

St Columba's

United Reformed Church, Oxford

Newsletter



Christmas & New Year Issue,
December 2016 - February 2017

CONTENTS

1. CHURCH SECRETARY'S LETTER PAGE 3
2. NEWS OF ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS PAGE 5
3. UPCOMING EVENTS PAGE 8
4. INFORMATION PAGE 10
5. NEWS ABOUT PEOPLE PAGE 12
6. REPORTS PAGE 13
7. EDITOR'S COMMENTS PAGE 14
8. DATES FOR YOUR DIARY PAGE 17
9. LECTIONARY PAGE 18
10. USEFUL CONTACT DETAILS PAGE 19

CHURCH SECRETARY'S LETTER



Dear Friends,

Many of you, I am sure, will remember the 'alphabet' prayer which some of the members of Junior Church wrote several years ago for Advent and which has been used in at least two Advent services since. I cannot resist the temptation to reproduce the prayer here, for the benefit of those of you who have not previously heard it and to remind those of you who may have forgotten it. The prayer is read by two people, one of whom reads the parts that are in bold and underlined. You will soon get the idea!

'Alphabet' Prayer for Advent

In this prayer, we thank God, the Alpha and the Omega, for everything that we love about Christmas. Let us pray.

*Loving God, we thank you for **Advent Sunday**, on which we begin to think about the **birth of Jesus**, who is **Christ the Lord**. On this day, we think ahead to Christmas, and the excitement of **decorations**, of **entertainments**, of **Father Christmas**, of **gifts that we give and receive**, of **holly** and of **ivy**. All of these things help to remind us of **Jesus**, who is **King** and **Lord**. And we think of all the delicious food that we*

shall have to eat. We thank you for mince-pies, for nuts, and for oranges. We also thank you for parties, as well as for quiet times. And we thank you for the wonders of nature that we especially remember at this time. We think of robins and the star of Bethlehem, which guided the three wise men. We thank you that we shall have unusual things to do, and that we shall be surrounded by very happy people, as we revel in the special joys of winter. Loving God, for these and countless other reasons, we thank you for Xmas, for all its yuletide cheer, and for its sheer zippiness. Amen.

I hope you agree that this is worth reproducing!

But I have another motive for reproducing it. Because of the way in which the prayer makes play with words, it reminds me of my own favourite Advent reading, indeed my favourite passage in the entire Bible: the passage at the very beginning of St John's Gospel, in which the author meditates on the nature of the Word and, in the formula that is traditionally used to introduce the passage at Advent services, 'unfolds the great mystery of the Incarnation'.

'Each year we try to come to terms with 'the great mystery of the Incarnation'. Each year, for me at least, it becomes harder.'

Small wonder, you might think, that I, as a professional philosopher, should be so drawn to this particular passage. The Greek word that is translated as 'Word' is 'Logos', and the idea of the Logos played a fundamental and wide-ranging role in ancient Greek philosophy. This is manifest in the fact that the word 'Logos' also gets translated as 'reason', 'judgment', 'concept', 'definition', and 'discourse'. From it we get the modern word 'logic', as well as all those '-ologies' at the end of all those ologies.

But isn't this all a little abstract? Doesn't this passage lack the earthy reality of the other Advent and Christmas readings? There is no new-born baby here, forced to lie in an animals' eating trough because there is nowhere else suitable to put him. There is no outraged Herod ordering the massacre of each child in and around Bethlehem under the age of two. There are no mothers weeping for their murdered children and refusing to be consoled.

No, but the passage does contain verses which, in their own simple though profound way, capture the essence of all those other stories. 'The Word', we are told, 'became flesh'. 'The world did not know him.' 'The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.'

In any case, perhaps what sends out an even more powerful message than either this passage or the other traditional readings is their juxtaposition: lofty meditation on the nature of the Divine made real in stories about the poor, the vulnerable, the fugitive, and the inconsolable. Each year we try to come to terms with 'the great mystery of the Incarnation'. Each year, for me at least, it becomes harder.

