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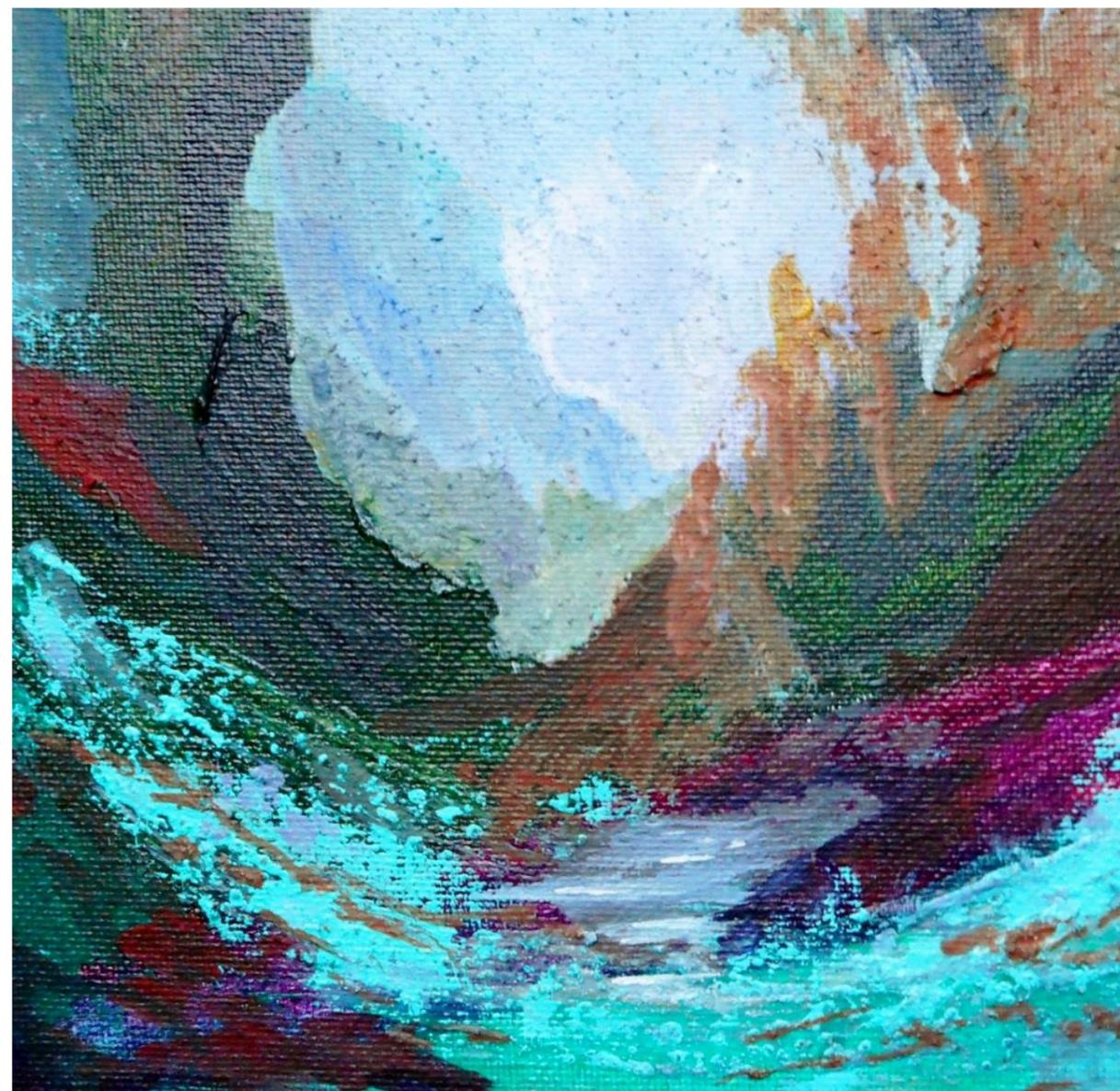
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WHEATLEY URC NEWSLETTER



MARCH 2018

Covering Thoughts

In a poetry collection called Shorelines (Hextall and McNaught 2015) I found 'Talisman' by Elizabeth Witts, a poem whose shape reminded me of the small abstract painting on the cover.

