

FELLOWSHIP MATTERS!

THE BI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE OF **CLARE BAPTIST CHURCH**

To follow and worship Jesus
and make Him known



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Back And Forth

Rev Paul Graham

We approach the season of Christmas, with the anticipation of Advent and the purchase of a new diary, in a very different world to that which celebrated Christmas 2019. Last year, we thought that Zoom was a type of lolly from yesteryear and we would never have thought have putting the two words “social” and “distancing” into the same sentence, let alone adopt them as a rule for life. So much has changed in our experience of the world around us, as restrictions continue to dictate where we go, who we meet with and where we buy our Christmas presents.

Our perceptions of humanity have shifted ever so slightly; we probably appreciate our bin man, delivery driver, nurse and teacher more than we did 12 months ago. We certainly will pay more attention to hand hygiene, though once we are allowed to, I don't think we will mourn the passing of face masks as the must-have clothing accessory of the year.

Looking back, we mourn what has been lost, the people who have gone, the events that will never be the same, even if they can be held once we are COVID-free. We feel for those who have suffered from the isolation, the loneliness, the enforced vulnerability and the harsh reality of being labelled “elderly”. And for those of us who have experienced any of those, we are hopeful that a new year will bring a new appreciation for all in our communities.



Image by [caqdesign](#) from [Pixabay](#)

We also celebrate the achievements; whether it is one retired army officer's daily garden stroll that captured the hearts of millions, or the influence of one Premiership footballer to ensure that families don't go unfed during holidays, or the weekly round of appreciative applause on our doorsteps, or the coming together of quickly-formed groups in support of their neighbours, there is plenty from 2020 that should leave us feeling a bit better about humanity.

The church buildings may have spent time closed for gathered acts of worship, but many service leaders and ministers have gained new skills in technology and broadcasting. I wonder if future trainee ministers will find New Testament Greek replaced in the college syllabus by courses on film editing and trying to untangle the opaque rules around the copyright of online material. Some churches are fearful that they will never reopen for services, even when they can unlock their doors. Some churches are wondering whether their new-found online audience will ever dare step across the threshold. Some churches, including this one, are wrestling with the convenience of attending church without leaving the house at the expense of worshipping together in one place.



There is a chance to reset, restart and relaunch; if only we knew quite when that was going to be. We had our “false dawn” towards the end of the summer, when we started to allow ourselves the luxury of planning for a future beyond COVID, but then November arrived with increased restrictions. At least, at the time of writing, Christmas is still to be celebrated with the enticing possibility of seeing family, if only we do things right. We have been warned.

But what does this all mean as we approach the end of one year and look towards the start of 2021? There will, of course, be as