Still, as we saw with the prayer written by the members of Junior Church, it can be both fun and enriching to make play with words. So, as I wish you all a joyful Christmas and a happy new year, I also hope that you will find time, in whatever sense and in whatever way may be appropriate for you, to make play with the Word.

Adrian

NEWS OF ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS

The Finance and Property Committee

Wow! Another year has flown by with pace! And yet another busy year for the Committee. Along the way, we have tackled

various property related activities, including the significant Quinquennial work that mainly related to the exterior of the building and the long-desired improvement of the staircase. There has also been the addition of numerous motion sensors to trigger lights in part of the church, the start of a project to make our lighting more efficient, and the redecoration of numerous heavily used areas of the building. The place is starting to get to where the Committee has been aiming for many years. But the tasks and challenges don't stop there...

Donations for the St Columba's Organ

Purchasing a new digital organ is expected to cost £12,555. The contribution from church funds is expected to be £3,139. Donations committed so far amount to £2,776 (incl. Gift Aid).

We therefore currently need to raise an extra £6,635.

Can YOU help?

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.

With the budget that is being proposed (approx. £143K) to the Church Meeting on 11th December, the Committee is setting 2017 as a big project year. The organ project is well known, but the Committee is looking to undertake other projects that have for many years been on hold until the funds are available and other priorities have been dealt with. This includes phase two of the heating project, which refers to glazing in the vestibule and gallery areas and a new air curtain above the main doors. Phase two of the audio visual project - enhancing the sanctuary - is also on the cards, as is further Quinquennial work and vestry improvements. And from where is this being funded? Mainly from our buildings fund, which was strategically introduced in recent years (not to be confused with our hard and soft reserves, which are there for 'rainy days')? We want to prevent the building from being a burden on energy and resources, rather it be the vehicle for our mission in Oxford. Exciting times!

In other pleasing news, we have a new member! A very LARGE

'thank you' goes to Iain Stephens for volunteering.

Tim Llewelyn

Small Groups

Our small group meets on Wednesdays at 8:00pm - 9:00pm at Ruth and Wilson Sutherland's house, on the first Wednesday of each month. We have just finished reading through the book of James. In the New Year we will start by 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

News from Cumnor URC



During the month of November Cara Heafey organised a remembrance theme inspired by All Saints Day. It was A Cloud of Witnesses and we were invited to remember someone who had been important to us and write each name individually on a white cloud shaped piece of paper. A line was erected across the Sanctuary, with vertical lines down that had about 6 'clouds' on them. They hung in front of the Communion table and were visually beautiful as they gently danced as air streams caught them.

The Ecumenical Remembrance Day Service, 13th November with

St Michael's Church went well and allowed many to reflect on our costly freedom through loss of so many lives. Revd Nigel Appleton led the service; Richard Dewar provided a Bible reading; and, Cara Heafey some prayers. It was good to be with our Anglican friends at the Memorial Cross and then their ancient and lovely church.

We had two very interesting and successful Fourth Friday events with talks about the Girl Guides/ Duke of Edinburgh's Award and Street Pastors. Please note the Fourth Friday supper and talk will be on 24th February with Martin Harris and local history.

Our Christmas Eve Service is at 6:00 pm and the collection will go to a homeless charity in Oxford. We hope some of you will be able to join us again.

Briony Newport

UPCOMING EVENTS

Final Church Meeting of the Year

There will be a special church meeting after the carol and gift service on Sunday 11th December.

This will be a relatively brief meeting, at which we need to approve next year's budget and reflect on possible ways of celebrating the quincentenary of the Reformation next year.

Advent and Christmas Services

- 11th December: Carol and gift service.
- 18th December: All-age communion.
- 24th December: Carols by candlelight, 6:00pm at Cumnor URC.
- 25th December: Christmas Day Worship.



Upcoming Taizé Services

Taizé services take place on the fourth Sunday of nearly every month at 7:15pm in church.

