

St Columba's

United Reformed Church, Oxford

Newsletter



Autumn Issue,
October - November 2016

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CHURCH SECRETARY'S LETTER



Dear Friends,

At this time of year Oxford is getting ready to welcome a host of new residents – students at the universities, people arriving for new jobs and others drawn to the vigour of, and the opportunities in, this great city. It's always a time of opportunities for St Columba's too – who will walk through the door this year and make their home with us?

Recent months have seen incredible turmoil in British public life, and the passions aroused by the European referendum have at times been pretty ugly; in particular, the hostility and violence towards people perceived as 'foreign', and the casual dismissal of facts and rigorous analysis by politicians declaring that '*people have had enough of experts*'. I would like St Columba's to be exemplary in welcoming both people from different backgrounds, and experts.

Our pulpit fall declares '*We are a multicultural church*' – and we have always benefited from the diversity of people in our community. While I have been worshipping at St Columba's, we have come from places including England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, South Africa, the United States, Kenya, Taiwan, the Netherlands, Germany, the Czech Republic, Jamaica, Rwanda, Australia and New Zealand – to list just some. What do we need

to be doing this Michaelmas to make sure that the people who walk through our door are welcomed into our community?

I would also like us to be a church that celebrates expertise. We have been blessed with ministers like Carla and Susan who can both grapple with modern scholarship, and help the rest of us who are not theological experts take something away for ourselves – and I think we play an important role as a church where people are interested in theology, even if most of us would doubtless not dream of claiming to be experts. I would like people coming to St Columba's to know that we are interested in understanding and celebrating their particular areas of expertise, and that they do not need to underplay their gifts and talents.

"For it seems to me that what matters is to bring our whole selves to God."

Of course, there are obvious dangers here too – we preach that Christ's table is for everyone, and it would be absolutely wrong to imply that the academically gifted are more welcome than others, just as it would be wrong to suggest the rich were more welcome than the poor, or the fit more welcome than the unwell, or the happy than the troubled. Sometimes it can be daunting to consider whether we ourselves bring any expertise when we meet talented people, and we may feel that our knowledge, skills and experience seem rather trivial in comparison. But this is to measure our own worth by human values, rather than God's values.

For it seems to me that what matters is to bring our whole selves to God; not to disown our backgrounds, our talents, our loves, our joys or our concerns, but to be open to God about who we are, and be open to God working in our lives – and the more we can help each other be open about what makes each of us the unique individual we are, made in the image of God, the more we can open our hearts to God's promptings.

So let's look forward to meeting new friends in the coming weeks, getting to know them, and benefiting from the sudden insights we get into our faith when we talk to someone with different experiences and expertise. And may they find welcome, worship and witness with us, and want to join us on our journey of faith.

Gordon

NEWS OF ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS

The Finance and Property Committee

This time of the year moves us from the relatively quiet summer hiring period into the new academic year, where hiring is usually at its peak performance. Nevertheless, this summer has seen significant use of the building - including a play that used the building for numerous weeks - and brought in some much needed revenue. Now, it's not all about the money... but it certainly helps! Running and maintaining a building to good standards is not a cheap activity and the hirers help keep us present in the centre of the city with much opportunity at our doorstep to carry out God's mission. This therefore continues to be a high priority for the Committee and particularly for our Facilities Manager.

We are currently preparing for the 2017 budget. This is both an exciting and also a frightening task. On the one hand, planning for enhancements makes the task feel very worthwhile but the expense of such development can be quite daunting. Some may suggest we are a wealthy church and, compared to some others, that may well be the case. However, our expenditure is not covered by the regular giving of our friends and members. We certainly 'get by' but we need to find new ways to increase revenue to allow us to do even more. After all, we aren't called to our faith to maintain buildings: we are called to exemplify God's unconditional love for all, offering welcome, worship and witness. The Committee aims to facilitate this through its activities.