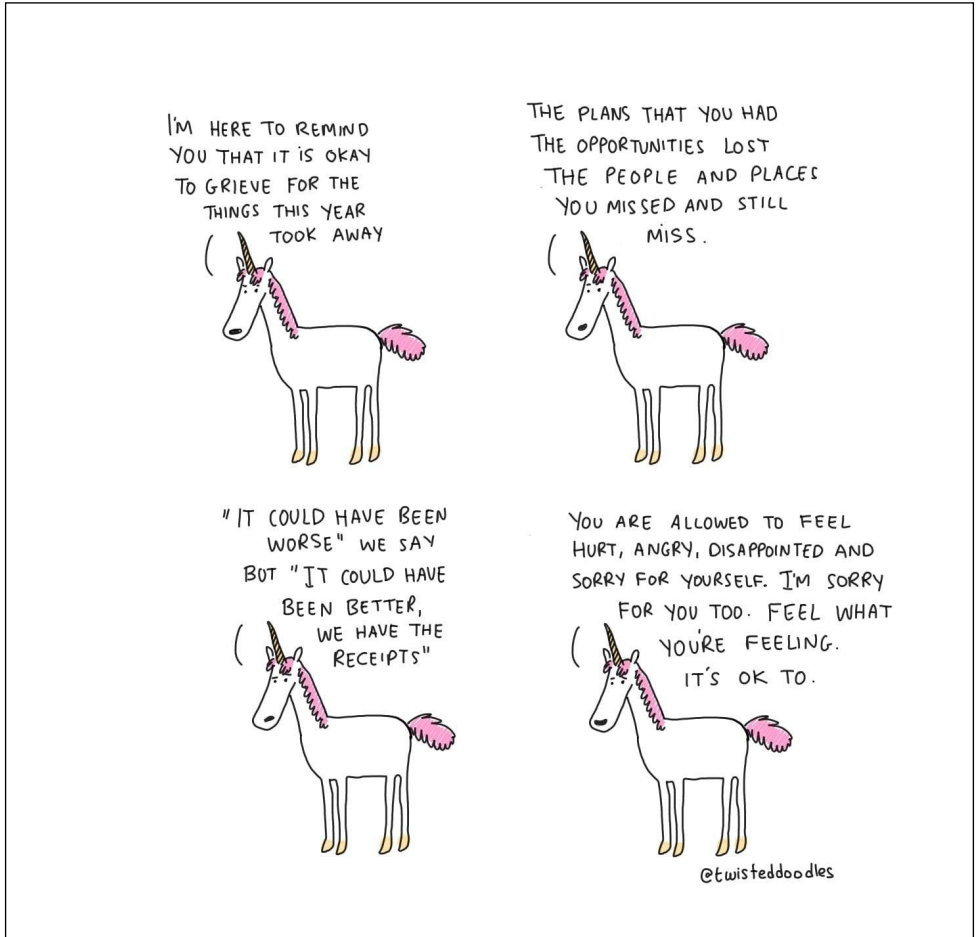
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many different answers as there are people who read this, and we would probably give variations on our response depending on the day, the weather and how we are feeling at the time. But from my perspective, what do I feel we can all take from this to propel us into the new year?

Well, for one thing, we need to be given space to lament. It's been a recurring theme throughout this year that we've lost so much; memories that should have been made that won't ever happen as events, people and time are no longer with us. We are fully aware

of the grief that we feel following the death of a friend or family member; but what about our summer holidays, or our church barbecue, or our plans? Lament covers so much of what is missing in our lives, and gives us space to imagine what life could have looked like if only, if only...

This "Self Care Unicorn" cartoon sums it up well:



Then, from lament, we come to hope. Hope that isn't blind luck, the crossing of one's fingers and trying to make something happen purely by a quirk of fate; but rather the firm belief that there is something more to come. Even at the point of death, there is the

hope of something beyond the veil, as we see in the resurrection of Jesus and the promise that the throne room of heaven awaits us once this life's race is run. Hope that holds onto the belief that this present suffering will ultimately end; hope that believes fervently that love is greater than hate, and that grace can restore the most sinful of lives. Hope that transforms our lament into something more, well, hopeful...

Lament and hope could be seen as two sides of one coin, but to do that would suggest that you can either have one or the other. It's probably more true to say that lament and hope are to be seen as clothes; a tightly-wound scarf of lament that restricts the breathing can be worn alongside a cardigan of hope that brings comfort and warmth (without descending into a morass of whimsy). We are more complex than to just hold onto one or the other at any given time; we can lament one thing while holding hope for something different (or even another facet of the same thing).



Photo by [Markus Winkler](#) on [Unsplash](#)

So, as we move from the strangeness that has been 2020 into the mystery that will be 2021 we go with the expectation of experiencing more of both lament and hope. We will still suffer loss, such is our lot in life, but we will hopefully give ourselves more space to recognise the effect that this has on us and be more tolerant of others

who walk the dark path at a different pace.

But I pray that we will approach this coming year with hope; we have got through so much that this year has thrown at us and God has remained faithful. Jesus' birth is still being celebrated, as will be his death and (gloriously) his resurrection.

Death is defeated. Love has won.

