

St Columba's

United Reformed Church, Oxford

Newsletter



Autumn Issue,
October - November 2017

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CHURCH SECRETARY'S LETTER



Dear Friends,

I hope that those of you who were here over the summer, and who heard my sermon at the end of July, will forgive me if I revert to some ideas that I paraded on that occasion. A few events since then, both in the life of St Columba's and in my own life, have made it irresistible for me to revisit my main theme: 'Stages of Life'.

In my sermon I considered different major events that occur throughout our lives, including its very inception and its very conclusion. I had been inspired by a 'Thought for the Day' talk that Giles Fraser presented on Radio 4's Today programme. His wife was pregnant at the time, and they had just discovered from the scan that they were going to have a boy. He described their toys of joy when they heard the news, adding - very amusingly, but also very movingly - that there would have been just the same tears of joy if they had discovered that they were going to have a girl. All of this had got him thinking - birth, about new life, and about the start of things. He proceeded to reflect, in a way that I found both deep and inspirational, on the fact that a common term for human beings is 'mortals', and on what difference it might make if, in characterizing ourselves, we focused on the beginning of life instead of its end, that is if we thought of ourselves, not as 'mortals', but as 'natsals'. This in turn

got me thinking about starting points, about end points, and about the various other significant points in-between.

Since then, St Columba's has witnessed its fair share of examples. We have, sadly, lost three much-loved members of our community: Bryan Patrick, Elsie Callander, and Margaret Slaven, whose families all remain very much in our thoughts and prayers. We have said a different kind of farewell to Wilson and Ruth Sutherland, whose contribution to the life of this church has been truly inestimable. (I still cannot quite believe that they have moved away: it seems like a violation of some law of nature.) On a much happier note, David Kennerley and his now wife Louise were married in August.

'We worship a God who attended both weddings and funerals, a God who was himself both born and killed.'

I personally have witnessed some examples since July as well. A week before David and Louise's wedding, I too was involved in a wedding: that of my goddaughter, in Washington DC. Her father was a colleague and close friend of mine here in Oxford, but he had been seriously ill for some time and there was never any question of his undertaking a transatlantic flight, even for his daughter's wedding. She therefore asked me to do something that it had never crossed my mind that I would one day do, namely give her away in marriage. The wedding was a wonderful and joyous occasion.

But, as you will have noticed, I used the past tense when talking about her father. Just two days before the wedding, he was admitted to hospital in a critical condition. He remained conscious long enough to learn that the wedding had taken place and that it had gone well. He died within a week.

More recently, my own father has visited Oxford to celebrate his ninetieth birthday.

Milestones, milestones - all part of human life, of course! And we are reminded, as we reflect on these, of the incredible fact that such milestones were all part of our Lord's life too. We worship a God who attended both weddings and funerals, a God who was himself both born and killed.

At this time of year we look ahead to Christmas, when our focus will be almost exclusively on the birth of Christ. We reflect back on Easter, when our focus was almost exclusively on the death and resurrection of Christ. But, since we are at some remove from both, perhaps we can take this opportunity to reflect on them both together. We worship a God who shares every aspect of our lives with us; a God who is raised from the dead, but who equally was alive before birth; a God who is timeless but who was within time; a God who is infinite but who became finite; a God who is life itself but who lived his own precious life as that of a first-century Palestinian carpenter; a God who is transcendent but who is a constant companion with us on our own journey through life. Praise be to this God!

With love in Christ,

Adrian

NEWS OF ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS

FirstSunday

FirstSunday is St Columba's monthly fellowship group for LGBT people, we meet once a month to share our stories and to spend time in God's presence.

In September, we cooked and ate a meal together and one of us shared their experience of marking the start of the Jewish Sabbath. We talked about the similarities to what Jesus did at his last supper with the disciples.

In October, to mark Harvest one of us talked about their passion for cider making.

In November, we return to looking at the lectionary readings for the week. We start our evenings with coffee, pizza and time to chat. Then we talk about the bible readings for the week before finishing with a short communion.

FirstSunday is a place where we can share our stories and encourage one another in our faith with the confidence that our sexuality or gender expression is welcomed and celebrated. We welcome all who want to spend time with us whether they are lesbian, gay, bi, trans, straight or prefer not label themselves.

