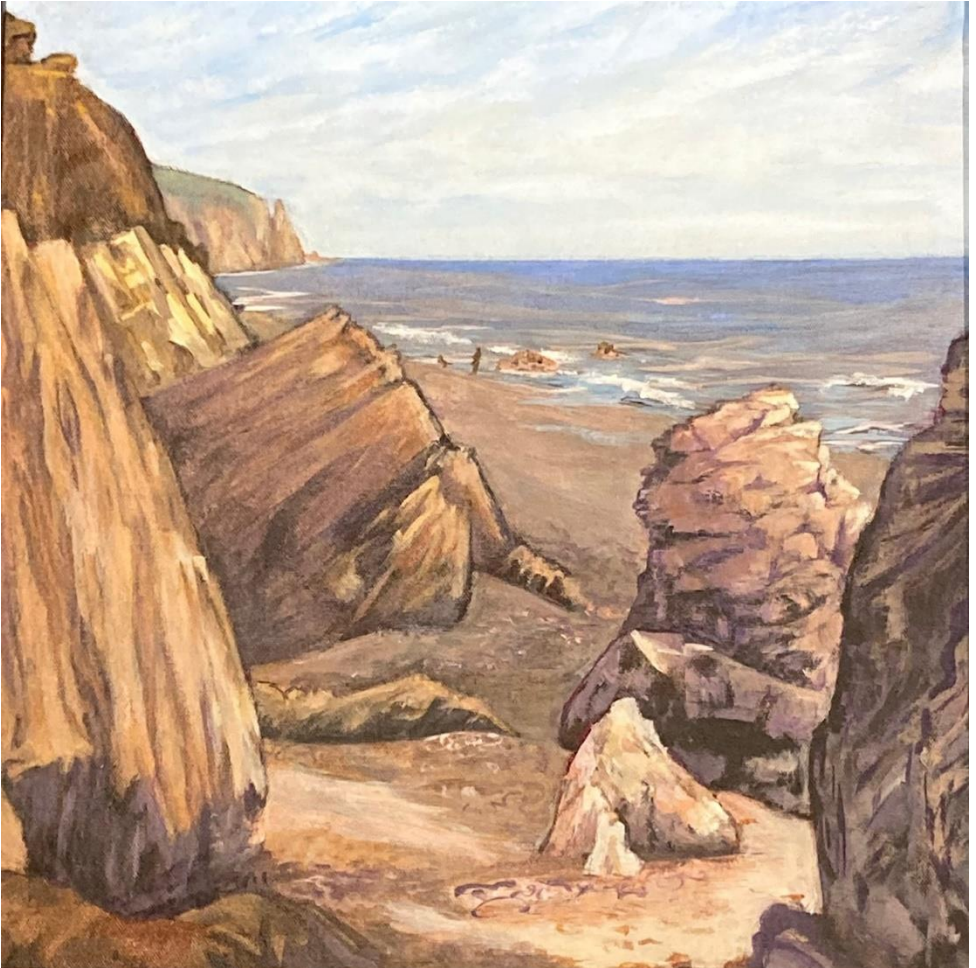


WHEATLEY URC NEWSLETTER



February 2026

Covering Thoughts

One of my enduring memories is of the beach at Branscombe in Devon. We rented a beach hut on the shingle, and I loved the red cliffs where due to erosion and cliff fall there were huge boulders on the sand. Early mornings at low tide when I could walk amongst them were best. The feature that fascinated me most was the quartz, which in undulating layers made fine raised ridges in the surface bringing a sparkle to the matt red Langstone rock.

I experienced the conflicting emotions of wellbeing and fear at dawn on that beach as an unexpected monster of a wave threw me back onto the shingle where I was completely winded and indeed as I discovered later had fractured a wrist.

Gerard Manley Hopkins words came to me:

*O the mind, the mind has mountains; cliffs of fall.
Frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed. Hold them cheap.
May who ne'er hung there.*

We are not protected from life's dangers but to live a safe life is to miss some of its beauty. Like the quartz in the cliff face I thought of the enduring strength of divinity despite the overwhelming size of the world's problems..

