

St Columba's

United Reformed Church, Oxford

Newsletter



Lent & Easter Issue,
February - April 2018

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CHURCH SECRETARY'S LETTER



Dear Friends,

The times they are a changin'! Or so sings Bob Dylan in one of his best known and best loved lyrics. As most of you will know, our minister elect, Helen Garton, counts the music of Bob Dylan among what she describes as her 'passions'. But there is, of course, another respect in which that lyric is relevant both to her and to the whole of St Columba's. After our recent decision to call Helen to our ministry, this is certainly a time of important change for us.

I shall say some more about our call shortly. But first, I want to mention two other significant events from the early part of 2018 that have meant that this year has got off to an auspicious start for us. Very early in the New Year we opened our doors for the first time to ten homeless people as part of our participation in the Oxford Winter Night Shelter. The space in our hall is going to be made available once a week as a shelter, until the end of the winter, and then again in future years, throughout the winter months. This is surely one of the most heartening initiatives in which we have been involved at St Columba's for a long time. Huge thanks are due to everyone who has helped to establish the Shelter and ensure that it has been such a success in these early weeks. The second significant event that I want to mention is that, towards the end of January, we heard that our

application for registering St Columba's for the marriage of same sex couples had been successful. We look forward to our first same sex wedding!

But the most exciting event of all has undoubtedly been the decision at our church meeting on 14th January to call Helen to be our new minister. Helen will move to Oxford with her wife Sally, who is an artist, at some point in the summer. We have not yet finalized the date of her induction, but there is a good chance that it will take place on Saturday 21st July 2018, so it would be good if you could make a note of this date in your diaries.

'We look forward to establishing new friendships, looking in new directions, seeing ourselves with new eyes, hearing new voices, and hearing old voices afresh.'

I hope that my fellow church secretaries will forgive me for quoting from their statements for the joint press release about Helen's call that was issued by St Columba's and our sister church in Cumnor: there is no better way to convey how we all feel about it. Briony Newport, secretary at Cumnor, said: *'We had a wonderful weekend when Helen and Sally visited; we found them so warm and friendly. We look forward to welcoming them into our community and to how our future unfolds under Helen's wise and experienced leadership.'* Gordon, my fellow joint secretary here, said: *'We look forward to travelling with Helen as we pursue our calling to offer a welcoming, inclusive, and prophetic ministry in the centre of Oxford. We are excited to be working with Helen and are looking forward to welcoming her and Sally.'*

As we come to the end of our period of ministerial transition, which has lasted for nearly two years, this is an apt time not only to look ahead, but also to look back. Let us thank all those who have helped to steer us through this period, especially those who have organized and led worship, those who have helped with

pastoral care, the members of the pastorate call group representing both St Columba's and Cumnor, and above all our extraordinarily helpful and understanding interim moderator Glyn Millington.

Although we have much to be grateful for in this retrospect, it will be wonderful when the vacancy is finally over. We look forward to establishing new friendships, looking in new directions, seeing ourselves with new eyes, hearing new voices, and hearing old voices afresh. Of course we cannot know exactly what is in store for us. That is part of the excitement. But we do know that we shall be forging ahead with - if you will permit me another quotation of one of Bob Dylan's lyrics - God on our side.

With love in Christ,

Adrian

NEWS OF ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS

Finance & Property Committee

The Committee is currently awaiting feedback from the Wessex Synod regarding its grant application in relation to the glazing project. Investigation into potential new seating for the sanctuary has been initiated and we intend to bring you more information in due course. The vestry refurbishment project continues and we aim to get input from Helen. Hiring - and the potential for further building use - is a particular focus this year: please keep us in mind if you or anyone else you know is looking for spaces to hire in the centre of Oxford - our rates are very competitive! And the day-to-day operations continue to keep us occupied!

We continue to search for a new chairperson. I will have held the role for approximately seven years in total come the end of June and it is time for a change. Please prayerfully consider if you are willing & able to take on this role. I would like to have as long a

handover period as possible. This should help the transition. Do not hesitate to contact me for more information.

