

## Churches Together in Reading

### Minutes of the Executive meeting Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> January at Grange URC

**Present:** Michael Penny (Chair CTR), Graham Fuller (Treasurer CTR), Rev. Robert Barthram (URC & Chair of CT In West Reading and Tilehurst) Rachel Belshaw (Chair of Trustees) and Clarie Lewis (Operations Manager, CCA), Rev. Julia Binney (Abbey Baptist), Julia Jones (Project Director) and Carrie King, (Team Leader REInspired), Steve Ballard (Torch) Andy Dickens (Faith Christian Group), Rev. Tracey Waklin (Minister at St Michael's, Tilehurst), Angy King (Chaplain of Reading FC Women)

**Apologies:-** Mabel Gregory (Prev. Boyd) Project Director for Cirdic, Katharine Shepherd of the Mustard Tree, Graham Bishop, and Pads & Kirstie Dolphin.

Michael opened the meeting with a Bible reading from Ephesians 4 "Unity of Spirit through the bond of peace" followed by prayer.

Michael then gave out notices/posters for people to take away for World Day of Prayer 1<sup>st</sup> March 10.30am at Salvation Army central. He also gave out a spreadsheet from Phil Creighton from 'Reading Today' who had requested 250 -300 word articles from a Faith perspective which was needed to be completed for the coming weeks.

Mike had recently completed a book with a colleague on 'Unity in Christ' for which he had copies available for those interested to purchase.

He then spoke that he was recently at the Salvation Army central when he had spotted one of their War Cry magazines and on looking through saw an in- depth article about Angy King so had invited her to come and speak today.

**Reading FC Women's chaplain - Angy King** explained that she had been a chaplain for 10 years and although works with the Reading FC Women she also works with the younger members of all ages in the different aged football clubs associated with Reading FC..

Training was once a week and she also held discussions with parents as well. The under 21s meet at the John Madejski stadium whereas the men meet at Bearwood and the chaplain for them is Steve Prince. Angy tries to get to the games and away matches too and has got to know the players well as individuals. There were challenges during Covid and the younger under 21s also have to take their A levels. Currently there are three Christian women in the team and she is starting to hold Bible study once a fortnight at their request.

**Una Chandler** – chaplain for Reading Borough Council spoke of her work there where. In the beginning she had intended to give it a try for 3 months and it is now 23 years. After Covid she did not think she would be invited back but was and is now continuing to support the workers of all levels as there is much challenging work going on within the council and people have their own personal worries as well.

#### **REInspired**

Julia spoke of how REInspired first started in 1997 where it came out of a little seed through CTEER (Churches Together in Earley and East Reading) but which was now many trees supporting the RE syllabus and schools religious work. It has now many sessions in senior

schools as well as junior and primary. It relies heavily on volunteers although there were 4 team leaders and a marketing / admin person to assist. The teams are multid denominational, and the aim is to tell young people about the Christian faith through stories, drama, craft and activities. Funds mainly come through the churches although individuals also give but fund raising has become more important as costs rise.

During Covid they had a quick learning curve as had to transfer much of their current work onto DVDs for schools to use, all new technology and now the schools were asking them back in again. They were now being approached by new schools in Katesgrove and Coley Park, Oxford Road Primary, Robert Piggot infants and Junior school, Southcote Primary with many new projects coming on board for 2024. Resources, and having enough people, is still a challenge. They are now doing so much in the South/West area of Reading they seek a Trustee to join them from that area.

There is a lack of RE teachers so ReInspired were being invited into more schools. If you can support financially or would like to become, or know someone who might like to, volunteer in this schools work in the West/South Reading that would be good. You do not have to have a background as a teacher to be a volunteer although that is helpful.