To help reduce running costs, the Committee is working to replace all the LEDs in the premises (excluding the hall, for the time being). Unexpected barriers have delayed this process but we hope to have - and our positive that - this Church Meeting-approved activity finalised before too long.

Tim Llewelyn

Donations for the St Columba's Organ

Purchasing a new digital organ is expected to cost £12,555. The contribution from church funds is expected to be £3,139. On this basis, we therefore need to raise an extra £9,416.

Can YOU help?

Payments can be made via bank transfer or via cheque, the latter of which must be made payable to '*St Columba's Oxford United Reformed Charity*'.

Please contact treasurer@saintcolumbas.org for more details.

FirstSunday

FirstSunday is St Columba's monthly fellowship group for LGBT people, we meet once a month to share our stories and to spend time in God's presence. We start our evenings with coffee, pizza and time to catch up with each other. Then we spend time thinking and talking about the bible readings for the week before finishing with a short communion. It's a place where we can share our stories and encourage one another in our faith with the confidence that our sexuality or gender expression is welcomed and celebrated.

In September we heard Jesus challenging the crowds around him to make difficult choices in order to be his disciples. We thought about the choices we've had to make and the choices we face in the future and the choices that come round again and again.

In October we heard him challenge the disciples to stop asking for more faith, to use the mustard seed of faith they had and see what God would do. We talked about the challenges that make

us feel like they did, and how God has brought us through tough times in the past.

We welcome all who want to spend time with us whether they are lesbian, gay, bi, trans, straight or prefer not to have a label.

The dates, times and titles of our meetings are on the FirstSunday website at <http://firstsunday.info/>.

Andrew Smith

Small Groups

Our small group meets on Wednesdays at 8:00 - 9:00pm at Ruth and Wilson Sutherland's house, fortnightly. We have just finished the excellent book, *The Upside Down Bible* by Symon Hill. It offers new ways of looking at well know passages of the Bible, and has lead to some fascinating discussion. We have time for some great discussion, prayer, coffee, wonderful biscuits and lots of laughs. We hope to encourage each other's faith and not to take ourselves too seriously! We very much welcome new members, so do get in touch if you are interested.

Jonathan Herring

News from Cumnor URC



It has been rather quiet through the summer months. The good news is we received into membership Anne Gow and Maggy Zeldin on 4th September. Both have been in regular attendance

on Sundays and this was a really encouraging commitment for us all to appreciate.

Some months ago the Church Meeting agreed that when it became possible for same sex marriages to take place that Cumnor URC would apply to have the church registered. The General Secretary has now issued guidelines. At the Church Meeting, 2nd October approval is sought to progress discussions with the Wessex Trustees of the building about registration.

Briony Newport

UPCOMING EVENTS

Upcoming Taizé Services

Taizé services take place on the fourth Sunday of nearly every month at 7:15pm in church.

The next services will be 23rd October and 27th November.

Taizé services include quiet, prayer, singing and reflection. The services are normally about 30 minutes and provide a wonderful break from the business of life and time of focus on the things that really matter. Everyone is welcome to come along.

Fourth Fridays Return

Fourth Friday supper and talks will start again as follows, 7:15 – 9:00pm:

- Friday 28th October with Pam Feast MBE talking about '*My life changed when I became a Leader of Girl Guides and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award*'.

- Friday 25th November with Glenda Appleton about '*My life changed when I became a Street Pastor*'.

INFORMATION

Students and Young Adults @ St Columba's

Having been founded to support the faith needs of the student population of Oxford, St Columba's is strongly aligned to the academic year. Throughout this period, there are a variety of opportunities for students to participate in the life of the church: from small groups to helping lead services. Numerous social events, such as eating out together, are also usually arranged. This is not limited to students but the invitation is also open to other young adults (normally meaning those between 18 and 35). Activities and events will be advertised as and when they arise.

A mailing list is used to keep in electronic contact. To be added to the list, please apply at <http://www.saintcolumbas.org/church-life/students-and-young-adults>.

