

# St Columba's

United Reformed Church, Oxford

## Newsletter



Lent & Easter Issue,  
February - April 2017

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## CHURCH SECRETARY'S LETTER



*Dear Friends,*

In some ways, waiting is becoming something of a rarity to many of us. Many organisations put a great deal of work into trying to eliminate waiting periods – organising same-day or next-day delivery when we buy things, and speeding up processing so that your passport now comes within days not weeks. Techniques such as ‘Lean’ look to strip out waste from all steps of a process so that the organisation neither has goods on hand waiting to be sold, nor raw materials piled up waiting to be transformed. And where waiting is inevitable, such as in queues at theme parks, companies try to make things less painful for us by providing additional entertainment.

This makes it particularly striking that the church's year has not just one, but two periods when we spend time waiting and watching – and in contrast to Advent, when our preparation is interspersed with joyful carol services, parties and other happy events, Lent is a longer and rather more sombre affair, when many people will be cutting back on pleasurable things like chocolate, and the drumbeat of the Passion narrative takes us right to the foot of the cross.

But unlike the time I spend waiting on railway platforms, or the time we spend in checkout queues, or waiting for deliveries that

often seem not to come quite as scheduled, our waiting in Lent has purpose and value. We travel with Jesus and the disciples through great highs, like the entry to Jerusalem, and the lowest of lows, and look forward to the mystery of the Resurrection – and as we journey, we remember and ponder.

***'...when the world seems ever more divided and tense, perhaps it is especially important to remember that we are all travelling together on a shared journey.'***

This year, the Elders invite you to journey together not only through our Sunday worship, but by sharing in using a collection of hymns and prayers for Lent, which have been chosen and written by members of the congregation. As we read and pray in our own homes, we share in our preparation for Easter, as part of our own church, and as part of the worldwide church. And at a time when the world seems ever more divided and tense, perhaps it is especially important to remember that we are all travelling together on a shared journey.

I hope Lent is a fruitful time for you, and I look forward to sharing it with you all.

*Gordon*

## **NEWS OF ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS**

### **The Finance and Property Committee**

2016 witnessed a relatively successful year for the Committee. Significant work was completed in relation to the most recent Quinquennial report, sizeable hiring revenue was realised, an LED project to reduce energy usage and also cost was started, and the Committee successfully highlighted the benefits of the cost-

effective digital organ solution to the church's failing organ that required heavy investment to repair. Further steps to deal with the needs of the facilities as they arise and to provision suitable funds also helped towards a good year, where the finances were left in a good place to hopefully allow other required activities to be undertaken in 2017.

Our Facilities Manager, Ken, has already liaised with the Synod Property Officer regarding recent and proposed upcoming projects at church. Advice was provided that, it is hoped, will help towards smooth and successful completion of the activities. The plans are currently being drawn up, so watch this space!

### **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 £7,613 (incl. Gift Aid).

We therefore currently need to raise an extra £1,603.

Can YOU help us reach our goal?

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](mailto:treasurer@saintcolumbas.org) for more details.

The Committee is also putting an early warning note out that new members will be required by the end of the year. The church's Joint Treasurer, David North, and I are in the final year of our respective roles (already extended by a year). The church will therefore be needing individuals to step up to these roles. Anybody wishing to greater understand what these roles entail should contact David and I for further information. Please give this prayerful consideration.

**Tim Llewelyn**

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### **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 are 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***

## **UPCOMING EVENTS**

### **Commitment for Life**

A special collection for Commitment for Life was held on Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> February. By that date all members of the congregation should have had the opportunity to contribute to this cause.

St Columba's contribution to Commitment for Life is used for projects in Israel/Palestine.

St Columba's is, in effect, having two Commitment for Life Sundays this year because Linda Mead, co-ordinator of Commitment for Life, is taking our service on Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> February.

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### **Upcoming Taizé Services**

Taizé services take place on the fourth Sunday of nearly every month at 7:15pm in church. The next service will be on Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> 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.

