

St Columba's

United Reformed Church, Oxford

Newsletter



May 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

We know we are doing God's work when the work requires more than we can accomplish ourselves. God's work always requires us to ask for help beyond ourselves.

I came into the sanctuary one evening early this month and felt the usual chill. With a flash of joy, I realised that by autumn this occurrence will be far rarer. Rather than the omnipresent chill, there will be many moments of acceptable ambient warmth. Thanks be to God (and the Synod and the many who have contributed to the heating fund)!

The speed with which we have garnered contributions towards the heating project has taken my breath away. Of course, we have been working on the decision for a long time. It was a January 2009 Church Home Day when we first identified the heating as a problem. The purpose of that day was to examine the fitness for purpose of our premises – how the building enabled or disabled our ministry and mission. From that time, through the decision to hire a heating consultant to get expert advice, last summer's series of after worship conversations about whether we would commit to staying on in the building, and our January 2011 decision to replace the heating, we have been striving to come to a decision that will serve God in this place.

Our decision to improve the heating is part of a much larger endeavour. As we've discussed at church meeting, the purpose

of church is to carry out the mission of God – providing an hospitable place of welcome, worship and witness; enabling participation in the life of God in the larger community and beyond; and equipping the saints for faithful love and service in daily life. At heart we are a missionary outpost: all that we do must contribute to the mission of God in the world. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote: ‘The church is her true self only when she exists for humanity’. (Letters and Papers from Prison, p.166)

All our decisions take place in this framework: how we worship and nurture faith, what mission projects we undertake or support, and how we spend our resources of time, energy and money week by week. In all and through all, we are seeking to further the mission of God.

At the 5th June Annual Meeting, we will hear more about how we exercise the mission of God through this place. We will look at how we seek to serve children and young people, adults hurt by loneliness, and people who have been excluded from some churches because of sexual orientation. We also hope to introduce Zi, a national advertising campaign that seeks to catch the attention of people outside the church who are drawn to Jesus but not so keen on the idea of church.

‘In all and through all, we are seeking to further the mission of God.’

If our experience of the heating project provides any wisdom, it is that God’s mission calls together the gifts and contributions of many. Facing what seems a huge task requires us to exercise our faith in God and in each other. There is a small plaque I’ve had on my desk for years which reminds me: The task ahead of us is never as great as the power behind us.

I look forward in confidence and hope. Not only will our building (and our welcome) be warm, but I trust that we will have all that we need to carry out the mission to which God calls us in this

place. God never gives us calling without giving the gifts necessary to carry it out.

Onward and upward in grace,

Carla

NEWS OF ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS

Finance & Property Committee

The heating project continues to dominate the committee's agenda, and the financial position is such that allows us to push ahead with the project this year. A pre-tender meeting has been held with heating consultant, Chris Reading, and the tender documentation is currently in preparation. The tender process should be concluded by the next issue of the newsletter and we will keep you updated with the progress. If everything goes according to plan, work should start in the church during August & September. In the meantime, the committee and Fundraising Group continue to look for additional finances to reduce the amount of Synod loan required to fund the project.

The committee has also been reviewing the overall financial position of St Columba's. We are glad to report that the church has made very good progress since the more challenging times of 2010. However, the focus must be maintained, especially as other minor building works require attention in the next few years. We are therefore in the process of prioritising these projects.

Tim Llewelyn

Manse Discussion Group

The group has spent four sessions reading and discussing one by one the poems that make up T.S. Eliot's Four Quartets. In the

session on Wednesday 20th April there was a reading of all four poems together. Next meeting: Thursday 19th May. You would be very welcome to come and take part on either of those dates. Meetings begin at 7:30pm.

Donald Schofield

Mission Group

The Group has continued to look at the welcome aspect of our church, using the 'Everybody Welcome' material. As part of this, a 'mystery worshipperr' exercise was undertaken and the results were generally positive, with one comment from a non-church goer stating 'It was a warm welcome, not over-gushing'. However, one mystery worshipper unfortunately failed to find anywhere to park. The result of this activity indicates that good progress has been made, yet further improvements are still necessary. More information and discussion will follow.

On the topic of welcome, we are looking forward to the visitation from Symon Hill, journalist and Assoicate Director of think-tank 'Ekklesia' (www.ekklesia.co.uk). The intention is that he will partake in the Sunday service on 26th June, as well as another activity that same weekend (more details to follow). And it looks like Symon is appreciative of the invitation...

'Since announcing my pilgrimage of repentance for homophobia two weeks ago, I've been delighted, excited and humbled to receive so many messages of encouragement and support...

In an exciting moment yesterday (23 December), St Columba's United Reformed Church in Oxford became the first church to confirm for definite that they will host me on my pilgrimage. I expect to be speaking in Oxford on or around Sunday 26th June.'

<http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/13838>

Tim Llewelyn



Cumnor URC

Whilst we continue to have concerns for a number of our members there is much to celebrate and give thanks for in our life at Cumnor URC at present.

