

St Columba's

United Reformed Church, Oxford

Newsletter



July 2012

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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

In May the Elders spent a Friday evening and Saturday on retreat in the lovely space that is Cumnor URC. (If you've not been to Cumnor since the renovations over the last two years, I highly recommend a visit; and check out the prayer garden on the west side of the church. There are cream teas every Sunday in July, 3:30 - 5:00pm, if you need an excuse.)

We started with Mark's story of the feeding of the 5,000 (Mark 6:30-44), noticing that Jesus says to the disciples 'You give them something to eat'. The disciples gather up what they can find – five loaves and two fish – and give it to Jesus, who blesses, breaks and shares it. Miracle of miracles, all are fed and there are twelve baskets of remnants! Over the course of the next day, we sought to gather up what we could find: examining our context, our mission, our resources and our opportunities.

Here are some of the things we noticed: that we are a gathered congregation (a sign of commitment, we think) with a wide range of ages; that we value both tradition and newness (and don't want to leave people behind when change happens); and that we are a thinking church, open to questioning, inclusive and collaborative. We expressed a desire to be relevant to our city centre, multi-faith, cosmopolitan setting. We are aware of spiritual hunger and also of hostility to organised religion, as we are aware of the economic trials of the times and of the vacuity of materialism. We are challenged to know how to communicate in

this postmodern context that is suspicious of absolute truth claims. We have a sense that being rooted in our faith is essential, but also that we may need to learn new language to communicate the gospel. We sense that the church is perceived, and even experienced, as 'analogue in a digital world'. In any changes we may propose, we are aware of the danger of throwing the baby out with the bath water.

As you can imagine, this conversation was accompanied by a variety of feelings: excitement and anxiety, being daunted and being proud of our heritage and where it has taken us, frustration and confusion, hope and joy.

We contemplated the *missio Dei*, God's purpose among us - - remembering the whole sweep of the Biblical story and focusing on the three gospel encapsulations of Jesus' ministry: Mark 1:14-15 (*the kingdom is at hand; repent and believe!*); Luke 4:16-19 (*The Spirit is upon me...*); and Matthew 28:18-20 (*make disciples of all nations*). We then wrote cinquains (structured five line poems) about mission. Here are a few:

Word
Eternal God-spoken
Inspiring Transforming Renewing
Freedom to fully live
Stories

Missionaries
Uncertain Committed
Learning Reaching Sharing
What is to come
Kingdom

After more conversation over The Christ we share, we asked ourselves what's next. The thoughts filled a number of flip chart papers and included things to which we aspire, including: growing closer and laughing together as a church; moving away from a focus on committees/buildings/resources/infrastructure towards action on mission; rediscovering and sharing our purpose; improving our communication within the church and outwith (*letting our light shine*); seeking to head in the same

direction (*unity in diversity*); nurturing learning and spirituality; revitalising church meetings; encouraging individual mission projects (like Sedhar's lunches and the book group); furthering ecumenical collaboration.

It was a stimulating time and we are still mulling over the things we were thinking about. Inside these pages, you will read the reflections of an Elder or two about their experience of the retreat. Over the coming months, you will hear more from us and we hope too to hear what you might be thinking about as we contemplate our future.

'We have a sense that being rooted in our faith is essential, but also that we may need to learn new language to communicate the gospel.'

At the end of the retreat, we wrote prayers in the traditional ichthys (fish) Christian shape. You'll see some of them posted in the Hall and on the windows of the church. Give them a read. Better yet, consider writing your own. There are blank ichthys A4 papers attached to a notice board in the Hall – give it a go and post it to share with all.

May God guide and bless us as we all pray, laugh, talk, share and hope our way into the future that God has for us.

Gratefully yours,

Carla

NEWS OF ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS

Finance & Property Committee

Well, we are already through the first half of the year and the

Committee is thankful for a reasonably stable period. There have been some challenges – such as the break-in earlier in the year – but it feels like the measures introduced in recent years is paying dividends. We therefore thank everyone who has contributed to this success.

As we look at the second half of the year, we hope to keep up the good progress. There are a few significant pieces of work that are required in the next few years so we are planning for this additional expenditure. Therefore it is important to maintain a good income and keep unnecessary expenditure to a minimum.