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## Lent & Easter 2017

- Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> April: Stations of the Cross at Blackfriars - time to be confirmed.
- Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> April (Palm Sunday): Ecumenical donkey - meeting at Radcliffe Square at 10:20am.
- Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> April (Maundy Thursday): Service at New Road at 7:30pm.
- Friday 14<sup>th</sup> April (Good Friday): Service at St Columba's at 10:45am.
- Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> April (Easter Day): Easter Communion service at St Columba's.

Please check times closer to each event to ensure these are still current.

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## Spring Lectures 2017

All are welcome to Summertown URC's monthly spring lectures at 294A Banbury Road, Summertown, Oxford, OX2 7HN on the following dates:

- Friday 24<sup>th</sup> February @ 3:00pm: 'REFUGEES AT THE DOOR: How does Britain/we respond?' - Dai Richards, retired BBC documentary photographer, will talk about his work and show a film he has made recently on the work of our Oxford charity Asylum Welcome entitled.
- Friday 24<sup>th</sup> March @ 3:00pm: 'LUTHER'S LEGACY' - Professor Henrike Lähnemann, holds the Chair of Medieval German Literature and Linguistics at the University of Oxford and is a Fellow of St Edmund Hall. In the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of Martin Luther's Wittenberg Promulgation in 1517, she will speak about his legacy since then to the present day.

Lectures are held in the rear hall from 3:00 – 4:30pm and include discussion and tea. Tickets: £5 per lecture in aid of Summertown URC's Church Building Fund.

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## **Wessex and South-Western Synods' Big Day Out**

*Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> July 2017 at the Burgate School, Fordingbridge, Hants, SP6 1EZ.*

The organisers hope that as many people as possible will travel by coach to Synod Day, but they also realise that some, particularly those who live closest to the venue in Fordingbridge, will want to make their own travel arrangements. So there will be four different types of ticket available to book for the Big Day. They are as follows:

1. Adult ticket including a coach seat for the journeys to and from the venue, and entry to it. Price: £18.00.
2. Young Person's (Aged 5 – 16 Years) ticket including a coach seat to and from the venue, and entry to it. Price: £12.00.
3. Adult ticket for entry only to the venue (making their own travel arrangements). Price: £8.00.
4. Young Person's ticket for entry only to the venue. Price: £4.00.

Subject to sufficient numbers booking, the organisers are arranging coaches starting from the following locations: Swindon, Bristol, Plymouth, Torquay, Exeter, Oxford, Weybridge, Havant, Southampton, Christchurch and Wareham. Some coaches will stop at other locations on route to Fordingbridge to pick up further passengers. The price of tickets that include the return coach fare will be the same wherever you live. Coaches will leave from, and return to, churches in each of the departure points listed above, and you will need to make your way to those departure point. Times of departure will be notified nearer the date.

Those buying the 'Entry only' tickets will need to make their own

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travel arrangements. Some car parking will be available at Burgate School, but it will be limited and will need to be booked in advance.

It is important for the Organising Committee to know as early as possible how many people overall will be coming to the Big Day, so the organisers are making a special offer on ticket prices for early booking. All tickets ordered and paid for by 1<sup>st</sup> April 2017 will be charged at a discount rate which will be £1.00 less than the prices quoted above.

Please contact the church secretaries if you are interested in attending via [churchsecretary@saintcolumbas.org](mailto:churchsecretary@saintcolumbas.org).

## NEWS ABOUT PEOPLE

### Thinking of Friends

Our thoughts and prayers are with our friends, Kelli Rudolph and Dunstan Lowe, following the short life of their daughter, Celandine Isla Rudolph-Lowe.

## PROFILE

Glyn Millington: Married to Reka, father of Chris (36!), Andrew (33), Peter (19) and Anna (15), currently serving as minister of Christ Church Henley-on-Thames.

Before moving to Oxfordshire I served in Torquay as minister to Central Church Torquay, after thirteen years in Essex at Christ Church Chelmsford, part of the (then) Chelmsford group of eight URC's and two LEPs. Before Chelmsford came a spell as Chaplain and Youth Centre leader at Hengrave Hall (near Bury St Edmunds) as part of the ecumenical community there. My first

pastorate was at Hadleigh in Suffolk. I have also done time as a Hospice Chaplain and synod trustee. Interests include languages, hill walking and sea-fishing.