The dates, times and titles of our meetings are on the FirstSunday website at <https://firstsunday.info/>.

Andy Smith

Small Groups

Our small group meets (normally) on the first Wednesday of the month at 8:00 - 9:00pm. We will be changing venue this term, following Ruth and Wilson Sutherland's house move.

Last term we looked 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

Cumnor URC

The external office building, now referred to as the Garden Room, is built and looking good. The landscaping and disabled access should be completed by the end of September if all goes well

and in use from October. The new wood smell is lovely and with under-floor heating this may be a fragrant experience for a while.



Briony Newport

UPCOMING EVENTS

Fourth Fridays

The new theme of these community events is about 'Places of interest' and we hope to attract lots of old friends and new ones to join our friendly crowd.

Friday 27th October: Stephen Dawson, Membership, Events & Fundraising Officer at Oxford Preservation Trust and his talk is titled 'Oxford Preservation Trust – Opening Doors all year round'. OPT are celebrating their 90th Anniversary this year and are often referred to as Oxford's own National Trust. Their annual Open Doors events every September, organised jointly by Oxford Preservation Trust and Oxford University, attracts thousands to visit places usually out of bounds to the public.

Friday 27th November: Anna Steven, a volunteer guide of over 25 years, will talk about 'Ark to Ashmolean' from its origins to some of the current exhibits. The Ashmolean is celebrating their 400th anniversary this year. Having heard her fascinating talk I can well recommend it.

Supper starts at 7:15pm and the talk at approximately 8:00pm, finishing around 9:00pm.

Food reservations should go to Briony Newport, tel. 01865 246 497 or via email address secretary@cumnorurc.org.uk by the previous Wednesday (if possible). Please state any dietary needs.

Reformation Dates for your Diary

As the exact date for the quincentenary of the publication of Martin Luther's 95 Theses is approaching (published on 31st October 1517), there are a number of Reformation events which might be of interest for those interested in the history and music of the Protestant past and its legacy. All welcome! (For more information, go to the Reformation 2017 blog of the Taylorian or drop me an email.)

On Wednesday 25th October at 5:00pm, Henrike Lähnemann will give a lecture at the Shulman Auditorium in The Queen's College, on Miles Coverdale's hymnbook, the first printed English hymnal (1535), in which he translated all popular Wittenberg hymns of the time, among them the first translation of 'Ein feste Burg'. The hymnbook which was banned by Henry VIII survives only in one complete copy – which is kept in The Queen's College! The lecture will be followed by Evensong where some of Coverdale's translation will be sung in the contemporary Wittenberg settings.

On Sunday 29th October, 2:30 - 5:00pm, there will be an afternoon of tea and talks on the Reformation in Oxford and J S Bach's Reformation cantatas in the new Cohen Quad of Exeter College on Walton Street where there also will be an exhibition of Reformation pamphlets from the College Library. At 6:00pm, the Evensong at Exeter College Chapel will feature the Bach cantata 'Nun danket alle Gott', written for Reformation day, performed by the College choir with the orchestra of the Oxford Bach Soloists.

Finally on the day itself, Tuesday 31st October, at 6:15pm there will

be a service of Lutheran Vespers in New College Chapel with a performance of the last and most pronounced cantata in the Bach cycle of Reformation cantatas which started this year in May at St Columba's: 'Ein feste Burg'. Henrike Lähnemann will preach before the cantata on Psalm 46 which is the basis for Luther's hymn. New College Choir is singing with full orchestra on period instruments which should be a very festive occasion.

Is it I, Lord?

WHAT: Ministry Enquirers' Day.

WHEN: Saturday 4th November 2017, 10:00am - 4:00pm.

WHERE: Westminster College, Cambridge.

FOR MORE INFORMATION: Vivienne Williams - Tel: 02079 168 649;
Email: vivienne.williams@urc.org.uk.

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.

INFORMATION

Students and Young Adults

St Columba's warmly welcomes students & young adults into its church life!

Get involved with social events (often including free food!). Lead church services (usually three per academic year). And participate in other church activities, such as joining a small group.

To keep in contact and share information, a mailing list can be joined at: <http://www.saintcolumbas.org/church-life/students-and-young-adults>.

