

Wesley Memorial *news*

The magazine from Wesley Memorial Church, Oxford | Christmas 2016



On the **Threshold**

The Manse, 26 Upland Park Road, Oxford

Dear friends,

Towards the end of Matthew's Gospel, Jesus tells a story about a wedding. Ten bridesmaids are waiting for the bridegroom to arrive for the wedding feast. Five of the bridesmaids are wise, and they take a supply of oil to keep their lamps burning; five are foolish, and they neglect to do so. The groom is late; the lamps burn low; the bridesmaids doze; and then, all of a sudden, the wedding party arrives, and the attendants are bidden to trim their lamps and make ready. The wise bridesmaids are prepared, and they go into the feast. The foolish bridesmaids scour the twenty-four hour supermarkets for extra oil, and are consequently delayed. When they arrive at the feast and seek admittance, they are turned away.

The principal message of the Gospel story of the wise and foolish bridesmaids is to be prepared, and the story can be given an Advent inflection about our readiness for the coming of the Kingdom, but its setting also invites reflection on the theme of this issue of *Wesley Memorial News*: 'on the threshold'. For the wise bridesmaids in the story, the threshold was the gateway to inclusion and to celebration; for the foolish bridesmaids, it brought exclusion and disappointment: 'the door was shut.'

So, is a threshold a bridge or a barrier? A place of meeting and connection, or a means of separation? Of course, it can be all or any of these things, and more besides. We start, surely, with a God who reaches out in love across the barriers that divide us, coming to us in Jesus, in whom the Divine and the human meet in utter uniqueness. The Church prepares through Advent for the new beginning signalled and effected by the Incarnation, and we know that, because of Christmas, a new age has dawned. In this age of the Kingdom, Jew and Gentile, male and female, slave and free, meet on the common ground of redemption and reconciliation with God in Christ, and the new creation is foreshadowed in the fellowship of the Church.

The God who takes the risk of incarnation also risks rejection by the people he loves. In Holman Hunt's famous picture, 'The Light of the World', Christ stands patiently knocking at the door (Revelation 3:20). God is both generous host and respectful guest, offering love, but not barging unbidden into our lives. Christ on the threshold waits for our grace-enabled invitation to come in, and eat with us.

God's venture of love and respectful invitation to us offer models for the mission of the Church. The powerful symbolism of 'open doors' must surely be that our doors are open to welcome visitors, pilgrims and seekers, but also open to allow worshippers to find and serve God in the wider life of the city and the world. The love of God and the good news of the Gospel may draw people across our threshold, but they should also send us out to offer love and to make connections wherever we may find ourselves.

What of our personal thresholds, on the eve of a New Year? In many homes an essential element of the ritual of Christmas Day is watching the Queen's Christmas Broadcast, continuing a tradition begun by King George V in 1932. It was the Queen's father, King George VI, who used these words in his 1939 radio broadcast:-

'And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year:

"Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown."

And he replied:

"Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the Hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way."

Words of reassurance spoken to a nation on the threshold of a world war have continued to resonate with people facing an uncertain future, and its excitements, opportunities, risks and anxieties. May we all know God's presence and constant love as we approach and cross the threshold of 2017.

Yours in Christ,



Editorial

This is a season of thresholds. In Advent we anticipate the coming incarnation when Jesus is born and the Word comes among us, changing the world forever. Christmastime coincides with the natural thresholds of the year: the passing of the longest night, and then New Year itself.

Our church stands on the threshold of completing the current phase of the Open Doors refurbishment project, bringing with it great opportunities for mission and service, but also new challenges and responsibilities.

For our nation and our world, we also feel to be on the edge of some

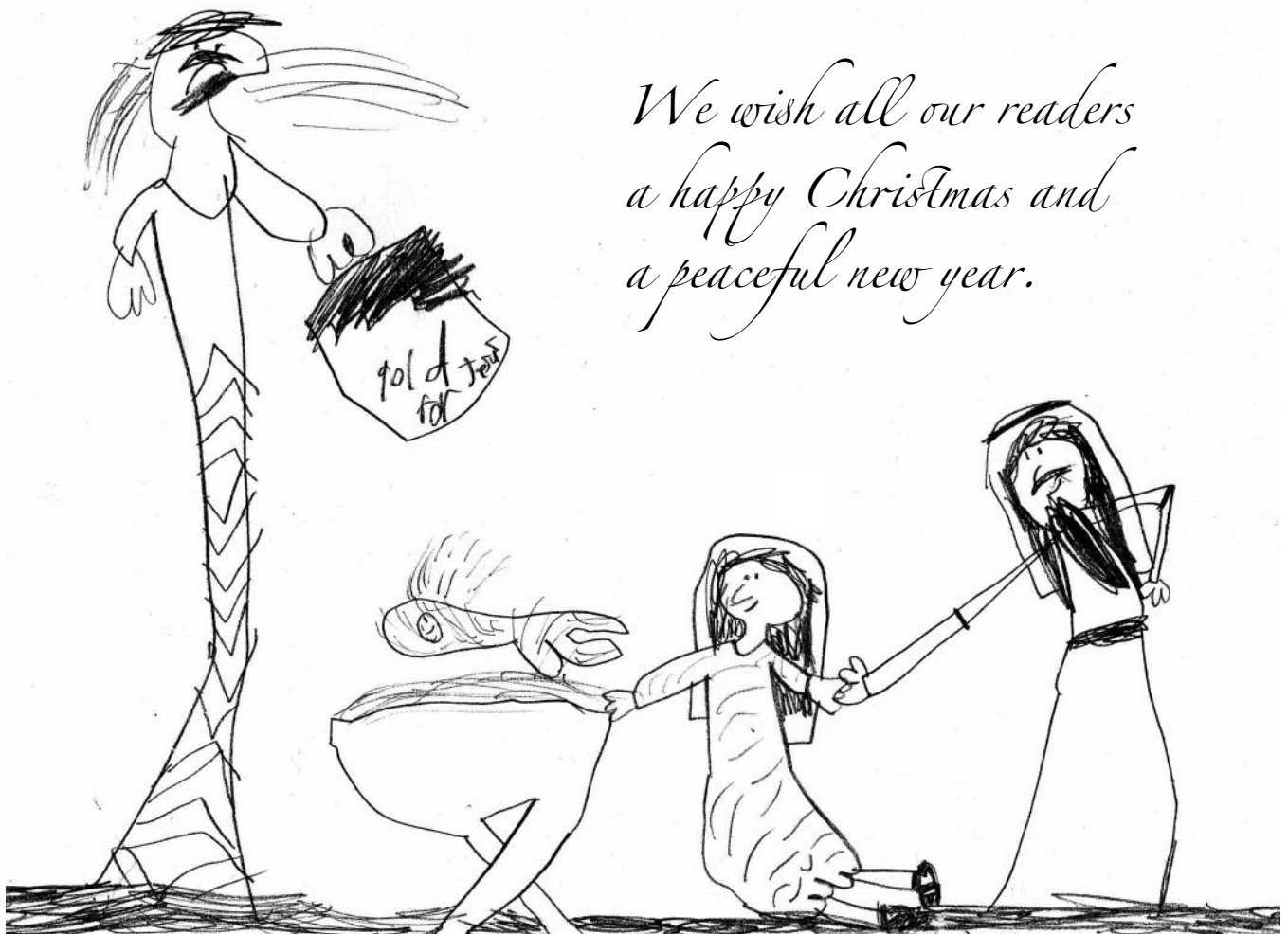
significant thresholds, following the outcomes of the Europe referendum and the US Presidential election.

