

Open Mind

The Bulletin of the Rosslyn Hill Unitarian Chapel

August 2011

'My Ministry is to Hold Up a Mirror' Rev Rob Gregson talks to 'Open Mind'



Christmas 2010, the first Christmas in London for Rev Rob Gregson, his partner, Matt Ostrower and their children, Cory and Addy. The family had moved to Hampstead from Newark, New Jersey, earlier in the year and regularly attended the Chapel. When there was a sudden need for a minister to take the traditional Christmas Eve service, Rob generously offered to step in. Through snow and ice people came crowding in, to listen, to sing and to fill the Chapel with light as they raised their

candles. After that heartwarming start, an arrangement was reached and Rob became the Chapel's part time Interim Minister.

Rob has been taking one or two services, both morning and evening, every month and has involved himself with many aspects of Chapel life. He has attended Management Committee meetings, contributed each month to 'Open Mind', worked with Worship Group. convened meetings and set working groups

discuss the religious education programme and membership. With the Elders and with the congregation he has discussed how members can best prepare for and support our new minister, Rev Patrick O'Neill, in September. His pastoral care has been welcomed by many. And throughout he has been a busy and enthusiastic house-father for his little children.

As the Chapel prepares for the arrival of its settled minister, Rob is beginning to

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August Services

7 August (11.00am) - "Generosity & Gratitude"A brief encounter with an angel (a human

being who reveals a truth) in Soho led David to reflect on his own attitude to receiving and giving gifts, including the gift of life! In this address he will share some of these reflections. Led by David Darling, member of Kensington Unitarians.

7 August (7.00pm) - "The Art of Appreciation and Gratitude" (Led by Kate Buchanan)

How do we feel appreciated? How do we express gratitude? Following recent morning services on gratitude, this service is an opportunity for the evening congregation to share their reflections on these themes.

14 August (11.00am & 7.00pm)

Led by Rev Rob Gregson

21 August (11.00am) – "The Goal of World Community"

This service will explore the idea of world community. What would a world community look like? What can we do as individuals, a congregation, and a denomination to work toward this goal? Led by visiting US ministerial student Aimee Downes

21 August (**7.00pm**) – TBA – Contact Gordon Jackson; gordonjackson70@hotmail.com

28 August (11am & 7.00pm) - "Realism/ Idealism: Living our Values Realistically"

Reconciling our Unitarian beliefs with the reality of the world we live in can be a real struggle. This service explores how hope and spirituality can enable us to live compassionate lives without becoming worn down and disengaged. Led by Judy Harris & Leighton Cole.

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The Rosslyn Hill Unitarian Chapel

The Unitarian Chapel in the heart of Hampstead



Unitarianism is spirituality withut dogma and welcomes people of all religious faiths as well as those who are humanistic. Unitarians cherish and live by the values of love, compassion, a free mind, service to others, human dignity, and other similar values. It encourages each person to deepen their relationship with God, yet allows each person to understand God in their own unique way.

The Chapel holds two services on Sundays, at 11.00am and 7.00pm

The morning service is more family-oriented, including activities for children led by professionally trained leaders, and a Children's Chapel is offered for children of all ages. The evening service is more intimate for those who prefer a more meditative tone.

Visitors and guests are always welcome!

The Chapel also offers a rich programme of social activities, covering a wide range of interests such as literature and poetry, Tai Chi, choir singing, monthly lectures, and a variety of monthly events for all age groups.

The Chapel is licensed for marriages and other ceremonies.

For more information, visit our website at www.rosslynhillchapel.com

From the Editor

'The virtue of gratitude' was the focus at one of the morning services in July, when Stuart Bowmann invited the congregation to share their thoughts on and experience of 'gratitude' to create the 'Rosslyn Hill Chapel Gratitude Wall' - please see back page. Gratitude is also the focus of the services on Sunday 7 August.

I believe that we have cause to be grateful for many things in our chapel community – Rev Rob's Ministry during the last few months (you can read more about Rev Rob on page 6); the wonderful music provided by Ed Connolly, Georgina Drewe and our Chapel Choir; Chapel flowers; Children's Chapel; - all the necessary work done by many helping hands – just to name a few. – Thank You!