Tim Llewelyn

First Sunday

To my surprise visiting the lectionary once a month for readings to inspire our evenings results in some lovely links from one meeting to the next. In February we were prompted to share how we each experience God (and what definitely doesn't work for us), in March we will be thinking about how barriers can be put up that keep us from God.

We've had some new people at the last two meetings; we hope they will become regular 'First Sundayers'.

We are very pleased that it's now possible for all couples to marry one another at St Columba's; it's a fantastically positive statement that all are welcome and valued whoever they love. Now we have to work out how to let people in the LGBT community know that St Columba's taken this step: challenge accepted!

Andy Smith

Note: For more information about First Sunday, there is a website at <http://firstsunday.info/> and also a [Facebook group](#).

UPCOMING EVENTS

Lent & Easter Activities

Further information of activities regarding Lent and Easter are expected to be distributed in the coming weeks. Please keep an eye out for information in the notice section of our service sheets and also in the church's weekly news update email.

Small Groups

Several groups linked to St Columba's meet regularly across Oxford. If you are not already a member of small group, please do consider joining one. Small groups are a way of encouraging each other in our faith and growing together as the body of Christ. Please contact your Elder or one of the Church Secretaries for more information.

Black Sheep and Prodigals: an Antidote to Black and White Religion

Abingdon PCN Group is hosting a talk by Revd Dave Tomlinson, Vicar of St Luke's, Holloway. Dave will be talking about *Black Sheep and Prodigals*, his new book aimed primarily at people who are on the edges or outside of mainstream religion - those who reject, question, or have little interest in the tenets of traditional faith.

7:30pm on Friday 16th March at Trinity Church, Conduit Road, Abingdon OX14 1DU.

Tickets for this event are £5 from 01235 530 840 or candpmarshall@btinternet.com.

Brave New World?

United Reformed Church members are invited to attend the *Brave New World? Faithful Living in a Time of Change* conference hosted by the Joint Public Issues Team. It aims to stimulate dialogue around the challenges faced by Christians today and their hopes for the future. A variety of speakers are expected to participate.

10:00am on Saturday 17th March at Central Hall, Oldham Street, Manchester, M1 1JQ.

Tickets for this event are free. However, there is a suggested donation of £10 per person to cover costs. For more information, visit <https://www.eventbrite.com>.

Fourth Fridays

Cumnor URC's Fourth Friday events provide supper and a speaker to spark interesting conversation about important matters. They run from October to spring, excluding December.

The evenings begin at 7:15pm with supper, followed by a speaker and Questions & Answers from 8:00 - 9:00pm.

Catering reservations to Briony Newport on 01865 246 497 or secretary@cumnorurc.org.uk.

There is no charge but donations are accepted.

The current theme is *Places of Interest*. The upcoming events are:

- Friday 23rd March: Laurence Waters - 'The Great Western Society and Didcot Railway Museum'.
- Friday 27th April: Col. Raymond ffenell and his amazing land bequests to the community. One of the founders of Oxford Preservation Trust.

Crossfire Camp

Crossfire is a Christian Youth Camp for 12+ years (year 7 and up) brought to you by GEAR and as part of the United Reformed Church. It is planned to include talks, small group sessions, sung worship led by the Crossfire worship band, and cooked food.

During Friday 25th to Monday 28th May 2018 at Stathern Lodge, Leicestershire, LE14 4EX.

Tickets for this event currently cost £30+. More details can be found at <https://crossfirecamp.org.uk>.

The Big Speak Out

Children's voices will be heard at an event in Nottingham during the URC's next General Assembly. *The Big Speak Out* event is open to children and young people aged 11 to 18 associated in any way with the United Reformed Church.

During Friday 6th to 8th July 2018 at The University of Nottingham, Beeston Lane, Nottingham, NG7 2RJ.

