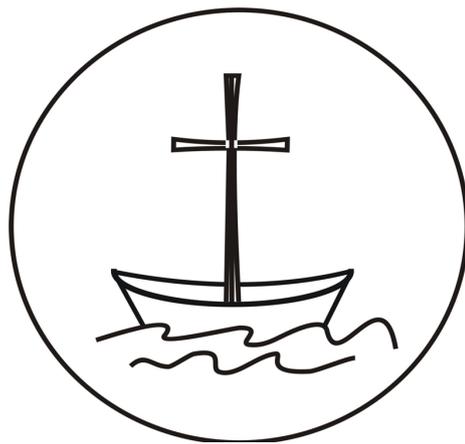


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The
Quarterly



*From the Summertown, Wolvercote, and Wytham
Church Partnership:*

All Saints', Wytham
St Michael and All Angels, Summertown
St Peter's, Wolvercote
Summertown United Reformed Church
Wolvercote Baptist Church

Contributions for the next issue of *The Quarterly*, preferably not exceeding 600 words, should be sent to one of the editors not later than Sunday 31 October 2021.

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Pastoral letter

Bit by bit, slowly and uncertainly, things seem to be opening up. Of course, there's always the possibility that our apparent progress will be reversed. All across the world, as I write, countries that seemed to have avoided or escaped the worst effects of COVID now appear to be struggling. For the moment, though, there is a feeling that here at least we might finally be heading in the right direction. The restaurants, pubs, and bars are doing good business. People are actually going on holiday. The return of congregational singing to our churches is a wonderful, and heartening, development.

Yet for all of us desperate to return to something like normality, there are others who never much liked their lives before the pandemic. There are still others terrified by this unlocking, fearful of the risk to which it may expose them or their loved ones. Already, there are people writing of their nostalgia for lockdown: for the strange sort of freedom it gave them; for the certainty; for the time at home with their families.

Just as COVID hits different parts of the world in different ways and at different times, so the experience of COVID has been highly differentiated. The pandemic has affected the poorest worst, struck the oldest and least well hardest, disrupted the lives of the young disproportionately, and revealed to us all how happy – or otherwise – we are to tolerate risk. Far from bringing us together, COVID has starkly exposed our differences.

That's why we should not worry if we each seem slightly at odds with one another or with what seems to be the public mood – whether that's because you want things to speed up or to slow down. And that's why we shouldn't worry if our attitudes change – and even if they change suddenly and sometimes seem to do so in contradictory ways. Just as there is no one of experience of COVID, so there is no 'right' answer to it. The pandemic has no overall moral, no specific

purpose. It's not a plot device. It's just something that is happening to us – and happening differently almost every day.

So how should we respond to it, then? As a Christian, I am called to respond by drawing on scripture. Here again, there is no one answer. Disease appears in the Bible in many different guises and calls forth many different responses. It has many different meanings too. But if we widen our view we can come to understand how it is that we are meant to address people's anxieties, angers, fears, hopes, and changes of mind.

Above all, we are called to a discipline of charity. We are called to love those who frustrate us and disagree with us – and even those who hate us. The pandemic cannot teach us that. It does, however, present us with an opportunity to live out the message of love that our faith has always tried to teach us. We will need it in the months ahead.

William Whyte

Abide in my love – a reflection

"As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love."

John 15:9-17

Recently I listened to an interview with a man from Alabama named Ray Hinton. His is a powerful story. An innocent man, he was wrongfully and spuriously convicted of murder and sentenced to death. The detectives on the case, the jury, the judge, none were interested in the fact that he had a solid alibi for the time of the crime, or that there was no evidence linking him to the victim or the event. His only "crime," it seems, was being a black man in the south.

Ray spent 30 years in prison, 28 of these on death row. For the first 2 years he was angry with God and in protest refused to speak a word to anyone. His 2 years of silent fury were broken by compassion: his cell-mate was weeping and Ray

asked, "what's wrong?" The man replied that he had just got word that his mother had died. Ray forgot himself and tried to comfort his grieving companion. As he did so it dawned on him how grateful he was for his own mother, whose love he described as "unconditional."