Christine Bainbridge

~*~

Reflection

Dear Friends,

Printing deadlines mean that this piece has to be written very early in the new year, and the wish to write something positive and inspirational for the coming year has been a tricky one to cope with over the last few years, given the alarming, and for many of us unexpected, global developments, ranging from the climate to military incursions to the ballot box.

Tom Holland's 'Dominion' has made a fine case for the positive legacy of our Christian forebears, but there does seem to be a moment in history now where extreme nationalism and economic power have a stranglehold on the world we hoped we would see once the Soviet and Apartheid regimes were gone.

So, what is there to be cheerful about in 2026? As a member of the Care for the World team, the Thursday morning prayer group and a recipient of slightly more information from charities than I can read, I am regularly amazed by what I hear from around the globe. As someone with friends and family in Ukraine, I regularly go back to Malcolm's amazing piece in these very pages showing Russian Christians' concern for Ukraine, and was very moved by the documentary film 'Almost Holy' which showed how a Pentecostal pastor helped rebuild the lives of young women and girls brutalised and exploited by the Russian mercenaries in Donbas.

Marxist and liberal humanist historians seem convinced that our faith played a part in the colonialist imposition of harsh social systems, but I often unexpectedly come across details to confound this. Ornithology and birdwatching were the topics that took me to a lecture by Mansfield College fellow and Professor of Human Science, Andrew Gosler, but I came away astonished that Darwin had described the indigenous inhabitants of islands in Patagonia as scarcely evolved and having a language consisting almost entirely of grunts, while the missionary who went and spent his entire life with these people also published a grammar and dictionary of their highly complex language. David Olusoga's, 'A House through Time', rightly focusing on the shameful links of Bristol with the slave trade also revealed how a Methodist church in Bristol was an early bastion of the anti-slavery movement, reminding me how Wilberforce was largely airbrushed from the bicentenary of the national ban on the slave trade.

An alternative look at some of the charities I support would also suggest that the idea that church somehow imposes outdated social and political structures on its converts is a little unfair. Recent editions of the Tearfund magazine have focused on its Transforming Masculinities programme which works to eliminate gender-based violence, its Transforming Communities programme, which works on everything from sustainable farming practices, through empowering the economically marginalised to understanding between different faith groups. Global Care, of which my sister-in-law is a trustee, has the empowerment of women as its common theme throughout all its work in the developing world and last year I was privileged to meet some of the adult products of the Nasio Trust, a charity helping AIDS orphans in Kenya, of which a friend is a leading light. Though the organisation has strong Christian roots, the young doctor, whom Nasio supported as a youngster, and whom I spoke to through dinner had been brought up a Muslim as that was the faith of his lost family.

My present to myself for Christmas 2024 was Pastor Christoph Friedrich Blumhardt's 'Evening Prayers for Every Day of the Year' in which he emphasises throughout the first three clauses of the Lord's Prayer. I shan't bore my Prayers for the World friends by quoting again at length from it but opening it at random I find ' Even when the world storms and rages, even when earthly kingdoms rise up against each other and everything seems dark...all shall be made new and good through your Spirit.'

Finally, as we leave the season where we celebrate the birth of a child born in squalor owing to the demands of an occupying power and made a refugee by the brutality of its collaborators, and look ahead to the season where we commemorate his torture and death in ways which would have been illegal for a citizen of the occupying power, and leave the year in which appropriately, I pray that we, along with our sisters and brothers throughout the world, can say along with the first named woman author in English:

'Sin is behovely, but all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well'

Mike Matejtschuk

~*~

Prayers

Please remember in your prayers all members of Ann Bettess' pastoral group: Sybil Beaton, Marian & Mike Mole, Moira & Jim Watson, Ann Wild, Sophie Block, Val Farmer.

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

~ ~ ~

New Year Walk January 1st 2026

A group of some 12 URC members set out from Crown Square at 10.00 am on a rather dank Bank Holiday Thursday and proceeded to walk the roads and footpaths of the East end of the village, making brief doorstep visits to those unable to join the walk themselves.