*held
in the hollow
of a hand this patterned
stone cold as the sea heavy
and round from the far shores
of western ross this piece of gneiss
a mix of mica feldspar quartz
millions of years its been at
home on planet earth this
forceful thing biding
its time.*

How often have we stooped to pick up a stone from the beach and held it wonderingly in our hand? Around our house and garden are many such stones brought home from holidays in various places, their origin long forgotten, but each time we venture out with eyes wide open to possibilities we will find new objects to fill us with wonder. We will value them for a while, relive the memories they evoke until they too fade into the mists of time. We cannot live on old experiences alone. We need to experience newness each day.

Jesus rejected the temptation to turn stones to bread. To do so would be to devalue the nature of stones with their timeless witness, and to replace them with a passing nourishment; hunger satisfied for a moment. Our lives are filled with possessions of a temporary importance. Taking the stones of the desert story as a meditation this Lent could be a way to discover something new and lasting about the source of all life.

Christine

'ROSENCRANTZ AND GUILDENSTERN ARE DEAD' **ST MARYS CHURCH – APRIL 2018**

Please come and support St Mary's latest fund-raising venture - a production of Tom Stoppard's dazzling comedy *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*. Peter Fanning will direct the play, which will feature many of the team that recently staged *Joseph and His Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat* and *Godspell*.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead is a play which, as it were, takes place in the wings of *Hamlet*, and finds both humour and poignancy in the situation of the ill-fated attendant lords. The National Theatre production in April 1967 made Tom Stoppard's reputation virtually overnight. Its wit, stagecraft and verbal verve remain as exhilarating as they were then and the play has become a contemporary classic.

Performances

7.30 pm, Thursday 12th April 2018: tickets, £8

7.30 pm, Friday 13th April 2018: tickets, £10

7.30 pm, Saturday 14th April 2018: tickets, £10

Students and under 18s: £7.50 for all performances

Tickets available by email smg.wheatley@gmail.com or telephone 872262.



PASTORAL LETTER

During Lent a year or two ago I was reading a book called *The Heart's Time*, by Janet Morley, a Christian writer and educator who has worked for Christian Aid and the Methodist Church. It's a book I heartily recommend, and I will probably re-visit it this year.

Each day there is a short poem to read – and perhaps learn by heart - and some comments from the author to aid one's own reflection. This poem, below, by R S Thomas was chosen for Ash Wednesday, as a reminder that Lent is a time for “turning aside” from the day to day in order to reflect on life and faith.

The Bright Field

I have seen the sun break through
to illuminate a small field
for a while, and gone my way
and forgotten it. But that was the pearl
of great price, the one field that had
the treasure in it. I realise now
that I must give all that I have
to possess it. Life is not hurrying
on to a receding future, nor hankering after
an imagined past. It is the turning
aside like Moses to the miracle
of the lit bush, to a brightness
that seemed as transitory as your youth
once, but it is the eternity that awaits you.

R.S. Thomas

At one level the poem invites us to lift our eyes, not to miss the transient beauty all around in a sunlit field, a rainbow, a cobweb sparkling with frost, the “lilies of the field” here today but gone in an instant. “What is this life if full of care, we have no time to stand and stare.” to quote another Welshman (William Henry Davies). And the memory of these fleeting moments in a day can refresh and inspire us, I find, if, unlike R S Thomas, we remember them!

But at a deeper level, the poem is about how we live our lives, about how easy it is to miss the important, deep things of life if we are continually planning ahead, working towards the future which we can never quite grasp, or if we are

always looking back to “the good old days” when things were somehow much better than today. Rather, life is about living in the moment, appreciating the treasure which is today, living life to the full.

