

St Columba's

United Reformed Church, Oxford

Newsletter



Christmas & New Year Issue,
December 2015 - February 2016

CONTENTS

1. MINISTER'S LETTER	PAGE 3
2. NEWS OF ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS	PAGE 5
3. UPCOMING EVENTS	PAGE 7
4. INFORMATION	PAGE 14
5. NEWS ABOUT PEOPLE	PAGE 17
6. A CENTENARY MESSAGE	PAGE 17
7. A MODERN PSALM BY SIÂN JONES	PAGE 20
8. REPORT	PAGE 21
9. EDITOR'S COMMENTS	PAGE 23
10. DATES FOR YOUR DIARY	PAGE 24
11. LECTIONARY	PAGE 26
12. USEFUL CONTACT DETAILS	PAGE 27

MINISTER'S LETTER



Dear Friends,

In the glitter and cheer of the Christmas season, it is easy to overlook the fact that the Christmas story is full of gross inconvenience, life-threatening danger, physical discomfort and bad smells. The unseemliness of the whole event surpasses even that most painful family holiday gathering when the turkey was undercooked, the brussel sprouts greasy and soggy, and a drunk uncle's behaviour reached past embarrassing to almost criminal.

It is good to keep this fact about the Christmas story in mind as we rush about with long shopping lists, argue about who is going where, and brace ourselves for the disappointment of loneliness or a brush with the irreconcilable conflict that erupts every time the family comes together. Christ was born in a messy way into a messy world.

"As important as balancing the budget is for everyone, balancing it on the backs of the most vulnerable is distinctly odious."

It was to be expected. Advent begins with a cosmic cry for help. The first Sunday we read a rare bit of apocalyptic literature from a gospel, a kind of 'horrors of the end times happening now' story

that captured persecuted people's fear and hope in the first centuries of Christian life. We prepare ourselves for the Christmas event by sending out an SOS because we know the world is a mess.

"For where there is threat and death and greed, the temptation is to close up shop, assume we are powerless and avoid the pain."

This year it all seems worse. Since 2014, the world has been experiencing the largest mass migration of people forced from their homes by violence and persecution since World War II. Each day we witness flimsy boats landing on overburdened beaches and spilling their contents of traumatised children, women and men. More than 3,000 have lost their lives crossing the Mediterranean this year. In the meantime those who can, shut their eyes and pretend it is not our job to do something about this. Just this morning (mid-November) I received an email alerting me to Oxfordshire County Council's proposed £50m annual budget cuts from 2017 which will eviscerate housing services for the most vulnerable people. As important as balancing the budget is for everyone, balancing it on the backs of the most vulnerable is distinctly odious. Then there is the continuing threat of climate change that will unleash more conflict and suffering in years to come, a situation national leaders can't seem to get a grip on.

Into this mess, Christ is born again. The poet W H Auden in his Christmas oratorio wrote of the Christ event as...

*'...the stable where for once in our lives
Everything became a You and nothing was an It'.*

Is that not the salvific moment - when each of us remembers that we are part of an interdependent whole made up of uniquely precious 'Thou's, no one an 'It', no one beyond our care and compassion? That this happened in a malodorous context

makes it all the more powerful. For where there is threat and death and greed, the temptation is to close up shop, assume we are powerless and avoid the pain. Yet that moment is the precise time when Christ the 'Yes' was born into a room full of 'No's (I may be quoting Jon Sobrino here). That moment, like many births, is the revelation of the gift of life and hope that enables us to meet the challenges of the day.

I love that Christmas comes each year and, like an aphrodisiac, moves us to love beyond our means. In the midst of pain and confusion, some long heard melody strikes up its song in our hearts and we remember the You-ness of our fellow human beings and for a moment, maybe more, we *love as we are meant to love*.

That's what the long shopping lists, the charity donations and the family and friends gatherings are all about: loving as we are meant to love. In a messy and mean world where our frailty and imperfections are daily on show, this season of Christ's birth and manifestation enables us to love. Thanks be to God.

Carla

NEWS OF ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS

The Elders' Meeting

The Elders met on Thursday 24th September for a normal business meeting. Carla chaired the meeting and she opened with a short worship and reflection where those present thought about what gave them 'strength to walk in the dark' and each shared a prayer on this theme with the group. As usual, Elders reported on news of the members and friends on their pastoral lists and Carla said prayers especially for those we were thinking about.

