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WHEATLEY URC
ANNUAL REPORTS
2015



Annual Church Meeting
Sunday 13th September 2015
11.30 am

- 4) It has been noted that some sprouting of new growth has been seen around the base of the beech tree stump. It could not be ground out, as it was in too close proximity to the metal railing supports. Tim O'Connor, who felled the tree, will be asked to take the necessary action to kill off the stump.
- 5) We are considering the re-painting of the metal railings around the garden.
- 6) We are also considering the painting of the corridor from the kitchen to the rear door.

The Maintenance Team have been asked to officially take on the responsibility for Building Safety and Fire Safety and under these duties, PAT Testing of the electrical items on our premises will be arranged, together with a review of our fire safety position.

Many thanks to all who carry out maintenance work both large and small on the Church premises. Your help is greatly appreciated.

women. Another theme, firewood, was at the forefront of the stall we had during the Fête in Dr Flury's garden: with women and children doing most of the wood-collecting in the developing world, the issue of firewood is pressing, not only in terms of environmental degradation and deforestation but also in terms of alleviating the enormous work-load of women. To bring that plight home we had a game which consisted of guessing the weight of a wood-bundle; this was an opportunity to have interesting discussions and good fun!

As the remit of the team also includes environmental issues, several members of the team attended a Conference on Energy-Saving for churches and some of the recommendations from the conference have already been implemented. We have exciting plans for the year ahead and would very much welcome new members to help us bring them to fruition!

Maintenance Ministry Team

Chris Shelley

The members of the team for most of this year have been Chris Shelley (Convenor), Tony Barry, and Bob Webster. (Wendy Bailey moved away and has not as yet been replaced).

The main items dealt with this year have been :-

- 1) Earlier in the year we had a severe drain blockage. Dyno-Rod were called in and they advised that the problem had been caused by a build up of 'wet wipes' in the drain. They also advised that even the 'flushable' wet wipes can cause blockage problems. Suitable notices were put up in both toilets.
- 2) The beech tree in the garden was felled, with the agreement of South Oxfordshire District Council. The main roots of the tree were found to be right up against the foundations of the building.

The main items under consideration for the coming year :-

- 1) Three quotes are to be obtained for work to be carried out on the external north wall of the Sanctuary (High Street) where the stonework is deteriorating.
- 2) We are looking into the resurfacing of the hall floor and quotes are to be obtained for the resurfacing of the Sanctuary floor.
- 3) Boarding has been purchased to enable the external wall in the p.a. system cupboard (under the stairs in the Sanctuary) to be lined, to help prevent dust and damp having an adverse effect on the system.

Letter to the Church from Tanya, Joel, Kit, Finny and Eli: July 2015.

To all the dear members and friends of Wheatley U.R.C:

What a special celebration our last Sunday with you was! For all of the thought, care and effort that was put into creating a beautiful space and atmosphere for the Anniversary/leaving service – for everything from the artwork and flowers to the music and presence of so many – and for the festive gathering at the Manse afterward: thank you from the bottom of our hearts!

The beautiful book of memories, the delightful parting card, and the gorgeous icon all will be among the many things we cherish from all of you- as will the memory of the "little ways" we'll be able to further spoil ourselves with, the very generous cheque for our journey by sea!

Our gratitude is beyond words for the kindness, love, support, and countless gifts you have showered upon us over the years. You have truly demonstrated to our family the extravagance of God and we carry that with us as we journey forward. Thank you, thank you, thank you!!

We set sail today for what awaits us on the western side of the Atlantic. But as we depart, a big part of our hearts and grateful spirits remain here with you. May God continue to bless you, and bless the world richly through you, as you have so generously blessed us.

*With our love, gratitude and affection always,
Tanya, Joel, Eli, Finny, Kit.*

There is also more up-to-date news on the noticeboard.

Children's Ministry

Malcolm Benson

It has been a great delight to have children sharing in our worship during the past year and there is a corresponding sense of loss that three of our families have moved away in the past month. Our good wishes go with them together with our thanks for their contribution to our worship. We hope and pray that the temporary void will soon be filled.

Although Godly Play was originally introduced for the children it offers something for all ages and many have found the quiet reflective way of presenting familiar stories enhances their understanding.

