

St Columba's

United Reformed Church, Oxford

Newsletter



Lent & Easter Issue,
February - April 2016

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MINISTER'S LETTER



Dear Friends,

*There was someone I loved who grew old and ill,
One by one I watched the fires go out.
There was nothing I could do
except to remember
that we receive
then we give back.*

Mary Oliver, Evidence 'At the River Clarion', 4.

From time to time as I have navigated the weeks since discerning that my ministry had come to an end here, these ancient words floated into my mind: *The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. Blessed be the Lord.* Mary Oliver's poem says something similar – we receive and then we give back.

All things come to an end. We hope for good endings where forgiveness is sought and extended, love and gratitude shared, and memories are harvested with laughter. It is a blessing and a healing when that can happen. I hope that happens amongst us.

This period of leave-taking coincides with the season of Lent – a season of remembering, of honest self-examination and surrender that prepares us for the Great Alleluia that is Easter. We are

reminded that little deaths lead to new life. Nothing is lost in the ecology of God. Mistakes morph into wisdom. Hurt and disappointment, engaged truthfully, become soil which nourishes hope and possibility. Small triumphs of love become seeds that grow into great bushes of sheltering love. Life in all its terror and wonder goes on. The paschal mystery enables us to stand in grace having learned the art of forgiveness, accepting and extending the love that will not let us go.

These past seven and half years we received each other, in varying ways, and now we give one another back into the flow of that Love which brought us together for a time. Blessed be the Lord.

"As important as balancing the budget is for everyone, balancing it on the backs of the most vulnerable is distinctly odious."

Years ago I used an earlier part of Oliver's poem *At the River Clarion (2.)* in a minister's letter. It comes to mind again as I contemplate what to say that may give us each a sense of enduring connection and joy, now and in the future.

*Yes, it could be that I am a tiny piece of God, and
each of you too, or at least
of his intention and his hope.
Which is a delight beyond measure.*

God be with you, in this time of leave-taking and beyond. And God be in you, blessing you and the world.

Love,

Carla

NEWS OF ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS

The Finance and Property Committee

Following our short December meeting and Christmas meal, January's Finance & Property (F&P) meeting saw the Committee return to business. Our special topic was an in-depth review of the building's cleaning contract, which resulted in a number of proposed amendments being made to better reflect our current needs. Ken, our Facilities Manager, has been reviewing quotes for making the stairs to the gallery safer – the Committee intends to present the proposed solution to the Church Meeting in due course. Other works completed in the building include decoration of the vestry and mounting of Wi-Fi routers, both of which will be of benefit to our members and hirers alike. Ken has also been diligently conducting fire safety training for our hirers and stewards.

We had a strong end to 2015 in terms of finance, with hiring income (strengthened by outstanding income from previous years) and members' donations both exceeding expectations – thank you to all for your generosity.

Finally, just a note to say that this is my final F&P newsletter report for St Columba's for the time being since I'll be moving to London to start a new job at the beginning of March. I have been inspired by the knowledge and dedication of the various Committee members I've worked with over the past few years. 2016 will bring its own challenges including, but not limited to, getting to grips with the Quinquennial work and fine tuning our processes for hirers (dare I mention the organ?!), but I depart safe in the knowledge that my fellow Committee members are faithful stewards of our church and its mission. I will be leaving an empty chair that I'm sure Tim would like to see filled, however! *[Indeed, he would!]*

Catrin Treharne

Small Groups

Members of the East Oxford / Cowley Marsh Small Group Fellowship have been enjoying meeting monthly on Friday evenings for about a year now. It all started at the home of Tony Brett and Gordon Woods, welcoming Saskia Hoskins, Ros Lacey and Tessa Davidson. Recently we've been delighted to welcome Rosemary Knagg and Henrike Lähnemann to the group. We have also moved around a bit, enjoying warm hospitality from Ros on a couple of evenings and more recently from Tessa at her home.

February's meeting will be at Henrike's new home in East Oxford. As we meet at 8:00pm on Fridays we tend to be more about food and wine rather than scholarly study of books. The fellowship we have shared has enabled us all to get to know each other and each other's Christian journeys at a much deeper level than before and we've all greatly enjoyed the time together.

If you want to know more about Small Group Fellowship then please talk to Tony Brett or to Kirsten Johnson.

Tony Brett

UPCOMING EVENTS

Young Adult Events

St Columba's is very fortunate to be home to a number of interesting and lovely young adults. They share lunch together after worship from time to time and also lead worship on a Sunday morning three times a year. If you want to be included in the email group, let David North know (david@dnorth.net). Here is what is happening this Spring:

- Sunday 21st February: after worship and church meeting, lunch with Amelia Sutcliffe of Christian Aid who works with

young adults on CA projects and recently visited Brazil. Amelia will also be with us in worship.

