

St Columba's

United Reformed Church, Oxford

Newsletter



Summer Issue,
June - August 2018

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CHURCH SECRETARY'S LETTER



Dear Friends,

As some of you know, I belong to a choir that sings the services at cathedrals about once a term. It's a great privilege to sing in places like Westminster Abbey, Liverpool and Durham, and it's introduced me to a whole realm of music we don't tend to use at St Columba's for various reasons. Sometimes the texts of the music can be surprising, particularly when they're based on older translations of the Bible. Psalms talking about '*naughty men*' need to be practised carefully so they don't raise an inappropriate smile in the service, for example! But others can be more thought-provoking. For example, S. S. Wesley's Blessed be the God and Father talks about being '*holy in all manner of conversation*'. That's based on 1 Peter 1:15, which in a more modern translation like the NRSV is rendered as '*be holy yourselves in all your conduct*' – sound advice but less poetic.

Conversation is something I've been thinking a lot about recently, as I've been leading a 'system conversation' across the 4,500 people that work in my bit of Defra. We've been asking teams up and down the country to spend time discussing what they think works well, and what we could do better – and feed back the results of those conversations to my team. We're now getting to grips with the large amount of material that has come in – including that from one team who have sent us a 20 minute

video rather than just a few bullet points! It's proving to be a valuable exercise – people are getting a lot out of taking time to take stock, and appreciate the good things about work, as well as feeling listened to about the things that make them less happy.

It occurs to me that a lot of what we do at church is about conversation. We try and listen for God, and we talk to God in our prayers. We try and make sense of the faith for ourselves by talking to each other – and one of the ways we show our care for each other is through talking and listening. These are reasons why I think it's quite hard to be a Christian outside the church – though there are millions of people in the UK who regard themselves as broadly Christian without being part of a local church – it is hard to have a conversation with yourself!

'If we were exemplary as a group of faithful people in following those guidelines, how would we be different as a church?'

So what makes a good conversation – and how might that be relevant to us as a church? You will have your own views and preferences here – personally, I find Radio 4's 'The Listening Project' unlistenable as the styles of conversation often irritate me! I'd suggest that some common features would be being present, being approachable, taking time to listen to each other, being open and honest, and concentrating on the matter in hand. If we were exemplary as a group of faithful people in following those guidelines, how would we be different as a church? Would we be better at welcoming the stranger, sharing the faith and caring for each other?

But maybe you think I'm trying to apply an irrelevant model to a community that is fundamentally different from a workplace. Perhaps we should have a conversation about that!

Gordon

NEWS OF ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS

Finance & Property Committee

I am glad to report that new seating for the church sanctuary has been approved by the Church Meeting. The chairs have since been ordered and we await their delivery. We hope these will be in place ahead of the induction service. Thanks, in particular, to Iain Stephens for his hard work to find the right chairs for us.

The glazing project has Wessex Synod approval but we now face a delay due to an unexpected planning permission process. We are currently working with a third party to be in a position to meet certain council requirements as part of this process.

The second half of the year should see progress on the vestry refurbishment project, a tender for projection equipment in the sanctuary, and also the next quinquennial survey.

Thanks to Andy Smith for his years of committee membership: he will be missed.

Tim Llewelyn

Special Collections

Some years ago I read an Easter message written by an URC clergyman. I thought it was very eloquent but at the same time the message was couched in a language which a large segment of the British population no longer finds meaningful. I believe a major task facing the church is to make the Christian message meaningful to a wider number of people. Of course, there are many ways of finding meaning. It can be found in the beautiful passages of the New Testament, in church music or religious art. The particular area of meaning on which I wish to concentrate is raising financial support for community projects. Matthew chapter 25, verse 40 recounts how Jesus said, *'Just as you did it to*

one of the least of those who are members of my family you did it for me.' So in the past St Columba's has had special collections for, among others, Archway, Street Pastors and more recently Oxford winter Night Shelter. On the same basis it is planned to have a special collection in July for the Citizens Advice Bureau.

