

WHEATLEY URC NEWSLETTER



February 2025

Covering Thoughts

One of the gifts I received this year was a hyacinth bulb in a tall glass vase. The bulb was dry and not showing any green growth, so I filled the vase and settled the bulb with the root area just touching the water. Then as I went to throw the packaging away I read the warning that if the bulb was not kept in the cold and dark for about 10 weeks it might not flower.

Hyacinths are my favourite spring bulb and it had never occurred to me that such a bulb might not flower unless it experienced adverse conditions – cold and darkness.

I began to wonder if it was equally necessary for humans to experience adverse conditions before they have something fruitful to offer in their lives. Without difficulties and hardship, pain and sadness an individual might lack appreciation for the good things in life and have no real comprehension of the suffering of others.

None of these thoughts were new, but I began to add a level of experience to them and found an encouragement I wanted to share with you. So much in life we cannot choose. The darkness descends and we may feel despair, but to have the hope that something fruitful may come beyond the difficulty is an encouragement to keep going not just for ourselves but for others too.

Jesus spoke of a grain of wheat being fruitful after being in the cold, dark earth but it makes more sense to me to find something close at hand, like the hyacinth as a reminder of his teaching. So the bulb is in the fridge for the time being and I will wait patiently for its flowering.

Winter is a season of the soul, teaching patience and resilience.

Christine

~*~

Pastoral Letter

What seems like a few weeks ago, in the gloomy days of late October, I looked at the garish commercially-driven preparations for Halloween/Samhain, and wondered what had happened to the two Christian festivals which begin November, All Saints' and All Souls' days, names associated in Britain with, if anything, a manufactured pop group and an elite college.

We occasionally are asked in a church service to remember those we have known personally who have enriched our knowledge of Jesus' way, which is perhaps part of what All Souls' signified. On All Saints' Day, however, I do get a feeling of the contemporary church drawing a veil over its history, perhaps as a reaction to the depiction of the history of Christianity by Marxist or liberal humanist historians as sexist, militaristic, colonialist, and aggressively proselytising, the accuracy of which being something I've intermittently wondered about, and is largely challenged in Tom Holland's 'Dominion' my best Christmas present..

A number of books and articles recently have encouraged me in looking for Christian individuals who might reach out from history to put this current bleak moment in eternity into perspective. During lockdown, I bought 'Priests de la Resistance!' by Fergus Butler-Gallie which outlines the lives and deaths of Christians who stood up against totalitarianism in the last century, including Bonhoeffer. but was astonished to learn for instance of Don Pietro Pappagallo who forged documents for the partisans in Italy, was imprisoned, tortured and finally died as part of a reprisal massacre by the SS, an organisation whose house magazine Das Schwarze Korps claimed that it would take 60 years to eliminate Christianity from the world.

I've mentioned Corrie ten Boom before, whose forgiveness of those who tortured her and her dearest friends is as hard to believe as anything in the bible. I had heard, bizarrely in a CSE (sic) reading comprehension, of Maximilian Kolbe: a Pole born in Russia, as a teenager he crossed the heavily guarded border to join a Franciscan monastery in Lviv. Already suffering from tuberculosis, he produced an anti-Nazi newspaper and radio broadcasts, for which he was sent to Auschwitz. When the order came to choose ten men to be starved to death for an escape attempt, Father Kolbe asked to take the

place of one of those selected, who had a wife and children. When the soldiers came to collect the bodies of the ten starved men, they found only nine, plus Father Kolbe praying; he was injected with carbolic acid and died, a modern martyr.

Not being a very ardent monarchist, I'd never heard of Princess Alice, mother of the much-maligned and -mocked Prince Philip. She spent the second world war in Athens, hiding Jewish people and bringing food and medical supplies to the poorest families, thereby gaining the disapproval of Italian, German and finally British occupying forces. She died in 1969, having followed Jesus' advice to the rich young ruler, giving her last possessions to charity. Finally, Pastor Fred Shuttlesworth of Birmingham Alabama, vocal opponent of segregation, whose house was blown up by the Ku Klux Klan on Christmas night 1956. Surviving, he was warned to 'get out of town' replying 'I wasn't raised to run.' After being beaten with bicycle chains and his wife stabbed, when he tried to enrol his children at an all-white school, on the way to hospital he spoke to the children about the centrality of forgiveness to the gospel. He regularly walked through crowds of pro-segregation agitators, their faces purple with hatred, suffering the local police commissioner's use of attack dogs to savage peaceful protesters. Told by doctors that the bruises of one beating meant he was lucky to escape serious concussion, he said 'The good lord knew I lived in a hard town, so he gave me a hard head.' Amazingly, he lived to see the inauguration of President Obama.

