

# St Columba's

United Reformed Church, Oxford

## Newsletter



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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

It is more than a month since the church meeting at which we decided to make a commitment to stay at our location for the foreseeable future. Since then, we have received numerous messages of encouragement and support from our hirers and colleague churches in the area. It has been gratifying to see the good will that surrounds us.

Now, on to work! As we said in the letter summing up the meeting that went to all members and friends, this was not a decision to preserve the status quo. As a part of the decision-making process, we laboured to articulate what would make staying the best possible option. Here is what we came up with:

- Understanding that the church building is not just a building, but a power house!
- Maintaining a strong church and using our resources well;
- Extending our hiring and engaging in fundraising (emphasising fun);
- Increasing our outreach to younger people;
- Building on what is distinctive about St Columba's: Letting our light shine!
- Giving the United Reformed Church presence around Oxford a strong focus, being cognizant of our role in the city centre;

- Creative thinking about how to use all of our resources;
- Endeavouring to speak to our contemporary culture.

In the last six weeks we have pulled together a fundraising committee and started working on our welcome using the 'Everybody Welcome' curriculum developed by the Church of England and recommended by the URC national office. Early in the New Year we will make the important decision of whether to commit to replacing our heating system. Leading up to that 16<sup>th</sup> January church meeting, you will have the chance to see the plans and consider the advice of the URC heating specialist and Synod property officer.

***“We do not accept the fate that contemporary culture allots to church life; we will not die!”***

Putting the last and the next few months into an Advent perspective, I would say that we are pregnant – nurturing new life that is hidden from full view. All the conversations and thinking that has gone on, all the decisions made and to be made, and all of the work to improve our welcome and hone our hospitality are but preparations for the new life that we desire. Our old life was not bad or inadequate, but we sense that there is more that lies ahead: more faithfulness, more joy, more work, more blessings and more fun. We do not accept the fate that contemporary culture allots to church life; we will not die! While we welcome the little deaths, the letting go and the taking on that will enable us to thrive, we are choosing life.

I have a sense of joy about this journey. With Mary, we are cradling the seeds of new life. With Joseph, we are listening for angelic voices in our dreams. With Elizabeth, we affirm the God-given gifts we see in others and call forth courage and perseverance.

No pregnant woman ever knows exactly who or what she is



carrying. So too we do not know where this journey will take us or what we will look like in one or two years' time. But this we do know: the new life we seek will be created by God, given in response to our yes, let it be done in me. Mary's willing and open heart, Joseph's courage in the face of public disapproval, and Elizabeth's gifts of affirmation guide us into the future in hope and expectation.

Gratefully yours,

*Carla*

## NEWS OF ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS

### **Finance & Property Committee**

The Finance and Property Committee continues to meet on a monthly basis. Reducing costs and increasing income also continues to be a focus. Although the last 3 months have not been as positive as was hoped, the year-to-date figure - influenced by numerous factors - is a substantial improvement. However, although the immediate concern has been removed, the church should not become complacent. Next year, for example, there will be the impact of increased VAT along with reduced Gift Aid contributions. The 2011 budget proposal highlights the high operating cost of the building and we believe this process is essential to manage the church funds effectively.

Since the commitment was made to the current building, our church administrator (Sue Pearce) has focused on the under-utilisation of the church building during the daytime. This, we believe, has much potential and Sue has already secured new hirers. Furthermore, a new fund-raising committee has been

initiated. The remit of this group is to help increase the income of the church for general funds and also for project-specific requirements.

The church heating project has also regained momentum, following which there is the intention for the system proposal (including design) to be made available to church members and friends in December, with a chance to ask questions of the consultant (Chris Reading) and also Synod representatives for a decision to be made by the church meeting in early 2011.

**Tim Llewelyn**

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## **FirstSunday**

In October we were able to welcome Sarah Jones to St Columba's as part of her 'First Person Singular' tour, we were treated to wry folk music and some insights into her personal story.



In November we started the 'Living the Questions' series and we are planning to continue with it for most of our meetings this year.

Find out what we're up to on our website or on Facebook.

**Andrew Smith**

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## **The Older Group in Junior Church**

The older group in Junior Church had a very special meeting on Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> November. It was one of those very rare Sundays

when Carla, though she was not leading worship, was nevertheless in church, and she came out and joined us. Although Carla had joined the younger group in Junior Church before, this was a first for us. Kesang, Tenzin, Max, Natasha, Kit, and I were all in attendance.

We had given some thought beforehand to how we would use the time. We were keen to take advantage of the opportunity to put various questions to Carla about her own faith. In particular, we were interested to learn by what journey she had eventually arrived at the United Reformed Church as her spiritual home. But we also wanted to ensure that the meeting did not turn into a simple interrogation of Carla, and the discussion eventually ranged very widely, with the youngsters contributing just as much as they elicited. Among other things, we talked about:

- fundamentalism, both in Christianity and in other religions;
- how to read the Bible, and in particular how to seek guidance from it when confronting various contemporary moral issues;
- similarities and differences between the United Reformed Church and other Christian denominations;
- similarities and differences between Christianity and other religions.

We had an extremely stimulating and thoroughly enjoyable session. We are enormously grateful to Carla for her participation. We also hope very much that the exercise will be repeated some day!

