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WHEATLEY URC NEWSLETTER



JANUARY 2018

COVERING THOUGHTS

Christmas is over and 2018 lies ahead. I wonder how many times we have wished others a happy new year, or written about our hopes for their good health and success in the coming months.

Hope is such a frequent word in our conversations and I was always delighted to think that our first grandchild had been given this name. For me it expressed the celebration of the fulfilment of hopes as she was a long awaited child, and it also projected hopes for a rosy future.

We never question that hope is one of the greatest virtues to possess. "There are three things that last for ever: faith, hope and love; and the greatest of the three is love," wrote Paul to the Corinthians. So it came as a shock to read recently that it is necessary to abandon hope. What could this mean? How can it be necessary to let go of our hopes for a better future when the world will be a more peaceful and fairer place, with no poverty and exploitation, sickness and suffering? Must we abandon our plans for the future, let go of our desire that the church will overflow with new members?

Of course none of these hopes are wrong in themselves, but they do make us focus on the future, and we can even imagine that we know what will be best. We may forget to appreciate just where we are, and refuse to accept a situation beyond our control. It may be that things will not improve, the problem will not be solved, or what we thought would be a good thing turns out to be the opposite and vice versa. In economic and global terms it may be impossible to win. Higher production of cars and other goods may provide work for many more and improve the export market, but at what cost to the planet?

Abandon hope. Well perhaps that is impossible, but seeking contentment in our present situation is certainly something worth working on in 2018.

Christine

PS The cover picture was painted from a traditional hopeful perspective. It is called 'They will Return,' and is a vision of rebuilding after the destruction of so much of Syria.

WEEKLY EVENTS

(NB several activities are term-time only)

<i>Brownies & Rainbows (Term time)</i>	<i>Monday 5.30 to 7.00 pm</i>
<i>Choir Around the Piano (Term Time)</i>	<i>Monday 7.30 to 9.00 pm</i>
<i>Wheatley Singers (Term Time)</i>	<i>Tuesday 7.10 to 9.00 pm</i>
<i>Pre-School Music Group (Term time)</i>	<i>Wednesday 9.30 am and 10.30 am</i>
<i>Guides (Term time)</i>	<i>Wednesday 7.00 to 8.30 pm</i>
<i>Prayers and Breakfast</i>	<i>Thursday 8.00 am</i>
<i>Mindfulness Sitting Group</i>	<i>Thursday 9.00 to 9.40 am</i>
<i>Table Tennis</i>	<i>Friday 10.00 am to 12 noon</i>
<i>Hymn Practice</i>	<i>Sunday 9.30 to 9.45 am</i>

Please remember in your prayers the members on Peter Devlin's Pastoral Care List: Bobbie Stormont and Tom Goss, Sybil Beaton, Lynette and Richard Wood.

Disclaimer: The editors of this Newsletter welcome letters, articles and announcements from individuals and organisations but reserve the right to publish or not, and to edit.

Deadline: **Wednesday 17th January 2018** is the deadline for the February Newsletter. Please send email copy to newsletter@wheatleyurc.org.uk or paper copy may be handed to Moira Watson.

OCCASIONAL EVENTS IN JANUARY 2018

4 th Jan	Thursday	10.00 am to noon 7.15 pm	Coffee morning, Church open Elders Meeting
7 th Jan	Sunday	2.30 to 4.30 pm 7.00 to 9.00 pm	Afternoon Tea in the Hall Pulse Group games, URC Hall
8 th Jan	Monday	2.00 to 4.00 pm	Not So Young Club
9 th Jan	Tuesday	1.00 pm	Lunch Club Two
14 th Jan	Sunday	7 pm to 9 pm	Pulse Group, Discussion, 17 Bell Lane
16 th Jan	Tuesday	1.00 pm	Lunch Club
21 st Jan	Sunday	8.00 am 7.00 to 9.00 pm	Morning Meditation, Foodbank Pulse Group Games, URC Hall
23 rd Jan	Tuesday	2.15 pm	St Mary's Guild

PASTORAL LETTER

In a new year when 'full alignment' is going to be in the political news, what 'alignment' do we seek? Just one: we seek to align our lives, day by day and moment by moment, with a Lord who taught us how to recognize and respond to God in our midst.

