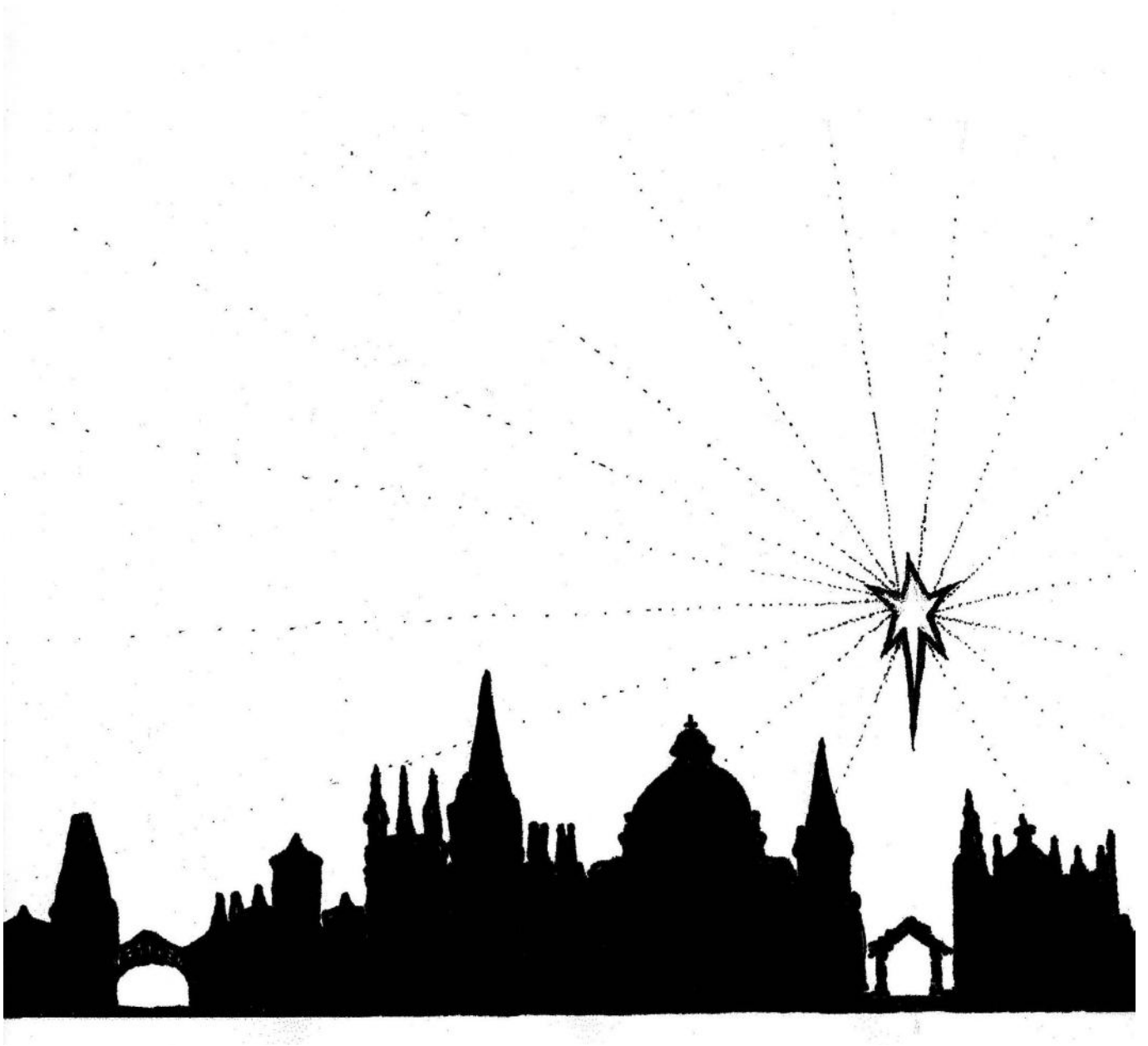


Wesley Memorial *news*

The magazine from Wesley Memorial Church, Oxford | Christmas 2015



Where is home?

The Manse, 26 Upland Park Road, Oxford

Dear Friends,

In the accepted seasonal narrative, beloved of advertisers and the purveyors of Christmas cards, 'home' and 'Christmas' go together as naturally as sage and onion, holly and ivy or Morecombe and Wise. Christmas is celebrated around the festive hearth, and scattered families reunite, as everyone goes 'home'. But, as this issue of *Wesley Memorial News* explores, the reality of 'home' is very much more complicated than the simple seasonal narrative suggests. Our sense of belonging may pull us in different directions, and 'home' may be elusive, transitory, or uncomfortable.

There is no Christmas story in John's Gospel. But John's profound reflection on the mystery of the incarnation is a staple of most Carol Services and is often read on Christmas Day: *'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.'* Towards the end of this wonderful passage, John expresses the presence of God-in-Christ in the world in this way: *'the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth.'* The Word became flesh and lived among us. In Jesus Christ, God took up residence among us: God made his home with us.

At Christmas God comes to be at home with us, in order that we may be at home with him. Not in the sense of cosy domesticity, but rather in terms of a restored relationship and an assurance of love and acceptance. Part of the human condition is a deep dis-ease with the way things are; an unsettlement, and a longing for something better. Christians see in this dissatisfaction evidence of the fracturing of the relationship between God and human beings, expressed in story form in the legend of the Fall in Genesis 3. God's way of mending the broken relationship and of restoring us to our proper selves is to enter our world in a new and unique way in the person of Jesus Christ, to share our life and our experience, to bear the effects of our estrangement and to make healing and new life possible for us all.

And at Christmas the presence of God hallows ordinary life and the things of everyday. The message of the incarnation, and of God being 'at home' with us, should make us wary of denigrating this world and looking always to a brighter tomorrow somewhere else. Some strands of Christian thinking have dismissed our present existence as a 'vale of tears', and have encouraged believers to struggle on until taken 'home' to heaven. Bible passages which speak of us as 'strangers' and 'pilgrims' on earth lend weight to this, but other writers remind us that God's purpose is to renew the entire creation, and that he is deeply involved with the world as it is now. When we work to improve our common home, we are working with the grain of God's purpose.

The Christmas story reminds us that God-in-Christ comes to a real home and not to an ideal home. Jesus is born to parents coping with many strains and stresses, and in a society familiar with conflict and injustice. If we are troubled and distressed by the state of the world, or struggling with life's challenges, or simply finding that the message of Christmas cheer rings hollow this year, we can be assured that God hears us, and feels for us, and continues to hold us in his love.