Whilst one door may temporarily close, there are other ways in which we can contribute to children's ministry. A number of members have helped with the Holiday club which reaches out to 150 children and over 700 people attended the annual St George's fun day. On Sunday evening there is a regular youth group and for younger children there is the after school club on Thursdays.

New helpers are always welcome.

The children's ministry team will continue to meet to hold in prayer the needs of the youngsters of the village and to seek new ways of service and witness.

Secretaries' Report

Malcolm Benson & Robert Harding

To misquote a well-known 60's phrase, 'That was the Year that was'! Few, if any of us imagined that we would be in interregnum in September 2015.

However the spirit calls, moves us on, issues new challenges and sets us on new paths. So here we are.

Much has been said and written in the recent past about Tanya's time with us, so we don't feel the need to repeat that now. However it would be remiss not to record our thanks and indebtedness to her, for 7 years of wonderful ministry. On the theme of moving on, we should record our thanks to Robert and Wendy Bailey for 40 or so years of faithful membership and wonderful service to Wheatley URC, and wish them well in their new home in Cheshire. Likewise, best wishes to Ulrike, (called to URC ministry in Epping Forest) Steve, Emily and Mariella Bell, who made their mark here, albeit over a shorter time scale! To balance up the leavers, we have welcomed Marjorie and Annette Wright into membership this year, as well as a number of regular attenders.

A much larger eldership has been a great bonus this year. Not only has it meant a wider wisdom being shared at meetings, it has also meant more

Taize Prayer at 3, Barns Close, Holton.

Christine and Richard Bainbridge

We have met for some thirty years now on Sunday evenings at 8 pm. This year marks the 75th anniversary of the founding of the community in Taize. For those who have not been but might wonder what we do, we sing simple chants [in English], have a reading from the gospel for the day [in English and Italian], sit in silence for ten minutes and then read short prayers for the needs of others. This takes about 30-45 minutes after which we have refreshments. You are most welcome to come once and see what it is like. We will be experimenting with which Sundays to select during the month and these will be put in the Newsletter and Link.

Care For The World

Laurence Devlin

While we continued to have our usual Traidcraft stall in the hall twice monthly after our Sunday service, St Marys' also has a stall now, once a month - a very welcome development. Fair trade was also represented at the Women's World Day of Prayer service in early March with a Traidcraft stall and special refreshments of cakes made by the team from fairly-traded ingredients.

At the end of October, in collaboration with the Adult Education Ministry Team, a presentation on Ethical Finance took place in the sanctuary with talks by Maranda St John Nicolle of CCOW (Christian Concern for One World) and Bridget Walker of ECCR (Ecumenical Council for Corporate Responsibility). The event was not as well attended as we had hoped but the people who came were given precious tips on how to invest their money ethically while still getting a good return.

One of the highlights of the year was the talk by Mrs Maureen Hussein, an Elder at St Columba's and a very active member of FROK, UK Friends of Kwendo Khor. Kwendo Khor is a Pakistani NGO which works with women and girls in the tribal regions of the country to improve their educational, health and economic situation. The talk was extremely interesting and was followed by a lively shared lunch. It was the first of a series of events illustrating this year's theme of "Reaching beyond ourselves."

As we regularly take up the advocacy themes developed by Christian Aid, this year was no exception: two members of the team made a presentation at the Wheatley Primary School on cows and their income generating potential for

The Rainbow Trust (£80), The Oxford Emergency Food Bank (£25), Crisis at Christmas (£70), British Red Cross - Syria Crisis Appeal (£50), The British Heart Foundation (£35) and The Multiple Sclerosis Society (Oxford Branch) (£110). Last winter there was also a series of Sunday evening services for Wheatley Area Churches set to modern jazz and folk style music, including contemporary music by popular pianist and composer, Will Todd and composer and fiddle player, Sam Sweeny (of Bellowhead fame). This Autumn and Winter I hope to be offering more of the same, including The First Sacred Jazz Concert of The Duke Ellington Big Band and Speakin' Choir (1965). Watch the Sunday Links for more details.

Traidcraft

Ann Bettess

As in previous years, Ann Bettess and Laurence Devlin have run a Traidcraft stall after Sunday services. In the year to the end of July 2015 our turnover was £2199.33 overall.

