

WHEATLEY URC NEWSLETTER



September 2024

Covering Thoughts

What do you do when you feel jaded, lacking in inspiration and energy, and have no motivation for doing anything? This downward spiral can hit at anytime and to anyone, even those who have no major problems to give them cause. We become a misery to ourselves and to those around us.

In the past when it hit me I used to feel guilty that I felt like this which only compounded the situation. But I have gradually learned to accept these times, reassuring myself that they will pass, and trying to find something nourishing just for myself to help me through them.

The last time I felt like this I randomly hopped on a bus and ended up in the Ashmolean. With a sketch book in my rucksack I decided there was a choice: chocolate cake or finding something to draw. Fortunately I went for the latter and in the Chinese Gallery discovered a wall size photo of a mountain landscape.

As I sat before it the beautiful rocky outcrops and peaks emerging through the clouds worked their magic on me. The pencil on the page kept me focused, made me look at detail as well as feel the atmosphere and emotion. Imagination took me through obscuring, damp mist to majestic views, and back again. I reflected on the meaning of landscape paintings in the Chinese tradition. Their peaks pointing to the heavens, the contrast between clarity and mystery, enormity and the miniscule. An hour passed, and only when a young girl spoke to me did I remember where I was.

When Wendy and I were painting together a few days later, I worked on a small watercolour based on it. It is this that is the cover picture for this month.

Christine



Pastoral Letter

September! Are you ready? Do you have your new winter clothes and new shoes? New pens, pencils and pencil case with protractor and compasses? New lunch box?

Are you excited to be with friends you haven't seen for a month and a half? What changes have happened while we've been away? What will be different?

The calendar says the new year begins after Christmas and that is of course a sort of new beginning. A time when we gather ourselves to carry onwards and upwards from the low of cold dark winter and the high of mid-winter festivities.

But the real new beginning, embedded in most of us from childhood (though perhaps not to those from the southern hemisphere) is **September!** This is the time for new challenges, new programmes of work, new starts.

As a church we've now received news of an exciting but challenging proposal. The Wessex Synod Area Pastoral Committee are suggesting the formation of five 'clusters' of churches each with a stipendiary minister to serve them. The challenge to us is that they are asking us to look away from Oxford to the north and east of the county and work with URC churches and LEP's from Thame to Banbury.

What does this mean for us? How will it work? How can one minister serve 7 churches? Has this been done in other places? Can we learn from them? The questions are endless, but this has been done successfully elsewhere and we can offer so much to someone prepared to work with us to achieve more.

At our church meeting in October, we will be considering our response to the synod proposal. In the meantime, a small group are getting together to brush up our pastorate profile – a document to describe who we are and what we do.

Wheatley URC has always shared its minister, until now with other churches in Oxford or with Mansfield College so sharing is nothing new to us. It would be wonderful to be able to call our own minister of Word and Sacrament to help

guide us in the next phase of our church life, to have a real say in whether they share our sense of call to rejuvenate the church.

This will be a voyage of discovery for us all as we try to match our dreams and aspirations to the reality. I know we can do this and with God's help we will.

Are we ready for a fresh start?

Phyllis Williams



Prayers

Please remember in your prayers the members in Bev Paton's pastoral group: Brenda & Graham Bell, Kevin & Lucy Betts - Hannah & Jude, Annie & Dave Crosby-Williams - Elliot & Sebastian, Martin & Emma Jee - Felicity & Jasper, Ann Ojewande - Alexandra & Benedict, Lynnette & Richard Wood. Roger & Alice Robar - Mary & Bobby, Sybil Beaton

Also remember members of the Youth & Families Ministry Team: Mark Williams, Lucy Betts, Keith Kidd, Bev Paton, Chris Shelley, Phyllis Williams, Brenda Bell.



Deadline

Monday 16th September is the deadline for the October Newsletter. Please send copy to: 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.



John Kidd



Keith, Debi and their family would like to thank their church friends for all the messages of support, cards and prayers that they received during John's last few weeks and following his death.

Many thanks too to everyone who helped make his funeral service such a celebration of John's long and productive life.