Finally, lest you think that our meetings lack levity, I should add that I was persuaded by the youngsters to recount a story that I had told the previous week about a recent sequence of letters that appeared in the 'Letters' page of The Daily Telegraph. Someone had written a letter complaining of the tendency among 'the youth of today' to use the adverb 'well' as a synonym for 'very', as in 'I only got three hours sleep last night, and I am well tired.' One by one other letters appeared in which

the complaint was endorsed and further egregious examples of this lamentable tendency were cited, until eventually someone wrote in expostulating, 'I have now heard the ultimate absurdity! I overheard a young man saying, 'I am well ill.' There then appeared a more conciliatory letter which ran as follows: 'Before we all get too irate about this usage, let us not forget that there is a Biblical precedent for it. In Matthew, Chapter III, verse 17, after Jesus has been baptized by John, a voice from heaven is heard saying, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.'

**Adrian Moore**

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## **Cumnor URC**



In spite of continuing concerns for the health of some of our members life in Cumnor URC continues apace. We are elated to have reached our £10,000 target for the Hope & Faith Christian Community School Building Fund but recognise that the School's needs continue. We have been working with the school and with a Zambian accountant (introduced to us by Iain McClaren) to strengthen their accounting arrangements to reflect the increasing size and complexity of the operation. This, together with maintaining support to the teaching and feeding programmes of the school, is our priority for the coming year.

We have launched a series of dinner and discussion sessions on the fourth Friday each month. The first, in October, was led by

Canon James Woodward of St George's Chapel Windsor on the topic of the 'Spiritual tasks of ageing'. The second, on 'Creativity' will be led on 26<sup>th</sup> November by David, Eve and Anna Lockett: an artist, a writer and a harpist. The meeting starts with supper at 7:15pm and aims to finish just before 9:00pm. The third 'Fourth Friday' will be on 28<sup>th</sup> January when Liz Carmichael will lead our thinking on 'Friendship'.

Through November we have provided 'Winter Lunches' on Saturdays, providing a simple lunch of soup, bread and cheese, apple pie and cream, with the added benefit of an opportunity to meet people and talk. It builds on our capacity for offering hospitality to a range of people drawn from our own and other churches, and from the community of Cumnor. If you missed the 'Winter Lunches' then look out for 'Country Lunches' on the Saturdays of March.

***Nigel Appleton***

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## **Oxford Reformed Christian Union (ORCU)**

This term, ORCU [[www.orcu.org](http://www.orcu.org)] has been fortunate to welcome eight fantastic speakers, including Keith Ward, Sharon Ferguson, Adrian Moore and our very own Carla Grosch-Miller! Each of them (so far!) has given powerful talks, which reminded us of both the importance and the limits of the role played by intellectual and academic study in faith, in amongst fascinating discussions of atheism, prejudice, the problem of suffering, and the beginnings and steps of faith taken by the faithful of the Bible (respectively).

The committee, me included, have worked exceptionally hard to keep things going, and I am sure you will join me in thanking them for their commitment to this project. And I assure you that we as a committee want to thank you, St Columba's URC, very much for the financial support which made the entire endeavour at all possible, including the use of facilities, bread and wine for communion, coffee and tea for after our meetings, sheet-music

for the rock-gospel choir from which to learn, and printing of our advertising materials.

Both ORCU and the choir have seen a consistent core of attendees (different for both!) and a significant number of 'fair-weather-attendees' - that is, people who just pop along when they want to hear the speaker, or fancy a sing-song! However, we still need your help!



ORCU is not yet large enough to support itself financially, and so we are asking you to continue to support us for another term, and to help us fix that problem by offering any assistance you feel you can provide to our advertising campaigns. Secondly, the choir is blossoming, but we are struggling to find a pianist (in fact, so is ORCU; Calum does a fantastic job, but we need to be looking toward him playing guitar), so I have been having to do parts of rehearsals acapella, and the provisional pianist who was coming up from Reading every week is still having to do so as many weeks as he can!

I thank you all sincerely for your support of the project, and hope you will continue to do so with gifts of time and talent, and not just tithe!

With love, God bless,

**Reuben Walsh**

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### **Tree Decorating**

There will be tree decorating in the church sanctuary on Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> December. We shall be having a fine Christmas tree in the church and want to make it even more lovely. All families with children are invited to come at 10.00am to help in decorating the tree. There will be refreshments when we have finished to help fortify you for the rest of the day.

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### **Gift Service**

On Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> December please bring your unwrapped gifts for children to be distributed by the Salvation Army, and any blankets, warm socks, hats, gloves or towels that you wish to donate to the Advent Appeal for Homeless Pathways which supports O'Hanlon House and Julian Housing. [See the poster on the church notice board for more information.]

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### **Open Air Carol Service**

On Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> December at 4pm in Bonn Square will be an open air carol service with the Salvation Army Band and a choir made up of local church members. Show up and sing!

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### **Prayers for the Homeless**

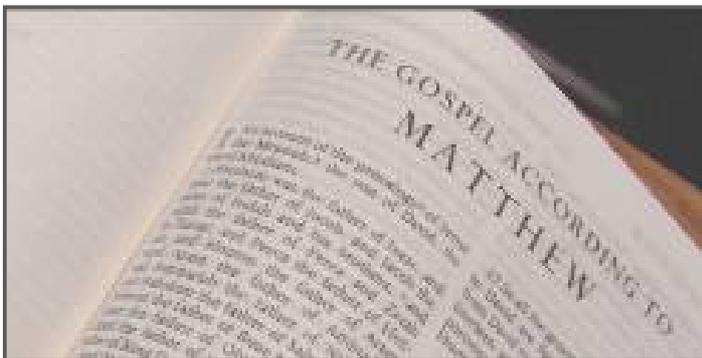
Every first Wednesday, Prayers for the Homeless are said in different churches from 1:15 - 1:35pm around the city centre. St Columba's will host the prayers on Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> January.