Whilst Brian shrugged off the surgery he underwent a month or so ago and is doing his utmost to preserve 'business as usual', Joan has had a set-back that required re-admission to the JR [John Radcliffe hospital]. Hopefully by the time you read this she will be home again. Along with Derrick's long spell in hospital, now at Wallingford Community Hospital, Daphne has had a fall with consequent fractures and after a spell in the JR is now in Witney Community Hospital. We hope that, at very least, they will soon be in the same hospital whilst their future plans evolve. One of our newer members, another Daphne, is back in hospital after a very unhappy time at home.

So where is the good news? We have had some wonderful services of worship, including the most recent 'People's Worship' to which a number of members of the congregation contributed, and a visit from young people and leaders who took part in last year's visit from Wessex Synod to Zambia. As well as being delightful and uplifting in itself the service helped us set our connections with the Hope & Faith School in the context of the Synod's Zambian links.

Our continuing support for the Hope & Faith School has had two fillips recently, our Treasurer received an anonymous donation worth, with Gift Aid, around £1,500 from a member of the Cumnor

community not connected with our Church but who admires our efforts for Hope and Faith. We also received a share of the proceeds of the Cassington Village Pantomime to support the School: a cheque for £500.

Our Country Lunches in March attracted good numbers and brought together the usual mix of people from the church and the churches, and from the community. Our Lent course, based around the film 'Chocolat', and using clips from the film as the basis of study, has been consistently well supported.

The good weather arrived just in time for our 'Church Clean-up' Day when we managed to fill a skip with debris and things we no longer needed from the grounds at the rear of the Church and our various outbuildings. We press on now with the preparations of our 'Quiet Space / Prayer Garden' Project. We held a Gift Day for this project at the beginning of April and raised around £1,600 to match the funding set aside in the budget so the project can proceed. We shall invite you all to come and share in the opening which we hope is only two or three months away.

In the meantime we shall continue with our Fourth Friday supper, speaker and Discussion sessions on the last Fridays of May and June. In May our local Member of Parliament, Nicola Blackwood, will open a discussion on Faith and Politics, and in June our speaker will be our near neighbour Philip Pullman. If you'd like to come, give Glenda a call on 01865 883 515 to book a place.

So there we are: a paragraph of some sad and challenging news and five paragraphs of good news, positive activity, and plans for the future; seems about the right balance!

Nigel Appleton

FURY

Worship. Fellowship. Refreshment. Sleep-deprivation. To me these words sum up FURY (Fellowship of United Reformed Youth) Assembly. In January over 100 young people met together to



share something of the wonder of God and to discuss issues affecting the younger generation today.

On the business front four resolutions were passed. These concerned the difficulties young people face in finding a new church when moving house or moving to university, an agreement to formulate a Code of Conduct for FURY Advisory Board members (inspired by the guidelines for Ministers of Word and Sacrament, Church Related Community Workers and Elders presented at General Assembly 2010), the creation of a position of Welfare Representative on FURY Advisory Board and support for the message of inclusivity behind the URC's advertising campaign. The proposers and seconders of the passed resolutions will now form task groups to carry work relating to the individual resolutions forward.

However, there is more to FURY Assembly than business. Various workshops were on offer where the delegates could discuss Commitment for Life, the Street Pastors scheme and ways to share faith, as well as having the opportunity to create artwork, try their hand at Christian DJ-ing or learn puppetry. All of the workshops were designed to provoke thought at the same time as equipping the young people with something to take back to their local churches.

For me, a key part of FURY Assembly is the fellowship. There was time during a murder mystery and a self-run 'FURY Gameshow' to laugh together and it was particularly special to share worship with young people from across the country, especially at the late night communion service. Many of those who attended are the only young person in their local church and FURY Assembly is an opportunity to meet with other young Christians and share the God we all worship, in so doing realising that we are not alone. Young people are full of energy and ideas and commitment and have so much to say to the Church - FURY Assembly is one opportunity for their voices to be heard.

At FURY Assembly I took over as FURY Moderator so for the next year have the privilege of serving FURY by chairing FURY Advisory

Board, representing young people at Mission Council and Youth and Children's Work Committee and representing the URC at other denominational events.

FURY Assembly 2012 will be held on 27th - 29th January 2012 at Whitemoor Lakes, Lichfield, Staffordshire. Any young person aged 14-25 who is associated with the URC is welcome to attend. For more information about this event or about anything else related to FURY feel free to contact me or check out www.fury.org.uk .

Victoria Paulding

victoria.paulding@ntlworld.com

UPCOMING EVENTS

Artweeks

Archway is advertised in ArtWeeks and an exhibition will be held in the church hall by members of Archway and Wednesday Welcome.

The first day will be Monday 23rd May (even though Artweeks in the city begins earlier that weekend) 11:00am – 1:00pm throughout the week to Friday and then Saturday 28th May 11:00am – 3:00pm.

A café will run in the hall at the same time, together with a chance to do some art work!

Can you volunteer to help a little? I have set those times so that I can give my own spare time to the project, although it is hoped that the event will be run by members of the groups – everyone is very excited.

The idea came out of a drama project, when artwork was shown to advertise it – it was good. There are some well experienced artists amongst the group as well. Book the date into your diary!

