

# St Columba's

United Reformed Church, Oxford

## Newsletter



July 2011

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Lord of all being,  
May you so live within us  
and among us,  
That in our relationships  
you become our love,  
In our decision making  
you become our wisdom,  
In our words you become  
our integrity,

In our actions you become our  
justice,  
In our darkness you become our  
light,  
In our suffering you become our  
hope,  
In our dying you become our life.  
Amen, let it be so.

*Sandra Pickard, Vision4Life*



## MINISTER'S LETTER

*'Jesus prayed...that they may all be one.'* John 17:21a

In early June, I used an empty picture frame and strips of cloth and ribbon during the Children's Moment to illustrate our unity in diversity. I had tacked five wide bands of light coloured cloth to stretch the width of the frame. The children helped me weave different coloured strips and ribbons vertically through the horizontal bands as we talked about how we bring different things together to be one.

After worship I brought the incomplete weaving home with me. I find that I have been unable to dismantle it, for it continues to inspire thought about our life together.

I imagine the frame to be the person of Jesus, for it is Jesus that we have in common. Each one of us is attracted to or compelled by him in some way or another. We may not share the same Christology (roughly defined as how human or divine or both one sees him), but we share him. The tacks are our commitment - our nailing our colours to the mast (the cross?).

The strong, wide bands that make the weft are those individuals who are our stalwarts: people who participate in St Columba's life week after week, some elders, some not. They are the ones we count on to hold us together. Some have been here for decades, some for years, some for less, but each contributes their

unique gifts consistently in ways that build up the community and extend our reach beyond ourselves.

The colourful warp bands and ribbons that make the weaving are the rest of us. It is not that we are uncommitted, it is just that perhaps our life circumstances or our other commitments keep us away as much as we are present or limit our contributions. Oxford being a stopping place for many, we see more movement in and out than other church communities. What we know is that each person who comes to us, whether they are just passing through for a few months or years or whether they are here for the long run, each person is a gift from God, valued and cherished simply for who they are. Each contributes to the beauty, the faithfulness and the usefulness of St Columba's.

The weaving in and out of bands and ribbons is our face to face encounter: conversations before worship or over coffee, caring phone calls and visits, committee and church meetings, and interchanges in groups small and large. Jesus holds us together so that we can meet and learn to love one another. Our faith is decidedly corporate: love of God goes hand in hand with love of neighbour as self.

***'...each person is a gift from God, valued and cherished simply for who they are.'***

Preacher Tom Long once said: *'A congregation is the place where a person goes in order to be with people he or she may not want to be with under other circumstances'*. Odd definition, but apposite to the diversity which is held together by the love of Jesus. Anthony B. Robinson suggests that *'oneness'* isn't as much about us as it is about God. We work and worship together not because it was our bright idea, but because in God's strange wisdom God has chosen to put us together and make use of us. ...God puts me with people I would not have chosen for myself and who wouldn't have chosen me. ... In the process, I learn things and grow. I learn about my blind spots. Sometimes I learn

to love people I don't like. Sometimes we share in a common sense of hope and purpose despite our rough edges.

The weaving propped up against my study wall, product and symbol of our life together, is God's gift and grace as much as our intention and effort. It is good to remember that. If and when community life gets a little harrowing, when we are disappointed or frustrated, it is good to remember that it is not just our feeble efforts that hold us together and nurture us towards holiness. God is powerfully if imperceptibly at work within us for the good in the mystery of the weft, the warp and the weaving.

Thanks be to God,

*Carla*

## NEWS OF ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS

### **Finance & Property Committee**

The heating project is starting to come to fruition. The tender has been completed, a contractor has been appointed, and the work should begin in August. Even just over a week ago this was not looking likely, especially following the first price offers that arrived. These had us scratching our heads somewhat! However, Chris Reading (our heating consultant) and the Committee evaluated the proposals in great detail and, after a long meeting that almost went into the night, a suitable solution was found. This has now come within the value authorised by the church meeting, although the extra 10% will need to be used... which leaves us with more money to raise. So back to work...

On the subject of fund-raising, the Fund-raising Group has struggled to take flight and so we are now looking for a new solution going forward. Fund-raising needs to be part of our culture to help avoid financial situations like that experienced 18 months ago. Therefore, we ask that anyone with fund-raising

ideas should pose the ideas to the Committee and/or the Treasurers.

The Committee is also in need of new members. Now, I am sure the subject of finance and property does not sound the most exciting prospect (!). However, this is an essential part of church operations to allow St Columba's to carry out its Christian mission. The commitment is approximately 2 hours per month for meetings and you can even give it a try before you commit! If you are willing to give this a go then please contact me.

**Tim Llewelyn**

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## **FirstSunday**

FirstSunday finished the first part of the Living the Questions (LTQ) series in July with 'Out into the World'. In August we have a barbeque at the Manse and, in February, we have a film night. We are planning a new series to start in the autumn called 'Soul Work', when we'll be examining various aspects of our spiritual and relational lives.

We had hoped to be able to have an inter-faith evening in May but this is requiring more planning than we had at first anticipated. We are, however, beginning to establish inter-faith contacts and this is something that we want to return to.

We were pleased to be able to participate in Oxford Pride in June with the film 'Prayers for Bobby'. There were 8 new people and there



was some good discussion afterwards. Both Carla and husband David were able to join us for the parade and on the stall and there were some very good conversations with people at the event. In particular, there was quite a lot of interest in Symon Hill's

Pilgrimage of Repentance for Homophobia and the St Columba's event on 26<sup>th</sup> June.

