

St Columba's

United Reformed Church, Oxford

Newsletter



Summer Issue,
July - September 2017

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CHURCH SECRETARY'S LETTER



Dear Friends,

Summer is definitely my favourite time of year – I love the local asparagus and new potatoes, fresh peas and beans, and the summer fruits that seem to taste of sunshine. We usually manage to take a summer holiday that includes my birthday in August, and the long light evenings encourage lingering outside, catching up with friends. I always think of doing summery things like punting, or heading down to the beach in Dorset – but don't always get round to doing them!

But there is a darker side to Summer too – the heat can get oppressive, and emotions can be more labile – whether it was the remarkable outpourings of grief after the death of Princess Diana in 1997, or the riots in Tottenham and other places in 2011, or other times when the tensions have boiled over into violence. At times like this, it seems to me that we should be particularly mindful of being disciples of the Prince of Peace, and think carefully how we can bring calm to situations such as these. As I write, I am reminded of Mohammed Mahmoud, the Imam of the Muslim Welfare Centre in Finsbury Park, who is credited with saving the life of the man believed to have attacked Muslim worshippers by driving a van into a crowd; as a mob began to beat the man, the Imam intervened telling them not to touch him, but to hold him for the Police. I doubt I would have had the

bravery or the presence to have been able to intervene in that way. But what is our calling in these heated times?

It is particularly fitting that we should be thinking about our role in these situations at this point in the church's year; after Pentecost and until Advent begins, we are in 'Ordinary Time', and the focus of our readings from the Bible is on the church's mission in the world. Of course, we don't confine our thinking about mission to this time of year – you will remember services this year focusing on the sufferings in Syria, and the need for peace and reconciliation between people of different faiths; on the work of Commitment for Life, the United Reformed Church's partnership with Christian Aid, and so on. But as our joint pastorate profile with Cumnor URC begins to be circulated across the URC, we look forward to testing both the calling that a potential Minister may feel to work with us, and being tested ourselves on our sense of calling to ministry and mission in this place. They will want to know more about what we wrote in our profile, and how we as members and friends of the church will work with our next Minister in that mission.

It should be an exciting time; visiting preachers have frequently said to me this year that they have felt very welcome, and they are excited to see the things we are doing – including the new organ; our registration to celebrate same sex marriages; the joint youth club with New Road Baptist Church and Wesley Mem; and our discussions with other Oxford churches about practical responses to homelessness in Oxford.

'...we look forward to testing both the calling that a potential Minister may feel to work with us, and being tested ourselves on our sense of calling to ministry and mission in this place.'

Our mission, however, is not just about activity for activity's sake, but about understanding what it means to be the people of God in our community. For me, I keep returning to the mission statement we developed a few years ago, and which you see at

the top of our meeting agendas – which identifies that we are here for worship, fellowship and service. All three of those are important, whether it is about sharing public worship in which the Gospel is preached for all, developing relationships between and beyond members of the church, so that new people are welcomed, and we have deeper relationships with each other and our neighbours, or our service through the church, in our working lives, in our families and relationships, and in every other sphere. I hope and pray that this Ordinary Time will in fact be an Extraordinary Time, and that we grow in confidence and faith as the people of God meeting at St Columba's, celebrating God's love and sharing it with the world through service in confidence and hope for a future in which the Kingdom really does come in the world.

Gordon

NEWS OF ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS

The Finance and Property Committee

The Committee has focussed on making progress with the glazing project but we have, unfortunately, hit numerous barriers trying to get the necessary quotations. We continue to push this forward but it now looks like this will not be achievable before Q3 2017. On the other hand, the vestry upgrade and sanctuary sofa replacement projects are making better progress and we have our new hiring software in place and already starting to make positive improvements. Between now and the year-end, a new key task is to implement a revised hiring methodology, required by the Synod. This will require approval by the Church Meeting by October and will allow us to continue the crucial hiring activity that provides circa 25-30% of our annual income, keeping us in our home premises.

Tim Llewelyn

First Sunday

We've been using the lectionary readings to inspire our monthly meetings this year and it's been interesting to see where that has led us. In April we reflected on stories of Jesus in the wilderness and our experiences of being in the desert. Then in May a reading from Ezekiel let us make paper flowers to plant in a little bit of desert and think of how God has brought life and reconciliation to us and lifted us out of those experiences.



Over the summer we have a programme of social evenings with a film night, a barbeque, a cook-and-eat evening and a talk about cider making before we return to the lectionary in the autumn.