Church Garden Party 2011

On Saturday 25th June, 3:00 – 5:30pm, the annual Garden Party will take place this year at the home of Betty Baxter – Church Farm Cottages, Ickford, near Thame. Betty's garden is beautiful and, as an expert flower arranger, she has planned it to be a source of interesting plant material. All you people with an interest in plants are in for a treat.

Ickford is a delightful village and the church (12th century) is a short walk along the road from Church Farm Cottages.

Our usual custom is for the tea to be 'bring and share' so we invite you to bring sandwiches or cakes.

It may be that there are people who would like to go but do not have transport of their own. If you intend to go to Ickford on 25th June and will have room in a car I would be happy to put you in touch with someone who would like a lift. Those who can offer a lift and those who would like to be uplifted should contact Rosemary Knagg (01865 245 042 or Rosemary@knagg.fslife.co.uk).

Elders Away Day

On Saturday 7th May, our Elders will join with Elders from the Oxford area churches at Cumnor URC for an away day led by Revd David Grosch-Miller, Moderator of the South Western Province of the URC. We are grateful for their service among us, and pray that they will be nourished and inspired on their day together.

Faith in Action Group Joint Worship: Tracing the Tax

On Sunday 19th June, the four Faith in Action Group churches (St Columba's, Wesley Memorial Methodist, New Road Baptist and St

Michael at the North Gate) will worship together at St Michael at the North Gate at 10:30am. The focus for the service will be Christian Aid's Trace the Tax campaign. A global culture of financial secrecy allows some unscrupulous firms to dodge tax - and rob poor countries of more than \$160bn a year. The Trace the Tax campaign is about getting their money back. For more information about the campaign, go to www.christianaid.org.uk and click on 'end tax secrecy – Act now'. Further information about this service and follow up activities will be provided in the Sunday notices.

Family Fun Day – Steaming Ahead!

Saturday 18th June, 11:00am - 4:30pm... Steaming Ahead, a fun day for all the church family at Fawley Hill near Henley-on-Thames with steam railway, a museum, performance areas, puppetry, sports, games, crafts, dancing, and a market place. We will be arranging a coach with other Oxford area URC churches. Tickets are £5 for adults, £2 for children ages 5 - 16, and free for younger children. To purchase your ticket, please call or email Sue Pearce (administrator@saintcolumbas.org; 07880 601 109).

Fourth Fridays at Cumnor

Cumnor URC continues its Fourth Friday dinner and discussion series, providing a hearty meal and stimulating discussion. Our conversation starting guests for the spring are: 27th May - Nicola Blackwood (MP) on Faith and Politics, and 24th June - Philip Pullman, topic TBA. Dinner begins at 7:15pm; the conversation begins at 8:00pm with a presentation by the guest speaker.



To reserve a place, please call Glenda Appleton (01865 883 515).

Kari's last Sunday

For the last few months, we have been pleased to have Kari Aanestadt, a Lutheran seminarian from North Dakota, with us on an informal internship. She has led worship and an ecumenical house group, and observed the inner mysteries of church life. On Sunday 12th June, Pentecost, she will lead her last service with us before returning to the US to complete her ministerial training. We have appreciated her gracious intelligence and sensitive attention, and wish her Godspeed wherever the winds of the Spirit will take her and her husband, Bryan, next.

Living the Questions: Call to Covenant

The last term of Living The Questions begins on Sunday 8th May. Drawing on the insights of progressive theologians, this Sunday evening dinner and discussion series has proved thought-provoking and soul-stretching.

Dinner begins at 7:00pm (thanks to Aphinya and Harald Thaler); the evening ends by 9:00pm.

8th May	Kingdom without Walls
15th May	Social Justice
22nd May	Incarnation
29th May	Prayer
12th June	Compassion
19th June	Creative Transformation
26th June	Embracing Mystery

To reserve a place, please contact Sue Pearce via:
07880-601-109 or administrator@saintcolumbas.org



[Photo reproduced with permission of Creation Theatre.]

-- Tales from King James --

14th May – 11th June

St Barnabas Church
Jericho, Oxford

Colourful. Condensed. Quirky. A boat big enough for every animal, a sea parted in two and a man swallowed by a whale... just some of the extraordinary tales you'll see burst into life with energy, comedy and insight.

Celebrating 400 years of the King James Bible.

Director: Helen Tennison

Actors: Raewyn Lippert, Tom Peters

Creative Producer: David Parrish

Tickets: from £9.50.

Book at www.creationtheatre.co.uk

INFORMATION

Planning for the Future: a Practical Workshop Covering Wills, Advance Directives and Lasting Powers of Attorney

Thinking about the future particularly our own death or future infirmity is something we all tend to put off. These are not issues we want to dwell on. But planning for the future by making sure that proper legal documentation is in place can help everyone particularly the people who care for us.

Everyone needs to have a will in place not just to say who they would like to inherit their assets, but also to appoint people they trust to be their executors. Executors are the people with the legal power to look after our assets after our death. If you do not have a will there is no one with this authority and decisions may have to be delayed.