Please pray for us as we prepare our new programme over the summer and as we seek to discern our future direction.

**David Townsend**

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## **Living The Questions**

Over the last year a group of people drawn from St Columba's and beyond have gathered on Sunday evenings in term to share a meal and explore the bible, faith & spirituality together using 'Living the Questions'.

We've talked about the bible, Jesus, Paul, evil & suffering, resurrection, social justice, prayer, the myth of redemptive violence, compassion, embracing mystery and more.

The DVDs have allowed us to hear thought provoking perspectives from leading Christian thinkers including Marcus Borg, John Dominic Crossan, Walter Bruggeman, Matthew Fox and John Shelby Spong as well as pastors and church leaders including Helen Prejean, John Bell, the UCC's Ron Buford and one of our favourites, Yvette Flunder.

It's been an interesting journey. There have been new ideas about God and faith and new ways of understanding our experiences. We've had a lot of time to consider and discuss them and to discover that we don't always agree with each other or the speakers on screen.

There will be a new series of discussions starting this autumn. We're still considering programmes we could follow, so if there's something you would like to explore let Carla know.

**Andy Smith**

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## Mission Group

The Living the Questions series has come to an end and we are reviewing what should follow for the autumn.

Over the weekend of 25/26<sup>th</sup> June, we hosted Symon Hill on his Pilgrimage of Repentance for homophobia. Symon joined us at the Garden Party on the Saturday and was surprised to discover that his girlfriend, Nicola, had come to Oxford so that she could be with him over the weekend. Symon spoke briefly during the service on the Sunday morning and then more fully at an after lunch event, when he explained the reasons for his pilgrimage and answered a number of questions.

Several people have had to drop out of the Mission Group recently and we are looking to recruit a few more people over the next few months. If you have ideas about the mission of St Columba's, we'd love to hear from you.

**David Townsend**

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## Cumnor URC



Our final Fourth Friday event of the 2010/2011 season was on 24<sup>th</sup> June when an audience of more than forty people heard our Minister Carla engage in a conversation with Philip Pullman. It was fascinating and challenging evening in which Philip

Pullman demonstrated the breadth of his biblical knowledge and the depth of his thinking on religious and ethical issues. Fourth Friday: Supper, Speaker and Discussion, will resume on 23<sup>rd</sup> September.

We have made two recent purchases of furniture for the Sanctuary that contributes to the completion of our refurbishment. A bookcase on wheels for hymn books and bibles, handmade in solid oak, is the gift of one of our friends in the Cumnor community. A new wall mounted rack for magazines and journals complements this.

Through July 10<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> Sunday afternoons we shall be serving Cream Teas between 3:00pm and 5:00pm. Do come and join us if you can; we'd love to see friends from St Columba's for this popular social occasion which brings together people from a variety of churches and from the wider community.



The development of our Quiet Space/Prayer Garden is well advanced with the 'hard-landscape' complete and planting well underway. We shall have an official open afternoon on 13<sup>th</sup> August between 3:00pm and 5:00pm with a brief act of dedication at around 3:30pm; do join us if you can.

Cumnor Church Barbecue will be on 20<sup>th</sup> August, starting at 6:00pm. If you would like to come then call Glenda on 01865-883-515. We are generally joined by friends from Marsden but attendance from St Columba's has been a bit thin in recent years so it would be good to see a few friends from our sister church.

On 3<sup>rd</sup> September we have a concert with the title 'A Musical Rendezvous' Featuring Harmony InSpires, Anna Lockett, Seven in a Bar, and Hayley Spong. The concert starts at 7:30pm, tickets are £8 for adults, £5 for children and available from Richard Dewar on 01865-864-415.

And finally... we look forward to welcoming our St Columba's friends to the joint Harvest Festival Service and Harvest Lunch at Cumnor on 25<sup>th</sup> September.

**Nigel Appleton**

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## **Christian Aid Week**

Our Church collection this year, together with the efforts of members who participated in the house to house collections, raised a total of £652. Although this figure is down on last year, to quote the Oxford Christian Aid Committee Treasurer: *'Fantastic result from St Columba's, despite the current climate'*.

Many thanks to all who donated, and a special thanks to our dear friends Shelagh, Gordon and Adrian who undertook street collections and also to Ian Kennedy who joined the 'tin-shaking' initiative at Oxford Station.

Please keep Christian Aid in your prayers throughout the year, as natural and man-made disasters continue to make demands on their staff and resources.

**Manon Hahn**

## **UPCOMING EVENTS**

### **A Quiet Place**

At Cumnor URC we've been following up a vision that we could share the ground around our building by transforming the side plot adjacent to the church into an area for quiet reflection and prayer. After some hard work clearing the ground, and levelling it off for laying weed-resistant fabric, we've now got a paved pathway winding between areas of coloured stones. Two of the old pews have been re-varnished as seats and we have added a

spiral of circular paving stones which leads to a central focal point with a small piece of sculpture. We're in the process of putting in the plants in preparation for our Open Day on Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> August between 2:00 and 5:00pm which we hope you will share with us.

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## **A Musical Rendezvous**

Cumnor URC is very pleased to announce that they will be presenting their very first musical concert on Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> September in the church.

As numbers are restricted we wish to give early advice to friends who have kindly supported our fundraising in the past. It should prove to be a very enjoyable evening with local talent coming together to entertain us in our recently refurbished premises.



The programme will be fronted by a section of a ladies' a capella group called Harmony InSpires who used to practice in our hall before their success caused them to outgrow our premises.

