

LENT 2019

FOCUS



**The
Faringdon
United
Church
Newsletter**

Minister:
Rev. Fred Ireland
25 Berryfield Way
Carterton
OX18 1GS



Tel: 01993 867301
Email: ireland.fred@gmail.com

Dear friends....

It is good to be back “on duty” after a period of being signed off work, though still very frustrating that I am still unable to drive. One thing I have realised is how poor our public transport is. For example, for me to visit my grandson in Aylesbury by bus is over three hours each way! By car, on a good day, it's less than an hour. And I have discovered there is no direct bus route from Carterton to Faringdon.

I'm still undergoing various tests and thus far none of them has revealed what caused my collapse. In one sense that's a relief as they haven't found anything sinister, but on the other hand it would be good to know the cause and likelihood of it occurring again.

So I want to apologise for the fact that until I am mobile again, I am restricted somewhat regarding being with my churches in the Circuit. I'm grateful for those who have thus far ferried me to and from services and for your ongoing patience. I do hope to be more mobile soon.

But one visit that I'm looking forward to is on Tuesday 5th February when I shall be chairing our AGM at 7pm in church. This will be an opportunity to catch up with things (for example the meeting held on 1st December about our mission and the way forward for our church). I'd like to encourage all who are able to attend and to share in a positive conversation about our future direction.

We live in uncertain times; the Brexit debate rolls on and on and the future shape of our nation is not clear. Similarly we wonder what the role of the church will be as we struggle with smaller and ageing congregations. Three of our churches in the Circuit have recently closed and there is an air of concern for some others. It is vitally important that we have a clear vision of our purpose as a United Church in Faringdon; we need to pray and seek to discern God's purpose as we go forward.

What I am certain is that God still has much work for his Church to do in this world and we have a responsibility for future generations who will live in this town that there is a place where they can find faith, hope and love.

So I look forward to meeting with you on 5th February.

With warm regards

Fred



Tenants of the King

The Ecumenical Lent Course this year is entitled TENANTS OF THE KING and has been organised by the Earth & Faith Group, using a new course from Operation Noah. Bible-based and Jesus-centred, it looks at the environment from a Christian viewpoint. Climate change, extreme weather, plastic waste, loss of species, threats to our food supply - what can be done?

Discover how Christian faith and everyday discipleship can come together on one of the most pressing needs of our time. If you feel this is a subject where you know little, or what you know is all doom and gloom, come and share in a search for God's wisdom and hope.

The groups start in the week beginning **March 11th**. There are four weekly meetings, with daytime and evening groups to choose from (please book your place not later than **Sunday 3rd March**). Lent Groups meet locally, hosted by friends from the Faringdon churches. Each group has its own leader chosen and trained to lead this course. Pick up a booking form from church or the Mustard Seed. Choose your group and fill in the form. The groups are limited in numbers, so the sooner you book the better chance you have of being in the one you prefer.

Send the form to Pam de Wit, 21 Harding Close, Faringdon SN7 7SJ or give to Dave (Earth & Faith rep) or Alun (group leader).

You will need to buy a course booklet: £ 2.50 from the Mustard Seed.

Pam de Wit

MONDAY EVENINGS from **11th March 7.45** at 28 The Pines SN7 8AS

TUESDAY AFTERNOONS from **12th March 2.15** at Blessed Hugh Church Hall

TUESDAY EVENINGS from **12th March 7.45** at 7 Leamington Drive SN7 7JZ

WEDNESDAY AFTERNOONS from **13th March 2.15** at 21 Harding Close SN7 7SJ

WEDNESDAY EVENINGS from **20th March 7.30** at 2 Leamington Gate, Coxwell Rd SN7 7FP

THURSDAY EVENINGS from **14th March 7.45** at 41 Ferndale Street SN7 7AH

THURSDAY EVENINGS from **14th March 8.00** at 10B Coxwell Street SN7 7HA

Womens Fellowship

12th Dec. - Our last meeting of 2018 took the form of “carols, poems and smiles”. As Rev. Fred Ireland was unable to be with us, Jane asked us to choose some favourite carols. Poems - *The Spotlight* read by Joy Blake and *The Holly Tree* read by Jane - followed. Heather went back to her teaching days and read *The Birthday of a King* written by Bob Hartman. After singing *Joy to the World*, Margaret B. had us smiling with a poem entitled *With our Zimmer Frames*. Our Christmas bring and buy table raised £66.63 for Missions. Our meeting closed with cups of tea and mince pies. A HAPPY NEW YEAR TO YOU ALL.