As Interim-Moderator my formal remit is to help you with the process of ministerial transition, which would normally involving attending Elders and Church Meetings. My informal remit is to be a friend in need to churches in vacancy, and I will help out where I can. I look forward to meeting the St Columba's congregation on Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> April.

## REPORTS

### **Burns' Night 2017**

We celebrated Burns' Night on Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> January 2017, with a traditional supper and ceilidh in the sanctuary. Thirty-four people attended, plus five dancers from the Oxford University student Scottish dancing group, who led the ceilidh dancing. Jamie Bell was the patient teacher, demonstrator and able caller, as always. The tables were suitably decorated, and added to the air of anticipation and enjoyment.

As always, it was a wonderful celebration of Scottish culture and tradition, in particular the legacy and writings of the Scottish bard, Robbie Burns.

David North (suitably attired for the occasion) was an admirable master of ceremonies, despite suffering a cold. Faye Mitchell addressed the haggis after it had been piped in by Henrike Lähnemann playing the horn (yes, at a stretch, you could imagine it was a set of bagpipes...). Colin Connolly (born in Ayrshire, the same county as Burns) offered the traditional Selkirk Grace, after which we all enjoyed our meal of haggis, neeps and tatties. The whisky and Irn Bru washed it all down - Irn Bru is a Scottish carbonated soft drink, often described as 'Scotland's

other national drink'. Faye presented a summary of Burns' life, tribulations and achievements before proposing the traditional toast to the 'immortal memory of Robbie Burns'. Peggy and Henrike continued the musical and vocal tributes – all of which were suitably enjoyed and appreciated by members of the congregation, as well as several international visitors who had never experienced a Burns' Night before. The dancing was energetic and exuberant – and all were able to join in, regardless of age or ability.



Thanks go to Tony and Gordon who purchased and delivered all the supplies, Tony and his team of helpers who chopped, mashed, cooked and served the delicious meal, and all those who helped to set up and clear away afterwards. We expect that the profit will be in the region of £300 which will go to church funds. Burns' Night is certainly an enjoyable and fascinating tradition that we are pleased to perpetuate each year.

*Many thanks to those who bought a ticket, even though they were unable to attend the function, and to others for additional donations.*

**Jill Fresen**

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## **Ministerial Transition: An Update**

*I thought that it would be helpful to bring you up to date with the process of ministerial transition...*

It is now almost a year since Carla left us, and many of you will be

wondering where we currently are in that process. One reason why things have not proceeded more quickly is that the Area Synod Pastoral Committee for the North West wanted to take this opportunity to consider the position of Oxford area churches as a whole. There are seven churches in the area. Three of these (St Columba's, Cumnor, and Aston Tirrold) are in ministerial transition; three (Summertown, Marston, and Collinwood Road) have a settled ministry; and one (Wheatley) has an interim ministry. There have been a number of meetings between representatives of the Pastoral Committee and representatives of the seven churches to consider the right model for the future deployment of ministers in the area.

The Pastoral Committee met on 17<sup>th</sup> January. Shortly afterwards Clare Downing, the Synod Moderator, wrote to us to confirm that the collective scoping for the seven churches would be 2.5 ministers and to let us know what the Pastoral Committee was proposing as a way forward. She outlined a plan that would involve collaboration between all seven churches. She also told us that the Committee was proposing Glyn Millington as our Interim Moderator. Glyn is minister of Christ Church URC in Henley-on-Thames.

We were delighted to receive this news about Glyn. Indeed he has already started to work with us. He has met once with the St Columba's/Cumnor Pastorate Call Group (commonly referred to as 'the Vacancy Committee') and once with the Elders of St Columba's. Glyn has contributed a brief item about himself and about his role as Interim Moderator, which appears elsewhere in this Newsletter. You will all have a chance to meet him on 23<sup>rd</sup> April, when he is due to lead worship for us.

As Glyn indicates, his role is to help us with the process of ministerial transition. He is not himself taking on the role of our minister. In fact, as he jokingly put it to us at our Elders' meeting, he sees it as his mission to sever the relationship between us as quickly as possible! And although we of course know what he means, we hope very much that we shall establish a friendship with him that will prove to be long-lasting.

