

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Feb. 10th.	Methodist Church Quiz
Feb. 26th.	St. Bede's Church Quiz
Feb. 19th – Mar.26th.	Lent Lunches
Mar. 6th.	Bridgebuilder Trust Quiz
Mar. 6th – 20th.	Embroidery Exhibition
Mar. 27th.	Lecture – Hymn Writing
Advance Notice	
May 9th – 15th	Christian Aid Week

Fairtrade Fortnight

22nd February to 7th March For this year's Fairtrade Fortnight the nation is being asked to join the Big Swap. For two whole weeks you will be asked to swap your usual stuff for Fairtrade stuff. Swap your bananas for Fairtrade bananas, your usual cotton socks for Fairtrade socks and your usual cuppa for a Fairtrade cuppa. This means that every time you go shopping you can use your wallet to make a stand. Every swap will be proof that the people of the UK want producers in developing world to get a fairer deal. To get more details go online at

http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/thebigswap/about_the_big_swap/

Christian Aid Week

This will be May 9th – 15th and at the recent Forum meeting Pat Parker reiterated the need for more collectors to enable greater coverage of the town and church reps were asked to publicise this within their own churches and try to recruit more volunteers. Please consider helping, Pat can be contacted on 610837.

United Reformed Church

This year is the URC 350th Anniversary and there will be lots going on during the year. In March there will be an exhibition of embroideries on the theme of "Peace and the Environment". Dates are 6th – 20th. Also on 27th a lecture by Alan Gaunt, with the theme of "Hymns and Hymn writing in the Free Church tradition"

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CONNECTIONS

February 2010

Thought for the Month

When you are content to be simply yourself and don't compare or compete, everybody will respect you.

Anon

Quiz Season

Newport Pagnell Methodist Church

"The Annual Church Quiz", having had to be postponed will now take place on Wednesday 10th February at 7.30pm.

Admission, £5 per person. Teams of 4-5, hot soup & bread roll available during the interval. Please contact Robin Marsh 611351.

St Bede's Quiz

A General Knowledge Quiz - Friday 26th February 2010. Is being held in St.Bede's Church. Tables of 6. Commencing 7.30 p.m.

Cost - £5 per person, including Fish & Chips Supper.

Tickets available from Mal Nally on 01908 - 611802.

Bridgebuilder Quiz

Bridgebuilder quiz is Saturday 6th March (7 for 7.30pm) Tickets are £7.00 each—pay on the door. Delicious meal included—jacket potato or rice with choice of topping (inc. vegetarian) Fairtrade tea or coffee also included. Bring your own cold drinks/wine & glasses.

Special Christians in Sports round included, put it in your diaries!

Venue: Netherfield Chapel, Broadlands, Netherfield, Milton Keynes, MK6 4YP (www.netherfieldchapel.org.uk)

Lent Lunches 2010

Lent Lunches 2010 to raise money for Christian Aid will take place at the United Reformed Church Hall for six weeks, starting Friday 19th February – Friday 26th March. 12.15pm to 1.30pm. Cost £3, for more info please contact Jennifer Mazzone 01908-613088

Articles to the Editor, Bill Watson,
preferably by e-mail to billw2@tiscali.co.uk Tel. 613431

Copy Deadline - 20th of each month

Letter from a Minister

February can be one of the most miserable months in the year. The old name for it was February Fill-dyke because it was usually very wet and very cold. To cap it all, it also includes the beginning of Lent, the forty days which Christians have traditionally treated as a time of penitence and fasting. Even today, while the practice of giving something up for Lent may not be as widespread as it once was, it has certainly not gone away.

Acquiring self discipline is not a bad idea, at any time of the year. We all know of people who would like to be able to give up smoking or drinking or eating too much but never quite manage it. Perhaps, for some of them, making a promise to God may help them control their appetites. But the reason for keeping Lent is not mainly to lose weight or save money. Rather, it is the season in the Church's year when we can purposefully give ourselves space and time to explore our relationship with God.

Lent is a marvellous opportunity for Christians to help each other to deepen that relationship. There are Lent groups to join and Lent books to read, even DVDs to watch. We can give extra time to Bible study and prayer, alone or with others and grow together in the knowledge and love of God.