An advance directive, or living will, is a document which sets out how you wish to be cared for at the end of your life. It can help those who are looking after you, both your relatives and the medical profession, to know what your wishes are at a time when you may not be able to state this yourself.

If you want to make sure that people who care for you will be able to look after your financial affairs and personal well-being when you become unable to do this for yourself, then you need to make Lasting Power(s) of attorney.

If you want to know more then come to a workshop at Cumnor United Reformed Church, Leys Road, on Saturday, 21st May, 10:00am - 12:30pm when retired GP, Lettice Bowen, and solicitor, Pat Bhutta, will be on hand to offer advice on these issues.

Pat Bhutta

[I am a former local solicitor with considerable experience of working with the elderly and infirm and now working as an assistant curate.]

Note: To reserve your place, please call Glenda Appleton (01865 883 515).

Evening Services at Wesley Memorial Church

Friends from the FIAG [Faith In Action Group] churches looking for a Free Church service on a Sunday evening in the city centre will be made very welcome at Wesley Mem, where a regular 6:30pm service is sustained. The service on the first Sunday evening of the month is generally a Taizé service, and on the second Sunday a service of Holy Communion.

Carla Grosch-Miller

Office Space

- Great news on the amount raised for the heating project – I knew we could do it!
- The heating will hopefully be installed from 4th August onwards and take up to 6 weeks – the space will not be available for hire during this time.
- One of our main hirer's has re-polished the hall and church floors at their own cost (saving us £200) with a specialist non-slip wax – thank you Oxford University Dance Club.
- The white board in the kitchen is working well for letting me know of any faults to repair or issued that need attention, please be aware that certain jobs are kept for a while to save call-out bills unnecessarily – thanks for the comments left though!

Sue Pearce (Church Administrator)

NEWS ABOUT PEOPLE

Best Wishes

With the end of this academic year drawing to a close, best wishes go to all those taking exams and we wish them all a very relaxing and enjoyable summer.

Congratulations

Saturday 16th April witnessed the marriage of our friends, Anna Pickering and Kaihsu Tai, in a lovely service at St Columba's led by Revd. Carla Grosch-Miller. We wish them well in their life together.

SIMPLE WEDDING

for Kaihsu and Anna

They came into the church
side by side
together and alone
looking their usual selves
wrapped in a new light.

We did not miss attendants and bouquets,
a frothy veil, a train, a fine silk tie.
Without these we could focus on their joy
their faces ever brightening
as they walked up between us
gathering our love.

At the front, greeted by the priest,
they left us, entered
a new world, like Moses' cloud.
There they made their vows
clasped each other's hands
wrapped and hidden in the holy stole,
a sign that God had made them man
and wife.

Then they returned to us
and we could break our silence
sing and clap, hug and greet
catch fragments of their dream
to carry to the feast.

Averil Stedeford

Farewell

Loyal student, Victoria Paulding, finishes her studies in June and leaves Oxford around the 25th of the same month. It has been wonderful to have her with us for the past three years, especially

with her contributions to the services led by the young adults of the church, prayer breakfasts and also church service music.

For the last three years, Matthew Burgess has graced us with his gifts as occasional organist. Matthew's studies at Oxford University come to an end this summer. His last Sunday with us is 5th June.

Kari & Bryan Aanestad and Lucas Merrill Brown return to the USA this summer following time with us this past year.

We thank all those mentioned above for their contribution to the life of St Columba's and wish them every success for their futures.

Sympathies

Gilbert McKay's funeral was a private cremation on Monday 14th March, followed by a service in St Peter and St Paul Church in Hanborough. Elizabeth is well, with lots of support, and says she is very grateful for the various messages that she has received from friends at St Columba's.

David Townsend's mother died on Sunday 11th April at 6:00am. The family was close by and gathered in the days beforehand. The funeral took place on Monday 18th April.

Kay Green died on Sunday 17th April. She died peacefully, having been ill for a long time. There will be a memorial service in St Giles Church, Bletchingdon, on Tuesday 10th May at 2:00pm.

Our sincere sympathies, thoughts and prayers go to the families of those mentioned above.

PROFILE

Kari Aanestad [accidentally omitted from February's newsletter]

Greetings, St. Columba's! My name is Kari Aanestad, and I will be acting as a contextual learning student at St. Columba's for five months. I am in my third year of training for ordination in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), and as a part of our training we are asked to look deeply into the heart of worship life within a community in order to better understand the rich dynamics of church communities. I hope to meet as many of you as possible and am thrilled to be able to be a part of your church!

My husband and I have been living in Oxford for almost two years as he works to finish his second Master's degree (the first one was in environmental change and management, and the second is in the history of science). I spent five months last spring completing a chaplaincy placement amongst the hospitals of the Oxford Radcliffe Hospital Trust and fell deeply in love with hospital chaplaincy. I am presently enrolled in online classes at my home institution in St. Paul, Minnesota and will finish my degree next January. I look forward to meeting you!

