

St Columba's

United Reformed Church, Oxford

Newsletter



Pentecost Issue,
May - June 2017

CONTENTS

1. CHURCH SECRETARY'S LETTER PAGE 3
2. NEWS OF ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS PAGE 5
3. UPCOMING EVENTS PAGE 7
4. INFORMATION PAGE 8
5. NEWS ABOUT PEOPLE PAGE 9
6. REPORTS PAGE 10
7. EDITOR'S COMMENTS PAGE 11
8. DATES FOR YOUR DIARY PAGE 13
9. LECTIONARY PAGE 14
10. USEFUL CONTACT DETAILS PAGE 15

CHURCH SECRETARY'S LETTER



Dear Friends,

I confess that I always feel a little sorry for ministers of the word and sacrament during the great festivals. They are under pressure to say something new concerning events about which so much has already been said - and about which the sheer enormity of the events makes it a challenge to know what to say in the first place. Easter is the ultimate case in point. What is there to say?

Well, I suppose that we can do worse than let the Bible stories speak for themselves. There is one verse in particular that not only speaks for itself, but says all that really needs to be said. In Mark, Chapter 16, Verse 6, the women who went to anoint the body of Jesus after his death are told, '*He has been raised.*' Let it, for the thousandth time, sink in. Jesus has been raised. We might look for new interpretations of this, new perspectives on it, new ways of making it relevant to our current situation, or new ways of trying to convince the sceptics of its truth. We can enter into long elaborate disquisitions about whether this is historical fact, a powerful myth, a symbol for something that is too profound for words, or some combination of all of these. A preacher might try to put a radical gloss on it, just to stir up those who are listening, or might try to put an orthodox gloss on it, just to avoid controversy. But really nothing more needs to be said: Jesus has been raised.

Does what precedes this in the Easter narrative speak similarly for itself? What about the darkness from which Jesus has emerged? It is noteworthy that not one of the four gospels dwells, to anything like the extent to which it could have done, on Jesus' physical, mental, and spiritual agony. They do not need to. And we would recoil in horror if they did - or at least, we would if we could only take in what they were telling us. In a way their silence matches the simplicity of the declaration that Jesus has been raised: what we are told about the bitter events leading up to Jesus' death likewise speaks for itself, by offering us just as much as we need and no more.

We nevertheless know that, when he was alive, Jesus suffered in unimaginable ways. And I wonder how often we properly consider the implications of that alongside the good news of his resurrection, the good news that he is now alive again. Yes, it is good news. But if Jesus really is now alive again, then we had better not simply take for granted that the agony is all over.

'Let it, for the thousandth time, sink in. Jesus has been raised.'

In recent weeks we have witnessed violence and atrocities on our own streets, as well as hearing the usual litany of horror stories from other parts of the world. Last month there was a terrorist attack outside the Houses of Parliament as a result of which five innocent people lost their lives. A few days before I sat down to write this letter an asylum seeker was brutally attacked by a gang of thugs in what appears to have been a hate crime. More recently over seventy men, women, and children were killed by chemical weapons in Syria. In times such as these we find ourselves turning to God in a tangle of confused and raw emotions. We feel shock and compassion; we feel anger and fear; we feel shame and guilt. We may even find ourselves wanting to echo the words that Jesus himself used on the cross: *'Why have you forsaken us?'* Where was God when these atrocities were being committed? But we know the answer: God

was right there. The risen Lord himself was right there. And he was hurting more than any of us.

Yes, we can glory in the good news that Jesus has been raised. And yes, this is good news that speaks for itself. But let us accept it for the challenge that it is as well as for the liberation that it is. The philosopher Pascal wrote: '*Jesus will be in agony even to the end of the world. We must not sleep during that time.*' As long as the risen Lord is suffering, we must respond to that suffering and we have work to do.

I am writing this letter in the fortnight before Easter. By the time you read it, Easter will have come and gone. I hope that it has been a happy and joyful one for you! Now let us carry on the work to which the good news of Easter calls us.

With love in Christ,

Adrian

NEWS OF ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS

The Finance and Property Committee

Since the previous newsletter, the Finance & Property Committee meeting has had to deal with various out-of-the-ordinary situations, including a significant leak in the property. Fortunately, the latter - thanks especially to the efforts of Ken Ngugi and David North - does not appear to have had any lasting damage. However, such events can distract from the other tasks in hand. Our project work has, however, continued.

Most recently, the highly anticipated installation of our new digital organ took place. We are hoping that this instrument proves to be a very good value for money solution. This saves us up to approximately £55K in the immediate term and probably tens of thousands more in the longer term, as well as providing an

instrument with a much greater variety of sound. We are looking forward to the organists showing us what it can do! Furthermore, we are progressing with the glazing project (currently waiting to finalise the tender documentation), are focusing on finalising the vestry refurbishment and look to replace the sanctuary sofas.



