



KINDLE

**Newsletter of the Romford
United Reformed Church at
Western Road**

Februsry2024

Ministers' Letter

Dear Friends

It was good last week to join with other churches in the town to mark the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. (There is a photograph elsewhere in Kindle) Despite the blustery damp weather the citadel was nearly full and most of the churches were well represented. The service this year was produced by Christians in Burkina Faso, with the theme "Go and do Likewise" taken from the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10. With the Salvation Army Band and a worship group from Elim, our singing was strong and uplifting. My Methodist colleague Revd Dr Eleanor Jackson in her sermon challenged us to think about what "Go and do likewise" might mean for us today in Romford.

Powerful words to challenge us as we think about living out our faith in a very troubled world, the Samaritan didn't allow racial barriers/stereotypes stop him helping a fellow human being in need. I think that will be my Lenten challenge this year, Go and do likewise on a daily basis.

Lent is approaching, we mark the start of Lent on Valentine's day following the pancake party. What are you going to do for Lent this year, give something up, adopt a Lenten discipline/challenge, both or neither?

Lent is a time of fasting and preparation, traditionally for baptism at Easter and as with Advent we need to prepare ourselves to celebrate in due course the resurrection. There is a danger that we seek to rush through Lent forgetting the period that Jesus spent in the wilderness after his baptism. I encourage you to mark Lent in an appropriate way for you which will deepen your faith and understanding.

Alison



The kingdom of God is righteousness and peace. True wisdom is never argumentative or quarrelsome. It does not strive. It maintains harmonious relationships with everyone, as far as possible. It is impossible to quarrel with a man who is filled with Divine wisdom, for such a man is a peaceable man.

NEWS



Church Leaders after the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity Service on Sunday 21st January 2024 at the Salvation Army Citadel.

What's Happening

4th February – Brass Band Concert
13th Pancake Party 5 - 6.30



Heath, Havering & Forest Local Area Group

Wed 14th February Ash Wednesday Communion Service 5.30pm Nelmes United Reformed Church

Once again there will be an art exhibition in Holy Week. The theme for 2024 is Life's Journeys, with a focus on hope.

Further details later but all forms of art welcome.

EASTER ART



Mali
World Watch List 2024 - 14



In a population of 22.1 million people, there are fewer than half a million Christians. The Islamic extremist insurgency that devastated the north of Mali in 2012 continues to have huge implications for the country's small number of Christians, particularly in the north of the country.

Churches have been burned down and many Christians lost their homes and had to flee the region. Although some Christians and congregations have returned to the north under police protection, they still live under the threat of attack. Those living in areas controlled by militants have been denied access to water and land to grow crops. Believers who engage in evangelistic activities in the north are especially vulnerable to violence, while Christian missionaries live under the constant threat of abduction by jihadists. Those who leave Islam to follow Jesus risk violence and pressure from their relatives and communities if their new faith is discovered.

The jihadist violence is spreading southward, and the country's institutions are breaking apart at a fast rate, further playing into the hands of jihadist groups. The authorities' inability to stem the insurgency has led to public protests and contributed to two military takeovers (in 2020 and 2021). The country has also become a geopolitical battleground between the west and east, making Christians vulnerable to government-related persecution.

Meet 'Adama'

“There are abductions, all kinds of attacks and banditry even in the city... Please pray for us that God will keep His children safe.”

ADAMA IS A PASTOR IN MALI



In April 2023, to give one example of the violence in the country, jihadists associated with so-called Islamic State captured the village of Tidermene, Menaka in north east Mali.

Since early 2022, a major jihadist offensive has been underway in the region of Menaka and that of Gao, further west. Since the departure of the French forces, at the end of 2022, the jihadists have stepped into the vacuum.

“Because of the insecurity in that part of the region, there is no known church in Menaka,” says a local Open Doors source. “Christians found in this area are mostly foreigners, travellers or soldiers.

“We are living under great threats in our area (northern Mali). The fear is increasing every day because we hear about fighting all the time. There are abductions, all kinds of attacks and banditry even in the city. The security situation is worsening. Please pray for us that God will keep His children safe,” says Adama*, a pastor of a church in Gao.

**Name changed for security reasons*

Mali has risen three places on the World Watch List and the persecution score has also risen, due to a small rise in violence and a significant increase in the pressures faced in national life. Christians remain in a highly precarious position given the rising influence of Islamic militancy in the country, with a deteriorating security situation. Violence against civilians, Christians in particular, and Christians in

buildings and churches remain very high. Militants targeted Christians, schools and other government institutions, as well as some Muslims.

But there has been some good news in the past year. Despite prominent Muslim leaders calling for Mali to become a 'multiconfessional state', raising concerns among Christians over what this could mean for them as a minority religion, in June, Malians approved a draft constitution that included the country remaining a secular state. Furthermore, the new constitution is being touted as a step towards elections in 2024, a return to civilian rule and stronger governance. There is hope that it will lead to greater protection of all Malians, including the country's vulnerable Christian minority.

God of peace, bearer of hope,
we seek your help
for the peoples of the Middle East.

Quiet the clamour of war
and guide us towards peace.

Where there is hatred and division
sow seeds of calm and openness.

Where there is destruction
help us to rebuild.

Where children are crying
bring an end to tears.

Shelter your peoples and protect them
Guide them and keep them from harm.

Show us how to break down the barriers of history and fear
and breathe whispers of hope.

Amen.

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