Such times can prompt excited anticipation and hope, but also trepidation and fear of what might stand on the other side. So in this edition of *Wesley Memorial News*, we explore what it means to live in a time of thresholds, and include reflections by people going through periods of personal change - moving, new jobs, and contemplating the end of life. We hope it will bring stimulus and solace in this season of change.

Wesley Memorial News team

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*We wish all our readers
a happy Christmas and
a peaceful new year.*

Nativity, by Laura Ibbotson (age 6)

On the threshold for Open Doors

Surprising as it might seem, the majority of the Open Doors project is now completed, and we are on the threshold of a new period of Wesley Memorial history. After so many years of debates, fundraising, meetings, planning and sheer hard work, and despite all the setbacks, it seems extraordinary that phases 1, 2 and 3 are virtually complete. This means we have an attractive Hall and John Wesley Room, two modern and efficient kitchens, and a brand new 'Bradbury Room' which is a delightful space in which to meet. I particularly like the views from the new windows which have been hidden for so long and now allow light into the bright modern rooms. Phase 4, building the atrium and heritage centre, still has to be completed, if we can raise the money.



use these new facilities and opportunities. The vision for the Open Doors project was to make the church more welcoming, hospitable, and flexible. Certainly the rooms we now have are, and have the potential to be, all three of these. They look much more welcoming and inviting, the wonderful new kitchen space can take our renowned Wesley Memorial catering to yet new heights! The space we now have is more flexible for our own use and for that of the wider church community throughout the week.



But what do we want the church to be now? How do we write the next chapter of our history, and make our church responsive to the needs of the 21st century world? The Open Doors building work has always been a means to an end, and now the end is in sight we need to ask how we maximise these new opportunities, as we start living the Open Doors project in reality. How do we keep working out the aims of welcome, hospitality and flexibility? What does that mean for us as individuals and as a worshipping community as we focus on these three key words:

So as we stand now at this threshold, it is a special time to catch our collective breath. It is a timely opportunity to reflect on and celebrate all that the process of Open Doors has meant: by giving us new experiences, drawing people in to the church community, and using the talents of so many individuals. Working towards a shared project has helped us to get to know each other better too. We can also celebrate the links we have made within our city centre community, with other churches locally, as well as with the national Methodist church over this period, all of which, we hope, will stay with us in the future.

Welcoming

How do we make the links between the large numbers of people who visit Wesley Mem and the worshipping community? How are we 'church' for these people?

Hospitable

How do we provide appropriate hospitality and care to each other and other people within our wider community? What

And yet I think this threshold is also an important time for us to reflect where we go next, and how God wants us to

are we being called to offer for the most vulnerable in central Oxford?

Flexible

How can we be flexible with people, starting where they are rather than where we want them to be? How can we do that in our listening, our conversations, and our decision-making about how we use our spaces?

As a church we have long struggled with these questions, but my hope is that seeing and using the new space may release new and imaginative thinking about where we are meant to be. As we move on from this threshold and however we decide to use these new opportunities, we will all need to continue to be involved in thinking and praying about, and being part of, our next chapter.

John Cammack



The saga of the Summer Lunch

When in January I booked space at church for our annual NHS Retirement Fellowship Summer Lunch on 22 August, I never imagined that I would be the first to use the new hall and kitchen. The expectation then was that the work would be finished by the end of May. When June came and went and the work was not finished, I began to get worried. “We’ll be in there in the middle of July,” said the church manager. The week before the lunch I peeped in and they

were still laying the floor and doing the painting, but the caretaker said it was almost ready. We could use the new kitchen to prepare our lunch, but not do any cooking, as the gas may not be connected. That was OK: all the quiches were in the freezer, as I’d been cooking them since June. Sausages and chicken were also in the freezer and some were being brought by the members. I spent the afternoon before cooking potato salad and rice salad at home.

On the day I arrived at about 9.30am. “Don’t panic,” said Reg the caretaker, though none of the equipment had yet been transferred from the old kitchen. There were no plates, cutlery, dishes or water jugs. The next hour was spent with the two caretakers, me and some of the helpers carrying things through. Most importantly, there was no hot water in the taps, as the immersion heater was not working. The caretakers - who were great - transferred the hot water boilers from the old kitchen. Halfway through the morning the electrician arrived to sort out the immersion heater. “It will take some time to heat up,” he warned. Well, it finally came through just as we finished the washing up.

In the end, the lunch was served on time. It felt like a minor miracle! A good time was had by all. And one of our Fellows was a star at washing up with water from the boiler.

The new kitchen is fabulous, and the hall is beautiful, light and airy. There were some teething problems, but after all the years of raising money and planning, it was worth the aggro!

Next year our Summer Lunch will probably be prepared in another new kitchen, and I hope it will be just as successful!

Dulcie Glassborow



A more inviting threshold

As the Open Doors project nears completion, how are other churches thinking about their premises and their mission? Gavin Knight, Vicar of St Michael and All Angels in Summertown, introduces the plans they have for reshaping their building, in which the concept of Threshold has been a key theme.

Threshold 'θrɛʃəʊld; 'θrɛʃ,həʊld *noun*

1. A strip of wood or stone forming the bottom of a doorway and crossed in entering a house or room:
"She stood at the threshold of the church's life and mission."
2. A point of entry or beginning:
"He was on the threshold of a dazzling vocation."
3. The magnitude or intensity that must be exceeded for a certain reaction, phenomenon, result, or condition to occur or be manifested:
"Nothing happens until the Spirit passes the threshold."

We have named our plans for developing the west end of our church, The Threshold. It stands for the moment of change, of decision and action. Our vision is for people to cross the threshold of our new building, for new life to flourish not only in the church but in the parish too.