Tickets for this event currently cost £125. These must be booked before 4th May 2018. Please visit <https://www.urch.org.uk/tbso> for more information.

INFORMATION

Reflections this Lent

This Lent, the Elders have decided to offer a series of devotions based on the 'Ten Holy Habits'. They began on Ash Wednesday and conclude on Easter Sunday.

What are Holy Habits and why have we chosen this as a focus for Lent?

The Holy Habits are described in Acts 2, and are: Biblical teaching; fellowship; breaking of bread; prayer; giving; service; eating together; gladness and generosity; worship; and the making of more disciples.

The URC has chosen the Holy Habits as the basis for its new discipleship programme, Walking the Way, and is using a book by

the Methodist Minister Andrew Roberts as a jumping off point. We thought it would be good to begin our exploration of the themes during Lent this year so an Elder will take each of the themes over the period. There will be one email on each of the ten habits.

How would the Elders like you to respond to these reflections?

We hope you find this series thought-provoking. How do you react to the list of ten habits? Does it feel like the sort of list that has been debated and finessed like a Government statement on a controversial issue, where every word counts and has been evaluated to make sure it is necessary and tells the story as best as it can be told? Or does it feel like the sort of shopping list you jot down as you rush out of the house, thinking that if you get the stuff on the list you'll have enough food for the week, but that you've probably forgotten to write down some other things you'll pick up?

As you think about each habit, does it resonate with particular Biblical stories for you? Does it feel part of your life - either individually, or as part of the community at St Columba's? Do you feel you need more support in that habit, or could you support others in developing that habit? Is it something you would like to do more of at St Columba's? Or do you think that the habits miss the point of Christian discipleship for you?

We will come back to the Holy Habits at a future church meeting, and we look forward to sharing reflections on and responses to the habits.

Note: To receive the associated emails, you must be on the St Columba's mailing list. To be part of this list, please use the link found at <http://www.saintcolumbas.org> [for readers of the electronic version, please click [here](#)].

Churches Together Lent Course

Churches Together in Britain & Ireland have made a lent course

available online for 2018. It focuses on hope and can be found at <https://ctbi.org.uk/lent/>.

Fairtrade Fortnight 2018

This year's Fairtrade Fortnight runs from 26th February - 11th March. As their website states, it 'aims to put a spotlight on trade'. For more information, please visit <https://www.fairtrade.org.uk>.

Faith in Politics

The Joint Public Issues Team has launched *Faith in Politics*, a new podcast series featuring special guests discussing current affairs that link with faith.

Each 30-minute podcast will be released on the last Thursday of every month. It can be downloaded from the following website: <http://www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/podcast/>. A subscription to it is also available from Google Play for Android devices and iTunes or Podcast for Apple devices.

NEWS OF PEOPLE

With Great Sadness

In mid-January, Louisa McLean died peacefully in the night. Louisa's family are in our thoughts and prayers.

John Fresen died early on the afternoon of 24th February. His death was peaceful. Jill, her daughter Anna, and John's brother Martin were with him. Jill and the rest of their family are very much in our thoughts and prayers at this difficult time.

THOUGHTS AND OPINIONS

The Ministerial Vacancy Period & Call

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

1. What have you missed in the absence of a minister?

'I have missed the lack of continuity and direction that comes with having a minister all the time.'

'During the vacancy I noticed a lack of consistency and continuity in the preaching on a Sunday morning.'

'A leader: someone who can drive the church forward; someone with a vision; and, someone who can be followed.'

2. What has surprised you in the vacancy period?

'By the time the new minister arrives it will have been more than two years since our last minister left. I have been impressed by the various ministers and lay preachers who have come to St Columba's to lead worship. On the positive side it has been good to see and have a variety of preaching styles and ways of leading worship.'

'At one point during the vacancy I found I had a pastoral issue which I would have wished to discuss with a minister. However I approached my Elder & the matter was dealt with satisfactorily.'

'Realisation that one person - in this case, the minister - has such an influence on an organisation and its members. And that people appear less willing to change without such a person in the lead.'