The focus of the meeting was a report from the Elders with special responsibility for Children and Young People (Adrian, Pippa and

Rosemary). It was agreed to hold the annual commissioning of Junior Church leaders in October and we also talked about Safeguarding responsibilities and about the Child-friendly Church Award. There was also discussion of the recent donation to the church for work with families and children. It was agreed that the children themselves would be consulted on how to spend this and we noted that young people have strong social consciences, and that we want to encourage their outreach. Other matters included discussion of finance and property. We are immensely grateful to Tim Llewelyn and David North for agreeing to serve further terms as chair of the F&P Committee and as Treasurer respectively. It was agreed to take various matters such as the level of our contributions to the URC's Ministry and Mission fund (which pays for the ordained ministry), expenditure on building maintenance and discussions on the future of the organ to Church Meeting for discussion.

We met again for a roll meeting on Thursday 29th October. This is a special annual meeting where each Elder gives news on the members and friends on their own pastoral list. [Please be assured that any news shared in any Elders' meeting is of course treated in strict confidence and that we are also sensitive to matters where it is not appropriate for Elders to share specific information about individuals with the group.] This particular meeting is also an opportunity to keep the membership list up-to-date, ensuring that new members and friends are assigned an Elder and that people who have moved on and no longer wish to remain in touch are removed from the list. News both good and bad of all 100 or so of our people (plus children!) was shared; as you can imagine this meeting often overruns and this year was no exception! Carla and all the Elders prayed for all our members and friends at the meeting and continue to do so at every opportunity.

Mike Healey

The Finance and Property Committee

November's F&P Committee meeting focussed on the review and update of the budget for 2016, which had been carefully

put together by our Treasurers, David and Mary, ahead of the presentation to the Church Meeting on 22nd November (where it was subsequently approved).

Ken, our Facilities Manager, has been hard at work arranging and managing a number of repairs and maintenance jobs throughout the building, including completing the repairs to the vestry roof following the recent leak, redecorating the toilets, cleaning skylights, painting the walls in the vestibule and polishing floors.

The picture in terms of hirings continues to look healthy, with a four-week block booking recently confirmed with a theatre company for the summer of 2016.

In terms of the Quinquennial Report work - phase 1, for which additional budget was approved at the Church meeting in October, Ken is in the early stages of setting out a schedule of work, and is working closely with the contractor.

The Committee looks forward to a shorter-than-usual December meeting followed by a Christmas meal (not funded by church funds!).

Catrin Treharne

UPCOMING EVENTS

Prayers for the Paris Climate Summit

On Sunday 29th November, prayers for 1st December international Climate Summit will be held at Wesley Memorial Methodist Church from 6:30 - 7:00pm.

Here is a prayer for you to say at home if you cannot be present on the day:

Each leaf, each petal, each grain, each person, sings your praises, Creator God.

*Each creature on the earth, all the mountains and great seas,
show your glory, Spirit of love.
And yet, the hand of greed has patented and plundered your
splendour,
has taken and not shared your gift, has lived as owner of the
earth, not guest.
And so, the ice is cracked, the rivers dry, the valleys flooded
and the snow caps melt.
God our Father, show us how to step gently, how to live simply,
how to walk lightly with respect and love for all that you
have made. Amen.*

By Linda Jones, CAFOD

Christmas Tree Decorating 2015



St Columba's plans to have a beautiful tree (again) this year. We are looking forward to doing the decorating with a 'working party' of families on the morning of Saturday 5th December, 10:00am onwards.

A good number of people makes the task less 'work' and more 'fun'. If you are in the town on that day you will be welcome to come and join the party, which will finish with seasonal refreshments for adults and children. Do come.

Gift Service

The St Columba's Gift Service is on Sunday 13th December, during which we are collecting unwrapped new toys for children. Items for teenagers are especially needed; high street gift vouchers are useful. Gifts for adults with additional needs are also sought.

Please bring what you can.

Advent and Christmas at St Columba's

This year the theme for our Advent Sunday celebrations is the qualities of God's love manifested in the Christ event.

- Sunday 29th Nov - Advent 1: *Abounding in love* - God's saving act abounds in love and justice
- Sunday 6th Dec - Advent 2: *Burning with love* – God's love purifies and prepares
- Sunday 13th Dec - Advent 3: *Saving love* – God's love saves. Gift and Carol Service.
- Sunday 20th Dec - Advent 4: *Believing love* – Blessed are those who believe. All-Age Communion.
- Thursday 24th December - Christmas Eve: Worship service at Cumnor URC at 6:30pm.
- Friday 25th December: Christmas Day worship service at 10:45am in our sanctuary.
- Sunday 27th December: Joint worship service at New Road Baptist Church (Bonn Square) at 10:30am. [There will be no worship service at St Columba's that morning.]