Ian Kennedy

Cumnor URC

Rosemary Mumbi, Hope & Faith School: Rosemary and her colleague Betty Mugale from Zambia were with us in May for a few days before spending time at Portree High School, Isle of Skye. It is always wonderful spending time in her company and being lifted by her wonderful enthusiasm and love of life.

Maintenance work: Completion of the outstanding landscaping around the Garden Office and a new disability access path at the front of the church, together with exterior painting of the church.

Briony Newport

UPCOMING EVENTS

Friendship Walk of Faiths

The Friendship Walk of Faiths, organized by The Oxford Council of Faiths will take place on Thursday 28th June from 6:15pm to 9:00pm. It is planned to start at the Synagogue on Richmond Road and finish at the Central Mosque on Manzil Way. Along the route, there will be stops at St Giles churchyard (approx. 6:40pm) and Radcliffe Square (approx. 7:15pm). The walk will assemble from approx. 5:30pm. It would be great to get as many St Columba's representatives joining this event as possible.

St Columba's First Ever Same-Sex Wedding

Iain Stephens and his fiancé, Adán, are delighted to be able to share in a milestone and new chapter within St Columba's. They invite you to join in bearing witness to their marriage on Saturday 30th June at 11:00am.

Induction of Our New Minister

The induction of our new minister, Revd Helen Garton, will take place on Saturday 21st July at 2:30pm. This service at St Columba's will be conducted by the Moderator of the Wessex Synod, Red Care Downing. Light refreshments will follow the service.

For catering purposes, please inform the Church Secretaries of intended attendance via churchsecretary@saintcolumbas.org.

Note: There will be no trains in and out of Oxford Station that day. Those arriving by train will need to allow time for a shuttle bus from Didcot Parkway (South) or Oxford Parkway (North).

Upcoming URC Youth Events

What: 'Beyond myself in exploring migration ...'

When: 27th July – 4th August 2018.

Where: North Yorkshire.

Application form: https://www.urch.org.uk/images/Children-and-youth/documents/CWM_Programme_-_Beyond_migration_-_Application_form.pdf

What: 'Beyond myself in exploring mental health ...'

When: 12th - 14th October 2018 and 11th - 13th January 2018. (Participants must attend both weekends.)

Where: St Mark's College, Audley End, Saffron Walden, Essex, CB11 4JD.

Application form: https://www.urchurch.org.uk/images/Children-and-youth/documents/CWM_Programme_-_Beyond_mental_health_-_Application_form.pdf
Deadline for Booking: 15th July 2018.

Greenbelt 2018

What: A festival of arts, faith and justice.

When: 24th - 27th August 2018.

Where: Boughton House, Northamptonshire.

For more information: <https://www.greenbelt.org.uk/>

INFORMATION

Daily Devotions

As recently featured on the BBC's Songs of Praise, the URC's Daily Devotions can be found at <https://devotions.urchurch.org.uk/>. This includes a contribution from our Church Secretary, Gordon Woods, and many others. This has been running since 2016. Email subscription is possible, with a form on the website.

Holy Habits Resources

As part of the URC's Walking the Way, the Wessex Synod has made various resources available related to Holy Habits. These can be found at: <http://wessexsynodurchurch.org.uk/holy-habits-resources/>.

Christian Aid: Food for Thought

Vilia and her family lived in Port-au-Prince when the earthquake hit. Vilia was on her way home when she heard people running

and shouting. She saw wires fall and houses crumble. The streets were confusing and terrifying. She couldn't even recognise her home or neighbourhood. As she searched for her home and for her mother, she had to step over bodies lying on the ground.

Vilia never found her mother. Her mum was an incredibly strong woman, but strength alone wasn't enough to save her from the earthquake. Vilia never got to see her mother again, and still doesn't know how she died. It's still a deeply painful source of sadness for her.

Bereaved and homeless, Vilia went back to her hometown with her husband and seven children. But life was a struggle, and she had nowhere safe to stay.

Christian Aid's partner KORAL saw how dire Vilia's situation was, and reached out to help her. They built her a new home, safe and strong enough to stand up to natural disasters. Vilia will never forget her mother, but our help has allowed her to move on from the other things she lost.