And that shouldn't be a depressing chore, undertaken with gritted teeth only over the forty days of Lent. Our knowledge of God's love and His presence with us is something to rejoice in throughout the year. We can go on deepening our relationship with him all our lives. And our love of God can flow over into loving and caring for others, especially those in need.

I shall be glad when Lent is over, but not because Lent is a miserable and cheerless time. I'll be glad because at the end of Lent comes Easter, the greatest feast in the Christian Year. People keep Lent in different ways, but we can all use it as a time to look forward in joy and hope to Easter.

Glynis Bell

Lent Study Groups 2010

These CTNP sessions are being held again this year, with the study book JESUS' FINAL WEEK. If you would like to participate please speak to your church rep this week. Closing date is February 7th.

Moderator's Letter February 2010 Dear Friends,

As this is the first time of my writing to you since before Christmas, I feel as if I should begin my letter by wishing you a Happy New Year! However, not only by now does it feel a bit late to be offering you such a greeting, but also, most of all, it feels rather uncomfortable - if not glib and *very* uncomfortable - to do so at a moment which has brought such calamitous events to the people of Haiti. I suspect that by the time you read this, news will still be ongoing and I hope that the world will not have forgotten the desperate and urgent needs of the Haitian people. News reports are currently pouring out full of pictures of devastation in the wake of the earthquake. Every bulletin carries figures of the number of people who have died, and websites carry appeals for funding to aid the victims. If there is anything at all hopeful to be seen in the midst of such turmoil and tragedy, it has to be in the way in which people across the globe are being drawn together, however inadequately or insufficiently, in order to offer help and aid to the victims. There is something about the image of hands reaching out from wreckage desperate for someone to come to the rescue which speaks to our very deepest selves. Such a picture touches within us the powerlessness which we are so rarely willing to acknowledge and draws from us a sense of common humanity which is able to overcome the barriers of race, colour, religion, age...and all the other barriers which so often divide us one from another. There is a sense in which true humanity and true ecumenism belong together: that those who remind us of our human fragility draw from us the profound knowledge that human beings belong together and need one another. No wonder the God who longs that we should be one comes to us in Christ as a fragile tiny infant and as one suffering on the Cross. News headlines about the earthquake, however, are more than often followed by news of fighting in Afghanistan - and news of war in other places. We are offered names and numbers of British soldiers who have fallen, but more rarely if at all receive news of the names and numbers of Afghan people who have been hurt or killed. Whilst we hear detailed descriptions of buildings - especially homes - destroyed by earthquake, we hear little of buildings which have been damaged or destroyed by combat. It is as if in the reports of war we are presented with a totally different picture of ourselves. If the bulletins are anything to go by, our concern is principally for those of our own side, as if we are no longer able to see those whom we perceive as our enemies as real people with whom we share a common humanity. So we are surrounded by two different pictures of ourselves: the human beings who are drawn to act lovingly on the one hand, and the dehumanised beings who perpetuate division on the other. It is tempting to wonder how we might have reacted had a natural disaster occurred in an area where we are at war. Which side of us would have emerged the more strongly? Over the years I have often felt dissatisfied by the way in which the Good News Bible, in an attempt to make the version accessible to readers who did not have English as their first language, translated Jesus' sayings in the Sermon on the Mount with the word 'happy'. In more traditional translations, the word 'Blessed' appeared. Even if I understood and welcomed the project of the Good News Bible it always seemed to me to be inadequate to suggest that blessedness was the same as happiness! However, as I stand here wondering how best to wish you a 'happy' new year in the context of a troubled world, I perhaps cannot do better than to hope that your year is 'happy' in the sense of Jesus' beatitudes:

Happy are those who know they are spiritually poor: the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to them.

Happy are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Happy are those who are humble; they will receive what God has promised.

Happy are those whose greatest desire is to do what God requires; God will satisfy them fully.

Happy are those who are merciful to others; God will be merciful to them.

Happy are the pure in heart; they will see God.

Happy are those who work for peace; God will call them his children.

Happy are those who are persecuted because they do what God requires; the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to them (Matt.5:3-10). Mary Cotes