Special Collections

This might be an appropriate time to remind the congregation about the arrangements for special collections following communion services. For some years I have arranged these collections. Basically my policy is to hold a collection every second month. If possible collections for domestic charities alternate with fundraising for overseas causes. However this policy can be interrupted if a sudden emergency such as a natural disaster occurs. I attempt to prioritise issues. For example, in recent years more than one appeal has been made for Syrian refugees.

Possibly the most significant collection organised in each year is

the commitment for life collection held in the spring. This is part of a programme developed by the URC centrally. At present the money raised by St Columba's goes to projects in Israel/Palestine. I am always open to suggestions from members of the congregation as to suitable causes to support. On 18th September of this year, in response to a suggestion from Tessa Davidson, an appeal was made for the International Liberty Association. This association is particularly concerned with the plight of dissidents in Iran. Later in the year, after a request from Sedhar Chozam, I intend to arrange a collection for Bridge the Gap the charity which Sedhar has set up to help Indian slum children.

At Christmas 2014 and again at Christmas 2015 St Columba's participated in special Christian Aid appeals which were supported by the URC as a whole. On both occasions the UK government added to the amount raised by the appeals. I hope that a similar appeal, with a contribution from the government, will be launched at Christmas 2016.

Ian Kennedy

NEWS ABOUT PEOPLE

Fundraising Success

A very large WELL DONE to Katherine Haigh, who recently raised over £800 for Cancer Research UK following the Pretty Muddy run event. And thanks to all who supported her in achieving such a wonderful total.

REPORTS

Reflections on Our Visit to Khwendo Kor

Thanks to the tenacity of the Khwendo Kor (KK) staff my husband

and I were given Notice of Consent by the authorities to visit the Trade Facilitation and Communication Centre, and the Peshawar Regional Office in Peshawar and also a school in the town of Mardan. You will have heard from the news that this is a very troubled area but we found a very warm welcome and every effort made to ensure our comfort and safety. We really had a great time and packed a lot into our 3 days.

At the trade centre we saw many items which had been made by women in local areas, some very distant. The women are given micro credit to finance their enterprise and helped to market their goods. As well as baskets I now have some beautiful scarves for sale which were made in the troubled area of Swat.

"They believe that the only way to peace and prosperity is to build a compassionate society where women and men live with dignity and self-reliance."

The Peshawar Regional Office now manages two new major projects for KK which are located in this regional office. KK is the implementing partner for the National Aids Control Program in this area since April 2015. They provide appropriate community and home based care. They are proactive in offering target groups (e.g. injectable drug users, sex workers, transgender, migrants) voluntary counselling testing. It was a very moving experience to see this centre working and to meet some of the clients.

In the same building we saw the new Community Mental Health Care Centre which is funded by Norwegian Church Aid in Pakistan and implemented by KK: another new venture undertaken at the request of the fund providers. KK is trusted at community level and hence is seen as a good vehicle to implement these projects. They have strong teams of highly qualified, gifted and caring staff working with some of the most disadvantaged and needy people in the area.

Our visit to the school in Mardan was a joy. A local young couple have donated 2 rooms in their own house to be used as classrooms for the very young girls of the brick workers in the town. The young mother of the house is one of the two teachers. The children were in uniform, very clean and very eager to show what they had learned in English as well as Pashtun. Clearly the teachers had been well trained and were using modern teaching methods.



Photo: Maryam Bibi at the Elma (Sinclair) Bibi Craft Centre

On our way back to Islamabad we visited the centre at Mathra which we helped to open 3 years ago. The craft centre there is dedicated to Elma Sinclair and we were pleased to see it growing in staff and clients. They also have 2 school rooms for girls and hope to have more soon. They have opened a health centre with a very dedicated doctor. Mathra is a very conservative area so it is really good news that the new KK staff member responsible for all training is based there and has been able to make very positive contact with the local community and has begun to get them involved in the projects.