So what is happening in August? On Wednesday 3 August, the second of the Summer Organ Concerts will take place, giving us another opportunity to enjoy wonderful music and support the Organ Fund. Sunday Services continue, although attendance might be smaller as people are enjoying a summer holiday. Visitors may join us giving us an opportunity to welcome them to our Unitarian community. Children's Chapel meets every Sunday, but other chapel activities are not taking place during August – many of these will resume in September, please watch this space.

Last but not least, I'd like to draw your attention to the call to members to use their 'helping hands' in preparation for the arrival of Rev Patrick O'Neill and his wife Patricia Williams (details on page 4).

Ingrid Tavkar (Editor)

Publisher's Statement: "Open Mind" is a tool of outreach for the Rosslyn Hill Unitarian Chapel. The views expressed in this publication reflect the spirit and substance of Unitarian values, as well as matters of concern to Unitarians, but are not necessarily shared by all members.

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Rosslyn Hill Unitarian Chapel is in London's Hampstead village on Rosslyn Hill between Willoughby Road and Pilgrim's Lane. It is 440 yards down Hampstead High Street on the same side of the street as Hampstead Tube Station. The 46 and 268 buses stop nearby.



PO'Nderings: "Clearance & Review"

From Our New Minister Rev. Patrick T. O'Neill

Dear Friends,

The summer is in full bloom here in New York (temperature in the high-80s-low-90s Fahrenheit) as Patricia and I are up to our necks in Visa applications and relocation logistics. Yikes! The UK security considerations for those seeking to move to England are unbelievably complicated and time-consuming. We've submitted lots of paperwork and documentation (birth and marriage certificates, old passports, bank statements, fingerprints, retina scans, etc. etc.) and now we wait for "clearance and review."

Interesting phrase, that — 'Clearance and Review'. The pace of life being what it is nowadays, it occurs to me we all need an occasional 'clearance and review' to catch up with ourselves. Relocating one's life to a new home is one way to force the issue, of course. What to bring, what to store away, what to throw out, what to give away. What is most precious and essential to hold onto at this point in life? 'Clearance and review'. This item, this old keepsake, these photographs, these clothes, this favourite book, this piece of music — keep, throw, pack away, bring with me, leave behind? Can I live just as well, just as comfortably, just as securely without all these things? How much of my personal identity is invested in such items at this time in my life? 'Clearance and review'

For example, over my thirty-two years since graduating from theological school I've accumulated a library of hundreds of books. Obviously I won't be moving them all to England with me. But now, which ones are "essential" to have with me, and which can I pack away? This is hard.

We'll be making scads of little decisions like this in the weeks ahead as we get ready to head off to our new home among you. We're excited and looking forward to a new stage in our life. I remind myself that we are constantly challenged to make room in our hearts for renewal as life unfolds. Before that can happen, however, we must be brave enough, and patient enough, to engage in the necessary task of clearance and review.

Fond regards, Patrick O'Neill

Submitting copy:

Unsolicited copy is welcomed and should be emailed to: RHUCbulletin@yahoo.com. All submissions may be edited for content and length (200 words) at the discretion of the Communications Team, who also reserves the right to reject unsuitable material. Deadline for submitting items for the September issue of 'Open Mind' is Saturday 20 August 2011.

Chapel Activities



Weekly Activities

Children's Chapel meets every Sunday at the 11.00am service. New children of all ages are always welcome. Infants are welcome in the creche.

All other chapel programmes will not be held in August.

You may like to mark in your diaries the following start up dates for September:

Thursday 8 September

Management Committee 7.30pm

Tuesday 13 September

Social Action Committee 7.30pm

Friday 30 September

Welcome Dinner for Rev Patrick O'Neil and his wife Patricia

Events in the Chapel



Wednesday 3 August 7.00pm – Summer Organ Concert. Maxine Thévenot, Director of Cathedral Music and Organist at the Cathedral of St John, Albuquerque, New Mexico, USA and Edmund Connolly, baritone, perform songs by Vaughan Williams, Wolf and contemporary New Mexican composers with organ works by Bruhns, Buxtehude and Bach. Tickets £15/£10 on the door.

Wednesday 24 to Saturday 27 August 7.30pm

- Sherlock Holmes by Harry Meacher.

