

# WHEATLEY URC NEWSLETTER



**February 2024**

# Covering Thoughts

*Remote and lonely places attract me like a magnet, and holidays can involve strenuous climbing and long hikes. The feelings and emotions arising from solitude and creation's awesomeness stay with me on my return home as long as there is canvas to paint them.*

*Covid put a temporary end to escape, but it also opened a new door. In our gently undulating landscape the accessibility of small hills became a gift. Climbing each one surprised me with a feeling of expansiveness as views faded into soft haze, or the sun picked out a windmill on the far horizon. Today gazing at Red Hill on my way back from Oxford it is impossible to imagine the experience of being at the top as it appears such a scrappy little hump in the landscape. However to stand beneath its ancient trees, avoiding the decade old burrows of rabbits and badgers, is to be transported away from the racing traffic to a new world. I am reminded of a poem by R S Thomas called *The Moor*. I recommend you read it but here is just a taster:*

*It was like a church to me.....What God was there made himself felt....in clean colours.....in movement of the wind over grass.*

*Some of us shared a mindfulness day at Cuddesdon College and spent time walking in the grounds. The cover painting is a view from the hill top painted shortly afterwards.*

**Christine**



# Pastoral Letter

Experiencing a joyous church full to the rafters on Christmas Eve and Christmas morning, it was hard to imagine that many people who have thought carefully about it predict that we are rapidly heading for a post-Christian future, part of the preparation for which is apologising for Christianity's role in numerous horrors from the crusades to the holocaust.

Be that as it may, I do like to think from time to time about the individuals and movements within the church who have made the world something a little closer to that which Jesus called the Kingdom of God, and which, as recently as Victorian times, Tennyson evoked in his New Year verse 'Ring out Wild Bells', which I still find deeply relevant:

'Ring out false pride in place and blood,  
The civic slander and the spite;  
Ring in the love of truth and right,  
Ring in the common love of good.

Ring in the valiant and the free,  
The larger heart, the kindlier hand;  
Ring out the darkness of the land,  
Ring in the Christ that is to be.'

Two quite recent books have helped me focus on the way in which the free churches in whose tradition we follow have improved the lot of the individuals making up the populace at large. In 'What are we doing here?' (Virago 2018), American novelist/theologian Marilynne Robinson surprised me by pointing out that in the state-led religious wars of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century, under only two regimes, the brief reign of Edward VI and the slightly longer Protectorate in which Great Britain was a republic, no one, Catholic or Protestant, was executed for their religious beliefs.

She quotes a text from this period which says of people we might find 'contemptible and worthless', we are to 'look upon the image of God in them, which cancels and effaces their transgressions and with its beauty and dignity allures us to love and embrace them', before revealing that these are the words of John Calvin, oft-maligned founder of the reformed tradition. All a far

cry from the Blackadder puritans who say the cold is God's way of telling us to burn more Catholics.

Meanwhile, 'The Protestants: the radicals who made the modern world' by Alec Ryrie (Collins 2017) was one of the treats of the lockdown. Endorsed by Diarmaid MacCulloch, whom many of us know for his lectures in person or on TV, as showing 'how the history of religion is the history of people,' I was surprised many times per chapter, mainly pleasantly, as indicated below.

Though Luther hailed the Bible as the final arbiter in theology, as well as throwing out the apocrypha, he wanted to remove the book of Esther, he doubted that large chunks of the Old Testament were written by their supposed authors, and wanted to remove to an addendum as semi-apocrypha the epistles of Jude, James and Hebrews and the book of Revelation. He argued that if a prince ordered his people to fight an unjust war, they should passively refuse. Calvin, seen by many as the advocate of the iron heart and closed fist, wanted compromise with the established church and insisted that everyone being their brothers' and sisters' keepers was central to the faith. Foxe, of the (in)famous Book of Martyrs is described by Ryrie as ' a consummate internationalist, an idealistic radical, who conscientiously opposed all religious violence'.

Cromwell is described as a shrewd, effective and even principled ruler whose attempt to police the population's moral behaviour was 'much exaggerated by subsequent legends', and of course he ended the centuries-old exclusion of the Jews from this country.