- Sunday 6th March: Mothering Sunday service with worship lead by young adults.
-

LGBT History Events

The Faith in Action Group (FIAG) - our ecumenical mission partnership with Wesley Memorial Methodist Church, New Road Baptist Church and St Michael at the North Gate - has organised a series of events in celebration of LGBT history month, the national theme of which is Religion, Belief and Philosophy. The events are open and should be of interest to all.

Thursday 25th February, 7:30 for 8:00 - 9:30pm: *Who do you say that I am? Sexuality and identity in religion and philosophy*. A panel discussion with Revd Dr Susan Durber, Professor Paul Fiddes and Professor Adrian Moore. At New Road Baptist Church, with refreshments.

Fourth Fridays @ Cumnor

The Fourth Friday events in 2016 will begin on Friday 26th February when Peter Baldwin will talk on *My life changed when I joined Her Majesty's Diplomatic Service*. Due to Easter being early it will then be a Third Friday - Friday 18th March - when Stuart Okin will talk on *Our lives changed when we became foster parents*. On Friday 22nd April Nigel Appleton will talk on *My life changed, then changed again: handbrake turns on the journey of life*.

Supper will be offered as usual at 7:15pm, followed by an 8:00pm talk finishing about 9:00pm after answering any questions.

To book supper please contact Briony Newport by the Wednesday beforehand. Please call 01865 246 497 or email secretary@cumnorurc.org.uk. Supper is free but donations are welcomed.

Abseiling for Christian Aid

There is to be a Christian Aid abseil on Saturday 12th of March at St Mary Magdalen Church in Oxford city centre.

It's a brilliant opportunity to raise money for people living in the poorest communities on the planet, and past participants have had a brilliant time climbing down the church tower. A St Columba's abseil team would be ace! The minimum age is 11, and there's no maximum age – we have octogenarian thrill-seekers scaling that wall most years. Registration is £15.

To sign up online, please visit the Christian Aid website via: <http://www.christianaid.org.uk/getinvolved/events/abseiling.aspx> or call Siobhan Grimes at the Oxford office on 01865 246 818.

We already have four members of the congregation (Siân Jones, Ian Kennedy, Henrike Lähnemann and Ken Ngugi) intending to participate. For those willing and able, there is opportunity to sponsor our brave members.

Holy Week Services

Holy Week and special services are shared with our Faith in Action Group partners:

- 24th March: Maundy Thursday, 7:30pm at St Columba's.
 - 25th March: Good Friday, 10:30am at Wesley Memorial Methodist Church.
 - 27th March: Easter Alleluia!, 10:45am at St Columba's (Carla's last Sunday service with us).
-

A Day Out On The Farm!

Join the Oxford Friends of Hope and Faith School, Ngombe, Zambia at Farmer Gow's on Thursday 31st March.

A donation to Hope and Faith School, Zambia, in lieu of entry ticket costs - <http://www.cumnorurc.org/school.php>.

Time: 10:00am to 2:00pm (ish!).

To reserve your place, please contact:

- Anne Gow (enquiries@farmergows.co.uk), or
- Richard Dewar (richardjdewar@gmail.com).

Location:

Farmer Gow's is located between Fernham and Longcot villages, on the B4508 (3 miles from Faringdon). About an ½ hour drive from Cumnor.

Entry price information:

- Adult - £8;
- OAP/Student - £7.50;
- Child (3+ yrs) - £7;
- Under 3 – free;
- Trailer Ride - £1.25.

INFORMATION

Lent Special Collection

The next special collection is for Commitment for Life: the URC's partnership with Christian Aid. The Elders should have distributed pamphlets outlining the work of Commitment for Life by the time the collection takes place to all members of the congregation. In addition on the day of the appeal (21st February 2016) Amelia Sutcliffe, the intern at the Commitment for Life office, is going to be present to talk about the work of Commitment for Life.

Ministerial Transition: The Process

At a brief Church Meeting on 3rd January we received the sad news that Carla had decided it was right to offer her resignation as Minister of St Columba's and Cumnor United Reformed Churches. Carla will be with us until Easter, giving us three months to continue to benefit from Carla's many gifts and to celebrate everything she has brought to our churches. Although we are very sorry to see Carla go, we wish her and David every blessing in the next stage of their life together. We will share more information about how we will mark Carla's time with us shortly.