Their question was 'Dare we dream bigger?' as God seemed to be sending more schools for them to be involved in. Many sessions were delivered last year reaching in excess of 18,885 children of all ages. For more details please email [julia.jones@reinspired.org.uk](mailto:julia.jones@reinspired.org.uk)

### **Christian Community Action (CCA)**

Clarie was CCA operation Manager and spoke of how the furniture deliveries helped people whose lives had been disrupted with painful stories. Accommodation, if offered to refugees or homeless people or those fleeing from domestic violence, is usually completely empty when they arrive. Readifood and Torch worked together with CCA to bring about some hope to people. Some have had their benefits frozen with no money, and preloved goods and items provided made it very fulfilling to see the change it brought in people's lives.

With their 5 shops in 2023 they had 1,646 contacts and 71 Bright future refugees sent to them from Launchpad. They had also given out 126 food parcels but these are based on a one off basis before the people are referred to Readifood. White goods had also been provided, but if those in temporary accommodation have to move then they leave such goods behind as have no means to take them with them, which can be heart breaking. The CCA furniture lorry is a great help in picking up goods for sale in their warehouse. Reading Borough Council try to help with safe houses and churches can provide practical support as well. Clarie introduced their new Chair of Trustees Rachel Belshaw who had recently taken up the position. Please pray for their work as they seek to do God's will and provide a wraparound service to their clients.

### **Faith Christian Group**

Andy explained Faith covers Readifood which delivers 180 food parcels a week to those in need. 90% were referrals and 10% were self-referred. They have two vans and a warehouse for food, which comes from collections via supermarkets and churches, schools or individuals. They operate with 80 volunteers and also help some needy people to get back into work. Readistreet is where they give out food collected from 'Pret a Manger' including

jacket potatoes for those in the evening on the streets. They also support community shops of which there are 5 across Reading, where people pay £5 but can collect items of groceries and toiletries to the value of £25. They usually have a café running at the same time with a local church being involved and 50 people attend each community shop every week. They also undertake some advocacy work as well.

Bed4 Night runs from January-March and involves central Reading churches along with Wycliffe in East Reading. People can attend if referred through St Mongos and have a hot 2 course meal, a safe environment, a bed to sleep on and breakfast before having to leave. The beds and individual bedding are then delivered to the next church to set up. At present there is 18 regularly staying over and there is also a second venue for refugees as well. Some have been evicted from the hotels they stayed in and have 7 days to find somewhere else to live. It takes 56 days to receive universal credit which is not easy to do when your first language is not English.

Faith work with St Mungos, Street Pastors and recognise the valuable work of Cirdic.

### **Churches in Reading Drop in Centre (Cirdic)**

A letter to all had been given to Michael to give out to all to explain the latest position with Cirdic. Many had seen Mabel on the South News appealing for more financial support. Their fixed overheads had risen and although some expenses had been saved previously by Mabel agreeing to run the Women's centre, the rising costs of rent for the premises, plus the increases in gas and electric (for cooking and heating and for water for the showers for their clients) had risen out of all proportions. The grant they received from RBC was £7000 and was may be decreased and at present they only had funds for a further 6 months. It takes £100,000 per year to run the service for their clients and this includes 50 part time volunteers to provide food over 3 weekdays and Sunday mornings. Main meals and snacks and hot drinks are provided in a warm safe environment with new clothing and bedding available along with baths and showers. Access to telephone and computers for those needing to apply for work and keeping in touch with families. Most important they can use the premises as a postal address. In addition classes are available in art and access is given to nurses, podiatrists and St Mungos ... along with a friendly listening ear.

Please let others know about this valuable work – we cannot let it close after 32 years serving the community. Can you help financially or know someone who could? This is Jesus' church in action.

Banking information – Churches in Reading Drop in Centre. Barclays Bank Sort code 20 71 03 Account 70269573

### **Torch**

Steve explained that he worked in Caversham churches where he was helping to deal with problems in the area. Many of the problems were related to people with difficult circumstances and mental health and by working as a team, with other voluntary organisations, they could make a difference to people especially if more volunteers were to come forward. It was suggested that a Roadshow night help to bring more coverage to their work and they did not appear on the RBC website. For more information see [torchhub.org.uk](http://torchhub.org.uk) to see how they work with the other voluntary organisations.