Also in the programme will be a small group of gentlemen calling themselves 7 in a Bar who will also provide harmonies with a smile in true barbershop style.

Then we are delighted to have Anna Lockett, a classically trained Harpist, who will perform and enchant us with a selection of beautiful melodies.

And finally, a young lady called Hayley Spong whose wonderful singing voice is sure to provide the wow! factor of the evening. Accompanied by her Aunt, who is an accomplished pianist, they go under the name of Keeley Connection derived from the family name Keeley.

The concert starts at 7:30pm and tickets are priced at £8 for adults and £5 for children under sixteen. Tickets and further details can be obtained from Richard Dewar on 01865 864415 or [richardjdewar@supanet.com](mailto:richardjdewar@supanet.com).

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## **Ride and Stride**

If you enjoy a walk or cycle in either city or county, why not help St Columba's at the same time?

Alternatively, could you spend an hour or two welcoming people to the church?

As the Historic Churches Trust again helped us when we appealed for a donation (and the constructive response was a morale booster when the idea of raising so much for the heating was truly daunting), it would be especially nice to support them again this year on Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> September.

We benefit too. Any money raised by sponsorship is shared with the church.

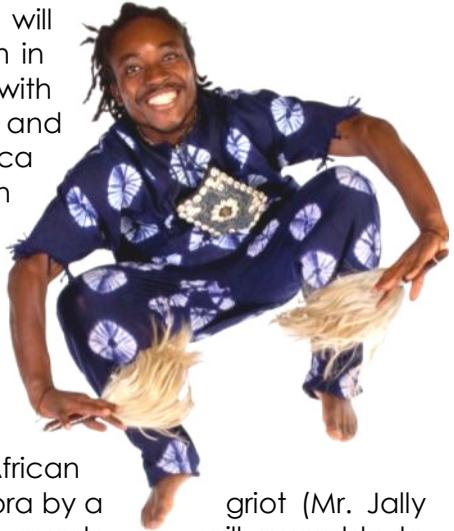
Although we have never quite managed to attract 100 visitors, duty in the vestibule can be very rewarding. Each year some arrive who 'had no idea there is a church here'. Some have very personal reasons – memories of a special occasion, or sometimes a wish to revisit a particular War Memorial. Others remember we offer a little basic hospitality!

Full details and sponsorship forms will later be available from Sue Pearce or Lettice Bowen.

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## One World Communion Sunday and Africa Day

On Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> September we will celebrate One World Communion in the morning at St Columba's with friends from area URC churches, and in the afternoon we will host Africa Day: a celebration of African culture and development. There will be an African lunch served immediately after worship (12:15pm-ish), at which the day will be introduced by Francis Boua. Lunch will be followed by two opportunities to participate in workshops in African drumming, African dancing and the playing of the Kora by a griot (Mr. Jally Suso). At 3:30 pm, the gathered guests will assemble to hear two speakers (TBA) on African development, topped by a finale. African crafts will be available for purchase. Tickets are £15 per person, £30 for families, with the proceeds going to benefit Hope and Faith School. You can reserve your ticket by emailing Jill Fresen ([jill.fresen@gmail.com](mailto:jill.fresen@gmail.com)) or you can purchase one or several at the little sewing shop around the corner on Blue Boar St come August.



griot (Mr. Jally Suso). At 3:30 pm, the gathered guests will assemble to hear two speakers (TBA) on African development, topped by a finale. African crafts will be available for purchase. Tickets are £15 per person, £30 for families, with the proceeds going to benefit Hope and Faith School. You can reserve your ticket by emailing Jill Fresen ([jill.fresen@gmail.com](mailto:jill.fresen@gmail.com)) or you can purchase one or several at the little sewing shop around the corner on Blue Boar St come August.

Africa Day is the brainchild of Mr. Francis Boua, who heads the cleaning company that cleans St Columba's and who grew up in Cote d'Ivoire and Paris. Unable to get an education for lack of funds in Africa, he immigrated with his parents to France as a young child. He learned French and made his way through school and university, qualifying in Business Studies. On his arrival in Oxford, he was struck by the low level of awareness about Africa here, so he organised an Africa Week. One day he noticed the Hope and Faith brochure on our vestibule table and resolved to speak with us about raising funds for the school. He has strong convictions about the importance of education in Africa and wants to do all he can to help the situation. Malcolm

Townsend, champion of Hope and Faith School at Cumnor URC joined the planning group of Jill Fresen, our minister and Francis.

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## **Harvest Sunday**

We'll be joining our friends at Cumnor URC for a joint Harvest Festival worship and lunch on Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> September. This will be an opportunity to experience harvest in the gentle environs of an almost rural village and a chance to see 'A Quiet Place' – the prayer garden that the church has created to share with any and all who pass by.

Worship will begin at Cumnor at 10:30am – there will be no worship service at St Columba's that day. Non-perishable items for the Community Emergency Food Bank and Asylum Welcome will be welcome on the day. For the Harvest Lunch, as we are the incomers we are responsible for providing puddings; Cumnor folk will provide the main meal. Witty, silly or moving contributions of verbiage will also be gratefully welcomed. After lunch, the Apple Press will be operational on the patio. Bring your apples, a paring knife and bottles to collect your apple juice. The Apple Press will also be on hand after the 1<sup>st</sup> October Quiet morning.