Threshold is a helpful metaphor in our attempt to live the Christ life. It is a way of positioning ourselves and our faith life. The Threshold presents us with a challenge - is it our desire to take a step in faith, whatever that step may be for us? God continuously invites us to become a pilgrim people. The invitations and the thresholds are part of the life that we have consented to live. But how far do we want to travel and what thresholds do we need to step over? The liturgical seasons are another way of expressing this sense of approaching new challenges and fresh commitments. Advent, the beginning of the new Christian year, is a way of preparing ourselves before plunging into the revelation of the incarnation. We enter into the cycle of the

birth of God and his life of wonder and pain. God understands thresholds and the Church is able to articulate this through the times and seasons of the liturgical year. So, thresholds are not just about buildings, they are part of the rich pattern shaping our Christian discipleship.

With regards to the specifics of my own Threshold experience, let me share these thoughts with you: At my interview for the post of Vicar at St Michael's in Summertown, I was asked to give my view of my initial thoughts and impressions regarding the church. I remember peering through the glass door of the west end and the sense of excitement which ran through me. If I were able to cross the threshold I would be able to experience this sacred space. Something wonderful could be achieved here! This viewpoint became the focus for the interview. My overriding thought was that the threshold was the key to the church's future. If we became dedicated to welcome, to allow light and life over the threshold, the church's potential could be realized.

I soon came to understand that mine was to become a 'threshold ministry.' I coined that phrase during a BBC interview. It also features on the Welcome page of our website. At a time when church attendances were supposed to be declining nationally, I wanted to set a principle that the church would grow if we could become more



welcoming, more hospitable, if we made that threshold experience easier rather than harder for others. In effect, the vision was to encourage people to live the Christ life in fellowship, enjoying the beauty of the building, people's gifts and talents, through liturgy, music, therapy and the arts.

The plans for the new extension incorporate a transparent vista, no longer obscuring the activity within. The new building will speak for us, that we have something to celebrate in our faith and community life, that we want others to join. The Threshold seemed to be an apt name for this new extension. The west end development has a purpose.

Its key aims are to be:

- **A place of welcome** - Opening up the church throughout the week and inviting the local community to enter and engage. The Threshold will become a 'hub,' an active centre of church life and prayer outside of normal 'worship' times.
- **A place of community** - New facilities will encourage different user groups to enjoy the church space. A meeting space, a kitchen, an office and much-needed toilets will make the church more welcoming and hospitable for the entire local community.
- **A place of healing** - Creating a therapeutic environment so that the church can be used to promote wellbeing. The Threshold will be offered to local care and health organisations for meetings, talks and consultations. The church environment lends itself to the pursuit of quietness and reflection.
- **A place of creativity** - Providing a creative space where talent and beauty flourishes. The Threshold will enhance the church's growing reputation as a venue for music and the arts.

We pray that all who are standing at a threshold of time and space will enter into God's invitation for them.

Gavin Knight

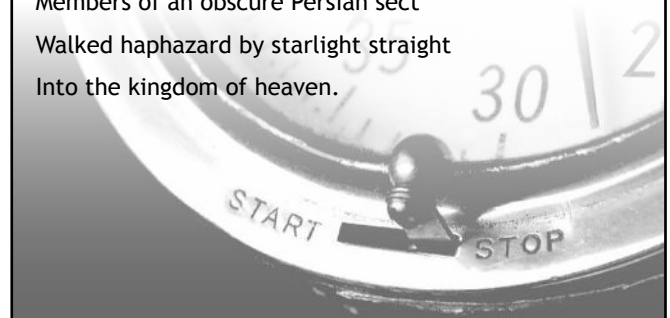
BC:AD *by U. A. Fanthorpe*

This was the moment when Before
Turned into After, and the future's
Uninvented timekeepers presented arms.

This was the moment when nothing
Happened. Only dull peace
Sprawled boringly over the earth.

This was the moment when even energetic Romans
Could find nothing better to do
Than counting heads in remote provinces.

And this was the moment
When a few farm workers and three
Members of an obscure Persian sect
Walked haphazard by starlight straight
Into the kingdom of heaven.



On the threshold of Christmas...

"We have these stockings. I like Alice's cute little one. The night before Christmas we put them up in our bedrooms. Last year before we did this we put them on and hopped around our bedroom. It was really fun.

I'm looking forward to going to the pantomime with my cousins and Nanna and Grandad. And Christmas pudding. And sleeping at my cousins' house."

Jasper Mitchell

"I'm looking forward to getting together with my family at Christmas time and opening all my presents. I also like the Christmas lights and the school plays and nursery plays that I act in and I listen to."

Rowan Mitchell

Mary's perspective

We are about to leave. Joseph hurries and fusses and makes me smile. His eyes are tender and his hands are gentle, but there is also reserve and reverence when he eyes my swelling shape. We both know that it can't be long before the hidden is revealed, but for now you are known just to me, my son. I feel your movements and your hiccups and I marvel at the hard limbs pressing against my belly. It can't be long, but you must wait just a little longer. There is a long road ahead and you are safe where you are.

I long to see you but I worry too. My heart aches because I have been given a glimpse of all that you will be for the world and yet I want to keep you safe with me too. I do not want to let you go. I fear for you to enter the world and be shared with others, loved by others... hurt by others. And so these last few days, hours of you and me alone are savoured and treasured. I hope we will have time to be mother and son. I am no Hannah and could not hand my baby over from the start. I do not think I could be brave enough for that.

As I stand at the door the sunlight falls on me, and though there is warmth in it, I shiver. We have a long journey ahead of us, but I know the real journey started months ago with an angel's voice. I could have said no, I could have turned away, but God held out his hand to me and I stepped into the unknown willingly. I glance down at my feet, and then a shadow falls on me. Looking up I see Joseph smiling and offering his arm. I reach out and hold on to him as I step into the light and we continue the journey together.

Mel McCulloch



Contemplating a move

On the threshold: what do those words conjure up? They will, of course, mean different things for each one of us: a first job, a new job, a new school, marriage; a new experience in an unfamiliar setting. How do we feel at the point of crossing the threshold? Are we excited, apprehensive, scared? How will we cope, crossing from the known and familiar to the unknown and new. Are we doing the right thing? Have we considered all the options?

These are all questions I have been asking myself recently. Of the many thresholds at which I have stood through the course of my life, this latest - the decision to put myself on the waiting list for sheltered accommodation - has been the most difficult to contemplate. So much is bound up in the decision to “downsize”, to exchange a family home for a flat.

I suppose I have known for a year or two that I should move house, but the occurrence of various health issues during the past nine months brought into focus the need to do more than vaguely think about moving, from a roomy four-bedroom house to something more manageable, which is where I am at the moment, at the threshold and waiting. I have taken the first step and registered my intention, but I must now wait.

