

Leeds United Reformed Church Partnership



Prayer Diary 2024



Introduction

Some years ago, a number of churches in the Leeds Mission and Care Group began looking at how they could co-operate more closely, sharing and making the best use of often limited resources in order to further the churches' mission priorities in their diverse communities. This led to the formation of the Leeds Mission and Care Group Partnership (LMCGP), the calling of Revd Clare Davison to the 5-year post of Mission and Ministry Enabler and eventually to the development of the Leeds United Reformed Church Partnership.

One of the ways the LMCGP churches sought to get to know one another better was through the use of a prayer diary, incorporating brief profiles of all the churches, so that we could pray about topics that were of particular concern for each of the churches. Now that the Leeds URC Partnership has been running for a while and because a lot has changed in most of our churches since the pandemic, the Steering Group felt that a Partnership Prayer Diary would be a useful resource, so here it is!

In the following pages you will find prayers, including a Partnership Prayer, brief descriptions of all the Partnership churches, a description of the Partnership itself, pen portraits of the members of our ministry team and a report from them looking back on what has already happened since the start of the Partnership and looking forward to future activities – a wealth of material to strengthen the bonds which already exist between the churches and to inform our prayers.

Exactly how you use this Diary is entirely up to you but please display printed copies and / or circulate the electronic version so that as many members, friends and visitors to your church can become more familiar with your partner churches. We know that some churches like to pray for one church every Sunday for a month, whilst others pray for a different church each week. Please pray for each of our ministry team members as well as for the churches. Please also pray for the Partnership as a whole, that our closer co-operation will enable each member church to fulfil God's mission within its own community.

Sheana Dudley, Synod Pastoral Elder for Leeds
on behalf of the Leeds URC Partnership Steering Group

What is the Leeds United Reformed Church Partnership?

The Leeds United Reformed Church Partnership officially came into being, (after several years of discussions), on 7th May 2022, when eight churches of the Leeds Mission and Care Group were inaugurated into the Partnership and members of the Ministry Team were inducted into it during a special service.

The Partnership churches are:

- Beeston Hill United Free Church (LEP: Baptist, Methodist, URC)
- Christ Church Halton (LEP: Methodist, URC)
- Headingley St Columba URC
- St Andrew's Roundhay URC
- Stainbeck URC
- The URC in South Leeds
- West Park URC
- Wigton Moor URC

The ministry team currently comprises:

- Revd Geoff Ellis – Non-stipendiary Minister
- Revd Angela Hughes – Non-stipendiary Minister
- Revd Tim Lowe – Stipendiary Minister
- Revd Dr Nicola Robinson – Stipendiary Minister
- Mr Alex Walker – Elder in Local leadership (unpaid)

The vision

The vision and opportunity of the Leeds URC Partnership is to enable each member church to fulfil God's vision and mission within its own local community, enabled by the ministry team. Although some activities involve some or all of the member churches, many are for churches on their own. Through the Partnership, the churches co-operate, encourage each other and make the best use of limited resources.

How it works

All Partnership churches have a named minister as their first point of contact. Currently, the pairings are as given below but this is subject to change (with the approval of ministers and churches) as the Partnership develops and / or ministers leave or retire:

- Beeston Hill United Free Church: Revd Peter Brazier (Methodist)
- Christ Church Halton: Revd Dr Nicola Robinson & Revd Edward Sakwe (Methodist)
- Headingley St Columba URC: Revd Dr Nicola Robinson
- St Andrew's Roundhay URC: Revd Tim Lowe
- Stainbeck URC: Revd Dr Nicola Robinson
- The URC in South Leeds: Mr Alex Walker, Elder in Local Leadership
- West Park URC: Revd Geoff Ellis
- Wigton Moor URC: Revd Tim Lowe

Revd Angela Hughes is a member of the team but not the named minister for a church.

The ministers work collaboratively in a way that best utilises their skills and abilities and enables elders and members to work for the benefit of all the churches in the Partnership.

The ministry team is accountable to the collective churches of the Leeds URC Partnership through a steering group, which includes one lay person from each of the member churches and is chaired by the Synod Pastoral Elder for Leeds.

The Partnership finances are shared between the churches.

Brief profiles of Leeds URC Partnership Churches

Prayer for the churches

Loving God, we thank you for the churches of the Partnership.
We praise you that you give to each congregation a variety and richness
which we often take for granted.