Meanwhile we have written back to Clare. In our response we made clear how urgently we now feel the need for a vacancy to be declared. (At the time of writing, this has not yet happened. By the time you read this, perhaps it will have done!) We also indicated that our Vacancy Committee has already been hard at work preparing a pastorate profile for St Columba's and Cumnor; that it will continue in that work; that it will be happy to include, in the profile, due acknowledgement of the potential future implications of the vacancies in the other five churches in the Oxford area; and that it will also be happy to include due acknowledgement of the importance of collaboration and mutual support among the ministers serving all seven churches.

I hope that this update will answer most if not all of your questions. If there are questions that remain to which you would like answers, you are very welcome to put them to either me or your Elder.

**Adrian Moore**

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### **Treasurers' Report: 2016**

2016 was a successful financial year for St Columba's. Despite completing a large amount of building work, we finished the year with just £8,000 less than we started it - significantly better than the budgeted outcome.

The top five areas of income were:

1. Standing orders from members - £40K (down 10% vs 2015);
2. Hirings - £36K (up 20% vs 2015);
3. Gift aid - £11K (down 15% vs 2015);
4. The chaplaincy fund - £7K (no change since 2015);
5. One-off donations - £3K (down 75% vs 2015; note this was an exceptional year because of the centenary appeal)

And the top five areas of expenditure were:

1. Major building work - £38K (up 270% vs 2015);
2. URC central funds (Ministry & Mission) - £32K (down 9% vs

- 2015);
3. Facilities manager (salary & expenses) - £13K (up 3% vs 2015);
  4. Utilities - £6K (down 5% vs 2015);
  5. Insurance - £3K (up 1% vs 2015).

(All figures are rounded to the nearest £1K.)

***David North and Mary Thewlis***

## **EDITOR'S COMMENTS**

Another newsletter and another significant Christian festival is just around the corner... No sooner have we heard a wonderful story of birth and new hope for a generation do we have the dramatic signposts pointing towards the end of the road for God in human form, Jesus Christ, which is then realised in his humiliating death on a cross. Fortunately, we know there is - like with every good story - a happy ending: the Holy Spirit is released into the world and the Christian church is born.

The Easter story is very familiar to Christians. I, therefore, often wonder how ministers, vicars, fathers, pastors and preachers by any other given title can teach something new to those listening year after year. It becomes like the film Titanic: we know the ending before it starts. So why not just ignore the fasting and forget the sad events and simply jump to the conclusion? We can then get chomping those lovely chocolate eggs as soon as possible and get on with life as usual!

As with the Christmas story, there is much that we think we know when, in fact, that can be far from the truth. We merge the Gospel accounts to create one 'truth' and we focus on certain elements rather than others. In particular, we often - consciously or subconsciously - choose to ignore the elements that are so confusing that they make our heads hurt.

Whether or not a man's body vanished from the face of the earth - but not before he reappeared to his friends in physical form - can be left to the paid theologians to debate. However, rather than talking about issues we can never actually prove either way, it seems to me that the time & effort of Christians across the globe should be focussed on that which can have a more significant impact on the world and its inhabitants.

The world is in a major mess; just look at it...! [I know, state the obvious!] Questionable world leaders - both democratically elected and also not - can create uncertainty and instability for the citizens of this glorious planet. Questionable public policies can lead to much hardship and discontent amongst a country's population. A desire for power, wealth and status can create significant social divisions, where the world's poor are often extremely poor and the world's rich are often extremely rich. And the environment can be left to disintegrate for reasons that most sane people cannot completely fathom.

***'Jesus should be present not simply through stories of his life but also through our actions as members of the Jesus Movement today.'***

The Bible shows Jesus as being highly critical of the established organisations of his day and also those in positions of power. It even illustrates how he criticised the religious powerhouse to which his faith belonged. But did he just stay quiet and bumble along, trying to avoid any potential conflict that came his way? No! He challenged established institutions and approaches. He did not shy away from that which he appeared to see as his - and others' - duty. He befriended and championed the poor and the marginalised. He was love incarnate. He used every opportunity to promote the cause. He was like a dog with a bone. He did not let it rest. And for this he was imprisoned, beaten, humiliated, nailed to a cross, and hung up to die a shameful death.