Keith and Debi Kidd

~*~

Thoughts from Iona



*The Infinite always is silent
It is only the Finite that speaks
Our words are the idle wave caps
On a deep that never breaks*

*We may question with words of science
Explain, decide and discuss
But only in meditation
The Mystery speaks to us*

In the grounds of the Abbey on the Isle of Iona stands the much older, smaller chapel of St Oran, built in the 12th century. It is set in a burial ground which is the resting place of numerous leading Hebrideans and, more recently, the politician John Smith. His epitaph reads: *"An Honest Man's The Noblest Work"*. The chapel is very simple, overlooking the sea, and, to me on my visit in June, it exuded peace.

Ellen Webster

Oxfordshire Historic Churches

“Ride & Stride” Event -14th September 2024

As usual, this month, Wheatley URC will be supporting the annual OHCT “Ride and Stride” event.

Riders - You will recall that last year Graham Bell cycled 95 km between 36 churches in the Oxford area and raised £487 by way of your sponsorships. Jill and Gordon Ewbank from Wheatley Community Church, cycled 50 km on behalf of Wheatley URC between 25 churches in the Wallingford area, raising £325 by way of your sponsorships and I spent a happy day walking between 4 village churches in the Rock area of North Cornwall, raising a more modest £30 from family members.

Half the total raised for OHCT from this enjoyable late summer event can be credited back into Wheatley URC’s bank account, to be used for “essential repairs” to the fabric of our own church.

Jill, Gordon (gordon.ewbank@gmail.com) and Graham (klokbell@gmail.com) have generously offered to cycle again this year under “the banner” of Wheatley United Reformed Church **and they need your support and sponsorship, please**, either by the kms cycled, the number of churches visited or simply with a flat rate donation. Your donations can be enhanced to the tune of 25 pence in the £, if you are a tax payer and elect to make your donation “Gift Aided”, for tax recovery purposes, by OHCT.

Striders - As I am unable to lead a walk again on that day around some of our local churches, **is there anybody else who would like to organise and lead a group walk in aid of OHCT?** Please get in touch with me by telephone on 872293 or e-mail me at ah.barry@btinternet.com). Usually, the leader collects a joining fee of £10 from each participating walker on the day, in lieu of sponsorship. If the weather is fine this can be a pleasant day out in the countryside, whilst raising money to help maintain the fabric of our Oxfordshire churches. (Wheatley URC has benefitted from grants from this fund on several occasions in the past). **Or** you could just walk alone and get sponsorship – ask me for a sponsor form.

Welcomers - Part of the deal is that we agree to open up our church on the day for visitors from other churches in the area who are on similar fund-raising missions for OHCT. I am most grateful to members of our church who have previously agreed to take it in turns to sit in the church, during the day, to greet and offer hospitality to any visitors who might turn up. **I would be pleased to hear from anyone who would be prepared and able to do this again, this year.** I will be placing an hourly rota of those volunteering to church-sit, on the notice board in the Church Hall. The church will be busier than usual this year as it coincides with a GAIN clothes collection for refugees taking place in our Church Hall during the morning.

Tony Barry



Join Us for a Conversation: Exploring Activities That Nurture Our Being

We are truly blessed to be part of a community that is deeply intentional, dedicated, and oriented towards service. Our collective commitment to our church and the wider community is a testament to the love and generosity that flows abundantly among us. To continue thriving and helping others thrive, it is essential that we also remember to replenish our own spirits, ensuring that we give from a place of fullness and joy.

During our Away Day in May, the topic of "Being" emerged as a theme—a reminder of the importance of nurturing our spiritual lives not just through action, but through presence. As we look ahead to the coming months, we believe this is the perfect time to focus on our journey towards fulfilment and spirituality by exploring the concept of "beingness."

We invite you to a relaxed and open conversation where we'll explore this idea, and the specific date will be shared during September. Together, we'll discuss ways our church can create opportunities for experiences and events that nurture our sense of being rather than just doing. This is a chance to share ideas and think about how we can cultivate spaces for reflection, fellowship, and spiritual growth.

