



The
**United
Reformed
Church**

Tavistock U.R.C.

Russell Street, Tavistock PL19 8BD

Founded 1652

Loving God,

Encouraging Questions, Welcoming all.

CONTACT

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Synod website: www.urcsouthwest.org.uk

Church Website: www.tavistockurc.org.uk

February 2025

Our Church is open for worship on Sundays at 10.30am.

The Service of Worship will be emailed or posted to those who want it.

2nd February Service led by Revd Iain McDonald with Holy Communion

9th February Service led by Mike Dennis

16th February Service led by Revd Elizabeth Kemp

23rd February Service led by Revd Rob Weston

St. Valentine (died 3rd century, Rome) was the name of a legendary Christian martyr whose life seems to have a historical basis. He is the patron saint of lovers, people with epilepsy, and beekeepers.



Dates for your Diary:

Sunday 16th March Church AGM after the Service

Elders' meetings 23rd February; 13th April 2025

Letter from our Minister

Dear Friends

At the end of January each year the RSPB organises a Big Garden Birdwatch, perhaps you took part this year? The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds began in 1889, it has been working to protect endangered habitats and endangered birds ever since. The RSPB has also been working with policy makers and helping to educate all of us, to ensure the well-being not just of birds but the eco systems that are essential for birds to live and thrive.

Suzy and I are fortunate to live on a smallholding in Devon where many different birds come to our bird feeders, to our hedgerows and our fields. We get very excited when we see a species that is new to the area. On our bird feeders in January we saw blue tits, great tits, goldfinches, robins, blackbirds, dunnoek, sparrows, woodpeckers (greater spotted), chaffinches, marsh tits and coal tits. Last month we spotted a pair of red kites circling above the field behind our house, a rare sighting in Devon. We used to see many red kites in Reading, as they had been reintroduced to the Chiltern Hills in the 1990s and their numbers are now well established.

Tavistock is a great place for bird watchers too, as we have the river where we've seen dippers, kingfishers and many others. Plus the habitat of Dartmoor, where I love to listen to the skylarks. I hope you are able to take time to look and enjoy the huge variety of birds on your doorstep and I hope they bring you joy too!

As a Gold Award Eco Church, we continue to work towards reducing our carbon footprint. Appreciating God's creation and the world of great diversity that God has enabled is part of our commitment. Working together to see eco systems protected and extended is part of our commitment. In all these things we walk the way of Christ, who celebrated diversity and prayed for unity. Let's continue to be guided by God and the Holy Spirit as we care for one another and God's creation!

Every blessing,
Rob Weston

Nominations for Church Charities this year

At the January Church Meeting, everyone was asked to submit suggestions for this year's church charities. Please send your suggestions to our Church Secretary, Mike Dennis.

Prayer Cards

It's now a year since we introduced prayer cards in the church and Lower Deck Hall. Each prayer card is on a different theme and these have proved very popular, so much so that we had to top up the supplies during the year. These resources are freely available, for all visitors and church members. There are twelve different prayer cards and they are displayed in a special rack.

Praying for Peace

Israel and Hamas have agreed to a Gaza ceasefire and hostage release deal, according to US and Qatari mediators. The first six-week phase is set to take effect on 19 January.

The agreement follows 15 months of devastating violence. Israel has attempted to root out Hamas fighters and secure the safety of its citizens. It has conducted a relentless bombing campaign in Gaza destroying homes, schools, hospitals, mosques and churches. Tens of thousands of Palestinians have been killed in what Amnesty International describes as a genocide, though this has yet to be confirmed under international law. International arrest warrants have been issued for leaders in Israel and for Hamas.

The United Reformed Church has been calling for an unconditional and permanent ceasefire for well over a year and joins with the Methodists and Baptist churches in the UK welcoming the news of the ceasefire deal.

'The commencement of a ceasefire between Hamas and Israel will come as an enormous relief for all living in Gaza and for those waiting for the release of hostages held by Hamas. The UN reports that 70% of those killed in Gaza are women and children and, even in the last few days, schools and hospitals sheltering those displaced have been bombed. Our churches deeply mourn the loss of life. Each person lost is uniquely and equally precious in the eyes of God....'