Recent attendees of our church services, especially any readers, will have probably noticed some challenges with the audio system. We replaced one microphone – which removed the annoying hiss – only for another to be broken weeks later. This has left us without a main lectern microphone. We are in the process of resolving this so please bear with it in the meantime.

Tim Llewelyn

Cumnor URC



Our services of Fourth Friday meetings for supper, speaker and discussion ended its season with a discussion introduced and led by Carla on the topic of Sex and Spirituality. We are now planning for the new season to begin in the autumn, if you have speakers or topics to suggest please let me have them, we have been

fortunate to welcome a number of friends from St Columba's in this past series.

July is of course the time when we provide Cream Teas and I hope that by the time you read this a number of you will have enjoyed a Cream Tea with us. In August we have our annual barbecue, a social rather than fundraising event, it's on the evening of 18th August from 6:00pm. If you would care to join us please contact Glenda who will be pleased to sell you a ticket.

Nigel Appleton

Christian Aid Week 2012

Our Church Appeal, together with the work of members who took part in the house to house collection, raised a grand total of £1,259.93. This is considerably more than last year, partly as a result of contributions from visitors who were present at our United Service on 13th May. Many thanks to all who donated and a special vote of gratitude to Shelagh, Gordon and Adrian who undertook street collections again this year.

Please keep Christian Aid in your prayers as they continue to answer the needs of those who call on their staff and resources.

Manon Hahn

Oxford Inter-Church Olympic Event

A number of us from St Columba's went along to an inter-church picnic held to celebrate the arrival of the Olympic torch in Oxford. Most of the city centre churches were represented as well as St Clement's and All Saints Headington. The event took place at the Iffey Road athletics track where Sir Roger Bannister first ran a mile in under 4 minutes in 1954. The proceedings began with Sir Roger himself lighting a real Olympic torch and starting a mini torch relay by passing it to his young grandson who led us in

a very fast procession around the track!

The sun shone and we all ate our lunches to the sound of the Oxford Classic Jazz Trio who treated us to a fabulous live performance. The youngest children did some races including egg & spoon and an obstacle race with medals being presented by Sir Roger and by the Deputy Lord Lieutenant. The older children and adults also competed in some fun three-legged and ball bouncing races but the highlight for many will have been the clergy's walking race (we wondered if the last would be first, but it seems that doesn't apply to athletics).



One of the churches had provided a Sumo wrestling event which proved very popular and we finished the day with a proof of the strength found in numbers thanks to the tug of war. It was a lovely afternoon which was enjoyed by all who went and great to see so many of Oxford's churchgoers coming together in one place.

Mike Healey

INFORMATION

St Columba's Book Group

Since its formation last autumn, the Book Group has met five times to consider the following books:

- Marilynne Robinson's 'Gilead';
- Marilynne Robinson's 'Home' in conjunction with 'Gilead' (two books which tell parts of the same story from different perspectives);
- Edmund de Waal's 'The Hare with Amber Eyes';
- Charlotte Bronte's 'Shirley';
- A Dickens' Bicentenary special: 'Dombey and Son' and/or 'Our Mutual Friend'.

Each time we have enjoyed a lively, wide-ranging discussion before deciding together what to read next.

As you can see from the titles, these are not, overtly at least, theological or religious books. We meet, first and foremost, to share our love of reading and enjoy each other's company and ideas. Yet we do also meet as people of shared faith which inevitably shapes our responses. Discussing books together seems to me a very good way of getting to know each other better and deepening mutual understanding and fellowship.

At present there are eleven of us in the group and our meetings are warmly hosted in their home by Elma and Ian Sinclair. We certainly have room for new members – and if it's only our taste in literature putting you off, once you join, you can influence future titles! Just speak to me, Shelagh Sneddon or Elma Sinclair. Our next meeting is at 7:30pm on Thursday 18th October to discuss Joseph Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness'.

If a book group isn't your thing, but there is some different kind of

group you would like to take part in with other members and friends of St Columba's, do get in touch with your Elder or send round a message to see if there are others who would like to join you; it was surprisingly easy to work out the practicalities of the Book Group once we had formed the idea and it is proving very successful and worthwhile.

Pippa Smith

NEWS ABOUT PEOPLE

Anniversaries

A warm (belated) congratulations to Duncan and Helen Fleming on their Diamond Wedding which they celebrated on 28th March. Jean and Donald Schofield also celebrate this milestone anniversary. Congratulations to them too.