No need to prepare anything—just bring your thoughts, your hopes, and your willingness to explore how we can enrich our communal and personal lives. Whether you have a specific idea in mind or simply want to be part of the conversation, your presence will be valuable.

Let's come together to imagine how we can foster a deeper sense of peace, presence and connection within our congregation.

We hope you can join us!

In peace and fellowship,

Bev Paton



Building Links with Wheatley Park School

Project Paramount

Thank you so much for the amazing response we received following our appeal to fund some art packs for the students who are part of the Wheatley Park School Project Paramount. This project supports students who have family members in prison and is linked to Children Seen and Heard Charity. We have met with Louise Yendole, the leader of the Project and she is very proud of this unique group, which is very much pioneering. Louise and the team at Space 2



Be at Wheatley Park School have a contagious enthusiasm for the young people they support. They were so grateful for the support from URC and “just wanted to say a huge THANK YOU” to us. We were not only able to fund 8 full art packs (see photo – plus pastels were later added to the packs) but we were also able to give a donation to help with other art and craft projects, which they were so pleased with. The young people really enjoy expressing themselves through art and having their own art packs means they have resources to use over the summer and beyond.

Project Paramount held an art exhibition at the end of the term which was a celebration of their art work and family members were invited and it was a really special occasion.

Peter Devlin, Bev Paton, Brenda Bell and I went back to Space 2 Be before the end of the summer term to catch up with Louise and hear more about how the team are getting on. Project Paramount is going to be run for another year but the team do not have a budget to pay for extra resources. Space 2 Be has an annual budget of £3500 for resources for all the young people they support in a school of over 1000 students, so the staff are often having to buy things out of their own pockets.

Louise shared that Space 2 Be have a dream to take the Project Paramount group for a theatre trip in Oxford in December this year. The students would love to see 101 Dalmations at Oxford New Theatre. The leaders have contacted the New Theatre and been offered half price tickets at £22.50 each. In order to take the group of 10 students and 4 teachers Project Paramount would need to raise £315. The team would appreciate any donations towards this goal and I wonder if we could support them with this. If you would like to financially support a ticket so a student can go on this theatre trip or are able to contribute towards a ticket please could you pass any contributions to myself, Bev, Brenda or Peter. Louise feels this would be a special opportunity for young people who couldn't afford such an experience without help.

Another request from leaders was if anyone would like to volunteer to help run a group activity with the students. If you would like to know more please contact me (lucyhbetts@btinternet.com) and I can link you with Louise. The Project Paramount sessions usually run on Tuesday mornings and would last

for an hour. The team are looking for a craft or other activity for a group of up to 10 students. This year they have done some graffiti art and cake decorating. Space 2 Be staff would be supporting the student group to facilitate any sessions.

As we left the team told us a story which demonstrates what a committed and caring team they are. An ex-student of the school was serving a prison sentence themselves but the Space 2 Be team had kept in contact with them and wrote to them regularly. They also sent photos of the school grounds promising them that one day they could come back to school and see it all for themselves. Last term they had a visitor to Space 2 Be and it was that ex-student! How happy they were to see them at last. As a team you get the sense that they keep all the students they come into contact with, whatever their background or situation, close to their heart. We always come away amazed at their dedication and enthusiasm for the young people they work with. It is great to be able to continue to build this special link with our local school.

Lucy Betts



The Old House, Art Department, Wheatley Park School

Blended Service Rotas for September 2024

Date	Worship Leader	Vestry Elder	Welcomer	Door Steward	Reader	Prayers
1st	H.C. Rev Colin Thompson	Bev Paton	Ann Bettess	Barbara Joiner	Malcolm Benson	Liz Barry
8th	Richard Bainbridge	Ellen Webster	Val Farmer	Bobbie Stormont	Ann Bettess	Christine Bainbridge
15th	Michael Hopkins	Charles Bennett	Pauline Shelley	Peter Devlin	Ann Gajda	Barbara Joiner
22nd	Mark Williams <i>Harvest</i>	Chris Shelley <i>Festival</i>	Bev Paton <i>at</i>	Rob Holdaway <i>Sandy</i>	~~~ <i>Lane</i>	~~~ <i>Farm</i>
29th	Laurence Devlin	Pauline Shelley	Val Farmer	Ann Hardiman	Rob Holdaway	Tom Goss