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## Matthew in Depth

On Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> January, John Proctor will travel west from Westminster College, Cambridge to join us for worship and a post-worship talk on the gospel of Matthew - our gospel for this year. John will be preaching 'Northern Light' from Matthew 4:12-23, and after a soup lunch will speak on 'Presence and Practice: the Plot and Progress of Matthew's Gospel'.

*John was born in Scotland in 1952, and grew up in England. He studied at Glasgow University for the Church of Scotland ministry, and was a parish minister in Glasgow for five years, before moving south again in 1986. Since then he has worked for the United Reformed Church, at Westminster College, teaching the New Testament to students in Cambridge and to church groups around the UK. John has published 'The People's Bible Commentary: Matthew' (2001), and several Grove booklets on topics in the gospels and Acts (1998-2009). He regularly takes services in local churches, and leads training events for ministers and congregations.*



*John is married to Elaine, with an adult daughter and son. Away from work he bird-watches, follows cricket and supports Cambridge City in the Southern Football League.*

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## TablePrayer: The Winter Name of God

Our January communion service on Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> January will feature the sung liturgy 'TablePrayer: The Winter Name of God' by Michael Joncas. If you are interested in joining the choir, please let Paul Page know: [ppage3@btinternet.com](mailto:ppage3@btinternet.com). Rehearsals will take place on 9<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> January at 10:00am.

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## **Week of Prayer for Christian Unity: 16<sup>th</sup> – 23<sup>rd</sup> January**

We will worship with our ecumenical sisters and brothers on Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> January at 6:30pm at Wesley Memorial Methodist Church to kick off the 'Week of Prayer for Christian Unity'. Professor Paul Fiddes, Baptist theologian and member of New Road Baptist Church, will be preaching. Mr. Fiddes is Professor of Systematic Theology at Oxford University and former Principal of Regent's Park College and chair of the Theology Faculty. He has been described as the leading British Baptist theologian of his generation and is the author of numerous books and publications, including 'The Creative Suffering of God'.

At the end of the Week of Prayer (23<sup>rd</sup> January), the four Faith in Action Churches will swap pulpits: Revd Bob Wilkes of St Michael at the North Gate will preach at St Columba's and our minister will take the pulpit at Wesley Memorial Methodist Church.

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## **Burn's Supper**



The annual St Columba's Burns Supper will take place on Saturday Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> January. We will be celebrating the birthday of Scotland's most famous poet with the traditional haggis dinner (vegetarian haggis available), followed by an informal evening of songs, poems and other entertainment, and some lively Scottish

country dancing. Do come along and bring your friends - this is a relaxed and friendly occasion, and no knowledge of Burns, Scotland, or country dancing is necessary! Anyone who would like to contribute a poem, song, story, or anything else to the entertainment is invited to get in touch with Shelagh Sneddon [[shelagh.sneddon@classics.ox.ac.uk](mailto:shelagh.sneddon@classics.ox.ac.uk)] as soon as possible.

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### **Fourth Friday at Cumnor: Friendship**

January's Fourth Friday brings the Revd Dr Liz Carmichael to Cumnor URC on Friday 28<sup>th</sup> January to speak about Friendship. Dinner will be held in the Church Hall at 7:15pm, after which Dr Carmichael will address us and lead a discussion. RSVP for catering purposes: Glenda, 01865 883 515.

*Dr Carmichael is Chaplain, Fellow and Tutor in Theology at St John's College, Oxford. Originally trained as a medical doctor in Oxford and London, she worked a year in Newfoundland / Labrador before heading for hospital work in Soweto, South Africa where from 1975 to 1981 she experienced the anti-apartheid struggle and co-led contact and reconciliation programmes. Returning to Oxford she gained a first-class BA in Theology and wrote a doctorate on Christian love as friendship-love. She was ordained priest in Johannesburg in 1992 while working in spirituality and theological education in the diocese and serving on local and regional Peace Committees under the National Peace Accord, for which she was appointed MBE in 1995. Her book 'Friendship: Interpreting Christian Love' was published in 2004. Liz convenes the Oxford Network for Peace Studies (OxPeace) - a multidisciplinary group that aims to promote and raise the profile of the serious study of peace, peacemaking, peace building and peacekeeping in Oxford University and beyond.*

## INFORMATION

### Reading Matthew's Gospel

As Advent marks the beginning of the Church's liturgical year, the lectionary takes us from Year C, in which we have worked with Luke, to Year A, where we read Matthew's Gospel over the year.

The Elders thought that members of the congregation might like to find out more about this Gospel, and how it relates to the other Gospels. We have found three books that we think people might find stimulating.

The first two are by Susan Durber's colleague John Proctor, who teaches New Testament at Westminster College, Cambridge. 'Matthew's Jesus' (Grove Books, 2004) is a short (28 page) introductory booklet looking at the message and meaning of this Gospel, while 'The People's Bible Commentary: Matthew' (BRF, 2001) gives commentary on the whole Gospel, divided into short sections so it could be used as daily devotional reading. Finally, for a different approach to the book 'Companion God: a cross-cultural commentary on the Gospel of Matthew' by George T. Montague (Paulist Press, revised edition 2010), is written by a American Catholic priest who has worked in seminary education and in Nepal, and reflects the insights he felt he gained from living in a culture that is perhaps closer to that of biblical times than a Western consumer society might be.

