

# WHEATLEY URC NEWSLETTER



**December 2023**

# Covering Thoughts

*There is a stall in Thame market that sells a range of cut-price groceries from tempting cakes and chocolate to healthy dried fruit and nuts. The stall holder is a friendly, chatty chap who seems to know his customers and has a cheerful word for everyone.*

*Surprisingly I was his only customer for a short while and he suddenly confessed that he had wept on his way home as he listened to the news from Gaza and Israel. His words to me were as wise as any I had heard in recent sermons. He spoke of keeping an open mind and heart and not having a bias to one side or the other. He spoke of humanitarian aid in situations of conflict, but also of the small actions that we can do in our daily life. It matters how we treat each other and view the stranger. He recommended that I looked online to see the work of an organization called REAct. I discovered that he had taken supplies to Ukraine and was actively involved in humanitarian aid.*

*I came away uplifted and encouraged. There is so much noise from the bad and the negative voices and actions in the world, but I was reminded of the very many peace loving positive people who quietly get on with life and make a small difference where they are.*

*Rumi's words seemed to resonate with what he had shared:*

If everything around seems dark,  
look again,  
you may be the light.

*Christine*

# Pastoral Letter

Christmas Greetings,

During the past year we have had the pleasure of celebrating a number of landmark birthdays with one of 100, two of 90 and a smattering of lower denomination celebrations. We now look forward to celebrating the 2023rd birthday, probably plus a few, of Christ. His birthday is indeed worth celebrating since His life and teaching radically altered humankind's understanding of God's saving love and grace and has had a huge impact worldwide for two millennia. Some of us may prefer not to celebrate or even acknowledge the passing of the years but I have recently been reflecting on Christ's teaching in the story of Nicodemus (John ch3 v3) that he must be born again in the Spirit which is a key doctrine in many Christian denominations. Theological interpretation of what this means has long been the subject of debate and I will leave it to others, more learned than me, to expound.

Whether and when I was born again has long been a puzzle to me. Was it at birth, I was born into a Christian family, at baptism, at joining a church or at confirmation.? A malapropism of Wendy's younger sister often comes to mind in this context. Wendy and her sisters went to a Methodist Foundation boarding school. At a certain age each of the girls was invited individually to the headmistress's office to discuss whether they wished to be received into membership of the Methodist church or confirmed in the Church of England. Wendy's sister was duly summoned and breezed into the head's office saying "I know what this is about Miss E....., you want to know whether I want to be reformed or conceived." Now I have enough medical knowledge to realise that conception and birth are not synonymous but the question remains, which is most important, rebirth or reformation? They are of course not mutually exclusive.

For Christ's disciples, His calling represented such a radical change to their life and faith, perhaps best exemplified in Paul's conversion, that it was indeed a 'rebirth'. Some Christians do experience such sudden transformation. However, for me and I suspect for many, our Christian journey is one of reformation. Our understanding of what it is to be called to be Christ's followers is one of constant revision and enlightenment through worship, teaching, reading, conversations, prayer and actions. There may be some landmark events although some steps are difficult to recall or even unrecognised at the time. We are, or should be, reforming members of a reforming church.

As we contemplate in Advent, Christ's coming and at Christmas celebrate His birth may I take this opportunity to wish all a joyful Christmas and a reforming New Year.

Malcolm Benson

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## Howe Trust Christmas Hamper Appeal

The Howe Trust is a small local charity which is repeating its Christmas Hamper appeal which was started 4 years ago during the first covid lockdown. We have been organising and delivering Christmas Hampers to support the most vulnerable families (those eligible for free school meals) at our local schools. Low income families have been particularly hard hit by the cost of living crisis- this year 213 families are eligible. Whilst the trust makes a significant contribution we are dependent on additional fundraising from individuals, businesses and local organisations such as the Parish councils.

Each hamper contains ingredients for a healthy Christmas Day family meal for up to 6. It includes a 2Kg turkey (or vegetarian equivalent), x12 pigs in blankets, stuffing, gravy, fresh potatoes, carrots, Brussels sprouts and frozen peas, a yule log, cream and a tub of family chocolates each costing about £48.

If you would like to make a donation you can donate by bank transfer - The Howe Trust, sort code 30-98-90 account number 16549660 or send a cheque to our treasurer - Celia Pagel, Howe Trust treasurer, Windyridge, Ladder Hill, Wheatley, OX33 1HY. She can also provide forms for gift aid if you are a tax payer [bagels2011@gmail.com](mailto:bagels2011@gmail.com). You can also donate by card using Just Giving <https://www.justgiving.com/campaign/howetrusthamper>

Finally we may well need help with deliveries on the afternoon of Saturday 23rd December. Last year one of our helpers described it as a humbling and uplifting experience and a recipient single parent mother wrote what a difference it had made and that it taught her two sons 'the kindness of strangers'.