For tickets please contact the Chapel Office 020 7433 3267

OUR CHAPEL COMMUNITY

Preparing for the New Minister

There are many things that need to be done before the arrival of a new minister, especially if the minister is not native to the UK. When the Rev Patrick O'Neill and his wife arrive in early September from New York, they will be ushered into their new home by a special team from the Chapel who will look after the practical aspects of settling in. This team will ensure that the Manse cooker works and that the mail gets delivered on time. But what are other members of the Chapel doing to prepare for this important event?

On 10 July, a group of about 20 members met after the service to discuss how we can support the O'Neills after their arrival whilst carrying on the broader spiritual activities of the Chapel. The main theme of the meeting was 'renewal'. Rosslyn Hill Chapel has been fortunate to have hosted many different ministers over the years with different strengths and different styles of leadership. The goal now is to remember some of the best experiences of the past, whilst being open to a new style of leadership in the future. At the meeting, members spoke about the need to be open-minded and to give the new minister plenty of scope to set his own priorities. It was even suggested that the O'Neills be strongly urged to take regular days off! The meeting was organised by the Elders group whose members are: Tanya Morrison, (chair), Will Hopper, Shirley Malin, George Appleby and Victoria Ellington. Victoria English Ellington, 17 July 2011

Welcome Committee/ Transition Team

To help Rev Patrick O'Neill and his wife Patricia Williams settle in to the manse, Hampstead and our community, we are putting together a Welcome Committee/Transition Team to offer practical help and information. Anyone interested in taking part is welcome to contact us.

Jane Crispin (jane@jcrispin.com - Away in August) Hillary Ratna (illariar@yahoo.com. 020 8455 1069)

Save the Date!



Friday 30 September 2011

Welcome Dinner and Entertainment for Rev Patrick O'Neil and his wife Patricia organised by the Chapel Choir.



Joys & Concerns

Ann Finer

Please keep in your hearts Ann Finer who has been receiving combined radio & chemotherapy and is feeling the effects of the treatment. Ann has appreciated all the messages of love and support from many chapel members.

Helene Howard

May 2011 Helene was discovered. unexpectedly, to have a serious kidney problem and on 7th July her right kidney was removed. Luckily her left kidney, which was also suspected of not being able to manage on its own, has proved to be so far up to scratch. She demonstrated her innate resilience by being out of hospital in ten days and she is now convalescing slowly but satisfactorily. She will be restricted for some time in her ability to carry heavy loads so the floristry has to be 'on hold' at present but she is quietly confident all will gradually return to full functioning. Meanwhile she has been immensely heartened by so many messages of love and support from so many Chapel members and her other friends and family (and Anthony's family too). Anthony Joseph

Helen Brandon-Jones

The funeral of Helen Brandon Jones was held on 14 July 2011. Rev Feargus O'Connor, minister at Golders Green Unitarian Church, officiated.

Helen and her family were very long standing members of RHUC. Helen's five children had all attended Miss Grundy's Sunday school. Helen had held the post of Treasurer in the past. John, her late husband had been architectural consultant to Rosslyn Hill Chapel and to other Unitarian chapels in the District. Her daughter Anne was the architect for the renovated cottages. Many will remember Helen's gentle presence, her generosity and abiding interest in the life of Rosslyn Hill Chapel.

-- Margaret Perry

OUR CHAPEL COMMUNITY

"Where I Stand"



My early church going life was traditional. fairly christened by a C of E padre onboard a Royal Navy warship, as my father was a serving officer; I went to Sunday school at St Marylebone Parish Church until I was 11, and attended Church Parade at St Johns Wood Church as a Girl Guide. However after the age of 12, I didn't go to church again until I became a choral scholar at University. By then my mother had become a fairly vehement atheist, and my family no longer participated in

church activities.

It wasn't until I had two sons of my own and wanted to find a spiritual community for our family to connect to that I thought of going to church again. I tried to find somewhere in London and in Kent that appealed to me, but there was nowhere that I felt at home. However, as soon as I attended my first service at Rosslyn Hill I knew that I had found a place that felt comfortable.

The 'doctrine' of open mind, loving heart and helping hands is such a succinct way of expressing so much that is important to me. My personal philosophy is that the only constant in life is change, and finding a supportive spiritual community which embodies the above values has been invaluable in helping me to confront the issues that change has thrown up, and to nurture the personal strengths which have given meaning and value to my life. In providing a context within which such a community can grow, I think that Unitarianism is extraordinary. I currently hold a theistic view of creation, but delight in being able to listen to and learn from, for example, a sermon at RHUC on how a thoughtful atheist draws meaning from his or her experience of existence. I am very grateful for the rich source of inspiration that is to be found in Unitarian services. -- Georgina Drewe



Faith for me is like a language and my first language is Christianity. I see God as the father that I know only by spirit and Jesus the older brother who gives me glimpses of that spirit in bodily form. The Holy Spirit is what connects us all. I guess that makes the Bible my language textbook.