My mother was someone who liked to live for today. On a sunny day during school holidays we would go off for a trip to the seaside, or take a picnic to the park. She wouldn't worry about the housework – “it will be there when I'm not”, she would say. How right she was; she died suddenly at the comparatively early age of 66. Her example didn't help my domestic skills, but her words often come back to me, and her homespun philosophy is I think the right one. Like the words of R S Thomas it encourages us to get the priorities of life right. The mindfulness discipline, which we are so fortunate to have as a resource in this church, also encourages this way of living.

Jesus had a similar focus on the present moment. “Give us *today* our daily bread”, he teaches us to pray “do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? “, he says - focus on this day.

And why – so that we can be more alive to the Kingdom of God, says Jesus. The Kingdom which is very much of the present moment, as we follow Christ and try to love and serve our neighbours - but is also a foretaste of “the eternity that awaits us”.

May we find glimpses of God's Kingdom this Lent and Easter season.

Pauline Main

BI-BLOG BY LAURENCE DEVLIN

As I mentioned last month, ancient Israel and the whole Hellenistic world at the time of Jesus, was a “group-oriented” culture in which people derived their identity not from an individual sense of self but from what the strongly bonded groups to which they belonged (kinship group, household, extended family) thought of them. In such a “collective” society, it was therefore the “honour and shame” code which underpinned all relationships and behaviours. Concretely it meant that every human action and interaction was an occasion for either increasing one's value in the public eye (honour) or decreasing it (shame). A man's honour depended on his authority over his household, his position as a husband and as a father, his strength and courage in public dealings and his status in the community. Women on the other hand were viewed as a potential source of shame and were expected to behave quietly and modestly in public, especially in

WOMEN'S WORLD DAY OF PRAYER

Friday 2nd March

Wheatley URC at 2 pm, St Mary's Wheatley at 7 pm

‘Women's World Day of Prayer’ is a world-wide movement led by Christian women of many traditions. More than 170 countries participate in an annual day of celebration which brings together people of various races and cultures, sharing in worship.

Each year the service is prepared by women from a different country. This year the country is Suriname. The Day of Prayer begins on the International Dateline and the first service is held in Samoa. Then, as the earth rotates, a great wave of prayer sweeps across Asia, rolls on to the countries of Africa and then to the Middle East. It continues into Europe across to the Caribbean and the Americas till the last service of the day is held as the sun sets over American Samoa.

In Wheatley there are two services on Friday the 2nd March, the first at Wheatley URC at 2 pm and later at St Mary's Church at 7 pm. Do come and join in this great day of prayer, the theme is 'All God's Creation is Very Good'. The services are open to all: men, women and children.

Ann Hardiman

SCIENCE CORNER - ELECTRIC CARS

Over 11,000 pure-electric cars were sold in the UK in 2017, just 0.5% of the two million cars on the road. Interest is boosted by the threat of pollution charges in city centres, scrappage incentives and government grants for electric vehicles. But, are electric cars as green as people think? The only exhaust is pure water but a big environmental impact occurs as the vehicle is manufactured. It probably takes twice the amount of energy to build an electric car than a conventional car. Also, where will the extra electricity come from to run large numbers of cars.

The main problem is the battery which uses a lot of energy to manufacture and needs lithium and rare metals, which exist in tiny quantities and hard-to-reach places. Lithium comes from brines beneath the deserts of South America, and from rock in Australia, which is processed in China. World supplies are limited, which results in mining companies increasing their footprint in search of new deposits but there is a chance that one or more of the rare metals will run out within just a few years!

Jim Watson

'ALL SHALL BE WELL'

'All shall be well': this is the song of love,
When love is bright, and full of hope and joy;
When stars are shining in splendour, to move
The mind and heart, Earth-chained, yet free to fly!

'All shall be well': this is the faith of love,
In darkness, loss, deep anguish and despair,
When all seems dead - the lack of love to prove,
Yet faith still holds that suffering Love is there.