Ray also experienced unconditional love from an incredible friend, Lester, who had been his buddy since childhood. Lester drove a 6-hour round trip every week without fail to visit Ray, making the journey after finishing his night shift. Somehow, love broke Ray open. It became a kind of calling to do all he could to ensure that the prisoners he saw being taken past his cell to the death chamber were shown love, unconditional love, something some of them had lived their whole lives up until that point without ever knowing. He led the other prisoners in creating a ruckus of noise, banging on anything to hand, to ensure that the individual would still hear his friends' love for him on the other side of those terrible doors.

Finally, Ray's own cause was taken up by a tenacious lawyer, his case reopened, his conviction overturned by the US Supreme Court and he was released. He might have been a bitter man. 30 years of his life, and much else besides, had been stolen from him. But hearing him speak I was left with an impression of a man filled with irrepressible gratitude and joy.

Since his release, Ray has dedicated himself to campaigning for the abolition of the death penalty. There is nothing a human can do, Ray believes, that would put them beyond the reach of love. Through those who loved him back to life Ray discovered, and now exudes, the unconditional love of God.

I know this is a rather long story, but it seems to illustrate beautifully these words of Jesus from John's Gospel. I remember at one time feeling puzzled and frustrated by Jesus' love commandment. How can love be commanded? I could understand being commanded to be gentle or patient;

these things can potentially be accomplished through self-discipline and sheer act of will. But love? Love is a spontaneous, unbidden thing. Love is a response.

And therein lies the solution. Jesus tells his followers repeatedly, "abide in my love". If we think we have to earn God's love by being loving ourselves, we have it all back to front. God's love for us is unconditional. When we learn this, when we lean into it, when we live in it, love begets love. Just like the picture of the vine and the branches, it's God's love that resources and enables us to love. It was God's love, mediated by Lester and his mother, that enabled Ray to love.

May we, too, abide in and be bearers of love.

*Cara Heafey
Associate Minister
Summertown URC*

The above reflection was one of a series of weekly lectionary-based reflections sent out to members of our three URC congregations during lockdown. The interview referred to is a podcast episode which can be found here: <https://katebowler.com/podcasts/anthony-ray-hinton-the-sun-does-shine/>

Oxford Welcomes Refugees

There are moments when all but the hardest-hearted are shocked by a news item and moved to help refugees and asylum seekers: whether by a photo, such as that of the lifeless Syrian toddler, Alan Kurdi, wearing a bright-red T-shirt and shorts, washed up on a beach, near Turkey's fashionable resort town of Bodrum; or by the news, breaking as I write, of the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan

The resulting compassion and desire for change does, for a while at least, challenge and even modify a little the Government's attempts to create an increasingly hostile

environment towards those people fleeing violence, persecution, poverty and the effects of climate change but unable to take a 'safe, official route' because there are so few.

The News doesn't stay new for long so if the shock and compassion we feel is to lead to real and lasting change, it's crucial that those who belong to a faith group remember and actively embrace the tradition of 'welcoming the stranger' and of justice being the public face of love. The Judeo-Christian tradition has so much to offer here that we can celebrate. Think of Ruth's solidarity with Naomi; of Scripture's reminders that in welcoming the stranger we may be entertaining angels unawares; of Jesus's response to the rich young man's question 'who is my neighbour'. And look beyond the Church too for signs of the Spirit moving with people from all faiths, and none, in so many ways today in Oxford. We need to catch up.

In recent years Oxford Council agreed to resettle many Syrian families under the Home Office Vulnerable Persons Refugee Scheme with voluntary groups such as Asylum Welcome and Refugee Resource and others providing invaluable help with language learning, job seeking, etc.

It has also been possible for community groups to apply to resettle additional families through the Home Office and UN Community Sponsorship scheme, something Blackfriars has done with great success. Inspired by their experience, another group, 'Oxford Welcomes Refugees' was set up last November involving people from St Michael's and other churches in the Partnership, as well as some attached to no faith group. We expect to receive a family from Iraq before November. The planning has been hard, sustained, work and the ongoing, day to day, practical support for this family over the next 2 years will be too.