Taizé / Longest Night Service

For many people the Christmas season does not necessarily bring with it the joy and happiness that is advertised everywhere. We may be facing loneliness due to bereavement, divorce or depression. May be we have suffered an emotional trauma, have lost our job or have just received worrying news about our health. Whatever the reason, the Christmas preparations seemed out of sync with many people's present situation and the constant refrain of happy family gatherings, of present-buying and present-giving and of displays of joviality can rub salt in the wounds that those people may already bear...



This is why 'Longest Night' services (also called 'Blue Christmas' as in 'having the blues') are being held in many churches before Christmas, including in St Columba's, to recognize that many people need space and time to acknowledge their sadness, pain and concerns. Most importantly, we all also need to know that we are not alone:

'The Lord is close to the broken-hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit' (Ps.34:18).

This year we will be combining such a 'Longest Night' service with our monthly Taizé service on Sunday 20th December at 6:00pm.

Come and join us to share meditative prayers, scripture readings and Taizé chants to reaffirm that God's Word comes to shine light into our darkness and brings consolation.

Everybody is welcome and please invite people outside the congregation.

Advent and Christmas in Oxford

- Sunday 13th December,
 - noon: Carol singing in Bonn Square in front of New Road Baptist Church;
 - 4:30pm: Carol service at Mary Magdalene Church of England.
- Wednesday 16th December, 9:30am: Oxford Centre for Mission Studies (Woodstock Rd), Christmas worship featuring the Moderator of the Church of Scotland preaching.
- Saturday 19th December, 2:00 - 4:00pm: Family nativity on Cornmarket with our friend Tracey the Donkey from 2:00 - 3:00pm, followed by service and fellowship at St Michael in the North Gate.

City Centre Prayers for the Homeless

On Tuesday 6th January from 2:10 - 2:30pm, St Columba's will host the monthly Prayers for the Homeless that take place around the city centre. Please consider joining this small group as budget cuts are increasing the numbers of homeless in our area and decreasing the services available.

The Octave of Prayer for Christian Unity

This year as in years previous, the Churches Together in Central Oxford (CTCO) will gather for an evening worship service on Sunday 17th January. The service will take place at St Aloysius Gonzaga Roman Catholic Church, the Oxford Oratory located at 25 Woodstock Ave. The time of the service will be published closer to the event.

Inaugural Lecture

Henrike Lähnemann's Inaugural Lecture for the Chair in Medieval German Literature and Linguistics on The Materiality of Medieval Manuscripts will take place on Thursday 21st January, 5:00pm, in the Taylorian Institute, followed by a reception. All members of St Columba's URC are very welcome for the lecture as for the drinks afterwards in the splendid Taylorian Theatre!



The image to the left is from the lecture's promotional poster, showing a marginal illustration from a new acquisition of the Bodleian Library: an illuminated and glossed Psalter from the

Cistercian abbey of Medingen. In the gloss, the letter 'p' of 'opera manuum eius' (the works of His hand) are linked to a representation of the hands of Gods, ambidexterously writing the world. This formulation from Psalm 19:2 'the works of his hands' was

made famous by Joseph Haydn's creation („die Himmel erzählen die Ehre Gottes und die Feste verkündigen seiner Hände Werk“), so is especially appropriate for a lecture in German Studies.

The (sometimes scandalous) story of how the Psalter was produced, annotated, augmented, dissembled and finally happily reunited in Oxford will be the starting point to look at a cultural history of manuscripts. The complex composition of the book with sewn-in cloth, heavy use of gold, multiple layers of illumination and heavy reworking raises important question about the materiality of manuscripts especially in the period when the parallel production of prints started. **NB:** The Abbess of Medingen, the Cistercian Abbey from which the Psalter originated, will be in attendance and walk in the procession with the manuscript on a velvet cushion by special permission of Bodley's librarian.

Burns' Night Event

Although not yet confirmed, it is hoped that our Burns' Night event will return on Saturday 23rd January. Further information will be made available in due course, so please watch this space!