Khwendo Kor has an amazing group of women and men who work in very difficult and dangerous situations. They believe that the only way to peace and prosperity is to build a

compassionate society where women and men live with dignity and self-reliance.

Maureen Hussain

[Editor's note: This piece replaces the report presented in the summer issue of the newsletter, as the Editor somehow failed to notice he had used a report from 2015! Apologies, Maureen. I am sure people enjoyed it just as much on second reading!]

Brief Trip to the Hope & Faith School, Ng'ombe

A brief trip to Zambia as part of the link between the Wessex Synod of the United Reformed Church and the Lusaka Presbytery of the United Church of Zambia afforded me the opportunity of a flying visit to the Hope & Faith School in Ng'ombe.

This is an exciting time for the school and much had happened since our more extended visit in October last year.

It is only just over a year since we heard of the need to find matching funding to that provided by Zambia Orphans' Aid to allow the school to build a science block. By the time we visited in October the building was up to first floor level. On this flying visit I was able to see that one of the two labs was completed and operational and the other nearly so. This secures the ability of the school to provide education up to Grade Twelve, the stage at which Secondary Education is completed.

The Oxford Friends of Hope & Faith are currently providing bursaries to one staff member and nine former pupils as they pursue higher or vocational training. We have so far made two rounds of awards with a third planned to start in January 2017. That will bring the annual value of the awards to around nine thousand pounds.

Courses vary from two to four years and fee levels depend upon the institution and the course being followed. At present, holders of a Wyn Cornish Award include students studying computer science, electrical engineering, tourism and hotel management, motor mechanics, pharmacy, teaching and biomedical

engineering. With support we can offer support to more former pupils to make the transition from secondary education to a career.

At the beginning of the year we received a donation to allow us to fund the purchase of knitting and sewing machines so that mothers with children in the school might find employment. We have also, in the course of this year, raised funds for the purchased of land so that the school may extend its facilities with a school hall and other amenities. The purchase of the first of these plots of land is complete and, putting these two initiatives together Hope & Faith's Director, Rosemary Mumbi, has launched the 'Women's Business Centre at Hope & Faith'. Using the building already on the site as temporary accommodation and the funding provided for equipment she has created three groups: one working in sewing and tailoring, one in machine knitting and a third in catering.

"With support we can offer support to more former pupils to make the transition from secondary education to a career."

Each group also receives instruction in English and simple business practice. When the funding was provided we envisaged a dozen women might be provided with employment, perhaps twenty at most. So far ninety women have enrolled and we have an extensive shopping list to fully equip the centre to meet the challenge of coping with these numbers.

If you would like to know more about this work or contribute support to any aspect of Hope & Faith's work in Ng'ombe please do contact me (E: AppletonN@aol.com; T: 01865 883 515).

Nigel Appleton

EDITOR'S COMMENTS

Ever heard the one about *'faith the size as a mustard seed'*? This popular phrase from the Gospel according to Matthew (NRSV, Chapter 17, Verse 20) is a response to Jesus' disciples wondering why they could not help an individual but Jesus could. When I read or hear this passage, I often sense frustration - maybe even anger (unlikely though it may seem) - emanating from the Son of God. Here he is, going out to local communities with a close group of friends to teach of and also to practise God's love, when those closest to him seem to have missed the point. And this certainly isn't the only occasion when this has been the case.

Whilst walking on this earth, Jesus was a rebellious outcast who challenged the establishment and their established ways right up until his ultimate punishment: a horrible death, hung out in public to suffer until the very end, high upon a cross. He appears to have known the scriptures inside out but he did not get paralysed by them; rather, he took the key principles and applied them to his daily life, promoting action and non-conformity. He appears to have loved to rustle others' feathers! He lived the life I believe we are meant to exemplify.