Maureen Hussain

BELFAST-----LIVINGSTONIA, MALAWI-----ST.IVES, CAMBRIDGESHIRE---
--BENSON, SOUTH OXFORDSHIRE.

I was a war baby, born to Margaret and Tom McQuitty in Belfast. Dad was a grocer and mother kept house, clothed and fed us and so much more. It was a happy place, although an only child, there were many family and friends around. I learned Bible stories from the family and the church as a child and later, it was in the teenage classes that I made the commitment to join the

church. For us as a family it was a Presbyterian Church in the northern suburbs of Belfast.

Just as I was writing my final exams in maths, History and Psychology at Queen's Belfast, a former assistant minister returned from Malawi with the message that Livingstonia Secondary School needed maths teachers. The result was that I spent 5 years as a missionary of the Irish Presbyterians in Malawi. That is where I really grew up. To say that I gained more from the folk in Malawi than they gained from me would be an understatement. It was there that my faith was matured and grounded.

I returned to a Belfast in 1972 which was in conflict and a very different place from where I had grown up. I taught there for 3 years and then it was time to move on. This time to Cambridgeshire and a very different job. I was the cultural adviser in an US High School on a US Airforce Base near Huntingdon.

I lived in St. Ives and found my spiritual home in the Free Church (URC) there. It was an exciting time as we gutted the church and made it a true 'Church in the Market Place' The challenges were great, as were the demands on time and energy but this was, for me, another real learning experience. It was an honour to be asked to serve as an elder and for a short time as church secretary there.

A few years before I retired I met a wonderful man who lived in Oxfordshire. On retirement I moved to Oxfordshire and in 2008 we were married. The only child from Belfast now has a stepson, a grandson and many in-laws as Dilawar (Del) my husband has six siblings.

A former minister, Bill Mahood, advised that St. Columbas in Oxford was a place where I would find likeminded people. He knew that, while I have open ecumenical views, my faith has deep roots in the Reformed tradition. And so I now find myself joining the fellowship in Oxford.

THOUGHTS AND OPINIONS

King James Bible: A Reflection

The 1611 Authorised Version of the Bible is special because the translation took place during the flowering of the English language. There is a poetry, grace and style that induces reverence in the reader. This quality permeates throughout the Old and the New Testaments.

It is the Christian stories of the New Testament that I find most interesting. Recounted in Shakespearean English one can feel the spirit of Christ's teaching in a manner that colloquial narrative fails to achieve.

Communication between human beings is never complete because of the refraction of thoughts transposed into speech. The problem is compounded when using the written word.

'There is a poetry, grace and style that induces reverence in the reader.'

Christ never wrote one letter, yet his teaching and the use of parable remains, in spirit, throughout the New Testament.

Christians are in great debt to St Paul. During his ministry he retained the spirit of Christ, even in his letters. He seems to have been acutely aware of limitations in the written word and its dangers. What would he have made of an EU Directive?

His advice to his Christian Corinthians on this matter is clearly stated in his second epistle, chapter 3: verse 6...

'Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.'

James Smith

King James Bible: Matthew, Chapter 25: Verse 40

'And the King shall answer and say on to them, Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.'

In chapter 25, verses 31 onwards describe the great judgement of humanity, the separation of the sheep and the goats. We learn that those who satisfied the Lord's hunger and thirst and gave him hospitality and clothing shall be deemed righteous. But v37 and 38 depict the bewilderment of the righteous who ask, 'Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? Or thirsty and gave thee drink?or naked and clothed thee?' and Jesus gives his amazing answer in v40.

In this verse Jesus identifies himself fully with the poor, the outcasts and the oppressed. The Son of Man, who judges all men, is encountered in everyone who suffers. If they are to be judged righteous men and women must minister to the suffering with acts of mercy.

Matthew chapter 22:34-40 gives the central Bible teaching of the love for God and for our neighbour. However, in chapter 25 the love of the poor neighbour is practically identified with the love of God. Indeed, if we cannot love our neighbour whom we can see how can we love God whom we cannot see?

In Britain a good deal of the care of the sick and the poor is provided by the people pooling their resources through taxation to finance the welfare state. The welfare state is undoubtedly doing God's work. Is it ethical, is it betraying the ideals of its compassionate founders to make the welfare state's and God's caring work subject to the profit motive through privatisation?

The Gospel of Matthew makes clear that our love of God has to be shown not by tithing and rituals and sacrifices but in a practical way through our caring for our neighbour. The

preaching on this paramount ethical demand echoes the teaching of the great prophets. We should try to remember that all humanity, having the same origins, is one body and we should all work together to try to end suffering in the world, for suffering demeans us all wherever it happens.

Howard Shaw

King James Bible: Romans, Chapter 8: Verses 38 & 39

'For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.'