Pulpit Exchange

On Sunday 24th January, the Faith in Action Group of Churches will engage in a pulpit exchange. The Revd Dr Martin Wellings (of Wesley Memorial) will lead worship at St Columba's, whilst our minister preaches at St Michael at the Northgate.

Homelessness Service

St Giles will host the annual CTCO service on homelessness on Sunday 24th January, which is a sung evensong service (time to be confirmed). Carla will be preaching at Jesus College that evening.

LGBT History Events

The Faith in Action Group (FIAG) - our ecumenical mission partnership with Wesley Memorial Methodist Church, New Road Baptist Church and St Michael at the North Gate - has organised a series of events in celebration of LGBT history month, the national theme of which is Religion, Belief and Philosophy. The events are open and should be of interest to all.

- Friday 5th February, 7:30 - 9:00pm: *A reading from the book of exile. An evening of poetry, theological reflection and storytelling with Pádraig Ó Tuama, leader of the Corrymeela Community. At Wesley Memorial Methodist Church, with refreshments.*
 - Sunday 7th February, 7:30 - 9:30pm: *FirstSunday: A gathering of LGBTI Christians and Friends. At St Columba's URC, with refreshments.*
 - Thursday 25th February, 7:30 for 8:00 - 9:30pm: *Who do you say that I am? Sexuality and identity in religion and philosophy. A panel discussion with Revd Dr Susan Durber, Professor Paul Fiddes and Professor Adrian Moore. At New Road Baptist Church, with refreshments.*
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Fourth Fridays @ Cumnor

The theme for Cumnor URC's Fourth Friday supper and discussion series is *My life changed when...*

Friday 26th February - *My life changed...How did I get here from there?* Providential handbrake turns through three careers with Nigel Appleton.

Supper begins at 7:15pm and the talk begins at 8:00pm.

To reserve your place for supper, email Briony Newport via email

Small Groups

Several small groups meet regularly. If you are not already a member of small group, please consider joining one.

- Friday night group in East Oxford which meets once a month at Gordon Woods and Tony Brett's house for a meal and fellowship.
- There is group which meets twice a month on Wednesday evenings in Headington, which is studying Ecclesiastes this term.
- There is a group which meets once a month on Tuesdays at 5:30pm in the city centre, led by Andrew Baker and Pippa Smith.

We have interest in starting a group in the Abingdon area and in the Kidlington area. Please let Kirsten Johnson know if you would like to join one of these.

Small groups are a way of encouraging each other in our faith and growing together as the body of Christ. Please do come try one out!

For more information, please contact Kirsten Johnson on: 07986 101 482 or kirstenjohnson@outlook.com.

INFORMATION

Christmas Special Collection

Last Christmas Christian Aid - supported by the URC - raised a total of £3.6million in donations to finance maternal and child

health projects in Kenya and Malawi.

This year the URC is again supporting Christian Aid in an appeal aimed at reducing the incidence of malaria in Nigeria. Nigeria accounts for a quarter of all malaria cases in Africa. Malaria is the cause of around 11% of maternal deaths and kills 250,000 children under five every year. The problem is compounded by lack of education and scarcity of affordable medication.

As happened in 2014, the UK government is committed to doubling the amount raised by matching every pound donated. The collection at St Columba's will take place after the communion service on Sunday 20th December.

A Christmas Challenge to all Children and Young People in the Wessex Synod

Last year the Wessex Synod launched its first ever challenge to children and young people in the Synod to create a design for the Moderator's Christmas letter.

This proved a great success that the challenge is being put out again to all the children and young people within the Synod to come up with a new design that the Moderator will use for her Christmas letter in 2016.

Details are available at: <http://wessexsynod.urch.org.uk/christmas-challenge-to-children-young-people/>

The closing date for submissions is Monday 11th January 2016 and should be sent to: *Deborah Walker, Wessex Synod Office, 120 Alma Road, Southampton, SO14 6UW.*

Nominations Being Sought

Nominations for Moderators of the URC's General Assembly (a minister or church-related community worker and an Elder) are

now being solicited for 2016 - 2018. If you want to nominate someone, please contact your/an Elder or a Church Secretary so that the matter can come to the Elders and a Church Meeting before the 12th February deadline.

Church Centenary & Fundraising

Our remembrance of things past provides the foundation for living forward, on the firm ground of faith realised in the commitments people have made over the generations. We stand on the shoulders of giants and wards of the sacrifices of time, energy and material resources of many. In order to continue the faithful witness of St Columba's into the 21st Century, we established a Centenary Fund. This Fund is intended to provide resources for maintaining the premises and making them fit for purpose. Please consider making a donation to the Fund.