Waiting does not trouble me: I find it hard to make quick decisions at this stage of my life, so the prospect of a space, between the decision to move and the actual moving, is something I welcome. Waiting will give me time to do the many things necessary before the move - reducing the contents of a four-bedroom house to fit into a two-bedroom flat being one of them. A task I do not relish, for here again decisions have to be made. What pieces of furniture shall I need and what must I let go, what pictures, books and ornaments to take? These are difficult decisions because so much is bound up in the contents of a home - memories of celebrations, joyful occasions, sad events, events which give us cause to reflect and recall.

For most of my life I have been part of village communities and, for the last 39 years, my home is in a small village on

the edge of Otmoor. During that time I have involved myself in the various activities of that village, have made many friends and have enjoyed being part of the community, so leaving the village will be a sadness. I shall miss the friendly banter and support of my neighbours in the small close where I live. I shall also miss the peace and quiet of rural life and, on clear nights, being able to stargaze without the distraction of light pollution.

On the other hand, I am looking forward to moving for many reasons. There will be new opportunities for friendship and fellowship, perhaps even opportunities to participate in a different kind of community. Having buses nearby will be a real bonus, as will be the proximity of shops, a library and other services. The opportunity to attend musical events, the theatre and talks, all things made more accessible without having to park a car!

Deciding to move is not easy for most people. It may be scary, and it needs courage to take this major step, but when all the hard work and the legalities are completed I believe it will be worth it. I have a very supportive family, and for them particularly I feel I am making the right move and they will know I am in a safe place.

So, in the fullness of time I expect to move. I am thankful for the support I have had to this point in my life, not only from my family, but from the continuing fellowship of my church family, but above all I am thankful to the One who guides and supports each one of us at all times and in all places.

Helen Paige



Facing death: a discussion

The one sure thing is that we are all going to die. By a twist of ill-health, Robert Protherough and I find ourselves, at 91 and 76, in a similar place - facing the threshold of our mortality. Robert, through age, has gradually become accustomed to the idea of his own death. I, after 10 years of living with a rare cancer in my leg, learnt in the Spring that the sarcoma has metastasised to my lungs, as it often does. I know this is an incurable condition but it's been discovered at an early stage and a course of chemotherapy is keeping the cancer at bay. But this doesn't alter the fact that I shall probably die sooner than I would have hoped or wished. So, although there are 15 years between us, as we share the same house since Margaret, Robert's wife, went into residential care, Robert and I sometimes share our thoughts and feelings about what we could call the last threshold. These are some of our random reflections on this topic which touches us all.

Judith Atkinson

RP It is the imminence of death that makes us think about death, rather than ignoring it. The writer Christopher Hitchens was preparing materials for his (atheist) position when he was attacked by an excruciating pain in his side. As he later wrote, "I found myself deported 'from the country of the well' across the stark frontier that marks off the land of malady" - over a threshold he had not anticipated.

JA I rarely gave a conscious thought to my own death until I heard about my lungs last Spring. Although I realised, being a reader and a literature teacher, that I'd unconsciously stored up the feeling and thoughts of many writers about this unavoidable topic. At the risk of a mini lesson on Shakespeare's plays I see now that his own developing feelings about death are reflected as he neared death himself. So, when younger he gave his character Hamlet long meditations on his own death, but really in the abstract, until he has him discovering the rotting body of a friend from his childhood in a newly dug grave and is forced to confront the reality of death before meeting it himself. While, in one of his final plays, "The Tempest", the central character, the magician Prospero, is an ageing man who,

feeling that his work is done, faces up calmly to the inevitable moment when he will give up his power.

RP Yet, the increasing weight of statistics assumes that the extension of life is the desired end. Every week they appear with news of new 'cures' for the diseases of old age and insurance firms calculating annuities and life insurance now routinely predict death at 100. A recent article in the *Guardian* by the writer Margaret Drabble pointed out that the very rich are now paying in advance to have their bodies frozen, in the hope that they will survive and will return after a cure for their particular condition has been found. What an appalling thought!

JA Yes, being alive but only half-alive with all the disadvantages of old age, the physical uncertainties and powerlessness. So, if death comes to seem the desired end, how do you now feel about your own?

RP I hope that it will be a terminus at which all questions will be answered. In one sense I look forward to it, in another sense I fear it because of the uncertainty about whether the questions will be answered. And you?

JA I think at the moment that I've fallen back in love with life again! It doesn't mean I've stopped reflecting on my own death, rather that I've realised that at the moment I prefer being alive. But I do share some of your feelings about the nature of death itself. At a funeral taken by an elderly retired minister for an equally old fellow minister he said simply, "Douglas has gone home," and I envied him his certainty. For a long time I've relied on the fact that even Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians seems to share my/our questioning. He acknowledges that in this life our understanding can only ever be partial, "For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror", we're allowed to be full of doubts and questions. But he writes of the moment of crossing the threshold between life as we know it and death with reassuring confidence, "then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known." That's the 'terminus', as you call it, which I hope to encounter and at the moment I look forward to it.

RP I'm glad you've 'fallen back in love' with life again. But the 15 years between us make clear how much has gone, powers that I once had (the ability to preach), the example of Margaret, the sense that things close in around me as I speak. This doesn't mean that living itself is not attractive, only that the sense of an inevitable ending gives it meaning.

JA I still have regrets about leaving life. It is, after all, the only kind of existence I've known and I love it. I can't imagine not being surrounded by interesting people and the world I see around me. But I guess I'll reach the stage that Bob Whorton told us about when, like many people who pass

through Sobell House, I'll feel I'm ready to die. And what comforts me about going at that stage is that I know life will carry on without me. In another of Shakespeare's last plays a son and his father witness two contrasting moments. The son sees with horror the violent death of a stranger, but his father finds the baby the dead man had given his life to save, "thou mettest with things dying, I with things newborn", he says. There will always be "things newborn" and, in fact, your fourth great grandchild will be born just before Christmas.

RP What more can I say? I could talk about this for ever!

Watchnight: threshold worship

Worship is one way in which we observe and make sense of thresholds. Christians hold services not only to mark life events such as baptism, marriage and death, but also the thresholds in the calendar. Watchnight - a special service of worship held in the hours leading up to New Year - is one manifestation of this particularly popularised by Methodism.

However, it is thought that the first community to have held Watchnight services was the Moravian Church, founded 550 years ago in what is now the Czech Republic. The purpose of the service was to renew one's covenant with God at the turn of the year. The Moravians were enthusiastic international missionaries who spread their spiritual practices around the globe in the 18th century. One person who encountered them, and was inspired by them, was Methodism's founder John Wesley.

According to historian Jonathan Chism, "Wesley felt believers should have an annual opportunity to renew their covenant with God and reflect on the state of their souls. Therefore, he incorporated Watchnight into his development of Methodist liturgical structures."