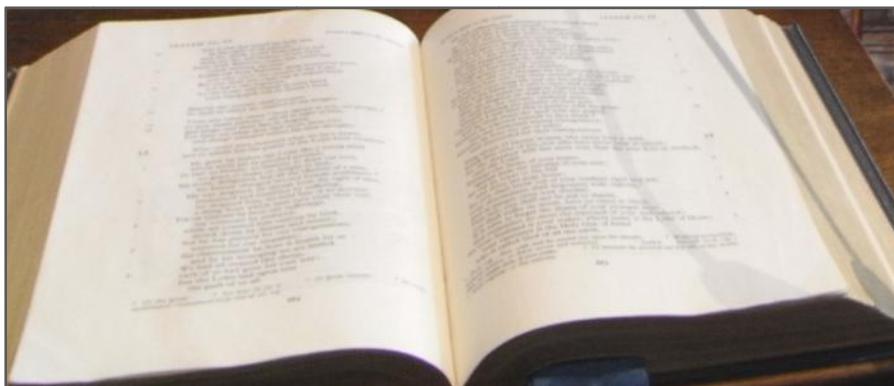
These two verses are the climax of a glorious passage in Paul's letter to a small group of Christians living in Rome. Think of them, small in number, suspected by the imperial authorities of disloyalty to the Emperor, living in fear of their lives. Some have paid the ultimate penalty for their faith in Jesus. Others will certainly share their fate. Who knows when the knock on the door will come? Each one asks, *'Shall I have the courage to be faithful to the end?'*

To them – and to us – Paul makes two bold assertions. He declares (Romans 8:28) that *'we know that all things work together for good to them that love God'*. It's an astounding claim which invites immediate contradiction. When an earthquake destroys your home and livelihood, or a tsunami overwhelms whole towns with their inhabitants in the twinkling of an eye, how can we believe in a kindly God? But Paul does not claim that only good things happen to those who love God. And perhaps it is only with the gift of long hindsight that we can discern the working of God's grace.

The second assertion, in verse 35, is his rhetorical question: *'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?'* To which Paul gives the answer: *'Nothing'*. Many people, then and now, believe that

their lives are governed by dark and unseen powers – perhaps the planets or secret forces of malevolence. Christian faith unblinkingly recognises the power and presence of evil as a force to be reckoned with. But it also affirms that through the Cross Christ has conquered evil and that through his victory we too are conquerors. This conviction is the basis of his resounding declaration in Romans 8:38 and 39 – and wonderfully expressed in the sublime translation of the King James - that there is nothing that can separate us from God's love revealed to us in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Tony Tucker



REPORTS

Street Pastors

Ruth Wilson and I have now been Street Pastors for six months and have each completed around half a dozen shifts (from 10:00pm to 4:00am). We have experienced all sorts of situations from lost tourists; to over-intoxicated language school students; to women who are grateful for a pair of flip flops after realising those stilettos were not such a good idea for a long night out; to men who are about to start fighting but stop when they see us and we start chatting with them; to people alone who just want walking back to The Westgate Car Park late at night. There have been

some humbling conversations both with homeless people and with those who are just in need of someone to listen to them. Ruth and I have both met situations where we were the first person that someone has talked to about something that may have been troubling them for years. Wearing the dark blue Uniform with 'Street Pastors' on it so clearly seems to have an almost magical effect whereby people calm down and are genuinely interested in what we are doing and why we do it. Although we are not on the streets to preach about of Christianity, many people do ask about our faith and beliefs and some fascinating conversations have ensued from such questions.

'...it is wonderful how the Spirit enables us to respond together to that basic calling from Jesus to listen, care and help those around us'

Street Pastors is now firmly established and respected in Oxford and we have good working relationships with Thames Valley Police, the many professional door supervisors ('bouncers') in Oxford, and with the Oxford Safer Communities Partnership via the Nightsafe initiative. I am also extremely grateful for all the hard work and dedication put in by the Management Group which includes Kat Bracewell, the minister of New Road Baptist Church, and Rob and Gemma Winn, of Wesley Memorial Church.

One of the wonderful things for me about Street Pastors is the great diversity of people that volunteer and work in this capacity. It really is true that you can't be too old, too busy, too shy or too anything else to be a Street Pastor. So long as you can walk the streets for a few hours and are not easily offended then you can do it!



Having a diversity of people is actually a great strength as it means there is almost always one of us best placed to approach a particular situation and four different viewpoints on it are much better than four identical ones! I feel I have benefited massively from working with Christians of other denominations and quite different Theological standpoints and this has taught me a huge amount about how other people live their lives as Christians. We might struggle to 'be church' together if we tried but it is wonderful how the Spirit enables us to respond together to that basic calling from Jesus to listen, care and help those around us in our City. This for me is what ecumenism is all about.

I was delighted to be invited to a meeting in East Oxford last week about the possibility of setting up Street Pastors in the Cowley Road area. Churches together in East Oxford is now actively discussion the possibility and I'm sure Oxford Street Pastors will be very happy to support and be a resource for such an initiative should Churches Together in East Oxford choose to go ahead with it.

A second cohort of Street Pastors was trained in late 2010 so there are now more people available for shifts meaning that we have to work less often and a reserve is scheduled each week in case of last-minute unavailability. The third cohort will start training very shortly so if you are interested please contact the coordinator, Pearl Lewis, for more information. You can find Oxford Street Pastors on Facebook and there is lots of useful information via the Ascension Trust at www.streetpastors.co.uk .