We thank you for each member, no matter their age or background,
and for the gifts they bring to the whole body of the Church.
Enable each of our churches to serve you well in their own local community,
resourced by your Spirit, equipped to serve, active in neighbourhood care,
and eager to make everyone welcome
so that we may all share together the good news of Jesus Christ,
in whose name we pray.

Amen

Beeston Hill United Free Church



Beeston HILL is an LEP in an inner city area of South Leeds.

We have good outreach and mission with our Coffee and Charity shop on a Friday. We also maintain our garden for the local community to use.

In our building we host several groups including Kidz Klub, Brownies, Guides and a Mums and Tots Group.

On a Sunday afternoon another church uses our building for their service.

Whilst our building user groups are child-centred we don't have many children or young people on a Sunday. This is partly due to the result of the pandemic and also due to changes in their circumstances such as moving away to attend university or taking up work.

We continue to be a welcoming church but acknowledge we are an ageing congregation

Our Prayer Requests:

We would like to pray for all the children and young people connected to our church in any way and all those that have moved on.

We would like to pray for all those who continue to serve Beeston Hill.

We would like to pray for members of our congregation who due to frailty and poor health can no longer worship with us. May we still be able to support them in their faith and well-being.

Christ Church Halton



Pentecost prayer tree



Messy Church party

Christ Church Halton is a Methodist and United Reformed Church Local Ecumenical Partnership located in a suburban area in east Leeds, 5 miles from the city centre, which celebrated its 30th Anniversary in October 2019. The church has a combined membership of 73. The average Sunday congregation is in the region of 35 folk, mostly over 65.

For almost 14 years, the church has had an active Messy Church which meets every second Saturday in the month when young children came along with their parent or carer for fun and crafts, food and an introduction to the Christian faith. During lockdown, there was some contact with the families, with a successful party in the car park in July 2021. Regular meetings re-started in late 2021 and there are now up to 20 children attending. We also have Rainbows and Brownies affiliated to the church.

At the other end of the age range the church has a very successful Guild with a regular weekly attendance of about 30. Guild is ecumenical, including members of other churches and some who do not attend any church. The church holds a weekly Luncheon Club where up to 20 elderly members of the community enjoy a hot meal and chat. We also have a coffee morning on Saturdays which is becoming increasingly popular with local people as well as church members.

In 2020, the church started to review its life and mission through the URC's Inviting Forward process. This had to be suspended because of lockdown but we are starting to re-engage with it. **Please pray that this will give us a clear plan of how we can move forward.**

The building, which was designed to be flexible with sliding walls, opened in May 1993. As well as meeting the needs of the church, it is well appreciated by community groups who use the premises, including St John's Cadets and Badgers, Slimming World and a Keep Fit group, plus a pre-school which has two sessions daily in the upstairs crèche and meeting rooms. However, after 30 plus years, the building is showing signs of age. We have recently replaced the single-glazed bay windows with double-glazing and are about to undertake replacement of the remaining ground-floor windows. This has required extensive fund-raising. **Please pray that we can continue raising money to replenish our reserves.**

After a long period of Methodist ministry we are pleased that, since September 2022, we have had shared ministry between Methodist and URC Ministers, with Revd Dr Nicola Robinson as our named Leeds URC Partnership Minister, working initially alongside Revd Helen White as our Methodist Minister. Helen has since moved on and Revd Edward Sakwe is now working alongside Nicola. **Please pray for Edward, Nicola and the church as we settle into this new ministry.**

HEADINGLEY ST COLUMBA UNITED REFORMED CHURCH



Headingley St Columba URC is a member of the Leeds URC Partnership group of churches. The church was built in 1966 and was formed in 1979, when St Columba's URC (formerly Cavendish Road Presbyterian Church) merged with Headingley Hill Congregational URC. We currently have 39 Members and 19 friends. We are a gathered community with people from the local area, other parts of Leeds and further afield including Wetherby and Beverley. The church buildings, situated on the A660 two miles north west of the city centre near the main shopping centre of Headingley, consist of the Sanctuary, a range of large and small meeting rooms, a kitchen and a separate caretaker's lodge, with good on-site parking. Hiring these facilities to local organisations provides a valuable source of income. Headingley is vibrant with students and several post-graduate students have joined our congregation.