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## **Summertown Bible Triptych comes to St Columba's**

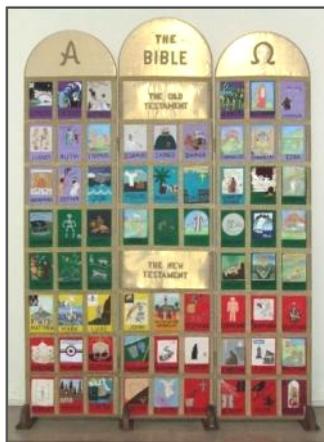
Around about 18<sup>th</sup> October, the Summertown Bible triptych will come to St Columba's for a two week visit before moving to Cumnor URC.

The Story of the Triptych (taken from [www.summertownurg.org](http://www.summertownurg.org) )

*In the first year of the URC three-year 'Vision4Life' programme Summertown URC's emphasis was on the Bible. As part of this programme a Bible wall-hanging, now in the form of a Triptych, was proposed on which each of the 66 books of the Bible would be portrayed, each on an A5 piece of coloured felt. Various colours are used to differentiate the specific sections of the Bible*

canon (Law, History, Poetry, Prophets, Gospels, Acts, Letters, Revelation).

People working on a given book were free to choose the particular theme they wished to illustrate and the means they wished to employ – appliqué, collage, embroidery or other in any combination they wished. The project was supported by members of all four of the Summertown Partnership churches as well as St Aloysius Roman Catholic Church, St Aldates Anglican Church and Cowley Road Methodist Church.



All of the panels have been photographed and the photographs will be assembled in an album with explanatory text which will accompany the Triptych wherever it is displayed. The panels have been mounted onto the three big sections of the Triptych, the work having been undertaken at All Saints Convent in Cowley under the guidance of Suellen Pedley and her fellow Cathedral embroiderers to whom very grateful acknowledgment is made.

The triptych's visit coincides with our celebration of the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of the Authorised (King James) Version of the Bible, during which we will be addressed by church historian the Revd Dr Judith Maltby of Corpus Christi College in worship on Reformation Day, Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> October.

## INFORMATION

### Lilies of the Field

I know I speak for everyone in repeating the thanks already expressed to Sheila Baker for the time and energy she has given over such a long time to ensure our church is always graced with

beautiful flowers. It has not always been an easy task. Too many times gaps in the rota have seen Sheila stepping in to prevent the communion table or flower stand remaining bare for our Sunday service.

I am guilty myself and have been wondering why I have always assumed it was somebody else's job and never signed my name on the rota. The answer is partly a lack of confidence in my ability to do it well enough, remembering rather stressful Saturday afternoons in my childhood when it was my mother's turn at Epsom, as expectations were high. And I suspect I am not alone.

But while we all love appreciating the artistry of our most skilful arrangers, there is Biblical backing to reassure the more diffident that lilies of the field can do very well by themselves without needing too much help from us: lovely flowers, from florist or garden, placed simply in a vase will be more than sufficient. So please consider signing your name on the flower rota in the hall, which Rosemary and I will now be overseeing, or speak to one of us to find out more.

***Pippa Smith***

## **NEWS ABOUT PEOPLE**

### **Farewell**

It is with great sadness but also tremendous pride that we are saying goodbye to Ruth Wilson and her daughter Megan as they continue their journey through life in Cambridge.

They first arrived at St Columba's in late 2002 when Megan was a toddler and soon became immersed in church life. Megan was baptized in July 2003 and has been an important member of the Junior Church. Ruth found work in Oxford Diocese and is now Senior Secretary in the Department of Mission.

She also registered for a course at the Open University. Four years later she graduated at a wonderful ceremony in the Barbican with a degree in Social Sciences with Social Policy. On top of all this, she volunteered to run the Church Newsletter for a number of years and did so most successfully. Then she was ordained as an elder carrying out her pastoral duties in a most caring way. Two years ago she became joint Church Secretary.

At about the same time she volunteered for the training course to become a Street Pastor and has been an active volunteer late on weekend nights in the centre of Oxford.

Supporting her in all her many efforts has been her strong faith and her willingness to serve others. Life has not been easy as a single parent with the need to make a living. Many would have been overwhelmed by these responsibilities. But Ruth has not only managed to make a success both of parenting and of earning her keep; she gained her degree the hard way; she has offered her time helping others – in church administration, eldership and more recently as a Street Pastor.

Now there is a new challenge. Some time ago, Ruth felt the call to the ministry. With the support of our minister, Carla, the Elders and congregation she has applied successfully to Anglia Ruskin University (Cambridge Theological Federation) for a place to study for a BA in Christian Theology for the next 3 years. Megan will start at her new secondary school in September and a student house has been found. We wish them both all the blessings, thanks and best wishes from the congregation at St. Columba's. We look forward to welcoming them back to their family here whenever they can come.

**Ros Lacey**

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## **Good News**

Despite the information in the previous newsletter, Lucas Merrill Brown will now be returning to Oxford for another year following a

summer break in the USA. We look forward to having him back with us.

## THOUGHTS AND OPINIONS

### A Fond Farewell

Dear Saint Columba's friends,

I cannot believe it has already been a month since I left you all. I have officially resettled in Saint Paul, Minnesota and have already completed a summer course! I continue to regard my time among you all with high esteem and great nostalgia. One of the most important lessons I have learned while in seminary is that we are hardly ever able to process in real time the experiences that have the most impact on our formation. Nearly every day I am overjoyed to discover new ways in which Saint Columba's continues to inform who I am, how I relate to others, and how I understand and practice ministry. Though I was only among you a mere five months, your gracious hospitality and welcoming spirit deeply affirmed my sense of call and renewed my hope in the institutional church. When friends and family in Minnesota ask how my time in Oxford was, I tell them that I had the luxury of spending time in what is the best church possible for me. 'Because Saint Columba's exists,' I tell them, 'I cannot wait to be a pastor.'