So, as a church, in everything we do, we seek 'full alignment' with our commission to be *reforming, inclusive* and *effective*. How? Our mission statement is clear about this: by sharing the Gospel in ways relevant to today's world, serving others in whatever ways we can; by making a difference in our communities and in the wider world; by welcoming all who may wish to join us as we journey together.

When we find ways to align ourselves with this vision, unexpected and remarkable things happen.

When a lunch club was set up some years ago, we might not have guessed how warmly it would be welcomed by the community. And now, extending the welcome with another monthly lunch club, with Sunday teas, with hosting the Not-So-Young-Club, the church is aligning itself even further with its mission to bring good news to those who sometimes feel imprisoned by loneliness.

When the *Pulse interchurch youth group* started in its present form in 2014, around 6 young people attended weekly. It was not at all clear how long the club would survive. Yet, it has taken root and continued to grow. Now there are over 20 young people registered and around 12 - 15 of these attend each week.

As part of its Care for the World ministries, the church organizes events, many of which are open to members of the wider community. What a joy to see staff from the local co-op helping with a soup lunch and the fete. This is what it is like to align ourselves with our mission to keep 'centre stage' issues such as environmental threats, inequality and trade injustice.

Who would have thought that Adult Christian Education could mean not only reading and discussion, but also creativity and stillness; different ways that allow us to take time to reflect on what are God's purposes for us and for the world.

And who would have thought that communicating what we do through the internet would have allowed over 6000 visits every month to our web-site, over 4000 of which are to the sermons.

Even five years ago, who would have thought that we would have had a weekly mindfulness sitting group? And who would have predicted that the noise and laughter of a new table tennis club on a Friday morning would compare with the noise and laughter of 11-16 year olds at Pulse on a Sunday evening?

Because of these signs of growth, the church has taken the decision to support its vision and mission by re-building the rooms at the back of the site and to consider refurbishing the hall. Elsewhere in the Newsletter there is a report on the progress of this project.

We are rebuilding because we have realized that, as well as continuing to have a room that acts as a vestry and office on Sunday mornings, we also need a space that will give us a chance to better support existing activities and to do new things; small to medium sized meetings to which we can invite the wider community, a 'gathering space' prior to Lunch clubs and the Not-So-Young club where short acts of worship might be offered; a break-out space for Pulse crafts and discussion; a space for mindfulness, where we could offer day-time mindfulness courses for parents of young children as well as evening courses for people in work.

Yes. When we find ways to be reforming, inclusive and effective, remarkable things happen.

Mark Williams

CREATIVE DAY - JOURNEY INTO STILLNESS

'I felt truly welcome....so much care and preparation had gone into every aspect of the day' '...aware of being 'held' in a beautiful space...I could explore my creativity, or not, as I chose.' 'This was my first attendance at a 'creative day....I enjoyed (it) very much.' 'The instructions and guidance were really helpful..... to focus without fear of interruption was brilliant.' 'I enjoyed 6 hours with nothing planned in my diary!.....the silent times, experimenting, the introduction and the final gathering.'

These are just some of the things people said to describe their experience of the second successful ACE Team 'Creative Day – Journey into Stillness,' held on 25th November.

The aim of the day was to explore ways in which we can experience the 'still point' through creative activities so while our hands may be active, our minds can become meditative and still.

We gathered together at the beginning of the day for the introduction which included the purpose of the day and an overview of the activities on offer and again at the end of the day where people were invited to share their experience if they wished.

The two short periods of silence, about 20 mins each, were a highlight for many. People found it so refreshing to simply create and 'be' without feeling they had to talk or listen to others. In fact we were asked if the silences could be made longer 'next time'. Our hope, is that this sense of 'well-being' experienced in the

CHURCH CALENDAR FOR JANUARY 2018.

Everyone is invited to stay for coffee or tea after 10 am Sunday services.
Traidcraft stall on occasional Sundays.