Over the years this evolved into two different practices; the annual Covenant Service, and the New Year's Eve

Watchnight service. The latter proved particularly popular and enduring in certain cultures including Korean and West African Methodism. Many churches embraced it as an alternative to the rowdy partying and drinking often associated with New Year's Eve.

Watchnight gained added significance for the African-American community in the United States during the American Civil War. Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation took effect from 1 January 1863, so many slaves gathered in churches on New Year's Eve in 1862, waiting for their freedom to arrive at midnight.

Watchnight services are still held in many Methodist churches in the UK and around the world. Usually several hours in length, and including hymns, readings and prayers, they provide an opportunity to reflect on the past and dedicate oneself for the year ahead. They will often conclude with the singing of Isaac Watts's famous hymn:

O God, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come,
Be Thou our guide while life shall last,
And our eternal home.

Simeon Mitchell



Hospice as liminal space

The traditional song 'Scarborough Fair' contains these lines:

Tell him to buy me an acre of land,
Parsley, sage, rosemary, and thyme;
Between the salt water and the sea sand/strand,
Then he shall be a true love of mine.

If you think about it, the image of an acre of land between the sea and the beach is a strange one. Is there any such space? Is it not the case that the sea and the 'sea sand' or 'sea strand' meet, with no space between? Perhaps I am being too literal! But I wonder if in the song there is an allusion to a mysterious, liminal space - a space where none seems to be, but which nonetheless exists. Celtic Christian sites like Iona are sometimes referred to as 'thin spaces', where land meets sea, and we find ourselves on the edge of holiness.

The word liminal comes from the Latin *limen* meaning a threshold. It is an in-between space wedged between the ordinary and the extraordinary, the profane and the sacred. We could also say it is the space between the life of earth and the life of heaven. This is where Jacob wrestles with God and Mary is visited by an angel. It is a creative place where dance, song and art can emerge.

I have sometimes illustrated liminal space in a group by asking people to 'draw' three boxes with their toes on the floor, and then step into them one by one. The first box is ordinary space, and here are our well-known everyday routines. The second box is liminal space - the normal day is gone and we are in a strange country. This can happen when we experience trauma, or holiness or we are in a deep creative process. Here we are on the threshold of the third space. This third box is the new space we have not yet entered. It is a place of grace because God waits for us there and here we shall sing a new song with the psalmist.

In a hospice patients and their families often find themselves in the second box of threshold/liminal space. They do not choose to be there and would much prefer to be in the first box, back in their normal day. But the diagnosis of a life limiting illness, treatments, and facing

the inevitability of death may well catapult them into a place of disorientation. It is usually an uncomfortable, pinched place, at least for some of the time.



Often the liminal space of a hospice contains an element of fear. We may well be frightened of the reality of dying. This body of ours will cease to function. It has carried us around reasonably well for many years, but now it is failing and perhaps failing fast. Faith can of course be a real help and an anchor in this place - but I have known many people of faith who are (not surprisingly) shaken by the prospect of their imminent death. Sometimes of course people are yearning to die and to move to the third box, the new place we call heaven. My mother is in a nursing home now. When visiting her recently a lady called out to me from a neighbouring room. She wanted to know what the time was, as she couldn't see her watch. I went in and we had a short conversation; she told me that every night, 'I ask God to take me'.

On the threshold between life and death there is the potential for something surprising to happen. This pinched place can turn into a spacious place. There may be experiences which are difficult to make sense of and which have more to do with heaven than earth. Someone said to me a few weeks ago, 'I hope you know him as I do'. I asked who they meant. 'God', she replied. This person was not a regular church-goer, but in her final weeks of life, through her distress, she had found acceptance and a deep peace. A patient talked to me about seeing his mother, who had died many, many years ago. 'I could have reached out and touched her', he said. This experience was immensely comforting to him.

Perhaps liminal space is holy because God naturally inhabits it. He is the God who waits with us for the new, a God who, in Christ, desires life in all its fullness for us. God is present in this intermediate space, waiting with us for the time when we shall be made whole.

Bob Whorton, Chaplain at Sobell House Hospice

Where the end is just the beginning

It is a Spring day in the mid-1980s. An elderly man gets his wallet and sets off on his customary walk to buy sweets for his grandchildren. But today's walk will be different from the previous 25-minute walks he has taken, once a month, for years - because, having made it to the shop and bought the sweets, he simply won't be able to find the way back. The police will bring him back home hours later, when his wife and adult children have noticed his unexplained absence. He will be somewhat embarrassed and concerned enough to go to the doctor's.

The reason will be far more serious than forgetfulness or a case of bad sense of direction. Because for him, it will be the first warning that something unusual is happening in his brain. That one by one, in that deep, mysterious forest of his brain, over the next decade, all the trees will slowly wither and die, stripping him of his sense of identity, his memories, his future.

Alzheimer's is one of the cruellest diseases. Over a decade, it reduced my grandfather, an active and proud man, someone who knew how to carry out basic electrical and furniture repairs, into a shadow of his former being, a shell that was capable of receiving love and care but had difficulties conveying those feelings.

His condition had a catastrophic impact in the family, leading to disagreement and personal struggles. My grandmother struggled to grasp the enormity of what was happening to her husband. In the final months of his life, he was trapped in a life he no longer understood. In the end, his mind regressed, and he forgot everything. He forgot who he was and whom he was married to, sobbing when told that his own mother had died years ago - a fact that thereafter would be hidden from him. Because sometimes, lies can be gentler and more necessary than the truth.

My grandfather died in December 1994, my last academic year at secondary school, just before a new era opened up in front of me: university, work, travel, new friendships. These were avenues to opportunities that my grandparents - a company chauffeur and a former housemaid working since

she was a child, later turned housewife and mum of five - wouldn't even have dreamed of. Life isn't always fair.

Now my four grandparents, two sets of aunts and uncles and various other relatives have stepped beyond the threshold of mortality, into that great unknown, a place where I hope they are reunited with their soulmates, looking down onto some of our happy moments from the distance. Their loss reminds me of my parents' fragility, as they now stand on the threshold of their 80s, and health issues begin to take their toll. They won't always be here (or there, I should say), and dealing with that realisation is part of being an adult - accepting love and loss are a natural part of our lives.

And so I say a silent prayer that the years around the corner will be as long and free from pain as possible, with as much love, light and laughter as possible, before the seasons change and they join others in a place where the end is just the beginning. Amen.

Eva Oliver

Coming soon: Amazing Love!

Church member Jack Godfrey has written a new musical about the story of John and Charles Wesley, founders of Methodism. It will be performed at Wesley Memorial on 18 and 19 February 2017.

Rehearsals will begin in January, and everyone is welcome to get involved. You could join the cast onstage, or help backstage (costumes, props, makeup, lighting, sound, stage, set) or help with front of house or catering/refreshments nearer the time. You could also join our prayer group and get email updates.