We covered Crown Road, Ambrose Rise, The Triangle Care Home, Anson Close, Elm Close, Beech Road and Farm Close Road, completing our walk via The High Street and Hollow Way, including Wellford Gardens Care Home. On our way we visited about 20 folk at their homes, presenting each with a New Year Greeting, a card, a carnation and a chocolate.

Returning to the URC, Liz welcomed us back with a warming glass of mulled wine and once suitably rested and refreshed, we adjourned to the comfort of Laurence and Peter's home for an excellent and well- earned shared lunch.

All in all, a very satisfactory morning's "stroll", with the bonus of a good lunch at the end.

Tony Barry

~ ~ ~

Lent Journalling Groups – Reflect Create Connect

This Lent, join a small, welcoming group to explore the season together. Each session begins with gentle discussion around Lent themes chosen by the group, followed by quiet journaling time. Using a range of multi-media materials, you're free to express your reflections in whatever way feels right for you - words, images, stitches, colour, collage.

No experience needed, just a willingness to pause, reflect, and journey through Lent together.

When?

Every Thursday in Lent - beginning on February 19th and ending on 2nd April, between 7 and 9pm

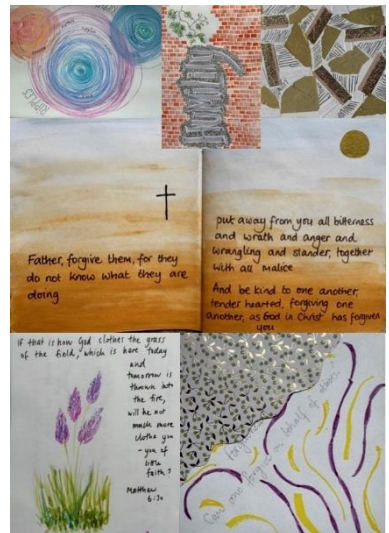
Where?

In the Mulberry Room, Wheatley URC, Crown Rd.

All materials and journals provided

No charge, but donations to the Falcon School Zimbabwe would be greatly appreciated.

Contact: Pauline Shelley - secretary@wheatleyurc.org.uk



Journalling through Lent 2025



Leaves and Crown



Sea of Forgiveness

Blended Service Rotas for February 2026

Dates	Worship Leaders	Vestry Elder	Welcome/Door	Reader	Prayers
1st	Colin Thompson HC	Debi Kidd	Ann Bettess/ Catherine Harding	Pauline Shelley	Noemi Roy
8 th	Richard Bainbridge	Rob Holdaway	Tom Goss/ Elaine Matejtschuk	Robert Harding	Tom Goss
15 th	Cara Heafey	Marian Mole	Phyllis Williams/ Barbara Joiner	Catherine Harding	Ann Bettess
22 nd	Noemi Roy	Pauline Shelley	Val Farmer/ Ann Hardiman	~~~~	~~~~

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## Wheatley Area Churches – WAC

Ten people from the churches in Wheatley area sat round the tables in the Mulberry Room planning joint events for Lent, Easter, and beyond.

Sadness as well as gratitude was expressed at the resignation of John Guy on health grounds and all united in sending love and good wishes. Shuna Mc Gregor from Our Lady of Lourdes will join us on WAC.

The role of deputy chair is under consideration and will be confirmed at the AGM in June when Liz steps down after her 2 years as Chair.

**Lent House Group:** At the home of David Bendor-Samuel:  
7.30pm Thursdays from 19 Feb - 25 Littleworth Rd. Wheatley.

**Lent Soup Lunches:** Saturdays, from 21<sup>st</sup> February 12-2pm

**Liz Barry**

# Common Lectionary Readings February 2026

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

| Date                 | 1st                    | 8 <sup>th</sup>     | 15 <sup>th</sup> | 22nd                      |
|----------------------|------------------------|---------------------|------------------|---------------------------|
| <b>First Reading</b> | Micah 6: 1-8           | Isaiah 58: 1-9a     | Exodus 24: 12-18 | Genesis 2: 15-17 & 3: 1-7 |
| <b>Psalm</b>         | Psalm 15               | Psalm 112           | Psalm 99         | Psalm 22                  |
| <b>New Test.</b>     | 1 Corinthians 1: 18-31 | Corinthians 2: 1-12 | 2 Peter 1: 16-22 | Romans 15: 12-19          |
| <b>Gospel</b>        | Matthew 5: 1-12        | Matthew 5 13-20     | Matthew 17: 1-9  | Matthew 4: 1-11           |