The next services will be 22nd January and 26th February.

Taizé services include quiet, prayer, singing and reflection. The services are normally about 30 minutes and provide a wonderful break from the business of life and time of focus on the things that really matter. Everyone is welcome to come along.

Burns' Night Event 2017

The annual Burns' Night Supper will be at 7:00pm on Saturday 28th January in St Columba's church.

The evening will take the format of a dinner (haggis/veggie haggis, neeps, tatties), poems and short speeches... as well as some good Scottish country dancing (suitable for novices)! Everyone is welcome.



Tickets are available from Jill Fresen, priced at £20 per ticket (concessions are available for families and the unwaged). Profits are intended to support church activities.

Jill is currently looking for volunteers to help on the day to prepare for the event. If you are willing and able, please contact her as

soon as possible via jill.fresen@gmail.com.

INFORMATION

Helping Oxford's Homeless

The charity, Gatehouse, gives gifts to those it serves at Christmas. They provide Christmas parcels that include items such as gloves, hats, scarves, socks, pants and chocolate. This year, they hope to give out around 100 Christmas parcels. Unusually, donations of such items have been minimal. St Columba's is contributing to this cause but are you also willing and able to support this cause?

If you can help, suitable items should be dropped off at the Gatehouse before 14th December between 4:00pm and 7:00pm Monday to Friday or 3:00pm to 6:00pm on Sunday. During these times a member of the Gatehouse team should be on site at St Giles Parish Rooms to receive any gifts.

Inspiration in the Inbox

Daily Devotions from the United Reformed Church started on the first Sunday of Advent and continue throughout the year. Each day, a reading, reflection and short prayer, written by one of 85 writers from different places and perspectives in the URC, will arrive in subscribers' inboxes. Over 750 people have signed up to receive the free Daily Devotion service so far. Names can be added to this devotions distribution list via: <http://urc.us13.list-manage.com/subscribe?u=8958e2851d933a7a389a9f51c&id=9c17704e4e>

Don't Lose Reform!

Following on from his 'heartfelt plea' in the October edition,

Stephen Tomkins, the Editor of Reform, joined Peter Knowles, convenor of the Communications Committee, in giving a presentation to Mission Council in October. Their message was 'Don't lose Reform!'

Getting a magazine out becomes more expensive every year. Therefore, the URC is looking for an increase in subscriptions.

There are various available subscriptions: paper, digital or combined. So, those of you who have never read it or who may have only done so some time ago, please take a look at the magazine and consider a potential new subscription. For those who already subscribe, please try to be advocates of this faith resource and perhaps choose a gift subscription for friends and family for Christmas or other such occasion.

And a request from Stephen Tomkins to existing readers: *'It's lovely that so many copies of the magazine are passed around churches along a string of readers – as you can imagine, we like to be read. But, to make it last, we really need all the readers who can afford to pay for it'*.

For more information see: <http://www.reform-magazine.co.uk/>. Reform can also be followed on Twitter via @Reform_Mag

Mission Council

A report with the highlights from the October meeting of Mission Council is now available at <http://wessexsynodurc.org.uk/mission-council-round-up-2016/>.

Synod Calling...

Our Synod tries to support one another in many ways. Its Development and Support Officers, Children and Youth Work Development Officers, Property Officers and Employment Adviser all support the work of local churches. But they also rely on

volunteers to enable them to plan together, work together and share resources with one another.

For Example:

- At the time of writing this it is looking forward to a visit from Bishop Chomba from Zambia, and exploring exciting possibilities for closer working with the United Church of Zambia. This would not have happened without the work of its World Church Group.
- Mission Development Group is looking at how God may be calling it to serve the new housing developments that are planned for parts of the Synod.

You can find out more about the work it does by looking at the Synod website: <http://wessexsynodurc.org.uk/>.

When the Synod meets next March, it will have a list of nominations to approve; volunteers who give their time and talents to serve us all.

