

St Columba's

United Reformed Church, Oxford

Newsletter



Christmas & New Year Issue,
December 2017 - February 2018

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CHURCH SECRETARY'S LETTER



Dear Friends,

Preparation is not my favourite activity, but over the years I have accepted that it is sadly necessary for success in many things that I think is important. Tempting as it is to rock up at a meeting and skim through the papers while the small talk is happening, I know that I will make a much better contribution if I've read them in advance – and that paying attention to my colleagues even in these marginal moments is not only respectful, but helps me work better with them.

As I write this on the evening of the Sunday of Christ the King – the last Sunday before Advent – I'm already well into Christmas preparations. The choirs I sing in have been rehearsing the Christmas music for a while, we've worked out which family members will be in which locations on which dates over Christmas, I've checked that I still have one of the Christmas puddings I made last year on top of the fridge, and I had a meeting earlier today with fellow Elders to plan the carol service on 17th December. Lots of activity aimed at producing concerts people want to listen to, services that help people worship God, and a happy family Christmas.

If Advent is a time of preparation, what does that preparation look like for us? I would suggest it looks very different from the sort

of preparation I outlined above, which all has a pretty clear endpoint (a concert, a service, a Christmas lunch etc), and a set of steps to take that I am pretty sure will result in success – turning up to rehearsals, looking at the music between rehearsals to tackle the bits I get wrong and so on. Our preparation in Advent is not taking us to Christmas Day as an endpoint, nor is our faith simply a matter of going through a series of rituals. Rather, we are opening ourselves up to uncertainty, and to God speaking to us in ways we may not expect. Indeed, the Bible frequently reminds us about the need to be alert and prepared – whether the story of the foolish bridesmaids, the image of the Day of the Lord coming as a thief in the night or other images that may come to your mind.

'...whether or not we call that Minister, we continue to need to examine what it means to be a Christian here today; what it means to be a church here in Oxford today.'

So what new directions might be opening up for us this Advent? As Adrian writes elsewhere in this Newsletter, we look forward to a potential Minister 'preaching with a view' on the weekend of 13th/14th January. That will be a time of discernment – we and they need to consider prayerfully whether we should journey together. And some of us may be considering whether now is the time to take the step of becoming a member of St Columba's in order to be able to participate fully in this process. But it will not be an end point – whether or not we call that Minister, we continue to need to examine what it means to be a Christian here today; what it means to be a church here in Oxford today, and how we should 'love God and enjoy God', as the Westminster Confession put it. No Minister can answer all these questions for us – and we can't delay thinking about them until we have a new Minister. That is why continuing to share our life in fellowship, worship and service together continues to matter, and why I am grateful to everyone who has participated in

welcoming people to church, leading worship, teaching in junior church, offering pastoral care, hosting a small group, keeping our finances and property on track and all the other forms of service that allow us to share our church life.

Whether you are staying in Oxford all through the period of Advent and Christmas, or travelling far and wide, I pray that you have a peaceful and joyful season, and that your preparation takes you forward in faith, secure in the love of God and 'compassed about' with your fellow witnesses at St Columba's.

Gordon

NEWS OF ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS

Finance & Property Committee

Another busy year has passed: the Committee has overseen the purchase and installation of the new digital organ and sofas; numerous areas of the church have been redecorated; and, there have been ongoing maintenance & repairs. There has also been much work regarding the required new hiring approach - including new agreement documentation - that Synod instigated earlier in the year.

We head into the New Year, awaiting application to Synod regarding the glazing project and with the aim to finish the vestry project, for which quotations have now been received. We also hope to tackle the often discussed sanctuary chairs and digital projection, and it will soon be time for the next quinquennial report. There is much to do but we have good members. However, David North and I finish our positions mid-year and new members are therefore sought. Please give this prayerful consideration.

Tim Llewelyn

Cumnor URC

Rohingya refugees: An emergency collection on 5 November raised £207 to help feed and care for displaced Muslim refugees forced to escape from Myanmar.