***'...your gracious hospitality and welcoming spirit deeply affirmed my sense of call and renewed my hope in the institutional church.'***

I am also happy to report that I finally got the dog for which I have been longing for years. She is a three and a half year old English Springer Spaniel named Sophie, and she is the biggest

bundle of co-dependent love ever. We entirely affirm the adage that a dog often resembles her owner. Our hair color and general demeanor could not be better matched. Alright, enough about the dog already.

I hope that we are able to stay in touch in whatever capacity possible. I simply cannot emphasize enough the impact that you all have had on my spiritual and professional formation. I will forever cherish my time among you.

With warmest regards.

**Kari Aanestad**

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## **Another Fond Farewell**

When I arrived in Oxford three years ago I was expecting a challenge. However, I had no idea how much of a challenge an Oxford Mathematics degree was going to be. There was the academic challenge, but also the challenge of living away from home, making new friends and coping with the lack of sleep that ensues when you get involved in societies on top of the amount of work you are required to do. As someone recently summed up Oxford to me, 'there's never a dull moment but there's also never a free one.'

St Columba's became a sanctuary to me. A respite from problem sheet struggles, lectures and tutorials. A place to be a part of a family and to talk to people from outside the university. A place where academic achievement did not matter because love was the most important thing.

St Columba's allowed me to grow spiritually and gave me a chance to be involved in a church as myself rather than as a child. My church involvement has grown phenomenally over three years. In addition to prayer breakfasts and other student activities and playing my trumpet at St Columba's, I have become more involved in national URC work and took over as FURY Moderator last January. This work has allowed me to

experience God in new ways through meeting people, visiting churches and experiencing different styles of worship.

Standing for Moderator was the first thing in my life that I had a sudden calling to do. It was not something I planned to do alongside Oxford finals and many people (myself included) could not see how I was going to manage it. Yet I was firmly told to do it. And I managed it, not least due to the support I received from St Columba's. It taught me that all things are possible when you put your trust and faith in God.

***'I thank you from the bottom of my heart for the welcome, hospitality, love and friendship...'***

I owe so much to St Columba's. I thank you from the bottom of my heart for the welcome, hospitality, love and friendship you have extended over the past three years. St Columba's is the most welcoming church I have ever encountered and it holds a special place in my heart. I give thanks to God that I have been able to call it home.

May God continue to bless each one of you as you continue your work and ministry together.

***Victoria Paulding***

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## **Celebration of 20 years of Rejoice and Sing**

In some ways it seems difficult to believe, but 2011 marks the 20<sup>th</sup> year since Rejoice and Sing was published. On 2<sup>nd</sup> October our service will be celebrating this anniversary, and we will be welcoming Rev. Brenda Stephenson to take part in leading worship. Brenda was a member of the editorial committee alongside our former Minister Caryl Micklem, our friends Colin Thompson and Carolyn Brock and others, and contributed a number of tunes and musical arrangements to the new book,

including Acceptance (to accompany Fred Kaan's hymn 'Help us accept each other'). She is now in pastoral charge in Dorset.

Rejoice and Sing is so much part of our life now that it feels strange to remember how refreshing it was when it came. The church I grew up in was using Congregational Praise (much of the work for which was done before the Second World War), and an uneasy mixture of Mission Praise and scraps of paper. Many of the tunes in Congregational Praise were deemed 'unsingable' by a fairly large, musical congregation, so the announcement that the next hymn would be sung to Truro was a regular feature of worship!

Rejoice and Sing brought us new music from such diverse sources as Taize, the Iona Community, Graham Kendrick, and our own URC hymn writers such as Alan Gaunt, Brian Wren, Colin Thompson and Fred Kaan - and attempted a real synthesis of the different Presbyterian, Congregationalist and Churches of Christ traditions. For my part, I think it serves us admirably in many ways - my years of working on discrimination law has reinforced for me the importance of non-sexist language, for example - but I am glad that Carla and our other worship leaders branch out into Common Ground and other sources to ensure that the right music is chosen to help our worship, not least to find music suitable for the youngest members of our congregation.

A small group will be meeting to plan the service on 2<sup>nd</sup> October. If you would like to suggest material or themes to be included in the service, please do let me know. I suspect many of us will have memories of times when the words of a hymn have suddenly cast a new light on the theme of a service, or have seemed to express a thought we have been brewing for a while - or hymns that have been particularly significant for us at particular times of our lives. I hope that our service on 2<sup>nd</sup> October can be a real celebration of the part that music and hymnody play in our worship, and look forward to a happy event.

**Gordon Woods**

## **King James Bible: Luke, Chapter 2: Verses 29 -35**

*'Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace...'*

For me there is no finer tribute to the King James Version than this verse from Luke.

To put it into context, Mary and Joseph, having taken Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem to make the prescribed sacrifices for a firstborn child, encounter Simeon. When Simeon sees the child, he took him into his arms and blessed God and said:

*'29 Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word:*

*30 For mine eyes have seen thy salvation,*

*31 Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people;*

*32 A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.*

*33 And Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of him.*

*34 And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against;*

*35 (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.'*

The climax of this passage is in verse 29 onwards, a passage sometimes referred to in Catholic masses and choral music by its Latin translation, the Nunc dimittis:

*'Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace...'*

In one sense, it is the testament of a man who is now ready for death, but there is so much more than this. Here is a man who has been told by the Holy Ghost that he would see the Christ, so he had been waiting, we know not how long. On recognizing Jesus, and what his coming will mean for his family, for Israel, and for the whole world, this is the culmination of his life, a fulfilment of everything that he believes in, and what follows is an outpouring

from his heart. What he says is not in the fashion of a man with a death sentence hanging over him: quite the contrary, it is an outcry of joy.