Ken and I attended a joint property meeting with other city centre churches (e.g. New Rd Baptist and Wesley Memorial). The idea is that knowledge, experience and best - or, at least, good practice - can be shared. It was a very fruitful meeting and the next meeting has been scheduled for later in the year.

Donations for Projects at St Columba's

The organ may now be installed but there are numerous other projects in the pipeline. Can YOU provide financial help?

If so, payments can be made via bank transfer or via cheque, the latter of which must be made payable to 'St Columba's Oxford United Reformed Charity'.

Please contact treasurer@saintcolumbas.org for more details.

Tim Llewelyn

Small Groups

Our small group meets (normally) on Wednesdays at 8:00pm - 9:00pm at Ruth and Wilson Sutherland's house, on the first Wednesday of each month. We are looking at Rowan Williams' book *Being Disciples*. We have time for some great discussion, prayer, coffee, wonderful biscuits and lots of laughs. We hope to encourage each other's faith and not to take ourselves too seriously! We very much welcome new members, so do get in touch if you are interested.

Jonathan Herring

UPCOMING EVENTS

Student & Young Adults' Service

The students and young adults of St Columba's are due to take the service on Sunday 4th June. In preparation for the event, there will be a (free!) dinner at St Hugh's College on Friday 19th May, meeting at the porter's lodge on St Margaret's Road at 7:00 pm. Please let Adrian Moore know if you will be attending the dinner by Friday 12th May. Please also inform Adrian if you cannot attend the dinner but would like to participate in the service.

Contact email: church.secretary@saintcolumbas.org

Movement 2017

Join students from across the country during Friday 9th and Saturday 10th June at All Hallows Church, Leeds for the Student Christian Movement (SCM) annual gathering to celebrate the past year and dream dreams for the future. Featuring the SCM annual awards, guest speaker Dr Rachel Muers, hearing from refugees in Leeds, and lots of fun activities including yarn bombing! Further details are available on the SCM website:

INFORMATION

A Minister for Cumnor and St Columba's Churches

The Vacancy Committee, consisting of representatives from Cumnor and St Columba's URC congregations has been working on a Pastorate Profile for both our churches. The Profile is designed to be used by the Synod to present our communities to ministers who might feel a call to ministry here. Our Interim Moderator, Revd Glyn Millington, is currently creating a very brief summary to inform ministers that the vacancy exists to accompany the Profile when it goes to the Synod.

The draft Profile was circulated to the congregation before the last Church Meeting on 12th March and it was accepted, subject to minor revisions, by those who were present. The final version will be sent to the next meeting of the Synod Pastoral Committee to be held shortly, after which we wait and hope.

Involvement in Church Services

The rotas for singing the Gloria, reading lessons, and leading prayers in morning worship on a Sunday have been looking a bit thing recently. Please consider signing up for any (or all!) of these. Such contribution church life is most appreciated.

You can sign up at <http://tinyurl.com/stc-rotas>.

Stewardship

Want to understand more about stewardship? *Giving to the*

Church is the latest leaflet from the stewardship subcommittee and is now available as a free download from the URC website: <http://www.urch.org.uk/images/Finance/Stewardship/Giving-to-the-church.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.

Opportunity for Proofreaders

Calling all experienced proofreaders and copyeditors! The URC's publications board is looking for experienced proofreaders and copyeditors willing to volunteer their time and work on manuscripts destined for publication by the URC. If you are interested in being part of this pool, or just to find out more, please email Gill Nichol via gill.nichol@urch.org.uk.

NEWS ABOUT PEOPLE

Recent Celebrations

Lucy Ette and Tim Llewelyn celebrated their marriage over the Easter weekend. A good time was had by all and even the British weather behaved itself! They are very grateful for the numerous

good wishes that have been sent their way.

Sad News

Since the previous newsletter, St Columba's has lost numerous friends and members of the church. These include: Pamela Anderson, Margaret Gray, Marilyn McCord Adams and Lily Thomson. We are thankful for their lives. Our thoughts and prayers are with their families.

REPORTS

Homelessness

All central Oxford churches were represented at a meeting with this title held on 18th March at New Road Baptist Church.

Oxford's services for the homeless have been seriously reduced as a result of financial cuts. Perhaps the predictable effect of this reduction has been a noticeable increase in rough sleeping.

'Oxford's services for the homeless have been seriously reduced as a result of financial cuts.'