We pray for a just, equitable, and lasting peace in the region that goes beyond simply the absence of violence. Our churches will continue to work closely with Israeli and Palestinian partners, agonising with them in their current sufferings yet confident that God's grace and deliverance offers hope for the future for all.' You can read the full statement at www.urc.org.uk

*Revd Philip Brooks, Deputy General Secretary (Mission), the United Reformed Church
Revd Lynn Green, General Secretary, the Baptist Union of Great Britain
Revd Helen Cameron, President of the Conference of the Methodist Church in Britain
Carolyn Godfrey, Vice-President of the Conference of the Methodist Church in Britain*

SANDS Charity

During the first two Saturdays of February, Robert and Suzy will be hosting snowdrop planting days at their retreat centre, Tinhay Retreats in Lifton. Each year we use any surplus from the donations received to support a charity. This year we have decided to support Sands, which works with people who have suffered the loss of a baby.

For more than 40 years, Sands has been supporting people affected by pregnancy and baby loss to offer understanding and comfort. Sands works in partnership with health care professionals, trusts and health boards and offers a range of training programmes and bereavement care resources to ensure that every bereaved parent and family receives the best possible care.

Sands supports and promotes research to better understand the causes of baby deaths, improve maternity safety and save babies' lives. The charity also raises awareness of baby loss and works with governments, key influencers and other stakeholders to make reducing the number of babies dying a priority nationally and locally.

Afghan refugee housing project

Tavistock Welcomes Refugees is a new organisation. At the January TACT meeting Catherine Carr & Robin Riddett came along to give information about their ongoing aim to support refugees seeking to settle in our area. The group is part of Citizens UK, who in turn are working with the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government to develop an Afghan sponsorship project.

The particular focus of Tavistock Welcomes at present is to urgently find a landlord willing to participate in a scheme to settle an Afghan family here – it is very difficult to find landlords, so they have appealed to local churches to publicise this aim. Please contact Rob if you know someone who might be able to help and he will pass on details to Catherine Carr.

The 2026 URC Prayer Handbook

The theme for the 2026 Prayer Handbook is ***Touching God***. Prayers are invited which express gratitude for, or a yearning to experience, the touch of God in our lives — moments when the sacred mystery of God breaks into the everyday, filling it with awe and wonder. Prayers that celebrate the sacramental nature of all life, affirming the presence of the divine throughout the world we share. The deadline for contributions is **21 February 2025**.

You can email your prayers for the 2026 Prayer Handbook to phb@urc.org.uk

From the Family Work Team at Tavistock Methodist Church Growbaby

"**Growbaby**" is now operating at Tavistock Methodist Church. Local "Growbaby" groups are supported by Growbaby International, a Christian charity whose aim is to support families by providing essential clothing and equipment in good condition. These things are provided free of charge to local families with babies and toddlers, regardless of income & background, and of any faith, or none.

At each session there is clothing and equipment for families to view and take away and any donations will be received. We hope that Growbaby will be a place where community is formed, & friendships made with an opportunity for families to stay and play with their children whilst having a coffee and chat.

We pray for families each time they come to see us and share the love of Jesus. This is a new project and our opening day was on 14th January. All are welcome to drop in and see what we do **between 10am and 12pm**. Growbaby will then run **every Tuesday during term time**. For more information on this international charity, please visit the website (www.growbaby.org)

Eco News: World Wetlands Day

The Wildlife and Wetland Trust champions wetlands 365 days a year. But on 2nd February, the world comes together to celebrate these habitats. Wetlands are super powered, flood-busting, nature-boosting, carbon-sinking and mood-lifting habitats, that burst with life. Wetlands are some of the most threatened habitats in the world, yet also the most vital for wildlife and people. They're areas of land that are either permanently or seasonally inundated with water, supporting species that are adapted to live there. They're dynamic, changing with the seasons and over time into different forms. Often, types of wetland habitat work together as part of an intricate ecosystem, home to a huge diversity of wildlife.

Wetlands come in all shapes and sizes. They can be found in millions of square kilometres of stunning scenery or simply in your back garden. Whether you visit one of our wetland centres, soak up the stillness of a local lake or follow the path of a winding river, we wish you a happy and peaceful World Wetlands Day.