Daughters Of The Church Series

Notes From A Really Big Country

For those who don't know me, I am Emma, and Elvena is my Mum. I grew up going to Clare Baptist Church, and was baptized there. When I left school I moved to Nottingham to do my nurse training, and after qualifying, worked there for several years before I went to work on cruise ships. This in turn led to a decision to work in Canada where I was blessed to meet my husband Barry. We have two girls (Cerys 11, and Ella 10), and I am now a homemaker in Grand Forks, BC. It is a rural town in the southern interior, on the border of the USA.

When I moved to Canada in 2005, I always thought that if there was a need, I would just hop on a plane and fly back to the UK. What seemed like such a simple action, is now wrought with complications and restrictions. It has been a stark reminder that the material things of this world, the things I often take for granted, are as fleeting as a breath of wind. It has reminded me of my need for God, my need to rest in His strength, and not my own, as He never changes and is everlasting.

It remains that I may not be able to be with those I love if they become sick right now, but I believe that God is in control (that he knew me before I came into being, that He already has the days of each of our lives ordained), and I must also, therefore, trust in His timing. Do I understand it? The answer is a definite 'no'. There may well be grief and suffering, especially if I am separated from those I love when they are in need, but God knows, and He has promised that the waters will not overwhelm us. This has given me such peace when I am so far away.

The death of my own father when I was nine was utterly devastating, but God used this gut wrenching loss to show me His life giving love. Of course I would wish my Dad back in an instant, but without his loss I may never have understood my eternal Father's love for me at such a young age. Who knows what God is teaching and planning through the devastation of COVID.

I know that some in our church have struggled with not meeting on

Sundays, and although small services have resumed it has been so beautiful to hear of home ministries starting. People who would feel overwhelmed by the thought of stepping into a church are joining and meeting regularly in a home church setting. Close and 'real' relationships are forming with the space for honest questioning and discussion. So pray for the Lord's movement in this. Also it has been beautiful to see so much more Christian content on social media as churches post their services online. The gospel is reaching out in new and exciting ways through the restrictions placed upon us.

Barry works and lives on a tugboat (where social distancing is not possible), so we have been very careful to socialize with just one other family. This has made it really hard to serve others in our community, and in the beginning I was struggling with this. One day one of my friends said to me, 'but you are loving me by staying away'. It reminded me that I often get caught up in the 'doing', forgetting we might also show love by stepping back, giving space and holding people in prayer. My Mum will tell you I was always busy when I was growing up, but we are also called to be quiet and listen, and it has also been a joy to have more time to be quiet with the Lord at this time.

Because of Barry's work, and the risk of transmission to our community here, we made a difficult decision not to send our kids back to school this year, but home-school them instead. But another one of the blessings is the growth in our family relationships. It's been a blessing (although my kids might not agree), to teach and spend time engaging with them in new ways. I also have a new appreciation for all that our teachers do, and the skills that they have.

It's been a joy to share something of our lives here in Canada. If anyone would like to know more, please email me at newpumpkinseed@hotmail.com I would love to hear from you.

We would also be grateful for your prayers as we make decisions and continue to navigate our lives through this time, as we will also pray for you as a church.

Daughters Of The Church Series

Fellowship Matter

Hi. I'm Vicki Taylor, Mike and Sue Cumber's elder daughter, I live in Knaresborough, North Yorkshire (which is about halfway between York and Leeds) with my husband Graham and our sons Joshua and William. Rita has asked me to write and tell you a bit about our experiences during lockdown.

Like everyone has, we found it a challenge. I lost my job as an activities co-ordinator in a local nursing home and took up home schooling which is still pretty much the case now as William broke his leg on the first day back at school, resulting in a full leg cast and he has not managed full-time school yet. Most home schooling was work set via the internet. It has been good to see what they were learning and to be able to help 1-1 when they had difficulties.

It is the big projects that stand out for me, the hours acting out Macbeth with Lego figures for Joshua's drama project and helping William write his story about a boy who could talk to wolves. Through everything, Graham has been able to go out to work as normal, he has his own gardening business so was outside all the time and worked through. He contacts people by phone and email now and can socially distance easily enough in the gardens.