There is also a specific Facebook group that can be found at: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/359421184202429/>.

Involvement in Church Services

There is more opportunity to add your name to the various church rotas. These include 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>.

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.

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.urc.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.

NEWS ABOUT PEOPLE

Congratulations!

Well done to Katherine Haigh, Mike Healey and Jonathan Herring for completing the Oxford half marathon: they all did brilliantly!

Sad News

Our thoughts and prayers are with the friends and family of Elsie Callander, Bryan Patrick and Margaret Slaven whom all recently passed away.

REPORTS

Greenbelt 2017

Greenbelt Festival celebrates the places where art, faith and justice meet. It's set in the grounds of Boughton House near Kettering and feels like spending in a weekend in a secret forest. It's an enchanting place to me – it's where I met Emma, and it's a place that has shaped and strengthened my faith over many years.

I love going to the talks and workshops on social justice, while Emma enjoys the creative crafty sessions and the comedy acts, and my mum takes joy in the beautiful green space, the sunshine and the peace she finds in the meditative and reflective prayer meetings.

'It is a rare and moving thing to be ministered to by young people through preaching, and it's these moments that encapsulate the spirit of the Greenbelt festival.'

It's wonderful to see such a wide range of ages at Greenbelt, from babies and young children through to older people. While younger people can often feel isolated in traditional churches there's a whole programme of activities for teenagers at the festival to sustain and encourage them in their faith. The sermon in the main service on Sunday morning was preached by a 13-year-old girl who spoke of the love and grace of God that she

has known through her experience of living with cerebral palsy. It is a rare and moving thing to be ministered to by young people through preaching, and it's these moments that encapsulate the spirit of the Greenbelt festival.

Greenbelt hosted two new venues at the festival this year – the Red Tent which housed talks and workshops on feminism, and Amal which focused on Muslim artistry, conversation and spirituality. I enjoyed going along to events at both new venues and my mum loved taking part in Sufi singing at Amal in the evenings.

Two talks really caught my attention this year. One was a talk about Constance Coltman, the first woman minister ordained in Britain. I loved hearing about how the United Reformed Church has championed the ministry of women, and left wondering what challenges we face in living out our faith now. The second was called 'More in Common' and included Kim Leadbeater, the sister of Yorkshire MP Jo Cox, speaking about her family memories and her grief, and also about her work to build communities and bring people together.

Greenbelt is a place where it's okay to speak to strangers, and change your mind, and find new ways to be creative. I leave every year feeling that the faith we share is special and precious and mustn't be hidden.

The next festival is happening on the 24 - 28th August next year and I'll be there again with my notebook, my sturdy camping chair, and my bells on.

Siobhan Grimes

Street Pastors Update

I've been doing shifts as a Street Pastor for seven years now and still find it interesting and humbling. We have some amazing interactions with people from all walks of life. We help many a drunk person on their way and have some very deep

conversations with others; including rough-sleepers or those in some sort of distress such as relationship break up (the two are not always mutually exclusive). People are always so grateful when we give them flip-flops if they can't manage their heels anymore and sugary lollies are brilliant for drunk young men – they can't shout with a lolly in their mouth. As alcohol can depress blood sugar, sometimes causing aggression, the sugar boost is also a very effective calmer-down. We've recently joined the Radiolink scheme in the City centre meaning we are in touch with Police, door supervisors (bouncers) and Bravo Victor (the CCTV control room). In the picture you can see us enjoying a shift from 4:30am to 8:00am on May morning earlier this year. The organisers were grateful for our presence and help.

'Jesus spent his time with those society frowned upon, in service to them, and I believe we are called to do the same.'

We have a steady flow of new Street Pastors joining us and others moving away, often carrying on as Street Pastors in their new locations. We can always use more people for more shifts so if you are interested – and nobody is too old if they can walk and are non-judgemental and broad-minded – then please have a word with me either at church or drop me an email. You can also email streetpastorsoxford@gmail.com if you prefer.

Personally I find Street Pastoring to be the perfect antidote to sitting through lots of meetings around church both at local and

Synod level. Jesus spent his time with those society frowned upon, in service to them, and I believe we are called to do the same. Street Pastoring is a great way to do it.

Tony Brett



Taizé

You'd think that after five years, leaving Taizé would get easier. It doesn't. It gets harder.