Whatever your circumstances, and wherever you are 'at home', may you know the loving presence and peace of God this Christmas.

Yours in Christ,

Martin Wellings.

Editorial

When we met to plan this issue in October the refugee crisis was at its height. Television screens revealed the weary trek across Europe of those who seemed to have lost everything. It was obvious that for these tired travellers 'home' was a hope or a memory. Often it was merely a difficult compromise in an alien land.

So we thought about Christmas – about Mary and Joseph in transit, and the birth of Jesus in a stable found by chance, perhaps never to be seen again. Here too people are uprooted and places of belonging are transitory.

And what about ourselves, as time passes and life compels us to move on? 'Where is home?' A big question for the festive season – and some articles of great wisdom to help you answer it!

Thank you to our wonderful contributors, and a Happy Christmas and best wishes to all from the *Wesley Memorial News* editorial team.

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Mary's homecoming

I suppose, on the way back, the sky was different.
 Had the shepherds' songs drifted to
 distant fields, new days, old work?
 Did you think about the wise men far away
 rejoicing at the signs they said
 your life declared?
 Was Gabriel just a memory torn by
 sleepless nights, the journey, disbelief?
 I wonder if your tired feet fitted then
 the footsteps of unconscious faith
 you found yourself retracing,
 braver times, brimful of praise,
 of wonder.

And when you reached the place you had called home,
 I wonder if you sometimes sought
 a silent space away from husband, child,
 to hear the echoes –
 while, above the rooftops, skies
 revealed a bigger world
 in which you trembled
 as you tried to
 whisper:
 'Here am I'.

Fiona Macdonald

Coming home?

Jesus and 'Home' in Luke's Gospel

When I was first invited to write this piece and as I've been thinking about it, I've found myself humming a couple of hymn tunes and singing their accompanying words. Both are from *Hymns and Psalms*: 154 (Margaret), *Thou didst leave thy throne and thy kingly crown*; and 173 (Love Unknown), *My song is love unknown*, and especially the words of verse 6. I invite you to look them up before you continue reading, and then to have a Bible handy to check my references.

As we enter the new lectionary year at the beginning of Advent (Year C in the Revised Common Lectionary, and so with a special emphasis on the Gospel of Luke in the coming months), it's worth remembering that many of the most familiar of the so-called 'Christmas stories' or 'birth and infancy narratives' – and those with an emphasis on home – are to be found only in Luke's Gospel (chapters 1 and 2): the parallel annunciations and births of John the Baptist and Jesus; Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem, the home of David, because of the Roman census; the birth of Jesus in an out-house "because there was no room for them in the inn"; the return to "their home town of Nazareth in Galilee" after fulfilling the requirements of the Law following the birth of a first-born son; and a visit to the Temple in Jerusalem when Jesus was twelve years old and when he asked his puzzled parents, "Didn't you know that I had to be in my Father's house?"

There's a puzzle here isn't there? We talk so glibly about 'the incarnation' and Jesus making his home amongst us as a human being, but where is Jesus's true 'home' and, on the evidence of this gospel, would we really want to offer him a warm welcome into our own homes? He may have experienced refugee status and done a lot of travelling in his earliest years but it seems also that as an adult he could be a prickly guest and one who generated controversy in people's homes. We might consider his visits to the homes of Simon the Pharisee (7:36-50), Martha and Mary (10:38-42), and Zacchaeus (19:1-10). I don't get the feeling that these were 'comfortable' occasions, and this leads me

to ask the question: would I really be comfortable to host such a guest, even if only for the length of time of a shared meal?

Luke tells us that Jesus was brought up in Nazareth, yet "prophets are never welcomed in their home town" and the people there "meant to throw him over the cliff" of the hill on which the town was built after his controversial sermon in the synagogue. His home town had become a place of rejection (4:16-30) and his former neighbours weren't too sure what to make of their home-grown celebrity who had become a peripatetic teacher, healer and exorcist. Where was his true home? Jesus tells would-be followers that, "Foxes have holes, and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lie down and rest" and there is some uncomfortable teaching about family duties and responsibilities (9:58-62).

He tells stories that are set in homes: looking for a lost coin (15:8-10) sits comfortably with us but what about the challenge of the behaviour and attitudes of the son who stayed at home (15:11-32, but especially vv.28-30) and may be myself?

At the end of his life Jesus will be asked by a penitent thief, on a cross next to his, to remember him (the thief) when he (Jesus) comes in to his kingdom (23:39-43).

So where is Jesus's home in Luke's Gospel? The family home town had become a place of rejection; as a wandering teacher he relied upon the hospitality of others in their homes; but does he also come from a kingdom? And would I/we want to welcome him into my/our home, and would it necessarily be a 'nice' occasion? Where do his followers find their true homes? Perhaps (hopefully!) these things will become clearer to us as we journey through the third Gospel together over the coming lectionary year.

*Robert Bates,
Methodist Chaplain at Oxford Brookes University*

Home – the current housing crisis

The housing crisis is of course about houses – but even more it's about people: the family struggling to meet next month's mortgage payment; the young family renting a rundown flat; the children living in temporary accommodation, forced to change schools every time they move. The lack of affordable, decent homes is affecting families across the whole country and Oxford is no exception, in fact it's one of the worst areas.

Here's how:

Home ownership: It's almost impossible for young people to buy a home, particularly in the high-cost south east. The situation is not helped when houses are used as an investment rather than a home. On average, according to the Office of National Statistics, house prices in 2014 were nearly 9 times people's incomes. In Oxford, it's a staggering 16.1 times and the average house price is nearly £427,000.

More families are renting from private landlords: Shelter says there are more than nine million renters in private rented accommodation, including almost 1.3 million families with children. Private renting can be unstable, with rising rents, hidden fees and eviction a possibility. And it can mean living in bad conditions – one third of private rented homes in England fail to meet the Decent Homes Standard. UK rents are the highest in Europe. On average, UK private renters pay almost 40% of their income in rent.

Levels of homelessness are rising: Ministry of Justice data shows that in

2014, 42,000 homes were repossessed by landlords in England and Wales, a rate of 115 a day. Shelter says the number of homeless households has risen to more than 50,000 a year. More than 2,000 people a year are sleeping rough.