As followers of Jesus in the 21st Century, being a Christian - and being Church - often feels far removed from the stories of Jesus presented to us in the Bible. Have we, especially in the West, come to embody the very thing that Jesus was opposing? Surely, not?! But remove those rose-tinted spectacles and notice the similarities to the organised religion against which Jesus was rebelling. Some of the reported conversations with the Pharisees could be well placed today with the leaders of the Church.

The Church has become far too comfortable in its often lofty position of power, influencing from the top and conforming as it has seen necessary - even against its core principles - to retain that power. And it then asks for sympathy when it feels it is losing its grip and also its investors! If it is to continue as it is, I say *'let it tumble'*! The Church needs to wake up and smell the coffee.

I may not agree wholeheartedly with the theology of the current Pope but I feel he deserves massive applause. He has found himself at the top of an embittered organisation - like many of its sister Christian movements - with its global expanse of temples full of infighting and finger-pointing, often focusing much effort on matters the authors of the Bible don't appear to have considered to be significant issues for Jesus yet simultaneously trying to regain credibility in a world where demonising organised religion is not uncommon. He has, nevertheless, highlighted that social justice is a topic worth paying great attention. In his position, it would be so easy to conform and just see it through until the next guy has to take the reins. It looks like the Spirit is still present and active!

"Jesus was a rebellious outcast who challenged the establishment and their established ways..."

Is this mission impossible? No. The Church has faced and has also survived many challenging times during its long life. Now is the time for it to step back and take a good, long, hard, and honest look at itself. It must ask itself what Jesus would do. I don't have the answer - I wish I did - but I believe we must return to the essence of Jesus' teaching, not afraid to take uncomfortable steps, realising that having even the smallest amount of faith is enough to make significant changes and progress.

What would *you* do? And what *will* you do to live a life as God intended? Be prepared to step out of your comfort zone and to be amazed at what can be achieved! Each one of us really can make a difference. And a collective can achieve even more.

Tim

Newsletter Contributions...

All contributions for the next issue of the newsletter should be sent to Tim Llewelyn (Editor) by Sunday 20th November 2016 to the following Email address: llewelyn_tg@hotmail.com.

The next issue will cover **from December 2016 to mid February 2017**.

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

October

23rd Taizé Service, 7:15pm @ church.

November

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

27th Taizé Service, 7:15pm @ church.

December

4th First Sunday, 7:15pm @ church.

MEETINGS

October

27th Elders' Meeting, 7:30pm @ church.

November

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

17th Elders' Meeting, 7:30pm @ church.

December

6th Finance & Property Committee, 7:00pm @ church.

LECTIONARY

October

9th Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7; Psalm 66:1-12; 2 Timothy 2:8-15; Luke 17:11-19.

16th Jeremiah 31:27-34; Psalm 119:97-104; 2 Timothy 3:14-4:5; Luke 18:1-8.

23rd Joel 2:23-32; Psalm 65; 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18; Luke 18:9-14.

30th Habakkuk 1:1-4; 2:1-4; Psalm 119:137-144; 2 Thessalonians 1:1-4, 11-12; Luke 19:1-10.

November

6th Haggai 1:15b-2:9; Psalm 145:1-5, 17-21; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-5, 13-17; Luke 20:27-38.

13th Isaiah 65:17-25; Isaiah 12; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13; Luke 21:5-19.

20th Jeremiah 23:1-6; Luke 1:68-79; Colossians 1:11-20; Luke 23:33-43.

27th Isaiah 2:1-5; Psalm 122; Romans 13:11-14; Matthew 24:36-44.

December

4th Isaiah 11:1-10; Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19; Romans 15:4-13; Matthew 3:1-12.

USEFUL CONTACT DETAILS

Facilities Manager

Kenneth Ngugi Tel: 07880 601 109 Email: facilitiesmanager@saintcolumbas.org

Church Secretaries

Adrian Moore & Gordon Woods Email: churchsecretary@saintcolumbas.org

Treasurers

David North & Mary Thewlis Email: treasurer@saintcolumbas.org



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.

ALFRED STREET,
OXFORD,
OX1 4EH

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