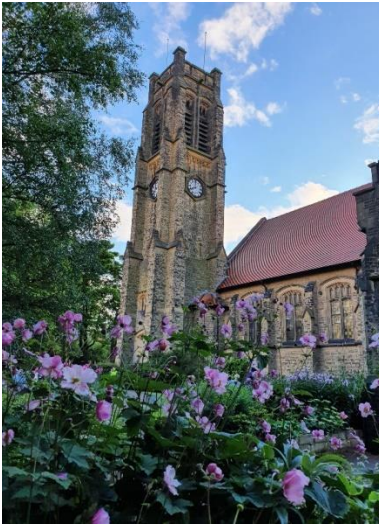
Sunday Morning Worship at 10.45am, including Holy Communion celebrated monthly, is held in a spacious, modern Sanctuary with excellent acoustics. The music at these services is led by our accomplished organist and a small but loyal choir. We are fortunate to possess both a fine three-manual pipe organ and a Steinway grand piano. Our worship is largely traditional, but we are open to a variety of formats including café-style services. Several times each year, we share worship with the neighbouring Headingley Methodist Church.

Our named Minister, the Rev Dr Nicola Robinson, was ordained and inducted into the Leeds URC Partnership Ministry Team in September 2022. We are an ageing, but willing congregation, with 6 Elders, including the Church Secretary and Church Treasurer. The church's financial position is good. Day-to-day running of the church is entrusted to a Management Committee, and the building is assiduously maintained by our caretaker. We have few children at present, but an important part of our Mission is to connect with children, through Social Services and the local Women's Refuge, for whom we hold an annual Christmas party. We also provide much-needed financial support to the Rainbow Junction café at All Hallows Church in Burley and the Leeds North & West Foodbank. The Guild meets monthly for lunch. We are members of Churches Together in Headingley. An important and longstanding part of our Mission is to support financially the URC Chaplaincy at the Leeds universities. We also play a full role within the Leeds URC Partnership: hosting joint events such as the well-received Easter coffee morning and taking part in a Quiet Day at the Parceval Hall retreat in the heart of Wharfedale.

Please pray for:

- Our local community and in particular the work of the Leeds North and West Foodbank and the Rainbow Junction Café.
- Our church congregation and all those who use and maintain our buildings.
- The ongoing discussions with West Park URC about how we can work more closely together.

St Andrew's Roundhay URC



The population of the north Leeds suburb of Roundhay, where the majority of the congregation live, is about 23,000. The area is popular with families due to the excellent local schools and community activities. There are people from different ethnic and religious backgrounds, mostly Sikhs, Muslims and Jews living throughout the area. Residents tend to stay long after their children have left home and we have several sheltered housing complexes as well as residential care homes to cater for our older population.

Families with young children and teenagers are represented in the church community which has 125 members. Church organisations for all ages provide a weekly point of contact with many people who are not yet fully part of the wider church community, including popular Guiding and Scouting groups. Good relationships exist with local schools.

Spiritual development, pastoral care of the congregation and community and a focus on work with children and young people are high priorities, as is the aim to be an open, inclusive, welcoming and growing Christian presence at the heart of our community, to attract new people to our life and worship.

The theology of the church is generally liberal, though the congregation encompasses a wide range of theological backgrounds, not all from the Reformed tradition. The introduction of a new way of worship through Sunday Café Style Worship, where the congregation join together in table activities whilst enjoying coffee and cake, has encouraged more families to come. The monthly Saturday Messy Church is very popular with local families where they engage in biblical themed activities and enjoy a meal together. There are also very popular Family Fun Days. There is a weekly Toddler group on Tuesdays for under 5s and two Tunes for Tots sessions on Fridays. We also have a Singing for Pleasure session, twice weekly Prayer Times on Zoom and a Bible Reflections Group.

Just before lockdown, we started our Clocktower Café. This re-started in March 2022 on Wednesday mornings and has flourished, attracting many people from the local community. The attendees have made new friends and a few have started coming to Sunday worship.

In 2022 we held our first Christmas Tree Festival, where local organisations and businesses sponsored and decorated a real tree. The church was open every day for a week so that people could come and see the trees and enjoy lunch or afternoon tea in very festive surroundings along with varied musical entertainment. Donations received were given to our Christmas Charities Appeal. It was extremely successful and we are running it again in 2023.