Hope & Faith School: When our friend Malcolm Townsend returned from his visit to the Hoper & Faith School in March he brought with him the challenge to provide the holders of Wyn Cornish Awards with laptop computers to facilitate their studies. By the time I travelled to Lusaka in June it was possible, through the generosity of Church members and members of the Oxford Friends of Hope & Faith, to purchase fourteen new laptops in response to that challenge. Subsequently, with the Oxford Friends of Hope & Faith we have been able to make a 'Business Start-Up Award' to Amos Mulenga on completion of his training as a Motor Mechanic and institute a new fund toward the maintenance expenses of Wyn Cornish Award holders.

Briony Newport

UPCOMING EVENTS

December Services

- Sunday 17th: Carol service, 10:45am.
- Sunday 24th: Morning service at Cumnor URC, 10:30am (no service at St Columba's). Carols by candlelight at Cumnor URC, 6:00pm.

- Monday 25th: Christmas Day worship, 10:45am.
 - Sunday 31st: New Year's Eve worship, 10:45am.
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Candidacy

Exciting times! We have a candidate for our ministry, who will be visiting us in January in order to 'preach with a view'. At the time of my writing this, the identity of the candidate still cannot be revealed. But I can go into some detail about what has brought us to this point and about what will be happening next.

Members of the pastorate call group met with the candidate early in November to explore the candidate's application for our ministry. Both they and the candidate agreed that it was appropriate to proceed to the next stage. The candidate will accordingly be visiting Oxford over the weekend of Saturday 13th and Sunday 14th January. Please do make every effort to take part in some or all of the events below.

The programme for the visit is as follows...

Saturday 13th January, at Cumnor URC

11:30am onwards: The candidate will meet members of both congregations.

Noon: The candidate will lead a short devotional service, of between twenty and thirty minutes.

12:30pm: There will be a shortish Q&A session.

1:00pm: There will be a light lunch, provided by our friends at Cumnor.

Members and friends of St Columba's are very welcome to attend any or all of these events.

Sunday 14th January, at St Columba's

10:45am: The candidate will lead worship at St Columba's. This will be a communion service. Some of our friends from Cumnor and other local URCs will be joining us.

12:30pm: Having said fond farewells to the candidate, we shall have a special church meeting at which we shall decide whether we wish to issue a call. We will provide sandwiches so that we do not feel under time pressure in discussing this important decision. Cumnor URC will have their own separate meeting at which they too will decide whether they wish to issue a call: their meeting will not be until the following day, Monday 15th January.

Arrangements for the Special Church Meeting

Everyone is welcome to attend the special church meeting and to share their views. But voting is restricted to church members who are in attendance.

Voting will be by secret ballot. We shall not issue a call unless 80% of those church members in attendance at St Columba's and 90% of those church members in attendance at Cumnor URC vote in favour of doing so, as decided at the respective church meetings.

Some people have expressed concern that proceeding straight to a vote in this way means rushing things. The Elders understand this concern, but on balance we believe that this timetable maximises the number of people at the church meeting who will have had the chance to take part in worship with the candidate.

I hope that you will be able to attend this extremely important church meeting. We are trying to discern God's will for the choice of our next minister. We shall not be able to do so without the careful and prayerful support of all concerned.

Burns' Night Event 2018

The annual Burns' Night Supper will be on Saturday 27th January at 7:00pm in St Columba's church.

The evening will take the format of a dinner (haggis/veggie haggis, neeps, tatties), poems and short speeches... as well as some good Scottish country dancing (suitable for novices)! Everyone is welcome and tickets, costing £20, are available from Jill Fresen.



Volunteers are being sought to help on the day to prepare for and run the event. If you are willing and able, please contact church.secretary@saintcolumbas.org.

Youth Assembly 2018 - Pilgrimage: are we there yet?

WHAT: A weekend to focus on Jesus, to share in community with other young people, and to explore what it means to be church together.

WHEN: Friday 19th – Sunday 21st January 2018.

WHERE: Whitemoor Lakes, Alrewas, Staffordshire.

FOR: Young people in school-year 10 up to age 25 (inclusive).