3. How do you feel now that a minister has been given a call?

'Finally! Enough said I think. I really don't see why it takes so long!'

'I feel pleased the congregation has given a call.'

'More hopeful, I guess. Hopefully progress and momentum will return to the church.'

4. What are you looking forward to when our new minister starts her role?

'I am looking forward to having leadership and vision. It would also be good to have a minister who is a person of action for "faith without deeds..."'

'I look forward to the new minister providing spiritual and pastoral leadership to the congregation.'

'Continuity and worship that builds a consistent message. Also, new styles of worship being explored.'

5. Going forward, what opportunities and challenges do you see for St Columba's?

'Getting more worshippers to join our congregation and spreading the good Word of our Lord Jesus.'

'I believe the main challenge facing St Columba's is to attract new members, particularly young families. In terms of opportunity I think many people have spiritual and pastoral needs which are not at present being met by the church.'

'Making St Columba's more relevant to and known in the community: it appears that many people do not know we even exist. To continue building links with other churches in Oxford. Our worship style feels quite niche in today's world and maybe a

barrier to encourage new people into and also remain in the church if it does not adapt (at least in part).'

Reflections for Lent

Below are some extracts from the recent reflections for Lent that have been written by Elders of the church.

1. Eating Together [by Tim Llewelyn]

'...God's mission was aided by the sharing of food from the early days of the Jesus movement, and it still is. In what ways can you do likewise in your daily life? Sharing food with a friend as you listen to their current trials & tribulations? Sharing food with a local homeless person you often pass by? Or maybe sharing food with a colleague as you explain your faith and also the wonders of walking the way of Jesus? You decide!'

2. Prayer [by Rosemary Knagg]

*'...Loving God,
as Jesus walked and breathed with you in his time in the wilderness,
help us in this Lent season to be more aware of Your presence and show a true Christian example in our daily lives. Amen'*

3. Making Disciples [by Pippa Smith]

'... In the first chapter of St John's gospel, when Jesus has called Philip and Philip goes to find Nathanael to call him too, I love the simplicity of his words in the face of Nathanael's scepticism: "Come and see." Perhaps both individually and collectively, together with our new minister, we can think of different ways and special events to invite more people to St Columba's to "come and see"...'

REPORT

Treasurers' Report

2017 – Top Five Areas of Income and Expenditure

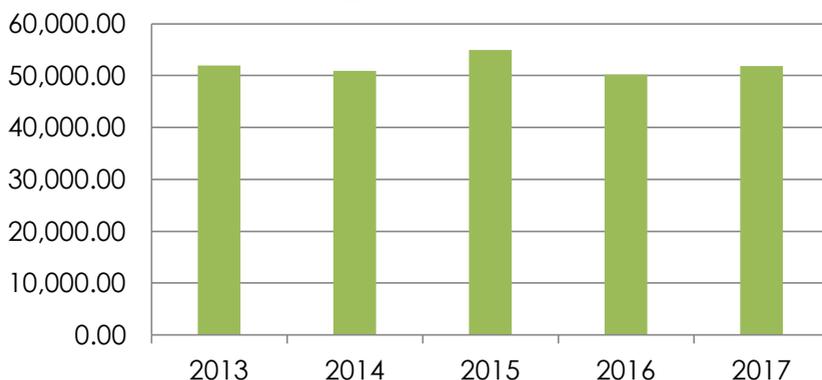
Income Area	Amount (£)	Expenditure Area	Amount (£)
Standing Orders & Gift	52,000	URC Ministry & Mission Fund	32,322
Hirings	30,300	Facilities Manager	13,250
One-off donations	7,192	Cleaning & Caretaking	7,915
Chaplaincy Fund	5,800	Building Maintenance	5,165
Cash Collection	2,672	Major Building Work	5,029

The above are typical of recent years. Giving via the cash collection and yellow envelopes has declined, but this is partly owing to a shift to standing orders.