We would like to involve as many people as possible in the appeal, so if you are in touch with St Columba's 'alumni' around the country or the world then please pass this information on to them.



How to Donate

If you are already a regular donor to St Columba's, simply add your centenary fund donation to your existing envelope or bank transfer (or post us a one-off cheque payable to 'St Columba's URC Oxford' to the church address), ensuring that you let treasurer@saintcolumbas.org know it is for the Centenary Fund. This is the most effective way for existing donors to contribute and ensures all Gift Aid will be claimed automatically.

Fundraising

If you have any ideas - large or small - regarding how else we can raise such funds then please contact Lucy Efte.

NEWS ABOUT PEOPLE

Welcoming a New Member

Since Lucy Efte's return to St Columba's, she has not only agreed to head up the Centenary Fundraising Committee but she has also chosen to become a member of our church. This was recently accepted by the Church Meeting and she will be officially made a member in the coming month. Welcome, Lucy!

The Passing of a Friend

Our longtime friend, Margaret Ackrill, died peacefully on 15th October. Our thoughts and prayers are with her friends and family as they grieve this loss.

A CENTENARY MESSAGE

Extracts from the centenary service sermon given by the Moderator of the URC's General Assembly, Revd David Grosch-Miller, on 25th October 2015...

'The story of who we are and where we have come from is an important one to own.'

'We look back and give thanks for the individuals whose commitment and determination have shaped the church that we now celebrate. The contribution of those who have gone before is not to be overlooked or casually dismissed; the church

of today stands upon the shoulders of those who led the way.'

'The church congregation that looks backwards and sees only their own footprints in the sand have their back to the future and fail to glimpse the God that is dancing into tomorrow and calling us all to follow. When people of vision and courage are enabled to let go of the comfortable and the familiar in order to take the risk of something better emerging then we make space for the Spirit of God to work the miracle of abundant grace.'

'The path of faith that disciples of any age must tread is always orientated towards the fulfilment of God's purpose and plan and that is yet to be completed. We are called to risk an uncertain future with the trust that God will not only keep us safe but will open up new horizons of adventure.'

'The assurance given to wavering followers is to develop the relationship of trust with the risen Christ, practice love towards each other and look forward to glimpse the rewards that will come to God's faithful people. This is the core message of the Christian faith in every generation.'

"Continually looking inwards is as dangerous as always looking backwards."

'We need to understand what is asked of us and with whom we are called to share the privilege of discipleship. What is it that are we to give, what might we expect and how will we build relationships that serve the needs of the whole community?'

'We live in 2015 in an age of individual sovereignty where the rights of the person trump what is in the best interests of the community. That is not the way of the Bible.'

'We are about building relationships of trust in which the individual is loved and respected but in which we are all committed to the flourishing of community.'

'Continually looking inwards is as dangerous as always looking backwards. Look forward, look outward. Grasp God's dream. Don't limit it by our own anxiety or selfishness.'

'Being a person of faith is not the easiest option in 2015 Britain, we are learning how to be a minority in a culture that we once dominated. That has taken some of us by surprise and we have been ill prepared for our new role but learn it we will. That new role as a minority is not to preserve the institutional church, much as we find it to our liking. It is not to provide community buildings, which we will continue to do. Nor is it to preserve a story that has been an inspiration for 2,000 years although we will. Our purpose is to co-operate with God in bringing about a new age. A new age in which the destruction and the neglect of the past will be reversed.'

'We are to dream today of the world as we imagine God would wish it. For us for the desert to bloom will be about reversing the catastrophic effects of climate change and pollution. For human life to flourish we will look for an end to all forms of prejudice and discrimination and the valuing of each human life. We will reject the politics of scarcity where the minority control the assets and resources of the world and keep the majority in poverty. We will look for a world where peace is built upon justice and every human being, woman, man, child knows that they are beloved of God, unique and precious and with as much claim upon the possibilities of life as any other. We will not rest while there are refugees fleeing war and a slow death through starvation in a world of plenty. We will speak out when it would be safer to remain quiet. We will not give in to despair even when the way ahead is uncertain. We will dream of a world that matches our understanding of the God who shapes our dreaming. We will not be content until the dream becomes reality.'