**Feb 1<sup>st</sup>:** Micah was Isaiah's contemporary, active in Judah and through the time that Israel fell to the Assyrians (about 740 to 698 BCE).

**Feb 8<sup>th</sup>:** Back in the land of Israel, the former exiles need a reminder of what is central that is championing justice and equality.

**Feb 15<sup>th</sup>:** How can we move towards, not away from, deeply significant personal encounters like the transfiguration. Perhaps mountains will give us a clue?

**Feb 22nd:** Before they are put on sale, towels are washed more than 50 times to ensure that the colour will not run. Jesus was also tested as to identity and the core of his being. Have you recently asked, 'Who am I?'

**Richard Bainbridge**

~\*~

# Charity News

**Lent Soup Lunches** start early again this year. They will begin on Saturday 21st February until Saturday 28th March from 12 noon to about 2.30pm depending on demand and the soups not running out! All lunches will take place in the URC Hall. With the URC most likely covering the first and the last Saturdays and the other WAC churches covering the Saturdays in between.

We shall be seeking volunteers to make and/or serve soups again this year on behalf of Wheatley URC. A list with appropriate dates will appear on the notice board soon, for you to sign up to volunteer, please. As usual donations will go to Christian Aid.

**London Marathon:** In April our granddaughter, Daisy Mifflin, who is studying Physiotherapy at Birmingham University, will be running in this year's London Marathon. She is seeking to raise at least £2,000 by the end of March from sponsorships, for her chosen charity, Brainkind.

The charity offers residential support to assist in the rehabilitation of people of all ages who have suffered serious brain damage. Details will be on the noticeboard, soon. Should you wish to help us in supporting her challenge, we'd love to hear from you.

## Tony Barry



# The Holy Ghost:

## Casper's divine cousin or theology's elusive third wheel?

For centuries, Christians have grappled with the Holy Spirit, or Holy Ghost, the enigmatic third person of the Trinity, fully God alongside Father and Son - comforter in crisis, spark of spiritual life. Yet mention of the "Holy Ghost" has often caused my mind to drift not to church but comic strips: Casper the Friendly Ghost, mischievous Spooky, the Ghostly Trio. Theological bewilderment!

The Spirit is the trickiest part of the Trinity to pin down. Father and Son? Tangible. (Although there are issues with God being male). But a ghost? Casper trying to make friends at a haunted house party? While Catholic and Protestant doctrine insists the Spirit is not simply a force but a personal divine presence – guiding, empowering, transforming, yet the language invites caricature.

Medieval mystics like Julian of Norwich offered a remedy: spirituality not as spooky ectoplasm but as God's "homely and courteous" love permeating everyday life.

Julian, the 14th-century anchoress whose *Revelations of Divine Love* endures, described the Spirit as the quiet atmosphere of divine compassion. No rattling chains: it's the interior nudge toward forgiveness, joy amid grief, courage against despair. 'All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well,' she wrote – the Spirit's insistent whisper. Spirituality is breathing God's goodness in ordinary air.

Classical theology fleshes this out. The Spirit, sent post-ascension, comforts, guides, gives life. It authored scripture, bestows church gifts – wisdom, healing – and dwells in believers, yielding "fruit." (Galatians 5:22-23): "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law." Pentecost's tongues (Acts 2) launched it publicly: multilingual, boundary breaking. Daily, it's subtler – conscience pricking grudges, welcoming strangers, persevering through burnout. (As an aside, and I'm no biblical scholar, the Holy Spirit actually appeared earlier viz. in Matthew 3:16–17, the Spirit descends on Jesus "like a dove" at the Jordan when John baptises him; this is the start of Jesus's public ministry).