Our Sharing God's Love Group have ongoing collections of food and clothing for local charities. The Clocktower Café also has specific charity support events.

Our Pastoral Care group look after our more senior members including those who are now frail or housebound by regular contact as well as organising Snowdrop and Harvest Tea parties. Coffee mornings/afternoon teas in group members homes are also greatly enjoyed.

The fourteen serving elders have a range of different skills and backgrounds which enables them to support ministry in specific ways e.g., Pastoral Care group, Worship group, Junior Church team, Finance and Property teams where all are very effective in carrying out the mission of the church.

There are good relationships with other ministers in Roundhay and the three covenanting churches in the neighbourhood (URC, Anglican and Methodist) share evening worship on the last Sunday of every month. The church also participates in Churches Together in Roundhay.

We pray that we are able to continue with all our activities and support of all our congregation. Give us the vision to attract more people to join us on our Christian journey. As a congregation, we worry about the high energy bills and how we will manage to pay them this winter.

We pray that congregations from all the churches in the URC Leeds Partnership will work together to share their expertise and resources.-



STAINBECK URC – THE EVERYDAY CHURCH IN THE COMMUNITY

THE FACTS

Stainbeck is the only church within a mile radius. It is surrounded by mixed housing, including pockets of deprivation. The majority of members and adherents live within a mile of the church and there is a high level of engagement in the life of the community, although post-pandemic, there is an acknowledgement that age takes its toll.

A Church and Community Partnership – **InterACT**, now a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) involving five local churches, is based at Stainbeck and has effectively enabled its wider community outreach and mission. Managing the Ward Community Hub during the pandemic has added to its influence and led to the successful InterACT Food Pantry which offers support locally – with food and beyond. The Partnership is now at a critical point as we explore future options and encourage involvement.

Stainbeck is also a member of **THRIVE Leeds** (another CIO involving four churches) and this grouping has greatly enhanced the work with young people and is opening up exciting new initiatives as we work with local teenagers. Messy Church, undertaken monthly at Stainbeck, also comes under the THRIVE banner and is enabling us to grow and consolidate our work with families and children.

Stainbeck is also a member of Leeds Citizens and supports the local estate residents group.

Two important places where our objectives, including those relating to the five threads of mission, come together, is at the weekly Community Café and the Lunch Club - both offering a time and space where friends are made, relationships built and faith shared.

THE FAITH

Worship is varied, informal and inclusive respecting the diversity of theological understandings within the congregation. During lockdown worship continued successfully via Zoom and the church is now equipped to continue with hybrid worship hoping to exclude no-one.

The church has embraced the challenges and opportunities of team partnership and is open to new ways of working together.

THE FUTURE

The church aims to be Christ in the Community, expressing the love of God in practical concern for others, without prejudice and uninhibited by barriers of race, gender, class, or poverty.

WE PRAY FOR:

- wisdom / discernment / courage as we move into the future.
- our local communities, that they experience God's love and provision, especially in the cold, winter months.
- for God's blessing on our church families and our city



www.stainbeckurc.org.uk

URC in South Leeds



The United Reformed Church in South Leeds was formed in 2002 when three churches came together to make one congregation. Since then, the church operates from two sites: Dewsbury Road, an area of great deprivation and flux, and Belle Isle, three miles out of the city centre, which also has its share of trials and tribulations.

The church worships at Belle Isle, whilst its charity shop operates from Dewsbury Road and other denominations worship there on a Sunday. There are regular room lets which assist with the finances.



The church has a small but faithful congregation, with the church's main mission being done through the South Leeds Team Ministry charity which manages Trinity Network, a day centre for older and isolated people. The church also supports the work of the uniformed organisations and hosts parade services which can see the church packed out with people.

Currently served by Alex Walker, the church's Elder in Local Leadership, with whom a relationship has been forged since 2017, both he and the church welcome input from the Partnership to bolster the work of the church.

Please pray for:

- the ever-needed work of Trinity Network. That the centre may continue to serve the elderly and vulnerable, especially with the current rise of loneliness and isolation in older folk.
- the work that the church wishes to do in the local communities at both sites, in particular serving the locals on Dewsbury Road through our charity shop.
- the eldership and officers as they streamline and modernise the church's protocols and ways of working, whilst acknowledging the good work done by others in the past.