As attacks on the principles of faith become more widespread, while few of us could hope to show the courage of these people, I pray that their examples will help give us confidence that now as even famous atheists Richard Dawkins and Elon Musk begin to mutter positives about 'cultural Christianity', we can still hope for the ideal we repeated over Christmas, that the future will see the mighty cast down, the lowly lifted, the hungry filled with good things and the rich sent away empty. To quote Julian of Norwich, 'Sin is behovely (inescapable) but all shall be well,' or in modern terms, our father/mother God will never abandon the created universe to chaos, depression and destruction.

Mike Matejtschuk

~*~

'Thought for the Month'

We are grateful and blessed to have 10 contributors from our congregation who write the pastoral letters for our monthly newsletters. We currently have space for a new contributor.

A pastoral letter could be described as a 'thought for the month'. It's addressed to the congregation and friends of Wheatley URC, and can take the form of words of reflection, challenge or encouragement. Contributors may draw inspiration from the changing seasons, events in the life of the village and church or wider world, poetry, art, Scripture, their own experiences, or anywhere, really!

We love to enrich our newsletter with a diverse range of voices. Could yours be one of them? Our current gender mix is such that another female voice would be very welcome.

If you are interested please let the newsletter editors know and if you have questions please speak with one of the current contributors.

newsletter@wheatleyurc.org.uk

Cara Heafey & Bobbie Stormont



Prayers

Please remember in your prayers the members in Ann Bettess' Pastoral Group: Keith & Debi Kidd, Marian & Mike Mole, Moira & Jim Watson, Ann Wild, Siobhan Fraser, Alyn Shipton, Cara Schulte, Val Farmer.

Also remember members of the Communications Team:

Christine Bainbridge, Pauline Shelley, Debi Kidd, Mike Matejtschuk, Roger Robar, Bobbie Stormont, Moira Watson, Phyllis Williams.



Lenten Faith Journalling

'An opportunity for people to explore Lent through discussion, cosy chat and creative journalling'

How will it work?

People who have signed up will be asked to choose one from a list of about 30 Lent words, on which they would like to base their reflections. (7 words required in total for the 7 weeks.) The reflections might include a related Bible reading, literary quote, poem, artwork etc. (This only needs to be about 5 minutes in length). The group will then follow on with discussion and chat, adding their own thoughts and experiences. (30-45 minutes.)

We will then take a refreshment break before moving into the creative session. Tea, coffee and biscuits will be provided.

What happens in the creative session?

Each group member will be provided with a journal in which they then record creatively, their thoughts and personal experience of this topic. This might include painting, drawing, writing, collage, etc. These journals are yours to be taken home for further reflection, and returned for future sessions. Everything you include in your journal is private. You will not be asked to share them unless you wish to.

All materials will be provided:

- Collage - papers, fabric, thread, (we will up-cycle waste)
 - Colour - watercolour, pencils, acrylics, pens, inks, glue, etc
- Group members may bring their own materials if they wish.

Where will it be held?

We will be using the Mulberry room at the URC, therefore numbers will be restricted to about 10.

When will this take place?

Thursdays in Lent from 7pm till about 9pm.

The dates are: March 6th, 13th, 20th, 27th, April 3rd and the 10th.

Is there a cost?

There will be a small cost for the journals, (no more than £5), however we would welcome any donations towards The Falcon School, Zimbabwe, bore hole for their water project.

How do I sign up?

There will be a list on the wall in the URC hall.

In addition, you can contact me at:

secretary@wheatleyurc.org.uk

Or my private email: pauline.shelley@googlemail.com

Deadline for signing up - Sunday 23rd of February

Please contact me if you have any questions.

While I aim to be present at the groups, I'm relying on different volunteers to lead the discussions.

Pauline Shelley

~ ~ ~

Christian Aid

Join us for lunch
and help transform lives

Date/Time: March 8th 12 noon

Where: URC Wheatley



Lent Lunch

New Year's Day Picnic!

We were going for a walk but ended up just eating, drinking and enjoying each other's company! Despite the terrible weather, at least 30 of us still gathered at the church to welcome in yet another New Year and all 'bearing gifts', including warm mushroom pasta, mulled wine, and 'bagatelle dessert' (trifle!).



We finished fittingly with a couple of rounds of bagpipied Auld Lang Syne (albeit one-handed for some!)

So **'thank-you'** to everyone:

For whatever you brought along,

For all your 'self-catering' help and clearing up at the end and...