June. We walked with our banner held high from Radcliffe Square to the Castle Quarter and several people told us how pleased they were that we were there.

We're delighted that the Church Meeting approved a resolution that will enable same sex couples to get married at St Columba's, and we think that there will be a First Sunday wedding at St Columba's very soon.



Andy Smith

Cumnor URC



Through the coming summer we are giving some attention to the outside of our buildings. The long awaited planning permission came through at the end of June and the order is now placed for the Garden Office that will provide a replacement for 'The Hut' that was demolished in early 2015. Due to be erected to the side of the Church Hall at the beginning of September, it will give us a new small meeting room, a bit of space for office 'clutter' and a small amount of additional storage.

To ensure that the outside of the existing buildings will not be made to look shabby beside the new addition we are hoping that a few relatively minor external repairs can be completed through the summer and the outside of the buildings decorated. By the time of our joint Harvest Festival service at the end of the September it should all be complete so if the weather is nice you will have the chance to admire it all!

Nigel paid a brief visit to the Hope & Faith School in Ng'ombe as part of a short trip to Zambia in early June. The school continues to prosper and the former students being assisted through trade and higher education courses are making good progress. The first 'Wyn Cornish Award' holder completed her teacher training at the turn of the year and is now teaching in the school. That brings to three the number of former pupils who have qualified for teaching and returned to teach in the Hope & Faith School. We had become aware that a laptop computer for their exclusive use is more and more an essential for these students and after a little fundraising effort in May Nigel was able to buy fourteen laptops during his visit and present them to the school. The

computers will be owned by the Women's Business Centre at Hope & Faith and leased to the students for a nominal sum.

We have a number of members going through tough times at the moment so please remember all at Cumnor in your prayers! Beryl Parmenter's husband Tony suffered a fatal heart-attack on Ben Nevis whilst taking part in the Three Peaks Challenge, our Church secretary, Briony, is recovering from knee replacement surgery and Jon Jones fello and fractured his hip!

Nigel Appleton

UPCOMING EVENTS

BBQ @ Cumnor

Cumnor URC is looking forward to welcoming St Columba's friends to the Cumnor Church Barbecue on Saturday 26th August from 6:00pm. Please contact Nigel on AppletonN@aol.com, to book a place.

INFORMATION

Ministerial Vacancy

Wessex Synod Pastoral Committee (NW) agreed at its meeting in early June to send the pastorate profile for a minister at St Columba's and Cumnor URC to the moderators' meeting. We await news of potential candidates.

Involvement in Church Services

There is still opportunity to add your name to the rotas for singing the Gloria, reading lessons, and leading prayers in morning

worship on a Sunday. Please consider signing up for any of these. Such contribution to our church life is most appreciated.

Names can be added at <http://tinyurl.com/stc-rotas>.

General Assembly Youth Intern Opportunity

Are you aged between 18-26 years old? Are you looking for an internship or looking to further your work experience?

The United Reformed Church is looking for two Youth Interns to make a real impact on its most significant council meeting by assisting and supporting the General Assembly Arrangements Committee (AAC) plan and run the July 2018 General Assembly in Nottingham.

More information available at: <http://wessexsynodurc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/GA-Intern-Opportunity.pdf>

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 news, comment, inspiration 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.

NEWS ABOUT PEOPLE

Birthday Wishes

Happy birthday to our friend, Glenda Appleton, who recently celebrated a significant birthday.

Congratulations

In the Oxfordshire Community and Voluntary Action 2017 Awards, Ian Kennedy won the volunteer of the year award. Our congratulations go to him; it is much deserved.

Farewell

A fond farewell to Ruth and Wilson Sutherland. They have both attended the church for many decades and have served the church so well over all these years, including Wilson as Church Secretary and Ruth being a loyal supporter of Archway and member of the Finance & Property Committee... to name but a few. We wish them well as they head to the northwest of England. They leave behind them a lasting legacy.

We say 'goodbye' to Jan Buy as he heads to Seattle to start a post-doc course. We wish him all the best for his future.

Sad News

Since the previous newsletter, Carolyn Brock sadly passed away. Carolyn was organist and choir director at Mansfield College for thirty years and music director at Wheatley URC for thirist-five years. Carolyn's family, and especially her husband Charles, who was Chaplain to the URC students in Oxford for many years, are in our thoughts and prayers.

THOUGHTS AND OPINIONS

Recent Terror Attacks

At the most recent Elders' Meeting, the Elders reflected on the recent terror attacks, particularly in Manchester and London. Some of these thoughts are recorded below...

