not recover enough in time, so it was a case of wait and see.

I had to go and collect my runner's number prior to the Marathon and so Ed and I had a day out to go and collect it from the Expo "Running Show" at the ExCel centre. It was an interesting show where businesses related to running are showing their wares, however all were far too expensive.



Related charities were there to including, "Save the Rhino". Ed and I had our photo taken with one of their runners. Afterwards we went and had a bite to eat before heading home.

On Marathon day, I headed to Little Havens to catch their coach with the rest of the Havens team and made our way to Blackheath and Greenwich. My start this year was the "Red start" and that was in a park in Blackheath. I sat on the grass for a while just relaxing, prior to being called for my start which was at 11:05.

The run was good for the first half and I took it very steady, however the knee let me down for the second half along with my foot too. I carried on with alternate run walk as I was determined to get to the end. It was a great relief when I saw Westminster and even better when I went through the Mall to finish. It had taken 6 hours but I was pleased to have raised another £710 for Little Havens.



Sue - on the right - with team mate Vicki Almond sporting 2026 medals and tee-shirts

After collecting my bag and changing into warmer clothes as I was chilling down, I met Ed and his friend Dave at the end and we went for a bite to eat before the journey home.

*Sue Horton*

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## Church 122<sup>nd</sup> Anniversary

We celebrate the 122<sup>nd</sup> Anniversary of the founding of our church on Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> June. Although the first ever service was held on 20<sup>th</sup> January 1904, we have tended to celebrate the anniversary at a warmer time of the year! The Anniversary Tea will commence at 4.30pm and will be followed by an evening service at 6.00pm. There will be no morning service on the 28<sup>th</sup> June. Our good friend, Rev. Dr Jim Tarrant has agreed to lead the Anniversary Service.

If you would like to come to the Anniversary Tea, please ensure that your name is added to the list to be posted on the main noticeboard. Hopefully, we will be joined by some of our preachers, some representatives of the other Hadleigh churches and by some friends from other churches in the new Mission Partnership. We look forward to an enjoyable time of fellowship and thanksgiving as we celebrate God's faithfulness to our small church here in Hadleigh. – *Malcolm Brown*

## Computer Corner

### ShareX – free screenshot and screen recording program

**Useful  
free  
software**

ShareX can be used to capture full screen or partial screenshots (which can be exported into various image formats) and can also record animated GIF files and video.

An included image editor lets users annotate captured screenshots, or modify them with borders, image effects, watermarks, etc.

URL: <https://getsharex.com/> (click on download and then click on Setup)

### What to do if you think someone has heat exhaustion or heatstroke

**Useful  
advice**

During hot weather, it can be easy to overheat, sometimes resulting in heat exhaustion or heatstroke. Heat exhaustion is not usually serious as long as you can cool yourself down - but heatstroke is a medical emergency which requires immediate treatment.

This page on the BBC News site has useful information about the two conditions.

URL: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/ckgl51jpp3jo>

### Timescapes

**Interesting  
video**

Liam Heatherson's recently-released documentary film Timescapes was commissioned by Estuary Festival and part-funded by Castle Point Borough Council. It is based on three accessible rambles around the Borough of Castle Point, highlighting aspects from the past which shaped our present and may – or may not – determine our future. The film's origin is firmly rooted in Liam's passion for local history. As Canvey teenagers, he and Joe Mander created an award-winning non-profit heritage organisation and website, 'Beyond the Point', to document the Island's unique story.

URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ddoS5u8eAGE>

## Word Search – Summer flowers

P	U	I	V	N	M	A	R	I	G	O	L	D	K	P	A	L	J	X	R
E	I	T	Y	E	K	T	B	L	A	Y	A	B	F	I	Z	Z	R	H	X
N	Q	I	H	V	R	A	R	L	I	I	E	X	N	Q	S	S	T	N	D
S	L	E	N	Q	U	A	S	K	N	A	I	N	L	A	Y	H	M	O	L
T	L	C	U	Q	R	N	E	U	K	R	I	H	V	F	T	L	P	I	S
E	M	U	I	L	L	A	T	J	L	Z	B	V	B	K	R	F	S	H	P
M	U	I	N	A	R	E	G	S	R	G	J	W	L	H	Q	U	T	L	P
O	P	T	F	D	P	L	S	C	H	T	V	I	W	A	N	C	D	I	Q
N	A	F	A	T	W	O	W	F	P	J	J	Y	E	F	S	Z	A	A	L
O	A	C	L	E	M	A	T	I	S	Q	S	Y	L	L	Z	Q	H	T	G
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Y	T	C	M	K	S	E	E	D	Z	E	H	A	R	E	T	S	A	S	V
A	O	C	V	O	N	P	D	L	R	N	S	A	M	U	E	G	K	E	X
Z	T	Z	L	U	O	C	N	W	C	G	P	B	I	S	S	S	I	K	P
A	J	E	S	H	S	X	E	K	V	E	N	C	O	R	X	U	N	M	C
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E	Q	Q	A	G	Y	E	A	J	P	R	Z	G	N	D	N	E	W	M	R
A	E	P	R	P	I	V	L	R	O	S	E	M	A	R	Y	O	L	B	U
V	E	F	O	K	F	U	J	W	G	G	U	A	B	I	O	J	V	L	L