For just **BEING** (there!)

Rob & Angela Holdaway & Ellen Webster

~ ~ ~

Discovering the Joy of BEING:

Reflections from Our November Gathering

In November, a small group gathered to explore the theme of **BEING**, It was a heartfelt conversation about spirituality, connection and fellowship. We explored what it is that feeds our soul and replenishes us, so that we can continue to contribute and participate from a place of fullness and joy, while appreciating that this is different for everyone. We started off by considering what we mean by BEING – and how this varied depending on whether we were replenishing our individual spirits or as a community, and how this changes for us at different times of need or energy.

What Does BEING Mean to Us?

For some, BEING is a mystery—a feeling with “fuzzy edges” that defies precise definition. Others described it as a “coming home” to oneself or a sense of presence found in stillness or activity. We reflected on how BEING is not static but evolves with our needs and energy.

- It’s a moment of awareness, being completely present with a person, situation, or feeling.
- It can emerge through service: “In my serving is my being.”
- It thrives in spaces that are open, non-judgmental, and invitational.

What Fills Our Cups?

We shared practices that bring peace and joy, and nurture BEING, such as nature walks, crafting, mindfulness, meaningful conversations and community moments like coffee mornings or shared lunches.

Looking Forward: Upcoming Activities

Building on these reflections, we’ve planned several activities to deepen our exploration of BEING:

- **Star-Making Craft Day:** A creative day with space for quiet reflection. (Held in December)
- **Flower-Making Craft Day:** A creative day of coming together to create and have companionship (March)
- **Warm Hub Knitting Sessions:** Early next year, with inspiration from Banbury Haven URC.

- **Guided Walks:** Headington in February and Waterperry Gardens in April.
- **Singing with Frances:** A joyful celebration through song.
- **Quiet Day Retreat:** A peaceful day at Cuddesdon in May.
- **Coffee Time and Shared Lunches** – these regular moments in our week that matter so much

We hope these opportunities will allow us to engage with BEING in ways that feel authentic and enriching. Thank you to everyone who contributed ideas and reflections. Together, we'll continue to foster spaces that fill our cups and celebrate the joy of BEING.

Bev Paton

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## Another BIG Thank You to the URC from Wheatley Park School!

As you may be aware we are building a strong link between the URC and Wheatley Park School through support for their Space2Be resource which

helps students who have extra needs. In December last year, thanks to donations from the congregation, we were able to help the Project Paramount group go on a special theatre trip in Oxford to see 101 Dalmatians. Project Paramount is a pioneering support group for students with family members in prison.



Over time we have built up a relationship with the staff at Space2Be and Cara Schulte, our Time for God volunteer, has been helping specifically with the Project Paramount group on a

weekly basis. This group meets on Tuesday mornings for an hour to share activities and get support from staff there. Space2Be offers support to individual students as well as running groups, many of whom may be struggling with school attendance or have difficult home situations.

Following on from the success of the theatre trip we asked Space2Be staff what else they needed. One of their dreams was to get a Classroom Wellbeing Kit. This is a resource created by an organisation called Cups of Calm, which was set up by a teacher. This kit includes games, visual prompts, a feelings first aid kit and actual tools (!) for staff to share with young people to help them to talk about their difficulties in a non threatening and easy way. The kit also comes with lesson plans and ideas to help the staff use the kit.

Thanks to ringfenced funding to support Wheatley Park School from the Youth and Families and Time for God Project budget, we were able to provide this wellbeing kit and it is something that the school would have struggled to find funding for.

Louise Yendole, from Space2Be wanted to say a huge thank you and feels that this well thought out and beautifully presented kit will be so appreciated by the staff and students. She hopes it will lead to many helpful conversations to support some of our local young people.



Thank you again for your care for our Wheatley Park students, it is much appreciated.

**Lucy Betts**

# Blended Service Rotas for February 2025

| Date        | Worship Leader     | Vestry Elder    | Welcomer      | Door Steward   | Reader          | Prayers        |
|-------------|--------------------|-----------------|---------------|----------------|-----------------|----------------|
| <b>2nd</b>  | Colin Thompson     | Debi Kidd       | Ann Bettess   | Allison Towner | Charles Bennett | Ellen Webster  |
| <b>9th</b>  | Richard Bainbridge | Pauline Shelley | Val Farmer    | Jen Yeates     | Robert Harding  | Barbara Joiner |
| <b>16th</b> | Mark Williams      | Bev Paton       | Debi Kidd     | Robert Harding | Pauline Shelley | Ellen Webster  |
| <b>23rd</b> | Cara Heafey        | Chris Shelley   | Ellen Webster | Barbara Joiner | ~~~~            | ~~~~           |