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## What's On – Dates for your Diaries

### Weekly

Monday &  
Thursday 9.00  
Friday 10am

**Contact**  
Mindfulness Sitting Group  
Table Tennis - Val Farmer

Mark Williams  
[jmarkgwilliams@gmail.com](mailto:jmarkgwilliams@gmail.com)  
[val\\_farmer40@hotmail.com](mailto:val_farmer40@hotmail.com)

### Monthly

Mondays 2, 16,  
Sept 2, 16, 30  
First Sunday 2.30  
First Thursday  
10am  
First & Third Thurs  
10.30am  
Second Thursday  
10am  
Second Tuesday  
Third Tuesday

Not So Young Club  
Tea - Ann Bettess  
Prayers for the World  
Coffee Morning  
Memory Cafe  
Picnic Cub  
Lunch Club

Frances Simpson  
[frances\\_simpson@icloud.com](mailto:frances_simpson@icloud.com)  
[annsgoog@gmail.com](mailto:annsgoog@gmail.com)  
Ann Hardiman  
Tel; 01865 873485  
Barbara Joiner  
[albarjoiner2@gmail.com](mailto:albarjoiner2@gmail.com)  
Laurence Devlin  
[laurencelalanne99@gmail.com](mailto:laurencelalanne99@gmail.com)  
Val Farmer  
Catherine Harding  
[hardings64@btinternet.com](mailto:hardings64@btinternet.com)

# Common Lectionary Readings Sept 2024

| Date                 | Sept 1st                          | Sept 8th                 | Sept 15th          | Sept 22 <sup>nd</sup>           | Sept 29th                           |
|----------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <b>First Reading</b> | Deut<br>4: 1-2 &<br>6-9           | Isaiah<br>35: 4-7a       | Isaiah<br>50: 4-9a | Jeremiah<br>11: 18-20           | Esther 7: 1-6,<br>9-10,<br>9: 20-22 |
| <b>Psalm</b>         | Psalm 15                          | Psalm<br>146             | Psalm<br>116: 1-9  | Psalm 54                        | Psalm 124                           |
| <b>New Test.</b>     | James<br>1: 17-27                 | James<br>2:1-10<br>14-17 | James<br>3: 1-12   | James<br>3: 13 - 4: 3<br>& 7-8a | James<br>5: 13-20                   |
| <b>Gospel</b>        | Mark 7: 1-<br>18, 14-15,<br>21-23 | Mark<br>7: 24-37         | Mark<br>8: 27-38   | Mark<br>9: 30-37                | Mark<br>9: 38-50                    |

**Sept 1<sup>st</sup>:** Rebuke hatred rather by your deeds than by your words.  
(John of Apamea, 5th century)

**Sept 8<sup>th</sup>:** God is there where the farmer is tilling the hard ground and where the labourer is breaking stones. (Rabindranath Tagore)

**Sept 15<sup>th</sup>:** Talkativeness is the throne of vainglory on which it loves to preen itself and show off. (John Climacus)

**Sept 22<sup>nd</sup>:** No matter how tight the mask you place on your face, you can't hide the child's eyes. (Malcolm Boyd)

**Sept 29<sup>th</sup>:** I don't know who I am or where I am but please love me. (sufferer from Alzheimer's disease)

**Richard Bainbridge**



# Intriguing Quote

On my visit to the Isle of Man in May I found this intriguing quote in Castle Rushen.