Welfare Reform changes: Recent tightening of benefits as part of the Government's austerity measures have made it even worse. There's the bedroom tax, which reduces housing benefit for social housing tenants for 'extra' bedrooms. There's the benefit cap, which limits the amount of benefits any family can be paid. This will reduce next April to a max £20,000 pa out of London, which will be a major problem in high housing cost areas such as Oxford. There will be tenants with insufficient benefits to cover their rent. Local Authorities will be making more housing offers to families outside the areas they have grown up in. Oxford City Council is reported as already doing this to places such as Birmingham and Cardiff.

There is a housing crisis – on that everyone agrees. Will the Government's recent proposals make matters better or worse?

Extending the Right to Buy to housing association tenants will benefit some better off tenants who are already well housed, but many people think it could lead to an overall reduction in social housing.

The Government's enforced reduction in social housing rents of 1% pa for the next 4 years, will result in Housing Associations and Local Authorities having less money

to build new housing! It will also mean less money for social landlords to manage the houses they have and to build strong communities.

Here are some arguments in favour of recent Government proposals (with thanks to Derek):

The Starter Homes proposals could help more young people to buy. Purchases are restricted to homes up to £250,000 (the same limit as the Help to Buy ISA) and to first-time buyers under 40.

The Government's proposals on Right to Buy will allow the Housing Association to use the cash receipt and a government grant to replace the home that is lost.

Housing Associations will be able to charge their better off tenants (earning over £30,000 outside London) near market rents.

So this shows how complex it all is. What can we do? We suggest 3 things:

- Try to understand the situation so that we are in a better position to argue for change. Good websites for gathering information include www.shelter.org.uk and www.housingjustice.org.uk. Follow the Housing and Planning Bill through its stages through Parliament and lobby your MP appropriately.
- Join in Shelter and Housing Justice campaigns.
- Support projects in Oxford such as Gatehouse and the Night Shelter that help people who are homeless.

Wendy Spray and Derek Rawson

What is a home?

What is the chief difference between a house and a home?

One writer to the papers complained of attempts to push her into somewhere smaller as a ‘dismaying prospect’: ‘This is our home, with all the contents and memories accrued over the years.’ I always felt a kind of envy of those many people who lived their lives in a single place – like my grandparents – and who grew up surrounded by people they knew, and for whom ‘home’ meant something rooted in a locality. Tessa Hadley’s novel, *The Past*, has something of this: the house where the family grew up and now can’t let go, even though the parents are dead, and the wallpaper is faded and damp-stained. For me, uprooted from Gloucester at the age of three, and going on to live in Maidstone, Stonehouse, Lampeter, Oxford, Canterbury, Retford, Nottingham, Birmingham, Hull and finally Oxford again – none of these has the sense of home. They mark stages in my professional development, but without ever becoming more significant than that.

This was brought home to me forcibly when Margaret was diagnosed with Alzheimers about ten years ago. At first she had clear memories of where she grew up in Rochdale, and could sing songs of the time. Later she had to be reminded with photographs of the places where we had lived. And now, in St Andrew’s, she is thoroughly confused about where home is: in Bankside, where we lived for some years together, or at St Andrew’s where she is happy, or in Hull, where we lived the longest, and where the picture on the wall serves as a reminder. None of these is ‘home’ for her.

Let’s look at what two very different poets have made of this. John Clare had to leave the Helpston cottage where he grew up, and where the country was etched on his mind, in order to rent a larger, more spacious, house. But Northborough – only three miles away – never became home for him. In a poem of the time, the recurrent phrase is, “I miss” That poem, *The Flitting (On leaving the cottage of my birth)*, begins:

*I’ve left mine own old home of homes,
Green fields and every pleasant place;
The summer like a stranger comes,
I pause and hardly know her face.*

In Northborough ‘all is strange and new’ and ‘I feel the loss from home and friends’. He sits in his familiar corner chair and dreams of past happiness, with ‘home bred pictures’. Nothing could make plainer the difference between house and home.

‘Home is so sad’, reflects Philip Larkin, conscious of how his father’s death has put an end to any hopes of change. In the poem, sparked off by visiting his widowed mother at Loughborough, he looks at the house and reflects that ‘It stays as it was left.’ Some of the phrases he cut out in draft, images of ‘the carpet bleached in squares, Furniture, kicked, not matching’, but the tone is fixed in the final lines:

*And turn again to what it started as,
A joyous shot at how things ought to be,
Long fallen wide. You can see how it was:
Look at the pictures and the cutlery.
The music in the piano stool. That vase.*

The sadness of the ‘joyous shot’ is that it is finally inadequate.

What these poets – and my own experience – demonstrate, is that our sense of what home means for us varies for each person, and out of those myriad experiences, our moral judgements grow. That is one reason that there are so many different attitudes to immigrants, who have left their homes or been driven from them. There is a huge gap between the suffering that we see through television, the ‘news’, and our ability as individuals to do anything to help the sufferers. Many people gave generously to help the victims of destroyed houses, or those who had had to leave their homes behind, but as more and more disasters fill the screens we are increasingly pushed into the position of voyeurs. Part of our dissatisfaction with our leaders is that their agreements seem to do so little to change things. A house is not a home, but home is where the heart is, as the proverb says.

Robert Protherough

More thoughts on the question ‘Where is home?’

The title made me think of G.K.Chesterton’s poem *The house of Christmas*. Its last lines are: “*To the place where God was homeless and all men are at home*”. That is a pointer to the heart of this question.

But when the question is put to me, as it has often been, that’s not the expected answer. Rather it is asking for a geographical location. I have lived in eleven different houses in different locations, some more than once. In each we tried to make our home a safe, nurturing, comfortable and welcoming place.

But the title leads to more thoughts. In these days we are aware of many thousands of people who have left their

homes and are seeking shelter in other places. I cannot avoid the challenge to my sympathies, understanding and political opinions. Have I reacted with understanding, compassion and generosity?

I respect those in many countries who have met the challenge with practical offers to migrants and refugees. They need to be helped to live through the current dilemmas by those more fortunate, to be secure and comfortable.

I pray that we shall be able to live up to the challenge.

Mary Gilson

When I retired in 2012, my husband, Dave, and I moved to live in Abingdon. During our married life we have lived in numerous places occasioned by our employment – initially with Dave’s in Shrewsbury, Leigh-on-Sea and Oxford, and then mine in Lampeter and Derby.