'All shall be well': the soul blest by God's love -
When life is ended, yet is just begun -
Should not say: 'Lord, 'twould have been better if...'
For Love knows all is well, and 'tis well done.

For, in truth, as St Julian did tell,
All things are as ordained; 'All shall be well.'

David Herring

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*Encouraged by writings by D. Bonhoeffer (20th century)
and St Julian of Norwich (14th century)*

their sexual conduct and not hinder the family honour. The prevalence of that honour/shame code is never articulated properly in the biblical text because it is a given but there is no doubt that it is the key to understanding the parable of **The Unjust Steward (Luke 16:1-13)** which has puzzled commentators so much over the centuries that they often resorted to far-fetched allegorical explanations. The most puzzling feature of the story is of course why on earth would a steward – or land manager – be praised for stealing from his boss?

Let's first re-read the story: *Jesus told his disciples: There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. So he called him in and asked him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you cannot be manager any longer. The manager said to himself, 'What shall I do now? My master is taking away my job. I'm not strong enough to dig, and I'm ashamed to beg—I know what I'll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.'* So, he called in each one of his master's debtors. He asked the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' Nine hundred gallons¹ of olive oil,' he replied. "The manager told him, 'Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it four hundred and fifty.' "Then he asked the second, 'And how much do you owe?' "A thousand bushels¹ of wheat,' he replied. "He told him, 'Take your bill and make it eight hundred. The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly.

Before dealing with the details of the story itself, some historical background will help. In the agrarian subsistence-economy of first century Palestine, as much as 90 % of the people were very poor while the wealthy absentee landlords and aristocratic priests who were living a life of luxury in Jerusalem or Caesarea, constituted about 2 to 3% of the population. The remaining 7 to 8% were making a reasonable living through their association with the rich, such as our steward. We also need to remember that the Roman occupiers demanded not only high taxes *in money* but a heavy tribute *in kind* as well: olive oil, wheat, wine and other agricultural commodities. The farmers had therefore to produce more and more for their masters, even when the harvest was poor - a common occurrence - and got into higher and higher debts. The debt burden of the dispossessed was a huge social problem well documented by historians of the time and of course mentioned in the Lord's Prayer. The steward's position in such social order was both privileged and vulnerable: He had a relatively high standard of living, but he was completely dependent on the goodwill of his master. So, when the master hears that his steward has put his hand in the till, he dismisses him.

But there are two very strange things here: First why does the master believe, *on simple hearsay*, the accusations brought against his presumably

trusted agent without giving him a chance to explain himself? And then of course why does the steward not defend himself at all and stay silent instead? Only the importance of the honour code can give us a clue: *the master's honour is seriously compromised not only because he is losing money through his agent's thievery but even more, because this has become common knowledge and people are gossiping!* In those days, a master's standing in the eyes of his peers was partly determined by his ability to control those under him. A master whose assets were wisely managed by a loyal agent would have been viewed highly by others. But the misdeeds of an employee would have resulted in a loss of honour for the master. The only way to recover honour, public standing and prestige was therefore to dismiss the culprit as swiftly as possible.

The steward of course knows this, and he also knows that nobody would hire a manager who had cheated and disgraced his previous employer. So instead of arguing, he stays silent. This would have astonished Jesus' listeners as the norm in that sort of culture when you lost a position or the favour of your "patron" is to plead and plead and plead again to get it back! I have personally seen this when I was living in West Africa where "patron-client" networks are also prevalent realities. In fact, the reason why our steward stays silent is because he realises that the best way to regain his position, is *to restore his master's honour* and he comes up with a VERY clever plan.

This is an extraordinarily ingenious plan for two reasons: **First** because, as debts always increased, never decreased, the farmers would have automatically assumed that the steward was carrying out orders from his master (remember, he does not tell the farmers that he had been fired!). So, they would have viewed their lowered bills as a sign of how generous the landowner is, more generous in fact than just about anyone else in his position would be: a real hero!!! So, although the master loses some profits, he gains back something much more precious: a measure of honour in the community. And if the master were ever tempted to denounce the steward's action, he would lose face, *again*, not only because he would lose his status of benefactor-extraordinaire but also because in such a culture, taking back a gift would bring great shame.