You can learn more about the Howe Trust on our website [howetrust.org.uk](http://howetrust.org.uk)

Malcolm Benson

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# UP OVER THE O2



Well, what an experience to climb over the O2! On 5<sup>th</sup> November six members of Chepping Wycombe Trefoil Guild challenged themselves to do just this to raise funds for Children in Need and girlguidinguk.

We were fortunate to have very good weather and so were able to appreciate the views of the Thames, Canary Wharf, etc. especially once we'd reached the platform on the top and were released from our clip-on harnesses until we started our descent.



My appreciation and thanks go to those who sponsored me and the encouragement in many forms from family and friends. To date we have raised £1,231 which will be split 50/50 between Children in Need and girlguidinguk. A wonderful result! Thank You!

Marian Mole

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# Advent Wreath 2023

## A Celebration of Creation and Creativity

*Create - from creare, Middle English - 'something from nothing'*

The task of deciding upon an original theme for the advent wreath is always a challenge which usually begins in the summer; we are now into our 20th year of themed wreaths! (I can't remember the exact year we started). Increasingly, I have struggled to think of original ideas, however new themes do emerge as I try to gather ideas from current world news and from within our communities.

The dictionary definition of the word 'create' is, 'something from nothing'. It occurred to me that creating something from nothing is what we all do every day, from choosing what to wear and what to cook, to our conversations, emails and planning our time. Creativity is not just about visual or literary arts and doesn't belong just to artists as we often think, but lies at the heart of *our* lives. Surely, God has created us *all* to be creative beings? Sometimes ideas and creations evolve and grow, like seeds in fertile ground, then surprisingly, taking on a life of their own. How many times have we seen that happen in our church? It is what we are *all* good at.

With these thoughts in mind this year, I was inspired to use The Creation Story and to expand it to include a celebration of human creativity, as it is so relevant and necessary to the issues facing the future of our church and its community.

*'We have serious resource issues that we need to face with creativity, patience, and openness to significant change'. [excerpt from the Synod report]*

The 2023 wreath will therefore be inspired by the Creation Story, with contrasts of water, dry land, dark and light, living and dried plants; seeds of hope and faith that our church, by the Grace of God, will find its path into the future.

*'Show me your ways, Lord. Teach me your paths'. [Psalm 25 v4]*

Pauline Shelley

# Common Lectionary Readings

## December 2023

**Note: leaders may choose to use other readings**

| Date                 | 3rd                    | 10th                   | 17th                     | 24 <sup>th</sup>               | 25th           | 31st                    |
|----------------------|------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------|-------------------------|
| <b>First Reading</b> | Isaiah 64: 1-99        | Isaiah 40: 1-11        | Isaiah 61: 1-4 and 8-11  | 2 Samuel 7: 1-11 and 16        | Isaiah 9: 2-7  | Isaiah 61: 10 and 62: 3 |
| <b>Psalm</b>         | Psalm 801: 7 and 17-19 | Psalm 85: 1-2 and 8-13 | Psalm 126                |                                | Psalm 96       | Psalm 148               |
| <b>New Test.</b>     | 1 Corinthians 1: 3-9   | 2 Peter 4: 8-15a       | 1 Thessalonians 5: 16-24 | Romans 16: 25-27               | Titus 2: 11-14 | Galatians 4: 4-7        |
| <b>Gospel</b>        | Mark 13: 24-37         | Mark 1: 1-8            | John 1: 6-8 and 19-28    | Luke 1: 47-55<br>Luke 1: 26-38 | Luke 2: 1-24   | Luke 2: 22-40           |

Dec 3<sup>rd</sup> - Waiting puts us all at the mercy of whatever we are waiting for, whether it's a bus or Christmas.

Dec 10<sup>th</sup> - What was the wilderness then and what is it now?

Dec 17<sup>th</sup> - Uriah Heep says how humble he is but what is true humility?

Dec 24<sup>th</sup> - Paul McCartney sings 'Let it be' - is this an echo of Mary? - McCartney was inspired by his late mother.

Dec 25<sup>th</sup> - Francis of Assisi made a nativity in 1223.

Dec 31<sup>st</sup> - What was the most amazing thing that happened in 2023?