WEST PARK URC, LEEDS



Harvest Festival 2021

Where are we? West Park is a residential area in North Leeds, approximately 4 miles out of the city centre. The church building is on Spen Lane and we also own the adjacent building (used by a nursery) and a nearby Manse.

Who are we? A small, friendly, welcoming and inclusive congregation. We are part of Abbey Churches Together, gathering alongside the local Anglican and Roman Catholic congregations for Christian Unity and Good Friday Witness. We're generous givers, supporting Christian Aid, the Leprosy Mission and local Christian charities including the Northwest Leeds Food Bank, Leeds Faith in Schools, Kidz Klub Leeds, Caring for Life and St. George's Crypt

What goes on at WPURC?

- Sunday morning worship – fairly traditional with a variety of leaders, usually following the lectionary, with Holy Communion monthly. Refreshments are provided after the service, in a time of fellowship.
- Monthly Saturday Café – a community drop-in. Church-led with a welcome for everyone.
- Regular community groups – the building is in use daily midweek. Users include Cubs and Beavers, Gamblers Anonymous, fitness classes, YAMSEN - Yorkshire Association for Music and Special Educational Needs, and other music groups.

What would we like prayer for?

- How best to build on the relationships we have with community users
- The ongoing discussions working together more closely with Headingley St Columba URC
- The pastoral needs of all our congregation and those who may join us

Wigton Moor United Reformed Church



The church is situated amidst several estates of private housing in North Leeds and people of numerous different faiths are resident in the area. It is very much a local church with few people travelling any distance to attend worship or activities. Our ministry both on Sunday and during the week is very much geared to older people and we aim to be a dementia friendly church. Many of our Jewish neighbours join us during the week when fun, fitness and friendship form the basis of our activities. There is a Community Coffee Stop one afternoon and also two chair based exercise classes and a dance exercise class for everyone's enjoyment. All of these activities have a very strong social element as well as providing exercise in a suitable form for those whose mobility is limited. We have recently had a new kitchen installed which should help us to expand what we can offer.

As a church we recognise that our faith must be at the heart of all we do. What does the Lord require of us? "To act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God" (Micah 6:8)

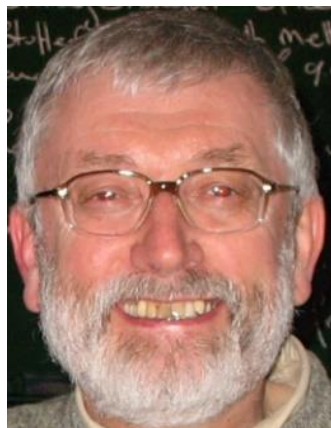
We pray that we will

- *Become a strong worshipping community which acting as Christ's body in the world can show the love of God to our local community through active service, sharing faith in word and deed and which will attract others to join us in worship.*
- *Be enabled to continue to increase our involvement in the local community showing the love of Christ to those around us and thereby helping to develop community cohesion and encouraging neighbours to get to know each other.*
- *Be able to expand our provision, particularly for elderly people amongst whom loneliness is common, to come together for activities and friendship.*
- *By working together with the other churches of the Leeds URC Partnership and ecumenical partners help to spread the good news of God's Kingdom across the city.*

Leeds URC Partnership Ministry Team



Revd Geoff Ellis



We settled in Leeds over 40 years ago. After a call to Eldership at St Andrew's Roundhay in the 1990's came a call to Lay Preaching and then to Ministry. I was ordained as an NSM in 2004 at Beeston Hill United Free Church (LEP). Later I ministered with Headingley St Columba and am now with West Park URC. After retiring from being a company director I also became an MHA Chaplain at Assisi Place, South Leeds.

Working with ministers across Leeds has convinced me team ministry with churches working in a partnership that supports their local mission is the way forward.

My diverse theological and ecumenical experiences now include the Northumbria Community, the Centre for Action and Contemplation, and appreciating what incarnation means for everyone. I have witnessed that when people experience God's presence they can be reassured and empowered to follow Jesus in new and life changing ways.

Revd Angela Hughes



I was ordained as a self-supporting Minister in the URC in 1997, following many years as member and Elder in our local church. My original remit as a 'District Minister' enabled me to explore the possibilities of Interim Ministry: fixed-term appointments to explore the local context and look for new ways of sharing God's love in word and action. This widened my experience and opened my eyes to the plethora of resources across our city. I discovered the joys of 'networking' and what I have come to call 'community ministry' which led me to Stainbeck URC.