If you are interested in serving God in this way, or know someone else who might find this a rewarding thing to do, please contact Sue Brown to find out more via clerk@urcwessex.org.uk or 01329 232 454.

NEWS ABOUT PEOPLE

Sad News

It is with very great sadness that our friend and member, Morris Baker, died on Wednesday 23rd November. Sheila, Andrew, and the rest of their family are very much in all our thoughts and prayers at this difficult time. The funeral will take place on Thursday 15th December.

Faith and Health Conference 2016

On 2nd November I attended a day conference with this title. Fifty-eight people attended the conference. Not only was the Christian faith represented but representatives from the Jewish, Muslim and Sikh faiths were also at the conference. Health administrators, doctors and nurses were also present.

The day was very full and I can only outline the highlights of the conference proceedings...

The first speaker was Stuart Bell, chief executive of the Oxford Health Foundation Trust. The chief executive pointed out that the oldest psychiatric hospital in the country, the Bethlem Royal Hospital, was established in the 13th century by a religious order. He went on to emphasise that the NHS, faced with fewer resources and greater demands from an ageing population, is looking at ways of working in partnership with faith communities. The objective of the conference was to explore these opportunities.

'...the NHS, faced with fewer resources and greater demands from an ageing population, is looking at ways of working in partnership with faith communities.'

Stuart Bell was followed by Professor Jim McManus who, among his responsibilities, is Director for Public Health for Hertfordshire. Professor McManus argued that religion can be a protective factor in health. He also believes that faith communities can act as a bridge between community and hospital.

Next came a speaker from Nishkam Healthcare, whose name I

did not catch. This is a Sikh charity based in Birmingham. Nishkam means selfless service. Although it is a charity relying on 150 volunteers Nishkam Healthcare also runs a pharmacy which I presume involves professionals.

After the Sikh presentation Becky Cuthbert, chief executive officer of the Karis Neighbour Scheme, spoke about the work of this charity. Karis is a small local charity based in Birmingham. It was set up by Christian GPs and works in conjunction with local churches. The focus is on meeting needs with which the GPs do not have time to deal for instance Karis will provide someone to listen to those distressed by loss of relationships or loss of hope.

Becky Cuthbert was followed by Sheila Furlong, well known to the congregation as director of Archway. It is established that loneliness can have adverse psychological effects. Recent research would suggest that loneliness can also have detrimental effects on physical health.

The final speaker was Daniel Singleton who is national executive director of Faith Action. Daniel pointed out that there can be a squeamishness when talking about faith and so the potential of faith is not recognised. Faith groups have a tradition of friendship and hospitality which can be an extremely valuable aid to socialisation.

This was a very fruitful day and I think we can all look forward to further developments in cooperation between faith communities and the NHS.

Ian Kennedy

EDITOR'S COMMENTS

I have heard many people throughout this past year passionately express how they wanted rid of 2016. But why wish the year away? Wogan. Rickman. Bowie. Corbett. Wood. Prince. Ali. Aherne. Wilder. Cohen. Vaughn. Sachs. And - not that we

could easily forget - Trump, and Brexit. OK, maybe they had a very good point! Or did they?

Yes, a big handful of very well-known and much-loved - or, at least, respected - individuals from popular culture passed away, with many classified as going 'before their time'. And, on the political front, there have been some major decisions this year that will have significant implications for many years to come. But is the apocalypse nigh? Despite what some areas of the media may suggest, I very much doubt it!

'The good things in life should be our focus and those which drive us on through the tough times.'

Let's, instead, focus on some things that are more likely to put a smile on our faces... Underdogs Leicester winning the Premier League. The ever-improving Andy Murray winning Wimbledon for a second time. Superstar Gareth Bale leading underdogs Wales to the Euro 2016 semi-finals [well, it certainly made my dad happy!]. Serial gold medal winners Mo Farah, Jason Kenny, Laura Trott (or 'Kenny'), Andy Murray and co achieving Britain's greatest Olympic medal haul in 108 years, finishing second in the medals table. 147 medals (including 64 golds) for the inspirational British Paralympic Team, also finishing second. And - now tennis great - Andy Murray ending the year as tennis World Number One. We should therefore be very thankful for the sports fraternity... and especially *that* man from Scotland!

