

WHEATLEY URC NEWSLETTER



June 2025

Covering Thoughts

It is Pentecost, the season of the Spirit and I have been pondering on the metaphors and images that help understand this abstract concept. The ones that spring to mind include the water of rebirth, the intimacy of breath, the power of wind and the danger of fire.

To begin to comprehend the Spirit is to enter deeply into human experience and is a universal phenomenon. Rudolf Otto's book The Idea of the Holy explores the sense of the numinous experienced by many people and I think that most would acknowledge that there are times and places where it is possible to feel overwhelmed by the mystery of life in its beauty, and awesomeness.

In the early church documents, it is the account in John that moves me most. The Spirit comes as a gift from Jesus at a moment of deep loss and grief. Nothing could be closer and more intimate than breath, so essential to life and renewal. At times of stress and anxiety, before doing or saying something important, it helps to concentrate on breathing to focus and to bring the present moment clearly to mind.

In contrast Acts shows the community bonded together in a common experience which empowers them to serve not just each other but the wider community. Here the gentle breath becomes wind, an external force which is not only felt but dynamic in its effect.

To convey something of the essence of Spirit visually may be seen in this month's tree. It is called Blown Away and I leave it to you to remember significant times when you felt blown away by an awesome experience. It is good to return to these and to reflect upon them for it is not just the experience but what they teach us that is important.

Quakers have a way of praying for others without requests or words. They simply bring the person or situation into the Light and hold them in the silence. The experience of being loved is heart-warming and of great importance. May we be held in the Light by others this coming month.

Christine Bainbridge

Reflection

On 10th May Laurence Devlin and I attended a conference at St Pancras Church in London for women worship leaders and clergy. It was titled “Women’s Voices” and had a line-up of great speakers. I have come away feeling inspired. Together, we learned about some of the women of the Bible: Lot’s wife, Tamar, Jesus’ mother Mary, and the haemorrhaging woman who is healed by Jesus, encountering their stories in refreshing and liberating ways.

I am reminded, not for the first time, that for those of us who have spent a good deal of time in churches, our reading of the Bible is often hampered by what we think it says, what we have been *told* it says, rather than what it *actually* says! Sometimes the text presents us with difficulty and discomfort; we should name this rather than trying to smooth it over or skirt around it. Sometimes, seen afresh, it yields surprising treasures.

Particularly exciting was a talk by Dr Karen O’Donnell about the ‘Shulamite woman’, the primary narrator in Song of Songs. This book of the Hebrew Bible is remarkable in many ways, but not least because it centres the voice and words of a woman. O’Donnell cited evidence from historical texts and her own, painful experience, to argue that Christianity has been bad for women’s agency, flourishing and faith. In church women often receive the implicit (and sometimes explicit!) message that the ideal is to be fertile, thin/slim, and quiet. The Shulamite woman – herself existing in a patriarchal culture where women were regarded as property, and their purpose for procreation – breaks all of these norms and expectations. She is loud and proud. She is full-bodied (see 7:1-2), or at the very least body-positive. She is comfortable – even celebratory – in her own body (“I am black and beautiful” (1:5)). She delights in her sexuality, and in sex for the sake of pleasure, not procreation.

Karen O’Donnell stated that “a body-loving, sensual revolution is needed in Christianity in order for women to flourish.” Perhaps it’s needed for all of us to flourish. Ours is an incarnational, embodied faith, after all.

In this same spirit of inhabiting, loving and celebrating our bodies, I have thoroughly enjoyed recent experiences of incorporating movement and dance into our worship. Huge thanks to Bobbie and the members of Dance Chapel for the ways they have helped us to playfully, joyfully, safely and intentionally worship God in ancient/new ways. I hope you have appreciated this as much as I have. Get ready for more dancing in the aisles on Trinity Sunday!

Peace and love,

Cara x

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A CROSS-BORDER WALK

FRIDAY 20th JUNE

From Haddenham to Thame

3.5 miles – no hills



*We are planning a walk starting at a bus stop in
Haddenham and finishing in Thame.*

*This is a gentle walk, crossing the river Thame where Bucks and Oxfordshire meet.
Please let us know if you'd like to join us, then we can give you more precise details.*

*We aim to start at a café in Haddenham at 10am,
so should easily be in Thame by lunchtime.*

Pauline and Ellen

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Great Big Green Week - 7th to 15th June



Littleworth Nature Reserve

Great Big Green Week is the UK's biggest celebration of community action to tackle climate change and protect nature.