While political sects like the Levellers and Diggers rose and fell in this era, it also saw the emergence of the Quakers who embraced a doctrine of absolute human equality. Later prison and housing reformer Elizabeth Fry was, of course a Quaker. I'm still puzzled at why Wilberforce's lifelong efforts to abolish slavery – earlier described by Calvin as 'man-theft' - were not more celebrated at the recent bicentenary, or why Lord Shaftesbury's work on mental health and child labour are seemingly erased from history books. The House Through Time tv series has more than once illustrated how local churches, even in slavery-dependent Bristol, took a principled stand against slavery. As Ryrie writes, 'By God's grace, a long tolerated practice had been exposed as a terrible evil.'

The twentieth century was not an easy period for Christians to follow the great commandment to love our neighbour, even our enemy, as ourselves. Eugenics

suggested that we should give evolution by natural selection a helping hand by choosing which humans should be allowed to breed, an SS magazine in the late 1930s suggested that Christianity could be eliminated within sixty years, while Stalin, Mao and Pol Pot were all devoted to the destruction of all religious belief, but I've previously mentioned how moving it was to read Corrie ten Boom's account of how she forgave the Nazi who had tortured and humiliated her friends and family. Terry Waite exhibited extraordinary forgiveness in revisiting Lebanon to offer his forgiveness to Hezbollah, and Jill Saward victim of rape in her father's vicarage stated that 'forgiveness gives you freedom.' Desmond Tutu of course chaired the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and received the peace prize with de Klerk. Ryrie writes of this period 'During the course of this monumental struggle, South Africa quietly became a Christian nation.'

Of course none of this is to deny that the church, particularly when it thought itself right to ally itself with state power, has been an accessory to numerous activities that cannot be reconciled with any of Jesus' teachings, but in the grim, polarised world in which we find ourselves, I certainly find it helpful to look to fellow-Christians who have managed to live the great commandment of love. Perhaps you will find it helpful, too. I'm happy to lend you either of the books mentioned.

**Mike Matejtschuk**

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## Deadline

Wednesday 16th February is the deadline for the March Newsletter. Please send copy to: [newsletter@wheatleyurc.org.uk](mailto:newsletter@wheatleyurc.org.uk) . Paper copy can be given to Bobbie Stormont. Please type in Calibri font size 11 & no capitalized headings. Thank you.

## Disclaimer

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

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# Prayers

**Please remember in your prayers the members in Moira Watson's pastoral group:** Ann & Roger Bettess, Jean Boxall, Val Farmer, Ann Hardiman, Pat Howard, Bev Paton & family, Pat Simpson.

**Also remember members of the Worship Ministry Team:** Allison Towner, Laurence Devlin, Pauline Shelley, Colin Thompson, Robert Harding, Liz Barry



## What's On – Dates for your Diaries

### Weekly

		<b>Contact</b>
Monday 9.00	Mindfulness Sitting Group	Mark Williams <a href="mailto:jmarkgwilliams@gmail.com">jmarkgwilliams@gmail.com</a>
Thursday 9.00	Mindfulness Sitting Group	Mark Williams
Friday 10am	Table Tennis	Val Farmer <a href="mailto:val_farmer40@hotmail.com">val_farmer40@hotmail.com</a>

### Monthly

Alternate Mondays	Not So Young Club 5 <sup>th</sup> & 19 <sup>th</sup>	Frances Simpson <a href="mailto:frances_simpson@icloud.com">frances_simpson@icloud.com</a>
First Sunday	Tea, 2.30 – 4pm	Ann Bettess <a href="mailto:annsgoog@gmail.com">annsgoog@gmail.com</a>
First Thursday 10am	Prayers for the World	Ann Hardiman Tel; 01865 873485
First Thursday 10.30am	Coffee Morning	Barbara Joiner <a href="mailto:albarjoiner2@gmail.com">albarjoiner2@gmail.com</a>
2nd Thursday 10am	Memory Cafe	Laurence Devlin <a href="mailto:laurencelalanne99@gmail.com">laurencelalanne99@gmail.com</a>
Second Tuesday	Lunch Club	Laurence Devlin
Third Tuesday	Lunch Club	Catherine Harding <a href="mailto:hardings64@btinternet.com">hardings64@btinternet.com</a>

# Falcon School ... Dates For Diary!

We are making really good progress with our current 6 month fund raising project in support of purchasing the very first lap top computers for Falcon students (see below).