Tony Brett

A Financial Update...

Overview

The new Financial Coordinator software for the church accounts looks to be working without problem now, enabling us to provide a detailed and up-to-date financial report...

	Feb - Apr 2011	Year To Date
Total Income	£49,930	£61,634
Income to Heating Fund	£26,691	£32,806
Other income	£23,239	£28,828
Expenditure	£15,521	£20,830
Balance (excl. Heating Fund)	£7,718	£7,998
Trend	+14.8%	+16.4%

Income

Income to the Heating Fund – donations and fundraising activities – has been itemised separately. Even without this item, it can be seen that there has been an encouraging double-digit percentage increase in the Church reserves. However, as always the Devil – so to speak – is in the details. Specifically, during this period there were two special items in the accounts: the Chaplaincy Fund and Special Collections.

It was just before the period under examination that the decision was taken to go ahead with the Heating Project, and almost immediately the Wessex Synod approved the grant and loan. Since then, there has been an extremely gratifying and generous response by members of the congregation to the appeal for funds.

That apart, direct giving has remained at the high level set by last year's Pledge Sunday, and the sterling work done by Sue continues to reap dividends in terms of the hiring of the premises (not to mention all her other hard work on behalf of the church). Of the other two major items of income, it happens that it is this time of year that we receive our annual chaplaincy grant from the URC. This is an item of income peculiar to this time of year.

Top five areas of income:

1	Donations to Heating Fund	£26,573
2	Direct giving by standing order	£7,832
3	Hirings	£5,798

4	Chaplaincy Fund	£3,782
5	Special collections	£2,987

Expenditure

You will notice that there is a £1,999 difference between Special Collections receipts and expenditure. The reason for this is that the collection for the largest of these, the Commitment for Life, took place during this period, and to allow for later contributions, it has always been the practice to delay its dispatch for a few weeks. This payment will be made during the next couple of months, and will thus show up as a greater item in our next report. The other major areas of expenditure are essentially routine. By far the greater part of the utilities area is due to the electricity bill, which can be expected to decline with the coming warmer weather and in the longer term after the installation of the new heating system.

Top five areas of expenditure:

1	URC – Ministry & Mission	£5,793
2	Church Administrator	£2,981
3	Building maintenance	£1,519
4	Utilities	£1,051
5	Special collections	£988

Current Balance & Trend

As stated in the first part of this report, even after setting aside the income to the Heating Project, there was a healthy increase in church funds. But it must be emphasised that the greater part was due to two special items – the Chaplaincy Fund, and Special Collections – and that if these are removed from the equation, the increase would be £1,937, which works out at 3.7%. This can be viewed with a modicum of cautious optimism, but it should be always borne in mind that it was only this time last year that the church finances were recovering from an all-time nadir.

Overall, the church balance is £89,774; of this, £32,806 is in the Heating Fund.

Substantial Anticipated Expenditure

The largest substantial anticipated expenditure forthcoming is, of course, the heating project, but the bulk of this is not expected to be for a number of months, and will not impinge upon the period before the next newsletter. Also, there are no other major items of work to the Church or Manse anticipated in the new future, though it is in the nature of such things that you never know just what is round the corner... (a Biblical plague of pigeons, perhaps?).

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.

EDITOR'S COMMENTS

Wow! I am writing this in April yet it feels like I fell asleep and woke up two months later! What amazing weather we have experienced this past month. And what a difference it makes to the way individuals feel, as – it would appear – does a good wedding. And for many there is also the joy that comes from the end of Lent and the celebration of the risen Lord. However, unfortunately, for a lot of people in this country the main thing that appears to be celebrated at Easter time is chocolate, with the link to the amazing sacrifice given to the world being ignored or even mocked. This is a sad situation.

Stories are told of churches in the past 150 or so years being full to the brim, with them being at the heart of community life, and construction of many new buildings due to popular demand. This seems so removed from the experience of the Church in the UK today; so much so that such stories have more a feeling of a legend rather than truth. Is this due to the human trait of positive

filtration of events from reminiscence? Or is this, indeed, past reality? I suggest that this type of discussion is where the Church can go wrong: talking too much about what may or may not have been and looking for something - or someone - to blame for the decline of the Church in the UK, rather than focusing on the current situation, the ideal situation and the means by which it should attempt to reach that desired destination.

The Church in the UK must recognise that it is no longer in the same privileged position it once was and that people will not automatically walk through its doors because it has 'always' been there. Many familiar high street brand names have fallen into this same trap. The clever and successful companies have overcome such complacency, surviving by understanding how to engage with 21st century Britain and adapting accordingly. Nevertheless, many well-established organisations have died. The Church must learn from such examples.