Further details at www.wwt.org.uk

Manse Proposals

'South Western Synod Manse Policy update. The Synod Trust is aware of the pressures on local churches and pastorates in maintaining a manse in good condition. The Trust is aware also of the likelihood of changes to the laws governing letting of properties, and the possibility of requiring properties to be let to meet increasing standards of insulation, and requiring a EPC rating of 'E' or better.

The Synod Trust notes that we should not be in the position of a landlord for other than ministers. We currently have on our property register some 54 manses, but we only have 16 ministers in Pastoral charge. Therefore, we have decided to offer churches and pastorates the opportunity to hand over to the Synod Trust the responsibility for their manses. This is, at this stage, a voluntary choice. In order to provide manses for ministers, the Synod Trust will provide a manse for any stipendiary minister or CRCW called to serve within the Synod. This will apply only to churches or pastorates which do not have a manse.

For manses provided by the Synod Trust, the Synod Trust will be responsible for all maintenance and insurance costs. Where a church decides that it can handover the manse to the Synod Trust and relinquish all rights and responsibilities to that manse, the Synod Trust will make available to the church or pastorate a sum of at least 40% of the value at handover (independently valued) which can be used for major capital works or repair to church buildings. To obtain a greater than 40% share, the church will need to make a case that it has a significant development in mind to be started within 2 years of giving up the manse.

The Synod Trust will, because of this policy, no longer offer grants for work on manses. To effect the change, the church meeting will need to pass a resolution, stating that it no longer needs the building. The step, once completed, is irrevocable.'

Given the current changes to legislation for landlords that are progressing through Parliament, it may be sensible for us to give serious consideration to this offer from the Synod Trust. Elders will be exploring this further before bringing any recommendation to a future Church Meeting.

Sunday Morning Rota for February: (Please ensure that you swap with someone if you are unable to fulfil your duty)

Date	Preacher	Organist	Elder	Welcoming Steward	Reader	Refreshments
2 nd Feb	Revd Iain McDonald	Steve	Anne	Stella	Mike	Stella
9 th Feb	Mike Dennis	Jenny	Sabrina	Anne	Anne	Sabrina
16 th Feb	Revd Elizabeth Kemp	Jenny	Bob	Mike	Mike	Anne
23 rd Feb	Revd Rob Weston	Jenny	Jo	Sabrina	Jo	Jo

From **Stella Rasdall:** My Life Story

It has been difficult to write this. When you get to nearly 80 there has been so much 'Life' to write about. I was born in June 1945, I have three brothers, two older and one younger. My father was a farmer, my mother was brought up in Cheltenham, a city girl, so I was a bit of a misfit in the tiny hamlet of Upper North Wraxall in Wiltshire. My primary school had about 12 pupils and two teachers. I passed the Eleven Plus to go to Chippenham Grammar School starting in the B class then being put down to the C class. Hence I always felt a failure. I gravitated to Marshfield, two miles up the main road where I went to Guides and met boys. We all paired up with local boys as you did in those days. I started 'going out' with Mike White at 15.

I left school at 16 to do my Nursery Nurse training in a children's home. The babies mostly 'illegitimate' stayed with their birth mothers for the first 10 days to be breast fed then sent to the nursery to be adopted. What awful practice! Those poor young mothers. Two years later I started my training as a SRN at the Royal United Hospital in Bath. I enjoyed it, unlike school I found the study side interesting and easy, probably because I could see some point to it. Mike and I got engaged when I was 18 and married as soon as I finished my training and moved to Tavistock where Mike was Site Manager for a Wiltshire based company building Courtlands Estate. We moved into the first house to be finished. We had three children, Peter born in 1967, Tracey 1969 and Lisa 1971. We moved to a bigger house in Glanville Road when Lisa was about a year old. It needed a lot of work to be done but it was a lovely home.

It was a good marriage until the early 90s when Mike's building business got into financial difficulties. We had to sell the house to pay the bank. It was a very stressful time. The house took a year to sell and we couldn't find anything we could afford to move in to but eventually we moved to Morwellham in 1993. It was such a relief, we could pay the mortgage out of my wages.

I had gradually increased my working hours over the years. Starting as a Staff Nurse at Tavistock Hospital, then night duty at Derriford. In 1986 I was thrilled to get a job as a Community Staff Nurse in Plymouth then after a year to be accepted on to a twelve-month full-time course at Plymouth University to become a District Nursing Sister. I loved it. On qualifying I was sent to a patch in Devonport! It was really hard work but I met some wonderful people. After two years I applied for a Macmillan Post, a specialist post caring for patients with terminal cancer and their families. Again I loved it but it was very demanding especially emotionally.