If you haven't already done so, please do email me or come and find me after a service to let me know if you are able to sign up to help with anything - big or small. Many thanks for your support and involvement!

Esther Ibbotson: esther.ibbotson@wesleymem.org.uk

On the edges of a possibility

The poet and novelist P. J. Kavanagh wrote in the memoir of his early years: “every experience, however simple, has its maximum brilliance [...] so startlingly different from anything less than itself that it seems to contain indications of a strength and a joy far beyond it, a hint that we live only on the edges of a possibility.”

I have been reflecting on these words through my own ‘threshold’ experiences of the last year. It is wonderful to have the opportunity to share what I’ve been up to since I left my role in the Oxford Circuit to begin a new job in London in November 2015. That job wasn’t quite right for me, so in September I began work as a Programme Manager at the Council of Christians and Jews (CCJ), Britain’s leading forum for Jewish Christian relations.

I am thoroughly enjoying the opportunity to work on CCJ’s programmes of education, dialogue and social action. I have spoken at several events, particularly relating to our work with student interfaith leaders, I have contributed to various resources, and I recently co-led a group of 22 church leaders on a 10 day seminar at Yad Vashem, Israel’s Holocaust memorial and museum. London is an exciting place to live, especially being close to Katie and friends from university. I am also continuing to value my local preaching training and I have almost completed my studies.

In many ways, though, 2016 has been a challenging year. The threshold that I have crossed has brought unsettlement and doubt. It was hard to leave Oxford, a place that after four years had become home to this wandering child of the manse. Nor has it been easy to find a niche for myself after becoming accustomed to the security of an Oxford college. I know that I’m not alone among my friends for feeling this. For our generation the search for space continues; it has also been difficult to get our heads around the changes that have recently swept through British politics and society.

Change is a difficult thing to experience, no matter how much practice we have at it, and perhaps we encounter the threshold far more often than it might appear. We don’t have to be starting a new job, moving home or marking a

milestone to feel that we are living through change. At this point in the calendar it is usual to look back on the year that has passed, to reflect on the changes that we have seen and look ahead to the challenges that we are yet to imagine. The threshold can be unsettling or even heartbreaking. Those who experience change can often question where God is in all that we experience.

For me, even when it was hardest to see Him and although I didn’t always recognise His presence at the time, God has been there throughout all the changes that I have experienced. On my threshold, I found peace on the waters of Lake Galilee. I sought comfort in rediscovering the words of a poem. I savoured joy in the laughter of old friends. I think that God was in all of these experiences.

P. J. Kavanagh’s words suggest that, though the threshold may challenge us beyond reckoning, there is hope to grasp. But crossing the threshold with hope is not an easy task. Is it even possible?

‘Hope is not blind optimism’, President Obama once said. Blind optimism would be a turning away from the threshold, a denial of the challenges we face. Hope does not have a certainty to it, no matter how much we might want reassurance. Instead, I’ve learned that hope is strengthened by a discernment of the reality and complexity of life all around us, a hesitant faith in the positive opportunities that moments of change offer us, and a practical awareness of our role in shaping what the future can be.

Life can turn out in ways different from what we first imagined and change can sweep stability from us. Yet the individual and small experiences of good show to us a possibility - even if it is only the edge of a possibility - that a seemingly fleeting joy can endure forever. The possibility is God’s, and it is also ours to make of it the ‘maximum brilliance’ we can.

I wish you all well on whatever threshold you find yourself, and I hope to be back in Oxford again soon.

Rob Thompson

On the threshold of ministry

Thresholds are something of a speciality of mine. After my DPhil in music at St Hugh's College in Oxford I joined Coopers & Lybrand to train as an actuary. Seven years later I left the pensions industry to train as a secondary school music teacher. Seven years after that I joined the University of Reading to train music teachers and to research music education. This September I have begun three years of training as a Methodist presbyter at the Queens Foundation in Birmingham. Like the other thresholds on which I have stood this brings with it a heightened awareness of the present, of standing at the transition between past and future and taking stock before continuing through the doorway.

Whilst I don't think I can, in truth, claim to have felt called to work in the pensions industry, each of my subsequent threshold moments involved a recognition that God was calling me to a particular form of service. Although each doorway represented something that I felt I wanted to do, each also entailed experiences that went against my inclinations but which I nevertheless felt obliged to face. Arriving at the threshold was not entirely my choice, but involved accepting the call on my life that was exercised by other people, and through them, God.

Perhaps, like me, you have stood at a threshold and become aware of how much luggage you are carrying? Beginning my training for ministry has involved giving up membership of my home church along with the various roles I fulfilled there in order to make space for the new opportunities that await me at Wesley Mem. Leaving them behind contributed to the sense of starting afresh, but also brought a sense of loss, of not quite knowing for a moment who I was. And yet, the person who steps across the threshold is still the same person who was called to approach it in the first place; unencumbered by luggage, perhaps, but taking through the door the experience of having carried it.

The threshold is not, of course, just a place at which we become aware of the past: standing there is a moment of anticipation. There is the excitement of fulfilling the hopes that have led to this point - of having the opportunity to

shape one's life according to how one imagines it. And there is also the prospect of having that vision of oneself

expanded in ways that can't yet be imagined: a process of formation common to all paths of discipleship.

For me, one of the most significant aspects of being on the threshold is the realisation that I am not there alone. On reflection this is obvious - others must have been there before in order to build the doorway. But as I assemble with my fellow students, we are finding out how we can help each other in the journey that lies ahead and confessing the areas in which we anticipate needing help. I am also very aware of the prayers that have sustained me in reaching the threshold and which remind me that this is not entirely my own journey.

It is very easy for us both to talk of God's call and to assume that it is directed at someone else without considering really what we are saying. The annual return of Advent is a reminder that life has a rhythm and purpose that speaks to us beyond our individual plans and inclinations. We are invited to recognise this call on our lives - whatever it may be at this particular time - and to respond through the dual processes of anticipation and letting go, of vision and repentance. I can think of no better expression of standing on this threshold than the song we sang at the first Chapel service of our first weekend at Queens:

Take, oh take me as I am
Summon out what I shall be
Set your seal upon my heart
and live in me.

(John Bell)

James Garnett



The Taming of the Queen

The Taming of the Queen, by Philippa Gregory
(Simon and Schuster, 2015)

It's 1543 at the court of Henry VIII. Queen Katherine Howard has been executed for dalliance with a lover, and now Kateryn Parr is bidden to Court. Only weeks after the death of her second husband. Henry, large, all-powerful but no longer healthy, proposes. And Kateryn knows she must accept.

So begins the story in which Philippa Gregory again skilfully brings to life a woman from history, and in this book, one whose name we all know. The survivor.