I was born and brought up in Wellington in Shropshire and my paternal grandparents came from Welshpool, over the border in Wales. When I was asked to go as a probationer minister to Lampeter in Ceredigion, I found that Welsh people have an interesting perspective on place. When they ask you, “Where do you come from?” they do not mean, “Where have you just moved from?” but “Where do you come from originally?” or, “Where is your home town or village?”

Dave and I lived in Oxford for 29 years. Two of our children were born in the John Radcliffe Hospital and all three were born and brought up in the city.

We have lots of friends in Oxford and Oxfordshire and we know where places and things are to be found. Further, the Methodist Church in Oxford played a fundamental part in shaping my life – among other things I trained as a Local Preacher here, found employment at Wesley Memorial and candidated for the Methodist ministry.

Until we moved to Lampeter in 2001 our daughter, Alison, lived with us. Every six weeks or so from then on we used to make the long journey back to Oxford and then Abingdon, when she moved there, to see her.

Oxford, then, has been a constant source of reference in my life for so many years. When we moved back to Oxfordshire in 2012 it felt as if I was coming home – even though I was not born here!

Frances Blood,
Wesley Memorial Lay Worker,
responsible for its Open Church Policy,
1989-2001



Home is made by people

Growing up in a manse teaches you many things. But if there's one thing that all children of the manse learn, it's how to say goodbye! Having moved from Manchester to Taunton and then to Lincoln before I came up to study at Oxford, there is a touch of familiarity to the fact that I am now leaving Oxford to move to London. And, whilst the moving around for the families of Methodist ministers means that I find it difficult to identify a hometown, for the past four years Oxford has been my home. Firstly as a student and latterly working for the Circuit, Oxford has been a place I have made my own and that makes it difficult to leave!

Home is the community that we build together.

Nevertheless, when I preached on the theme of 'home' at Wesley Memorial in August, I suggested that home is not something that can be confined to a place. Home is made what it is by people. I am very grateful to the many people who have helped to make Oxford a home for me. I still remember the warm welcome I received here on my first Sunday as a student and it has been a joy to stay for an extra year to work both at Wesley Memorial and Cowley Road churches and to get to know so many people.

Just before I left Oxford I returned to my college to preach at Sunday evensong. The text was Ecclesiastes 11: *'Rejoice, young man, while you are young, and let*

your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. Follow the inclination of your heart and the desire of your eyes, but know that for all these things God will bring you into judgement.'

This was an appropriate text to preach on, as I said goodbye to one stage of my life and looked forward to another, because it says something about the home that we build for ourselves. It suggests that life is something to be enjoyed and that we must make the most of it but it also hints at life's finality. It reveals a God who grants us, whoever we are, a very great gift: the gift of living life now. And what wonderful possibilities are open to each of us, to make our time on earth useful, to use the gift of living life now to make life worth living for someone else: a smile when we'd prefer to turn our face away, a word of encouragement or affirmation when silence is the easier option, an outstretched hand of welcome or support when much is demanded of us elsewhere.

Home is the community that we build together. And the adventure that we set upon in our lives depends on a just protection of community, building one another up as well as securing ourselves, fulfilling the potential of the future, as well as holding fast the present.

So home is ours to make it what we dream of, but to do that we must live out the grace of acting alongside each other in community. To do that we must have courage to conceive our part within the adventure and go out and make those

small moments of change which can move the world, knowing that, though the future is unknown and its finality is something from which we can never escape, our place in building tomorrow can and will be its best part.

The theme of home is addressed at length by the American novelist Marilynne Robinson in her books centred on the town of Gilead, home to the two principal families that feature in the books. The novel Gilead is effectively a farewell letter written by the ageing minister, the Rev John Ames. John Ames knows that he will not live to see his son growing up and so the book explores his reconciliation with the past and his hope in the future. He ends by writing this:

'Theologians talk about a prevenient grace that precedes grace itself and allows us to accept it. I think there must also be a prevenient courage that allows us to be brave – that is, to acknowledge that there is more beauty than our eyes can bear, that precious things have been put into our hands and to do nothing to honour them is to do great harm. And therefore, this courage allows us, as the old men said, to make ourselves useful [...] I'll pray that you grow up a brave man in a brave country. I will pray you find a way to be useful.'

So home is made by people. It is a memory of the past, yes, but it is also a hope for a brave, generous, and useful future in which all of us can feel at home.

Robert Thompson

Home is where the heart is

As a 'child of the manse' I've moved around quite a bit. I was born in Brazil, living in Rio for the first year and a half of my life, from there we moved to Luton, then Birmingham, and finally London. When I was sixteen, we moved from the house we'd lived in for ten years, while my father had been stationed at Hinde Street. I was, it's fair to say, heartbroken, but it was a very interesting experience. My parents, being sensible, organised it so that we moved the day after coming back from a long holiday. We'd left for holiday with the house packed, and when we got back, several of the rooms, including my bedroom (which was a beautiful bright pink, or at least I thought it beautiful), had been painted to more neutral colours. That last night we slept in our house it didn't feel like home.

At the moment, I live something of a nomadic lifestyle, eight or nine weeks in Oxford, and then home for the holidays. Each time I return to my Oxford room, it feels empty, alien. I make my bed, I put up my keyboard, and my pictures and quickly it feels like home. It is my stuff that makes my room feel homely.

And yet, that seems a horribly materialistic thing to say, and I actually don't think it's quite right. When we came back from holiday and spent our last night in the Fairfax Road house it wasn't because everything was packed up that it didn't feel like home, it was because the packing up symbolised the moving of our family life. When I unpack at the start of term, it's not the fact that I'm unpacking that makes it homely, it's the intimate connection that stuff has to my family life. Almost everything I bring I bought with my parents, or grandparents, or was given by a friend. Home is not about the objects that you have, but the people that come with those objects. When my parents move church, several years from now, I will probably not live with them again. I hope that I will, in some ways, continue to see their house as my home. When you move quite a bit, neighbours change, you lose contact with friends, but those closest to you remain constant. Wherever they are is home.

Maddalena Leao

Moving house

We lived in our big house in Oxford for over forty years. 'Home' was a lively, noisy place filled first with babies and young children, then older ones practising music, dancing and entertaining friends, followed by teenagers – coming in late, working for exams, attending music school. It never became quiet because friends' teenage children came to live while their parents worked in Africa. And then – weddings followed by the arrival of grandchildren and finally little Natai from Ethiopia. The house became quiet – too large for just the two of us.