'On this day of celebration think of God leading a conga line, dancing through creation, inviting the risk takers and the dreamers to join in. The future is being shaped and we need to be part of it. Look forward, catch the glimpse of God, grab hold

and hang on tight, there is more to come for St Columba's, Oxford. God bless you as you become a blessing to others.'

A MODERN PSALM BY SIÂN JONES

When the world's words wound you deep in your soul,
And hard stares pierce a fragile heart;
When you are looked down upon, beaten, or betrayed,

Come, draw near to Me.

Find my words written on your heart,
and know that you are loved without bounds,
beyond reason, and beyond measure.

Cling fast to Me.

Come, and in holding fast,
Know that no matter what earthly voices claim,
You are made and kept by Me.

Come, and in drawing close
know that My Assurance
Is far broader than your fears,
Far stronger than your frailty.

Come, and into your vulnerability –
Into the heart that is breaking,
the spirit that is aching,
Let Me pour my soothing psalmody.

Lean on Me.

Above all,
Remember that I have called you by name.

Whisper your name.

I Am
And you are Mine.

Visiting the Hope & Faith Christian Community School in Ng'ombe, Lusaka

Glenda and I, in company with Malcolm and Diana Townsend, visited the Hope & Faith School from the 15th to 22nd of October. The history of Cumnor's connections with the school from its early days will be familiar to many members of St Columba's. Our connection is a personal one: the founder and leader of the school, Rosemary Mumbi, was a pupil one of our own senior members; Wyn Cornish. From a handful of children taught in her kitchen in 2003, the school has developed to six hundred pupils with substantial premises of its own, in addition to the rooms it continues to rent as teaching space. The new Science Block that will consolidate the ability of the school to offer secondary education through to Grade Twelve, is under construction and should be complete by the turn of the year.

Ng'ombe is officially an 'unplanned' community: that it to say it just grew on former farmland to the north of central Lusaka without any formal planning. The population is now approximately 100,000 but it has little in the way of infrastructure: roads are not made up, whilst there is electricity in most parts there is no general piped water or sewage system.

The school provides order, purpose and opportunity through education to children who are from the margins. About a quarter to a third of the children are orphans or otherwise vulnerable. It is estimated that only one in eight of the children have someone at home who has anything resembling a 'proper' job. Most scrape a living in the marginal economy.

Zambia is going through a challenging time: the price of copper is at an historic low, poor rainfall means that the hydro-electric power plants, that not only supplied Zambia but provided income through the export of power to neighbouring countries, are unable to work at anything like capacity and power cuts are

a daily occurrence. This has consequences for the commercial and industrial productivity. The Zambian currency, the Kwacha, has halved in value against the Dollar and the Pound in just the last two to three months.

Although there are many challenges, arising from both national and local difficulties, the School offers a positive presence. The four hundred children in pre-school and primary education, and the two hundred in secondary education, work hard and are committed to their studies. There is an appetite for learning and a desire to do well.

There are already role models for the current pupils in those who passed through the school and are now in vocational and higher education:

- Witney Malambo, in the second year of her course at the University of Zambia, studying for a degree in Education.
- Amos Mulengo, studying Automotive Engineering and looking to qualify in December 2016.
- Lexina Piri, studying to be a bio-medical technician.
- Samson Maguana, reading Law at the University of Zambia and hoping to be called to the Bar in 2018.
- Nchiminya Siankandi, who has completed her Diploma in Teaching Primary Education and has returned to the school as a member of staff.

All of these were pupils of the Hope & Faith School, all but one had assistance in completing their secondary education elsewhere in the period before Hope & Faith could offer full secondary education. Amos and Lexina, together with two others, are currently supported by 'Wyn Cornish Awards' provided by the Oxford Friends of Hope & Faith.

In 2005, on his return from his first visit to the school, Malcolm Townsend reported: *'When we consider all the misery and need in the world, we are in danger of depressive paralysis. If we can find one good thing to do, we can recover purpose and*

confidence. I think this is it: this is our good thing! I want to testify that, on the evidence of our visit, these are true and prophetic words, this is indeed 'Our Good Thing'. I hope and pray that for St Columba's too this may be your good thing.