I, too, can fall very easily into the same frame of mind: focussing on the negatives rather than the positives. My dad's ill-health this year has been a major concern for me and my family, and it would feature very much at the top of the list if someone was to ask me about my 2016. However, this had the positive side-effect of meaning I saw my family more frequently than usual. So even this situation was not all bad. Then I look back to the rest of the year... I started the year as an engaged man - and am glad to say that is still the case(!). I saw one of my favourite bands, The

Corrs, play live at the O2 Arena as they returned after a decade's absence. I met star of the big screen Tom Cruise. Even my favourite football team, Bolton Wanderers, have started to make winning a regular occurrence following a horrendous previous season. I really should not complain.

The good things in life should be our focus and those which drive us on through the tough times. We must have the hope that the good times are not one-time occurrences but will come again. Things we have done wrong and that caused us and/or others pain should become lessons learned, hopefully avoiding repeat performances in the future. We should also try to pass on what we have learnt from times of such grief, empathising with others struggling and going through similar experiences, as we should promote to others the light that can shine through most darkness.

With Christmas, we are reminded of the light that was brought into the world through the birth of Jesus Christ. His light shone like a star in the sky, illuminating a world of possibilities and much goodness. And it still does over two thousand years on. For that reason, whilst we may sometimes worry that this light is fading, we should have faith that - like many times in history - God's love will prevail. Unconditionally. So, how will you help spread this light in your local community through to the darkest parts of this earth?

Thanks to all the contributors to the newsletter during 2016; it is most appreciated and makes the newsletter what it is today.

Wishing you peace & happiness this Christmas and also all the best for the New Year!

Tim

Newsletter Contributions...

All contributions for the next issue of the newsletter should be sent to Tim Llewelyn (Editor) by Sunday 20th January 2017 to the following email address: llewelyn_tg@hotmail.com.

The next issue will cover **from mid-February to April 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

December

24th Carols by Candlelight, 6:00pm at Cumnor URC.

January

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

22nd Taizé Service, 7:15pm @ church.

28th Burns' Night Supper, 7:00pm @ church.

February

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

MEETINGS

December

11th Church Meeting, after Sunday worship @ church.

January

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

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

February

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

12th Church Meeting, after Sunday worship @ church.

LECTIONARY

December

11th Isaiah 35:1-10; Psalm 146:5-10; James 5:7-10; Matthew 11:2-11.

18th Isaiah 7:10-16; Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19; Romans 1:1-7; Matthew 1:18-25.

25th Isaiah 9:2-7; Psalm 96; Titus 2:11-14; Luke 2:1-14, (15-20).

January

1st Isaiah 63:7-9; Psalm 148; Hebrews 2:10-18; Matthew 2:13-23.

8th Isaiah 42:1-9; Psalm 29; Acts 10:34-43; Matthew 3:13-17.

15th Isaiah 49:1-7; Psalm 40:1-11; 1 Corinthians 1:1-9; John 1:29-42.

22nd Isaiah 9:1-4; Psalm 27:1, 4-9; 1 Corinthians 1:10-18; Matthew 4:12-23.

29th Micah 6:1-8; Psalm 15; 1 Corinthians 1:18-31; Matthew 5:1-12.

February

5th Isaiah 58:1-9a (9b-12); Psalm 112:1-9 (10); 1 Corinthians 2:1-12 (13-16); Matthew 5:13-20.

12th Deuteronomy 30:15-20; Psalm 119:1-8; 1 Corinthians 3:1-9, Matthew 5:21-37.

19th Leviticus 19:1-2, 9-18; Psalm 119:33-40; 1 Corinthians 3:10-11, 16-23; Matthew 5:38-48.

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 -