This year, Wheatley celebrates this week by offering a series of events around the village and activities throughout the week, aimed to entice local families to engage in nature and learn about local projects to help with the cause.

This year, Littleworth Nature Reserve are organising events in the reserve. On Sunday the 8th, a small group of us will be situated in the **Nature Reserve's Butterfly Glade from 10am to 3pm**, for a Bug Safari for the younger ones and family friendly fact sheet and map, for a self-guided tour of what there is to see. We invite you

to come along and learn about this valuable resource and how we might help protect it for the future. Whether you just want to enjoy the peacefulness surrounded by nature or walk the footpaths, there is so much to enjoy.

One of our aims this year is to set up a simple database record of everyone's findings which is accessible to all, so we will be talking to our visitors about how they can do that.

Please do come and join us. Wear stout shoes and cover your arms and legs to protect from nettle stings, thorns and insect bites. We look forward to seeing you!

How to find it: From Wheatley, through Littleworth village towards Horspath, turn right down the track after the last house on the right. The entrance to the reserve is a little way down on the left.

Old Rd entrance: There is a footpath up the steps between the houses about half way up the hill. This leads directly down to the steps and onto a boardwalk. Take the footpath on the right into the reserve.

Pauline Shelley

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# Blended Service Rotas for June 2025

| <b>Dates</b>           | <b>Worship Leaders</b>            | <b>Readers</b>    | <b>Intercessors</b> | <b>Vestry Elder</b> | <b>Welcomer/ Door Steward</b>     |
|------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <b>1<sup>st</sup></b>  | Laurence Devlin                   | Liz Barry         | Ann Bettess         | Ellen Webster       | Val Farmer/<br>Elaine Matejtschuk |
| <b>8<sup>th</sup></b>  | Colin Thompson<br>HC              | Catherine Harding | Barbara Joiner      | Chris Shelley       | Charles Bennett/<br>Peter Devlin  |
| <b>15<sup>th</sup></b> | Cara Heafey                       | Sybil Beaton      | Ellen Webster       | Pauline Shelley     | Bobbie Stormont/<br>Liz Barry     |
| <b>22<sup>nd</sup></b> | Mark Williams                     |                   |                     | Ann Bettess         | Ellen Webster/<br>Ann Hardiman    |
| <b>29<sup>th</sup></b> | Mary Thomas<br>Church Anniversary | Charles Bennett   | Marian Mole         | Pauline Shelley     | Marian Mole/<br>Bobbie Stormont   |

| <b>Dates</b>           | <b>Organist</b> |
|------------------------|-----------------|
| <b>1<sup>st</sup></b>  | Jeff Clarke     |
| <b>8<sup>th</sup></b>  | Frances Simpson |
| <b>15<sup>th</sup></b> | Jeff Clarke     |
| <b>22<sup>nd</sup></b> | Frances Simpson |
| <b>29<sup>th</sup></b> | Jeff Clarke     |

# Prayers

**Please remember in your prayers all members of Pauline Shelley's pastoral group:** Liz & Tony Barry, John Hall & Tina Everett, Frances Simpson, Catherine & David Hughes, Elaine & Mike Matejschuk, Allison Towner, Annette Wright and Jill Cansell.

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

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## Brill United Reformed Church

invites us to join them for a picnic  
on – Sunday, 22<sup>nd</sup> June  
at - Brill Windmill  
at - 4.30, followed by a service of  
Holy Communion at their church at 6pm

(Please bring a picnic and a chair)



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# FALCON SCHOOL LATEST!

Message from all the staff and pupils at the Falcon Junior school:...