Language evolves losing those bits that no longer make sense in the world of today and creating new meanings for the world of today. I like the idea of faith being a language as it gives me a way to communicate with the world and the divine. Equally, the world with it many languages communicates back to me and in so doing it teaches me its insights. Indeed, I may even learn another faith language or two. My belief and faith connects me to the source of all, it is my plug into the source of life.

Where I stand is where I stand at time of writing as a follower of the free spirit. Where I stand when you read this may be over your shoulder! -- Gordon Jackson

If you would like to contribute to "Where I Stand," please e-mail RHUCbulletin@yahoo.com.

"Ingathering Sunday" with Rev Patrick O'Neill on 11 September

This very special service will be led by Rosslyn Hill Chapel's new settled minister Rev Patrick O'Neill.

A service for the end of summer and the beginning of a new school year, we will mark this Sunday as the beginning of our Unitarian church year. Please join us for Rev O'Neill's first official service and the launch of a new ministry at the Chapel.

Helping Hands at Services

Stewards

August 7 Leighton Cole and Will Hopper August 14 Hillary Ratna and Danielle Wilson August 21 George Appleby

August 28 Britta and Jim Burtles

Worship Group Reps

August 7 Kate Buchanan August 14 Janna Williams

August 21 James Chiriyankandath

August 28 Kate Buchanan

FEATURES

Talking to Rev Rob Gregson, Cont'd from Page 1

step down. His last scheduled service is on Sunday 14 August; he is continuing his pastoral care into September. And he looks forward to continuing his relationship with the Chapel during the ministry of Rev O'Neill, whom Rob knows and admires.

'Open Mind' thought this was the moment to ask Rob to talk to us. He was caught up with house hunting but still gave generous time to the conversation. We talked about his early days and the influential models in his life. His schooling was in Seattle, where his father's family come from, college at Amherst (MA) and he has spent much of his working life on the East coast of the States. Early on, he was interested in world religions and started an Interfaith Support Group at college, inspired by the chaplain of the United Church of Christ (a liberal group, President Obama's denomination). Later he joined the UUA and met Rev Victoria Safford 'the most dynamic, powerful minister I've ever heard'. She led a programme, Welcoming Congregation', which congregations to look at their approach to welcome, with particular regard to gay and transgender people. The commitment of those involved affected Rob profoundly and helped to bond him to UUism 'in a way that's beyond intellectual, and makes me feel I can be a whole person'. Following a stint working in the UU headquarters in Boston he decided to train for the Ministry and went to Harvard Divinity School.

It was after he'd obtained his degree he met another of the important mentors in his life 'and still a very important figure for me', Dick Broholm, who funded a pilot project, an interfaith chaplaincy at Boston Alzheimer's Center. Rob was that first chaplain, ministered to all faiths, and learnt what it was like to 'live under a wasting disease'. Other sources of inspiration? 'My mother: very warm hearted, committed to compassionate causes.'

Rob has spoken before of his love of gardening, and led a flower communion service at the chapel. Nature inspires him, the partnership between nature and humans which he sees as a 'web of mutual interdependence' and he coins the phrase 'garden-centred spirituality'. Another influence was his father, who tended a large garden completely organically, back in the 70s.

The discussion turns to spirituality within the Unitarian tradition. On the one hand, we are given freedom and can draw on the traditions of many faiths, but Rob questions whether our own traditions enable Unitarians to develop a strong spirituality 'so that in times of great crisis, you have something to turn to'. For himself, he finds sermon-writing a significant spiritual practice, and prepares for it with a meditation. He uses 'metta meditation', the Buddhist loving kindness meditation he learnt at a Unitarian church. He finds it beneficial, 'lovely and very calming'. He values silence and being prepared to let things 'bubble up, the turning off that all mystical traditions share'.

A minister, and Rob sees this as central to the role, holds up a mirror and asks a congregation, 'Who are you?