We have aimed at holding a stall twice a month, but because of various other demands on our time Traidcraft has sometimes been squeezed out. Many thanks to Liz Stuart who ran the Traidcraft stall at Worminghall and at the church fete this year.

From September 2015 Laurence will be busy with her URC Training for Learning and Serving course, and will no longer be in a position to run the Traidcraft stall. Would anyone else be willing to join a rota to help occasionally in setting up, selling and packing away? I would continue to order and house the goods. If you are willing to try, please have a word with me.

On the national level, Traidcraft's campaign on Trade justice continues. In July this year a delegation visited government departments to press their point that British firms abroad should not be free to commit abuses of human rights that would be illegal at home. It should be possible to bring criminal cases in UK courts where the chances of success are higher, and the barriers to civil cases should be removed. Please look online at <http://www.traidcraft.co.uk/campaigns> to see how you can help in this campaign.

people on our rotas, and a greater sharing of the various tasks the elders undertake.

The past year might be described as one of consolidation, rather than exciting new initiatives. That is not to say that there haven't been a number of significant developments, which include: the installation of broadband/wifi in the building, the updating of our 'Safeguarding Policy' and allocation of a number of jobs related to it, having a theme for the year, 'Reaching Beyond Ourselves', the relaunch of the Sunday evening youth group and of course the demise of 'the tree'.

In the wider village context we took an active part in the new Village Fayre event, and we look forward to sharing in the inaugural service of the new Community Church.

In the wider URC context, some of us got involved in the Synod's 'Le Weekend' event, a real blessing to those who took part. We also spent some time thinking about and responding to the booklet 'What is the Spirit saying to the Churches', which was sent to all URC congregations.

As for the future, the elders have met with Revd Clare Downing our Synod Moderator, to talk about possibilities for ministry at Wheatley URC. The process is likely to be lengthy and almost certainly not very straightforward. However the talking has already begun, and we will keep everyone informed as and when things develop, and of course involved when that becomes necessary.

Once again would like to express our gratitude to Richard Bainbridge and Colin Thompson for leading worship so regularly and faithfully throughout the year, and always being so stimulating and interesting.

We would like to put on record our thanks to all of you who have supported us throughout this transitional year, and look forward to that continuing for the next twelve months. Indeed may we all continue to support and pray for each other in the year ahead.

Worship

Colin Thompson

The team continues to meet quarterly, to plan future services and to reflect on past ones (especially Advent, Christmas, Lent and Easter). I have taken over as Convener for the time being from Peter Devlin, whom we warmly thank for having acted in this capacity in recent years. The task of finding worship leaders in the future will inevitably be harder following Tanya's

departure, and we are delighted that Laurence Devlin has agreed to look after the preaching rota. Catherine Hughes has taken the notes of our meetings for quite a long time and is now leaving the team; we thank her for her service and for her contributions, and are grateful to Pauline Shelley for taking over this task. We have continued to admire and benefit from the art work of Pauline and Christine in the sanctuary. It goes from strength to strength and we are privileged to have such gifts among us.

We have introduced one change into our service, to try to make the lighting of the candle as part of the act of worship rather than a job someone has to do. The intention is simply to let the light remind us of the one who is the light of the world, and to prepare ourselves to receive him. A number of short biblical texts for different times of the year have been chosen to be read when the candle is lit. We are still getting used to this and will continue to work at it until we find the best possible pattern.

The team would welcome two or three new members. If you feel called to share in thinking with us about the services we offer, please let us know!

Adult Christian Education Ministry Team (Ace)

Robert Harding.

This time last year we had decided to change direction and concentrate on organising one-off events. Consequently it has been a relatively quiet year for the team. The most ambitious event was 'Religious Question Time', with panellists Imam Dr Usama Hasan, Rabbi Jonathan Romain MBE and The Revd Professor Graham Ward. The evening, chaired by Colin Thompson, was deemed a great success. We held a session on 'Hymnody' (Colin Thompson again!) after church on Sunday 14th June, and two sessions trying to come to grips with the booklet 'What is the Spirit saying to the Churches'.