## ***The Voice of the People***

*“On the Thursday before it [Good Friday], the Poker and the Tongs and all the fire-irons and the fender were put out in the outhouse and locked away. The fire was cleared out with a bit of wood and a piece of cardboard, no fire-irons used.*

*His mother used to get all the Aprons in the house and fold them and put them in a drawer and lock them in the night before. This was because the women brought the nails for the crucifixion in their aprons, so his mother and grandmother never wore aprons on Good Friday.*

*Then at three O’clock on Friday afternoon everything was brought back and could be used again.*

*On Good Friday morning they always had Flitters (limpets) for breakfast, but never used a knife and fork to eat them. The Thursday afternoon used to be called Flitter Holiday and everyone went down to get flitters on the rocks.”*

**Ellen Webster**



# Our Memory Café is thriving!

It seems incredible that we have already been in existence for 2 years, a milestone that we celebrated with a special cake very much appreciated by our guests and volunteers. That celebration was also the opportunity to ask them what they particularly appreciated about the café and what was most often mentioned was the socializing aspect. This is not surprising from people who are often anxious and isolated but find a safe space with us: “seeing everybody”, “having a hug”, “new friendships”, “being made welcomed”, “lots of love and laughs” were some of their answers.

Our activities continued apace with the all-important singing part thanks to our two “musicians-in-residence” Pat Jeffs and Bobbie. We are always amazed to see some people who are not necessarily very responsive to other activities, suddenly coming alive and singing old favourite songs.

The various games, the active as well as the quiet ones, remain very popular and we added a few to our panoply: new jigsaws, giant draughts and two boards of darts - not the pub version I hasten to add - but the safe version where the darts themselves are made of spongy rubber and stick to the board thanks to Velcro!

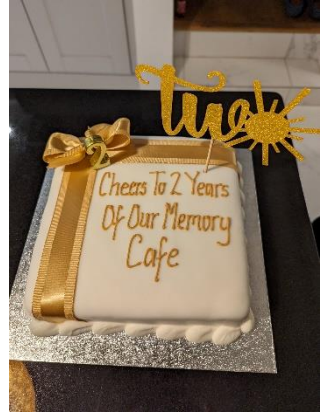
As far as our craft activities are concerned, everybody had a great time making mobiles with recycled CDs with the CD being the (fat) body of the fish and the decorations added to it in coloured paper and cards. The results were hanging in our church hall for everybody to admire the artistry! In July, it is worth mentioning that we had our own (very tame ) version of the Olympic Games with javelin, hockey and shot put: The competitive spirit was high but the laughs even higher!

Our 10 volunteers continue to be an amazing asset for the café as they are attentive, encouraging, joyful and have remarkable listening skills. We also benefit from the presence at every session of the new representative of Dementia Oxfordshire, Leigh, who replaced our friend Katie who moved to pastures new, having been promoted within the organisation. Leigh is able to give support and advice to the carers whose task of looking after a person living with dementia, 24/7, is emotionally and physically exhausting.

On a sad note, two of our regular guests passed away this year but there is no shortage of people being referred or being informed of the existence of the café. The main problem is often that people living with dementia are quite averse to trying new things, feeling safe in their daily routine and in the known environment of their own home. So it does happen that at the last moment, on the morning of the café, they refuse to come and this is especially true of the newer members. But most of our “old” regulars who were very anxious in the beginning, are now totally at ease, love coming and have a great time... like all of us!

Please if you know of people who would benefit from coming to the café, do let us know.

**Laurence Devlin**



# Thoughts on Independence and Belonging

I was disappointed to have missed the Away Day in May, as it seemed to be a rich and connected day filled with open discussions, thought-provoking ideas, and meaningful suggestions. Among the many topics discussed, one comment that stood out was the idea of becoming an independent church versus remaining aligned with the Synod. I can imagine this could spark much conversation and possibly some differing viewpoints.

Without having been there, I lack the full context of this comment, and I'm unsure of feelings in this regard. However, I'd like to share a few considerations from my perspective, recognizing that my view may be somewhat simplistic. We are truly blessed at Wheatley URC. Our congregation is active, committed, determined, diverse, curious, and service-oriented. Our members have consistently shown an incredible generosity of spirit and service. We are a church rich in spirituality, creativity, and outreach, known for our ethical stands against injustice and our openness to deep conversations and explorations of the scriptures. Given these strengths, it's understandable that the idea of independence might have surfaced—we've accomplished so much together and could continue to do great work as an independent body.