Each of the previous queens had a motto, a sort of declaration of intent. In the cases of the beheaded ones, these proved unfortunate. Kateryn's sister Nan, her chief lady-in waiting and confidante, reminds her that Anne Boleyn's was *The Most Happy*, and Katherine Howard's *No Other Will But His*. She should therefore play safe and go for *To Be Useful In All That I Do*. Not as easy as it sounds, in the minefield that is Henry's court!

If ever we thought Kateryn Parr survived just by outliving the King, this account, largely based on abundant sources from the time, shows how quickly success can be reversed at the whim of a paranoid and ailing monarch. Henry is surrounded by powerful factions all fighting for control over the next monarch, and they stop at nothing. Torture and beheadings are the order of the day: this is not a book for the squeamish!

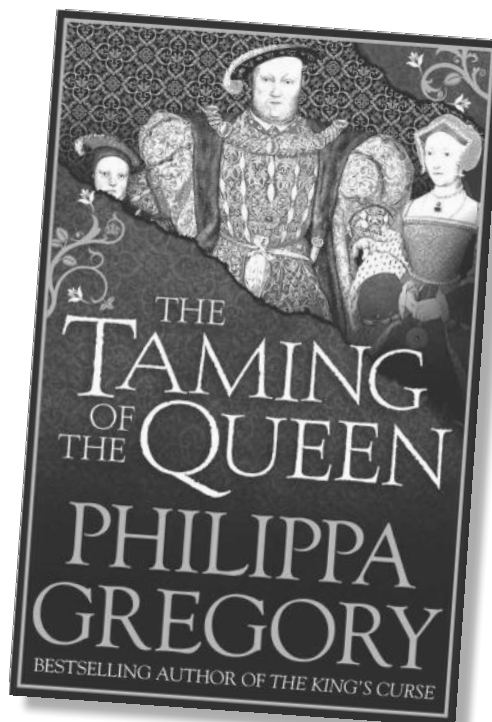
At first Kateryn manages to please Henry, successfully bringing to court his three children - Mary, Elizabeth and Edward - to be with her. She holds conversations with the King about the bible and the reformers' ideas, and at first he seems to appreciate the liberal thinking and her dedication to it. Then in a sudden swing of mood, there is a witch-hunt, orchestrated by the pro-Catholic counsellors - a deliberate attempt to condemn the queen for heresy.

Now read on to find out how she managed to survive and at what cost. And witness a sea battle in the Solent culminating in the sinking of the *Mary Rose*!

An impressive aspect of Philippa Gregory's presentation of the period is her unashamed attention to the religious conflicts that dominated politics and her respectful treatment of the Queen's genuine spirituality. She manages to combine all this, and the attested material with very credible imagined scenes between Henry and Kateryn in the privacy of the royal bedchamber; and snatched conversations between Kateryn and her possible but secret 'love interest', Thomas Seymour, later her fourth husband.

If you like this author, *The Taming of the Queen* is definitely up to standard; and if you have not tried her books, this is a very good place to start.

Kate Dobson



The Unlikely Pilgrimage of Harold Fry

The Unlikely Pilgrimage of Harold Fry, by Rachel Joyce
(Doubleday, 2012)

As the title suggests, Harold is someone who would seem to be an unlikely pilgrim, with an unlikely success story. At the start of the tale he is a quiet man, recently retired from an unremarkable brewery job, living in a dull seaside town in Devon, unsure what he is going to do after tidying up their garden, living with his house proud wife, and both waiting for their absent son. But then a surprise letter arrives from Queenie, an old friend and work colleague, simply saying that she is in Berwick on Tweed and is dying of cancer.

The rest of the book tells of how Harold sets out to send her a letter, but he does not stop at the post box. He just keeps walking and decides to keep going until he can reach her in the hospice before she dies. It is not a planned trip, he is not prepared and has nothing with him except his wallet and the clothes and soft deck shoes he was wearing when he left home. He has never travelled much beyond the South West and has no idea really where Berwick is. But for Harold none of this is important, it is only important that Queenie lives long enough for him to arrive.

Along the way, like the pilgrim he becomes, he meets all sorts of people all wanting to know what he is doing on the road. As he tells them about walking to see Queenie, his

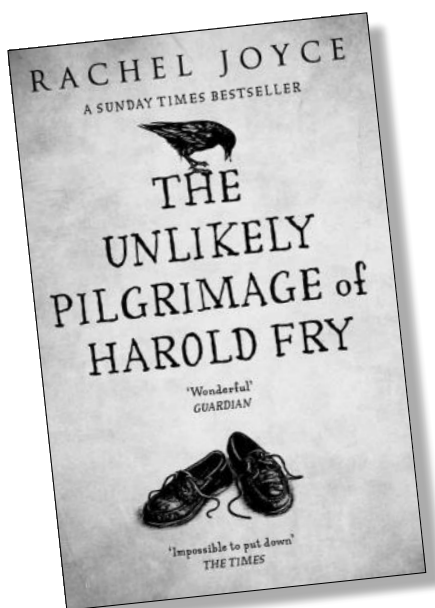
companions are interested and respectful of his quest. He is offered all sorts of kindness, a cup of tea, a compass, a rucksack and a young migrant medic dresses his worn, smelly and sore feet and forces him to rest in her flat. Harold also proves to be a willing and able listener and opens up to hear many other stories, often sad and regretful. As his long days and nights on the road pass, the real Harold begins to emerge as he reflects honestly on all he has heard, on his own life so far, about his highly intelligent but unhappy son, and most importantly recalls his deep but unspoken friendship with Queenie.

He marks his journey by picking up souvenirs for her and sending postcards to mark his all too slow progress northwards, always urging her to wait. Insisting on wearing his old shoes, he begins to realise that he does not actually need any possessions and is happier the lighter he travels. As his wife Maureen, and then the press find out what he is aiming to do, our unlikely hero slowly emerges as a national star followed on TV news, no longer seen as a hopeless middle-aged man with a daft notion, but a real inspiration. None of this is what Harold had wanted and indeed the attention becomes too much for him, but he carries on walking. Perhaps his biggest impact is on the community of nuns and patients in the hospice, who are all, like Queenie waiting patiently for their Harold to arrive.

This is a gentle and easy to read story, but for me it asks valuable questions about how we and our society measure success, whether it is about outward signs or really about inner growth and a healing of relationships. Despite the pilgrimage theme, it is not an overtly Christian story, and yet the themes of love, life and death, and a kind of rebirth are deeply entwined throughout.

Complete with a route map and quirky line drawing the book and the journey come to life for me, so much so that I was soon drawn to read *The Love Song of Miss Queenie Hennesey* which poignantly and yet joyfully tells the same story from her perspective.