The notes of a friend who, like me, journeyed to Taizé for the fifth time this year.



One might wonder why around three thousand teenagers and young adults from all over the world each week, in the summer, look forward to time with a group of neo-monastic brothers in quiet reflection, attending church: not just once a week, but three times a day.

I can tell you, though, that my friend is right. Taizé is the highlight of my calendar year; a week that I look forward to and long for, and which sees me recharged for the year ahead. *But why?* Taizé to me is home. Tents and stars and church and music and openness and stillness, intermingled.

After a welcome in their home language, pilgrims are divided by age into small discussion groups, early on in the week, to reflect with, after a morning Bible study with a brother.

Everyone contributes to the life of the community as they are able, so there are assigned chores, as well as time to enjoy the glorious Burgundy countryside alone or with friends, old or new. The afternoons are often filled with workshops - sometimes by visiting guests - last year, I was overjoyed to hear Jean Vanier speak - and sometimes around a theme - science, refugees, money, dance, crafts....

Services take place three times a day - before breakfast, before lunch, and after supper. No-one leads the service from the front

(with the exception of Sunday Holy Communion) - rather the brothers see God leading us. Chants are cantored, and the Gospel and prayers are voiced, in multiple languages by the brothers, from the centre of the church. Each time of prayer includes eight minutes of silence.

Towards the end of the week, the prayers relate back to the Easter story. For me, the most powerful time is Friday evening, when The Veneration of the Cross is observed. On Saturday, is the Service of Light, where children (who are invited to sit centrally with the brothers) pass the Easter candle amongst the congregation, lighting their own candles in turn, revealing the spread of the Gospel through the church.

'Taizé is home because it is where I feel closest to my true self, and where I can most easily find limerent space. to meet with Christ.'

Taizé is home because it is where I feel closest to my true self, and where I can most easily find limerent space, to meet with Christ. Where I feel more able to talk to people, and where I feel a sense of belonging, glimpses of hope for the future.

This year, I went to Taizé unemployed, stressed, and tired, afraid of what is to come.

The fifteenth century words of Nikolaus Von Flüe have been written into a new chant:

*Gott, nimm alles von mir, was mich hindert zu dir!
Gib alles mir, was mich fördert zu dir!
Mein Herr und mein Gott, nimm mich mir und gib mich ganz zu
eigen Dir!*

*God, take from me everything that distances me from you.
Give me everything that brings me closer to you.*

My Lord and my God, detach me from myself to give my all to you.

A brave request. To go to Taizé is, in Fr. Roger's words, a pilgrimage of trust. God is trust. Taizé helps me to learn to trust. In myself, in others, and more deeply, in God.

Siân Jones

Homelessness Conference

On 1st July I attended a conference on homelessness held in the Kings Centre, Oxford. The conference was organised by a group led by the Oxford Community Church.

Nerys Parry, rough sleeping and homelessness manager at Oxford City Council, was the first speaker. We are probably familiar with the fact that rough sleeping has increased markedly in recent times. Perhaps we are not so familiar with the statistic that some areas of Oxford are among the most deprived in the whole country. According to Nerys, the main reason for homelessness is the loss of private rented accommodation.

'Perhaps we are not so familiar with the statistic that some areas of Oxford are among the most deprived in the whole country.'

Paul Roberts, Chief Executive Officer of Aspire, followed. Aspire is an organisation which seeks to find employment for vulnerable people. It is now approaching employers and asking them how they intend to meet their recruitment needs. The labour market in Oxford is very tight. There are at present 2,000 people in Oxford in receipt of Jobseekers Allowance, yet we are told the new Westgate development is going to create 3,000 jobs. Aspire takes the view that, to meet labour demands, employers are going to have to recruit in a more inclusive way. Paul also

pointed out that, in the context of homelessness, paid employment is the most effective avenue to independent living.

Simon Pitkin, head of service at O'Hanlon House, emphasised that large hostels are not the solution. However, it is important that the homeless must be housed before work can take place to deal with their problems.

Dr James Porter, a GP at the Luther St Medical Centre, came next. The centre is open to anyone in Oxford who is homeless or vulnerably housed. Dr Porter presented a long list of health problems, including mental health issues, which can affect the homeless. Also, homeless can reduce longevity.