Date	7 th Jan	14 th Jan	21 st Jan	28 th Jan
Service	Morning Service with HC	Morning Service	Morning Service with H.C.	Morning Service
Time	10 am	10 am	10 am	10 am
Worship Leader	Revd. Pauline Main	Richard Bainbridge	Revd. Colin Thompson	Revd. Donald Norwood
Vestry Elder	Catherine Harding	Pauline Shelley	Ann Hardiman	Ellen Webster
Welcomer	Peter Devlin	Charles Bennett	Malcolm Benson	Moira Watson
Steward	Liz Barry	John Kidd	Barbara Joiner	Joan Kidd
Reader	Moira Watson	Ellen Webster	Richard Wood	Christine Bainbridge
Prayers	Ellen Webster	Ann Bettess	Malcolm Benson	Bob Webster
Flowers	Allison Towner	Christine Bainbridge	Frances Simpson	Wendy Benson

Elders' names in **Bold** are on Communion duty

COMMON LECTIONARY READINGS (leaders may use other readings.)

Date	7 th Jan	14 th Jan	21 st Jan	28 th Jan
First Reading	Genesis 1, 1-5	1 Samuel 3: 1-10 (11-20)	Jonah 3: 1-5 and 10	Deuteronomy 18: 15-20
Psalm	Psalm 29	Psalm 139: 1-6 and 13-18	Psalm 62: 5-12	Psalm 111
New Testament	Acts 19: 1-7	1 Corinthians 6: 12-20	1 Corinthians 7: 29-31	1 Corinthians 8, 1-13
Gospel	Mark 1: 4-11	John 1: 43-51	Mark 1: 14-20	Mark 1: 21-28

PASTORAL LIST

Catherine Harding (2017)

Christine & Richard Bainbridge
Gillian & David Herring
Pat Simpson
Annette Wright

Moira Watson (2017)

Jean Boxall
Pat Howard
Zena Knight
Frances Simpson
Liz & Tony Barry
Bev Paton and family

Malcolm Benson (2017)

Graham Dobson
Ann & Fred Hardiman
Doris & Dick Sinfield
Barbara & Albert Joiner
Sue & Charles Bennett

Tom Goss (2017)

Laurence & Peter Devlin
Colin Thompson
Joel and Kit Rasmussen

Ann Hardiman (2015)

Ann & Roger Bettess
Annie Hughes, Dave Crosby
and Elliott
Moira & Jim Watson
Allison & Colin Towner
Ellen & Bob Webster

Charles Bennett (2016)

Catherine & Robert Harding
Wendy & Malcolm Benson
Pauline & Chris Shelley

Pauline Shelley (2016)

Angela & Rob Holdaway
Phyllis & Mark Williams
Catherine & David Hughes
Joan & John Kidd

Peter Devlin (2017)

Bobbie Stomont & Tom Goss
Sybil Beaton
Lynette & Richard Wood

Elders with no Pastoral List

Robert Harding - Church Secretary
Ellen Webster (2015) - Admin
Chris Shelley - Treasurer

Members & Friends living locally we keep in touch with

Jeff Clark - Wendy
Jennifer and Hennie Eloff
Robin and Jennie Gladwin - Ann H
Cathy and Mike Hogan - Malcolm
Cynthia Mancey - Moira
Ann Newman - Frances
Siobhan and Alan Shipton - Malcolm
Ann Gajda - Malcolm
Elaine & Mike Matejschuk - Pauline

stillness and silence goes beyond the creative day, as we are able to gift to ourselves some time for things that nourish us and time, even a few moments, for stillness or silence amidst the ordinary things of life.

Activities people could choose from to explore were; painting, felting and needle felting, whittling, collage, drawing, knitting, weaving, writing, sand play, flower arranging and looking at/reading books that might spark our creativity. It was such a joy to see so many members of our own church and of the wider community 'going with the flow', trying things they had never tried before.

The day was a gift to all those who came; the gift of time to experiment and create using a wide range of quality materials - no previous experience needed and no pressure to complete anything. It was a day to freely choose what you wanted to do; explore materials, make things, watch others, catch up on conversations, meet new people or take time to simply sit and be.