BOOK YOUR PLACE AT: <http://urc.org.uk/discipleship/childrens-and-youth/urcya.html>

BOOK BEFORE: 1st January 2018.

Summertown URC Springtime Lectures

Friday 26th January at 4:30pm - 'RESTORATIVE JUSTICE': The story of the Thames Valley Restorative Justice Service. What is restorative justice, how and what does it offer?

Friday 23rd February at 4:30pm - 'MINDFULNESS ANCIENT WISDOM AND MODERN SCIENCE': What is 'mindfulness' and why is it important? What are the latest discoveries that can help us understand what is going on when we meditate? How can we practice it to help cope with stress and depression, and to engage more fully with life?

Fourth Fridays

We have had two superb speakers – in October it was Stephen Dawson about 'Oxford Preservation Trust – Opening Doors all year round' and in November Anna Steven about 'Ark to Ashmolean'. Our next event will be on Friday 23rd February about 'Oxford Bus Museum' and the speaker will be either Frank Collingwood or Chris Butterfield. Supper is served at 7:15pm and the talk at approx. 8:00pm. For food reservations contact Briony on 01865 246 497 or email secretary@cumnorurc.org.uk.

Crossfire Camp 2018

WHAT: Held at Stathern Lodge (near Melton Mowbray), Crossfire is a camp brought to you by GEAR and URC Youth. It's a fun weekend of talks, small group sessions, sung worship led by the Crossfire worship band and fantastic cooked food. Expect a great weekend of learning more about Jesus, fun activities and meeting new people.

WHEN: Friday 25th to Monday 28th May 2018.

WHERE: Stathern Lodge, LE14 4EX.

FOR: Young people aged 12+ years (year 7 upwards).

BOOK YOUR PLACE AT: <https://crossfirecamp.org.uk/book-now/>

INFORMATION

The Moderator's Christmas Challenge

The Moderator's Christmas Challenge has been a great success for the past three years, so the Wessex Synod is sending out the challenge again to find the design for our moderator's 2018 Christmas Letter. It is open to anyone aged 0 - 26.

The information sheet includes the rules of the challenge and the entry form - which should be attached to any drawings submitted - can be downloaded.

<http://wessexsynodurc.org.uk/moderators-christmas-challenge-2/>

Closing date for entries: 8th January 2018.

Advent Devotions 2017

Revd Ruth Dillon has written advent devotions that are available on the Wessex Synod website at:

<http://wessexsynodurc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/advent-devotions-stars-2017.pdf>

Walking the Way: Living the life of Jesus Today

The United Reformed Church is asking its members and friends to commit to prayer as a way of growing in discipleship and supporting those who seek to live out their discipleship in every

part of their life. To support in this process, there are numerous prayers online at: <http://www.urb.org.uk/wtw/prayers-for-the-season-of-preparation.html>.

Reform: The URC's Magazine

The United Reformed Church's own magazine can be found at <http://www.reform-magazine.co.uk/>. It focuses on inspiration, news, comment, and debate, and is available in paper and electronic format. Details about subscribing can be found on the same site: <http://www.reform-magazine.co.uk/subscribe/>. Gift subscriptions are also available. This may be an ideal gift this Christmas!

Special URC Appeal for the Rohingya People of Myanmar

The URC's partner Church, the Presbyterian Church of Myanmar (PCM), has been working on the ground, providing shelter, food, clothing, and care especially for displaced children. The Council for World Mission is working with both the PCM and the Church of Bangladesh (another CWM Partner) to find helpful ways to respond to the situation.

All monies received will be sent to support the work that PCM churches and partners in Bangladesh are already doing from their meagre resources.

Should your individuals wish to contribute, they can send donations (payable to *The URC Trust*) to:

*Global and Intercultural Ministries, The United Reformed Church,
86 Tavistock Place, London, WC1H 9RT.*

Please specify that the contribution is for the Rohingya people.