**Gordon Woods**

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### Office Space

There is an exciting new lettings opportunity that has arisen with an English college based in a small building in St Aldate's - they would like to use St Columba's during day times for some individual tuition, Monday morning new student arrivals,

examinations, etc. They will pay the business rate and are thrilled with the building!

**Sue Pearce**

## NEWS ABOUT PEOPLE

### **Congratulations**

Paul Page completed Ride & Stride in September raising £109 for the Oxfordshire Historic Churches Trust of which half will go to St Columba's.

St Columba's contribution to the work of Archway was recently honoured when Ruth Sutherland, who co-ordinates Wednesday Welcome for Archway, received a 'Volunteers Make a Difference in Oxfordshire' award at County Hall. In making the award, Lindsay Watts - who heads the Oxfordshire Community and Voluntary Action - described briefly the work that Ruth co-ordinates: a weekly drop-in cafe for people who suffer from loneliness (the Oxford-based charity Archway supports all people suffering from loneliness).

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### **In Memoriam: Alison Duthie**

Longer-standing members were saddened in September by the death of Alison Duthie.

Alison attended St Leonard's School in St Andrews as a girl, where she and Ruth Micklem met. A graduate of Edinburgh University, Alison trained as a nurse at Edinburgh Royal Infirmary. She married Robert (later Professor) Duthie who worked at the Nuffield Orthopaedic Hospital. They had two boys, Malcolm and Alistair, and two girls, Catriona and Gillian. Alison became Sunday School Superintendent in 1975, a post which she held for several years and which she carried out superbly; one member

remembers how kind she was and how she used to take the Sunday School out to Christ Church meadow for lessons on summer Sundays. She was elected an Elder in 1977, and she served on the Elders' Meeting until 1998: she was a very conscientious Elder, who for example visited my mother even when such visits were not very rewarding (my mother suffered from dementia). The grounds of Barna Brow, the house in Harberton Mead in which Alison and Robert brought up their children, was the site for the 'manse' garden party on at least one occasion, and the house itself was the venue for various important church meetings, for example meeting with prospective ministers.

Alison was full of good works outside as well as inside St Columba's: among other things she worked for the Red Cross in North Oxford for many years, and later she was a committee member of the Wyndham House Housing Project. She taught History at Headington School for several years, and she was also a member of the Board of Governors there.

After retirement, she and Robert moved to sheltered housing at Shipton under Wychwood, where they became very much part of the village community and attended the village church, although they always thought of St Columba's as their 'home' church. Particularly after Robert's death in 2005 Alison's health deteriorated, and she died on 7<sup>th</sup> September of this year. She was a very fine person. St Columba's was represented at the cremation service on 17<sup>th</sup> September by Lettice Bowen, Alastair Howatson, Ian Kennedy and Tony Tucker.

***Wilson Sutherland***

## **PROFILE**

### **Islam: Towards a Broader Understanding...**

One of the stated objects of the Oxford Council of Faiths is 'To promote projects, meetings and events whereby faiths can

inform people of all ages in the local community about their beliefs and traditions'. This is something we haven't really got round to yet. We have heard from time to time, a member of one faith group saying something about what another faith group believes, but we much prefer to have a faith group speak for itself.

We recently came across a booklet titled 'Understanding Islam and the Muslims' and since it was offered to us by a respected member of one of our local Mosques, we believe it to be correct in content. We cannot begin to cover all the material in one short article, but we hope that the following paragraphs will give some concept of the core of what the Islamic faith is all about.

***“Muslims follow a religion of peace, mercy and forgiveness”***

The Arabic word 'Islam' simply means 'submission' and it derives from a word meaning 'peace'. In a religious context, it means complete submission to the will of God. Islam is both a religion and a complete way of life. Muslims follow a religion of peace, mercy and forgiveness, and the majority have nothing to do with the extremely grave events which have come to be associated with their faith.

They believe in One Unique Incomparable God; in the Angels created by Him; in the prophets through whom His revelations were brought to mankind; in the Day of Judgment and individual accountability for actions; in God's complete authority over human destiny and in life after death.

Muslims believe in a chain of prophets starting with Adam and including Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Job, Moses, Aaron, David, Solomon, Elias, Jonah, John the Baptist and Jesus. But they believe that God's final message to man, a re-confirmation of the eternal message and a summing-up of all that has gone before was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad

through Gabriel.

By this time, many readers from a range of faiths will be seeing some points of difference from their own beliefs, but also some common ground – and it is always interesting to the writer of this short article to find the points of commonality.

The Prophet Muhammad was 40 years old when he received his first revelation from God through the Angel Gabriel whilst engaged in a meditative retreat. This revelation, which continued for 23 years, is known as the Q'uran. Remarkably, the Prophet memorised the entire revelation and subsequently dictated it to his companions, amongst whom were scribes who recorded and cross-checked it during his lifetime. Not one word of its 114 chapters has been changed over the centuries. Muslims regard the Q'uran as the last revealed word of God, and it is the prime source of every Muslim's faith and practice.