The Creative Day team, Pauline, Angela, Christine and Bobbie supported people to use materials if needed, answer any questions and ensure everyone was looked after with refreshments throughout the day. The ACE team would like to thank them for taking so much thought and care in planning this inspiring day and gifting their own creative skills and experience to make this day such a success.

A thank you too, to all those who made delicious cakes. Keep an eye out on our website for photos of the day and see what fun we had.

Bobbie Stormont

REMARKABLE THINGS: A REPORT ON THE RE-BUILD/ RENEWAL PROJECT

At the special church meeting in October 2017, we decided to go ahead with a plan to re-build the back-rooms. All agreed that these rooms have served the church well, but they no longer provide the welcoming space that they used to do. Meanwhile, the demand for space for church and other activities has increased (see the Pastoral letter). Brocklehurst Architects had produced plans that would meet our needs. We committed ourselves to see how much of the cost of around £200,000 we could find as a congregation before seeking support from the Wessex Trust, from friends and former members, and from external Trusts and Charities.

Recently, our treasurer Chris Shelley has reported to us that the response from church members has been remarkable: over £93,000 pledged. With Gift Aid, this will bring us £110,000. A huge thank-you to all who have pledged their support.

At our meeting with Synod Officers in early December, they warmly welcomed our plans. They also encouraged us to go further: to assess how much our mission might be further supported and enhanced by giving our existing hall

a makeover. They noticed, for example, the flooring (uneven and tending to splinter), the roof (not insulated and with some failing battens), the windows (single glazed with failing lead, and with no blinds), the lack of a 'loop system' in the hall (a limit on accessibility for those that are hard of hearing). So the elders decided to ask the architects to advise on carrying out a condition survey of church and hall, including a structural engineer to advise on existing issues. The architects will ask a Quantity Surveyor to estimate for us the cost of renewal of the hall: its floor, its roof, its sound and its window insulation and furnishing (blinds).

Whether we decide to go ahead with renewal of the hall is up to the church meeting. We are getting the costs of it all so we can decide. It might form a Phase 2 of the rebuild-renewal project, or be included in a single re-build phase or not be done at all. In any event, the possibility of renewal of the hall will not hold up our plans to go ahead with the rebuilding of the back rooms.

Plans are in place for this to happen. A heating engineer (John Lawford of JLBS, Aylesbury) visited the church on 15th December to assess the capacity of the boiler to meet the needs of the new building and advise on other heating needs. A full 'condition survey' of church and hall will be conducted on 3rd January by Mark Battram of Battram Associates, and on 4th January the structural engineer (Phil Goodliffe of Intrepid Consulting Engineers) will come to look at specific structural issues.

Here is the current time-line for the next few months:

- **January 2018:**
 - o Brocklehursts submits planning application and costs new items
- **February - March 2018:**
 - o Church decides on scope of project and prepares draft application to Wessex Trust (for authority to carry out work and for a grant towards the cost)
 - o Church Fundraising Group prepare and send bids to Charities, Trusts and SODC; to friends, hall users and former members
- **End March:** decision on planning application
- **April/May 2018** Brocklehursts prepare 'schedule of works'
- **May 10th:** Meeting of Wessex Trust
- **End May 2018** Brocklehursts send out to builders who might tender for project
- **June 2018** Tenderers price the work. Tenders back by **end of June.**

The rebuild 'task group' are deeply grateful for the continuing prayers and support from within the church and from our wider circle of friends and former members.

Mark Williams

UPDATE ON THE CHURCH HIGH STREET WALL

OG Stonemasonry Contractors Ltd, whom we have asked to repair the external wall of the Sanctuary along the High Street, cannot give us a specific date at the moment, but they hope to start the work during the second or third week of January. We await confirmation in due course.

Chris Shelley

'What you don't know about Refugees'

Come and find out . .

“Care for the World” team invite you to a Presentation and Discussion

with Sanctuary Hosting and Asylum Welcome

followed by Soup Lunch
SATURDAY JAN 20th, 11 am

URC, Crown Square, Wheatley



NEW YEAR WALK AND LUNCH

On the Monday the 1st January 2018 there will be a walk organised to be followed by a bring and share lunch at Laurence and Peter's home. Everybody is welcome to take part in one or both of these events! There is an attendance list on the noticeboard in the Church Hall.