Trends

The graphs below capture some of the most interesting trends we've seen over the past five years.

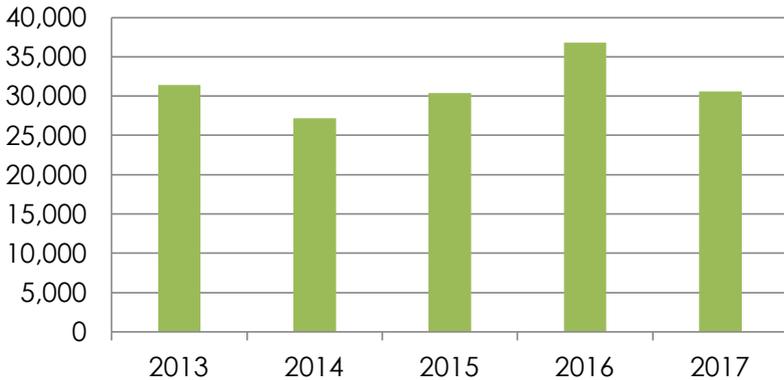
Standing Orders & Gift Aid



Income from members' standing orders (and the associated Gift Aid) in 2017 was the second highest in five years. What the graph doesn't show, but is particularly encouraging, is that the total

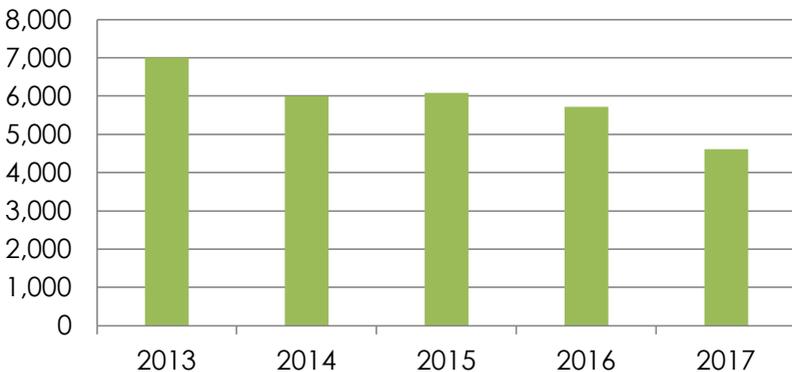
amount is spread across a larger number of individual donors than in the past.

Hirings



Hiring out our building is an important source of income, and indeed a necessary one if we are to retain our central Oxford base. Although 2017 was not a vintage year, most of the difference from 2016 was a single large one-off hiring we did not manage to repeat. Increasing hiring will be a focus in 2018 now that new IT systems to make this easier are in place.

Utilities



Utilities have been a significant area of expense in the past; however the impact of a new two-year contract negotiated in 2016, and some warmer winters, is clearly visible in the above.

Summary

Financial security is a journey, not a destination. However, at present the journey is not presenting major challenges for St Columba's. Our recently approved 2018 budget should see us through this year, and leave us with a solid basis on which to plan for the future with our new minister. If anything, the challenge we face will be spending more rather than holding too much in reserve at a time when mission and growth are all-important.

David North & Mary Thewlis

EDITOR'S COMMENTS

Hallelujah! Our vacancy period is soon to come to an end! I am, like so many others, very pleased that we have found someone to join us on our journey as we try our best to walk the way of Jesus here in the beautiful city of Oxford.

We are now in an exciting period full of hope and expectation. This is accompanied by a certain amount of trepidation, whether it is conscious or not. And this is the same for both the friends & members of St Columba's and also our minister elect, Helen.

We both have our own identities that have developed independently from one another. There will no doubt be much common ground and the initial signs appear to show us as a very good match. However, there will also be areas where we have different perspectives and approaches. This is absolutely natural. We will bring different elements to this 'marriage' and this will be for the greater good, as long as we are willing to listen to and learn from each other from the very start.