Congratulations

Margaret Yee has been given an award from OxTALENT Awards 2012 (Oxford Teaching and Learning Enhanced by New Technology), University of Oxford, as winner in the category 'Use of Technology for outreach and impact' for the Dialogue Event.

Exam Celebrations

Congratulations go to Katherine North and Andrew Grey, both of whom received their undergraduate results this summer. And, don't worry, they will both be back for the next chapter of their studies. Congratulations also go to anyone else who has recently collected their results.

Farewell

At this time of the year, we often have to say farewell to members of our congregation. This year is no different. In particular, we wish Kelli & Dunstan Lowe and Haruka Sekiya all the best for their futures.

Summer holidays

St Columba's wishes all the students a wonderful summer holiday and looks forward to seeing them back in the autumn.

In Remembrance: The Revd Gordon Ewart Harris, 4th March 1929-15th June 2012.

On Monday 2nd July, St Columba's and friends bid a fond farewell to Gordon Harris with a crematorium service early in the afternoon followed by a Service of Thanksgiving at 4:00pm in the Church. The sanctuary was full to overflowing with extra chairs, and the gallery put into good use and three quarter's full. Moving remembrances were offered by Gordon's son John, his long time friend and colleague Revd Stephen Haine and the current minister of Aston Tirrold Revd Ulrike Bell. The hymn singing was fulsome and wonderful to hear, as was the recording of Gordon singing Love Bade Me Welcome, George Herbert's poem set to music by R. Vaughan William.

Gordon was born in Battersea, South London and raised in Surrey and Bristol (during the War). He earned a degree in German language and literature from the University of London before training for the ministry at Westminster College, Cambridge. In July 1954, on the heels of his graduation, he married Jean and was ordained two weeks later.

He cut his ministerial teeth in Pelaw (1954-1958) and then moved to Kenton, Newcastle-upon-Tyne (1958-1962). A return to the London area ensued and five productive years in Stepney (1962-

1967). In 1967, Gordon and Jean and their four children moved to Aston Tirrold, where Gordon employed the fullness of his varied gifts in a ministry that spanned twenty-eight years. His interest in human flourishing led to psychoanalytical training and practice in conjunction with his ministry. The great tragedy of Jean and Gordon's life happened while at Aston Tirrold, when their eldest son Paul was killed in a motorcycle accident. In retirement, Gordon continued to contribute to the life of Aston Tirrold in diverse ways, including film afternoons, while he moved his membership to St Columba's.

Alongside a rich and varied ministry, Gordon pursued and developed his musical interests. His love of German extended to German lieder, which he performed beautifully in his baritone voice. He gave musical evenings at Aston Tirrold and performed at venues in Bristol, London and at Windsor Castle. His recordings include Schubert's Winterreise, the Biblical Songs by Dvorák, Brahms Four Serious Songs, and R. Vaughn Williams Five Mystical Songs. In 2010, Gordon led a beautiful service based around the poetry of George Herbert and we were able to hear recordings of these set to music by Williams and sung by Gordon. He was also an eager Sunday service accompanist, on piano or organ, here at St Columba's and elsewhere.

Gordon was the keeper and organiser of our Manse Discussion Group of late, his keen intellect contributing to spirited conversations about theology, poetry, spiritual practice and more. His theology and spirituality were broad, and he was endlessly curious. He took to emerging technology like a duck to water and was always keen to share his interests.

For all his many gifts, it may be his sheer humanity that will be most missed. Gordon touched the lives of so many, modelling and enabling us to embrace our vulnerability and grow in grace. We continue to hold Jean and the children (Liz, John and Michael) in our thoughts and prayers.

Carla Grosch-Miller

[If you would like to read the fulsome remembrances given at the Service of Thanksgiving, Carla is happy to share them.]

In Memoriam

It is with sadness that we have to report the death of Grahame Bailey, who died in his sleep early on Tuesday 8th May 2012 at the age of 97. His ministry brought him to in Oxford between 1947 and 1957. Our thoughts go to his family: Diana, Elizabeth and Rosalind Bailey.

THOUGHTS AND OPINIONS

Junior Church

Cinquains written by Junior Church in response to the story of Jairus' Daughter (Mark 5. 21-43)...