For me, in this passage from the King James Version, it is not only what is written but also how it is written. In recent years I have been reading some of the novels of Dickens and Scott, and I have as a result acquired a taste for the English language at its finest. And there is no finer than that of the King James Version. Yes, I know that it is full of what are regarded today as archaisms: such as 'lettest' 'thou' and 'thy'. But these words, and the way in which they are used, render so much more meaning to the passage. Here I get onto one of my hobby horses: these days I find so much of 'modern English' trite and empty, without meaning, and this applies to certain (but not all) modern translations of the Bible. Even the New King James Version '*Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace...*', I feel loses something. There is a magic in the King James Version found nowhere else.

**Andrew Baker**

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### **King James Bible: John, Chapter 17: Verses 20 & 21**

*'...That they may all be one ... That the world may believe...'*

We grew up quickly in the wartime years. At 16, I was reading regularly - from the King James Bible - at Evensong. At the same age, we had the freedom to set up and run our own church youth group. It was then that I began to notice that there were six separate church buildings within a quarter mile radius, their doors seldom open and their congregations never meeting with each other.

Although I would not have expressed it in those terms, the question beginning to form in my mind was 'how could a church that was so divided spread a gospel of reconciliation?' I sent out invitations to my contemporaries at the other churches for joint

meetings. Little came from that initiative but later, the Presbyterians, under the guidance of a new young Minister, took up the challenge which led to my finding a lifetime soul mate and, so that we might worship together, changing my church allegiance.

The words in Jesus' prayer for his disciples, both then and to come, are so beautifully simple but that early experience, reinforced so many times since, has taught me how difficult it is for those weighed down by history to determine, let alone put into practice, the meaning of those words for Christians in a divided Church.

Much has, of course, improved in the way that we regard each other and work together. While local partnerships have led to a form of 'unity by patchwork', separate national institutions still separate. We now have challenges that seem more pressing with falling membership, divisions within the denominations and the steady secularisation of society. Meanwhile, we are learning to work with all people of good will and to seek what common ground there is with those of other faiths.

The shape, though not the purpose, of the Church may very well change from the rather rigid institution to which we have become, perhaps, too used.

And, through it all, the prayer of Jesus remains that we might all be one that the world might believe...

**Norman Pooler**

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### **King James Bible: Thessalonians, Chapter 5: Verse 21**

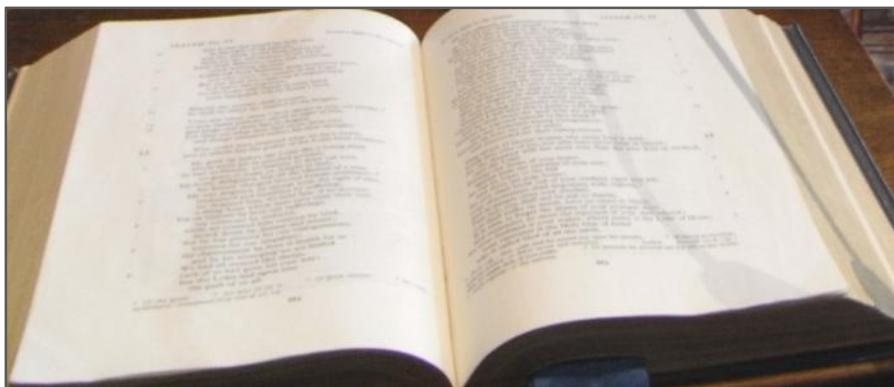
My favourite text from the King James Bible is found in 1 Thessalonians 5, 21; '*Hold fast that which is good*'. It's not even a whole verse, and I choose it simply because it was the text of the bookmark my parents put in the bible they gave me when I was nineteen and about to leave home for some months. It struck me

at the time as pretty good advice. It should really of course be judged on its context; St Paul is actually advising the Thessalonians to put what the 'prophets' say to the test (*'prove all things'*) and discard what doesn't seem right. But if for 'prophets' we read, for example, 'politicians', his advice can hardly be faulted.

But it is the all-embracing six-word text which I like, and not only because it shows the beautiful economy of expression of the king's translators (compare it with the rendering of a modern translation). It isn't a mere injunction to be 'good', at which we should certainly fail even if we aim for the doubtful privilege of joining the 'unco guid' (the Pharisees, if you prefer); it's more like an anchor for everyone for all seasons. I imagine that few people would take exception to it, and most of us would strongly agree with it. But, beyond the commandments of scripture, our view of what exactly is meant by 'good' is very much a matter for each individual: even within the Church what seems good to some can seem quite the opposite to others – hardly surprising, since philosophers have been arguing about it these two-and-a-half millennia at least.

So those six words, it seems to me, are not only an unfailing guide, but also an invitation to put our own thinking to the test.

***Alastair Howatson***



### **Children and Families at St Columba's**

As the University and school years come to a close we are often saying 'farewell' to adults and children. This summer is no exception, with Megan Wilson going with Ruth her mother to start a new phase of life in Cambridge and Yuri and Kao Motomura returning to Japan when their father completes his year of study in Oxford. The younger Junior Church group will miss them all: the liveliness of their thinking; their creativity; their thoughtful making of connections and most of all the way they are developing in faith as Christians. We wish them every blessing as they go and pray that they will continue to keep in touch as their lives develop.