The **second** reason why the steward's plan is incredibly clever is because he reduces the debts *not by an arbitrary amount* but by the amount of interest that was usually charged on commodities: the riskier the commodity, the higher the interest. The interest on oil was 50 percent because it could easily be spilled or spoiled. The interest on wheat was 20 percent because it was a more stable commodity. *BUT, and here is another twist, the Torah strictly prohibited charging interest*, so wealthy Jews found ways to charge interest in other ways. One way was to incorporate the interest into the total amount of a debt and present it as

SIMPLE LENTEN SOUP LUNCHES IN THE WHEATLEY URC HALL



The last four **Wheatley Area Churches** simple soup lunches will be on Saturdays 3rd, 10th, 17th and 24th March **between 12.00 noon and 2.00 pm**, to raise funds and awareness for the on-going work of **Christian Aid**, worldwide. They will be hosted and organised by the following churches:

Saturday 3rd March Wheatley Community Church Team
Saturday 10th March Our Lady of Lourdes/St Bartholomew's Team
Saturday 17th March United Reformed Church Team
Saturday 24th March St Mary's Church Team

There will be some form of **themed meditational experience** in the URC worship area, that people will be able to visit, if they wish to, before or after their lunch.

There is **no fixed charge** for the soup, but there will be an opportunity available for **donations in lieu**, for the work of **Christian Aid**. (From past experience, it is anticipated that about £200 should have already been raised from the previous two lunches).

All are most welcome to attend, regardless of denomination, creed, faith or none, so do bring a friend or neighbour along with you, if you can.

Tony Barry (872293)

OCCASIONAL EVENTS IN MARCH 2018

1 st Mar	Thursday	10.00 am to noon 7.15 pm	Coffee morning, Church open Elders Meeting
2 nd Mar	Friday	2 pm	Women's World Day of Prayer
3 rd Mar	Saturday	12 noon to 2 pm	Lenten Soup Lunch
4 th Mar	Sunday	11.30 am 2.30 to 4.30 pm 7.00 pm	Foodbank Church Meeting Afternoon Tea in the Hall Pulse Group games in Hall
5 th Mar	Monday	2.00 to 4.00 pm	Not So Young Club
10 th Mar	Saturday	10.30 am 12 noon to 2 pm	Refugees follow-up discussion Lenten Soup Lunch
11 th Mar	Sunday	6.00 pm 7.00 pm	Worship Pulse Group prepare worship in Hall
13 th Mar	Tuesday	1.00 pm	Lunch Club Two
17 th Mar	Saturday	12 noon to 2 pm	Lenten Soup Lunch
18 th Mar	Sunday	8.00 am 6.00 pm	Morning Meditation Pulse Group, Worship in Church
19 th Mar	Monday	2.00 to 4.00 pm	Not So Young Club
20 th Mar	Tuesday	1.00 pm	Lunch Club
24 th Mar	Saturday	12 noon to 2 pm	Lenten Soup Lunch
25 th Mar	Sunday	7.00 to 9.00 pm	Pulse Group film evening
27 th March	Tuesday	2.15 pm	St Mary's Guild

PULSE GROUP WORSHIP ON 18th MARCH at 6.00 pm

Last year there was a lively and successful evening service put together by The Pulse Youth Group with Dan Evenhuis, Mark Williams and Malcolm Benson. The Group meets regularly in the URC on Sunday evenings. Another service is planned for the 18th March and everybody is welcome to take part. Do come along to support Pulse!

part of the total. So, when the steward reduces the debt by the amount of the interests, he is, *strictly speaking, not committing a fraud but making right what his master is doing wrong!* The result is that between his honour at stake and the interest that is NOT supposed to be charged, *the very clever steward has his master over a barrel!!!* This is why the master praises him for being **shrewd**, as the text actually says, not for being dishonest!