Church services for us moved online very quickly, using Facebook and YouTube. We are starting to get services back just once a fortnight in the morning for 47 people (I've heard from people who couldn't get in the first week and they said how exciting it feels to have to book to go to church and for it to be too busy to get your first choice) or afternoon for families.

As a member of the pastoral team at church we have worked hard to try and make sure everyone feels supported and encouraged people to ring someone at 11am for a coffee and a chat. We also asked people who felt they were struggling if they could help ringing others and I think this sense of purpose helped.

Church as a building never really shut down as Resurrection Bites,

a charity who help in the church café on a Friday, moved in. Using donated food from supermarkets and local people to make food parcels and hot meals for those in need in the local area they give out hundreds a day in a 20-mile radius.

I help run a toddler group on a Friday and we have really wanted to support our families, so on the last meeting before lockdown we asked if people would be happy to join a WhatsApp group to keep in touch, this has worked well. I have also tried to message people 1-1 a few times to make sure they are coping.

In June we started meeting at 10am on a Friday as we used to, but in the castle yard which is a big open space in the middle of town. We met every week during the summer (but are struggling now as it is too cold and often wet) everyone brought their own picnic rug to sit on which made distancing easier and we took a balls or bubbles or music to dance to along with lots of hand gel and it was lovely to see 6 or 7 families able to chat again. We are working on risk assessments for when and how we can meet inside and trying to think of ideas to help the families.

Graham is half-way through a part time youth mission and ministry course at Cliff College in Derbyshire at the moment and missing the fact that he can't get back to college with the other students. He will be working from home with online lectures and has said he will miss the reflective spiritual sense of being away. He is back running youth groups and has a week of online learning in November which will be challenging for him. The sense of God's plan being a bigger picture has really helped to keep me going and the support from church and the things to do within church have given me purpose.

It has been a lovely opportunity to be together as a family more, and the boys, who were spending less time together now they are at different schools, have discovered it's ok to spend time with each other again. As we adjust to the new normal, for us it's about making sure that what we pick up again and continue with what God wants us to do and realising that maybe we shouldn't be doing all the things we used to.

A Story For Christmas

by Jenny Watt

She was the smallest of them all so she was surprised when Gabriel sent for her.

"Angel," said Gabriel, "I've got a job I want you to do"

"Me?" said Angel. "I'm not experienced like the others. Will I be able to do it?"

"They're all busy just now." explained Gabriel. "I want you to go to Earth, and when you get there, look for a prince and then come back and tell us exactly where he is."

"I've never been to Earth." said Angel. "Will I be able to find the prince?"

"I think so," said Gabriel kindly. "He's a new born baby and he's somewhere in Bethlehem. When you get back to Heaven, we'll have a special Homecoming celebration for you."

Angel was quite overwhelmed. "When do I go?" she asked.

"Now!" said Gabriel. "Go wisely, and we'll see you again soon."

So Angel left the safety of Heaven and set off on her journey. She flew through the star-studded skies; she flew through the moon's bright beams; she flew through the shining clouds and saw the spinning blue globe of Earth.

"Oh, it's beautiful," she breathed. "It's really beautiful!"

She watched for a while, gently moving her wings in the night air and then she remembered her mission.

"Bethlehem," she murmured and closed her eyes. A few minutes later she landed softly, so softly on a grassy hillside overlooking a

small town. There were shepherds, some looking after the sheep and two looking after the fire. Those two had fallen asleep and the fire was burning very low. Angel went over to it and gently fanned it with her wings until it burst into flame. The shepherds woke suddenly.

"Good job that ol' wind come along," said one. "That fire'd have gone out else."

"That be funny though," said the other one. "There be no wind now."

Angel smiled to herself and drifted on down to Bethlehem. Now,



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where to start looking?