Richard Bainbridge

~\*~

# Dates for Your Diaries

## Weekly

Mon & Thurs 8:45am Mindfulness Sitting Group (Mark Williams Tel 876288)  
Friday 10am Table Tennis (contact Val Farmer)

## Monthly

Alternate Mondays (11th) Not So Young Club (contact Frances Simpson)  
First Thursday 10am Prayer and Reflection (contact Ann Hardiman)  
First Thursday 10.30am Coffee Morning (contact Barbara Joiner)  
Second Thursday Memory Café (contact Laurence Devlin)  
Second Tuesday Lunch Club (contact Laurence Devlin)  
Third Tuesday Lunch Club (contact Catherine Harding)

## INVITATION



*The Elders invite you to a Party*

*on Friday 26<sup>th</sup> January 2024  
from 6pm to 9pm*

*FUN, FRIENDSHIP, GAMES and SUPPER*

*Make a note in your diary to keep the date free!*

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## Deadline

6<sup>th</sup> December is the deadline for the January Newsletter. Please send copy to: [newsletter@wheatleyurc.org.uk](mailto:newsletter@wheatleyurc.org.uk) Paper copy can be given to Debi Kidd. Please type all contributions in Calibri font, size 11. Thank you.

## Disclaimer

The Editors welcome letters, articles and announcements from individuals and organisations, but reserve the right to publish or not.



# Blended Service Rotas for December 2023

| Dates                             | Worship Leaders    | Readers         | Intercessors         | Vestry Elder    | Welcomer/ Door Steward         |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------|----------------------|-----------------|--------------------------------|
| 3 <sup>rd</sup>                   | Colin Thompson     | Marian Mole     | Ann Hardiman         | Bev Paton       | Charles Bennett/Allison Towner |
| 10 <sup>th</sup>                  | Richard Bainbridge | Ellen Webster   | Tom Goss             | Charles Bennett | Robert Harding/Liz Barry       |
| 17 <sup>th</sup>                  | Kate Hartford      | Pauline Shelley | Christine Bainbridge | Ellen Webster   | Pauline Shelley/Barbara Joiner |
| 24 <sup>th</sup><br>Eve<br>Carols | Colin Thompson     |                 |                      | Moira Watson    | Malcolm Benson/Marian Mole     |
| 25 <sup>th</sup>                  | Mark Williams      |                 |                      | Ann Gajda       | Bev Paton/Bobbie Stormont      |
| 31 <sup>st</sup>                  | Ministry Team      |                 |                      | Robert Harding  | Chris Shelley/Angela Holdaway  |

| Dates            | Organist                    |
|------------------|-----------------------------|
| 3 <sup>rd</sup>  | Jeff Clarke                 |
| 10 <sup>th</sup> | Frances Simpson             |
| 17 <sup>th</sup> | Jeff Clarke                 |
| 24 <sup>th</sup> | Jeff Clarke – Carol Service |
| 25 <sup>th</sup> | Frances Simpson             |
| 31 <sup>st</sup> | Frances Simpson             |

## Prayers

**Please remember in your prayers members of Malcolm Benson’s pastoral group:**

Colin Thompson, Herthe Thompson, Jeff Clarke, Cynthia Mancey, David Herring, Jill Cansell, Laurence & Peter Devlin and Ann & Norbert Gajda.

**Also remember members of the Pastoral Care Ministry Team:** Ann Bettess, Jean Boxall, Angela Holdaway, Barbara Joiner and Frances Simpson.

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# Donation Update for OHCT Sponsored Walk and Cycle Rides 2023

You will recall that, this year, Jill and Gordon Ewbank (Wheatley Community Church) and Graham Bell (Wheatley URC) cycled and I walked (well, a modest Cornish stroll!) on behalf of Wheatley URC and Oxfordshire Historic Churches Trust (50/50). Altogether a very grand total of £842.00 was raised, to which may be added a further £75+ in Gift Aid, to be claimed from the Inland Revenue by OHCT.

Jill & Gordon – 50 kms cycled, 25 churches visited and £325.00 sponsored.  
Graham - 96 kms cycled, 36 churches visited and £487.00 sponsored.  
Tony – circa 8 kms walked, 4 churches visited and £30.00 sponsored.

Many thanks, again, to Jill, Gordon, and Graham for their efforts, to all who sponsored them and to all of those who were able to gift aid their “donations”. It can make for a very worthwhile 25% uplift for OHCT on those donations made, if you are a taxpayer and at no extra cost to the sponsor.

Tony Barry

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## Harvest of Pumpkins



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# The Revd. J Charles Brock

April 27th, 1935 - November 1st 2023

John Charles Brock was born in Erie, Pennsylvania to Arloween (a made-up name, he always said) and Ralph Brock. His life of religion, scholarship and philanthropy took him from Erie to Oxford and after retirement back to Erie, where he remained active academically and socially. His philanthropic contributions to academia in both Oxford and Pennsylvania were made possible by a large legacy from his mother, whose father, J.A. Zurn, had founded Zurn Industries, an internationally renowned engineering enterprise.