During the period of 'Ministerial Transition', the Wessex Synod will appoint an 'Interim Moderator' to work with the churches. Their role is not to step into the shoes of the Minister, but to guide the churches through the process of creating a pastorate profile, and in due course introducing potential candidates. They work closely with a 'Pastorate Call Group' (sometimes known as a 'vacancy committee') representing the churches. [The Elders are discussing nominations to this group with our colleagues at Cumnor.]

The Synod will meet with the Elders to discuss the pastoral needs of the churches, and will decide the shape and 'scoping' of the pastorate. This means the number of churches in the pastorate, and the amount of ordained Ministry that should be allocated to them. At the moment, we have one Minister allocated to the pastorate of Cumnor and St Columba's.

The Pastorate Call Group will then work with the Interim Moderator to draw up the pastorate profile. When that is agreed, it is circulated to all the Synod Moderators and a summary is published online (at <http://www.urch-eastern.org.uk/pastorate-profiles>).



The
**United
Reformed
Church**

The Synod Moderators meet monthly to consider possible Ministerial movements: names might be suggested by Moderators at this meeting or Ministers may have indicated that they are

interested in pursuing a particular pastorate. Candidates do not contact churches directly.

The profiles of candidates wishing to be considered are then passed to the Pastorate Call Group, who may choose to meet one candidate. If both the candidate and the Group then wish to proceed, the candidate is invited to spend a weekend with the churches, meeting the congregations and leading worship.

Following the visit, each church would have a church meeting and have a vote on whether to issue a call to the candidate. In a joint pastorate, both churches would need to have voted in favour of the call in order to proceed.

If the church meetings vote in favour of a call, the detailed terms and conditions would be worked through and we would seek the Synod's 'concurrence' to a call. If the church meetings did not vote in favour, or the vote was sufficiently divided that the candidate did not feel it was right to proceed, then the process would cease with that candidate, and the Pastorate Call Group would work with the Interim Moderator to consider next steps.

During the period of Ministerial Transition, the Elders and Church Meeting remain responsible for the life of the church - Gordon Woods will continue to arrange Pulpit Supply and the Elders continue to have pastoral responsibility for the congregation.

Do please talk to your Elder if you have any comments or questions about the Ministerial Transition - not least if you would like to share in the work of, for example, pastoral care of the congregation during this time.

Can You Help?

As has been published in our newsletter in the past, our sister church - Cumnor URC - has been supporting the Hope and Faith School in Zambia. Much money has been raised for the cause but the school has further requirements where funding is required.

Two plots of land are currently available for purchase at a combined value of circa £24,000 (dependant on current exchange rates). This land would help integrate two parts of the site and would also enable the construction of a new assembly/dining hall. Approximately £17,000 has been raised (including Gift Aid). Can you help towards the acquisition of both plots of land? If you would like more information and/or are willing & able to contribute then please contact Richard Dewar (richardjdewar@gmail.com).

Potential Trip to Bath

Like Bath? Never been to Bath? Just fancy a trip outside of Oxford? Well, June 2016 might just be the time to provide you with the opportunity to visit this historic city!

St Columba's and Cumnor are looking to take a day trip to the city, with the American Museum in Britain being the main destination. The provisional date is Saturday 18th and organisers Maureen Hussain and Briony Newport are looking to see who is interested in this outing.

Briony says that she *'last went two decades ago on a beautiful sunny, summer day and remember[s] sitting on the grass on a hill, enjoying beautiful panoramic views over a deep valley.'* She explains that *'the Manor is within 125 acres of which 35 are open to visitors, to see the gardens and enjoy walking. Keen walkers will experience amazing views of the Limpley Stoke Valley and River Avon.'* Furthermore, Briony highlights that *'the endless fascination of the house itself is so rewarding. It shows the American way of life from the early settlers, including the arrival of the Quakers. There are small period rooms showing how people lived from 1690 to 1860. It is interesting to see they gradually embrace more comfortable homes as they prospered. Also the diverse and complex nature of American traditions are on show.'* If that has not wetted your appetite then you can also find out more information online at <http://americanmuseum.org/>.

Entry costs are circa £11 for adults, with reduced concessionary rates also available. If a minimum of 15 people are interested then further discounted rates should be available.

Travel arrangements - and any associated costs - to and from Bath are still to be confirmed. Coach hire and car sharing are options. Briony and Maureen would like to hear preferences.

Please let Maureen Hussain know if you are interested or if you have any further questions on the subject (tel: 01491 832 927).

Half-price Digital Reform... + Other Offers

If you're a student, good news: you can get Reform's digital edition for £9 – that's 50% off! The digital edition (which is usually £18) can be read on tablets, smartphones and computers. At 10 issues a year, the 50% offer works out at just 90 pence per issue.