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What's On – Dates for your Diaries

Weekly

Mon & Thurs 9am

Friday 10am

Monthly

Alternate Mondays

3rd & 17th Feb

First Sunday

2.30-4pm

First Thursday 10am

First & Third Thurs

10.30am

Second Thursday

10am

Second Tuesday

Contact

Mindfulness Sitting Group

Mark Williams - jmarkgwilliams@gmail.com

Table Tennis -

Val Farmer - val_farmer40@hotmail.com

Not So Young Club

Frances Simpson - frances_simpson@icloud.com

Teas

Ann Bettess - annsgoog@gmail.com

Prayers for the World

Ann Hardiman - 01865 873485

Coffee Morning

Barbara Joiner - albarjoiner2@gmail.com

Memory Cafe

Laurence Devlin - laurencelalanne99@gmail.com

Picnic Cub - Val Farmer - val_farmer40@hotmail.com

Common Lectionary Readings Feb 2025

| Date | Feb 2nd | Feb 9th | Feb 16th | Feb 23rd |
|----------------------|------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------|
| First Reading | Jeremiah 1: 4-10 | Isaiah 6: 1-8 | Jeremiah 17: 5-10 | Genesis 45: 3-11 & 15 |
| Psalm | Psalm 71: 1-6 | Psalm 138 | Psalm 1 | Psalm 37: 1-11 & 39-40 |
| New Test. | 1 Corinthians 13: 1-13 | 1 Corinthians 15: 1-11 | 1 Corinthians 15: 12-20 | 1 Corinthians 15: 35-38 & 42-50 |
| Gospel | Luke 4: 21-30 | Luke 5: 1-11 | Luke 6: 17-26 | Luke 6: 27-38 |

Feb 2nd: It is not always popular to speak the truth.

Feb 9th: Mick Fleming a former violent drug dealer and addict now leads Church on the Street in Burnley.

Feb 16th: Some of us love by being by the sea, the vastness of it. It seems to put everything into perspective.

Feb 23rd : An English Defence League protest outside a mosque was diffused when members of the mosque invited the protesters in for a chat over tea and biscuits and to join in a game of football.

Richard Bainbridge



Flower Celebrations

Every week our church is graced with flowers provided by a rota of willing helpers, donors and arrangers.

For many years, Allison Towner has taken on the responsibility of managing special events which require a team of helpers at times such as Christmas, Easter, Church Anniversary and other occasions.

We are looking for one or maybe two people to take over from Allison to ensure that we continue this tradition. Also, if you feel you could contribute to these special times in any way, this would be much appreciated.

Please let Allison know if you can help - she can also give you more information.

Thank you in advance from the current members of the team.



What's the Buzz?

✿ Wet Felt Making ✿

Preparation for Flowers

Saturday February 8th, from 10am to 4pm URC Hall

You are invited to come and make felt for the Flower Workshop. This is great fun but takes a bit of time for massaging, rolling, throwing and drying. The finished pieces will be used to create flowers at the Flower Workshop on the 1st of March.

Bring a packed lunch, snacks and drinks provided.

Please sign up on the list in the hall, or let me know if you will be coming.

Pauline Shelley - email: pauline.shelley@googlemail.com

&



Flower Workshop ✿ ✿ ✿

Saturday March 1st

URC Church Hall from 10am - 4pm

We are making flowers for World Day of Prayer and for Easter to decorate the cross.

This will be a similar activity to the Star Workshop, except that we will make flowers.

Bring a packed lunch - tea, coffee and biscuits provided. No need to book, but please sign up on the list in the church hall during February.

Many materials will be provided, but please feel free to bring your own.

World Day of Prayer is on 7th March at 2pm and we will be praying for the Cook Islands. Easter is on 20th April.

Pauline Shelley

Children at Risk

We all know the famous verse from Matthew's Gospel: "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." Sadly, the reality for many children in this country is very far removed from the kingdom of heaven.

Indeed, we hear a lot these days about children who have been abused or even killed by parents or stepparents but the extent of it may shock you. It does me, every day in my work as a judge. Violence against children is a pervasive crime worldwide but only a small fraction comes to the attention of child protection authorities in this country and elsewhere. The most difficult and far-reaching decision I ever have to make is to order that a child be removed from its family and placed in the care of Oxfordshire County Council. Why does this happen?

