

WHEATLEY URC NEWSLETTER



March 2026

Covering Thoughts

*I recently came across a summary of a book called *The Solace of Fierce Landscapes* by Belden Lane. Immediately I was taken back to my attraction to wild and desolate places, mountains and rough coastlines, and thought that reading this book could be my challenge through Lent. My trips to the south coast fall short of encountering a fierce landscape. Never the less to stand alone on a beach at dawn in winter leaves me open to experience something of majesty, awe and wonder. It expands my understanding of that mystery which tends to be personalised. I have yet to get far into Lane's discourse, but it is clear that he is drawing a parallel to the fierce landscapes of human experience of suffering and death.*

Lane is uncomfortable with the idea of God who is there to meet human need, wanting human attention and helping individuals to reach their potential. He writes: "The austere, unaccommodating landscapes of the desert, mountain and heath recall once again the smallness of self and the majesty of being. Such places bring to mind what theologians once described as the aseity of God, a divine indifference having as its goal the ultimate attraction of that which it initially repels".

Spending some time in the Sinai desert and climbing the mountain by moonlight to greet sunrise has stayed with me through the years. The vastness and silence can only be experienced, as can an untamed God who is beyond our limited understanding, but somehow shimmers in the glowing dawn.

You are most welcome to borrow the book.....when I have finished it.

Christine Bainbridge

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Transfiguration Sunday

*"May we open
and open more
and open still
to the blessed light
that comes."*

From *How the Light Comes*

Jan Richardson – www.janrichardson.com

Flowers by Christine Bainbridge

Reflection - Hope not Hate

Last summer like many of us I became increasingly frustrated by the media publicity given to inflammatory and violent demonstrations against asylum seekers and immigrants. Although there have been counter demonstrations, in general these were peaceful and as such were less newsworthy. Social media largely generated by extreme right wing politicians and activists has continued to fuel xenophobia and visceral hatred with many communities being subject to physical violence and living in a state of anxiety and fear. In searching for ways to counter such, I came across 'Hope not Hate' a political action group which has existed for 20 years and is specifically focused on countering the extremes of racism and xenophobia. It works with community groups, schools and workplaces providing a positive antidote to the politics of hate. Fuller details are on their website – www.hopenothate.org.uk.

The church has generally kept a low profile with regard to 'politics' and some MP's have publicly said that the church should keep its nose out of politics and concentrate on the spiritual. However whilst not supporting one party or the other, the church is becoming more vocal with respect to specific issues. Fortunately the attempts by Tommy Robinson to usurp Christian 'tradition' to his own distorted and divisive messages of hatred has been thwarted. Presumably he would be happier at a time when other faiths were regarded as infidels although it is a sobering thought that faith groups including the Christian church have been divisive and remain so to a certain extent. The slogan 'Hope not Hate' is one which Christ both practiced and preached and one which could easily be adopted by the Christian church. He was 'political' in challenging the established order and focusing on the needs of those less fortunate.

For many of us 'hope' is a rather passive process. We hope that someone will recover from illness, that we won't get flooded (again) or that there is peace where there is war. However fulfilment of our 'hopes' often requires action if not by ourselves, then by someone else. I was encouraged by the fact that children's Oxford word of the year 2025 was Peace. For those like me who can only hope for peace in the face of the world's conflicts I conclude with a poem written by John Rondel which was included in our recent carol service.

I can't make the world be peaceful
I can't stall tanks from roaring down roads
I can't prevent children from hiding in bunkers

I can't convince the news to stop turning war into a video game
I can't silence the sound of bombs tearing neighbourhoods apart
I can't turn a missile into a bouquet of flowers
I can't make a warmonger have an ounce of empathy
I can't convince ambassadors to quit playing truth or dare
I can't deflect a sniper's bullet from turning a wife into a widow
I can't stave off a country being reduced to ash and rubble
I can't do any of that, the thing I can do
Is love the next person I encounter without any conditions or strings
To love my neighbour so fearlessly that
It starts a ripple that stretches from one horizon to the next
I can't force peace on the world.
But I can become a force for peace in the world
Because sometimes all it takes is single lit candle
In the darkness to start a movement
"Lord make me a candle of comfort (and hope not hate*) in this world.
Let me burn with peace."

Yours in hope.

Malcolm Benson (* my addition)

Permission given by John Rodel www.johnroedel.com

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Deadline

Monday 16th March is the deadline for the April Newsletter. Please send copy to: 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.