Nigel Appleton

EDITOR'S COMMENTS

Christmas: a simple title that means so much to so many. To some, it means the giving and receiving of gifts, mulled wine and mince pies, Christmas parties, carol singers knocking at the door, special TV episodes of Dr Who and Downton Abbey, and having some much needed time off work... even if it means spending it with ALL the family(!). For others, it is a very lonely time where thoughts are full of loneliness, regret, sadness & pain, and wishing cheery old Christmas would get up, collect its clichéd ways and move on as quickly as possible. But what does it mean for you?

This intriguing story of a mother giving birth to her first child in a simple room and welcoming in an array of visitors into their hosts' humble abode - from smelly shepherds to perfumed magi - helped to inspire a generation... and then continued to do so for generation after generation, right up to today: approximately 1,900 years after the event took place. They had prophesied a warrior king but what they - and we - got was a very unexpected and revolutionary servant king: the prince of peace.

A century ago, this saviour to the world inspired some Scots to build a church in Oxford: St Columba's. Like the figurehead who inspired these visionaries to exercise great faith in his name, they left a legacy that would inspire many a generation. This story continues with us. It may sometimes seem an impossible task to follow in their footsteps, but then they probably felt the same on many an occasion. Have faith, keep hope, and spread love and joy to the world as exemplified by the Alpha and Omega's number one son, Jesus Christ: our Lord.

Thanks go to all the contributors to the newsletter during 2015; it is most appreciated and really helps this editor.

Wishing you a very happy Christmas & a fantastic New Year!

Tim

Newsletter Contributions...

All contributions for the next issue of the newsletter should be sent to Tim Llewelyn (Editor) by Sunday 24th January 2016 to the following Email address: llewelyn_tg@hotmail.com.

The next issue will cover **from mid February to April 2016**.

Word limits: Thoughts & Opinions items - 600 words; all other contributions - 400 words. [For the sanity of the Editor, please keep to these!]

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

----- **EVENTS** -----

December

5th Christmas Tree Decorating, 10:00am @ church.

6th First Sunday, 7:15pm @ church.

13th Carol singing, noon in Bonn Square.
Carol service, 4:30pm @ Mary Magdalene CoE.

16th Christmas worship, 9:30am @ Oxford Centre for Mission Studies (Woodstock Rd).

19th Family nativity, 2:00 - 4:00pm on Cornmarket.

20th Taizé / Longest Night Service, 6:00pm @ church.

January

3rd First Sunday, 7:15pm @ church.

6th City Centre Prayers for the Homeless, 2:10pm @ church.

17th Taizé Service, 7.30pm @ church.

The Octave of Prayer for Christian Unity @ St Aloysius
Gonzaga Roman Catholic Church (time TBC).

February

5th A reading from the book of exile, 7:30pm @ Wesley
Memorial Methodist church.

7th First Sunday, 7:30pm @ church.

----- **MEETINGS** -----

December

2nd Finance & Property Committee, 7:00pm @ church.

January

13th Finance & Property Committee, 7:00pm @ church.

21st Elders' Meeting, 7:30pm @ church

February

3rd Finance & Property Committee, 7:00pm @ church.

LECTIONARY

December

6th Baruch 5:1-9; Luke 1:68-79; Philippians 1:3-11; Luke 3:1-6.

13th Zephaniah 3:14-20; Isaiah 12:2-6; Philippians 4:4-7; Luke 3:7-18.

20th Micah 5:2-5a; Psalm 80:1-7; Hebrews 10:5-10; Luke 1:39-45, (46-55).

27th 1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26; Psalm 148; Colossians 3:12-17; Luke 2:41-52.

January

3rd Jeremiah 31:7-14; Psalm 147:12-20; Ephesians 1:3-14; John 1:(1-9), 10-18.

10th Isaiah 43:1-7; Psalm 29; Acts 8:14-17; Luke 3:15-17, 21-22.

17th Isaiah 62:1-5; Psalm 36:5-10; 1 Corinthians 12:1-11; John 2:1-11.

24th Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10; Psalm 19; 1 Corinthians 12:12-31a; Luke 4:14-21.

31st Jeremiah 1:4-10; Psalm 71:1-6; 1 Corinthians 13:1-13; Luke 4:21-30.

February

7th Exodus 34:29-35; Psalm 99; 2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2; Luke 9:28-36, (37-43a).

USEFUL CONTACT DETAILS

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St Columba's URC, Oxford

Sunday Worship: 10:45am

*Be thou a bright flame before me,
be thou a guiding star above me,
be thou a smooth path below me,
be thou a kindly shepherd behind me,
today, tonight and forever.*

St Columba's Prayer

ALL are welcome.

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