Charles was educated at Longfellow and Strong Vincent High School, where he was president of the student council and an accomplished clarinetist, playing in the marching band and developing a lifelong love of jazz. He held a degree from Carnegie Mellon and, after duty with the National Guard and a spell working in the metal industry, he studied at Harvard Divinity School. It was during this time that he met his wife to be, Carolyn Dexter, originally from Deming, New Mexico, who had graduated from Oberlin College and the New England Conservatory of Music and who was organist at the First Presbyterian Church of the Covenant, to which the Brock family belonged.

In 1962, Charles and Carolyn moved to Oxford for further study. The following year they took up residence in the Manse, Crown Road, Wheatley and began a ministry which they thought would be for two or three years and which turned out to last for thirty-six. At the same time Charles was appointed as Chaplain of Mansfield College, Oxford and to Congregationalist students at the University (URC from 1972). Later he became Director of Ordination Studies at the College. In 1999, Charles retired from his duties at Mansfield and Wheatley to spend more time with his mother. She was in her nineties and for many years had been a regular visitor to Wheatley (she lived to be 102). His return to Erie enabled him to resume contact with old friends, some of whom were members of the 'notorious nine' who met for lunch every Friday and discussed 'politics, gossip and God in descending order'. He also resumed membership of the Siebenbuerger club, Polish and German clubs and the Saxon Singing Society. He became pastor at the First Universalist Church in Girard, where he regularly led worship. Academically he taught courses on comparative religion and politics at Behrend (Penn State) university where he also founded and directed the Institute of the American Dream. He also sponsored the first chair in Humanities at Behrend. He was a

founding member of the Jefferson Educational Society, devoted to civic enlightenment. At Oxford he endowed the John Milton Fellowship at Mansfield and delivered the annual lecture in 2022 on Milton and Jefferson.

After their move back to Erie Charles and Carolyn continued to visit Oxford for three months each year until Carolyn's deteriorating health prevented this. She died from a progressive neurological disease in 2017. In 2018 Charles married Mary Lincoln. She and her late husband, who died at about the same time as Carolyn, had been longstanding friends. They had five years of happy marriage during which they travelled extensively, despite Charles's reduced mobility. Charles remained in contact with his Wheatley and Oxford friends, through occasional visits and numerous communications on politics, religion and education. He remained active until shortly before his death, which followed a diagnosis of advanced pancreatic cancer only twelve days earlier. He died peacefully at home. May he rest in peace.

Malcolm Benson

When Charles and Carolyn began their ministry at Wheatley Congregational Church, as it then was, in 1963, it was a brave move on both sides. How would a young American couple adapt to life in an English village? And how would a congregation which consisted mainly of what Charles always thought of as 'the old villagers', members of families with deep roots in the community, cope with a minister from such a different background? It was greatly to the credit of both sides that it worked so brilliantly. Charles and Carolyn enjoyed the steep learning curve and delighted in the characters they met, while the villagers took them to their hearts and instructed them in important matters such as making a proper cup of tea and growing their own vegetables, which they did with conspicuous success in the Manse garden. Above all, each side came to love the other. Wheatley was beginning to change as they arrived. The distinction between Church and Chapel, the Established Church of England and the Nonconformists, often based on class perceptions, remained strong and took a good few years to break down. But break down it did. Charles had a considerable hand in that process, and successive Vicars of Wheatley took up the challenge. At the same time the village's population was growing, as opportunities expanded for work in healthcare and education, and the church grew with it.

I first met Charles and Carolyn on my first Sunday as an Oxford undergraduate, at a tea party for Congregationalist students in the Principal's Lodgings at Mansfield College. It was the beginning of a long and extraordinary friendship. As time went on I became an increasingly frequent visitor to both the Manse and the church, which was beginning to thrive under their leadership. Young families and children became part of its life and Charles held together the old and the new, respecting the views of those who had been brought up in the church and welcoming the new life that incomers were bringing. Like many of my contemporaries, I found Charles stimulating and exciting to listen to. There was a real intellectual fizz about him, connecting religion to what was going on in the world, so that the Church seemed less of a backwater than a powerhouse of ideas. It fed my hunger for a kind of faith which engaged with the big issues of the day and could be argued about intelligently. And there were parties. Many parties. Charles enjoyed his food and drink, and Carolyn was a legendary hostess (though, despite repeated attempts, she never entirely succeeded in curbing her husband's desire for second helpings of everything). There was a lot of music, too, all kinds of new hymns and songs as well as occasional turns on the clarinet from Charles. It's thanks to Carolyn that we sit and listen to the organ postlude as part of our worship. They also made real connections with members of the village community who weren't part of the church and won the affection of so many.