Scared,
Worried crowd
Squishing, pushing, pulling
Dead, then Jesus heals:
Hungry!

by Darcy Herring Johnson

Dead –
Scared daddy
Weeping, crying, begging –
A very happy Mum and Dad –
Hooray!

by Freya Blundel

Dying,
Parents scared,
Weeping, crying – astounding:
'I am very hungry!'
Meal

by Ashton Elder

REPORTS

Elders' Retreat 2012: Reflection 1

In her minister's letter, Carla has given you a fine overview of the Elders' retreat that took place in May. In our most recent Elders' meeting, which was the first after the retreat, we pursued some of the ideas that had emerged there. We considered a variety of ways in which we might move forward as a church and let our light shine. These ranged from the very general - such as encouraging greater connection between children and the rest of the community, or trying to provide greater spiritual nurture for younger adults - to the very specific - such as installing a notice board at the front of the church, or arranging a social evening to learn some new hymns. As Carla has already indicated, you will be hearing more from us about these and other suggestions over the coming months, and we very much hope that you will want to contribute to the conversation that has already begun.



Meanwhile one notable memory from the retreat, for me, was the excellent 'ice breaker' activity on the Friday evening. We were

divided into small groups, and everyone was invited to tell the other members of their group three remarkable things about themselves, two of which were true and one of which was false. The rest of the group then had to identify the falsehood, and the winner was the person who managed to fool the greatest number. This got me wondering what it would have been like if Jesus had been playing the same game. Imagine if he had said, 'I am the truth', 'I am the light of the world', and 'Whoever believes in me will do even greater things than I do.' The rest of his group might well have reckoned the third of these the most improbable! In fact, of course, Jesus made all three claims. So may our light indeed shine, lest we belie one of the most remarkable things that he ever said about himself!

Adrian Moore

Elders' Retreat 2012: Reflection 2

Right at the beginning of our Elders' Retreat, Carla described us as the people she'd most like to be locked in a room with. After a split second came the anxious query, 'We're not actually locked in, are we?', thus triggering the first of many bursts of laughter throughout the weekend, illustrative of the warmth and wit which characterized our time together. It was a spacious, reflective time, set apart from the concerns of our own ordinary lives, set apart even from the pressing day to day concerns of St Columba's, to give a fresh perspective on our life and mission together.

The programme had been designed with a lovely variety and creativity, poetry and art encouraging us to feel as well as think. I particularly enjoyed seeing a sequence of images of Christ drawn from different times and cultures. Each of us had to choose one which spoke to us individually and then, in groups, one which seemed to us to represent St Columba's.

My first choice was a picture of the Last Supper from the Philippines. I loved the faces, full of so much character, such

individuals of different ages and temperaments, yet drawn together to share a meal. The relaxation it represents is only transitory. Amid their crops and herds, some merely squat, pausing in their work, ready to respond if called to action. It is interesting, too, when you come to look at it, that it is impossible to tell which figure is Christ. My group chose this picture to represent our church.

But partly because of the absence of any women, I suggested a different picture: a Ugandan painting of the Flight into Egypt. The infant Jesus is strapped on his mother's back in traditional Ugandan fashion. Her hand is in her husband's, who is carrying a very large square wooden box containing their belongings. It made me think of our church family journeying forward together, but with all the treasured possessions of the past, which have made us who and what we are, going forward with us.

Pippa Smith

Sabbatical Report

Our minister Carla was on sabbatical at the beginning of this year. At our Annual General Meeting, co-Church Secretary Gordon Woods interviewed Carla about her time away. Here is an expanded version of the interview...

Gordon: *Can you tell us a bit about what you have been doing over your sabbatical?*

Carla: You may be wondering why I was gone for three and a half months, rather than just three. Some of you may remember that I have a side teaching ministry. I teach sex and ministry short courses for ordinands in Cambridge, Oxford and Salisbury, usually at weekends or on my day off. The Cambridge Theological Federation course is a little longer than most: two 2.5 day intensives in separate weeks in January. The Wessex Training Officer said that those two weeks were work weeks, not sabbatical, and extended my sabbatical to 17th April.

I began with a week in Berkeley, California to visit a programme at the Pacific School of Theology related to my field of study and interview the senior academic research director. My daughter lives about 25 miles away, so I was able to visit her as well. After two weeks in Cambridge (and a lovely visit with Ruth and Megan Wilson), I spent a week on silent retreat at St Beuno's in north Wales. St Beuno's is where Gerald Manley Hopkins studied theology from 1874-1877 in preparation for the priesthood. It is a lovely setting and well-resourced for retreats. My time there was very rich.