The Gatehouse Christmas Appeal 2017

The Gatehouse is appealing for donations for Christmas presents for the homeless and vulnerably housed again this year. They hope for new donations of pants (90% of users are male) socks, hats, gloves, scarves and bars of chocolate. This means that they will hopefully be able to give each user of the project at least one Christmas present in 2017 (they are currently averaging 385 visits a week).

Their community Christmas present wrapping event is due to be held on Wednesday 20th December 11:00am - 3:00pm at St Giles Parish Rooms, 10 Woodstock Road, Oxford OX2 6HT. Everyone is welcome, including children (with a responsible adult). No need to book, just turn up to help!

Donations can be delivered to the same address between 4:00pm - 7:00pm Monday-Friday and 3:00pm - 6:00pm on Sunday. Thank you in anticipation of your support; the project really couldn't operate without the support of the community.

To support the cause further, more details can be found at: <http://oxfordgatehouse.org/support-us/>

THOUGHTS AND OPINIONS

Various friends and members of St Columba's were asked the following questions.

1. *What does Christmas mean to you?*
2. *What is your fondest memory of Christmas?*
3. *What Christmas traditions do you have?*
4. *What are you looking forward to the most about Christmas 2017?*
5. *If you could have anything for Christmas, what would it be?*

The responses follow...

Christmas, for me, is a time of hope. We celebrate the coming of the Christ Child who brings us hope that love and peace can prevail. We celebrate with bright lights and family gatherings believing that a loving God has sent us a saviour to show us out of the way of darkness and conflict into light.

My fondest, quite recent memory is of having a Christmas lunch with family from India, Canada, Pakistan, and the UK, We had young, old, Christian, Muslim and Hindu. At Epiphany, it was very moving to see the Hindu children from afar, carry the frankincense and myrrh into the local church service.

Our traditions include having a real Christmas tree from Christmas Common. The decorations hold many happy memories as many have been given by friends. Two special ones come from the US. One is a decorated sand dollar given by the first person in our group to get his Gold Duke of Edinburgh's Award. The other is an angel made from a cotton husk.

I am and always do look forward to hearing from many friends and family spread all over the world. It is also great to have folk join us for meals over this happy time.

My greatest wish is to have good health.

Maureen Hussain

It is sometimes said that we all make mistakes. At Christmas when we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ we are celebrating the birth of our Redeemer. In other words, we celebrate the promise of redemption, the promise that we will be redeemed and pardoned for all the sins of omission and commission we have committed. When we contemplate our redemption we are joyful and share our joy by giving gifts to family and friends.

I usually enjoy Christmas. My fondest memories are of Christmases celebrated when I was very young in the years immediately after the Second World War. Times were hard then but my parents always had presents for my two sisters and myself.

My main Christmas tradition takes the form of eating a meal with my nearest family.

I look forward to Christmas itself but I also enjoy the tasks, such as writing letters and cards, which are involved in preparing for Christmas.



If I could have anything for Christmas I would ask for a fairly large sum of money not to spend on myself but to enable me to ensure that my grandnephews and grandnieces do not need to take out loans to finance their university education.

Ian Kennedy

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Christmas for me is a time for reconnecting with friends and family members, some of whom I may only have contact with at this time of year, but who are an important part of my life.

This year when, after 40 years in the same house, I have moved I am reflecting on the richness of the gifts that have come to me through life experience and all the children and adults associated with those times.

I found the process of packing and unpacking the contents of a house a very powerful experience, not least in unearthing the decorations for the Christmas tree. Many of the baubles bring

back memories of a particular person or time and carry with them the delicious feeling of festive anticipation that comes with dressing the tree on Christmas Eve. For quite a long time I've been delighted to have a living tree that spends the rest of the year in my garden until it becomes too big to come into the house.

Our family is small and collectively we have always tried to make sure that family members can come together at Christmas even when they have been widely scattered. Now that there are two younger generations it is becoming more complex to achieve and celebratory times are becoming spread out - this year from Advent Sunday. All my sister's children will be with their parents in law so my sister and I are going to our French house. There we shall celebrate Christmas in English style - on Christmas Day and with our English neighbours, rather than on Christmas Eve, which is the French custom. Last year we made a tour of the village to the homes of some of the oldest residents to sing carols and I am looking forward to doing something similar this year.