Comic ghosts thrive on spectacle. Casper floats harmlessly; Spooky yells "Boo!"; the *Ghostly Trio* do slapstick. They're visible, reactive, and panel-bound. The

Spirit? Invisible, proactive, uncontainable. Casper avoids scaring; the Spirit disconcerts: exposes selfishness, crosses divides, demands reluctant love.

This tension is somewhat mirrored in everyday Buddhism, stripped of exotic trappings. Buddha's core teaching – mindfulness in the ordinary, compassion through Metta-practice (loving kindness) – parallels the Spirit's quiet nudges. Where the Spirit navigates towards love, Buddhism cultivates equanimity or balance amid dukkha (suffering), observing thoughts without grasping. Both foster present-moment awareness: Julian's loving gaze meets breath-watching. The Spirit nurtures the truer self; Buddhism steers towards no-self.

Neither needs temples or halos. A Buddhist walking mindfully down the High Street, engaging with sensations without judgment, mirrors a Christian sensing the Spirit's prod to smile at a stranger.

The Spirit isn't an app-platform but a presence promoting depth amid shallowness. The Holy Ghost invites confusion – even cartoon detours. But behind Casper's grin emerges not friendly apparition, rather Christianity's holy disturber: patient love revealing our worst to draw our best. Buddhism echoes: delusions yield to clear seeing. Theological details aside, it's about presence, Christian or Buddhist, eschewing superficiality for alive-ness.

## Graham Bell



# 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 (9<sup>th</sup> & 23<sup>rd</sup>) Not So Young Club  
Barbara Joiner – [albarjoiner2@gmail.com](mailto:albarjoiner2@gmail.com)

First Sunday Teas - 2.30-4pm  
Feb 1<sup>st</sup> **CANCELLED** Ann Bettess – [annsgoog@gmail.com](mailto:annsgoog@gmail.com)

First Thurs. 10am Prayers for the world  
Ann Hardiman - 01865873485

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 Lunch Club  
Val Farmer – [val\\_farmer40@hotmail.com](mailto:val_farmer40@hotmail.com)



## Deadline

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

## Disclaimer

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



# The Cure for it all

*Go gently today, don't hurry  
or think about the next thing. Walk  
with the quiet trees, can you believe  
how brave they are—how kind? Model your life  
after theirs. Blow kisses  
at yourself in the mirror*

*especially when  
you think you've messed up. Forgive  
yourself for not meeting your unreasonable  
expectations.*

*Praise fresh air  
clean water, good dogs. Spin  
something from joy. Open  
a window, even if  
it's cold outside. Sit. Close  
your eyes. Breathe. Allow*

*the river  
of it all to pulse  
through eyelashes  
fingertips, bare toes. Breathe in  
breathe out. Breathe until*

*you feel  
your bigness, until the sun  
rises in your veins.*

*Breathe until you stop needing anything to be different.*

**by Julia Fehrenbacher** (permission given)

<https://www.juliafehrenbacher.com>



# Put a Smile on Your Face -

**Why was the cell phone scared to go to the dentist?**

He didn't want him to remove his blue tooth.

**What do you call a criminal at the North Pole?**

A burrrr-glar.

**Why don't scientists trust atoms?**

Because they make up everything!

**What do you call a bear with no teeth?**

A gummy bear.

**Where do bad rainbows go?**

To prism. It's a light sentence, but it gives them time to reflect.

**What did the zero say to the eight?**

Nice belt!

**Why did the bicycle fall over?**

It was two-tired!

**Why did Socrates bring a pencil to the party?**

Because he liked to draw conclusions.

**What do you call a snowman with a six-pack?**

An abdominal snowman.

**Why did the golfer bring two pairs of pants?**

In case he got a hole in one!

**How do you organize a space party?**

You planet!

Why do consultants always carry a briefcase?

**Because they love case studies.**



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

**CHURCH CONTACTS**

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