A secondary source is the Sunnah, which is a record of the practice and example of the Prophet. Belief in the Sunnah is part of the Islamic faith. A hadith is a reliably transmitted report of what the Prophet said, did or approved. Here are a few examples, which have an interesting parallel in the Christian's Bible:

- 'God does not judge according to your bodies and appearances, but He scans your hearts and looks into your deeds';
- 'God has no mercy on one who has no mercy for others';
- 'Powerful is not he who knocks the other down; indeed, powerful is he who controls himself in a fit of anger'.

We hope to continue this series of simple introductions to the beliefs of our constituent faith groups in subsequent Newsletters, so we would welcome authoritative material on which we can draw.

***From the Oxford Council of Faiths' Newsletter***

### **Corporate Responsibility and Ethical Investment**

We all know that the actions of multinational companies can have a huge impact – for good or ill – on the well-being of communities around the world; and indeed on the fabric of the earth itself. We have seen dramatic examples recently in the global financial crisis and in the Deepwater oil disaster off the USA. But every day around the world the policy and practice of well-known companies with regard to human rights, employment, supply chains and environmental impact has a significant effect on the lives and livelihoods of communities, particularly on the poorest.

Christian faith calls us to work for justice and environmental stewardship. But often we feel helpless to change the actions of the powerful, be they governments or multinational companies. In fact we potentially have much more influence than we sometimes realise. The positive impact of consumer power has been graphically illustrated in recent years by the exponential growth of fair trade. We also have power as investors and shareholders.

***“Christian faith calls us to work for justice and environmental stewardship.”***

All of us are, one way or another, investors in companies and therefore part owners. This may be directly through owning shares, or indirectly through our pension funds, savings, bank accounts and insurance policies, and through the church we belong to. Most church denominations are major shareholders.

Shareholders, as company owners, give companies their mandate to operate. What companies do, therefore, they do in our name. Investment entails responsibility. Awareness of this fact

is a key ethic for Christians, and accepting this responsibility empowers us to realise that we can all participate in improving the policy and practices of companies.

There are three main aspects to ethical investment (sometimes referred to as 'socially responsible' or simply 'responsible' investment):

1. *Negative* - Choosing not to invest or to divest/disinvest from industry sectors, e.g. armaments, tobacco, gambling, pornography, or from companies with a poor record on human rights, environment, etc.
2. *Positive* - Choosing specific good things to invest in, e.g. sectors like sustainable forestry, renewable energy, health care, & sustainable property, or the most responsible looking company in its particular sector. Micro-finance for small scale start up business, mainly in developing countries, and funding for social enterprise are becoming increasingly popular as positive investments, e.g. through Oikocredit, Shared Interest, and Big Issue Invest. Sometimes investors choose to accept a lower return than the current market average for this sort of investment in recognition of the additional social return generated.
3. *Engagement* - Talking to those multinational companies in which investments are held to try to improve one or several aspects of their corporate responsibility. If the dialogue does not progress satisfactorily, shareholders can make their concerns more public, e.g. through questions and voting at the company AGM, and by filing a shareholder resolution, e.g. shareholder resolutions on tar sands extraction at the 2010 AGMs of BP and Shell.

ECCR (the Ecumenical Council for Corporate Responsibility) is a membership organisation which ties together corporate responsibility and ethical investment issues by undertaking research, advocacy and dialogue to encourage companies to meet higher standards of corporate responsibility, while assisting

churches and their members to make investment decisions which further this work through responsible and positive impact investment. ECCR's website [www.eccr.org.uk](http://www.eccr.org.uk) has lots of information about current issues, ideas for action, and the chance to sign up for a monthly e-newsletter and to become a member or make a donation to support ECCR's work.

**Helen Boothroyd**  
**Church and Membership Relations Officer, ECCR**

## REPORTS

### A Financial Update...

#### Overview

	Aug – Nov 2010	Past 6 Months	Year-To-Date
<b>Income</b>	£17,678	£50,801	£103,524
<b>Expenditure</b>	£22,940	£45,784	£75,276
<b>Balance</b>	£43,479	£43,479	£43,479
<b>Trend</b>	-10.8% (£5,262)	+13.0% (£5,017)	+185.5% (£28,248)

Disappointingly, the past three months have seen a significant nett loss, in contrast to the more encouraging figures for the first eight months of the year.

#### Income

As with the last report, it seemed most useful to make a comparison with the same period last year. When this is done, it shows a slight increase in income; this is only of about £700 (4%), but is nonetheless disappointing. The decline can actually be attributed to a receipt from the URC Chaplaincy Fund received during this period last year, received earlier this year. The most encouraging sign was that a slight decline in giving through the plate and by envelope was more than matched by giving by

standing order: overall, there was a £1,000 increase in giving, which may well have been the outcome from last year's Pledge Sunday.

*The top five areas of income were:*

1. Giving by standing order	£9,537
2. Giving by envelope/cheque	£3,095
3. Hirings	£2,046
4. Giving through the open plate	£1,047
5. Special collection: Pakistan	£1,003

### Expenditure

The changes in income relative to last year are small compared to expenditure, which for this period this year is no less than £18,000 lower than last year! This is greatly to be applauded, of course, but it must be recognized that it is almost entirely attributed to three items: 1) major fabric and equipment, relating to the work being done for the Quinquennial Report and the requirement Health and Safety, which does not appear this year; 2) building maintenance, now partially under the heading of 'utilities' (it is very much to the credit of Sue that this item has been brought down so dramatically); 3) our donation to Commitment for Life, which this year was sent off earlier. Once again, there needs to be a warning that we never know when some major expenditure might be required upon the building...