How the attacks made some of the Elders feel:

- *'Worried for those Muslims who feel very vulnerable in this country today.'*
- *'Dismayed at the world we live in.'*
- *'Confused about conflicting points of departure, agendas, beliefs in the world, and things that drive people to desperation - does anyone think about the perpetrators, and what drives them to commit such acts?'*
- *'Sad that there is so much hatred, racism and religious intolerance.'*
- *'Feeling that society / the Church has somehow failed the individuals who felt driven to take these actions.'*
- *'Sad for all the families who lost loved ones or whose family members were injured.'*
- *'Angry that this could be done to innocent victims enjoying evenings out.'*
- *'Sick and sad.'*
- *'Joy for the signs of positive humanity, such as the homeless people who went in Manchester Arena to help the victims, the taxi drivers who sacrificed income to assist, and the off-duty doctors who worked through the night to help the injured.'*
- *'Troubled that my children are growing up in a world with random violence targeted at innocent people.'*

- *'Like never reading a newspaper or turning on a TV again.'*
-

Some of the positive outcomes felt to have followed from the attacks:

- *'Communities coming together in solidarity to stand against hatred and racism.'*
 - *'People of all faiths and none supporting the Muslim community.'*
 - *'The Muslim march in support of Manchester.'*
 - *'Wonderful generous community spirit and response - both secular and Christian - responding to these terrible incidents.'*
 - *'Interfaith vigils at Carfax, a visible presence giving testimony that faith leaders will work together in Oxford.'*
 - *'Muslim leaders marching together in London, carrying roses and stating that the perpetrators will not be given Muslim burial rights.'*
 - *'Hands-on help [from the Church] in London and Manchester with donations and helping victims.'*
-

Things that are believed should be the focus of the Church in this uncertain world:

- *'Action, not words.'*
- *'Leading by example.'*
- *'Street Pastors and homelessness project -> reaching out to all people in love and tolerance.'*
- *'Can we help people to be racially blind?'*
- *'Joint activities with other faiths in helping others - e.g. asylum seekers, homeless.'*
- *'Relevance.'*

- *'Inviting those of other faiths to our events.'*
 - *'Offering welcome and safe places.'*
 - *'Annual interfaith friendship walk.'*
 - *'Holding open-air picnics / community celebrations with those of other faiths.'*
 - *'Somehow get a presence in Parliament among our politicians.... How?'*
 - *'More outreach with other faiths.'*
 - *'Illustrating the goodness of Christianity.'*
 - *'Big open-air celebration.'*
 - *'Think the unthinkable.'*
-

A Prayer for Manchester

Gracious God,
Hear the cries of all people
in the brokenness of a new day,
where music is silenced in grief
for the loss of loved ones.
Jesus, suffering Lord,
hold in your loving arms
those caught in the distress of this tragedy
and sustain all who are working
to aid those affected.
Spirit of life,
when words fail us
speak through us
your word of Peace
into broken lives.
Amen.

Revd Andrew Mills
Moderator of North Western Synod

A Prayer for London

Oh Lord hear our prayer, whether people of faith shout God, Allah or Yahweh.

Nothing can justify the taking of another's life and we denounce the actions in your name that justify murder.

Help us to gather as people of faith against extremism and terrorism.

Help us to boldly speak out against those who wish to make us quiet.

May we never become numb to the suffering of others.

May we never become embittered by others.

May we never accept that evil and atrocities are normal.

Lord bless us and keep us.

Amen.

***Revd Dr Peter Stevenson
Minister of Crossway URC, London***

REPORTS

Homeless on our Doorstep

During the end of March and beginning of April, we had a homeless young lady on our main entrance doorstep. When asked to move before the Sunday service, with offers of coffee, to enable people to enter the door, she belligerently refused. Finally the police were called and she was led off. We were all deeply affected by the incident.

I was devastated and wept all through the service. One of the hymns was 'I have no bucket and the well is deep', based on John 4: 11, using the words of the woman of Samaria. John 4:5-42 was the reading that Sunday. Yes, I thought, we all have buckets but she has none. A number of passages kept going through my head:

The words of John the Baptist in Luke 3:11: John answered,

"Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise." (NRSV)

John 13:34-35: 'I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.' (NRSV)

Luke 10:25-37: The parable of the Good Samaritan.

I imagined Jesus pulling out his mobile and calling the police saying: Officer we have a homeless person on our doorstep – remove her at once if you please. And the officer asking what his name and address was: Jesus, St Columba's URC, Alfred Street, next to the Big 'ol Bear pub.