Mel Gibson's film, *Passion of the Christ*, received much criticism for its brutal portrayal of Jesus Christ's last days on Earth. Maybe this criticism was at least partly deserved. However, maybe we have - through over exposure to the story - also become desensitised to the level of violence to which Jesus was subjected. This was a brutal, slow and painful death, to the point where even he questioned why God - the being he called 'Father' and for whom he had dedicated his life - had appeared to abandon him in his hour of need. Imagination simply cannot recreate the torture that Jesus had to endure during his crucifixion.

When we are enjoying those eggs on 16<sup>th</sup> April this year - and also on future Easter Sundays - we should listen carefully to the Biblical story at the heart of our faith and remember that even the darkest of days can be conquered by goodness and love. As Christians, we must not shy away from the difficult topics of the moment. Neither should we shirk our responsibilities. We must stand up and be counted, flying the flag for the cause that we represent. Jesus should be present not simply through stories of his life but also through our actions as members of the Jesus Movement today. We must do him proud by continuing his legacy and advocating unconditional love to - and for - all.

I wish you a reflective and productive Lent and Easter.

*Tim*

#### **Newsletter Contributions...**

All contributions for the next issue of the newsletter should be sent to Tim Llewelyn (Editor) by Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2017 to the following email address: [llewelyn\\_tg@hotmail.com](mailto:llewelyn_tg@hotmail.com).

The next issue will cover **from late April to June 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

#### February

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26<sup>th</sup> Taizé Service, 7:15pm @ church.

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#### March

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5<sup>th</sup> First Sunday, 7:15pm @ church.

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26<sup>th</sup> Taizé Service, 7:15pm @ church.

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#### April

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2<sup>nd</sup> First Sunday, 7:15pm @ church.

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23<sup>rd</sup> Taizé Service, 7:15pm @ church.

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### MEETINGS

#### March

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7<sup>th</sup> Finance & Property Committee, 7:00pm @ church.

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12<sup>th</sup> Church Meeting, after Sunday worship @ church.

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16<sup>th</sup> Elders' Meeting, 7:30pm @ church.

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#### April

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4<sup>th</sup> Finance & Property Committee, 7:00pm @ church.

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## LECTIONARY

### February

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26<sup>th</sup> Exodus 24:12-18; Psalm 2; 2 Peter 1:16-21; Matthew 17:1-9.

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### March

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5<sup>th</sup> Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7; Psalm 32; Romans 5:12-19; Matthew 4:1-11.

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12<sup>th</sup> Genesis 12:1-4a; Psalm 121; Romans 4:1-5, 13-17; John 3:1-17.

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19<sup>th</sup> Exodus 17:1-7; Psalm 95; Romans 5:1-11; John 4:5-42.

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26<sup>th</sup> 1 Samuel 16:1-13; Psalm 23; Ephesians 5:8-14; John 9:1-41.

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### April

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2<sup>nd</sup> Ezekiel 37:1-14; Psalm 130; Romans 8:6-11; John 11:1-45.

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9<sup>th</sup> Isaiah 50:4-9a; Psalm 31:9-16; Philippians 2:5-11; Matthew 26:14-27:66.

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16<sup>th</sup> Jeremiah 31:1-6; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; Colossians 3:1-4; John 20:1-18.

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23<sup>rd</sup> Acts 2:14a, 22-32; Psalm 16; 1 Peter 1:3-9; John 20:19-31.

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## USEFUL CONTACT DETAILS

### Facilities Manager

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*Kenneth Ngugi*      Tel: 07880 601 109    Email: [facilitiesmanager@saintcolumbas.org](mailto:facilitiesmanager@saintcolumbas.org)

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### Church Secretaries

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*Adrian Moore & Gordon Woods*      Email: [churchsecretary@saintcolumbas.org](mailto:churchsecretary@saintcolumbas.org)

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### Treasurers

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*David North & Mary Thewlis*      Email: [treasurer@saintcolumbas.org](mailto:treasurer@saintcolumbas.org)

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## 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](http://www.saintcolumbas.org) -  
- [www.facebook.com/groups/stcurc](https://www.facebook.com/groups/stcurc) -  
- Twitter: @stcurc -