The meeting heard how during February of this year St Aldate's church opened ten beds for rough sleepers in the basement of their parish centre. The project was supported by seventy trained volunteers and ran for a month. During the duration of the project only two people had to be banned because of disruptive behaviour.

The work of the Wycombe night shelter was also outlined. The shelter has been running for ten years and provides 900 -

1,000 bed nights per year. It enjoys the support of every single church in High Wycombe. The shelter does not simply operate in the winter but is open all year. During the last year a forum has been set up where the needs of each rough sleeper are discussed. Bracknell drop-in centre was also briefly described.

One of the factors underlying homelessness is a shortage of affordable housing. Hostels are not necessarily the solution and it can be argued that the homeless should be integrated into affordable housing.

This is possibly an appropriate opportunity to remind the congregation that once a month a short lunch time service is held when prayers are said for the homeless. A rota of central Oxford churches organises these services. The rota is available from me.

Ian Kennedy

EDITOR'S COMMENTS

Easter is one of the most important events - if not *the* most important - in the Christian calendar. The story makes the scriptwriters of Dr Who and the many superhero film & TV franchises of our day seem quite unimaginative... A miracle-working prophetic preacher man was nailed to a cross and crucified; three days later, he apparently rose from the dead in full physical form; he reappeared to many of his closest friends and followers who had gone into hiding; he left them with amazing gifts to help them spread his message; and, off around the world did his followers travel to inform others of what they had witnessed and what they felt it meant for them, starting a movement that is still globally active over two thousand years later. But what should be the main focus and purpose of us 21st Century Christians?

Some churches would say '*bringing people to our faith*'; others

would say 'worship'; and, there would be those who would say 'social justice'. Of course, there are also many that would say 'all of the aforementioned points in equal measure'! So, what do you think? Don't think long and hard about it: just take note of your instinctive response - it might surprise you!

For this issue of the newsletter, I will focus on social justice. It is a 'banner' that is often waved from many churches, but what does it actually mean for its mission & members? Is it serving Fair Trade tea & coffee and having a regular Fair Trade stall? Is it having special collections or a church meal to contribute to an external not-for-profit organisation? Is it petitioning local councillors and/or MPs about fair provision of services for the local community, especially those with significant financial challenges? Is it church members sacrificing their own time to volunteer to collect on the city streets for Christian Aid & co? Or is it the church building being used as a homeless shelter by night? Different churches will be in different positions to support social justice. However, I believe it is essential for each such Christian community to evaluate what it can do with the resources available to it.

As we consider our response to homelessness in Oxford, I will pass on a thought from Ed, a homeless man on the streets of this city... He said to me that he and other homeless people do not want to be in the situation, that they do not wish to ask others for money, and he wants to reiterate the ever-growing issue that is not helped by the significant reduction in related local amenities & services. He sees his mission to inform the public with first-hand experience and he wants people to vote for parties that are looking to take the necessary action. *How would you help Ed?*

Tim

Newsletter Contributions...

All contributions for the next issue of the newsletter should be sent to Tim Llewelyn (Editor) by Sunday 18th June 2017 to the following email address: llewelyn_tg@hotmail.com. The next issue will cover **from July to September 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

May

19th Student & Young Adults' Dinner, 7:00pm @ St Hugh's College.

June

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

9-10th SCM Movement 2017 @ All Hallows Church, Leeds.

MEETINGS

May

11th Elders' Meeting, 7:30pm @ church.

28th Annual General Meeting, after Sunday worship @ church.

June

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

22nd Elders' Meeting, 7:30pm @ church.

LECTIONARY

May

7th Acts 2:42-47; Psalm 23; 1 Peter 2:19-25; John 10:1-10.

14th Acts 7:55-60; Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16; 1 Peter 2:2-10; John 14:1-14.

21st Acts 17:22-31; Psalm 66:8-20; 1 Peter 3:13-22; John 14:15-21.

28th Acts 1:6-14; Psalm 68:1-10, 32-35; 1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11; John 17:1-11.

June

4th Acts 2:1-21; Psalm 104:24-34, 35b; 1 Corinthians 12:3b-13; John 20:19-23.

11th Genesis 1:1-2:4a; Psalm 8; 2 Corinthians 13:11-13; Matthew 28:16-20.

18th Genesis 18:1-15, (21:1-7); Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19; Romans 5:1-8; Matthew 9:35-10:8, (9-23).

25th Genesis 21:8-21; Psalm 86:1-10, 16-17; Romans 6:1b-11; Matthew 10:24-39.

July

2nd Genesis 22:1-14; Psalm 13; Romans 6:12-23; Matthew 10:40-42.

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



The
United
Reformed
Church

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 -
- www.facebook.com/groups/stcurc -
- Twitter: @stcurc -