In March there are 2 Falcon events in which we would love you be involved, so for now just put these dates in your diaries and we'll provide more information as we go through February:

**SUNDAY MARCH 17th:** Reverend Wilbert Sayimani will be attending our service (accompanied by his new wife Regina, their daughters and 'prime mover' Lauren!)

Wilbert will update us on news at the school and, as the 'welcoming church', we will all jointly host a shared lunch

**FRIDAY MARCH 22nd: .... FALCON QUIZ!**

Expected to be an enjoyable evening where we have fun and raise funds for **a very worthy educational cause** ... so please spread the word to family, friends and fellow quizzers!

Sustenance for our quiz brains will be tasty pizzas + side salad.

**So thank you for all your support so far ... Falcon School's target for 6 months to end April is: 15 second hand lap tops (approx; £3000).**



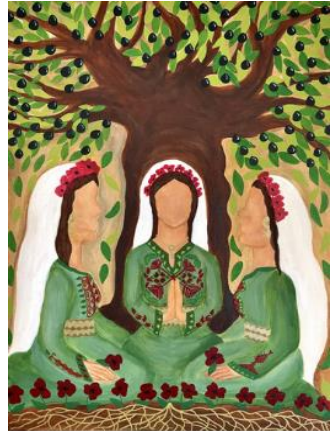
We have already raised 24% towards their target and the quiz, with your support, should help increase that significantly

# World Day of Prayer Service

## *“Bear With One Another in Love”*

This year’s service with the theme ‘Bear with One Another in Love’, calls us to bear with each other in love, despite all difficulties and oppression. The programme was prepared by a group of ecumenical Christian Palestinian women quite some time before the current hostilities started. The topic now even more poignant and relevant. The women wrote the material in response to the passage from Ephesians 4:1-7. They said “We reflected collectively on this theme from the context of our suffering as Palestinian Christian women. We hope to inspire other women around the world to bear with one another in love during troubled times.”

There is a perception/belief around the world that women in the Middle East region are passive, silent, and non-influential. However, the role of women in Palestine (both historically and in modern times) is active and influential. They are steadfast, strong and courageous. Although Palestinian women have played an influential role in society, there is still room for better conditions.



*Come and hear more; join in our worship;*

*pray for the situation in Palestine; bring your friends;*

*all are welcome.*

**Friday 1<sup>st</sup> March, 2pm at Wheatley URC**

Refreshments will be provided in the Church Hall after the service.

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# Stunning Starling Show

Murmuration 'veterans', Bobbie and Tom, invited Brenda and me to join them on a walk into the RSPB sanctuary Otmoor, also known as the local 'Lake District' after heavy winter rains. We had a two-kilometre walk, at first trying to avoid the puddles, but then not bothering as we encountered inch-deep pools of mud. It was late afternoon and the sky had turned intermittent blue, white and grey with rays of sun peeking through and a light westerly wind.

There was already a handful of people at the hide looking out north over the waters into a horizon of bare trees. At first, we saw distant flights of starlings fleeing across the panorama. Then we spotted high up other groups - faint - like indistinct shapes moving much faster than clouds in different directions. They came closer and closer until large clusters flew low down from in front and behind us, with the lead birds undulating up and down, sheering off one side to the other, with the flock following meticulously. Their high-precision, millimetre-exact manoeuvring was at least partly due to predator-avoidance and changes in wind speed and bearing, but there was also a sheer joie-de-vivre exuberance in their spectacular aerodynamics. The flocks seemed as one in perfect harmony, swirling like tornadoes, rippling, swooping, bonded together. At times two huge groups would approach each other at breakneck speed, only to swerve sharply and merge into dense, coagulating, inky blackness and surge off in a new direction. Around us was a quiet cacophony of mesmerised human 'wows' and 'aahs' and 'looks'.