At last we decided to move, and parted with our house to a large family who we hope will get as much joy from it as we did. So now home is in Oundle, a small, lively market town where we live near daughter Jane and Steve the vicar. Home is now a smaller warm convenient house within walking and cycling distance of shops and churches. In order to shoe-horn ourselves into it we had to shed several car-loads of books, music, and possessions. However the removals men did

managed to get the old stone sink complete with four pillars into our new garden, and Anthony has his piano in the sitting room.

The neighbours were immediately friendly and helpful when we were struggling to shut the garage doors to conceal the stacks of unpacked boxes.

Finally, Church – always a focus in our lives and those of our family – for which we are thankful. We have made contact with the small friendly Methodist Chapel in Oundle, and the large lively Anglican church which we have visited over the past eight years (and seen our musicals performed). We are also fortunate that Kath & Jon and Mary & David are still in Oxford so we can return for visits whenever we feel the need to see you all!

Barbara and Anthony Eddy



Christmas at Home

Years and years ago, when I was a boy, when there were wolves in Wales, and birds the color of red-flannel petticoats whisked past the harp-shaped hills, when we sang and wallowed all night and day in caves that smelt like Sunday afternoons in damp front farmhouse parlours, and we chased, with the jawbones of deacons, the English and the bears, before the motor car, before the wheel, before the duchess-faced horse, when we rode the daft and happy hills bareback, it snowed and it snowed. But here a small boy says: "It snowed last year, too. I made a snowman and my brother knocked it down and I knocked my brother down and then we had tea."

"But that was not the same snow," I say. "Our snow was not only shaken from white wash buckets down the sky, it came shawling out of the ground and swam and drifted out of the arms and hands and bodies of the trees; snow grew overnight on the roofs of the houses like a pure and grandfather moss, minutely-ivied the walls and settled on the postman, opening the gate, like a dumb, numb thunder-storm of white, torn Christmas cards."

"Were there postmen then, too?"

"With sprinkling eyes and wind-cherried noses, on spread, frozen feet they crunched up to the doors and mittened on them manfully. But all that the children could hear was a ringing of bells." "You mean that the postman went rat-a-tat-tat and the doors rang?"

"I mean that the bells the children could hear were inside them."

"I only hear thunder sometimes, never bells."

"There were church bells, too."

"Inside them?"

"No, no, no, in the bat-black, snow-white belfries, tugged by bishops and storks. And they rang their tidings over the bandaged town, over the frozen foam of the powder and ice-cream hills, over the crackling sea. It seemed that all the churches boomed for joy under my window; and the weather-cocks crew for Christmas, on our fence."

from "A Child's Christmas in Wales" by Dylan Thomas, 1914-1953

Posada party!

"In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child."

Luke 2:1-5

In those few words, we read a journey that would have taken days. The journey between Nazareth and Bethlehem is 92 miles long. Normal walking pace, even with a camel or donkey, is 3 miles per hour so a traveller can usually walk 20 miles a day.

At that rate, the journey would have taken Joseph and Mary at least four to five days. It would have been a wearying journey for Joseph, but for Mary, heavily pregnant and due to give birth, soon it would have been very hard work, even if she was able to ride on a donkey!

It was early spring. In the Jordan Valley, which is below sea level, the temperatures would have been mild and pleasant but it would have been cold at night in the hills.

From Jericho's desert to Bethlehem is an uphill hike of 3,500 feet. How utterly exhausted Mary must have been and how anxious Joseph must have felt to find a comfortable room at the inn for Mary to rest in.

The Posada festival in Latin America remembers the journey made by Mary

and Joseph and their hunt for lodgings when they arrived. Posada is Spanish for “lodging” or “accommodation”. There are various types of festival, but they all include models of Mary and Joseph or people dressed up as these two travellers, and they all end in a party!

As part of Advent preparations at Wesley Memorial Church, we are sending models of Mary and Joseph out on a journey. During this season they will visit various places in the city centre and they will return to the Church in time for Carols for the City on Thursday 17 December at 5.30pm.

We hope that some church members will also offer Mary and Joseph a night’s accommodation with the opportunity to invite friends and neighbours round to celebrate during Advent.

There is a ‘Posada Pack’ available for anyone who is interested in hosting Mary and Joseph. Included in the pack is everything



from a Posada prayer for a coffee morning, to instructions for making a Posada Piñata and a number of party games.

Look out for the journeying couple as they travel through Oxford!

Janice Smith

Christmas

*The bells of waiting Advent ring,
The Tortoise stove is lit again
And lamp-oil light across the night
Has caught the streaks of winter rain.
In many a stained-glass window sheen
From Crimson Lake to Hooker’s Green.*

*The holly in the windy hedge
And round the Manor House the yew
Will soon be stripped to deck the ledge,
The altar, font and arch and pew,
So that villagers can say
‘The Church looks nice’ on Christmas Day.*

*Provincial public houses blaze
And Corporation tramcars clang,
On lighted tenements I gaze
Where paper decorations hang,
And bunting in the red Town Hall
Says ‘Merry Christmas to you all’ .*

*And London shops on Christmas Eve
Are strung with silver bells and flowers
As hurrying clerks the City leave
To pigeon-haunted classic towers,
And marbled clouds go scudding by
The many-steepled London sky.*

*And girls in slacks remember Dad,
And oafish louts remember Mum,
And sleepless children’s hearts are glad,
And Christmas morning bells say ‘Come!’
Even to shining ones who dwell
Safe in the Dorchester Hotel.*

*And is it true? and is it true?
The most tremendous tale of all,
Seen in a stained-glass window’s hue,
A Baby in an ox’s stall?
The Maker of the stars and sea
Become a Child on earth for me?*

*And is it true? For if it is,
No loving fingers tying strings
Around those tissued fripperies,
The sweet and silly Christmas things,
Bath salts and inexpensive scent
And hideous tie so kindly meant.*

*No love that in a family dwells,
No carolling in frosty air,
Nor all the steeple-shaking bells
Can with this single Truth compare –
That God was Man in Palestine
And lives today in Bread and Wine.*

John Betjeman
1906-1984

Knitting for Syria

Jane Austen said ‘There is nothing like staying at home for real comfort’ and as we head into the winter months, we can understand what she meant; that comfort and security we feel as we watch the rain and the snow fall, the wind blow while the weak winter sun hardly has time to warm the earth before the dark of the evening twilight chases it away.