9th Jan. 2019. - Welcome to a new year and a new speaker - **Mr. Jim Mynors** who lives in Coxwell Road and spoke to us on countering challenges to the churches - ageing, scepticism and urbanisation.

Jim, who is coming up 70, grew up in a church with no children; he was expected to join in and the congregation was ageing. He showed us a photo of his grandmother celebrating her 90th birthday with her family. She had five children including twins. Her family has grown and multiplied to the grand total of 160! This large family had made a significant contribution by sharing the faith throughout the generations.

Grandmother had been a leading light in the Mothers Union in rural Hertfordshire. After moving to Shellingford with his mother, Jim later worked with the Theological Students Fellowship. He became the national secretary reporting to Oliver Barclay (General Secretary) and his job was to visit Methodist, URC, Congregational and Presbyterian churches anywhere in the country. Donald English at the time was an encouragement to him.

The Tyndale Fellowship has greatly increased understanding and confidence in scripture. The Tyndale House Library in Cambridge is full of books to help you understand the scriptures. From 1988, Jim pastored rural churches and trained candidates for the ministry. He joined the Churches Rural Group whose aim is for

rural churches to support one another. As Jim's background had been engineering he used his talents to help fix buildings. Pews came out of one church so that the village could use it better. Spaces were cleared so that people could gather more freely. One church also changed the way the village worked by opening a shop (The Titchmarsh Shop) making the village become more vibrant and self sufficient.

16th Jan – Always a pleasure to welcome our friends **Ruth and Philip Pepler**. Philip read from Corinthians II (The Old Covenant – The Laws) to the New Covenant, that much greater glory (Ch 4) which can be seen in each one of us. It reminded him of over 40 years ago when he attended a meeting/dinner at The Upper Reaches, Abingdon. The purpose was to recruit men to form the South Oxfordshire Gideons. Ruth joined soon after, as an auxiliary member. Philip was given his badge with the emblem of the pitcher with a small light shining from it at the first business meeting. Paul says we have this light in our hearts, let it shine in the community around us.

The Gideons here are now called Gideons UK with an open bible as its emblem. Supported by churches, it is the aim of the Gideons to put Bibles for those who have none in every hotel, school, hospital, prison and individual place. Faringdon Community College, year 7 will be receiving their New Testaments later in the summer term during a “prayer space called time out with God.”



Both Philip and Ruth have retired from the Gideons after almost 40 years service. They are now involved with “Open the Book.” programme which Ruth says is gripping fun. It encourages children mainly junior school age to feel safe in their own skin even if home life is not so good. The material is well written and the stories will not offend any religion. If children don't learn about the Bible, how can they possibly make a commitment to God? Tomorrow Thursday morning Challow Primary School will be hearing about The Good Samaritan.

Our Mission table raised £47.82.

23rd Jan. - When our speaker Margaret Broadberry was training to become a Local Preacher, part of her course work involved Religious Art. As a child she was given a picture by an aunt of Holman Hunt's *Jesus the Light of the World*. Margaret

told us there are three versions of this painting: one hangs in Keble College, Oxford. Another is in Manchester City Art Galleries, and the third one in St. Paul's Cathedral. Hunt hoped the last version would be in the Tate Gallery, but Charles Booth, a wealthy ship owner who owned the painting, donated it to St. Pauls in 1907. It was such a precious painting that during WWII it was evacuated, but now it sits within a fire proof box whose doors close if fire threatens. The painting has been described as a sermon, and explores the idea of Christ coming into the world as light through a variety of symbols: the Lantern is associated with Psalm 119.

Another painting was *The Heavenly and Earthly Trinities* by Bartolome Esteban Murillo (1617-1682). This shows Jesus with his human mother and father, the figure of God and the hovering dove of the Holy Spirit. The picture is a representation bringing out the theological point that Christ is both human and divine.