Following discussion at an Elders' Meeting, Jill had an experience that led to her writing the following day:

'The basic idea is that churches would form groups of seven, with each church providing shelter for ten homeless people, one night a week.'

'I thought I would share with you this amazing coincidence from last evening....

I 'loitered around' for a bit, then remembered that I needed to draw some cash... So I went into Tesco, bought a chocolate milk and got some cash back. Then I went back to stand at the 2B bus stop. A woman approached me and said, 'I'm not going to give you a long story... I just desperately need a shower. Can you help?' I hesitated, then reached for my purse, thinking to myself 'Amazing that I have only just drawn some cash'. I offered her some money. She thanked me profusely, and said, 'My name's Keira'. The light dawned on me and I said, 'From outside the church?' and she said, 'Yes!' I said, 'I have just been to a meeting there'; she said, 'Oh, they must have been talking about me. They

are trying to help me'...

She also mentioned that 'some Asian guy has put up his tent there and is bothering me'. So that explains the presence of the tent. She indicated that she is thinking of moving because of this new issue...'

The Elders followed up with a plan to include three members involved: Ian Sinclair (because of his experience with homeless people), Jill and I.

A few Sundays later Revd Mary Gurr - the chaplain to homeless people in Oxford based at St Michael at the North Gate - attended one of our services and gave an outline of the Oxford Winter Nights Shelter (OWNS) for local churches to provide a night shelter for homeless in Oxford over the winter months. Ros Lacey and I have since joined the OWNS steering committee.

The basic idea is that churches would form groups of seven, with each church providing shelter for ten homeless people, one night a week. The committee have been guided by a document Night Shelter Guidance and the experience of a number of churches in Oxford already running a night shelter. The churches serving on the steering committee are: St Michael at the North Gate, Mary Mags, St Aldates, Quakers, St Columba's, Blackfriars, Cowley Road Methodist, St James and St Francis, New Road Baptist Church, St Clements, St Mary the Virgin, Gatehouse and the Salvation Army.

Ros and I felt the response from the local churches was very enthusiastic, most of whom have committed to the OWNS scheme. They were impressed with the practical suggestions from the people in churches which are already doing this; they are very positive about their experience so far.

We are hoping St Columba's will commit to OWNS over the winter months January to April. If we decide to commit, all expenses incurred in doing so will be borne by OWNS.

John Fresen

Thinking of you: Dementia Forum

On 14th June a forum with the above title was held under the auspices of the diocese of Oxford. The forum was led by Dr Joanna Collicutt, adviser, spiritual care for older people, diocese of Oxford.

Dementia is not the normal ageing process. It is a chronic, progressive, irreversible decline in mental abilities. Underlying this decline is the progressive death of brain cells. This in turn can be the result of a number of conditions of which Alzheimer's disease is only one. Parkinson's disease, multiple sclerosis, motor neurone disease, Lewy body disease and Pick's disease can also cause dementia.

It is reckoned that there are about 800,000 people in the UK with dementia. The incidence of the condition increases with age. For example, it is calculated that 1 in 6 people aged over 80 have dementia. It is also important to point out that younger people can be affected by what is known as early onset dementia.

'Dementia is not the normal ageing process. It is a chronic, progressive, irreversible decline in mental abilities.'

There are psychological aspects of dementia apart from the cognitive decline of the person who has dementia. The family as carers may also be seriously affected.

Dr Collicutt set out some of the features of a dementia - friendly congregation. This is a congregation which has made particular efforts to ensure that those with dementia are understood, included and reached out to. In addition, if possible, meaningful worship is provided. A service could also be held to celebrate the contribution of caregivers, including professional carers.

Towards the close of the forum the experiences of St Nicholas church, Old Marston and also the church in Earley - both of which have attempted to become dementia-friendly congregations - were outlined. What has been learned from these efforts is that, as is so often the case with human beings, we cannot afford to assume that one size fits all. Different approaches are required for different individuals. It also seems that the most effective arrangement for providing for the spiritual needs of those with dementia is to organise small groups in a person's house.

Ian Kennedy

EDITOR'S COMMENTS

On the morning of 23rd May, I woke to the dreadful news of an explosion at the Manchester Arena following a music concert. Another day, another terrorist attack in Britain. But this one hit me harder than most: it was an attack on my home city; it was around the corner from where my younger sister works; it was where my dad's bus to work passes by; it was where I have attended various events; and, it killed 22 innocent people, including numerous children who had gone to see international singer, Ariana Grande - one of whom was from my hometown.