So once again, by using the cultural context his audience knew so well, Jesus makes a familiar point: even if our land-agent is no saint and even if his motivations are entirely selfish, by reducing the farmers' debts, *he starts to dismantle the landlord's system of oppression and exposes the corruption of his powerful master and of his entire class. What Jesus intimates is that it is only when the debts are forgiven, and the needs of the people are met that the Rule of God can be established here on earth.* Our man is indeed a thieving rogue but thanks to his action, things start to change, and the grace of God is extended further, like it is extended through other Gospels rogues such as repentant tax collectors, hated good Samaritans or prostitutes!

THE REBUILDING PROJECT - "COGWHEEL"

The project team have a name for the project: *COGWHEEL* - *because everyone counts.* *COGWHEEL* refers to all the things we have done and continue to do together: **Community, Organisation, Gathering, Welcoming, Hospitality, Enabling, Exploring and Loving.** We are also suggesting that the new meeting space be called ***The Mulberry Room***, as it will look upwards towards Mulberry Drive.

The project continues to go well, and we now have details on our Wheatley URC web-site (www.wheatleyurc.org.uk/cogwheel). Do take a look. The Planning application has been submitted, and our Synod Officers are helping us to take our project to the Wessex Trust. They have been very complimentary about the approach of the whole congregation, and are bowled over by the generosity we have shown.

The fund-raising subgroup has started its work, and is now preparing a leaflet explaining what we are doing. It also sets up a way for friends to make donations on-line. You can access this through a link on our web-page: www.wheatleyurc.org.uk/cogwheel

Mark Williams and the Project Team

CHURCH CALENDAR FOR MARCH 2018.

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

Date	4 th March	11 th March	18 th March	25 th March
Service	Morning Service with HC	Morning Service	Morning Service with HC	Morning Service
Time	10 am	10 am	10 am	10 am
Worship Leader	Revd. Pauline Main	Richard Bainbridge	Revd. Colin Thompson	Revd. Pauline Main
Vestry Elder	Pauline Shelley	Catherine Harding	Ellen Webster	Peter Devlin
Welcomer	Peter Devlin	Charles Bennett	Moira Watson	Catherine Harding
Steward	Liz Barry	Sybil Beaton	John Kidd	Barbara Joiner
Reader	John Kidd	Zena Knight	Catherine Harding	Robert Harding
Prayers	Robert Harding	Barbara Joiner	Ellen Webster	Ann Bettess
Flowers	Allison Towner	Joan Kidd	Sybil Beaton	Team

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

Simple Sunday evening services in the style of Taize will be at 7.30 pm on Sundays 11th and 25th March, at 3 Barns Close, Holton.

COMMON LECTIONARY READINGS (leaders may use other readings.)

Date	4 th March	11 th March	18 th March	25 th March
First Reading	Exodus 20: 1-17	Numbers 21: 4-9	Jeremiah 31: 31-34	Isaiah 50: 4-9a
Psalm	Psalm 19	Psalm 107: 1-3, 17-22	Psalm 51: 1-12	Psalm 31: 9-16
New Testament	1 Corinthians 1: 18-25	Ephesians 2: 1-10	Hebrews 5: 5-10	Philippians 2: 5-11
Gospel	John 2:13-22	John 3: 14-21	John 12: 20-33	Mark 14: 1- 15

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 Moira Watson's pastoral Care List: Jean Boxall, Pat Howard, Zena Knight, Frances Simpson, Liz and Tony Barry, Bev Paton and family.

We also ask you to pray for the members of the Care for the World Ministry Team: Liz Barry, Sybil Beaton, Ann Bettess, Angela and Rob Holdaway, Ellen Webster.

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 14th March 2018 is the deadline for the April Newsletter. Please always send email copy to newsletter@wheatleyurc.org.uk and not to individuals. But paper copy may be handed to Moira Watson.

Please also inform newsletter@wheatleyurc.org.uk if the Church Calendar duty entries are changed.