## **Churches Together in Earley and East Reading (CTEER)**

Gaye spoke of Ministers and lay people still meeting roughly once a quarter and focussing on sharing with each other their work in the area and where information could be circulated and prayed about. Rev Stephen from Park URC and Gaye had attended the installation of Rev Kate Wakeman-Toogood at Earley St Peter's church. There still were new ministers moving in the area, and vacancies, which made it difficult to raise new joint projects. The local ministers did however still meet separately.

The Week of prayer for Christian Unity took place at Grange URC on 21<sup>st</sup> January and some from CTEER attended.

REInspired continues through the CTEER churches and beyond and St John and St Stephens were building up their contact centre, although more volunteers would be welcomed to help run it on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Sundays from 2-5pm.

Some CTEER churches are involved in Bed4Night and Park URC is to host a Community soup and chat session on Fridays from 11am-1pm.

It was hoped a Walk of Witness would take place Good Friday in 2024 and the Christian Aid walk was also to take place on 18<sup>th</sup> May 2024.

The World Day of prayer will take place on 1<sup>st</sup> March at Reading Central Salvation Army and the service has been written by the Christian ladies of Palestine. (These are always written at least 2 years in advance) and we really hope for a good number to attend. There is also a service at St Michael's in Spencers Wood at 2.00pm .

## **CT West Reading**

Rev Robert Barthram spoke of January and September when Ministers in the area meet to discuss and organise joint outreach events to take place during the year. In Coronation Square they had held successful carols at Christmas and at the Tilehurst Triangle where 300 people had joined in the singing. CT West Reading had laid fallow for several years but was to be brought back after Mike joined as Chair of CT Reading.

Robert also worked additionally and separately with Queens Road Methodist Church and Abbey Baptist being close by.

There will be a Walk of Witness at Southcote and Tilehurst Triangle for 2024 on Good Friday. The Service for the week of Christian Unity took place at Grange on 21<sup>st</sup> January and Rev Henry from West Africa, who was the new Minister from Southcote Family Church, gave the address.

## **CT in the Centre of Reading**

There was a successful joint open air service with picnic at Caversham to celebrate Pentecost arranged with CT in the Centre of Reading. Mike spoke of the three w's, Worshipping Together, Witnessing Together and Working Together with a diversity of different churches

Mike was expanding his chaplaincy work with the Activate Learning colleges and this was being supported by the colleges. Those out of the area he was setting up and involving

different churches. Michael supports all the college chaplains and hopes to get back to two lunchtime meetings a year for all the chaplains in the Reading area where they can discuss their work and seek or give advice.

Events taking place during the year were a Good Friday Service in the centre of Reading, Easter Sunday in the Forbury Gardens (if wet in Abbey Baptist) and Pentecost Sunday with CT Caversham churches and carol singing in Broad Street with the Salvation Army Band.

Michael holds two meetings a year, one lunch time for the executive committee and one in the evening being the AGM. There is usually a short time for official business and then members can share what is happening in their own organisation/area.

It was agreed we should look to get this up and running now that more information is generally accessed by people looking on websites. Graham was to check current progress with present web person.

### **CTiR Accounts**

Graham presented the accounts and there were no questions.

### **Approval of AGM reports**

Minutes of the last CTR AGM on 4<sup>th</sup> July 2023 were approved by Gaye Rees and seconded by Robert Barthram.

The Minutes of the Meeting of CT in Tilehurst and West Reading meeting were approved by Gaye Rees and seconded by Graham Fuller.

The Minutes of the Meeting of CT in the Centre of Reading was approved by Graham Fuller and seconded by Una Chandler.

Robert closed the meeting in prayer at 2.00pm

Date of Next meeting, the AGM, will take place on Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> June 2024 at Grange URC in the evening at 7.30 pm.