We have a much fuller programme in mind for next year, if all our plans come to fruition. Again we will be concentrating on 'one off' sessions. The personnel has changed this year with Tanya's departure. The group membership is now: Tom Goss (coordinator), Joel Rasmussen, Sybil Beaton, Peter Devlin, Bobbie Stormont and Robert Harding.

First Report For Buster's Jazz Appreciation Evenings 2014/15 (Aka "Buster's Off The Square")

Tony Barry

This eclectic group of people originally came together back in 1998 to share their common interest in jazz music as a vehicle for raising money for the Wheatley URC Restoration Project. The URC Treasurer had put up stakes of £10 and challenged each member of the congregation to go away and make it grow! I invested mine in cakes and wine and invited jazz lovers to pay £10 each to join me for a series of evenings to play board games whilst listening to jazz. Sometimes we would have a speaker on a particular aspect of the music and on one occasion we even invited a couple of musicians to demonstrate the technique of improvisation and then, with two music students from Wheatley Park School, to "jam" together. As the size of the membership increased we outgrew our lounge and ended up in the Church Hall. So "Buster's On The Hill" became "Buster's Off The Square". (Buster, incidentally, was the resident cat, who detested jazz and the people who invaded his house and was never present after the first arrival!) For new members, lifetime membership is £10, which goes to Wheatley URC general funds.

It waned for a few years and then reformed more recently, by popular request and now meets regularly at the Church Hall whenever there is a fifth Friday evening in the month. In the last twelve months we have met four times and celebrated the lives and music of trombonist Jack Teagarden, clarinettist Acker Bilk, blues singer and guitarist B B King and bandleader James Last. At these evenings we raise money by donation, for an appropriate named charity, but after a donation to the URC for use of the hall and costs of wine and other beverages have been accounted for. Any food provided is on a "bring and share" basis.

Charities supported this year have included:

Disasters Emergency Committee - Gaza Crisis Appeal - £20.

(Jack Teagarden event)

Help Musicians UK (formerly The Musicians Benevolent Fund) - £33.

(Acker Bilk)

Diabetes UK - £25. (B B King event)

Disasters Emergency Committee - Nepal Earthquake Appeal - £25.

(B B King event)

Wheatley Fusion Summer Kids Club 2015 - £60. (James Last event)

In previous years we have also supported:

Thursday Prayer Breakfast

Anne Hardiman

Prayer Breakfast continues every Thursday morning at 7.30am with prayers for the world, for justice, for peace, for victims of famine and abuse, for those experiencing illness or bereavement and for those facing death. This half-hour is followed by breakfast in the hall at 8.00am when we give thanks for our food and our friendship. There are no more of us this year than last but the important thing is that prayer is taking place.

Thursday Coffee Mornings

Barbara Joiner

Thursday coffee mornings are continuing but with smaller numbers, particularly since the John Watson Post 16 class stopped coming. To boost our numbers we are trying to include books and cakes with our coffee and only meeting on the first Thursday of the month. The village has three places now for coffee so people have lots of choice.

Donations given after the Sunday morning service, and on Thursday mornings have totalled £25.00

Table Tennis

Pat Simpson

The Table Tennis club which started in January this year is held every Friday morning between 10.30 am and noon. It is held in the U.R.C. church hall. It has a regular attendance of approximately 10 members who contribute £1 each time they attend.

When not actually playing, there is time to catch up on the village news and have a cup of coffee. It is not necessary to come every week, people come when they can and there are those who have not played for years or have never played, but it does not take long to join in the fun and make new friends. It is a social event, great fun, and open to all. It is good to know the Youth Club appreciate the use of the table too.

Treasurer And Finance

Bob Webster

The team met twice during the past year to discuss general finance issues and charitable donations. Apart from the charitable giving paid on a regular monthly basis and responding to the DEC Nepal disaster appeal, so far in 2015 we have not yet made any specific one-off donations.

The 2014 annual accounts will be presented at the AGM, so please ensure that you have collected your copy from the hall beforehand. The offertory figures for the first seven months of 2015 show a slightly higher level of income to that of 2014. As at 31st July 2015 we had a balance of £11,413 in our Nationwide savings account and a balance of £2,806.71 in the current account at Barclays. Just over £6K is now due to be received from Gift Aid relief.