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Lent. An ordinary event with huge significance!

Shedding tears on the first day in school is very ordinary... The two sons of one of the Syrian families recently arrived in Oxford had their first day in school in the New Year. They weren't in tears... but their mother was, overwhelmed at the welcome her boys was given, and seeing them go to school for the first time in four years. Going to school is an ordinary thing for most of us, but with huge significance for this mother and her boys.

Asylum Welcome is working with the families newly arrived in Oxford under the government's resettlement scheme for Syrian refugees. We are also helping refugees from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Eritrea and other countries who have made their own way here, and face challenges of all sorts.

Giving up something for Lent is a fairly ordinary thing for us, it reminds us how lucky we are. Sending what you save to Asylum Welcome will enable us to help refugees with various ordinary things, of huge significance to those who have been forced to give up almost everything.

Please send what you save to Asylum Welcome.

By cheque payable to Asylum Welcome (with your name and address on the back) at Unit 7, Newtec Place, Magdalen Rd, Oxford OX4 1RE or make an online donation via <https://www.justgiving.com/asylumwelcome/>.

Thank you.

Minister Honoured

Carla, our minister, was installed as an Honorary Ecumenical Canon at Christ Church Cathedral on Saturday 23rd January 2016: the first URC minister installed as an ecumenical canon at Christ Church.

Ecumenical Canons take part in the life of the Cathedral by serving as ambassadors for the Cathedral in their parish or other ministry. It is a great credit to Carla's work in her wider ministry that she has been honoured in this way by the Diocese of Oxford and a great accolade for our two churches.

Members from St Columba's and from Cumnor attended the Installation evensong to support Carla and a great time was had by all!



An Announcement

Lucy Ette and Tim Llewelyn announced their engagement over the Christmas holiday period. They are currently working on their wedding plans and are hoping to set a date for early 2017.

Pastures New

It is with sadness that we say 'farewell' to our friend and member, Catrin Treharne. A new job in London means relocation during Q1 of 2017. She will be greatly missed, especially for her involvement with the Finance & Property Committee and also her musical contributions to church life. We wish Catrin all the best in the next chapter and look forward to seeing her again in the future.

THOUGHTS AND OPINIONS

An article written at the request of the Faith in Action Group of churches:

These are desperate times in Oxford's housing situation, with more and more people in serious difficulty. The impact cuts across all sections of Oxford society – whether it is employers struggling to recruit, grown-up children unable to leave their parents' home and start families of their own, or those on low incomes served notice by their landlords as they can no longer afford their rent, who face being kicked out of the city they call home. When house-prices and rents are compared with wages, Oxford is frequently considered the least affordable city in the country.

One of the most visible consequences has been an increase in rough sleeping. At the last count, in November, when council officers and charity workers seek to find those sleeping rough, there were 39 rough sleepers identified, compared with 26 a year

before; this, of course, excludes those who aren't found (and, for safety reasons, many rough sleepers will choose to be well-hidden), as well as those who don't have settled accommodation but end up 'sofa surfing', stopping at different friends' houses. Homeless hostels report that they are now bursting at the seams – so much so that some provision is now on fold-away mattresses, rather than beds.

"...it will be down to Oxford's charities, churches and, ultimately, its citizens to do what they can to support those who are left, almost literally, at the bottom of the pile."

It is hard to see this situation getting any better. Recent changes in government policy have made it much less likely that the council will be able to build new homes itself, and indeed it will be required to sell off some of its existing stock to fund the 'right to buy' for housing association tenants. Housing benefit levels are being frozen or cut back, and already housing benefit barely covers the rent in any privately rented property in Oxford. The government has announced it will refocus its own housing investment on 'starter homes', which are at a 20% discount on the market price. While this will be a great investment for those who can afford them (at a price of up to £250,000), it will come at the expense of affordable housing to rent for those on lower incomes. And, sadly, reductions in funding for Oxfordshire County Council have led it to propose deleting from April 2017 every penny of funding (£1.5 million) it currently gives to homeless hostels, hot on the heels of a significant cut being implemented this year.

In all this bleakness, it would seem that, more than ever, it will be down to Oxford's charities, churches and, ultimately, its citizens to do what they can to support those who are left, almost literally, at the bottom of the pile.

***Ed Turner
Deputy Leader, Oxford City Council***

A LETTER FROM THE COMMUNITY EMERGENCY FOODBANK

On behalf of the Trustees and volunteers of the Community Emergency Foodbank (CEF), I would be very grateful if you would pass on our thanks to the congregation of St Columbus for the generous support we have enjoyed in 2015, both financially and by way of food donations. St Columbus donated over 300 items of food since April 2015, as well as giving generously during their Harvest Festival.