In February and March, I settled down in my husband David's Taunton work bungalow to write my doctoral thesis. I treated the task like an ordinary job, working no more than 8 hours a day, Monday through Friday. Oddly enough I found that far more exhausting than the 50+ hours a week I work for St Columba's and Cumnor. Having the weekends free was wonderful. We attended our Taunton home church or I travelled with David to wherever he was preaching, spending some lovely nights in Devon and Somerset. As I said in my annual report, I rediscovered the sheer joy I take in Sunday worship.

I completed a first draft of my thesis on 30 March, a few hours before we left Taunton to attend David's son Paul's wedding in Leeds. It was lovely to begin my sabbatical seeing my daughter Katja, spend most of it living with my husband (who appreciated the ironed shirts and cooked meals), and end it enjoying a very special family occasion with the Miller part of the family.

Gordon: *What have you been researching for your PhD thesis?*

Carla: First I should clarify that I am a candidate for a relatively new doctoral degree called a Professional Doctorate in Practical Theology, intended to train practitioners (e.g. ministers or theological educators) to be researchers of their practice.

My topic concerns the sexual-spiritual integration in ministerial training. When I immigrated in 2003, I was unable to serve as minister in a pastorate because the URC had 'turned off the tap'

to foreign ministers. Given my legal background (I had been a civil rights and poverty lawyer before ordination), the Church asked me to serve on a review group that was seeking to identify lessons learned from a case of ministerial sexual abuse that had, like an earthquake, spawned a tsunami that wreaked havoc far and wide over many years. Soon after beginning that work, I took a job as a theological educator in Salisbury and ended up being the sexual ethics tutor. Having witnessed firsthand the devastation that ministerial sexual misconduct can cause and knowing how prevalent it is (twice as prevalent as sexual misconduct among secular counsellors), I was very interested in how we trained ordinands and ministers about sexual ethics. Simply saying 'these are the rules; follow them' does not work. One thinks of the words of Paul in Romans that sum up the problem: I know what is right but do what is wrong.

I researched how sexual-spiritual integration occurs with the goal of recommending education methods for teaching sexual ethics in ministerial training. The research was qualitative, examining the lived experience of how ordinands developed sexually and spiritually. The most important theoretical bases of my work have been adult learning theory, post-structural literary theory (Ricoeur) about how we integrate texts, sexual formation, virtue ethics, practical theology and theological anthropology.

Gordon: *What do you feel your research has told you?*

Carla: It has confirmed that integration is not about rules or seeking to use reason or the will to control the body. Rather, individuals create a 'faithfully realistic' personal Christian sexual ethic - a poetic phronesis/hard won practical wisdom - from working with scripture, tradition, other sources of knowledge and most importantly their personal experience. Churches and training institutions actually are not terrifically helpful - there is a culture of shame and secrecy around sexual matters; it's very much a 'don't ask, don't tell' situation. In my conclusions, I recommend specific formative approaches to resource integration and highlight some underlying challenges in contemporary church doctrine particularly around theological anthropology - our view

of the person.

Gordon: *Do you think your research has informed your work as a Minister in pastoral charge?*

Carla: Yes, in some surprising and not so surprising ways. I'm a more critical reader now. My own views for instance on theological anthropology have consolidated and I have increased confidence in my identity as a constructive, rather than an apologetic, theologian. One of the difficulties in the church around sex has been our view of the person: if we conceive of people as 'fallen', sinners and bad by nature, we disable people. I think that people who have a decent sense of self, and enough esteem and confidence to face their own limitations, are better able to exercise moral agency. This has made me aware of the power and potential problems of liturgy: I am ever more the careful in prayers of confession and assurances

'...we are persons-in-relation – made by love and for love...'

of grace, conscious of the tradition's fostering of shame. Guilt about things done is a prick to the conscience and enables the receiving of forgiveness and freedom to start again. Shame about who one is cripples people. (There is a very interesting book by Stephen Pattison called 'Shame: theory, therapy and theology' that examines chronic shame). I long for the day when Christian tradition has a more humane and realistic view of the person so that shame is not so easily triggered. My own theological anthropology is that we are learners and what we learn is how to exceed the limits of our natural self-preoccupation that seeks to assure survival. 'Made in the image of God', we are persons-in-relation – made by love and for love, and we are inherently creative. The Christian faith hopefully forms us for love.