We moved further along beyond the reeds flanking the lake, scattered with ducks, also watching the show, like us. Suddenly an immense flood of starlings, seemingly without end, flashed by, wave after wave, chirping high-pitched, the whoosh of their wings gently audible, not like the loud flutter of a flock of pigeons taking off but dulcet whispers, surprisingly gentle for so many birds packed together. They were settling in the reeds by their thousands, body by body for safety, as the last of the twilight faded.

We walked back to the car park using flashlights with St Mary's Charlton-on-Otmoor church tower at our backs and the bright orange and red Beckley tower ahead.

Copy this link into your browser and you can view this murmuration on youtube. <https://youtu.be/GmzoS8Zp1iw>

**Graham Bell**

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## Saturday Lenten Soup Lunches for Christian Aid

Wheatley URC Hall  
February 17 & March 16 12-2pm

**Soup, Serving and Company Needed**

Liz & Tony Barry are co-ordinating every Saturday  
Feb 12 – March 23<sup>rd</sup>

Contact Liz or Tony on 872293 or [ah.barry@btinternet.com](mailto:ah.barry@btinternet.com)

£400 raised in 2023 from just two Saturdays

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# Blended Service Rotas for February 2024

Date	Worship Leader	Vestry	Welcomer	Door Steward	Reader	Prayers
<b>4th</b>	H.C. Rev Colin Thompson	Chris Shelley	Robert Harding	Elaine Matejtschuk	Barbara Joiner	Ellen Webster
<b>11th</b>	Richard Bainbridge	Pauline Shelley	Bev Paton	Tom Goss	Robert Harding	Ann Bettess
<b>18th</b>	Laurence	Ann Gajda	Moira Watson	Allison Towner	Angela Holdawa y	Marian Mole
<b>25th</b>	Mark Williams	Ellen Webster	Malcolm Benson	Liz Barry	~~~~	~~~~

## Common Lectionary Readings Feb 2024

Date	Feb 4th	Feb 11th	Feb 18th	Feb 25th
<b>First Reading</b>	Isaiah 40: 21-31	2 Kings 2: 1-12	Genesis 9: 8-17	Genesis 7: 1-7 & 15-16
<b>Psalm</b>	Psalm 147: 1-11 & 20c	Psalm 50: 1-6	Psalm 25: 1-10	Psalm 22: 23-31
<b>New Testament</b>	Corinthians 9: 16-23	2 Corinthians 4: 3-6	1 Peter 3: 18-22	Romans 4: 13-25
<b>Gospel</b>	Mark 1: 9-39	Mark 9: 2-9	Mark 1: 9-15	Mark 8: 31-38

**Feb 4:** We need to look beyond situations and beyond persons .  
[Brother Roger]

**Feb 11:** Mysticism is a different stage of spiritual life than asceticism.  
[Nicolas Berdyaev]

**Feb 18:** In forgiveness you receive the deeper goodness of the one you have forgiven and your own gratuitous goodness.

**Feb 25:** Sometimes our failing can be the foundation for our ongoing spiritual growth.

**Richard Bainbridge**



Are you new to the United Reformed Church? Perhaps you're a new member, considering membership or wondering what membership is about?

Do you have questions about where the URC comes from, how it functions or what it stands for?

If so, you are warmly invited to explore and learn more over a cup of tea on

**Saturday 24th Feb**

**10am until noon**

at the home of Brenda and Graham Bell in Headington, Oxford.

For more information or to RSVP, please email Cara:  
[caraheafey@hotmail.com](mailto:caraheafey@hotmail.com)



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Cara: [caraheafey@hotmail.com](mailto:caraheafey@hotmail.com)

**Cara Heafey**

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# Should We Really Pray For Christian Unity?

Asking that question, it seems, is controversial as I can hear many of you saying “Well of course, we should! All these divisions are terrible and got us in very murky waters for centuries and continue now...” But there are however legitimate questions we should ask ourselves: “What would Christian unity” look like? Can it be achieved? Is it desirable? Because the central issue is, it seems to me, when churches pray for Christian unity are they praying for uniformity of belief or structural unity?