The new house made Vilia incredibly happy, but it's done more than that. It's been a safe haven for dozens of people when they needed it most.

On that terrifying night when Hurricane Matthew hit, Vilia's neighbours quickly realised that her house was the only one in the area sturdy enough to cope with the hurricane. One by one, they fled to her house and she welcomed them in. As the storm raged on, she shared food and a safe shelter for several days. 54 people sheltered safely from the hurricane in Vilia's house.

Despite the ferocity of the hurricane, her house lost only one roof panel and wasn't damaged in any other way. Many other homes in the area were totally destroyed.



Vilia's crops and livestock were swept away, but KORAL helped her with a water filter and seeds for beans, sweet potatoes, yams and plantain. This meant Vilia could start to rebuild with crops that help soil retention, helping to protect her crops in the future. Not long after Hurricane Matthew, another tragedy struck and Vilia's husband passed away. This time, KORAL gave her the cash she urgently needed to keep sending her children to school.

During Hurricane Matthew, Vilia and her house were at the heart of the community, and it's the same in good times. She's the president of her marching band, which plays music using basic drums and other instruments at weddings, funerals and during communal farming. But they do more than play music: as a group of marginalised people, they pool their resources, forming something between a credit union and a community insurance policy. They work on each other's land and help out when someone is sick or dies.

Vilia is incredibly grateful for the help she's received, and she's used it to help others. But she knows there are still many others in her neighbourhood who are struggling. She wishes we could help them too.

Siobhan Grimes

NEWS OF PEOPLE

Congratulations

Well done to both [Katherine Haigh](#) and [Lucy Llewelyn](#) for their successful completion of significant running events. Katherine took on the famous - and gruelling - London Marathon, whilst Lucy took part in her first 10K event: the Oxford Town & Gown.

Wedding Celebrations

Our best wishes go to Iain Stephens and his fiancé, Adán, for their

new married life together: it is an exciting time for them and also St Columba's.

Moving On

Siân Jones has been offered and has accepted a permanent academic job (a lectureship in Psychology) in Edinburgh. She will leave Oxford in early September. We wish her every success and happiness in this next chapter.

Sad News

Ruth Micklem, a former member of St Columba's and widow of one of our former ministers - Caryl Micklem, died on 25th May after a short illness. Thoughts and prayers go to her family and friends.

THOUGHTS AND OPINIONS

Holy Habits

Below are extracts from the final set of reflections sent at the end of Lent that were written by Elders of the church.

1. Fellowship [by Peter Stevenson]

'... Believers in Christ are to come together in love, faith and encouragement, both of themselves and of one another. It is what as disciples of Jesus we share together, what we give as well as what we receive. As followers of Christ, we are called in Acts 2 to share our lives with each other and with the world around us...'

2. Worship [by David North]

'Aged eighteen, I wrote a piece for the Macclesfield URC church

magazine about how complacency was a big danger to Christians. And perhaps nowhere more so than regarding worship. It tends to happen at fixed points in the week, it's familiar, it's routine, and it's all too easy to let one's mind wander. Worship - especially on Sundays - is the first thing a non-churchgoer would say the church is all about, and it can be easy to take for granted...'

3. Biblical Teaching [by Andrew Smith]

'... Andrew Roberts knows full well what the phrase signifies, and in 'Holy Habits' he undermines that meaning. While a gifted preacher can inspire us from the pulpit, that is not the only way we can be changed by the stories in the Bible. Just as a teacher learns from their students, we all learn from one another and about one another when we read and reflect on scripture together...'

4. Sharing Resources [by Adrian Moore]

'... I am reminded of a recent session in Junior Church, during which I referred to a related verse from the Bible: St Matthew, Ch. 19, v. 21. This is the verse in which Jesus tells a rich young man that if he wishes to be perfect, then he must go, sell his possessions, and give the money to the poor. But I inadvertently stopped short of the full quotation and had Jesus telling the young man just to go and sell his possessions. One of the youngsters in the group pointed out to me that, if all the young man did was to sell his possessions, he would still be rich! The whole point, it seemed, was what he did with the proceeds...'