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New Minister for Wheatley and the Bernwode Cluster

On the weekend of the 31st January and 1st of February, the 5 Churches in the Cluster; Banbury -The Haven, Brill, Twyford, Marsh Gibbon and Wheatley, met with the Rev. Robert Sheard and his wife Heather, at Marsh Gibbon URC for an informal lunch, which was kindly provided by our Interim Moderator, Anne Bedford. It was a very enjoyable occasion over a delicious lunch. Thank you Anne!

The following day, Rev. Robert 'Preached With A View' at Wheatley in the morning and at The Haven, Banbury in the afternoon. Members from the other 3 churches chose to come either to Wheatley or to Banbury. After both services which included members on Zoom, (thanks to Phyllis and Roger), we had the opportunity to ask Robert more formal questions to which he answered openly.

After the votes were counted from all the churches, we are pleased to report that we were able to issue a 'Call'. Robert has accepted and both he and Heather will most likely be joining us in a few months' time. We look forward to warmly welcoming them into our Church and community and we offer them our prayers as they say goodbye to their friends and family in Stowmarket.

Pauline Shelley

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Prayers

Please remember in your prayers all members of Marian Mole's pastoral group: Alice Halliday. Ann & Roger Bettess, Nan Hixon, Christine & Richard Bainbridge, Noémi, Mya. Myriam & François.

Also remember members of the Youth & Famillies Team: Mark Williams, Brenda Bell, Lucy Betts, Peter Devlin, Keith Kidd, Bev Paton, Sophie Block & Phyllis Williams.

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FALCON SCHOOL ... into 2026!

Following our January church meeting when there was agreement to continue supporting the Falcon school through this year, we requested and received from Wilbert the school's priority needs for the first half of this year....

... well, remember the second new teachers accommodation for which we helped get the roof on 'JIT' (Just-in-Time) before the rains came ?



..... alas, the urgency of the new bore hole suddenly took over and **so finishing off the staff accommodation (eg electrics, installation, plastering) is now the top priority i.e. to make it totally inhabitable**, critically ensuring the school retains (and attracts) new teachers. Estimates of costs involved are right now being shared by the school so we can soon judge if and how to sensibly contribute (we will keep you all posted!)

Meanwhile, 'back in the fields', the **chibage (maize!)** crops which we helped develop from bare earth grow from strength (see Dec first) to strength (Feb in comparison!)

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Grateful thanks from the school for all your continued support.

Your Care For The World Tea

INVITATION to our WORLD DAY OF PRAYER



“I will give you rest”

World Day of Prayer Service - Nigeria **2pm 6th March**

Our sisters in Nigeria invite us to join them for the World Day of Prayer on Friday 6 March 2026. The service they have prepared reflects on the theme, *"I will give you rest."*

The World Day of Prayer is an international, ecumenical movement that shares the hopes, concerns, and prayers of women from around the globe. Each year, women from a different country craft a service, sharing their unique spiritual journey and culture. For 2026, the women of Nigeria have created a service that speaks to our need for peace and solace, drawing on their faith and experiences in a world filled with struggles and anxieties.

The preparation for this day is extensive. The writing country and theme are chosen years in advance, and the service then travels to the international committee in New York for translation and dissemination to national committees in over 120 participating countries. From there it is adapted and shared locally, culminating in gatherings at hundreds of churches every March.

This day is a powerful demonstration of global solidarity. It begins in Samoa and moves across the world in a continuous wave of prayer, finishing 38 hours later in American Samoa. It truly is a worldwide day of prayer!

Do join us for this very special service and refreshments afterwards

Marian Mole, Ellen Webster & the Care for the World Ministry Team

Can You Guess Who They Are?

Two individuals at the Elders' party offered these surprising facts about themselves. Can you guess who they are?

- A.
1. I once spent New Year's Day afternoon at the Bayview Stadium watching East Fife v Stranraer.
 2. My father won the 5000 metres race in the athletics games held in the British-occupied zone of post-war Germany.
 3. I won my first computer, an Acorn Electron, in 1983 in a competition run by an ice lolly company.
 4. My old classics teacher still tells everyone that she has a 100% record of students getting the top grade in O-level Classics. She then admits I was her only candidate ever.
 5. My brother is one of the small team who determine the contents of each year's British 'flu vaccine.
 6. I find it difficult to stand still, because my mother when pregnant with me, worked on a swing lever in a ball-bearing factory!