One of the significant benefits of belonging to the United Reformed Church, however, is that we are part of something much bigger than ourselves. While we have the freedom and flexibility to be the church we want to be for the communities we serve, playing to our own strengths and talents and evolving with our congregational needs, we also benefit from the support, structure, and opportunities that come with being connected to the wider URC.

It's easy to underestimate the value of this broader connection, but isn't it a wonderful position to be in? Belonging to a diverse and geographically widespread Synod presents its challenges, particularly in terms of organization and differing ways of working, yet, we have a voice in these conversations, and the support we receive is significant.

This support includes theological and doctrinal guidance, ensuring that our teachings remain grounded in the rich traditions of our faith. It provides accountability and shared resources, enabling us to maintain high standards in governance, ethics, and ministry. We are part of a supportive community that



offers fellowship, encouragement, and opportunities for collective outreach and mission, amplifying our impact both locally and globally.

The URC aims to provide ministerial support and development, and resources dedicated to children and youth, helping us nurture the next generation of believers. As part of a unified voice in public affairs, we can contribute to and benefit from the denomination's stance on justice, peace, and societal well-being. We have also been very fortunate to have benefitted from the significant financial support they offer, examples that come to mind are the Mulberry Room project and the Time for God volunteer, which is now in its 3<sup>rd</sup> year.

Our ecumenical relationships broaden our perspective and allow us to collaborate with other Christian denominations. We are heirs to a rich history and heritage that connects us to a long tradition of faith and practice, while the diversity within the URC enriches our worship and community life.

Each of these aspects creates opportunities for us to look both outward and inward. We come together in fellowship and exploration, continuing to learn, grow, journey together, and serve our community and beyond.

In my opinion, it's important to appreciate the many blessings we enjoy as part of this broader family. While independence might offer certain freedoms, the support, structure, and shared mission we experience within the URC provide a strong foundation that allows us to thrive as a congregation, both now and in the future.

**Bev Paton**

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# Memorial service for Charles Brock

Address given by Colin Thompson at Mansfield College Chapel, Saturday 29 June 2024

The temptation on occasions like these is to lapse into anecdote, so I will. One Monday morning early in his ministry at Wheatley, he received a telephone call from Mrs Hinton. Mrs Hinton lived opposite the chapel and, like God in Psalm 121, kept an eagle eye on all the goings-out and comings-in. 'I went into the chapel this morning', she said. 'There is a mystery, and I don't like mysteries.' In those days a thick



velvet curtain hung behind the pulpit area to shield the organist, in this case Carolyn, from public gaze. It also enabled Carolyn to poke Charles in the back if he had got something wrong. Mrs Hinton explained the nature of the mystery, which was not at all theological. 'I found a pair of men's knickers on the organ stool', she said. Quite what she thought that betokened I leave to your imaginations, though hers was well developed when it came to that kind of thing. In fact, the suspicious underwear was used by Carolyn for dusting the seat and the keyboard, and, lo, the mystery was no more.

The arrival of a young American couple with several degrees between them in a small and rather sleepy Oxfordshire village more than sixty years ago might lead you to wonder about such clashes of culture. But Charles and Carolyn were blest with those great American gifts of enthusiasm and positivity. They got a great kick out of the villagers and their ways. Carolyn's first attempts to make a cup of tea for men from the church who had come to do some work in the Manse were met with something approaching scorn, but she found that funny and learnt the lesson. They came to respect the ways of the locals and their rooted wisdom, which was no less genuine for not expressing itself in convoluted academic prose. To put it simply, a real love developed between members of the congregation and their new minister and his wife, and that never changed, not even as the village did, with an influx of young

professionals and their families. The old villagers took Charles and Carolyn to heart, were amused by their peculiar ways and use of English, and admired their energy and commitment to the life of the community, not just the church - even Mrs Hinton, once she'd got over the shock. Charles and Carolyn ministered for thirty-six years to what was still Wheatley Congregational until the union of 1972. The church grew and flourished. Innovations, like the serving of champagne after Easter Sunday morning service, proved something of a draw. There were parties, there was laughter, but there was also Charles the pastor, standing alongside people in their times of distress and offering comfort and support. Perhaps it was easier for him to be accepted into the life of the community because he came from outside, especially in the early days, when class distinctions between Church and Chapel were still keenly felt. That ecumenical relations in the village are now so warm owes a great deal to his leadership.