'...for a lot of people in this country the main thing that appears to be celebrated at Easter time is chocolate'

Think of how the Church in the UK usually behaves and then compare it to successful companies... Such companies invest heavily in promoting their products, both financially and in terms of time & effort, informing the potential customer of the reason(s) to try their offerings. The retail outlets then invest heavily to present the product effectively and to ensure the individual perceives that their custom matters, as well as them enjoying their experience. If the product satisfies their need then this will entice future transactions. Such companies then spend more time, effort & money trying to keep the individual's loyalty, through continued communication and offering other value-added products or services. Recommendations are then made by these individuals to their family, friends & colleagues, from whom the companies gain more custom and which leads their product to become a household name. The context and motivation may be

different in business world to that of the Church but I believe individuals' behaviours and expectations remain the same.

Effective communication is essential to encourage individuals to walk through church doors, they must then receive the correct welcome and our faith & God must be presented to them in a relevant and effective manner. As with the example above, the same offering (in this case, God) can be sourced from many places and an individual's return to a specific place of worship can never be guaranteed. The individual may like the offering at one location and then try another from a similar brand of worship, or they may like the offering but not the delivery and try a different brand of worship. However, in the worst instance, the individual can be completely deterred from a relationship with God. Such an occurrence means the failure of the Christian mission to be witnesses of God and His unconditional love for all.

It is good to see the United Reformed Church evaluating the current state of affairs and trying to address them, particularly with the introduction of the ZI initiative that we will hear more on as the year progresses. This is an encouraging initiative that utilises communications experts to help us engage with modern day Britons, many of who have never walked through the doors of a church, who do not see the relevance of the Church or even having a faith, who despise organised religion and who think the Church to be hypocritical in many ways. Yes, it is a major challenge but it is nothing new in the history of the Church. I just hope that when people come knocking on the URC doors that our houses are in order.

Tim

Newsletter Deadline...

All contributions for the next issue of the newsletter should be sent to Tim Llewelyn (Editor) by Sunday 10th July 2011 to the following Email address: lllewelyn_tg@hotmail.com.

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

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

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Events

May

- 1st *FirstSunday*. Church. 7:15pm.
- 8th *Living the Questions*. Church. 7:00pm.
- 13th *Students & young adults' Meal*. The Manse. 6:00 pm.
- 22nd *Living the Questions*. Church. 7:00pm.
- 23rd *Artweek*. Church. 11:00am – 1:00pm.
- 25th *Living the Questions*. Church. 7:00pm.
- 27th *Fourth Friday – Nicola Blackwood*. Cumnor URC. 7:15pm.
- 29th *Living the Questions*. Church. 7:00pm.

June

- 5th *FirstSunday*. Church. 7:15pm.
- 12th *Oxford Pride Parade*. Oxford. All day.
Living the Questions. Church. 7:00pm.
- 18th *Synod Family Fun Day*. Henley-on-Thames. 11:00am - 4:30pm
- 19th *Faith in Action Group Joint Worship: Tracing the Tax*.
Michael at the North Gate. 10:30am
Living the Questions. Church. 7:00pm.
- 24th *Fourth Friday – Philip Pullman*. Cumnor URC. 7:15pm.
- 25th *Garden Party*. Ickford, near Thame. 3:00 – 5:30pm.
- 26th *Living the Questions*. Church. 7:00pm.
-

July

1st *First Sunday.* Church. 7:15pm.

Meetings

May

4th *Mission Group.* The Manse. 7:30pm.

5th *Elders' Meeting.* Church. 7:45pm.

12th *Finance & Property Committee.* Church. 7:30pm.

17th *Elders' Meeting.* Church. 7:45pm.

June

5th *Annual General Meeting.* Church. After worship.

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

23rd *Elders' Meeting.* Church. 7:45pm.

July

13th *Mission Group.* The Manse. 7:30pm.

14th *Finance & Property Committee.* Church. 7:30pm.

LECTIONARY

May

1st Acts 2:14a, 22-32; Psalm 16; 1 Peter 1:3-9; John 20:19-31.

8th Acts 2:14a, 36-41; Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19; 1 Peter 1:17-23;
Luke 24:13-35.

15th Acts 2:42-47; Psalm 23; 1 Peter 2:19-25; John 10:1-10.

22nd Acts 7:55-60; Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16; 1 Peter 2:2-10; John 14:1-14.

29th Acts 17:22-31; Psalm 66:8-20; 1 Peter 3:13-22; John 14:15-21.

June

5th Acts 1:6-14; Psalm 68:1-10, 32-35; 1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11;
John 17:1-11.

12th Acts 2:1-21; Psalm 104:24-34, 35b; 1 Corinthians 12:3b-13;
John 20:19-23.

19th Genesis 1:1-2:4a; 2 Corinthians 13:11-13; Matthew 28:16-20.

26th Genesis 22:1-14; Jeremiah 28:5-9; Romans 6:12-23;
Matthew 10:40-42.

July

3rd Genesis 24:34-38, 42-49, 58-67; Zechariah 9:9-12; Romans
7:15-25a; Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30.

10th Genesis 25:19-34; Isaiah 55:10-13; Romans 8:1-11; Matthew
13:1-9, 18-23.

17th Genesis 28:10-19a; Solomon 12:13, 16-19; Romans 8:12-25;
Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43.

24th Genesis 29:15-28; 1 Kings 3:5-12; Romans 8:26-39; Matthew
13:31-33, 44-52.

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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