All my life I have been involved in singing Christmas music. I love the breadth of the repertoire; traditional carols outdoors, congregational singing and the many inspiring works written for the season of Christ's birth. For a number of years I used to accompany an older friend to the Cathedral to the afternoon service on Christmas Eve - a beautiful start to the festival. Now I make sure that I can hear the Festival of Nine Lessons with Carols from Kings College.

And if I could have ANYTHING for Christmas? I wish for safe shelter for those people who have no homes and for the kind of care and attention that will support them towards a different way of life.

Rosemary Knagg

Celebrating the birth of Christ alongside thanksgiving for God's provision both material and through people. It's a time that I tend to spend largely by myself reflecting on the past year and what lies ahead enabling those around me.

This has to be waking early in the morning to the sound of my neighbours singing in South Africa. I had recently moved into an informal settlement where economic hardship prevailed. The gentle singing around a fire and their welcoming me to join as the newest arrival in the community was a turning point in my life.

I have no specific traditions through Christmas although mince pie consumption ranks as a given.

Celebrating this for the first time with my fiancé, Adán, and sharing in some of the traditions he brings with him. Importantly it will also be the first time he meets some of my extended family.

Completing payments of my boat enabling me to have a secure place to call my own.

Iain Stephens

For me now, as for so many people, Christmas means being alone when others are celebrating with their families.

I did like the tradition my wife instituted. We would open presents one at a time starting with the youngest person and working up. Towards the end of my time as a member of the family it would be lunchtime by then. We would repeat until all the presents had been opened - probably about Boxing Day evening.

This Christmas I'm looking forward to meeting some of my new family at church in the morning, then having dinner at the Kings Centre with people who are in more need than I am.

I'm not sure what I would like most. Perhaps to be reunited with my blood family. Although I feel it would be better to be able to make a significant contribution towards ending the violence against trans-people.

Mary Thewlis

EDITOR'S COMMENTS

Snow... proper snow... in Oxford... during Advent! Yes, just last Sunday, those beautiful snowflakes fell heavily onto an already scenic city, transforming it into a winter wonderland reminiscent of CS Lewis's Narnia in 'The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe'. It made for a spectacular walk to church along the river and through the city centre.

I must admit that I turn into a 'big kid' whenever it snows! I love it! I love the quietness it brings to the usually noisy world around us; I love the scrunching of feet in the fresh and fluffy snow; I love wrapping up warm, putting on my walking boots, and heading out for a winter adventure; I love snapping away at the beautiful scenes on my camera; and, I then love it even more when I return indoors and defrost with a warming drink. It's so special. Having church as the destination on this year's winter adventure made it even more special.

Due to quite a hectic life at present, it was my first Sunday at St Columba's for many weeks. Whilst the warmth from the heating system was very much appreciated, being back in our church on a Sunday morning made me glow inside. I was greeted by friendly and familiar faces; a fantastically decorated festive tree was in situ; and, there was a hive of action as members of the congregation worked collaboratively to pull a service together at short notice, due to our preacher-for-the-day being stranded elsewhere. There was such a fantastic community spirit.

Given the tricky wintry conditions, a good number of people turned up to the service to worship. Those who were leading the service did a wonderful job, to the point that anyone unaware of the situation probably wouldn't have even noticed the lack of preparation. However, as I sat in church, I felt a sense of guilt.

In trying to ensure there was a service for our loyal friends and members, had we - inadvertently - missed out on a wonderful opportunity to witness to the local community and be truly Christ-

like in our actions? Yes, worship is at the heart of our religion but Christianity should be much more than this: it should be outward-facing, helping those in need, and being the exception rather than the rule.

I couldn't help thinking that our efforts should have rather been to go out into the streets and take hot food & beverages to the homeless of our city and/or to have opened the doors to the same people and invited them in for shelter & warmth.