There has been much publicity recently about the huge rise in the number of Food banks that have opened all over the country, almost exclusively run by church communities. You will have read of attempts to 'politicise' food banks. Despite media pressure to comment, CEF chooses to not to speculate as to the reasons for food poverty. Suffice it to say that they are complex. We doubt that any government of any stripe could devise a benefits system that catered for the many hazards that afflict families: debt, desertion, alcohol addiction, gambling, divorce and imprisonment amongst them. The fact is that the demand for CEF's services is constant. In 2015 CEF fed circa 3,000 people. Without the generous support and encouragement of the churches CEF could do little to help.

"Without the generous support and encouragement of the churches CEF could do little to help."

Having enjoyed the generosity of Nielsen UK, who have provided free warehouse space for us over the past 3 years, they are selling their site on the London Rd and we are having to move. The exciting news is that we have been able to purchase a purpose built portable unit which will be installed at St Francis Church, Hollow Way at the end of January. That will make the storage and distribution of food much easier and more efficient.

In March 2015, we opened our CEF café for a third day at Littlemore Baptist Church on a Thursday. After a slow start, the café there is now receiving more referrals and we are grateful for the enthusiastic volunteers who meet there every Thursday.

Best Wishes,

Jane Benyon, CEF Director

REPORT

Finance Report

2015 was a reasonably successful financial year. We finished it approximately £12,000 better off. Part of this was thanks to the centenary appeal (which raised over £7,000) and part of it was thanks to us not spending as much as we anticipated on quinquennial survey work (though this has been deferred to 2016). The 2015 accounts should be available in draft form by the end of February.

We are especially grateful to all our members and friends who made donations in 2015. Regular giving continues to be our principal source of income, although 2015 was a record year for building hires and we will continue to push for more of these.

David North

EDITOR'S COMMENTS

Sadness often comes when least expected. This is certainly the case with Carla's announcement of her imminent departure. Still, we must celebrate her work with us during her tenure and thank God for all her effort, leadership and pastoral care. She leaves a legacy from which we must continue to grow. Let's celebrate the good times, staying strong together, and then turn our focus to the future, recognising the opportunities that lie ahead.

Tim

Newsletter Contributions...

All contributions for the next issue of the newsletter should be sent to Tim Llewelyn (Editor) by Sunday 26th June 2016 to the following Email address: llewelyn_tg@hotmail.com.

The next issue will cover **from May to mid-July 2016**.

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

February

21st Taizé Service, 7.30pm @ church.

25th LGBT History Event, 8:00pm @ New Road Baptist Church.

26th Fourth Friday, 7:15pm @ Cumnor URC.

March

6th First Sunday, 7:15pm @ church.

18th 'Fourth Friday', 7:15pm @ Cumnor URC.

20th Taizé Service, 7.30pm @ church.

April

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

22nd Fourth Friday, 7:15pm @ Cumnor URC.

May

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

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

February

21st Church Meeting, after Sunday Worship @ church.

March

2nd Finance & Property Committee, 7:00pm @ church.

17th Elders' Meeting, 7:30pm @ church.

April

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

LECTIONARY

February

21st Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18; Psalm 27; Philippians 3:17-4:1; Luke 13:31-35 or Luke 9:28-36, (37-43a).

28th Isaiah 55:1-9; Psalm 63:1-8 1; Corinthians 10:1-13; Luke 13:1-9.

March

6th Joshua 5:9-12; Psalm 32; 2 Corinthians 5:16-21; Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32.

13th Isaiah 43:16-21; Psalm 126; Philippians 3:4b-14; John 12:1-8.

20th Isaiah 50:4-9a; Psalm 31:9-16; Philippians 2:5-11; Luke 22:14-23:56 or Luke 23:1-49.

27th Acts 10:34-43 or Isaiah 65:17-25; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; 1 Corinthians 15:19-26 or Acts 10:34-43; John 20:1-18 or Luke 24:1-12.

April

3rd Acts 5:27-32; Psalm 118:14-29 or Psalm 150; Revelation 1:4-8; John 20:19-31.

10th Acts 9:1-6, (7-20); Psalm 30; Revelation 5:11-14; John 21:1-19.

17th Acts 9:36-43; Psalm 23; Revelation 7:9-17; John 10:22-30.

24th Acts 11:1-18; Psalm 148; Revelation 21:1-6; John 13:31-35.

May

1st Acts 16:9-15; Psalm 67; Revelation 21:10, 22-22:5; John 14:23-29 or John 5:1-9.

USEFUL CONTACT DETAILS

Minister

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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

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