ALLIUM  
 ASTER  
 AZALEA  
 CELOSIA  
 CLEMATIS  
 COSMOS  
 DAHLIA  
 DAISY  
 GERANIUM  
 HAIRBELL  
 LAVENDER  
 LIATRIS  
 MARIGOLD  
 PENSTEMON  
 PETUNIA  
 ROSE  
 ROSEMARY  
 SALVIA  
 SUNFLOWER  
 ZINNIA

Words may appear in any direction including diagonally, back to front and upside down.

## WHAT'S ON

### A round-up of future events in the area

Mon 1 Jun 2026	- Smart Minds dementia club at Hadleigh URC from 1.00pm to 3.00pm every Mon. Phone Sue on 07889 762172 if interested. Every Mon.
	ditto - Tea & Chat at Hadleigh Library from 2.30pm to 4.30pm. Every Mon.
Tue 2 Jun 2026	- Kettle's On Coffee Morning at St Barnabas Church, Hadleigh, from 10.30am to 12.00 noon, every Tue.
Wed 3 Jun 2026	- Coffee Morning at St Michael's Church, St Michael's Road, Daws Heath, from 10.00am to 11.45am, every Wed.
	ditto - Westwood Art Group from 9.30am to 12 noon at the SA Hadleigh Temple Hall, every Wed. Phone Ian on 07768 871875 for info.
	ditto - Top of the Hill Club meeting (chat, play games) at the White Hart pub, Thundersley from 14.00-16.00. Held 1 <sup>st</sup> & 3 <sup>rd</sup> Weds. All welcome.
Thu 4 Jun 2026	- Drop-in at SA Hadleigh Temple from 9.30am to 12 noon with friendly chat, free tea and toast or coffee and cake, every Thu.
	ditto - Coffee Morning at the church from 10.30am to 12 noon. Free refills.
Fri 5 Jun 2026	- Castle Point Art Club from 10.00am to 12 noon in wooden hut next to Hadleigh URC every Friday. Phone Ted on 01702 555113 for info.
	ditto - Benfleet Art & Crafts Club from 2.00pm to 3.30pm at Hadleigh Methodist Church. Held every Friday. Phone 01702 554358 for info.
Sat 6 Jun	- Hadleigh PIP Councillors Street Stall outside Iceland store, Rectory Road from 10.00am to 12.00 noon. Held 1 <sup>st</sup> Sat, weather permitting.
Sun 7 Jun 2026	- Benfleet Community Fayre at Woodside Park, top of Manor Road, Thundersley, SS7 4PA. From 12 noon to 5.00pm.
	ditto - Southend Band in Concert with Leigh Boys' Choir at the SA Hadleigh Temple. Starts at 4.00pm. Free admission by ticket - phone 01702 552668. Retiring collection in aid of Bookworm Alley. Refreshments.
Sat 13 Jun 2026	- Coffee Morning at Hadleigh Methodist Church from 10.00am to 12 noon with drinks, cakes and bric-a-brac stall. Held 2 <sup>nd</sup> Sat of month.
	ditto - Beat and Beans Café at St James the Less Church from 10.30am to 12.30pm. Refreshments & live music by Vocal Ease.
	ditto - St Peter's Church Coffee Morning & Book Sale at St Peter's Church Hall, Church Road, Thundersley, from 10.30am to 12.30pm. Held 2 <sup>nd</sup> Sat.
	ditto - Southend Symphony Orchestra Concert at the SA Hadleigh Temple. Starts at 7.30pm. Tickets £15, conc. £12.
Sun 14 Jun 2026	- Rayleigh Trinity Fair from 11.00am to 4.00pm. Tickets £15, conc. £12, 18s and under £5 via website or at the door.
	ditto - Music in the Park with Rayleigh Brass at Southend Bandstand, Priory Park, from 3.00pm to 4.30pm. Free event.
Thu 18 Jun 2026	- Poetry Reading Group reading poems of Wordsworth at Hadleigh Library from 2.30pm to 3.30pm. All welcome. 3 <sup>rd</sup> Thu of the month.
Sat 20 Jun 2026	- Summer Fete at St James the Less Church from 10.30am to 2.30pm.
Sun 28 Jun 2026	- Music in the Park with Cantare at Southend Bandstand, Priory Park, from 3.00pm to 4.30pm. Free event.

More events listed on the HELIX website at <http://www.hadleighsex.info>