Freda Cammack



Treasurer's report

We have just completed the financial statements for the financial year ending 31 August 2016. Here are the highlights of the year:

Total annual income: £790,509 (2015: £359,849)

Total annual expenditure: £303,439 (2015: £370,131)

The income is higher than last year because it includes one-off grants received for the Open Doors building work. An additional amount spent on Open Doors of £636,991 (funded by these one-off grants and money we had received for Open Doors in previous years) is not included as 'annual expenditure', but shown separately in the accounts as 'capital expenditure'. It represents the value of the refurbishment and new buildings at the hall end of our premises.

General funds: modest surplus of £1,401

This figure is remarkable, as with all the building work happening we had expected a larger decrease in the lettings income. In reality, the decrease in income was not so large and thanks are due to Nikos and the caretaking team for this. This, along with generous contributions from members of the congregation, has allowed us to do slightly better than 'break-even'.

Church 'reserves' or savings

Wesley Memorial's savings for general funds represent about 30% of one year's expenditure. This is normal for a charity of the size and with the activities of Wesley Memorial. Our property reserves are now nearly £60,000. This is primarily kept for major items of repair to the building. Some of this money may be used in 2016/17 to offset the lack of lettings income over the period of phase 3 of Open Doors, and possibly phase 4 building work.

Open Doors

Fundraising has continued during the year, and previous donations and grants that had been promised and now received have been spent. Phase 2 of Open Doors is already paid for, and phase 3 which started in September 2016, in the new financial year, is also funded. We have taken a loan from the Oxford Methodist Circuit of £90,000 to help us



complete phase 3. This loan enabled us to avoid the need to pay for the building contractors to leave after phase 2 and then return for phase 3, which would have incurred substantial additional costs. We expect to be able to refund some of the loan when it falls due in Spring 2018 from VAT refunds that we can claim on the work completed, and we are actively fundraising to be able to pay back the rest.

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.

Changes in the finance team

We are delighted to welcome Alistair Jackson as the new Church Treasurer from December 2016, and Frank Vreede as gift aid and salaries administrator.

David Eddy will continue with his wonderful work as bookkeeper, and I will continue as Open Doors treasurer for the rest of the life of the project.

John Cammack

Editors' Note: Many thanks are also due to John for his tremendous service as Church Treasurer over the last eight years!

Light the way: refugee focus at Advent

Celebrating Jesus, the light who came into the world, at Christmas we fill our homes with light and laughter, family and friends. But for more than 65 million people who are fleeing from conflict, a joyful home is a distant memory. This Advent at Wesley Memorial we are focusing on refugees through our Advent liturgy, and through our support for Christian Aid's Christmas Appeal, which aims to light the way for people fleeing violence this Christmas.

We had the opportunity on Advent Sunday to hear first-hand from Marija Vranešević about her work on the Serbia-Macedonia border with those fleeing the bloodshed in Syria and Iraq. Marija works through a Serbian Orthodox church project, Philanthropy, supported by Christian Aid.



Christian Aid also works with refugees in areas that don't hit our headlines so often, such as in the Democratic Republic of Congo. In his 16 years as a priest in the DRC, Celestin (pictured above) has witnessed more darkness than most. He's seen his own bishop and nine other priests killed by armed groups. Celestin had to flee - but now his ministry brings light to others who've been forced to escape from horrific violence. He works in a relatively safe community that has become a sanctuary to many distressed survivors of violence. Local host families show extraordinary generosity to newcomers, but their few resources are often already stretched. This is where our support through Christian Aid can make all the difference - providing agricultural training and food, plates and bowls to those that need them, and offering counselling to people who have been through traumatic violence.

So thank you if you're raising money in your Divine Advent Calendar by replacing the chocolate with £1 each day. Thank you if you choose to give to Christian Aid's appeal through the envelopes at church, or at www.christianaid.org.uk/christmas. Please do use the Advent liturgy to reflect on what life is like for refugees, and on what we can do to bring light into darkness.

Jenny Ayres

Heard it on the grapevine...



Births

Cavell George, September 2016

Baptisms

Benjamin William David Sandford, 14 August 2016

Eleanor Judith Stammers, 11 September 2016

Weddings

Camellia Daniel and Fabien Vielleveille, 14 August 2016

Owyn Cooper and Naomi Stewart Hale, 19 August 2016

Transferred to other churches

Anne Ransome, to Adderbury Methodist Church

Sheila Munday, to Lime Walk Methodist Church

Normalisa Chasokela, to Cornerstone Methodist Church, Corby

Deaths

Clarissa Tucker, September 2016

Ceased to be a member

Su Riddell

Welcomes

James Garnett as student Minister (see page 15).

Mel McCulloch to the role of Children's, Families' and Outreach Worker.





Wesley Memorial Church

New Inn Hall Street, Oxford OX1 2DH

Minister: *The Revd Canon Dr Martin Wellings*

Children's, families' & outreach worker:

Mel McCulloch

Church manager: *Nikos Papolmatas*

Services: Sundays 10.30am & 6.30pm (monthly)

Wednesdays 12.30pm

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Contributions, letters, questions, pictures, book reviews and any other suitable items 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 views of Wesley Memorial Church or the Methodist Church as a whole.

Printed on 100% recycled paper.

Deadline for the next issue:

17 February 2017

Dates for the diary

Sunday 18 December, 6.30pm	Service of Readings and Carols
Thursday 22 December, 5.30pm	Carols for the City
Sunday 25 December, 10.30am	Christmas Morning Service
Sunday 8 January 2017, 10.30am	Covenant Service
Sunday 15 January, 10.30am	Visit of Rachel Lampard, Vice-President of the Methodist Conference
Monday 16 January, 8pm	JWS Start of Term Communion
Tuesday 17 January, 7.30pm	Church Council (open agenda)
Saturday 21 January	Church Party
Sunday 22 January, 10.30am	Guest preacher: Revd Dr Megan Daffern, Chaplain of Jesus College
Friday 27 January	Moonrakers Concert
Sunday 12 February, 10.30am	World Church Sunday Guest preacher: Revd Stephen Poxon
Saturday 18/Sunday 19 February	Musical: 'Amazing Love!' premiere
Saturday 4 March	Bladon Junior Church in concert at Wesley Memorial
Sunday 12 March, 10.30am	Guest preacher: Very Revd Bob Wilkes (FIAG pulpit exchange)
Saturday 25 March, evening	'Big Sing', led by John Bell, Iona Community
Sunday 26 March, 10.30am	Guest preacher: Revd John Bell, Iona Community
Thursday 13 April	Maundy Thursday service at New Road Baptist Church
Friday 14 April	Good Friday service at St Columba's URC
Sunday 16 April, 10.30am	Easter Sunday Communion

WESLEY MEMBRAIN

2016

A YEAR ON THE THRESHOLD OF....?!

FARAGE



TRUMP



BALLS