Undoubtedly we will be joined by other families and we will gladly welcome them to our community. Now our existing families are getting ready to lead worship on Children's Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> September. On that day we have a plan to focus on the Millennium Development Goals for children. Please pray for those who are preparing for the service in the early days of September and then come to take part yourself on 11<sup>th</sup> September.

As part of their regular review of the life and ministry of St Columba's the Elders have recently considered the place of children and families, thinking particularly how children could be more involved. One outcome was to set up a Task Group to focus on the needs of children and families and Rebecca Bullard, Brian McNab and Barbara Micklem are the members. The group is being asked to take forward the work towards the 'Child-Friendly Church' Award. They will also be thinking about ways to link families with other members of our church community; how St Columba's can better support parents with child-care for church meetings and how we might encourage greater participation by adults in the Christian education of children and young people.

**Rosemary Knagg**

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## A Financial Update...

### Overview

Similarly to the last report, we shall split off the Heating Fund...

#### *Heating Fund:*

	April - July 2011	Year To Date
<b>Total Income</b>	£5,573	£37,799
<b>Expenditure</b>	£207	£207
<b>Balance</b>	£5,366	£37,592
<b>Trend</b>	+16.7%	- (1 <sup>st</sup> Jan = 0)

#### *Non-Heating Fund:*

	April - July 2011	Year To Date
<b>Total Income</b>	£21,282	£48,370
<b>Expenditure</b>	£24,952	£45,279
<b>Balance</b>	-£3,670	£51,930
<b>Trend</b>	-6.6%	+6.3%

Since the report in the previous Newsletter, there has continued to be a net increase in the size of the Heating Fund, albeit, unsurprisingly not at the dramatic rate prevalent following the initial decision. Disappointingly, outside of Heating Fund, the church has made a net deficit; it is still showing a surplus on the year, but the deficit of the past three months has served to halve this. There is, however, a special reason for the deficit, which will be explained below.

### Income

As stated in the previous section, donations to the Heating Fund are now not at the spectacularly high levels of the first few months of the year, but have still been at a significant level. It should be noted that taking the fund balance together with the

various grants promised (in particular, from Synod), we now have enough money to complete the heating project.

As per usual, the majority of our income comes from giving, particularly by standing order, and by the hiring out of the premises. Note the amount coming from tax reclaimed through Gift Aid: I would urge those members of the congregation who have not already made a Gift Aid Declaration to do so.

*Top 5 areas of income:*

1	Giving by Standing Order	£11,115
2	Hirings	£5,316
3	Donations to Heating Fund	£5,011
4	Gift Aided Collections	£1,766
5	Gift Aid Tax Reclaimed	£1,340

Expenditure

Out of the main areas of expenditure, Ministry & Mission and the administrator's salary are more or less fixed features. The fact that special collections features as an item of expenditure but not income is due to the fact that following the collection taken for it some weeks earlier, a sum for this amount was sent to Commitment for Life. It is actually this single item which caused the non-Heating Fund part of the project to show a deficit. The greater part of the building maintenance item is due to a comprehensive electrical inspection, and the work resulting from it. As has been well documented, the largest part of the utility item is due to the electricity bills, which ought to be remedied in the very near future!

*Top 5 areas of expenditure:*

1	URC – Ministry & Mission	£8,890
2	Special Collections Payments	£3,930
3	Administrator & Expenses	£3,249
4	Building Maintenance	£2,442
5	Utilities	£1,874

### Current Balance & Trend

Despite the deficit in the non-Heating Fund budget during this period, due to the Commitment for Life payment, the current balance is still relatively healthy. Let it, nonetheless, remain as a warning that the church needs to stay vigilant both in maintaining levels of income and also in keeping a close watch on expenditure.

### Substantial Anticipated Expenditure

We are sure that you don't need us to tell you that the biggest single item of expenditure forthcoming is that for the impending installation of the new heating system, the culmination of the past 2.5 years of agonising, decision-making, fund-raising & planning. The next couple of months are almost certainly not going to be easy, in terms of worshipping and working around the installation, but nonetheless it is an exciting time to be a member of St Columba's, for which I personally thank God. Afterwards, it will be time to make more plans for the mission of the church.

***Andrew Baker and David North***

#### ***A reminder of how YOU can help...***

- Donating money;
- UK taxpayers claiming Gift Aid on donations;
- Donating your time;
- Fundraising.

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### **Wessex Synod Strategy on the Delivery of Ministry & Leadership: Meeting of Oxford Area Churches on 21<sup>st</sup> June 2011**

At the Church Meeting on 10<sup>th</sup> April St Columba's reflected on the discussion document produced by a Wessex Synod working group to consider the challenge to the URC of how ministry and leadership are to be achieved in the future. We face declining numbers of members and even fewer ministers. Following that meeting our Minister Carla organised a meeting of the Elders of

the United Reformed Churches in the Oxford area (NetWURC). That meeting took place at Wheatley on 21<sup>st</sup> June.

Since the strategy document took the concept of a Team Pastorate as the way of ensuring that churches have ministry and leadership Cliff Bembridge, who ministers in Southampton, was invited to make a short presentation to the meeting. Cliff's experience has been that in each of the churches where he has ministered the work has developed in such a way that he has become part of a team pastorate within a team of churches. His conviction is that more is accomplished through working together, even though the development of a group approach takes energy in itself. Although, as the conversation at St Columba's acknowledged, we are faced with a shortage of ministers in relation to the number of churches that does not have to mean that a single minister has to be trying to stretch him or herself around more and more churches. In Cliff's current pastorate there are four churches learning to work together served by a team of two stipendiary ministers, a Church Related Community Worker, one locally accredited and four nationally accredited lay preachers. As he writes in the article he left with us the churches have moved from 'the natural "what is in it for us?" to the more adventurous "what can we do together that we could never do on our own?"'