All the way to work, I struggled to comprehend how anyone could contemplate or justify such a horrific action. What did these individuals represent that was so sinister that made them a target? Was it a sick individual acting alone, or was it part of organised terrorism? And, even if related to a so-called religious cause, could the perpetrator truly be a person of real faith?

My mind was overwhelmed by thoughts of the event, analysing the details, and trying to make sense of it all. What I knew without a shadow of a doubt was that no one should ever try to take on the city of Manchester in anger: its community would only ever rally around and grow stronger together. And I was glad to be proven correct. From the multi-faith vigil held that very evening

to the scooter rally from Bury to Manchester in memory of a young victim, to the rousing One Love Manchester music concert that brought international music stars together and further conveyed the prevalent phrase 'We Stand Together' to the world.

Eleven days later, there was London's second significant terrorist attack of 2017. I was actually back home in Manchester with my family and watched the terrible events unfold live on national TV. Further innocent victims innocently enjoying an evening out, and further injuries and fatalities. What could possibly happen next? Sadly, an attack outside of Finsbury Park Mosque in London - just a couple of weeks later.

'...we must not let fear rule our lives. We must not let unnecessary divisions be created or widened. And we must not let hate win.'

So, what is going on in this country of ours? Is it something new? And, is it only happening to us in Britain? The answer: 'No, to both.' I remember other terror campaigns in Britain during my lifetime: in fact, in June it was 21 years since the devastating Provisional IRA attack on the Manchester Arndale Centre. And, unfortunately, terrorism is a global phenomenon. However, we must not let fear rule our lives. We must not let unnecessary divisions be created or widened. And we must not let hate win.

Through all of these events, one thing has shone through greater than anything else: love. So many good acts - from those with faith and also from those with none - have been witnessed and recorded. People from all sorts of backgrounds have rallied around each other, especially those directly affected. There is solidarity and we must not let this be broken. Events such as the recent Great Get Together in memory of murdered MP Jo Cox are what we need, not people turning on others through hate crimes. And the Church must be right at the centre, standing strong with other faiths and walking the talk. There are good examples here in Oxford, such as city centre vigils and the annual

interfaith walk, but it must go further. With all we do, we must choose love.

Tim

Newsletter Contributions...

All contributions for the next issue of the newsletter should be sent to Tim Llewelyn (Editor) by Sunday 17th Sept 2017 to the following email address: llewelyn_fg@hotmail.com. The next issue will cover **from Oct to Nov 2017**.

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** -----

July

15th Thanksgiving Service, 3:00pm @ Carver Uniting Church, Windermere.

August

6th First Sunday, 7:15pm @ church.

September

3rd First Sunday, 7:15pm @ church.

October

1st First Sunday, 7:15pm @ church.

----- **MEETINGS** -----

September

5th Finance & Property Committee, 7:00pm @ church.

21st Elders' Meeting, 7:30pm @ church.

LECTIONARY

July

9th Genesis 24:34-38, 42-49, 58-67; Psalm 45:10-17; Romans 7:15-25a; Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30.

16th Genesis 25:19-34; Psalm 119:105-112; Romans 8:1-11; Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23.

23rd Genesis 28:10-19a; Psalm 139:1-12, 23-24; Romans 8:12-25; Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43.

30th Genesis 29:15-28; Psalm 105:1-11, 45b; Romans 8:26-39; Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52.

August

6th Genesis 32:22-31; Psalm 17:1-7, 15; Romans 9:1-5; Matthew 14:13-21.

13th Genesis 37:1-4, 12-28; Psalm 105: 1-6, 16-22, 45b; Romans 10:5-15; Matthew 14:22-33.

20th Genesis 45:1-15; Psalm 133; Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32; Matthew 15: (10-20), 21-28.

27th Exodus 1:8-2:10; Psalm 124; Romans 12:1-8; Matthew 16:13-20.

September

3rd Exodus 3:1-15; Psalm 105:1-6, 23-26, 45b; Romans 12:9-21; Matthew 16:21-28.

10th Exodus 12:1-14; Psalm 149; Romans 13:8-14; Matthew 18:15-20.

17th Exodus 14:19-31; Psalm 114; Romans 14:1-12; Matthew 18:21-35.

24th Exodus 16:2-15; Psalm 105:1-6, 37-45; Philippians 1:21-30; Matthew 20:1-16.

October

1st Exodus 17:1-7; Psalm 78:1-4, 12-16; Philippians 2:1-13; Matt 21:23-32.

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,
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