However, as of October 2015, there are over 10 million refugees from the conflict in Syria. Four million people unable to go home at the end of the day, knowing that somewhere there is a place of safety, a place they have loved, a place with warm clothing and useful items – but they cannot go there.

It began in 2011 in the Syrian city of Deraa when locals took to the streets to protest after fifteen schoolchildren were arrested – and reportedly tortured – for writing anti-government graffiti on a wall. Now, however, other groups have



taken advantage of the unrest to further their own agendas and so there is no easy solution to the problem in Syria, and no sign of refugees being able to return to their homes (if they still exist!) in the immediate future.

The Knitting Together group have been meeting on Tuesday mornings to knit

(and crochet!) items to be sent to refugees in Syria. The group gather at Wesley Memorial at 10am for a couple of hours of enjoyable company, chatting while they work and pausing in the middle to pray and share biscuits and tea, or cakes made by one of the group.

While we enjoy a time of fellowship together, it is good to feel that we are able to use our skills to do something for the people who have been forced out of their homes. We have also been joined by knitters in Watlington, Chipping Norton and Banbury. The items will be delivered to a charity who will take them across to the refugees along with medical help and food aid.

“How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?” 1 John 3:17

Janice Smith



News from Phab

We are delighted with the news that Mary Lines, Co-ordinator of Oxford Phab, is a joint winner of the Paul Hope Award 2015, along with Jackie Ames (Unity 70 Phab), who is pictured here with Mary. The presentation was made at the House of Lords on Thursday 8 October. This award is made annually, together with a bursary of £1000 for the recipients' clubs.

Helen Williams, Chair of Oxford Phab, nominated Mary for the award for all her contributions to Oxford Phab, Phab South East and Phab Nationally over many years. See www.phab.org.uk and www.oxford-phab.paladyn.org for more details.

"Whilst there is always a strong committee working for Oxford Phab, it is Mary who is the overall co-ordinator for all the activities, trips and holidays. She ensures these can be accessed by all and very much in keeping with the Phab ethos of encouraging people of all abilities to come together on equal terms.



...Above all, it is Mary's enthusiasm that has enriched the lives of Oxford Phab members and has been the secret success of the club for so many years."

Obituary – Joyce Newman

1924 – 2015

Joyce Newman was born in Oxford in May 1924. Her family had deep roots in Oxford Methodism: her grandfather was one of the stonemasons who worked on the building of Wesley Memorial in the 1870s. Joyce was baptised at Walton Street Wesleyan Methodist church, and she started coming to Wesley Memorial in her twenties. Thereafter she served as JMA Secretary, was a member of the Wesley Guild and of the Tuesday Afternoon Fellowship, and was a flower-arranger, towel-washer, after-service coffee-maker and helper at countless church teas, garden parties, lunches and many other events.

In her professional life Joyce trained at the Schools of Technology, Art and Commerce in Oxford, passed the Civil



Service entrance examinations, and worked as a telegraphist. She married Robert (Bob) Newman in 1951, and they lived in Kingston Road, and then in Wolvercote, tending their garden and allotment, and supporting the local Labour Party and the Royal British Legion.

Bob's sudden death in 1996 was a devastating blow to Joyce, and, although supported by her family and friends, she remained bereft. Gradually age and ill-health slowed her down, and a diagnosis of dementia was made in 2011. Joyce spent two years

at the Iffley Care Home, and died there, very peacefully, on 25 October.

Martin Wellings

Open Doors update

Homes have to be adapted over time to meet the changing needs of the occupants and our spiritual home at Wesley Memorial is no exception.

Our Halls were built in 1932 and, whilst they have given us yeoman service since then, our Vision Group Report of Advent 2003 pointed the way to improvements to meet the changing needs of those whom we serve, especially during the week.

We have spent a long time in our planning and fundraising (Church Council first approved the Project in March 2009) and at long last we are making a start on **Phase Two** of the building work which comprises:

- a new green kitchen of 24sq m
- a new gas supply to the green kitchen
- a new upper meeting room of 50 sq m
- refurbished teaching rooms including

new double glazed windows, new flooring and lighting and dry lining internally to walls

- a new podium
- a new store off the Hall with access for maintenance to the City Wall
- a new Hall floor with service ducts around the perimeter
- insulation to the Hall roof
- redecoration throughout the Hall and premises to the rear.

Church Council agreed the details at its meeting in September 2015:

	£	
<i>Building Contract</i>	527,879	<i>Council agreed that this figure could be varied by up to 10% if necessary after consultation with the Chair and Treasurer</i>
<i>Professional fees</i>	98,576	<i>This sum includes some fees already paid</i>
<i>Net total</i>	626,455	
<i>VAT @ 20%</i>	125,291	
<i>Total Phase Two cost</i>	<i>751,746</i>	
<i>Funded by</i>		
<i>Own funds</i>	126,597	<i>Includes 150 fundraising events that have raised £54,000 for Open Doors</i>
<i>The Methodist Connexion</i>	270,000	<i>Oxford Circuit, Northampton District and Fund for Property</i>
<i>External Trusts</i>	127,149	
<i>Wesley Memorial endowments</i>	100,000	
<i>Appeal to members</i>	100,000	<i>Loan of £90,000 also agreed by Oxford Circuit for cash-flow purposes</i>
<i>Appeal to members</i>	28,000	<i>Pledges already received from appeal to members</i>
<i>Total funds available</i>	<i>751,146</i>	



We have been given a grant of £40,000 for Phase Two from the Bradbury Foundation in Hong Kong!

The contract start date for our contractor, Benfield and Loxley, was 16 November with completion due on 13 May 2016. We realise that there will be much disruption to our weekday life especially during this period, and Nikos and the team of care-takers will be doing all they can to maintain our bookings and keep the inevitable dust down to the minimum. It is necessary to close the car park for members during the building contract as this area has become the contractor's secure site area for their Portakabins and storage of materials.