For what purpose? Do you like what you see? What is beautiful and what's missing? For a minister to be a spiritual guide is essential to the development of the deep core of a congregation as is the promoting a strong commitment to social action. Pastoral care and encouraging good interpersonal relations are key elements in ministry. (Rob's wants people in distress to find solace in Unitarianism and the Chapel.) Listening to his analysis of all the elements that make up a minister's role it is clear he has a special interest in and gift for building up a congregation. I learn that in his previous ministry, seven years at the First Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Hunterdown County in rural New Jersey, the church's first settled minister, he built the congregation up from 47 adults and 20 children to 148 adults and 50 children.

'At Rosslyn Hill Chapel, you're right in the middle of change and that's exciting and terrifying. He adds, 'It's critical for congregations to have this challenge.' A particular strength of the Chapel in times of change is its history and its traditions, including a tradition of strong ministry; all this creates a powerful feeling of loyalty. Our location, in the heart of the Village, is a wonderful asset and one to make more of. We talked of ways to bring people into the Chapel, and the contribution children make to a congregation. Sustaining warm, friendly relations amongst Chapel members unifies a congregation and this reflects in the welcome it extends to visitors. Rosslyn Hill has a core of 'well meaning, thoughtful, caring, motivated people, who all have their foibles. It's got a real base to work on'.

Rob and his family were already part of our Chapel community but when he became our part-time Interim Minister, he found himself with a definite role in a fully-fledged society. 'It was lovely,' he says. 'And being at the Chapel has given us all a wonderful 'in' as newcomers to London.' He hasn't quite mastered the NHS and can be caught out by the common language (complimenting someone at Chapel on her 'lovely pants'). Rob enjoys London, and likes the Tube (mostly), Pimms (in moderation) and Eccles cakes. Being well into the novel he's writing, he's pleased to have found a supportive writers' group.

It is nearly time for Rob to pick up the children. I ask what is important to him about Unitarianism. 'It's a source of peace; a place to reflect on life's deepest feelings. And Unitarians have stood up for so much, always prepared to struggle for social justice and spiritual values.'

It was in this spirit of Unitarianism Rob took on the challenge of being the Chapel's part-time interim minister. He provided stability, comfort and good humour but there was to be no coasting along for him or the congregation. He's held up the big mirror he speaks of and asked us what we see and what we might want to review before our settled minister takes up his post. We have a lot to thank him for. --Janna Williams

Our Larger Unitarian Movement

Choosing to 'Freely Follow Jesus'



An irony in America is that a growing number of Unitarian Universalists, after being granted unlimited freedom, were choosing 'to freely follow Jesus'. This was stated by a visiting Unitarian Universalist, the Rev Victoria Weinstein, at a 'Conversation with Christian Unitarians' at Golders Green Unitarians in North London on 11 July. "We've been given all this freedom, and this is what we are choosing," she said.

The Rev Weinstein is a parish minister and worship teacher in the US who is spending a month in Britain leading workshops for the London District. She is prominent in the Unitarian Universalist Christian Fellowship; she describes her theology as 'mystical Christian'.

Rev Weinstein spoke of wanting to rehabilitate Christianity within Unitarian Universalism. Among the points she made were:

By embracing the Trinity, she encountered a 'relational God' — creator, redeemer, sustainer. This could be a dance with all three elements, or a conversation with one part of the Trinity: Father, Son or Spirit.

On grace, sometimes our mistakes were so serious we were not able to forgive ourselves. Through grace, which is the Divine loving and accepting the human, we were able to pick ourselves up again.

Obedience was essentially listening to God, or to whatever our sense of the Divine was.

Then on Sunday 17 July, after taking the morning service at Rosslyn Hill Chapel in Hampstead, Victoria Weinstein led a stimulating workshop on liturgy and worship in the chapel in the afternoon. Those taking part led the 7.00pm service at the chapel that evening. (insert photo of Victorria)

Jim Corrigall (co-convenor of the London District Liberal Christian Group.)

What's On in September

Unitarian Music Society – Annual Conference 2011 Thursday 25 – Sunday 28 August 2011, The Ammerdown Centre, Ammerdown Park, Radstock, BA3 5SW, Somerset; Web Site: www.ammerdown.org



Unitarian Fellowship in Canterbury

Dear Fellow Unitarian,

A Fellowship is being established in Canterbury, where there has not been a Unitarian presence since 1903! The founding service will be held at 7.00pm on Monday, 26 September in The Friends' Meeting House, 6 The Friars, Canterbury CT1 2AS. I very much hope you can be present for this historic occasion.