We couldn't have got off the ground financially without the extraordinary generosity of so many people including members of the Partnership, an Exmoor group of Churches

known to Michael Taylor, and friends far and wide who responded to our fundraising Birthday Challenges. Over £20,000 has now been raised. The advice, training and help with form-filling provided by 'Sponsor Refugees' (an arm of Citizens UK) has been equally vital. So too has been the determination of the planning group to keep going through lockdown's monthly zoom meetings without ever meeting in person.

It's worth stopping to consider 'What are the benefits of this kind of project beyond helping one refugee family out of the many thousands desperate to find a safe place to live?' For the family, there is the friendship and quality of support towards independence they will receive from a group of people committed to helping them navigate the bureaucratic intricacies of applying for benefits, registering with the job centre, local GP, etc, as well as learning a new language and recovering from the losses and difficulties they have been through in recent years. For the Sponsorship Group there is the experience of getting to know this family as people like us with much to offer, but who have been through a very difficult and painful time and difficult transition most of us have not had to encounter.

I suspect and hope that this meeting of equals and mutual enrichment will lead many of us to become much more active and persistent in challenging the assumptions underlying the proposed 'Nationality and Borders Bill (often described as the 'Anti-Immigration' Bill) as profoundly unchristian.

If you would be interested in having a conversation about how Christians and people in general can work together to make our Government's Immigration policy and planning more compassionate, humane and just, do let me know on aspeberdy@aol.com or oxfordwelcomesrefugees@gmail.com.

*Alyson Peberdy
Chair 'Oxford Welcomes Refugees'*

COP26 – why it matters

From 2nd to 13th November the world's attention will be briefly on COP26 in Glasgow. It is the annual Conference of the Parties (i.e. member countries) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). All 197 Parties have (in theory) an equal voice in the process of negotiating the Convention and the agreements made in Paris in 2015. Nearly all Parties have made commitments to mitigate the impacts of climate change through reducing carbon emissions, and to build their resilience through adapting to climate change, but inevitably the impacts of climate change and their capability to respond vary hugely. Richer countries like the UK, which developed on the back of a coal-fired industrial revolution, are the historically biggest emitters and poorer countries like Mali and the Maldives who emit the least carbon are feeling the effects of climate change related drought and sea level rise.

For a number of years I led a UK government funded programme to assist the developing countries to work in groups (e.g. Least Development Countries, Small Island Developing States) to improve their voice and negotiating capacity in front of the dominant technical and political capacity of the US, EU (and UK used to negotiate as part of and often led the EU block) and Chinese delegations to the COPs. This, together with promises of finance to assist adaptation and a transition to low carbon development, helped secure the fair deal in Paris six years ago.

Since then the focus has been on developing the Paris Rulebook – how countries will monitor and hold each other to account to reduce emissions – and importantly on driving action. The relentless accumulation of carbon in the atmosphere, rising temperatures and more frequent climate related disasters have now changed the narrative of rich emitters and poor victim nations to one in which we are all in this together – for example the former President of the

Maldives expressed condolences and solidarity to Germany after the terrible losses from recent flooding in the Rhineland.

In Glasgow the focus inside the negotiation rooms will continue to be around implementation of the many strands of work agreed in Paris and subsequently. Outside, it will be around accelerating action through every sector of society – business, finance, city and national governments, even the Arts, will be pledging to get to net zero and build their resilience. Citizen voice to encourage leaders to make difficult decisions to combat climate change is key. This doesn't have to be through school strikes or Extinction Rebellion but it can be about demanding our banks and pension fund managers stop investing in fossil fuels or lobbying our MPs to legislate for higher ambition. Historically COP host countries have accelerated their actions on climate change and let's hope that the UK does the same.

I will be going to COP26 in Glasgow with a number of objectives: I will be representing my colleagues based in developing countries many of whom are unable to share their concerns and travelling at this time. Virtual facilities will be in place but we know that isn't as effective as physical presence. I am also keen to see the promises of climate finance to assist the adaptation of the world's 500 million smallholder farmers realised. Without steps to build their resilience to climate change, the lives and livelihoods of millions of women and men, and the efforts of Opportunity International and so many others will be at risk.