- B
1. I once had a spiky conversation with Prince Philip.
 2. I'm learning Welsh.
 3. I walked at 9 months old.
 4. I spent the Millennium celebrations in Chile.
 5. I don't live in Wheatley.
 6. My favourite book is The Prophet.

Answers on page 10

Ann Hardiman



Blended Service Rotas for March 2026

Dates	Worship Leaders	Vestry Elder	Welcome/Door	Reader	Prayers
1st	Colin Thompson HC	Tom Goss	Phyllis Williams/Charles Bennett	Marian Mole	Liz Barry
8 th	Richard Bainbridge	Marian Mole	Ann Gajda/Tina Everett	Ann Gadja	Ellen Webster
15 th	Kate Harford	Keith Kidd	Debi Kidd/peter Devlin	Barbara Joiner	Robert Harding
22 nd	Mark Williams	Ann Bettess	Val Farmer/ Liz Barry	~~~~	~~~~
29 th	Laurence Devlin	Phyllis Williams	Pauline Shelley/Allison Townsend	Phyllis Williams	Barbara Joiner

Common Lectionary Readings March 2026

Note: leaders may choose to use other readings

Date	1 st	8 th	15 th	22	29 th
First Reading	Genesis 12: 1-4a	Exodus 17: 1-7	1 Samuel 16: 1-13	Ezekiel 37: 1-14	Isaiah 50: 4-9a
Psalm	Psalm 121	Psalm 95	Psalm 23	Psalm 130	Psalm 31: 9-16
New Test.	Romans 4: 1-5 & 13-17	Romans 5: 1-11	Ephesians 5: 8-14	Romans 8: 6-11	Philippians 2: 5-11
Gospel	John 3: 1-17	John 4: 5-42	John 9: 1-41	John 11: 1-45	Matthew 2: 1-11

March 1st: If you have nothing to be grateful for, check your pulse [came with a set of quotes at Christmas].

March 8th: The land where Jesus lived is 'water, stressed' and sharing water is a problem.

March 15th: Describing someone as 'differently abled' rather than 'disabled' asks what they can do rather than what they can't.

March 22nd: Someone said recently that they wanted people to wear black at his/her funeral because it shows the importance of grieving.

March 29th When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey there does not appear to be any crowd control or police presence.

Richard Bainbridge

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Dates for Your Diaries

Weekly

Mon & Thurs 9.00am Mindfulness Sitting Group
Mark Williams - jmarkgwilliams@gmail.com

Friday 10am Table Tennis
Val Farmer – val_farmer40@hotmail.com

Monthly

Alternate Mondays Not So Young Club
Barbara Joiner – albarjoiner2@gmail.com

First Sunday Teas - 2.30-4pm
Ann Bettess – 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

Second Thursday.
10am Memory Café
Laurence Devlin – laurencelalanne99@gmail.com

Second Tuesday Lunch Club
Val Farmer – val_farmer40@hotmail.com

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Can you Guess? – Answers: A. Mike Matejtchuck & B. Noémi Roy



FREE LUNCHTIME MUSIC RECITALS in OXFORD

Have you found the new Schwarzman Centre for the Humanities in Oxford yet? It is sited in the Radcliffe Observatory Quarter (the old Infirmary area). To quote from their website:

“The Schwarzman Centre is a stage set for boundless creativity. Under one remarkable roof, academia and culture are breaking a new kind of common ground – bringing seven humanities faculties and research institutes together with world-class libraries, collections, exhibitions, cinema, music, theatre, and performance. Created with inclusivity at its core, the building’s design itself makes sure the invite extends to everyone.

The Centre follows principles of Passivhaus – the design standard for buildings with ultra-energy efficiency. Our highly insulated, all-electric venue with solar roof panelling and biodiverse landscaping is set to become the UK’s largest Passivhaus scheme, and the world’s first Passivhaus concert hall.

The Lunchtime Recital Series showcases the talent of student performers. Each concert is free, lasts around 40 minutes and offers a variety of repertoires from multiple performers. The series takes place on Friday afternoons throughout term, starting at 1.15pm. The ground floor café is also open to the public.

Schwarzman Centre - <https://www.schwarzmancentre.ox.ac.uk/>

Ellen Webster





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CHURCH CONTACTS

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