A baby prince would be in a big house. She chose the biggest and went inside. Good! There was a baby in a cradle and her mother watching. The baby saw Angel and smiled, then started to laugh.

"What you laughing at, Ruth?" asked her mother. "You don't often laugh like that!"

Ruth! Oh dear! Angel quickly went on to the next house and the next, and the next. All the babies she saw smiled and laughed with her, but none of the mothers seemed to see her.

Angel was getting worried. A few babies, but not one anything like a prince. She searched in houses and farms and inns and barns

and everywhere she could think of. Nothing!

"Oh dear!" thought Angel sadly. "No Homecoming celebration for me and I've let Gabriel down badly. It was only the babies who could see me, except..."

At that moment, she heard Gabriel's voice in her head saying, "Come back now, Angel. Come and tell us about the prince."

"Oh dear!" thought Angel again. She said goodbye to the babies in their cradles, goodbye to Bethlehem, goodbye to the shepherds on the hillside and goodbye to the slowly spinning Earth.

"I may come back one day, " she whispered. Then through the paling sky again and back to Heaven, but not the hoped for Homecoming.

Gabriel met her. "I'm sorry, Gabriel," said Angel sadly. "I didn't find the prince."

"Come and tell me about it," said Gabriel sympathetically and sat down on a flowery bank by a quiet stream. Angel sat down too.

"I found babies," she said, "and they were all so pleased to see me, but I didn't find a prince."

"What about the mothers?" asked Gabriel. "Were they pleased to see you too?"

"They didn't even see me," said Angel. " Well, there was one mother who did and a father too. They looked kind and smiled at me. But the baby wasn't a prince, definitely not. He was lying on a bed of straw in a stable. Princes aren't born in stables, are they?"

Gabriel closed his eyes and thought for a long few minutes. Then he leaned forward and looked at Angel.

"Angel," he said. "That baby in the stable. You say his mother had a kind smile. Do you remember her name?"

I AM GOD
submitted by Rita Bateman

Today I will be handling all of your problems.
Please remember that I do not need your help.

If the devil happens to deliver a situation to you
that you cannot handle,
Do not attempt to resolve it.
Kindly put in the SFJTD (Something For Jesus To Do) box.
It will be addressed in *my* time, not yours.

Once the matter is placed into the box,
do not hold onto it or attempt to remove it.
Holding on or removal will delay the resolution of your problem.

If it is a situation that you think you are capable of handling please
consult me in prayer to be sure
that it is the proper resolution.

Because I do not sleep nor slumber,
there is no need for you to lose any sleep.
Rest my child.

If you need to contact me,
I am only a prayer away.



designed by freepik

A Celebration of Reg Wood's Life

This is the tribute by Val Phillips, Reg's daughter, which she gave at Reg's funeral. We are privileged to print it here.

"Some die without having really lived, while others continue to live in spite of the fact they have died. " (anon)

I think we would all agree that Reg, Dad, Grandpa, Uncle Reg, Reggie – however you knew him – will continue to live in our hearts. He may not have been an enormous man, but he leaves an enormous warmth in our hearts and hopefully, a huge smile on our faces!

Dad was born in Oliver Street, Ampthill on 2nd July 1927 to John and Bertha Victoria Wood. He was followed by two sisters, Sheila and Margaret. By the time Reg was 4 years old, the family had moved to 12 **Ashburnham Road**, Ampthill. This was the childhood home that Dad talked about with great fondness throughout his life, including in his final months.

Dad first went to **school at The Sands School, Ampthill**. At the age of 11, he won a scholarship to **Bedford Modern School** where he grasped the opportunities of education, despite misdemeanours that led to the occasional caning! It was here that his **love of sport** was fostered, including rugby, rowing, football and cricket. He also **excelled at academic subjects** and showed a flair for art, to be rekindled in later life. By the time he left at the age of 16, it was clear he would have a sparkling career. It was during his teenage years that **other hobbies** emerged, including stamp collecting, woodwork, cycling and a love of the countryside, especially wild birds. These interests were sustained throughout his life.