Many years after Mrs Hinton's mysterious discovery Charles and I went on pilgrimage to Mount Athos, leaving Carolyn behind in the little port from which we sailed. We spent four days on strenuous walks between monasteries in great heat, attended long liturgies at dawn, in spartan accommodation and with very basic food. We had many adventures, the last of which came as we were walking back to the boat to return to decadent civilization. A rather sinister-looking monk was toiling in the fields and greeted us. He explained that he'd been sent to Athos as a punishment for misbehaviour in his monastery. When he discovered Charles was American he could scarcely conceal his delight. 'Have you been to Las Vegas?' he asked. Charles had. 'And is it true about all the gambling and the women?' Charles said it was. And try as Charles might to get the monk to talk about the beauties of the Greek Orthodox liturgy he was only interested in one topic of conversation, the fleshpots of Las Vegas. Perhaps the punishment wasn't working as intended. Charles loved this juxtaposition of a naughty monk who dreamed of worldly pleasures on the Holy Mountain, because there was something of that about him too. He loved the world of wine, women and song on the one hand and the realm of the holy on the other. He didn't see a contradiction between them, because his theology was soundly incarnational.

I encountered the Brocks sixty years ago, on my first Sunday in Oxford, at tea in the Principal's Lodgings. Charles had just become Chaplain to Congregationalist students in the University. They nurtured and nourished me



and opened my eyes to worlds I was only dimly aware of, and that was true for many others. The Congregationalism we'd grown up in was in many ways a radical movement, sitting easy to doctrinal formulae and liturgy, and giving every member of the church an equal voice in decision-making. But it could also be quite moralistic and stuffy, especially about sex and drink. Charles was fascinated by doctrine and liturgy but disliked moralising dressed up as religion intensely. For many years members of the Congregational Society and its successor, the 1970 Society, would spend a week hiking in the

Lake District, combining physical exertion with great merriment. Charles, Carolyn, I and various friends continued the tradition into the 1990s. I travelled with them widely across Western Europe and in the USA, with memorable trips to Colorado and New Mexico, hiking at high level in the Rockies and visiting First Nation and Spanish colonial sites. They both felt strongly that American history was so much more than the legacy of the Pilgrim Fathers or the conquistadores. That openness to the other, that willingness to learn about and to embrace other cultures was something entirely natural to Charles.

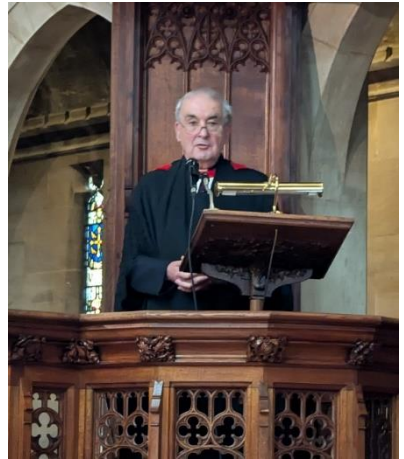
He was, above all, a man gripped by ideas, which, as I look back, fell into three main periods. The first, in the 60s and 70s, was all about Marx and Freud: the challenges they posed to organised religion, the debt they owed to their Jewish ancestry, and how Christian theology might engage with them creatively. It was a time of theological ferment and all kinds of weird and wonderful liturgical experimentation here in this Chapel. Then, in the 80s and 90s, came a focus on the Exodus narrative, the prophets, and the theology and politics of liberation as fundamental to an understanding of the New Testament. This expressed itself in new liturgies at Wheatley and sermons which were more politically engaged than some might have expected. From this grew, as the new millennium dawned, a growing desire for better relationships between

the Abrahamic and other faiths, concern with the foundations of American democracy and the meaning of the American dream, and the need for education to be more than simply churning out a workforce whose skills were so narrow that they were unable to think more broadly. Interfaith dialogue, the fight for democracy and an educational system which incorporated values and ideals into the curriculum became pressing concerns for him. After his return to the USA he became increasingly bothered about the polarisation of society and the threat, as he saw it, that the cult of Donald Trump posed to the peace of America and the wider world. He was surely right. As Lincoln, quoting Jesus of Nazareth said, a house divided against itself cannot stand, and Western democracies which find themselves under pressure from populist movements with easy answers, and autocratic regimes which brook no dissent, need to find their confidence once more, instead of turning in on themselves like warring tribes.