After hearing something about what might be possible with a new way of working the meeting took time to discuss two questions: 'Can we imagine team ministry working in our area?' And, 'what would it take?' All the groups reported that they could envisage such a prospect and had ideas about what that might involve. There was a keen sense of realism.

Before we went our separate ways Carla took the opportunity to enquire whether people would warm to exploring further the idea of group ministry in our area. Interestingly the vast majority of those present indicated that they would. This response has been communicated to the Area Pastoral Committee so that they might help to take the work forward. Suggestions were made for questions to be asked at the next stage of deliberation, that

churches might ask themselves 'What do we have to offer?' and 'What do we wish to receive?'

The Synod working group will be receiving responses to their paper from individuals, churches and groups such as NetWURC during the summer. When the group meets again in the autumn (and I shall be there) we should have a picture of how ready churches are to consider new ways to further God's mission through God's people. If members of St Columba's have had additional reflections about the strategy document since our Church Meeting I will be glad to hear them.

***Rosemary Knagg***

#### **EDITOR'S COMMENTS**

So it looks like the summer weather might have come and gone in the spring... but I hope for all those taking holiday in the UK that the warm weather will be back during August and September. I also hope that everyone taking a break this summer will have a very relaxing time, whatever the weather.

Thanks go to all of you who have contributed to this and previous newsletters. Without your articles there would not be the variety that makes our church newsletter what it is.

Have a great few summer months... and hopefully the church will have a new heating system installed by the time of the next issue.

***Tim***

### **Newsletter Deadline...**

All contributions for the next issue of the newsletter should be sent to Tim Llewelyn (Editor) by Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> September 2011 to the following Email address: [llewelyn\\_fg@hotmail.com](mailto:llewelyn_fg@hotmail.com) .

The next issue will cover from late September to late November.

News items: 400 words (maximum); discussion articles: 600 (maximum).

## **DATES FOR YOUR DIARY**

### **Events**

#### *July*

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31<sup>st</sup> *Cream Tea.* Cumnor URC. 3:00pm.

#### *August*

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7<sup>th</sup> *FirstSunday.* Church. 7:15pm.

13<sup>th</sup> *Prayer Garden Open Afternoon.* Cumnor URC. 2pm.

20<sup>th</sup> *Barbeque.* Cumnor URC. 6:00pm.

#### *September*

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3<sup>rd</sup> *A Musical Rendezvous.* Cumnor URC. 7:30pm.

4<sup>th</sup> *FirstSunday.* Church. 7:15pm.

10<sup>th</sup> *Ride & Stride.* Oxford. TBA.

11<sup>th</sup> *Children's Sunday.* Church. 10:45am.

18<sup>th</sup> *One World Communion Sunday and Africa Day.* Church.  
12:15pm.

23<sup>rd</sup> *Fourth Friday.* Cumnor URC. 7:15pm.

25<sup>th</sup> *Harvest Festival & Lunch.* Cumnor URC. 10:30am.

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## **Meetings**

### *August*

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11<sup>th</sup> *Finance & Property Committee.* Church. 7:30pm.

21<sup>st</sup> *Church Meeting.* Church. 7:45pm.

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### *September*

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7<sup>th</sup> *Finance & Property Committee.* Church. 7:30pm.

8<sup>th</sup> *Elders' Meeting.* Church. After worship.

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## LECTIONARY

### July

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31<sup>st</sup> Genesis 32:22-31; Psalm 17:1-7, 15; Romans 9:1-5; Matthew 14:13-21.

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### August

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7<sup>th</sup> Genesis 37:1-4, 12-28; Psalm 105: 1-6, 16-22, 45b; Romans 10:5-15; Matthew 14:22-33.

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14<sup>th</sup> Genesis 45:1-15; Psalm 133; Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32; Matthew 15: (10-20), 21-28.

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21<sup>st</sup> Exodus 1:8-2:10; Psalm 124; Romans 12:1-8; Matthew 16:13-20.

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28<sup>th</sup> Exodus 3:1-15; Psalm 105:1-6, 23-26, 45b; Romans 12:9-21; Matthew 16:21-28.

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### September

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4<sup>th</sup> Exodus 12:1-14; Psalm 149; Romans 13:8-14; Matthew 18:15-20.

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11<sup>th</sup> Exodus 14:19-31; Psalm 114 or Exodus 15:1b-11, 20-21; Romans 14:1-12; Matthew 18:21-35.

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18<sup>th</sup> Exodus 16:2-15; Psalm 105:1-6, 37-45; Philippians 1:21-30; Matthew 20:1-16.

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25<sup>th</sup> Exodus 17:1-7; Psalm 78:1-4, 12-16; Philippians 2:1-13; Matthew 21:23-32.

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## USEFUL CONTACT DETAILS

### Minister

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Revd Carla A. Grosch-Miller      7 Hawkswell Gardens, Oxford, OX2 7EX.  
Tel: 01865 554 358. Email: minister@saintcolumbas.org

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### Church Administrator

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Sue Pearce      Tel: 07880 601 109 Email: administrator@saintcolumbas.org

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### Treasurers

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Andrew Baker & David North      Email: treasurer@saintcolumbas.org

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## St Columba's URC, Oxford

Sunday Worship: 10:45am

***ALL are welcome.***

*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***

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