Following the service there will be celebratory refreshments, and an opportunity to talk about the future of the Fellowship. How often it might meet, at what times, and what form its meetings might take.

Please invite others to join you for this hopeful occasion, and publicise it within your congregation and beyond. It would also be helpful to me to know beforehand if you plan to attend, so that I can plan accordingly.

With all good wishes, Rev. David Usher (London District Minister)

Study Courses

The GA website now includes details of the Unitarian Studies Course and the Worship Studies Course. Please see:

www.unitarian.org.uk/support/StudyCourses.shtml

Ann Finer and Helene Howard are very grateful to the people who so willingly agreed to do flowers for Sundays, and keep them watered, during July, while neither of them was available.

Many thanks to Betty Thomas, Camino Egurun, Charlotte, Christopher Mason and Christina Ayckbourne. - Thanks also to Sharron Conduit for overseeing the logistics. - Bless you all. Ann Finer

August Diary

Wednesday 3 August

7.00pm - "Summer Organ Concert" *

Sunday 7 August

11.00am – Morning service -"Generosity and Gratitude" - Led by David Darling

7.00pm – Evening service - "The art of Appreciation and Gratitude" – Led by Kate Buchanan

Sunday 14 August

11.00am – Morning service – Rev Rob Gregson

7.00pm – Evening service – Rev Rob Gregson

Sunday 21 August

11.00am - Morning service - "The Goal of World Community"- Led by visiting US ministerial student Aimee Downes

7.00pm – Evening service – TBA

Sunday 28 August

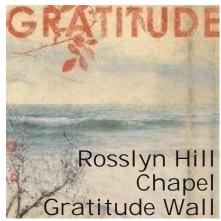
11.00am - Morning service - "Realism/Idealism: Living our Values Realistically" - Led by Judy Harris and Leighton Cole.

7.00pm – Evening service - "Realism/Idealism: Living our Values Realistically" - Led by Judy Harris and Leighton Cole.

* = further details inside Bulletin



Our Chapel Community, cont'd from Page 5



The 'virtue of gratitude' was the focus at the morning service on Sunday 3 July 2011 - Here are some inspiring quotes from members read out during the service:

"I am grateful for people who are willing to take leadership positions in the Chapel while we await the arrival of our new minister – especially the worship

group and the lay leaders who take the services." (Jane)

"I am grateful to all my past experiences – joyful as well as painful. They have helped me to be the person I am today. Gratitude allows no space for bitterness and resentment. I am happy to have discovered the Unitarian Chapel and am GRATEFUL". (Luise Deol)

"Gratitude! Good health and a lovely family in which each member supports the other. Also, that I can be part of the creative worlds of writing, music and dance." (Victoria Ellington)

"I believe it is very important to practice an 'attitude of gratitude' – to count our blessings, to be grateful for what we have and what we receive on a daily basis. In the words of Meister Eckhart

'if the only prayer you say is "Thank You" 'that is enough'. (Ingrid Tavkar)

"The more I remember to focus on gratitude (and by extension to let dissatisfaction recede) the more I experience life as full, as rich, as a place where hope is always present." (Rob)

"The more you express or acknowledge your gratitude the more you experience it.

Giving is receiving. Practising gratitude you experience abundance". (anonymous)

Resources for Services

The Worship Group would like to hear from anyone who would be happy to help in some way with the Sunday services. If you can play an instrument, sing, would like to do one of readings, or assist in practical terms, for example with the sound system, please get in touch.

We will create a Resources Folder which Rev O'Neill will be able to turn to when planning his services. If you'd like to help, please email Janna Williams j.williams16@virginmedia.com

Pastoral Care

Following conversations with the Management Committee, Rev. Rob Gregson has agreed to provide ongoing pastoral care to the congregation through the end of August. If you would like to speak with our interim minister about a pastoral concern, please feel free to contact him on 07411 280 667.



East Africa Crisis Appeal

The entire Sunday collection on 17 July -£263.97 – was donated to the UK Disaster Emergency Committee Appeal for relief efforts in parts of East Africa. Thank you for all your contributions.