Sometimes, when they went off to the States in the summer, I lived in the Manse and kept an eye on the church. Charles took part in my ordination in 1971 and spoke at its Silver Jubilee in Mansfield Chapel in 1996. He had profound things to say, but they were always laced with a keen sense of humour. He was a man of enthusiasms. It was Marx and Freud in the early years, then the Jewish roots of Christianity and especially the Passover/Eucharist link and the nature of liturgy. Later it was a more political reading of the Gospels, and then a commitment to interfaith dialogue which led him to a more Unitarian stance. He was greatly exercised by the deteriorating political climate in the USA, mindful always of what the founding fathers of that country had set out as their vision. Over the years I travelled with them extensively. It began in the Lake District, the scene of student holidays for many years, as we conquered peaks and strode along ridges. I accompanied them both on holidays to Spain, France, Belgium and Italy, and went with Charles to Mount Athos, where we spent four days hiking between monasteries and consuming the meagre provisions provided. Carolyn said we had never looked in better shape when she met us on our return. In the 90s I joined them for some serious hiking in the Colorado Rockies and visits to New Mexico, including Carolyn's home town. After their return Charles got me over to give a lecture at Penn State and I was glad at last to see fabled Erie.

It has been the most extraordinary and life-enriching privilege to be associated so closely with them over so many years. Their legacy lives on in all kinds of ways. Charles was so pleased to see Wheatley URC continuing to develop and welcome new friends. He didn't mind at all that the Mulberry Room replaced a mid-sixties block which he insisted had been built on the cheap. There was nothing negative about him. His vision was a positive one, his enthusiasm catching, his eyes focused on the future and the need to plan for it now. We shall miss Charles and Carolyn terribly, but their achievements live on. Heavenly banquets will be even better for their presence, and I imagine the choir of angels (especially the basses) will sing even more sweetly under new direction. Though we have lost them from our company on earth we have gained so much from their sharing with us, and we pray that they may now know in eternity the peace and the joy which here we glimpse only in passing.

Colin Thompson

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## Sharing

Have you had a tune running through your head and couldn't get rid of it? I woke up with 'The Teddy Bears' Picnic'. About 4 hours later I decided to send it to my great-grandchildren in Australia by email. It seems that the act of sharing paid off and it was gone from my mind. In return, my son (the children's grandfather) sent me a song that he remembered from when he was little. It was 'The Song of the Prune' sung by Frank Crumit.

My Dad used to play on the piano to my sister and me when we were small, songs which had been popular in 1930s. My husband entertained our children on long car journeys in the 1950s by reciting 'Abdul Abulbul Amir', the lyrics of another Frank Crumit song. How many people remember that one?

All very amusing and it is great that good memories can still go down from one generation to the next. That is history! Great fun! I will never know what today's children will pass on to their great-grandchildren. Will they laugh at the idea of putting petrol in a car or talking on a phone with a cord attached to the wall?

Pat Simpson

~\*~

# FALCON JUNIOR SCHOOL NEWS

Here's an update on the current news from west of Harare. Your help is greatly appreciated out there ... thank you!

## THE FOWL RUN READY TO ROLL!



If you remember it's Wilbert and the Falcon School's idea to help raise their own funds to resume the building of more teacher accommodation.

We raised funds (\$1400) to help build the run. First chicks are now expected w/c 26th November.

Using feeds (and medicines to prevent disease) they will be reared over a 6-week cycle and sold for profit before the next cycle starts.

## NEW FALCON PROJECT NEXT 6 MONTHS!



See photo: two laptops are shown to Falcon students for first time last year

Computers are now mandatory in Zimbabwe Junior School curriculum but with no funding.

Falcon parents cannot afford to pay for their child's laptops ....

... Wheatley URC will help raise money towards the purchase of up to 15 laptops as part of a future 'Computer Lab'.

The recent Organ Recital will have helped kick-start the project....

Care for the World Team

~\*~



***High Street,  
Wheatley, OX33 1UE***

**CHURCH CONTACTS**

*Associate Minister: Revd. Cara Heafey*  
*Email: [caraheafey@hotmail.com](mailto:caraheafey@hotmail.com)*

*Church Secretary: Phyllis Williams*  
*email: [secretary@wheatleyurc.org.uk](mailto:secretary@wheatleyurc.org.uk)*

*Church website: [www.wheatleyurc.org.uk](http://www.wheatleyurc.org.uk)*