At the age of 16 and in the middle of the Second World War, Dad was encouraged by his father to join **Barclays Bank** as a Clerk. The story goes that he would have by far preferred to be a farmer! However, he quickly showed great promise, working at branches in Luton and Woburn Sands. During the years he worked at Woburn Sands, some 9 miles from Ampthill, he cycled there and back eve-



ry day, whatever the weather!

Just after the war had ended in 1945, Dad, aged 18, was **conscripted to the Royal Navy** for three years National Service. He actually wanted to go in the RAF but it wasn't to be. However, his time in the Navy was very happy, and in his later years, he told many stories about his experiences. He went to Portsmouth for his initial training and then spent most of his time on **HMS Adamant as a Writer** (an administrator). His main job

was to prepare the paperwork for British prisoners of war returning from countries such as Japan who were then taken back to the UK by HMS Adamant. Imagine being an 18 year old, suddenly finding yourself among hundreds of prisoners of war who had experienced the horrors of incarceration in Japan. He told stories of the decks being so full of prisoners of war that he had nowhere to sleep. So, ever enterprising, he would sling his hammock over the edge of the ship and sleep there!

But Dad was **definitely no angel** during his time in the Navy; with a glimmer in his eye, he would talk about the delights of the young ladies in Japan. Misdemeanours on board saw him regularly receiving punishments such as peeling potatoes for the entire crew, or scrubbing the decks on his hands and knees. He had particularly fond memories of his time in **Singapore and Ceylon (now Sri Lanka)**. A few years ago, I was fortunate enough to visit Sri Lanka and showed him some of my photos of Colombo. A spark came into his eye and he was able to name every member of the Adamant football team who challenged a local team to a match in Colombo. He and his team won! He also played for the Adamant rugby team and there began a love of the game that was to continue for the rest of his life.

It was on **leaving the Navy** that Mum and Dad became better acquainted. They knew each other previously but didn't start 'stepping out' until they both joined **Ampthill Youth Club**. Youth Club dances led to afternoon walks and visits to the cinema. And so began a love story that lasted over 70 years!

Mum and Dad **married on 15th July 1950** at Ampthill Methodist Church, with Uncle Les as best man, his sisters Margaret and Sheila as bridesmaids together with Ann Howlett, a cousin of Mum's. Their first home, 7 Grange Road, was initially rented from my grandfather before they were able to purchase it. They lived in **Grange Road for over 50 years**, firstly at No. 7 then no 33, before moving to Clare in 2001. So Grange Road was where their three daughters, Julie, Carol and I were born and the base for our very happy childhood.



Dad's long **career as a banker** took him to a number of branches in Bedfordshire, including Bedford, Woburn Sands, Luton, Ampthill and Flitwick, where he became Manager. There is no doubt that he was not only respected in that role, but also loved by staff and customers alike. **A former colleague** wrote to my mother last week, saying:

"I was delighted to be sent to Flitwick to work with him in my first job for the bank. He even taught me how to use the adding machine and the sealing wax machine, warning me how easy it was to burn oneself! When I was 30, it was back to Flitwick to work as his No. 2. I learnt so much, including how to treat customers who had problems. He was always a kindly, understanding bank manager; his customers loved and never forgot him." I think that says it all.

Always a busy man at work and with his family, Dad also found time to **support local charities and organisations**, particularly Round Table and Rotary both of which also provided Mum and Dad with a lively **social life**. There was nothing Dad liked better than to don his dinner suit and bowtie and attend a ball with Mum on his arm! He was also **Treasurer of the local Scouts** association and a founding Vice President of Ampthill Rugby Club. I well remember him actually helping to build the Club's first clubhouse when I was a child. He was a driving force behind the Club throughout the 1970s and 1980s and remained committed to it until he moved from Ampthill in 2001, rarely missing a home match.

Rugby was in his blood and he had many stories to tell about happy hours spent at the Ampthill Club. However, I don't think my mother ever really knew what he and his many rugby friends got up to on the annual trip to Jersey!