*The top five areas of expenditure are:*

1. URC – Ministry & Mission	£8,690
2. Church administrator/expenses	£3,784
3. Insurance	£1,991
4. Special collection: Pakistan	£1,263 (with Gift Aid)
5. Manse expenses	£1,154

### Current Balance & Trend

The balance of £43,479 represents, as has already been mentioned, a decline of £5,000 from three months ago, but is still

higher than six months ago, and a great deal higher than the low point at the beginning of the year. The hope is that the savings that have been made in our expenditure can be maintained, and further improved. As an example, to that effect Sue is currently investigating electricity suppliers which may be cheaper than our current one. As for our income, we have just had another Pledge Sunday, and it is to be hoped that we will be seeing an increase in dealing as a result. It is still the intention of the treasurers that when the church bank balance has increased a little further, to make a long-term investment to replace those which have had to be cashed in over the past few years.



### Substantial Anticipated Expenditure

The largest single anticipated item of expenditure is, of course, the heating project. Now that the decision has been taken that the church should remain in this building, it will be possible to go forward with the process of taking decisions in relation to the project. Feelers have been put out for the creation of a Fund-Raising Committee in view of this and also to increase income generally. [Volunteers are very welcome!]

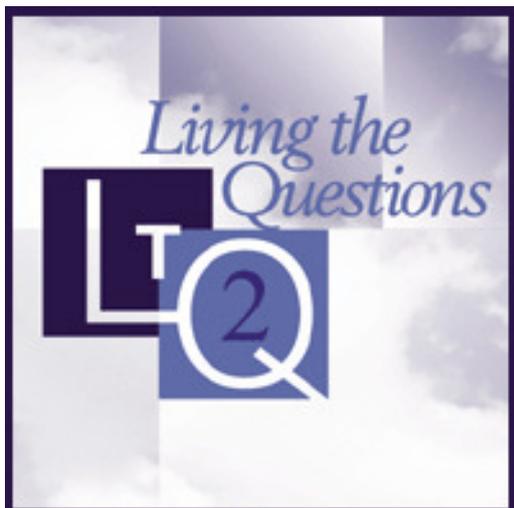
***Andrew Baker and David North***

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### **Living the Questions**

I recently became a member at St Columba's and only two weeks later the Sunday evening discussion group 'Living the

Questions' began. There could have been few better ways of exploring what membership means.



Our Sunday evening fellowship begins with the sharing of a truly delicious meal, prepared each week by Aphinya Thaler, with help from her husband Harald. Each week Ian and I have shared a table with different members of St Columba's, most of whom we had not known well previously, as well as with guests from Cumnor & New Road Baptist Church who have joined our group.

The discussion which follows the meal enables us to take our fellowship further. The reading of an introduction to the week's topic is followed by a series of video interviews with eminent modern theologians. The videos are interspersed with periods of discussion with the others at our table, and finished by a discussion among the whole group. I have found the small group discussions especially valuable as they have made me think in a fresh way about what it means to be a member of the United Reformed Church.

The course encourages us to question simplistic or authoritarian interpretations of our faith in the light of modern research and scholarship. The material for the introductory session hinted that we might find this uncomfortable, revolutionary, even shocking, but I do not think it has come as either a new revelation or a heretical surprise to many of our group. The Congregationalists and Presbyterians who formed the URC had behind them centuries of dissent from authoritarian doctrines, and their reverence for the Bible has always encompassed new interpretations and translations. However, I have found that these discussions have stimulated new thought about the implications of our 'dissenting', 'reformed' tradition.

I am sure that the ideas discussed each Sunday evening have

focused on as many different aspects of the material as there are small groups, and that the dominant thoughts taken away each week are as varied as the group members. For me, the questions have clustered around the idea of 'authority'. I have always taken for granted the Reformed dissenting attitude to creeds and Bible translations, without asking myself how I then distinguished 'churches' from sects, or how I used the Bible without cherry-picking the bits which suited my own prejudices. 'Living the Questions' has confronted me with these issues, but as we have struggled with ideas about the origins of the Bible and theological debates on the nature of God it has also suggested an answer: that it is membership of a group, and thus implicitly of a church, that enables one to begin to work towards a less subjective or prejudiced answer.

I am now looking forward to the remaining sessions in which we shall examine the lives of Jesus and Paul and, in the final session on 28<sup>th</sup> November, confront together 'the challenges facing progressive Christians'.

***Elma Sinclair***

## **Living the Questions: Reclaiming the World**

An exploration of progressive Christianity featuring premier religious thinkers of our day and providing a safe environment for people to ask questions and wrestle issues.

<b>16<sup>th</sup> Jan</b>	Restoring Relationships
<b>23<sup>rd</sup> Jan</b>	The Prophetic Jesus
<b>30<sup>th</sup> Jan</b>	Evil, Suffering & a God of Love
<b>13<sup>th</sup> Feb</b>	The Myth of Redemptive Violence
<b>20<sup>th</sup> Feb</b>	Practicing Resurrection
<b>27<sup>th</sup> Feb</b>	Debunking the Rapture
<b>13<sup>th</sup> Mar</b>	Reclaiming the World

Dinner is followed by a DVD and discussion session.