It was at Stainbeck that we established an ecumenical partnership (now a CIO) called InterACT, Church and Community Partnership. This was established in 2005 and because I recognised the short-term nature of so many projects in deprived areas and because I enjoyed the challenges of the diverse estates and because the church called me to continue with them, I was inducted as their minister.

I am married with children, grandchildren and more recently great grandchildren. Although stepping back from Stainbeck I am enjoying working as part of our new team!

Revd Tim Lowe



Whilst I admit to being born down South, I have always felt drawn to Yorkshire and love living in Leeds. Along with the Trossachs in Scotland, Yorkshire has become my heart's home (this might also have something to do with my wife having been born in Harrogate, her mum in Bradford and her dad growing up in Skipton!). Rachel and I have been married 26 years, we have three children and two dogs.

I trained at Northern College in Manchester, was ordained in 1998 and served as minister to churches in St Leonards-on-Sea, Stafford and Coventry before moving to Leeds. I have served the wider church on the Assembly Children's and Youth Work Committee, as well as Chaplain to FURY Assembly and Youth Exec. I'm currently serving on Assembly Communications Committee. I was on the original editorial group for Roots worship and learning resource, and have been a regular writer of material for ROOTS for over 20 years. I have a passion for all kinds of visual arts, whilst in a past life trained as a graphic and exhibition designer. I am also mad for cars, Jaffa Cakes and Lego. My childhood (and adulthood) hero and role-model is Paddington.

My ministry style is based on co-operation, friendship and equality, not authority – a ministry of all believers in the truest sense. I see my ministry priorities as encouraging people to explore their own discipleship, as individuals, within the church and the wider community. I believe in a vision of a church with no walls, that is willing to listen to the stories of others, whilst well as passionately expressing its own, and that gives space for the imagination to stretch and a chance to be awesomely creative. Finding God in community as we grow as Jesus' disciples together has to be a focus for me.

Revd Dr Nicola Robinson



I was born, and grew up, in the bonnie capital of Scotland, Edinburgh. I currently live with my dog Maisie, an 8-year-old cockapoo. My family – Mum and Dad, brother, sister-in-law, nephews, and niece live in Edinburgh and East Kilbride.

I was ordained and inducted into the Leeds URC Partnership in September 2022. My ministry is deeply person-centred, it's about building relationships with people who are different ages /cultures /denominations as well as across the churches, the wider community, and the city. I am passionate about deepening individual's and congregations' relationships with God, through different types of worship, Bible studies and creative ways of praying. I have a strong commitment to social and environmental justice, for people and planet who are experiencing marginalisation and exclusion, both locally and globally. I embed issues such as racial justice, creation care, refugee awareness and more in worship services and with churches, explore how people who have been excluded from church can be welcomed and affirmed.

My hope and prayer for the Leeds URC Partnership going forward is that we can be flexible, adaptable and open to following where the Spirit is leading.

In my spare time, I love walking with Maisie, in the woods, hills or at the beach. Muddy and messy adventures with my nephews are a great joy. I am also an avid reader and knitter (though I haven't quite mastered the art of being able to do both at the same time!)

Mr Alex Walker



I first moved to Leeds in 2004 after my wife got a job at Harewood House. I lived down the road from Wigton Moor Church and became involved there, first with the youth club and later on becoming an elder and church secretary. I was called to serve the URC in South Leeds as what was then known as interim moderator and found myself called to serve as their lay leader. I was inducted into the role in 2021 and inducted into the team in 2022 when the Leeds URC Partnership was formed.

I am also a fully trained secondary school teacher. I trained in Maths but actually ended up teaching music. I currently work 25 hours a week as Head of Faculty for Performing and Creative Arts at a secondary school in Dewsbury.

I am married and have an 11-year-old son, who is due to start secondary school in September 2024. I also play in a 90's themed rock band with other dads of a certain age.

I like to think that I bring an element of professional personality to the team, leaning on skills I use at school and bringing an approach that leans into church culture but with a wider approach to planning and delivery. I dislike meetings and wish we had less, I'd rather do than discuss. I also aim to bring something creative to the group, be it a new idea or a fresh way to express or indeed some technical know-how when needed. I like to be musical but also prayerful in worship whilst preaching from a modern and life relevant perspective.