Our third picture was *The Healing of the Lunatic Boy* by John Reilly. Reilly was born in Kingston on Thames and lived by the river near Teddington. He loved drawing and was interested in architecture. Joining the navy he was in the meteorology section when they hand drew isobars. This had some bearing on his fascination with lines in later life. The picture is yellow and grey with lots of straight lines. Jesus and the healed boy are standing in the yellow section, warm and comfortable. In the grey part we see three figures, the parents and the convulsing boy - representing chaos. Chaos that comes from not having Jesus in our lives. We can assume that this family did have faith but Jesus' miracle reassured them and confirmed their belief. Part of the Methodist Church modern art collection, this picture is located in Oxford Brookes University (I must add that there was nothing about this picture I liked at all).

However Margaret started her talk by showing us two lovely photos taken up Badbury Woods this morning. One of lambs' tails in the snow and one of a cluster of snowdrops around a tree. More to my taste!



Jane Rimmer

Church Flowers

I have put up a new rota on the notice board. If you would like to contribute please add your name on a chosen date. Many thanks, the flowers are appreciated.

Jane

Speakers for Women's Fellowship

February	6th	Tracey Liddiard
"	13th	John Taylor
"	20th	A.G.M. (Missions)
"	27th	Mary Blow
March	6th	Rev. Barbara Mapley
"	13th	Joy Blake
"	20th	Daffodil Tea (Missions)
"	27th	David Sarbutts

Joan Boreham

Decline in the Church?

A few years ago, during a discussion about the causes of church decline, one of our more conservative members declared, "I blame television! Too many people today have television!" This, to my mind, raises the question, how many people should have television then? Should television be a privilege of the wealthy? Given that at the time, Maplin, the electronics firm were selling small battery-powered televisions for just £25, it would have been difficult to restrict television ownership even if we thought this was reasonable, ethical or effective to do so. Furthermore, most people who do attend church have television themselves. This doesn't seem to harm their beliefs in any obvious way, and it is rare for peak viewing material to conflict with the times of church services. Hence this line of thinking would appear to be open to question to say the least.

A similar argument was advanced by another member when he declared, "I blame pop-music!" While the effect of popular music on religious belief has often been the subject of much debate, the relationship is equally complex. It might also be observed that in churches where growth is evident, especially among young people, that much use is made of modern hymns and worship songs that manifest a strong influence from the popular music of the past four or five decades.

At this time, when we are thinking about the future of our church, and when we are looking at difficult and worrying questions such as why is church attendance declining? – and how can we reverse the pattern in decline in our own church – it is easy simply to blame many of the changes that have taken place in society, but to do so may be unwise. The truth of the matter is that the start of the decline pre-dates both television (which first became a public service in 1936) and commercial popular music as we generally understand it which is mainly a late 20th century

development. Professor Grace Davie [1] observes that free-church membership in this country reached a maximum just before the First World War, but has been declining since then with an accelerated rate following the Second World War.

In an anonymous un-dated history of our churches, it is claimed that when a Primitive Methodist Society was founded in Faringdon in 1851 there were 35 members, and 37 members when the Coxwell Street church (now our hall) was opened in 1897. At the time of Methodist union in 1932, there were 57 members, but attendances were falling even then. It is significant, perhaps, that membership levels of our church in recent years are of a similar order to these figures. It is attendance by adherents that appears to have fallen most noticeably.

What does this mean? It raises questions about the optimum size of churches in terms of membership. Did people come to church in larger numbers in the past simply because there was nothing else to do? I will tackle these and many other related questions in a series of reviews I hope to publish in future editions of Focus.

Pete Haskins

[1] Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain, - a Persistent Paradox*, (page 57), Wiley-Blackwell, 2015, ISBN 9781405135962.

Come – Everything is Ready!

This year's World Day of Prayer* will take place on **Friday 1st March** at All Saints Church. As usual there will be a service at 3.00 pm, repeated at 7.30 pm and all are welcome.

This year's service has been written by Christian women of Slovenia, one of the smallest (and youngest) countries in Europe, formerly the northernmost region of Yugoslavia.

In the service we will hear the varied experiences of some Slovenian women, from those who remember living under Communism to younger ones who only remember it as an independent country. We will also celebrate Slovenian art and food – hence the title **Come – Everything is Ready!**

Led by Helen Wilson and members of all Faringdon churches, everyone is welcome at one of the two services. Please come and pray for Slovenia and join together with 170 countries worldwide.

Jill Headey

* Formerly Women's World Day of Prayer