**Sunday Evenings, 7:00 - 9:00 pm**

## **Street Pastors: Commissioning & the First Night on Oxford's Streets**

What an exciting night! I was commissioned along with around a dozen other Oxford Street Pastors yesterday evening and New Road Baptist Church. We were addressed by DCI Colin Paine of Thames Valley Police and by Revd Paul Rush of the Ascension Trust, that sets up each Street Pastors Scheme. There were people from many local churches and denominations being inducted as Street Pastors. Rob and Gemma Winn from Wesley Memorial Church have worked very hard in setting up the scheme and we are very honoured to have Pearl Lewis from the Salvation Army as our coordinator.

***“...doing things together with other denominations of Christians is extremely important”***

We started at 10:00pm and walked around Cornmarket Street, George Street, Park End Street, Hythe Bridge Street, Frideswide Square and St. Ebbes. We met and spoke to lots of people. Many were just interested in what we were doing, some wanted to know where to find a cab, a few women had tired feet and had taken their shoes off and so were grateful for the Street Pastors flip-flops that we were handing out. One group of us got into a really deep conversation with someone about problems at home and were the first people this person had felt able to talk to about it. We picked up quite a few glass bottles off the street and put them in bins thereby reducing the likelihood of their causing injury or being used as weapons. We spoke to quite a few homeless people who seemed genuinely pleased of the conversation and attention. There were some humbling stories.

I think we successfully stopped a fight from happening by going up and chatting to a group of young men who I think had had one too many drinks. Street Pastors is not about breaking up fights – that's the Police's job - but it is amazing the effect seeing a person wearing a clear Street Pastors uniform has on people. They want to chat and their aggression just seems to evaporate.

Quite the opposite reaction that people unfortunately sometimes have to the Police.

Towards the end of our session we met a very drunk young man who couldn't stand up and was rather ill. We helped him, giving him water, and making sure his friends knew how to look after him and were not going to leave him. We finished around 3:45am after an incredibly rewarding evening. I can't wait to go out again!

We were really grateful for the support of Karen Crossan, Oxford City Council's nightsafe manager; and of Thames Valley Police for being so friendly and supportive. You may ask why I am writing about this in my council blog. Well apart from the fact that most of our pastoring happens in my ward, Carfax, I think doing things in the community, whether they be as a response to faith or not, is very important for councillors if we are to stay in touch with our constituents.

On a theological note, I think that doing things together with other denominations of Christians is extremely important and is absolutely the way we grow together in common understanding of our calling. Sure - we have differences of opinion on some things but I think we are all agreed that we are called to share God's love, care and listening with all those we meet on the streets in our 10:00pm - 4:00am sessions.

**Tony Brett**



## EDITOR'S COMMENTS

Throughout the year we say 'Before you know it, Christmas will have arrived!', and - as this newsletter is distributed – it is now less than a month away, with Advent having already begun.

At this time of the year there is great anticipation of the event yet to come. We often get caught up in the hustle and bustle of Christmas shopping, the pre-Christmas parties, overloading our cupboards with indulgent foods, and everything else surrounding this festive season. Consequently, it can be far too easy to forget the actual event we are celebrating: the birth of Jesus Christ – God taking human form. Now that is something to celebrate!

In the West, where Christian custom and practice is in our heritage, we can forget that there are millions of people around the world whom have never heard the Christmas story and millions more whom have heard it but do not recognise its significance. This is a sad situation. If you are still asking why then let me reiterate... we are celebrating the Alpha and Omega walking on this very earth! No wonder organs roar and angelic voices sing during this festive period!

So, why then do we not shout about our Christian faith more often? Do we simply forget? Are we too busy to find the time? Do we not believe we are in possession of the necessary skills? Are we frightened that - in a world of science and reason – others will perceive us as rather crazy and therefore cast us aside? In fact, it is probably all of these and more.

With the start of Advent, we enter into the URC's evangelism year. This is the third and final year of its 'Vision4Life' programme. If you were not already aware of this then it might be a terrifying prospect. Or perhaps you were aware and have already decided that the Bible and prayer years were of much interest but that there is NO way you will be involved with evangelism! On the other hand, you may be chomping at the bit, ready to convert the masses!

The 'e' word is something that is avoided in many mainstream Christian denominations in the UK, for which there are many reasons. However – like Paul, Timothy, Peter and co. with the early Church – we are in a situation where there are many people who need to learn about God and what He has to offer, exemplified through Jesus Christ and understanding of which is provided through the Holy Spirit.

In the 'Vision4Life' 'Exploring Evangelism' booklet it is clear that evangelism is simply about sharing our faith. It states we can do this through cooperating with the Holy Spirit, with prayer, in hope, with joy, through stories, as a whole church, without a guarantee of success, through being vulnerable, in a variety of ways, by affirming what we are doing already, and with encouragement. So, don't worry, it is not just about standing in the high street quoting scripture and asking people if they have met Jesus (but feel free to do that if that is what you feel called to do); we all can – and must – pass on the message as witnesses to the world.

***“Evangelism – sharing our faith with others – is in our Christian heritage; it should be current practice; it must be our future; and it is not optional.”***

In committing to stay in our church building for the foreseeable future, I believe St Columba's has committed to share the Good News with ALL. This must be proactive, not just reactive. And it must be in ways that today's society can relate. This no doubt means change to one extent or another. And very few people like change even when it is for a good reason, as they have to leave their comfort zone. We, however, cannot let this be a barrier.

As indicated earlier, two thousand years ago the first Christians needed to draw upon the Holy Spirit and use much energy to introduce God to others, even with death being a potential consequence. This has continued throughout the subsequent centuries, by local church members to international missionaries.