The role of Elder in Local Leadership is one that sometimes needs explaining, but in reality, walks alongside more traditional forms of ministry easily. I like to think that I am seen as an equal and return that vision to all I work with.

I also currently sit on Synod and national safeguarding committees and serve as Safeguarding link to three of the Partnership churches.

It is a pleasure and a privilege to bring these gifts to the partnership and have them blessed in return.

Prayer for the Ministry Team

Ever-living God, we ask your blessing on Alex, Angela, Geoff, Nicola and Tim, each of whom has been called to serve you through the Partnership Ministry Team.

We give you thanks for their different skills and abilities and willingness to work together as a team.

Grant to each vision and discernment.
May they have a daily sense
of your guidance
and living knowledge
of your presence with them
even when their work is challenging.

Fill them with patience,
peace and joy in their work,
knowing that they do your will. Amen

Looking Back/Looking Forward

The Leeds URC Partnership Ministry Team have looked back over the past year and looked forward to the year to come. We focussed on 5 key areas: Quiet days. Bible studies, shared worship, serving across the Partnership and participation in worship.

Quiet Days

The day at Parcevall Hall on Friday 28th April was a valuable exercise for the Ministry Team in working together and in the growth of teamwork in the Partnership. This was financed by the URC Education and Learning Committee's Discipleship Development Fund. It enabled 27 of us from across our 8 churches to explore the theme of 'The Spring within us', with many opportunities for quiet reflection and to listen and to get to know each other and build bonds. People were encouraged to discover what is in store in future and what might be taken away to build on as we worshipped together and shared communion. The positive impact has helped to awaken, refresh, and stimulate the spiritual life within us.



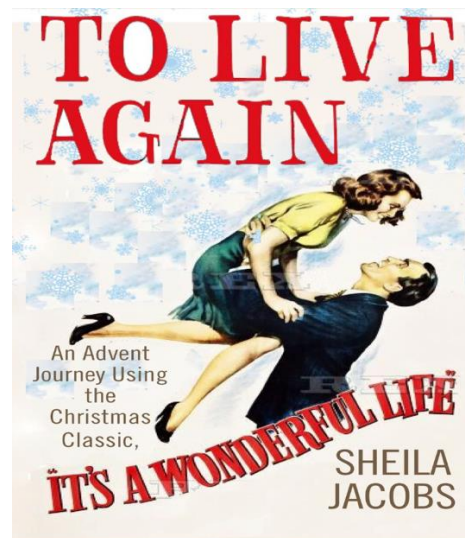
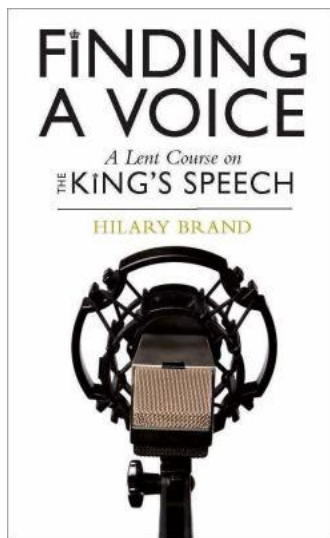
Following the enthusiasm to organise another Quiet Day we have now booked Saturday 20th April 2024 at The Community of the Resurrection, Mirfield, for from 30 to 60 people.

Bible Studies

Over the past year, Bible studies across the Partnership have included:
Travelling Light (Advent 2022) – exploring the journeys of travellers in the Bible alongside our own

Finding our Voice (Lent 2023) - using the film: *The King's Speech* alongside the Bible to explore the ways we can face our fears and find our voice

A Glorious Whisper (September/October 2023) - exploring how the Word of God is speaking (or getting through) to us within our daily lives.



With each Bible study course, there have been options to take part on Zoom and in person in a church building. These occasions of coming together have provided opportunities for participants to share their own faith and their corporate church journeys, wrestle with Bible passages and their relevance to our lives and world today and ask questions.

Forthcoming, the Ministry Team are planning courses in Advent and Lent, based on films. In Advent, the Bible study will explore the film: *It's A Wonderful Life*. We hope that each member of the Team will continue to share leadership, including at South Leeds. We are also looking at opportunities to use different church venues each time we run a course - fitting with a particular church's availability. We will also continue to have one session on Zoom.