My world fell apart when Mike left the year after moving to Morwellham. I didn't know who I was any more or how I could manage on my own. I stumbled on with the job for eighteen months then became ill with a virus. It was like having the plug taken out, I couldn't walk along the road. I was physically and emotionally burnt out. I was off work for a whole year. It was really scary. I retired from Macmillan on ill health grounds, but Plymouth Community Trust paid for me to take a diploma in Counselling course. I gradually got my strength and confidence back starting by working in a children's day nursery at £3.50 an hour. It was a real gift, no responsibility and the children were so up-lifting.

The years I spent on my own before meeting Raz were hard but I wouldn't have missed them. It was a time of healing and learning who I was and what I was good at. I took in young people as lodgers to supplement my income. They were great, like having the children home again. I had found the Tavistock URC earlier when my daughter Tracey wanted to be married in Church but her fiancé Dean had been married before so the Parish Church wouldn't accept them. The Rev Lilian Dean was minister at that time. Lil was an inspiration, I was made welcome, people spoke to me and were interested in me which was a revelation. I met wonderfully joyful, wise women, Madeleine, Mary Jane, Rosemary, Muriel and more.

Finding faith and a Church family helped me through those tough times and I'm so glad. I met Raz through Hash House Harriers. A mad lot of people who run around the Moors at 7pm every Monday evening, summer and winter. We married in the Church in 2005. It was a marvellous occasion. A marquee on the Green here with all the villagers and our two families and friends. Two lives coming together. Between us we have 5 children, 9 grandchildren plus an unofficial granddaughter, and 6 great grandchildren. I have had a very Blessed life. Now I have to learn to be old. I'm not looking forward to it but know that God and my Church family will be with me.

From **Mike Dennis:**

Choose Fairtrade

Tune: Suo Gan, arranged Maggie Hamilton

Tea, bananas, honey, coffee, change today and choose Fairtrade
Poor producers all will tell you what a difference it has made
Fairer prices, longer contracts, extra payments help them plan,
Features of a fairer system that respects our fellow man
Multinationals squeezing prices, corporate insanity
Do they think that this will really benefit humanity?
All the trading rules and practice testify to human greed
Wanting change must make me willing to supply my neighbour's need

All my fathers may be guilty of creating poverty,
All my children will inherit fruits of inequality,
Noble words and abject sorrow, little difference these have made,
We can help by taking action,
Keep campaigning, **buy Fairtrade**

Sue Good

From **Jenny Dennis:**

At the beginning of January, I challenged myself to walk 160km (100 miles) during January to raise funds for Prostate Cancer UK.

I am doing this in memory of a dear friend who died at the end of October of prostate cancer, a friend who has successfully completed treatment and another distant relative who has recently received the diagnosis. If you would like to make a donation through Just Giving my page is: https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/prostate-cancer-january-walk-81084?utm_source=SFMC&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=LFCFRUK_Badge_5thDonation&mi_u=49643860&mi_ecmp=LFCFRUK_Badge_5thDonation

or I am happy to receive donations I can add in.

I am on target to finish my walks by 31st January!

From **Mike Dennis:**

The Church AGM will be on 16th March. All reports for the meeting should be with Mike by 2nd March so that he can collate them and circulate the final version before the meeting.

Jo O'Driscoll will be re-standing as an Elder after her first 3-year period but if you would wish to suggest anyone else - with their permission- then you may propose others for the role of Elder. We thank Jo for her contribution as an Elder and also note that next year both Jenny Dennis and Sabrina Burd will have completed their 6 years and will be required to take a break for at least one year.

From **Maureen Tulloch:**

We think of, and pray for, our members who have not been able to get to church recently – Barry, Geoff, Pam and Peter, Pip, John, Garth, Jenny and Dorothy. May God bless them and keep them.

As a Gold Award Eco Church, we email out copies of our magazine and use recycled paper for our printed copies.

CONTACT items for March– please email them to me (maureen.tulloch@homecall.co.uk) by the 25th February. Many thanks.