Underlying all the ideas which Charles explored was a strong belief that the proper concern of Biblical interpretation, Christian tradition and Christian theology was the world as it is, its problems, its injustices, its possibilities, its needs. The job of the preacher and pastor was to apply the gathered wisdom found there to contemporary life: not simply to denounce whatever is wrong but to point to ways in which the world's wounds might be healed. In later life he found a natural ally in John Milton, who insists in the *Areopagitica*, written at the start of the English Civil War, that ideas must be allowed to flourish freely and not face censorship, because that is the only way in which we grow towards a better and fuller understanding of the truth. Milton's words echo those of the sermon preached by Pastor John Robinson to the Pilgrim Fathers as they prepared to set sail for America in 1620: 'For I am verily persuaded the Lord hath more truth and light yet to break forth from his holy word'.

Charles could be serious. But his normal mode of operation was far from it. Wherever you went with Charles, there were jokes, often wonderfully unclerical, there was fun and laughter, there were parties at which he usually drank too much, and a great deal of raucous laughter. He really liked those Gospel passages where Jesus hangs out with all the wrong people and gets up the nose of the righteous. The fact that he died on All Saints' Day would have amused him no end. He was far from being a saint in the traditional sense of the word, preferring the New Testament usage, where it simply refers to members of the Christian community. Larger than life, the life and soul of any gathering, a man of faith and vision, and above all a mentor, friend and

complex, rounded human being: this is the Charles we remember, with affection and gratitude, and the Charles we commend to the God in whose service he lived and in whom all things are forever made new. Amen.



Colin Thompson

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## \*\*\* FALCON SCHOOL NEWS! \*\*\*

**STOP PRESS:** TO HELP TOWARDS COMPLETING NEW TEACHERS' QUARTERS & PURCHASING A PRINTER SCANNER, WE HAVE AGREED  
(A) SCHOOL MAY USE THE £1800 FROM REIMBURSED MISSING LAPTOPS  
(B) SENDING OFF THE £1000 ALLOCATED FROM OUR LAST YEAR'S GIVING.



## CARE FOR THE WORLD TEAM

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# Sydlings Copse to Elsfield Wood

As I ate my egg and cheese sandwich  
layered with home grown lettuce and  
homemade blackcurrant chutney,  
I turned my gaze to the long grass alongside the path  
where I had plonked myself  
down in a small piece of shade,  
to assuage the hunger  
more and more strongly voicing its need for food.

Upside down  
on a single slender, grass stem,  
a black insect so tenderly caring for its wings,  
taking one leg and smoothly running it over  
the length of one translucent wing, again and again,  
then stretching it open like a fan showing  
its spindly veins and splendid ribbed structure.  
Suddenly it stretched open wide, both wings,  
revealing its black segmented body,  
studded round the rimmed circumference of each segment  
with beautiful bright gold dots seen quite clearly with the naked eye.

In one moment,  
known only to this magnificent winged creature,  
it gave its full attention with equal care and diligence  
to its second wing.  
How important this ritual to its survival.  
I wondered how I tend my wings,  
how often I offer them such care-filled grooming and mindful attention  
so important to my own survival  
and flights of freedom.

**Bobbie Stormont**



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

***CHURCH CONTACTS***

*Associate Minister: Revd. Cara Heafey*

*Email: [caraheafey@hotmail.com](mailto:caraheafey@hotmail.com)*

*Church Secretary:*

*email: [secretary@wheatleyurc.org.uk](mailto:secretary@wheatleyurc.org.uk)*

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