Sam Bickersteth

The Summertown, Wolvercote, and Wytham Church Partnership

The Church Partnership is the successor to the Ecumenical Parish of Wolvercote with Summertown and expresses a desire to continue to share our Christian lives. In 2007, the

churches in the Ecumenical Parish, St Peter's Wolvercote, St Michael and All Angels Summertown, and Summertown United Reformed Church, along with Wolvercote Baptist Church, made a commitment to each other in the Partnership Covenant. Last year All Saints Wytham were welcomed into the partnership, although a public welcome has been delayed by the Pandemic. The Partnership's full name is now the Summertown, Wolvercote and Wytham Church Partnership. There are a number of features of our churches' lives that are Partnership activities. Among them are the Coffee Cafés, the Pavilion Service, the shared Christmas Card, the Advent Carol Service, Christian Aid, Traidcraft and not least this magazine! The Partnership has a link with St Chad's Parish, Taung in South Africa.

The Partnership Covenant, which is renewed every 7 years, is due for renewal this year. The Partnership Enabling Group, senior representatives from each denomination and from Churches Together in Oxfordshire, have reviewed the agreement which remains essentially the same.

In the Partnership Covenant we express our underlying unity in Christ and commit ourselves and our churches:

- (a) To continue to co-operate with each other, in search of the unity for which Christ prayed and in shared evangelism and service to the world.
- (b) To engage in joint worship, prayer and study, so that we may know and value each other and seek God's will for His people.
- (c) To work together where appropriate in pastoral, social and evangelistic outreach into our community.
- (d) To monitor progress and co-ordinate decision making about existing and future joint activities and publicity through a meeting three times per year of a Partnership Enabling Group, comprising the ministers and two lay representatives appointed by and from each participating congregation. When representatives cannot attend, the church may send someone in their stead.

- (e) To share costs arising from Partnership activity in the proportions agreed by the Partnership Enabling Group.
- (f) To consult with the other churches over the appointment of new ministers as far as is reasonably possible and consonant with denominational procedures, and to ensure that the relevant church profile sent to prospective candidates includes a copy of the Covenant and a positive statement concerning the existence and nature of the Partnership.
- (g) To recognise each other's Ministers and Eucharist, so that ministers may preside at the Eucharist in the church of a different denomination.
- (h) To hold joint services of Confirmation and Reception into Membership.
- (i) To be known as the Summertown, Wolvercote and Wytham Church Partnership.
- (j) To review this local covenant no longer than seven years after it has been signed, with the help of one or more external facilitators if considered appropriate.

The renewed covenant will be signed and All Saints formally welcomed into the partnership at a service on Sunday 24 October 2021, 6.30pm at All Saints, Wytham. The Archdeacon of Oxford, The Venerable Jonathan Chaffey, will be preaching. The service is beginning to take shape and it is hoped there will be a Partnership Choir. There will be further details about the service nearer the time.

Clare Leal
Chair of the Partnership Enabling Group

Book reviews

Rage and Hope, 75 Prayers for a Better World:

Celebrating 75 years of Christian Aid

SPCK, ISBN 9780281086238 £9.99

This is not a straightforward book of prayers. These prayers come out of the real-life experiences of Christian activists, theologians and church leaders from all parts of the world. Words of introduction accompany most prayers and their authenticity may often make us feel uncomfortable. However they do give us a very good picture of the many things that have been done by Christian Aid and its partners throughout the world. Prayers come from different people in different situations and some may speak more directly to us than others.

The prayers are set out under four headings:

Remember – bearing witness to the injustice that causes our rage and lament. Current and recent events provide much material for this section.

Resist – how our long lament is an act of resistance in the struggle for justice. We must not lie down in acceptance of all that is happening.

Resolve - making clear that our prayers are to encourage us to be part of the solution.

Reimagine – awakening hope-inspired possibilities for the world. This must spring from our faith in a God who loves us all with a love that will never let us go, a God who created everything that is and for whom **all** things are possible.

While *rage* at the state of the world is not difficult, *hope* is another matter. However this issue of *The Quarterly* includes two contributions, highly relevant to the theme of hope. Cara Heafey's story of Ray Hinton tells how God's infinite love, conveyed through the actions of quite a few people, raised Ray from deep despair, following the grave injustice he suffered, to a new and active life campaigning for the end of

the death penalty in America. More locally, Alyson Peberdy's article on 'Oxford Welcomes Refugees' gives us reason for hope, especially with the knowledge that this is but one of some 300 such schemes in this country, hope that good things can indeed happen, that the love of God is alive and active among us.