Have you had chance to read the associated book by Andrew Roberts? If so, what are your thoughts on the Holy Habits as set out in the publication? How do you relate to them? And what might you do to improve these habits? If you haven't read it, there is still plenty of time! It is highly recommended.

Oxford Winter Night Shelter 2018

The Night Shelter began to function on 2nd January, with St Columba's opening for the first time on the following Monday. The initiative followed an experimental period of a few weeks at St Aldate's church early in 2017. After this the various members of Churches Together in Central Oxford were so concerned by the number of homeless people on the streets of our city that they were moved to instigate the formation of a plan for the winter just passed.

At the beginning Ros Lacey was our contact with CTCO and kept us in touch with the early developments. Then John Fresen, who was passionate in wanting to change the circumstances of homeless people, joined the Trustees of OWNS.

Through the following summer and autumn funds were raised; an implementation plan was devised; a manager was appointed; volunteers were called for (I believe over 200 people responded) and were trained; churches were asked to offer their premises and then had to be formally approved as suitable for the purpose; then equipment was purchased for each venue - folding mattresses, pillows, linen, blankets, etc.

The pattern for each night was as follows...

- The guests arrived between 10:00pm and midnight. They each had to have a recommendation from St Mungo's, one of the charities working with homeless people, who have outreach workers in Oxford.
- Each venue is staffed by three teams of volunteers. The evening and night groups arrive in time to prepare for the arrival of the guests, making individual bed areas and putting out refreshments. The extended arrival time gives everyone -

guests and volunteers - time to chat and settle down.

- Overnight there is a shift leader and two volunteers who take turns to be awake or asleep. The morning volunteers arrive at 6:30am to prepare breakfasts as the guests get up and prepare for the day. They depart by 7:30am, after which there is the usual sort of packing up and general cleaning you would expect for the building to be ready for its daytime use. The session is brought to a close with prayers.

When the project began I found it daunting to compare the estimated number of homeless people in Oxford (over 50) with the 10 who were offered hospitality each night by OWNS. However, over the 89 nights that the shelter was open between the beginning of January and the end of March there is now solid data telling us that 33 different guests came to the churches, some for many nights. Those who stayed for more than a few days began to show an improvement in their physical appearance and their health.

On 18th April, a service was held at St Michael at the Northgate for all the people who had been involved with OWNS. This was followed by a gathering / reunion at which there was some preliminary feedback from the way the shelter has worked. A few, minimum of 4, had passed the necessary tests to return to work. Several were going out to do a day's work when they left St Columba's and were glad of the relative quiet indoors in addition to the shelter so their rest was undisturbed. Other numbers have been used earlier in this account.

Kerry, the manager of OWNS, is preparing a more formal project report for the end of April. The Trustees have sent a message of thanks to all the churches who offered their premises and to the volunteers. I would like to recognise the contributions given at St Columba's by the people who have helped to make our part of the shelter more hospitable - explaining the building to the volunteer teams; providing cakes and other provisions; regularly collecting and doing the laundry; making donations of money and socks (very important) and those who held the night shelter

and its people in their prayers. The name of John Fresen has been heard often. It is possible that without his faithful attention to the plight of homeless people on the streets of Oxford St Columba's would not have been so actively involved in OWNS.

As the weather warms the winter feels an age away but the Trustees of OWNS are already thinking about next winter. They would like to know whether those churches that opened this year will extend their hospitality again. We were told at the volunteers' training that we are not there to proselytise but one member of St Columba's said to me, *'this is just the kind of witness that the churches should be involved in'*. So my question, after a winter of involvement is *'Can we do it again?'*

Rosemary Knagg

EDITOR'S COMMENTS

Can you remember where you were on Saturday 19th May at 12:00pm? In front of the TV? Outside Windsor castle with your union flag? Or out of the way from anything to do with the royal wedding, deliberate or not?