The keynote speaker, Revd Cowley, described his childhood as 'hopeless' because both his parents were alcoholics. As a young man, he served a term in prison. Now ordained as a clergyman in the Church of England, he was recently awarded an MBE for services to ex-offenders. He asked how the church has a lasting effect on poverty. Quoting Jeremiah 29: 11, he pointed out that the Lord promises hope. Quoting Romans 5: 5-11, he pointed out that it is through our sufferings we form this hope. He ended with reference to Matthew 25, interpreted to mean that we are commanded to help the needy.

A panel of ex service users also spoke to the conference. I was struck by the account of one. After a long history of drug-taking and crime, his rehabilitation began with the realisation that, to use his own words, *'he did not want to be sick anymore'*. Surely it is a question of changes in our own lives coming from within ourselves. As Jesus said, *'the kingdom of God is within you'* (Luke 17: 21, NRSV).

Ian Kennedy

EDITOR'S COMMENTS

It has been circa 18 months since our previous minister, Carla,

ended her time with us and we are still without a replacement. Frustrated? Confused? Maybe even concerned? It certainly feels like a long time but this really is not uncommon within our denomination. And it is not time to panic.

A longer period of vacancy is often disconcerting to the frequent and/or regular attendees of a church. We can enjoy the increased variety of people leading worshipping and can learn new insights and perspectives as a result, but we can also feel adrift with the uncertainty of the unknown. Numbers may even dwindle and we can start to fear the worst. But we shouldn't.

The vacancy process is relatively lengthy as standard, with the aim to find the right person for the job. Currently, there is the added factor of the United Reformed Church and its Synods trying to find the best resource strategy for the future of its churches as it battles with significant societal changes and the modern demands on our churches. We must be patient.

'As a church, let's come together, let's have faith, and let's support one another as we welcome, worship and witness.'

Being without a full-time minister can be a big drain on the local resource of a church, especially as most leadership and support roles are voluntary and are often worked around people's own busy lives, with many holding full-time jobs as well. It can, therefore, be difficult to sustain the energy and enthusiasm that previously existed. Stamina is a must, along with a supportive network for when things get particularly tough. People from this network may also be required to 'step up' and take some of the strain for the greater good.

Furthermore, volunteers in such a situation can feel under qualified, doubting their own abilities and wishing they could do a better job. And they can feel as though they are failing others, even when they know deep down that nobody is perfect. High

standards are great but humans are not robots... and, let's not forget, robots can fail too. Self-belief needs to be found and also appreciation given where it is due.

As a church, let's come together, let's have faith, and let's support one another as we welcome, worship and witness. A minister will be found and we will continue our mission here in Oxford.

Tim

Newsletter Contributions...

All contributions for the next issue of the newsletter should be sent to Tim Llewelyn (Editor) by Sunday 19th Nov 2017 to the following email address: llewelyn_tg@hotmail.com. The next issue will cover **from Dec to mid-Feb 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** -----

October

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.

November

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

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

December

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

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

October

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

19th Elders' Meeting, 7:30pm @ church.

November

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

16th Elders' Meeting, 7:30pm @ church.

December

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

LECTIONARY

October

8th Exodus 20:1-4, 7-9, 12-20; Psalm 19; Philippians 3:4b-14; Matthew 21:33-46.

15th Exodus 32:1-14; Psalm 106:1-6, 19-23; Philippians 4:1-9; Matthew 22:1-14.

22nd Exodus 33:12-23; Psalm 99; 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10; Matthew 22:15-22.

29th Deuteronomy 34:1-12; Psalm 90:1-6, 13-17; 1 Thessalonians 2:1-8; Matthew 22:34-46.

November

5th Joshua 3:7-17; Psalm 107:1-7, 33-37; 1 Thessalonians 2:9-13; Matthew 23:1-12.

12th Joshua 24:1-3a, 14-25; Psalm 78:1-7; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Matthew 25:1-13.

19th Judges 4:1-7; Psalm 123; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11; Matthew 25:14-30.

26th Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24; Psalm 100; Ephesians 1:15-23; Matthew 25:31-46.

December

3rd Isaiah 64:1-9; Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19; 1 Corinthians 1:3-9; Mark 13:24-37.

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