*'Mese zvenyu munodadisa ... Ndinotenda, Ndinotenda, Ndinotenda ...*



*zvikuru ne tarisiro yemvura yakachena yamapa' .....*

.... fairly accurately translated from Shona as: *'You're All Am-az-ing ... thank you, thank you, thank you, in hope and anticipation of a renewed supply of fresh and clean water!'*

**Yes! ... Drip-drip-drip, a drop at a time**, we raised £1170 by end January, £1590 end February, £ 2670 end March and by mid-May **we have exceeded our £3000 milestone!**

Isn't it great how we pull together?! ... we very gradually, but very steadily **in the Wheatley URC Way, achieved our target to help pay for the much needed new water borehole.**

By mid-June Wilbert will be visiting the school and will be keeping an eye on the start of drilling for the new borehole ... we will be mindful of their work later in June when we are planning to sing together the 'Zulu Farewell', as we wish them 'Godspeed' for a successful borehole installation.

So to everybody once again **‘Siyabonga kakulu’** (‘Thank you so much’,



appropriately in Zulu this time!) ...

### Care for the World Ministry Team

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#### Deadline

June 16<sup>th</sup> is the deadline for the July/August Newsletter, including the Annual Reports. Please send copy to: [newsletter@wheatleyurc.org.uk](mailto:newsletter@wheatleyurc.org.uk). Please type all contributions in Calibri font, size 11. Thank you.

**Please remember that this is also the deadline for Team Reports for our AGM which is on 13<sup>th</sup> July.**

#### Disclaimer

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

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# Dates for Your Diaries

## Weekly

Mon & Thurs 9.00am Mindfulness Sitting Group  
Mark Williams - [jmarkgwilliams@gmail.com](mailto:jmarkgwilliams@gmail.com)  
Friday 10am Table Tennis  
Val Farmer – [val\\_farmer40@hotmail.com](mailto:val_farmer40@hotmail.com)

## Monthly

Alternate Mondays (2<sup>nd</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>, 30<sup>th</sup>) Not So Young Club  
Frances Simpson – [frances\\_simpson@icloud.com](mailto:frances_simpson@icloud.com)  
First Sunday Teas - 2.30-4pm  
Ann Bettess – [annsgoog@gmail.com](mailto:annsgoog@gmail.com)  
First Thurs. 10am Prayers for the World  
Ann Hardiman – 01865 873485  
First & Third Thurs. 10.30am Coffee Morning  
Barbara Joiner – [albarjoiner2@gmail.com](mailto:albarjoiner2@gmail.com)  
Second Thursday 10am Memory Café  
Laurence Devlin – [laurencelalanne99@gmail.com](mailto:laurencelalanne99@gmail.com)  
Second Tuesday Picnic Club  
Val Farmer – [val\\_farmer40@hotmail.com](mailto:val_farmer40@hotmail.com)

# BONOU UPDATE 2025

It is now 8 years since our small charity, The Friends of Bonou, ceased to fund the project that I initiated in the village of Bonou in the south of the Republic of Benin and I am happy to report that the Training Centre for Girls is still thriving, with the 6<sup>th</sup> cohort having started their 3-year training this April.

For those who are new to our congregation and don't know what it's all about, it all started when I was in Benin in early 2003 on a BBC assignment and took the opportunity to go to the small village of Bonou with my friend Dominique Hounkonnou who had talked to me a lot about what the villagers had managed to create, entirely by themselves, what he called a "local development dynamic", the title of his own PhD thesis. The achievements of these subsistence farmers with so little resources were very impressive indeed: a community school, a micro-credit institution and a small "dispensaire" (sort of rural clinic). But their main problem remained: many girls from the village were "emigrating" to the big giant of a country next to Benin, Nigeria, to get some very poorly paid "jobs", most often nothing else than domestic slavery, because they had no prospects as they had no formal education nor any vocational training. Traditionally in West African villages, the boys receive a minimum education while the girls stay at home or go and work in menial jobs until they get married. It became clear that this was their major development goal, and this is what the village Elders told me they wanted (and asked my help for it) in that very first conversation I had with them under the mango tree, which was to be followed by so many. So, to cut a (very) long story short, this is what we worked very hard to achieve for 4 years and the Sonagnon Training Centre for Girls opened in January 2007: a very happy day!