A busy career and family life were followed by an active and **happy retirement** for both Mum and Dad that began in 1984. It was largely focussed on the family, as they enjoyed visiting them all over the country with increasing pride in their growing brood of **grandchildren and eventually great grandchildren**.



Reg was also known to participate in the occasional round of golf. He loved wine making (and then drinking it!) and was a **passionate, instinctive cook**, taking over the lion's share in the kitchen and always boasting that he never made the same dish twice! He would use only the best ingredients, loving his Friday morning trips to the butcher, the fish van and the local farm shop. Many of us here can testify that his barbecues were legendary! **Bird watching and gardening** were also shared passions

of Mum and Dad. His gardens at both Grange Road and in Clare were always a joy to behold! Keen lovers of **travelling**, many of Mum and Dad's favourite holidays were on cruises and to Austria.

As vascular dementia took its cruel hold, Dad **moved to Cleves Place Care Home** early in 2018. He was loved and expertly cared-for by the committed, ever-smiling staff many of whom would call him '**Reggie**' or '**Gorgeous**'. There is no doubt that he was happy at Cleves, taking part in the many activities and rekindling his **artistic talent**. A highlight was his 2019 exhibition at Haverhill Arts Centre as part of Dementia Awareness Week; you can see many examples of his art work on the easels. He loved the company of the Cleves staff, often sharing a joke with them and frequently flirting! He was the life and soul of any 'party' organised for the residents! Mum and Dad celebrated their **70th (Platinum) wedding anniversary** in July, but COVID-19 restrictions kept them apart on the day and largely throughout lockdown. Although Mum was unable to visit him, regular phone calls enabled them to continue to share their

love.

In his written instructions for today, Dad said that he wanted '**no mourning, just rejoice**'. He wants us to **rejoice** in the long, happy, busy life that he led. We should rejoice for the wonderful kind, intelligent man that he was and for the happy memories that he leaves behind. We are the luckiest of families to have had him in our lives whether as husband, father, brother, grandfather, great-grandfather or uncle.

I'll finish with another anonymous quote which struck a particular chord with me:

I am who I am today, because I knew you. If I could reach up and hold a star for every time you made me smile, the entire evening sky would be in my palm.

No mourning, just rejoice.



Link to Hope 2020

Gale Marshall



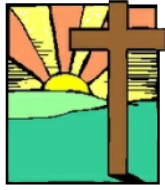
I want to thank all of you who have supported our “Link to Hope” shoebox campaign this year. It has been very different owing to COVID-19 and made some difficulties, but we have managed to produce many beautiful boxes that will be most welcome I am sure to our recipients overseas.

As I write this, I am looking at the many beautiful blankets and knitted hats I have been given and it is such a large pile made with so many stitches in different patterns. It makes me think God has made each one of us, all different, all different “patterns” and “stitches.”

From all the donations, I have managed to make up 96 boxes and donations have been so generous, covering the shipping costs for all the boxes.

Last Monday (16th November), 330 boxes were collected from the church by the “Link to Hope” van. They are now on their way to Moldova, Albania, Romania or Ukraine where they will be received by families and elderly folk with the same love that they were packed with.





CLARE BAPTIST CHURCH

Website:

www.clarebaptistchurch.org.uk

Minister:

Rev Paul Graham, 1 Gosford Close, Clare,
CO10 8PT (01787 277864)
minister@clarebaptistchurch.org.uk

Secretary:

Vivien Sargeant, 2 Gosford Close, Clare,
CO10 8QD (01787 278556)

Treasurer:

Colin Barrable, The New Barn, 16A High
Street, Clare CO10 8NY (01787 278373)

Editor:

Rita Bateman, Penhryn, Bridewell Street,
Clare, Suffolk CO10 8QC (01787 277567)

Publisher:

Janet Shaw, Brookfield, Bridewell Street,
Clare, CO10 8QD (01787 277572)