Diversity of beliefs started even during Jesus’ lifetime as there was no agreement about who he really was: “Who do people say that I am”? he asks his disciples who answer: “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life”. And then according to the 3 Synoptic Gospels, Simon Peter proclaimed “you are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” The gospel writers were not strictly relaying eyewitnesses’ records but tried in their own (different) way and with their own agenda to understand who Jesus was. It is arguable that some of the sayings attributed to him about who he was are put there by the evangelists themselves, in an attempt to understand and proclaim his message.

After Jesus’ death there were within the early Church, innumerable and radically different interpretations of his nature: only human, only divine or both. The Nicene Creed we say today was itself a political attempt by Emperor Constantine to impose a uniform statement of belief on the early and evolving church and most voices of those who disagreed with him were repressed and many have been lost.

That diversity of belief however continued with the Great Schism of 1054 followed by the Reformation and the multiplication of protestant denominations as each sought to portray itself as the one true interpretation of scripture and arrogated to itself the right to pronounce on matters of faith and in some cases to persecute those who disagreed. As we know, differences continue today over sex and marriage, the role of women and of course what happened at the last supper. In fact, probably the most important difference between all the present trends of Christianity is the way they interpret the Bible: All Christian denominations are “bible based” but their main difference is the way they interpret it: in a radical, liberal or fundamentalist way.

These differences are so entrenched that there seems to be no prospect of Christian unity, because for many, “unity” means uniformity, and all the churches have vested interest in preserving the status quo and their own institutions. I am convinced that unity does NOT mean uniformity and I contend that we should pray instead for the richness of diversity. The Bible is still speaking to us and people experience Jesus in different ways. There is nothing wrong with that. It is the attempts to impose uniformity that has been the cause of so much suffering throughout the ages. Human beings are not uniform in any way, we all experience the world in different ways as we try to make sense of it. It is that independence of thought and desire to learn, challenge, understand and interpret that give human experience its meaning and its richness. So join me in praying for Christian diversity!

**Peter Devlin**



## Background Music

Nowadays, it appears that music in the background is a ‘must’.

If I am listening to speech, I prefer the background to be silent as it is difficult to concentrate on what is being said on the television, (I do not use a radio).

Very occasionally, while using different senses (sight, touch or taste) I might listen to some Classical music, or John Denver or ABBA or perhaps some Beatle’s songs, with no other distraction using the same sense.

Perhaps the senses of sight (pictures) and hearing (music) can be combined using two different senses but add speech to the mix and my concentration has to work overtime. Another problem I have is reading print which has a picture behind it. Perhaps it takes time to train the brain to accept more than one item at the same time to each sense such as a pianist playing a different tune with each hand.

Am I alone with this feeling?

**Pat Simpson**

# Activities during Advent 2023, January 2024 and looking forward to Lent 2024

**Christmas Eve Carol Service** (with mulled wine and mince pies). We collected and sent to **Christian Aid**, £180. Thank you for your generous donations and thanks also to those who brought mince pies and to those who helped prepare and administer the festive fare.

**New Year's Day Walk.** Nine church members and two adherents walked a circuitous route around the village, starting from the URC and making doorstep visits to about twelve other folk living alone and unable to join us for our annual walk. A doorstep greeting, a card, a flower and a chocolate were left with each person visited. Most of the walking group then returned to the church for a shared picnic lunch and a "beverage" or two. We were very pleased to be joined for lunch by a couple of the ladies visited during the walk.

**Wheatley Singers**, who use our church for rehearsals, stage a concert in Great Milton Church at 3.30 pm on Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> January, of **Handel's Coronation Anthems and other items of music by Brahms and Walton**. Do come if you can - all profits from the concert will go to **Oxfordshire Dementia**. (See A4 poster on the noticeboard for full details).

**Six simple Lenten Soup Lunches** are being organised again by Wheatley Area Churches on each of the Saturdays in Lent, to raise funds for **Christian Aid**. They will be held, as usual, in The URC Hall and each of the four/five churches will prepare and host at least one lunch. The URC will be hosting two, on Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> February and Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> March. May we have offers to make soup, please, for those dates and offers of help to heat and serve the soups. Ideally four/five homemade soups for each day would be good.

Many thanks.

Please contact Liz and Tony Barry on 872293 or [ah.barry@btinternet.com](mailto:ah.barry@btinternet.com))

**Tony Barry**





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

***CHURCH CONTACTS***

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