After 10 years of intense involvement in the funding and running of the Centre, we felt that it was time to let the village take full responsibility. Consequently, in May 2013, while the third cohort of girls was beginning their training, we started a phased withdrawal of our financial involvement by tapering down our funding over the next 4 years. Good development practice informed that progressive withdrawal as since the start, we had made clear that we would stay long enough to achieve what the village needed *but not too long* as this, we strongly believe, would create a new "dependency culture". We had arrived at a natural crossroads as we had achieved our goal to help local people do what they could not do on their own, e.g. build the Training Centre and the magnificent dormitory facility adjacent to it and help setting up a local management structure with the village

Elders, therefore empowering them. It was time for us to let go, which we did in 2017, an awesome decision for us but the right one.

Since my last update 3 years ago, all the training activities in the girls' curriculum have continued at a pace: food processing, tailoring, hairdressing, batik-dying, numeracy and literacy, French, home economics, sport, health awareness, market gardening and basic principles of micro-enterprises management. Then in 2023 the new activity of hand-loomed weaving was added to the curriculum and is as popular as the wonderful batik-dying that has been one of the Centre's most successful income-generating endeavours. Here are some of their creations with the girls wearing their uniform's woven skirts and the new looms, part of the starting kit they received on graduation day.



The village Elders and the Centre's management Committee succeed every year to raise the £12,000 necessary to ensure the day-to-day running of the Centre (instructors' salaries, general maintenance of the equipment including the solar panels, purchase of training materials, fuel for the generator and food for the girls) but they had to face multiple repairs during the last 3 years, as the West African climate is hard on buildings and the bats love to roost in the space between the roof and the ceiling and make their presence felt in not very clean ways ...! So, there were some difficult times, but a major crisis was avoided thanks to a big fundraising initiative launched by Djona Hounkonnou, our friend Dominique's eldest daughter who got much more involved in the project since her dad's death in 2021

But the most important development of these last 3 years was the official recognition of the Centre by the Ministry for Women and Children, as a CAPE (Centre d'Accueil et de Protection des Enfants), which means that it has to apply rigorous safeguarding measures but can also benefit from some modest funding from the state. More importantly though, it means that the girls have now to take a national exam and that *their diploma is therefore being recognized nationally by the state* which has immediately opened new doors for their future. This is a great victory for a small rural Training Centre, something that was not easy to achieve given the extremely slow pace of the state administration and the huge amount of red tape to go through: It took several years!

Since the start, Wheatley URC had been a stalwart supporter of what we were trying to do with many members showing a keen interest in our work, contributing very generously by giving a monthly contribution, buying my beaded necklaces and various bags made of African material and coming to many of our fund-raising events. Around 150 girls *and their children* now have a different life and a different future thanks to that support, and I will be for ever grateful to all of you for that. Thank you!

**Laurence Devlin**

# Common Lectionary Readings June 2025

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

| Date                 | 1 <sup>st</sup>                    | 8 <sup>th</sup>        | 15 <sup>th</sup>      | 22 <sup>nd</sup>   | 29 <sup>th</sup>          |
|----------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|
| <b>First Reading</b> | Acts 16: 16-34                     | Genesis 11: 1-9        | Proverbs 8: 4 & 22-31 | Isaiah 65: 1-9     | 1 Kings 19: 15-16 & 19-21 |
| <b>Psalm</b>         | Psalm 97                           | Psalm 104: 24-34 & 35b | Psalm 8               | Psalm 22: 19-28    | Psalm 16                  |
| <b>New Test.</b>     | Revelation 22: 12-14, 16-17, 20-21 | Acts 2: 1-21           | Romans 5: 1-5         | Galatians 3: 23-29 | Galatians 5: 1 & 13-25    |
| <b>Gospel</b>        | John 20-26                         | John 14: 8-17          | John 16: 12-15        | Luke 8: 26-39      | Luke 9: 51-62             |

1<sup>st</sup> June - Pliny noted that the sale of fodder for sacrificial animals had dropped off as a result of Christian presence. Christianity is bad for business.

8<sup>th</sup> June - The kingdom cannot be described but only made known in metaphors.

15<sup>th</sup> June - The trinity is music. The trinity is life. (Hildegard of Bingen)

22<sup>nd</sup> June - Are those without much by way of material wealth able to sit alongside the wealthy in decision-making and leadership?

29<sup>th</sup> June - When we are on a journey - and especially when we are in hurry - we may find it hard to be kind to those we encounter.

**Richard Bainbridge**



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### ***CHURCH CONTACTS***

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