CHARITABLE / OUTREACH GIVING 2017

In addition to our regular donations and donations to the Disasters Emergency Committee appeals this year, the balance of our charitable giving will be split between the following organisations:

The Gatehouse Oxford is a drop-in café with an open door for everyone who is 25 or over and exists to provide a calm safe refuge for people who are homeless or vulnerably housed. **£500.**

The Trussell Trust run a 400-strong network of foodbanks in the UK and are also working with foodbanks to provide services like money advice and Fuel Banks and basic cookery, nutrition and budget management courses. **£500.**

Medical Aid for Palestinians (MAP). For over 30 years, MAP has been reaching out to Palestinian communities, striving to deliver health and medical care to those worst affected by conflict, occupation and displacement. In Gaza, people are suffering and medicines are now running desperately low. **£500.**

Mission to Seafarers offers help and support to the 1.5 million men and women who face danger every day from problems such as piracy, shipwreck, abandonment and separation from loved ones. The Mission work in over 200 ports in 50 countries, offering practical, emotional and spiritual support to seafarers. **£250.**

Commitment for Life is the world development programme of the URC. They work in partnership with Christian Aid and Global Justice Now. Further information was given in the November newsletter. **£500**

Oxfordshire Credit Union (OCU) Credit Unions are community savings and loans providers. As community co-operatives, they also appeal to those who want to benefit their neighbours. Peter Stevenson (Treasurer OCU) gave us a talk earlier in the year, and details were also circulated by email on 15th November. **£1000 loan over 5 years (£500 from charity/outreach funds and £500 from Church funds)**

For 2018 as part of our charitable giving, we will be donating £50 monthly for 12 months, to the **YMCA Roomspenser Scheme.** The YMCA is a Christian movement that focuses on working with homeless young people and gives people the space to turn their lives around. They give a safe place to stay to over 9000 people every night. These young people are given a second chance in life and reminded that there are people (e.g. roomspencers) who care.

Chris Shelley

THE ACE TEAM

The Team would like to advise that bible study meetings plan to be held on Monday the 12th, 19th, and 28th of February 2018. The groups will be limited in size to 12. Pauline, Nigel and Cara have offered to lead the evenings. They have not yet chosen the areas of study but we will advise of agreed topics as soon as possible. Finally, URC (which would have been our preferred meeting place) cannot be used as a venue as we have a clash concerning use. Therefore we are looking for a generous host to offer a venue for the event (could this be YOU)? Please contact Tom Goss (on 01865358364) if you feel inspired to offer your home as a venue for the series. Starting time 1930 and finish at 2100.

Tom Goss

BIBLOG BY LAURENCE DEVLIN

In times of great personal crisis, God often appears silent and distant. Many people have reported losing their faith as the result of such perceived absence in times of trials. Others on the contrary, testify that they have encountered the presence of God in the midst of their distress, loneliness and struggles. This is often described as the "dark night of the soul" an expression coined by the great Spanish mystic and spiritual master, John of the Cross (ask Colin for more details!). Strictly speaking, the "**dark night of the soul**" does not refer to the difficulties of life in general but is rather one of the steps to go through on the journey of union with God and the expression is nowadays commonly used to describe such trials.

In the Bible, we find many characters who feel they have been abandoned by a silent and distant God. Many psalms express that despair, including one of the most famous, Psalm 22 that Jesus made his own on the cross: *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning? "Oh my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest."* (Ps. 22: 1-2). Psalm 13 is another well-known example of God's perceived absence: *"How long, O lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day"* (Ps. 13: 1-2)

Job is one of the most powerful examples of that lack of divine solace in the face of utter despair and unimaginable suffering: *"Why let people go on living in misery? Why give light to those in grief? They wait for death, but it never comes; they prefer a grave to any treasure... Everything I fear and dread comes true. I have no peace, no rest and my troubles never end."* (Job 3: 20-21 and 25-26) And addressing God directly in his famous speech in chapter 10, he laments: *"Your hands have made me and fashioned me, an intricate unity; Yet You would destroy*

me” (Job 10:8) What is remarkable however is that in spite of it all, Job never really loses his faith and continues a dialogue with God even if it feels more like a monologue a lot of the time.