Having set Jesus as the benchmark for the way we should live our lives, did we - like most other UK churches that Sunday - not miss the mark? Why was such action not the first thing that we considered? And is it any wonder that people outside of the Church often call Christians and our religion 'hypocritical'?

I will leave you to ponder these challenging questions over the coming weeks (they might be good to mull over whilst munching through the feast that is Christmas dinner!).

I strongly feel the Church as a whole needs to realign its priorities, looking back to the life of the revolutionary Nazarene who was born in lowly conditions on that first Christmas Day and who was the very epitome of a non-conformist. May we find the best way to live as he would wish, even if that means uncomfortably standing out from the crowd.

Thanks to all the contributors to the newsletter during 2017.

Wishing you peace and happiness this Christmas.

Tim

Newsletter Contributions...

All contributions for the next issue of the newsletter should be sent to Tim Llewelyn (Editor) by Sunday 28th Jan 2018 to the following email address: llewelyn_tg@hotmail.com. The next issue will cover **from Dec to mid-Feb 2018**.

Word limits: Thoughts & Opinions items - 600 words; all other contributions - 400 words. For the sanity of the Editor, please keep to these!!

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

EVENTS

December

25th Miles Coverdale lecture, 5:00pm @ The Queen's College.

27th Fourth Friday, 7:15pm @ Cumnor URC.

31st Service of Lutheran Vespers, 6:15pm @ New College.

January

7th First Sunday, 7:15pm @ church.

13th Meeting Ministerial Candidate, 11:30am @ Cumnor URC.

14th Candidate Preaching with a View, 10:45am @ church.

26th Springtime Lecture, 4:30pm @ Summertown URC.

27th Burns' Night Supper, 7:00pm @ church.

February

4th First Sunday, 7:15pm @ church.

23rd Springtime Lecture, 4:30pm @ Summertown URC.

Fourth Friday, 7:15pm @ Cumnor URC.

----- MEETINGS -----

January

9th Finance & Property Committee, 7:00pm @ church.

14th Church Meeting, 12:30pm @ church.

18th Elders' Meeting, 7:30pm @ church.

February

6th Finance & Property Committee, 7:00pm @ church.

11th Church Meeting, after Sunday Worship @ church.



LECTIONARY

December

17th Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11; Psalm 126; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24; John 1:6-8, 19-28.

24th 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16; Luke 1:46b-55; Romans 16:25-27; Luke 1:26-38.

31st Isaiah 61:10-62:3; Psalm 148; Galatians 4:4-7; Luke 2:22-40.

January

7th Genesis 1:1-5; Psalm 29; Acts 19:1-7; Mark 1:4-11.

14th 1 Samuel 3:1-10, (11-20); Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18; 1 Corinthians 6:12-20; John 1:43-51.

21st Jonah 3:1-5, 10; Psalm 62:5-12; 1 Corinthians 7:29-31; Mark 1:14-20.

28th Deuteronomy 18:15-20; Psalm 111; 1 Corinthians 8:1-13; Mark 1:21-28.

February

4th Isaiah 40:21-31; Psalm 147:1-11, 20c; 1 Corinthians 9:16-23; Mark 1:29-39.

11th 2 Kings 2:1-12; Psalm 50:1-6; 2 Corinthians 4:3-6; Mark 9:2-9.

18th Genesis 9:8-17; Psalm 25:1-10; 1 Peter 3:18-22; Mark 1:9-15.

USEFUL CONTACT DETAILS

Facilities Manager

Kenneth Ngugi Tel: 07880 601 109 Email: facilitiesmanager@saintcolumbas.org

Church Secretaries

Adrian Moore & Gordon Woods Email: churchsecretary@saintcolumbas.org

Treasurers

David North & Mary Thewlis Email: treasurer@saintcolumbas.org



St Columba's URC, Oxford

Sunday Worship: 10:45am

*Be thou a bright flame before me,
be thou a guiding star above me,
be thou a smooth path below me,
be thou a kindly shepherd behind me,
today, tonight and forever.*

St Columba's Prayer

ALL are welcome.

ALFRED STREET,
OXFORD,
OX1 4EH

- www.saintcolumbas.org -
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