Our planning has had its ups and downs this summer and most recently we were disappointed to learn that WREN had declined our application for £50,000 and the Joseph Rank Trust withdrew their grant of £40,000 because we had failed to comply with their condition of completing Phase Two by 31 December 2015 (three years and nine months after they offered us the grant). However, these amounts have been replaced by our endowments and special appeal. We also received a visit from the Bradbury Foundation who has asked us to submit an application for £40,000 for Phase Two and we expect to hear about this by Christmas. For the first time we have been successful in our application to join the Big Give Christmas Challenge with the Reed Foundation offering us £2,500 if we can raise £5,000 by donating on-line on December 4th and 5th. We have applied for the fourth time to the Gannett Foundation (*Oxford Times*) for £10,000 towards fitting out the new Green Kitchen.

Meanwhile, we are continuing to work up our plans for completing the project. These comprise works to the John Wesley Room, including the new floor, refurbishment of the Blue Kitchen, provision of the Heritage Atrium and new Ladies WCs



The builders have begun! An Asbestos Removal Unit sits in the Hall. The door on the other side of the unit says 'Clean'!

on the ground floor, automatic doors to the ground floor spaces, refurbishment of the existing Gents toilets on the ground floor and the Ladies toilets on the first floor, replacement windows for the Christian Aid office (street frontage), solar panels on the main hall roof with a new external store behind the choir vestry and provision for a rainwater harvesting tank to flush toilets, subject to a detailed site survey (the original location for the tank was not suitable).



The builders have constructed a shed for the church to use as storage space during the building work.

In September, there was an opportunity to apply to the Connexion for a major grant for the Heritage Atrium and new Ladies WCs on the ground floor. Using the tender data from Benfield and Loxley, we estimate that this work will cost £375,000. If we are successful, we expect that this phase will follow on from the completion of Phase Two. If we are not, we will be considering our options about the content of the follow-on project, given the continuing success of the recent appeal and our further fundraising. In either case, our detailed proposals will be brought to Church Council in the New Year.

Whilst raising funds for improving our own spiritual home, we have also been mindful of those less fortunate, particularly in Burkina Faso. Five per cent of the funds raised locally have been given to our partner Christian Aid and to date has raised £13,500 which in turn is quadrupled by the EU to £54,000.

As we begin to see new life emerging from our old buildings, we hope and pray that all the activities that will take place on completion will further our mission in Oxford City Centre.

Derek Rawson

A groundbreaking moment



Mary, John and Jim with hard hats and pick-axes, ready to start the building work. Mary looks a little uncertain!

To mark the start of building work on site for the Phase Two works, we held our *Open Doors* Groundbreaking ceremony on Sunday 8 November. We sang a celebratory song and had a photo opportunity featuring the younger and older generations, represented by John and Jim McCulloch and Mary Ronaldson. A big thank you to them and to Alan Dobson for the photographs.



John Cammack and John McCulloch accompany the song of celebration written by Clare Matthews – “*Now we’re building our hope for the future*”.



Mary is looking more cheerful now, and Jim is ready to get to work with the pick-axe. Hang in there, John!

Now we’re building our hope for the future

to the tune CSB 38 ‘For I’m building a people of power’

(with thanks to Clare Matthews)

*Now we’re building our hope for the future,
And we’re building our trust in the past,
And we’re building our faith in a gospel
Which speaks out of a love that will last.*

*Bless our bricks, Lord,
Bless our mortar,
Bless our ceilings,
Bless our floors;
Send the fresh wind
Of your Spirit
Blowing through our
Open doors.*

*May this building be lit by compassion,
And be warm in its welcome for all;
May it offer both comfort and laughter,
May it ring with both challenge and call.
Open doors, Lord,
Open hearts, Lord,
Open lives, Lord,
To your grace;
May we witness
To your kingdom
As your people
In this place.*

Nikos Paplomatas, Church Manager, and Derek Rawson, *Open Doors* Steering Group Chair, are seen here at the pre-contract site meeting with the contractor and the design team. Photograph from the architect, Gray Baynes + Shew.



Year-end financial report

We have just completed the financial statements for the year ending 31 August 2015. Here are the highlights of the year:

Total income: £359,849 (2014: £384,842) and expenditure £371,391 (2014: 261,629)

The changes from 2014 to 2015 are largely because of *Open Doors* income being slightly less this year, and *Open Doors* expenditure paid in preparation for the building work starting this autumn (see below).

General funds: modest surplus of £3,370

This figure hides the fact that the lettings income from the rooms in the church has increased this year, but the income from our offerings towards general funds has decreased.

Church 'reserves' or savings

Our churches savings for general funds represent about 31% of one year's expenditure. This is normal for a charity of the size and activities of Wesley Memorial.

Open Doors: income £42,295 and expenditure £60,473

Fundraising has continued during the year, and previous donations were spent on a new stairlift between the ground and first floor of the building (Phase One), and on architects and

other professional fees in readiness for Phase Two of the project from 16 November

2015. Due to the success of the recent appeal, the funding is now fully in place for Phase Two.

We have also allocated some of the funds raised from the appeal, towards Phases Three and Four of *Open Doors*. We are continuing to apply for further external grants to support the work on future phases.

Property reserves

Our property reserves have increased to around £56,000. Some of this money will be used up this year to offset the lack of lettings income over the period of the building work.

The annual accounts have been independently examined by Peter Stevenson. A copy of the Trustees' report and financial statements is available on the church website at: www.wesleymem.org.uk/annualreports.htm.

Finally a big thank you for your continued financial support of the work of Wesley Memorial, both for our general funds and through the *Open Doors* project.

John Cammack, Church treasurer



Book review: *A Spool of Blue Thread*

At the centre of the American author Anne Tyler's novel is a home – the house on Bouton Road, Baltimore, built in the 1930's by Junior Whitshank, the patriarch of the family. It's round this house that Tyler unfolds the story of the Whitshanks, through four generations. At the heart of that story are a couple, Red and Abby, in their early seventies in the present time.

I've enjoyed Tyler's earlier novels for the way in which she tells an unremarkable-seeming story of everyday incidents and conversations whilst simultaneously giving the reader insights into deeper currents of life. This latest novel is no exception. Red and Abby's sometimes fractious relationship prompts us to consider the nature of the love which has survived, and developed, over their adult lifetimes. Their relationships with their four grown children, while outwardly happy and successful, are shown to be uncertain and complex. Their son, Denny, is a "problem child". Troubled since childhood he left home at the first opportunity and leads a rootless life, excluding the family. Abby comforts herself that the other three are happily settled near the family home. Yet, when the eldest succeeds in phoning her brother after one of his particularly long absences her final words open up a picture of their family as a complex and often unhappy network of relationships. "Denny, most of all;

I will never forgive you for consuming every last little drop of our parents' attention and leaving nothing for the rest of us."