I am in awe of the human person and our creativity, and have a renewed and deepened appreciation for the diversity of human experience in sense-making and religious viewpoint. I've renewed

my interest in liminal space: which is the kind of space we try to create in worship, space which enables a person to encounter God. Poetry, silence and play all engage liminal space, which is inherently creative. I hope that as we (St Columba's) continue on together we will laugh and play more.

Gordon: *Do you have any reflections on the differences in worshipping in Taunton vs St Columba's and Cumnor?*

Carla: No, just to notice that I really love going to church on Sunday mornings, as I wrote in the annual report. It made me appreciate how special it may be for some of you, at least some of the time, and to want to make it special for you. It's a holy and wonderful time, when we gather together in worship, prayer and praise.

Gordon: *Did you have any other experiences over your time away that have been formative?*

Carla: Oh, yes. Last autumn when I was wondering if and how I could accomplish my goal of completing a first draft, my closest friend Kathy O'Loughlin (an Anglican priest), suggested that I think of my sabbatical simply as time with God, and let go of rigid expectations. I resumed a practice of daily prayer consisting of a period of meditation and using the prayerbook I've used since 1994 which has daily scripture readings, other spiritual writings and a weekly prayer. (I usually think I'm too busy to take the time.) From the first week, I found that I couldn't pray the psalms as I would like to. The images and concepts were far removed from my understanding of God as it has evolved over time. So I started rewriting the weekly psalm so that I could pray it calling them 'Psalms redux', a practice I have continued along with daily prayer since I returned back to work. Indeed, I found the practice of daily prayer so nourishing that I don't want to go without it. I think it helps me keep buoyant and resilient in the face of challenges. (Copies of a collection of Psalms redux are in the vestibule, if you want to give them a go.)

Aside from the spiritual renewal of daily prayer and psalm writing,

I learned the importance of 'taking the time things take' rather than always rushing about. I would occasionally panic about the lack of progress I thought I was making on the thesis. At those times, I would take a breath and remind myself to just put in the time and take the time it takes. I'm discovering that, for a task-oriented, overly responsible person like me, this is a spiritual discipline that helps me to inhabit the present fully so that the future may unfold as best it can.

Treasurers' Report

Overview

May - June 2012	
Income	£14,718
Expenditure	£9,852
Current Balance	£62,039*

* Should have been £57k in previous report.

Income

Income continues to accrue in a 'normal', post-heating-project fashion, and we remain very grateful to all our members and friends for their continued support. Special mention must also go to Sue Pearce for delivering hiring income of £12,870 to the end of June – some £3,870 better than we budgeted for! Hirings will inevitably drop off over the summer, but at least – unlike last year – we will have the building open during the summer months with some income being generated.

Cash collection continues to under-perform, but this has mostly been made up for by some new standing order based regular donors.

Top 5 areas of income:

1.	Direct Giving by Standing Order	£5,886
2.	Hirings Income	£4,277
3.	Unrestricted Donations	£2,305

4.	Cash Collection	£677
5.	Gift Aid (Reclaimed)	£553

Expenditure

Top 5 areas of expenditure:

1.	URC Ministry and Mission	£2,897
2.	Church Administrator and Expenses	£1,577
3.	Cleaning	£529
4.	Minister's Expenses	£293
5.	Manse Expenses	£250

Current Balance & Trend

The current state of our finances remains healthy. General funds have remained almost static over the six months of the year so far, which is better than we anticipated in the budget.

Substantial Anticipated Expenditure

There has been some water damage to the organ vestry caused by poor drainage on the roof. This area of the roof is very difficult to access for cleaning purposes, and we are likely to have to invest in some permanently installed ladders to allow the drainage to be maintained to prevent future damage. Repairing the current state of affairs is also near the top of our list of priorities. We do not anticipate this being beyond the major works budget for this year, but F&P are still investigating the matter.

Andrew Baker & David North

A reminder of how YOU can help...