We would like to encourage feedback: what have you enjoyed about the courses? What could be better? What would you like to see in the future?

Sharing Worship

Moving forwards, we should like to build to the small beginnings and successes of shared worship opportunities over the past year for our Partnership. Events such as the **Pentecost Picnic** celebration held at Wigton Moor or the **Pet Blessing services** held at Headingley St Columba, Stainbeck and Christ Church. Pentecost in particular seems a most appropriate time to celebrate the unity of our churches, and we hope to build on this for 2024.



New initiatives within and across our eight churches are always encouraging. Equally, it is good to share opportunities of existing times of prayer or worship that might have been already going within our churches for some time, but which we might now generously share with others: Each Advent St Andrew's holds a **candlelit service of remembrance**, when those who have been recently bereaved (and are not necessarily regular worshippers) are specifically invited to spend time in reflective worship and to light a candle in memory of a loved one.

Last year, in a similar vein, Stainbeck held a **Longest Night service**, aimed to support those who struggle with difficult memories during the Advent and Christmas seasons.

West Park and Headingley St Columba are exploring opportunities to **worship together**.

St Andrew's has recently started using liturgy from the **Iona Community** within a monthly evening communion on the second Sunday of each month.

Elsewhere we might look to explore the possibilities of a Taize style act of worship.

Alex has recently run a **Bag Blessing service**, which can be held within schools at the start of the school year, where children bring their book-laden school bags in September as a symbol of new beginnings, opportunities and potential blessings of the academic year ahead.

Building on the success of the synod Big Days Out, we might also look to explore the possibility of a partnership **Fun Day Out**, which would have a shared act of worship at its heart.

Worship and prayer is at the heart of driving all that we do as Christian communities in each of our eight locations. We want to explore opportunities of moments when these times might be a shared blessing to us all.

Serving across the Partnership

One of the joys of team ministry is that together, along with lay leaders and other clergy, the eight churches can receive the word in many different ways.

As a team we all use and share our gifts as fully as we can and it has been good to learn about the different approaches each church takes in worship and discipleship. We have endeavoured to visit each of the churches for Sunday worship at least once each and for the most part have succeeded in the aim and have attended other meetings and events as we've been able.

Along the way the leadership team have joined many churches at their social and community events, both in person and online via Zoom. This has led to a deeper sense of understanding who our congregations are and our role within and around them.

The one thing the team would like to reiterate is that we need to be invited to things if you wish us to participate. We welcome all invitations, to lead worship and join in with events and celebrations across the city, as we're sure you would welcome our companionship and giftings.

Participation in Worship

It has been encouraging to share in worship with churches across the Partnership this year and we think we have begun to see some of the benefits as we engage together. Little by little we are beginning to share resources and expertise. What next?

Looking forward as a Ministry Team we would like to offer one-off (stand-alone) opportunities to explore ways in which we can participate in worship within our own fellowships. This is not about another 'Starting to Lead Worship Course'. Rather this is to look together as a group at different aspects of worship. What resources are available? How do we choose? How does this all come together on Sunday morning? Informal sharing? Hymns and worship songs? Prayers – so many ways to pray? Introducing and reading The Word? Using the microphone effectively? Even perhaps technology? Creative ideas for Café Church? Spread across the year – different venues? What about it? Whatever the outcome, simply the experience of sharing is of benefit to all of us.

Yours in peace,

Geoff Ellis, Angela Hughes, Tim Lowe, Nicola Robinson, Alex Walker

- Leeds URC Partnership Ministry Team -

Partnership Prayer

Loving God,
thank you for bringing us together
from across our vibrant city.

We come together as
the rich tapestry
that is the Leeds United Reformed Church Partnership.

A rich tapestry which brings together
so many wonderful threads
of congregations
of individuals
of communities
of opportunities and challenges.

Weaving Spirit,
as we look at the tapestry
we rejoice and are glad
in all we can do together:
worshipping and praying in various ways
nurturing each other's faith in Bible studies and Quiet Days
sharing in coffee mornings and fellowship
supporting each congregation's mission
engaging in justice for people and planet
and more.

Weaving Spirit,
you who love us so utterly and unconditionally,
help us to trust your skill;
to entrust you with the future
and to follow your inspiring
as we work with you following Jesus
and make God's kin-dom a reality
in our lives and world.
In Jesus name, we pray.
Amen.