When we pray 'Your Kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as in heaven' this is not only a commitment by us to work for this end but it is also a statement of faith that this is God's will and it will be achieved.

John Harding

Living Faithfully in the Time of Creation edited by Kathy Galloway & Katharine Preston
ISBN 978 1849528016

This is a Wild Goose publication from the Iona Community, an ecumenical Christian community with its origins and mainland base in Glasgow. One of the many aspects I was very impressed with whilst working for the Community on Iona as a volunteer was the unwavering and practical commitment of its members to justice and peace and care and integrity for God's creation. With COP 26 in mind, this book comprises (a) lectionary reflections covering 12 weeks from mid-September; (b) some essays from different parts of the world describing the impact that climate change is having on the place in which they live, the area of work/activism they are involved in and their own personal motivation behind their work; (c) a service of worship in preparation for the COP26 Climate Change Conference being held in November; (d) liturgical resources – a perhaps somewhat clunky description for a cornucopia of prayers and meditations; and (e) some hymns, songs and chants.

There is much to read and think about arising from this book and for the price of £14.99 it packs a punch, on occasions uses

humour to make a serious point (of which there are many) and is a compelling read. And, as a gentle hint to our own Partnership ministers, the editors of the book say they hope it will be of use for worship leaders and preachers as well as for individual reflection and prayer.

For further information on this book go to www.ionabooks.com or, if easier, try asking about it at Daunts in Summertown.

Ann Stedman

Partnership News

Caring for creation

Festival of arts in the time of climate change

Tuesday 5 – Sunday 10 October 2021
at St Michael & All Angels Church Summertown OX2 7ES

The climate emergency weighs heavily on us all. It is already having devastating effects on deprived communities around the world and threatening future generations. Nature with its abundant life is also severely at risk. As a result, we are increasingly urged to take action, to reduce our carbon footprint and live more sustainable lives in order to avoid disaster.

This arts festival is designed to raise awareness of these issues, to remind us of the beauty of the world around us and to fall in love again with what might be lost. The focal point of the festival is an Exhibition of Paintings and Drawings, with a programme of events to highlight environmental issues and the need to care for creation. We are reminded of our fragile world and what we can do to save it through art, music, poetry, talks on gardening and trees, ending with a special service and meditation.

No booking is required and the exhibition and events are free. Covid precautions will be in place.
Enquiries 07968 231173

Licensing of the Revd Kate Tuckett

We are delighted to announce that the licensing of the Revd Kate Tuckett, the new vicar for St Peter's, Wolvercote, and All Saints, Wytham, will take place at 7.30 pm on Thursday 16 September at St Peter's church, First Turn, Oxford OX2 8AQ. The service will be conducted by the Bishop of Oxford, The Rt Revd Stephen Croft, and will be attended by the Deputy Lieutenant of Oxfordshire, Mr Peter Bennett-Jones, in addition to senior clergy from the Diocese, the local clergy team and members of both parishes. Some Covid restrictions will be eased, but we are recommending the wearing of masks.

Kathy Day-Dawson, Lorna Logan
Wendy Sobey and Edward Wates
Churchwardens

The Summertown, Wolvercote, and Wytham Church Partnership

unites in covenanted relationship:
St Michael and All Angels, Summertown;
Summertown United Reformed Church;
St Peter's, Wolvercote;
Wolvercote Baptist Church;
and All Saints', Wytham

Clergy: Revd Gavin Knight *St Michael's*

Tel 07833 251939

Revd Pauline Main *URC*

Tel 513581

from September:

Revd Kate Tuckett *St Peter's and All Saints*

Revd Vivien Edwards *Wolvercote Baptist Church*

Tel 790755

St Michael's Churchwardens:

Irim Sarwar

Keith Lewis

URC Church Secretary:

Vacant – contact Pauline Main

St Peter's Churchwardens:

Wendy Sobey

Edward Wates

Wolvercote Baptist Church Secretary:

John Harper

All Saints' Churchwardens:

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