Besides Job, **Jacob** is also one biblical character who most strikingly shows us that God can be encountered in times of personal wrestling with darkness and desolation. Jacob is a man whose deepest spiritual encounters happen when he is on a journey, alone and afraid at the dead of night, fleeing from one danger to another: while he flees from his brother Esau whom he wronged very considerably, he is about to meet his uncle Laban, a man who will cause him great grief. Then 20 years later, he retraces his steps, fleeing from Laban and about to meet Esau, a meeting which makes him “very afraid and distressed.” Yet it is precisely at these moments of maximum fear that he has the most intense spiritual experiences: fleeing Esau, he has a vision of a ladder stretching from earth to heaven with angels ascending and descending and he says: *“Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it. How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven.”* (Gen. 28:16-17). Then just before he is about to meet Esau, he wrestles all night with a stranger and after receiving a new name, Israel, he says: *“I have seen God face to face and my life was spared.”* (Gen32:31)

This is a big moment in the history of faith and it teaches us that great spiritual encounters happen not only in the desert or in the wilderness or on a mountain top, nor necessarily in a monastery, a retreat centre or in places where the soul is at rest, the body calm and the mind in a state of expectation. It shows us that God can be encountered when we are deeply troubled, alone, in fear and in darkness or when we feel a total failure. *Sometimes it is when we feel utterly lonely that we discover that we are not alone.*

Jacob is in good company in that regard: Moses at his moment of crisis says: *“I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me. If this is what you are going to do to me, please kill me now if I have found favour in your sight and let me not see my misery”* (Numbers 11:15). However, this is the precise moment that God chooses to show Moses the effect of his leadership on seventy Elders of the tribe: *“I will take of the Spirit which is upon you and will put it upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with you so that you might bear it not alone.”* (Numbers 11:16-17)

Similarly, it is when Elijah is weary to the point of asking to die that God sends him the great revelation at Mount Horeb: the whirlwind, the fire, the earthquake and the small, still voice (I Kings 19). Then there is also the time when Jeremiah feels so low that he says: *“Cursed be the day on which I was born, let not the day on which my mother gave birth to me be blessed... Why did I come out from the womb, to see toil and sorrow and to end my days in shame?”* (Jer.20: 14,

18) and yet it is after this great despair that he has his most glorious hope-filled prophecy regarding the return of Israel from exile and of God’s everlasting love for his people.

To come back to Jacob, his two “awe-some” encounters with God can be understood as two powerful metaphors of the spiritual life: sometimes we experience *faith as climbing a ladder*, a hard plod day by day, week by week, year by year as we learn to trust God a bit more and come closer to Him/Her, little by little. And then there is *faith as a wrestling match*, as we struggle with our doubts, our hesitations and our fears. Like Jacob, that sort of faith may leave us limping and bruised, but it may also show us that after wrestling all night with a strong adversary, we have a strength we did not know we had. Out of the depths, we may reach the heights and through the most painful crises in our life, we may encounter the deepest truths.

SUNDAY EVENINGS AT BARNS CLOSE

For over thirty years we have hosted a simple form of worship in the style of Taize. At one time we met every week which allowed for continuity and people to drop in when they wanted. In Littleworth Road there were many young people around the table and the discussions formed our thinking as well as that of our children.

Commitments change and we now try to meet twice a month. In 2018 it is proposed to meet on the second and fourth Sundays which clears some of the more busy Sundays of the month. In consideration of the preparation time we propose to simplify and experiment. There may be more listening to music rather than singing and the use of other liturgies such as those from Iona. However the central core of silence will still be there, and as always a social time afterwards with refreshments.

To allow for continuity and for those who may wish to come occasionally it is proposed that we will be there to welcome people whether anyone comes or not on the two Sundays a month advertised in the newsletter.

It has been a great privilege to host worship in our home. We have considered ending the practice but will try new formats in the coming year as part of our new year resolutions, and will review this again in the future.

Richard and Christine