At St Columba's, we evangelise in many ways. Recent initiatives include 'Living the Questions' and 'Everybody Welcome'. The URC's 'Vision 2020' programme and new marketing campaign will also heavily contribute to evangelism. And such activities must continue to be utilised. Evangelism – sharing our faith with others – is in our Christian heritage; it should be current practice; it must be our future; and it is not optional.

And, on that note, I will end the lecture!

***Have a Relaxing & Enjoyable Christmas  
and  
Best Wishes for the New Year!***

*Tim*

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

All contributions for the next issue of the newsletter should be sent to Tim Llewelyn (Editor) by Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> January 2011 to the following Email address: *llewelyn\_tg@hotmail.com* .

The next issue will cover from mid-February to April.

Please use the contents page to clarify the types of topic areas that are included in the newsletter.

### **For Guidance:**

- News items should ideally be no more than 400 words (maximum);
- Discussion articles should ideally be no more than 600 words (maximum).

## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

### Events

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#### December

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- 4<sup>th</sup> *Tree Decorating.* Church. 10:00am.
- 5<sup>th</sup> *Gift Service.* Church. 10:45am.
- 12<sup>th</sup> *Carol Service.* Church. 10:45am.
- 18<sup>th</sup> *Open Air Carol Service.* Bonn Square. 4:00pm.
- 19<sup>th</sup> *All Age Communion: For Everyone Born a Star Overhead.* Church. 10:45am.
- 24<sup>th</sup> *Wee Worship for Children.* Church. 3:00pm.  
*Carols by Candlelight.* Cumnor URC. 6:00pm.  
*Midnight Communion.* New Rd Baptist Church. 11:30pm.
- 25<sup>th</sup> *Christmas Day Worship.* Church. 10:45am.
- 26<sup>th</sup> *Boxing Day - Sunday Worship with New Rd Baptist Church.* Church. 10:45am.
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#### January

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- 5<sup>th</sup> *Prayers for the Homeless.* Church. 1:15pm.
- 9<sup>th</sup> *Matthew in depth.* Church. 10:45am & post-worship.
- 16<sup>th</sup> *Living the Questions.* Church. 7:00pm.
- 22<sup>nd</sup> *Burns' Night Supper.* Church. Evening [Time TBC].
- 23<sup>rd</sup> *Living the Questions.* Church. 7:00pm.
- 25<sup>th</sup> *Manse Discussion Group.* The Manse. 7:30pm.
- 28<sup>th</sup> *Fourth Friday: Friendship.* Cumnor URC. 7:15pm.

30<sup>th</sup> *Living the Questions.* Church. 7:00pm.

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*February*

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

13<sup>th</sup> *Living the Questions.* Church. 7:00pm.

22<sup>nd</sup> *Manse Discussion Group.* The Manse. 7:30pm.

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**Meetings**

*December*

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2<sup>nd</sup> *Elders' meeting.* The Manse. 7:30pm.

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

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*January*

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

16<sup>th</sup> *Church Meeting.* Church. After Sunday worship.

20<sup>th</sup> *Elders' meeting.* Church. 7:30pm.

26<sup>th</sup> *Mission Group meeting.* The Manse. 7:30pm.

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*February*

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

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## LECTIONARY

### December

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5<sup>th</sup> *Isaiah 2:1-5; Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19; Romans 15:4-13; Matthew 3:1-12.*

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12<sup>th</sup> *Isaiah 35:1-10; Psalm 146:5-10; James 5:7-10; Matt. 11:2-11.*

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19<sup>th</sup> *Isaiah 7:10-16; Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19; Romans 1:1-7; Matthew 1:18-25.*

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26<sup>th</sup> *Isaiah 63:7-9; Psalm 148; Hebrews 2:10-18; Matt. 2:1-23.*

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### January

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2<sup>nd</sup> *Jeremiah 31:7-14; Psalm 147:12-20; Ephesians 1:3-14; John 1:(1-9), 10-18.*

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9<sup>th</sup> *Isaiah 42:1-9; Psalm 29; Acts 10:34-43; Matthew 3:13-17.*

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16<sup>th</sup> *Isaiah 49:1-7; Psalm 40:1-11; 1 Corinthians 1:1-9; John 1:29-42.*

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23<sup>rd</sup> *Isaiah 9:1-4; Psalm 27:1, 4-9; 1 Corinthians 1:10-18; Matthew 4:12-23.*

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30<sup>th</sup> *Micah 6:1-8; Psalm 15; 1 Corinthians 1:18-31; Matt. 5:1-12.*

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### February

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6<sup>th</sup> *Isaiah 58:1-9a (9b-12); Psalm 112:1-9 (10); 1 Corinthians 2:1-12 (13-16); Matthew 5:13-20.*

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13<sup>th</sup> *Deuteronomy 30:15-20; Psalm 119:1-8; 1 Corinthians 3:1-9; Matthew 5:21-37.*

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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](mailto:minister@saintcolumbas.org)

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### Church Administrator

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Sue Pearce      Tel: 07880 601 109 Email: [administrator@saintcolumbas.org](mailto:administrator@saintcolumbas.org)

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### Treasurers

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Andrew Baker & David North      Email: [treasurer@saintcolumbas.org](mailto: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***

ALFRED STREET,  
OXFORD,  
OX1 4EH

[WWW.SAINTCOLUMBAS.ORG](http://WWW.SAINTCOLUMBAS.ORG)

- FIND US ON FACEBOOK TOO! -