Our annual total payment for *Ministry & Mission* for 2015 is to continue at £19,695. Again, I encourage anyone who gives regularly to Wheatley URC and is a tax payer, to consider signing a Gift Aid declaration in favour of our church if they haven't yet done so. This will improve the income to the church without any additional cost to the giver. Also, all of you who have signed up to Gift Aid please let me know if you have now ceased to be a tax payer, as the church would then not be eligible to claim a tax refund on any money you pay to Wheatley URC. If anyone would prefer to pay their regular offering directly to our bank account I can provide our bank accounts details. Finally, thank you all for your continuing generosity to Wheatley URC throughout the last year. As you will be aware, I have decided to step down as treasurer at the AGM, having completed a 10 year stint. I am pleased to confirm that Chris Shelley has agreed to take over from me as Church treasurer and, I know, will prove to be very capable.

Hospitality Team

Catherine Harding

The team continues to provide Sunday morning coffee and refreshments for various church events, such as the carol concert and a visit to the church recently by Thame U3A. We meet occasionally to discuss any coming events and changes that need to be made and themes for the decoration of the church. We would welcome new members.

The two lunch clubs continue to flourish and are much appreciated by those attending.

Flowers On Sunday

Allison Towner

We all appreciate the flowers which are provided each week for the decoration of the sanctuary and the porch. They add to the welcome for those who visit the church, particularly on the Sunday for the service.

We are grateful to all those who give their time and flowers to Wheatley United Reformed Church.

Pastoral Care

Frances Simpson

This year we welcomed Liz Stuart to our group, so now we are seven.

We continue to respond to anyone who needs a listening ear and to visit individuals in hospital or in care homes and those confined at home, both our own members and others who we know in the village.

We spent some time earlier in the year preparing a service for June 28th based on "When I needed a neighbour." No-one will forget Jean's trusting distribution of £5 notes round the congregation, Elizabeth Fry or Elliot and Clem' s lovely singing.

The Sunday Afternoon Teas on the first Sunday of the month have proved popular. Pretty china, nice tablecloths and flower posies all add charm, and homemade cakes are always popular, but our guests really come for the company and conversation with friends old and new. There's a great buzz from twenty or more people chatting and a reluctance to break up the party! Donations for the Alzheimer's Society have amounted to £365 since we began the teas fifteen months ago.

The Not So Young Club continues to flourish. Sadly two members have died during the year but we have been pleased to welcome several new members, so that almost every seat in the Merry Bells Coffee Room is now used. Apart from our regular fortnightly meetings, this year we have enjoyed three special events: a coach trip to the theatre at High Wycombe to see Joseph and the Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat, a Christmas lunch at the Kings Arms, and a summer coach trip to Millets Farm.

Communications Ministry Team

Phyllis Williams

The team met regularly through the year. It is our aim to ensure that the church's message is available to all and both within the congregation and to the wider community.

Our brief is wide-ranging and includes the audio-visual systems and website as well as the more traditional media of posters and noticeboards, headed stationery, leaflets, the monthly newsletter, The Link and we also send contributions to the village newsletter.

This year we have installed Broadband and WiFi throughout the church buildings. This was at the instigation of, and partially supported by the Citizen's Advice Bureau, and has benefitted on occasion both worship services and junior church as well as providing a convenient resource for anyone wishing to make use of it on an ad hoc basis.

Sermons are recorded whenever possible and (with the permission of the preacher) are made available on the website at www.wheatleyurc.org.uk/worship/sermons/ or by clicking through from the home page. It is clear from the number of downloads that these reach a much wider audience than our little community.

More use is being made of the general email list all@wheatleyurc.org.uk and this seems to be generally appreciated.

This year we have promoted the use of the online Church Calendar, found at www.wheatleyurc.org.uk/whats-on/ or by clicking through from the homepage and we encourage everyone to help ensure that this and any other information on the website is correct by sending any amendments, corrections and updates to web-admin@wheatleyurc.org.uk. This is also the address to contact if you need to be added to or removed from any of our email lists.

It has come to our notice that others outside the URC really do use this information to know what is going on in this church. The world at large is changing and more people turn to the web in the first instance for information. We are changing with it.

The team would welcome new members, not necessarily people with specific expertise – although that it always helpful – so if you have a passion for “communications” in its widest sense, perhaps you’d like to join us.