The novel also questions the nature of 'home'. After building the house with love and care for a customer, Junior Whitshank succeeds in buying it for his family. With its situation in Bouton Road the house takes the family 'upmarket', fulfilling Junior's dreams of elegant living. The three later generations love but take for granted the spacious house. To Red and Abby's grown children the house is still 'home', despite their own houses and families. Yet, at the end of the novel when it's feared that the house will have to be sold Red, who has lived here since his birth, announces matter-of-factly, "I'm going to get myself an apartment." They are words which solve the children's problems, yet they receive the news in shocked silence. Poignantly, near the end of the novel the living home becomes a shell for boxes of belongings to be allocated to new homes, and for discarded, broken toys to be collected for rubbish.

By the end of the novel we come to realise how this apparently successful family has built its life on secrets – secrets you can discover if you read this humane and often amusing novel.

Judith Atkinson

Annie the musical by Bladon Junior Church

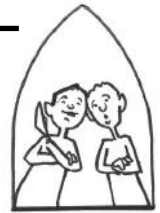
Having been absolutely wowed by *Cats* at Bladon Junior Church last year, I was really looking forward to this year's show, *Annie*. I wasn't disappointed – what they produce is amazing! There is great scenery, brilliant choreography and the singing and acting is of a really high standard. Children do also occasionally get flung across the stage too, all carefully planned of course, and in this production there was a real live dog!

Annie is the story of a little girl living in a run-down orphanage during the Great Depression under the 'care' of the drunken Miss Hannigan. Annie dreams of her parents returning to take her home. In a curious twist of fate Annie is invited to stay with the millionaire 'Daddy' Warbucks and the rest of the story sees the characters searching for a different life – Miss Hannigan

dreams of 'easy street', Annie continues to long for the family that 'may be' just round the corner and Warbucks discovers that 'something was missing' in his life despite all his riches. A very poignant aspect of the play is Annie letting go of some of her dreams and finding home in a place and with people that she wasn't expecting. Dreams are good but sometimes that is all they are. The question is can we let go of our dreams and happily run into the arms offered to us, learning to be happy with what we have, rather than being imprisoned by what we lack.

If you've never been to a Bladon production, do try to go to their next one, they are a real joy and a wonderful experience. I'd go back 'tomorrow' if I could!

Mel McCulloch



Heard it on the grapevine...

Baptisms:

Catherine Yanling Roberts, 26 July 2015
Kayla Tanya Uugo, 2 August
Nelson Oppong, 6 September

Wedding:

Martin Wellings and Fiona Macdonald, 15 August 2015

New Members:

Nelson Oppong by confirmation
Jim Godfrey and Maria Moore by transfer

Transferred to other churches:

Marion Andrews
Marion Hingley-Hickson to the Grantham and Vale of Belvoir Circuit

Deaths:

Anita Segar, July
Molly Stayte, 9 July
Joyce Newman, 25 October

Notes from Church Council

The Church Council has met three times since the last magazine. Minutes of meetings are now posted on the website.

On 13 July members agreed that members of the congregation should be reminded that Church Council meetings are open meetings and this will be signalled in the notice sheet prior to meetings. It was agreed that the Stewards would look at four priorities arising from Martin Welling's paper '*Our Calling*'. The Finance and Property Committee would discuss questions compiled during a review of the resourcing for Wesley Memorial's mission over the next decade. Reports had been circulated and were discussed.

On 8 September members met for an Extraordinary Church Council meeting focussed on *Open Doors*. Derek Rawson updated the meeting on progress towards starting the building work. Following discussion of Derek's report, all the recommendations were agreed and can be viewed on the website. An application for funding to enable the Atrium to be constructed – the cost is in the region of £400,000.

The appointment of 2 new stewards was agreed.

Martin Wellings is exploring the possibility of the Church taking part in a short lecture series in July/August 2016.

Members met on Monday 16 November for its autumn meeting. Key matters addressed were:

- Responsibilities/liabilities of the Trustees.
- Jonathan Todd will be leaving the Circuit in April 2016 to take a sabbatical before taking up a new role as Chaplain at Kent College, Pembury.
- Circuit Finance is being discussed and this will be fed back to Churches before being discussed further at the March Circuit Meeting.
- The Reserves Policy was approved.
- Wesley Memorial Staff are now wearing identity badges.
- Ideas for supporting a specific charity next year.
- The Trustees' Annual Report.
- The Appeal to raise £90,000 has been very successful and now totals £101,000 plus Gift Aid.
- Churches Together in Central Oxford and Faith in Action Group matters.

The next meeting will take place on Thursday 3 March 2016.

Janet Forsaith, Church Council Secretary

Dates for the diary

Saturday 12 December	2pm	Junior Church rehearsal and party
Sunday 13 December	10.30am	Junior Church service
Thursday 17 December	5.30pm	Carols for the City
Sunday 20 December	6.30pm	Carol Service
Friday 25 December	10.30am	Christmas Day Service
Sunday 3 January 2016	10.30am	<i>Alternativity</i>
Sunday 10 January	6.30pm	Circuit Service at WM
Sunday 17 January	10.30am	Covenant Service
Saturday 23 January		Partnership New Year Party at Cowley Rd
Sunday 24 January	10.30am	Rev. Kat Bracewell preaching at WM
Monday 25 January	7.30pm	Junior Church Leaders' meeting
Sunday 14 February	6.30pm	Holy Communion Service
Thursday 25 February		FIAG panel at New Road
Thursday 3 March	7.30pm	Church Council meeting
Thursday 24 March		Maundy Thursday Service at St Columba's
Friday 25 March	10.30am	Good Friday service at WM
Sunday 27 March	10.30am	Easter Day

Wesley Memorial Church

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 Children's, families' & outreach worker:
Janice Smith

Church Manager: *Nikos Paplomatas*

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 Wednesdays 12.30pm

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Contributions, letters, questions, pictures, book reviews and any other suitable material for publication are always welcome. Please pass them to the editorial team by hand or by email, stating if you are unwilling for them to appear on the church website. Articles may be edited. Articles express the views of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the view of Wesley Memorial or the Methodist Church as a whole.

Deadline for the next issue

19 February 2016

WESLEY MEMBRAIN