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

EDITOR'S COMMENTS

The day after my birthday, on Sunday 3rd June, I was back in Bury with my family watching the Queen's Diamond Jubilee flotilla on TV. There were apparently one thousand vessels on the water and – despite the rain – was an impressive spectacle for the onlookers who had travelled from far and wide. The rest of the celebrations that weekend also saw a significant turnout.

The next major TV event followed a week later, seeing many European nations arriving in Poland and Ukraine for the football championship tournament. Fans filled the stadiums for the next three weeks, spending their hard-earned cash to support their teams on rollercoaster rides all too familiar to England fans... that is unless your team wear the red and navy blue strip of Spain!

Towards the end of June and into July, the Wimbledon tennis championship tournament took its turn to dominate the airwaves. The players and their fans came from the world over to be part of the traditions and famous atmosphere. Some camped overnight to ensure their place in the queue to obtain 'priceless' tickets and many endured the challenging British weather to see yet another Briton be ambitious yet fail in their search for sporting glory.

And, since departing from Athens in May, the Olympic torch has been touring around the UK and Ireland, being passed from person-to-person, heading for its final destination: the opening ceremony of the Games on 27th July. People have lined the streets, entered the parks and even stopped production lines to catch a glimpse of this 'once in a lifetime' event (including me). Furthermore, for those people not able to witness the relay firsthand, the live images have been streamed across the globe via cables and satellite networks.

So what links all of these events? [Hint]: The answer is not 'Tim Llewelyn watching far too much TV' ... even if that is true!]

Journeys. People's journeys.

Most of us take journeys every day. This may be to places of work, education, historic significance, natural beauty... and many more. We take the car, bus, train, plane... and sometimes we even use our God-given 'talent' of walking! It appears that such travelling seems to be one of humankind's greatest pastimes, whether it is motivated by necessity or pleasure.

As Christians, we are on another type of journey: that of faith. From birth, I believe there is an innate sense that there is more to life than simply being human. This may or may not result in a public or private recognition of a deity. There may even be times when believers turn away from their faith. Nevertheless, during the human journey - consisting of many facets, twisting and turning in unexpected ways, providing both highs and lows - God's love is unconditional and is ever present. As the popular song by Brian Doerksen & Brenton Brown proclaims, his 'love is amazing, steady and unchanging'. It really should make us sing!

So what does this mean for us? Should we sit back, do little or nothing and wait for the kingdom to come? Or perhaps we should take our inspiration from stories like those belonging to the Somali Olympic team (a grand total of two people) and the young boy who – after hearing stories of torchbearers selling their mementoes for huge sums of money – decided to auction his handmade paper torch online to raise money for charity? To me, the answer is commonsensical. The Church needs to focus on its life mission and discover an approach that can inspire all people from all backgrounds... not for fun, not for glory, but for God.

Tim

Newsletter Deadline...

All contributions for the next issue of the newsletter should be sent to Tim Llewelyn (Editor) by Sunday 16th September 2012 to the following Email address: llewelyn_tg@hotmail.com.

The next issue will cover October and November.

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

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Events

August

5th *First Sunday*. Church. 7:15pm.

18th *Barbeque*. Cumnor URC. 6:00pm.

September

2nd *First Sunday*. Church. 7:15pm.

Meetings

July

31st *Mission Group*. The Manse (TBC). 7:30pm.

August

9th *Finance & Property Committee*. Church. 7:30pm.

14th *First Sunday Planning*. Time & place TBC.

28th *Mission Group*. Place TBC. 7:30pm.

21st *Elders' Meeting*. The Manse (TBC). 7:30pm.

September

4th *Finance & Property Committee*. Church. 7:30pm.

6th *Elders' Meeting*. Church. 7:30pm.

LECTIONARY

July

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

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

August

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

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

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

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

September

2nd Song of Solomon 2:8-13; Psalm 45:1-2, 6-9; James 1:17-27; Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23.

9th Proverbs 22:1-2, 8-9, 22-23; Psalm 125; James 2:1-10, (11-13),14-17; Mark 7:24-37.

16th Proverbs 1:20-33; Psalm 19; James 3:1-12; Mark 8:27-38.

23rd Proverbs 31:10-31; Psalm 1; James 3:13 – 4:3, 7-8a; Mark 9:30-37.

30th Esther 7:1-6, 9-10, 9:20-22; Psalm 124; James 5:13-20; Mark 9:38-50.

USEFUL CONTACT DETAILS

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Treasurers

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



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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