The media reported that it was believed that circa 18 million people in the UK tuned into the event and claims of 100s of millions to over 2 billion people having viewed it worldwide. No matter the actual figures, it is safe to say it was a significant total! And one of the biggest talking points regarding the wedding? The address / sermon from Bishop Michael Curry!

Some might suggest he 'outstayed his welcome'. Some might say that such a 'sermon' - arguably more directed at the rest of the world than the couple themselves - was not appropriate. Some may say that the approach wasn't in keeping with British culture. But I am with those whom applaud his delivery, his message, his passion, and his use of this amazing & rare opportunity to reach out to the world.

My firm belief is that we need more Christians - leaders or not - whom are not afraid to 'stand up and be counted', spreading the gospel of love through word and deed,

I recently watched the TV miniseries A.D. Kingdom and Empire. This starts with Jesus' crucifixion and follows the Acts of the Apostles. It was not a perfect show but it reminded me of the Church's origins and that - like the mustard seed - great things can come from those that are very small.

'...it reminded me of the Church's origins and that - like the mustard seed - great things can come from those that are very small.'

The Apostles were a minority group, challenging the established & powerful order, winning over opinion against adversity, even facing death for their beliefs and actions. They had doubt but they also had a spirit that defined and differentiated them: something that made others curious and want to belong. They were proud of their identity and what they represented. And they did what they felt necessary to achieve their goals, not with violence but with compassion and love.

To quote the audacious Bishop Curry, *'There's power in love. Don't underestimate it. Don't even over-sentimentalise it. There's power, power in love.'*

This probably once-in-a-lifetime opportunity rarely gets presented to most but, if it had been you in that position, would you have done the same? Would you have maybe thought it but not acted? Would you have just turned up and 'ticked the box', doing what was expected of you? Or would you have run in the other direction completely?

We can all be like the Apostles in the Bible and we can all have 'Bishop Curry moments' (albeit probably to a much smaller

audience); we just have to recognise it, making the most of every possible opportunity to spread the Good News.

What do you take from this? What can you do differently? And what possibilities lie ahead?

Wishing you a wonderful summer period.

Tim

[For Bishop Curry's full address: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-44186049>]

Newsletter Contributions...

All contributions for the next issue of the newsletter should be sent to Tim Llewelyn (Editor) by Sunday 12th August 2018 to the following email address: llewelyn_tg@hotmail.com. The next issue will cover **from Sept to Nov 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** -----

June

28th Friendship Walk of Faiths, 5:30pm @ Richmond Road Synagogue.

30th Iain Stephen's Wedding, 11:00am @ church.

July

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

21st Induction Service, 2:30pm @ church.

August

5th First Sunday, 7:15pm @ church.

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

July

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

August

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

LECTIONARY

June

24th Job 38:1-11; Psalm 107:1-3, 23-32; 2 Corinthians 6:1-13; Mark 4:35-41.

July

1st 2 Samuel 1:1, 17-2; Psalm 130; 2 Corinthians 8:7-15; Mark 5:21-43.

8th 2 Samuel 5:1-5, 9-10; Psalm 48; 2 Corinthians 12:2-10; Mark 6:1-13.

15th 2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12b-19; Psalm 24; Ephesians 1:3-14; Mark 6:14-29.

22nd 2 Samuel 7:1-14a; Psalm 89:20-37; Ephesians 2:11-22; Mark 6:30-34, 53-56.

29th 2 Samuel 11:1-15; Psalm 14; Ephesians 3:14-21; John 6:1-21.

August

5th 2 Samuel 11:26 - 12:13a; Psalm 51:1-12; Ephesians 4:1-16; John 6:24-35.

12th 2 Samuel 18:5-9, 15, 31-33; Psalm 130; Ephesians 4:25-5:2; John 6:35, 41-51.

19th 1 Kings 2:10-12; 3:3-14; Psalm 111; Ephesians 5:15-20; John 6:51-58.

26th 1 Kings 8: (1,6,10-11), 22-30, 41-43; Psalm 84; Ephesians 6:10-20; John 6:56-69.

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 -