With trust and honesty as foundation stones of our relationship, we can join together to find a shared purpose and mission. It may well require both parties to step out of their respective comfort zones. Some old and familiar traditions may need to be

resigned to the history books and be replaced by new and more relevant practices. And it may force us all into unknown territory.

Collaboration is a key factor to progress. This includes in-depth conversations, good listening, and respectful responses. This can take time. And it should be given time. However, it is important that the resulting decisions are put into action as soon as are viably possible, for keeping the status quo is - at best - standing still, or is - at worst - waiting to disappear into oblivion.

Given the dynamic nature of the world around us, we must be both brave and agile. If something fails then we should embrace the situation and try again with something else. Rarely, will something have been lost.

'... keeping the status quo is - at best - standing still, or is - at worst - waiting to disappear into oblivion.'

The challenges and opportunities are numerous. There are some that will apply to the Church in the UK as a whole and there will be others that specifically apply to St Columba's. We need to be willing to take a step back and attempt to look at the situation from a third party's perspective, especially those who were once part of the Church but are no longer and also those who have never felt they could be part of such an institution.

A careful balance must be found: too much 'navel-gazing' is unlikely to deliver God's mission; too much outward-focus could leave the church's loyal friends & members feeling neglected and wondering if this is still the place for them. If in doubt, we should apply the - now clichéd but ever relevant - 'litmus test' of asking the simple question, '*What would Jesus do?*'

So, having digested the above, we can now comfortably put up our feet and wait for our new minister to come and change the world... I think not! In the meantime, there is - as there has been in the past two years - work to be done! And then, when our

vacancy is no longer, we must ensure we give our all to the cause, supporting our new minister and our church's next chapter in every possible way.

Individually and collectively, we can make a difference. We must try to honour God and provide a fitting representation here on Earth through our every thought, word, and deed. So, let us apply the 'Holy Habits' this Lent - and beyond - to help this be realised.

Tim

Newsletter Contributions...

All contributions for the next issue of the newsletter should be sent to Tim Llewelyn (Editor) by Sunday 8th April 2018 to the following email address: llewelyn_tg@hotmail.com. The next issue will cover **from May to June 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

March

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

16th Black Sheep and Prodigals, 7:30pm @ Trinity Church, Abingdon.

17th Brave New World? Faithful Living in a Time of Change, 10:00am @ Central Hall, Manchester.

23rd Fourth Friday, 7:15pm @ Cumnor URC.

29th Maunday Thursday, time TBC @ Wesley Memorial Church.

30th Good Friday, time TBC @ New Road Baptist Church.

April

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

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

MEETINGS

March

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

15th Elders' Meeting, 7:30pm @ church.

April

3rd Finance & Property Committee, 7:00pm @ church.

May

1st Finance & Property Committee, 7:00pm @ church.

LECTIONARY

February

25th Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16; Psalm 22:23-31; Romans 4:13-25; Mark 8:31-38 or Mark 9:2-9.

March

4th Exodus 20:1-17; Psalm 19; 1 Corinthians 1:18-25; John 2:13-22.

11th Numbers 21:4-9; Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22; Ephesians 2:1-10; John 3:14-21.

18th Jeremiah 31:31-34; Psalm 51:1-12 or Psalm 119:9-16; Hebrews 5:5-10; John 12:20-33.

25th Isaiah 50:4-9a; Psalm 31:9-16; Philippians 2:5-11; Mark 14:1-15:47 or Mark 15:1-39, (40-47).

April

1st Isaiah 25:6-9; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 or Acts 10:34-43; John 20:1-18 or Mark 16:1-8.

8th Acts 4:32-35; Psalm 133; 1 John 1:1-2:2; John 20:19-31.

15th Acts 3:12-19; Psalm 4; 1 John 3:1-7; Luke 24:36b-48.

22nd Acts 4:5-12; Psalm 23; 1 John 3:16-24; John 10:11-18.

29th Acts 8:26-40; Psalm 22:25-31; 1 John 4:7-21; John 15:1-8.

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 -