Children who are suffering harm come to the notice of the Council in various ways. If the family is not already known to the council, referrals may come from schools, from concerned neighbours, from GPs or hospitals and in one of my recent cases, from builders working on a house. The harm children suffer is commonly the result of living in a violent and chaotic home, being starved and neglected, not attending school or being subjected to physical, emotional and, frequently, sexual abuse. In a few cases they are deliberately harmed (experts often appear in courts to help the judge determine whether an injury is accidental or deliberate).

The Council, through its social workers, has an obligation to investigate and to engage with the family to offer targeted help and support to parents. This is set out in a "Child in Need" plan and can include sign posting to parenting courses and drug rehabilitation programs. Young mothers may be sent to a specialist mother-and-baby unit to learn how to parent their child. The parents may be psychologically assessed by an expert who can also assess IQ. In some cases, the help and support the parents receive results in an improvement in parenting and the case is closed.

However, if there is no improvement despite all the help and interventions, then *as a last resort* the Council will go to court to ask for a "care order." They have to prove to me, the judge, that the children are suffering significant harm caused by things done or not done by the parents. This is known as the "threshold test". If that threshold is crossed, then the court makes a care order. This does not mean automatic removal from the parents as the Council

will carry out a kinship assessment to identify extended family members who might be suitable and willing to look after the children. I find that grandparents are the unsung heroes, often stepping forward to look after grandchildren.

Failing suitable family members, young children can be placed for adoption (generally adopters prefer babies or young children) or if older, with long-term foster parents. Adoption is final (uniquely in Europe) and constitutes a complete break from the birth family, whereas foster care leaves open the possibility of contact and return to the children's biological parents. In a small number of cases the parents improve sufficiently *before the court hearing* for the child to be returned to their care, but it is rare and at this stage, it is more likely that court proceedings do go ahead. So it is up to judges, after hearing all the evidence over a number of days from social workers, experts and of course parents, to determine what is the best option for the child's welfare throughout its life. There are 107,000 children (called "looked after children") in the UK in care.

In extreme cases, an "emergency care order" can be made if the child's safety demands it. I and my colleagues routinely make orders removing newborns from hospital. It is always heartbreaking to tell a parent that their child will not be going home but it is because in those cases home is the most dangerous place a child can be. Many mothers have had several children removed: up to 5 is not unusual, up to 10 is not unheard of and 16 from the same mother is the record. These protection measures are however not fool-proof as we know from the recent cases in Oxford and Rotherham where older children in care homes were groomed and abused by older men after being plied with drinks, drugs, clothes and more.

Peter Devlin



A Moment of Wonder



Late afternoon sun illuminated Christchurch photo by Peter Devlin

Have you ever been 'stopped in your tracks' by a moment of awe and wonder as Peter was when he left his work place recently? Were you also inspired to take a photo?

If so, we would love to share it in our church newsletter.

Please send to newsletter@wheatleyurc.org.uk

The world is full of magic things, patiently waiting for our senses to grow sharper - William Butler Yeats



The Maple Tree

As a Time for God volunteer I joined the URC Wheatley in September 2024 and work with the Youth and Families Project. As a church community over the last 2 years we have built relationships with local projects like The Maple Tree. As a volunteer I support this project during the week.

My Wednesday mornings start with The Maple Tree which has a Baby Cafe from 9.30 until 12. During this time mothers, fathers, grandparents and carers have the great opportunity to meet once a week to talk and support each other. We provide coffee, tea and biscuits for them. Furthermore we are there to listen and chat with the carers.

Also toddlers are welcomed to join, which are often the older siblings. For them we have snacks during the time and a lot of options of toys.



Each week The Maple Tree have a different theme for the little ones for example, farms. Then they decorate the room with colouring and there are play stations around the theme. The lovely team and carers welcome everyone who is joining the group and/or visit on Wednesdays mornings. I finish my morning session at The Maple Tree with singing with the carers of the babies. At the beginning of the month The Maple Tree have a Health Visitor for the mothers

and fathers to talk to about their children/babies. Unfortunately, The Maple Tree was recently affected by the flooding in the village and also suffered some serious roof damage. The result is that they are closed for the first three week of January.

The Maple Tree was founded entirely by donations, grants and a busy fundraising programme, which started in August 2017. One of the ways they receive donations is The Maple Tree Wish tree. On the leaves of the tree are standing items that the institution needs. People, who have a pound or two more while shopping the next time, can get the items and leave them under the tree. Some of the requests on the leaves are items such as wet wipes or nappies for the baby changing tables.



Cara Schulte



Deadline

Sunday 16th February is the deadline for the March Newsletter. Please send copy to: newsletter@wheatleyurc.org.uk . 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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