



Westminster College Newsletter

Issue 2 – December 2019

Greetings & Good Wishes

We live in times of tremendous change and challenge. Communities and nations are rocked by increasingly harsh political debates which become incendiary online. The climate crisis haunts us. The seemingly endless injustices of poverty, racism, sexism, classism and many more continue to blight humanity. How many, as I write this, are enduring agonies I cannot imagine, or seeing life end without hope?

As it has always needed to, the Church finds its place amidst these terrors, and no few triumphs. The fragile flow of history carries us. Again, we are entering Advent and the journey with our sisters and brothers to the baby who brings God impossibly close, ushering the realm that unseats our pretensions to power with the power of the love the God. Once more, we will remember, and we will rejoice.

Westminster stands, like churches and theological colleges everywhere, as a sign that the stories we can tell about God come amongst us in Jesus are the greatest stories of all. Westminster stands, with our churches, as a shelter for community and a place of prayer. Here, hospitality happens and faith is fostered. Here, the bonds of friendship and love reach across the decades into centuries and around the world.

It is my delight to welcome you to our second newsletter. I hope you enjoy discovering something of what has been going on since our first back in April. Join us in celebrating Westminster's continuing story and, I pray, in supporting its future life.

Neil Thorogood, Principal



Alumni and Friends enjoying the launch

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Alumni and Friends Launch Day

1st June 2019

Wasn't it wonderful?

The Association of Alumni and Friends of Westminster and Cheshunt Colleges was launched in glorious sunshine and amidst real celebration.

It was a delight to welcome so many of you back to the college and to share in reunions and worship. Prof. Janet Soskice duly unveiled the blue plaque honouring Agnes Lewis and Margaret Gibson which now takes pride of place on the college gates.

We held our annual service of thanksgiving for those whose foresight and generosity created the colleges and, much more recently, renewed Westminster. We were able to offer time to pray for the continued work of the college, exhibitions that brought some of its rich history to life, tours of its enlarged campus and fine food.

It took tremendous hard work to make it all happen. But it was entirely worth the effort.



Praise God for all who have shared in these two colleges and, now, for all supporting and shaping their continuing life and work.

Come and Stay with Us

We have 38 en-suite bedrooms that are available for you to book for bed and breakfast. Stay for just one night or extend your time with us as much as you need. With prior booking you would also be able to join us for lunch in the stunning Dining Hall, where you will have enjoyed your sumptuous breakfast.

Join the Westminster community in morning prayer, enjoy the tranquillity of the College and take advantage of our central location for sightseeing and enjoying all that Cambridge has to offer.

To book your stay with us, simply call the reception team on 01223 330633 or email us at accommodation@westminster.cam.ac.uk.

Remember to quote your Alumni Membership Number when you book!



Reflection on our Living with Dementia Day

On Saturday November 2nd we hosted the second joint Westminster College/Faraday Institute "What it is to be Human" event.

We focused on having a greater understanding of dementia in all its forms, and to discovering ways of being dementia-friendly churches in both the way we are as church communities, and in our worship life.

This was a powerful day with great input from Rev Mhari McLintock, who is living with dementia herself, Charlotte Overton-Hart, Rev Sam White and Dr Rodger Charlton. The day dealt with some big issues but was based within the context of worship, and there was laughter and hope mingled in with the realities of this condition which touches the lives of so many in our society.

The day was completely sold out with 60 attendees and I am sure we will look to hold future events on this important subject. Some of the speakers' input is available to read on the Westminster College website under the resources tab.



Left to Right: Charlotte Overton-Hart, Mhari McLintock and Hugh MacCallum

A Venue for all Seasons

The summer of 2019 provided a fantastic canvas to showcase the wide variety of events that the team at Westminster College organise and deliver throughout the year.

From weddings to formal banquets, weekend breaks to Summer Schools, the College welcomed them all and delivered the highest level of service and experience to each guest. Often running multiple events across the College Campus, the summer showed the fantastic skills of the Hospitality team here – from the organisational prowess in the Conference Office through to the flair and skill in the Kitchen and Front of House teams.

Summer at Westminster College means weddings, and this year we hosted a number of memorable occasions for brides and grooms. From small, intimate blessings with a private family meal, through to receptions for 120, the Dining Hall was the backdrop for fine dining, dancing and nervous best-man speeches.

This year, Westminster College worked with a number of new Summer Schools, hosting lectures, tutorials and dining, providing a great contribution to the students' experience. The relationships formed with these companies have been hugely positive, with some already re-booking for 2020.

The stunning Woolf Institute on campus was the venue for a global team re-location for 6 weeks through August and September. "Let's Do This", a world-leading digital firm specialising in

the online marketing of sporting events (such as the London and New York Marathons) moved their teams from the UK, Australia and US to our College for an intense sales programme. Using the KC Shasha Suite, their directors loved the venue and complimented the high level of hospitality offered from the day they arrived to the time they left us.

In amongst all of this activity, we welcomed back many of our valued clients for Summer Bible Study, reflective programmes, and our Lay Preacher events. In conjunction with the team at the Faraday Institute we also hosted the popular 'Blue Planet, Blue God' event.

Our Reception team welcomed over 2000 guests to the College to stay in our bedrooms this summer. Whether as part of a group, visiting Cambridge

for the first time, or enjoying our bedrooms as a chance to gain the true 'College experience', our guest feedback has been superb and again testament to the hard work and determination of the Reception and Housekeeping teams here at Westminster.

As we have moved out of summer and into the darker and chillier climes of autumn and winter 2019, the level of events does not drop off – we continue to welcome more visitors and host more events, further building the reputation of the team and the College as a leading venue amongst the Cambridge Colleges.

Why not get in touch and see how we could welcome you in 2020?



Meet our New New Testament Tutor, Revd Dr Jonathan Soyars

August saw the arrival of Jonathan from the United States with his wife, Johanna, and their two young boys. Prior to his appointment, Jonathan taught at Louisville Seminary in Kentucky and was Assisting Priest at Christ Episcopal Church in Charlotte, North Carolina. He did his doctorate at the University of Chicago and trained for ministry at Princeton. Jonathan (JS) was joined by the Principal, Neil (NT), for a welcome chat recently.

NT: What attracted you to this post?

JS: One of the things that really excited me was the opportunity to engage in theological education for the life of the whole Church, both in training people for traditional ordained ministry and, equally vital, coming alongside and equipping all of God's people to engage meaningfully with scripture in whatever contexts they find themselves. In my experience, multifaceted roles like this are rare in North America. Westminster and the wider URC are doing something unusual but deeply important.

NT: How has arriving here been?

JS: It's been a wonderful journey so far. Within a week or two of arriving, members of the teaching staff offered a lay preachers' module on the book of Matthew. That confirmed my sense of being called to this place. Truthfully, it was a bit of a jolt to arrive and be thrown into the deep end of the pool, so to speak. But it was gratifying to know that I was quickly expected to do serious and significant work. Now we are in the middle of the teaching term, and the work continues at a blistering pace.

NT: How has the Cambridge Theological Federation been for you?

JS: Our work within the wider Federation is one of the many things that drew me to this role. Its ecumenical ethos and the

collaboration that it fosters between teaching staff and students from a variety of houses and traditions are very unusual in the theological landscape of Europe and North America.

NT: A lot of people tell us that contemporary Church engagement with scripture can be remarkably thin and flimsy. You're teaching New Testament. Do you have a sense of why, for many folk, the Bible might not be at the heart of life?

JS: It's likely a combination of cultural and historical factors. But I don't think faithful people should feel guilty about the situation in which we find ourselves. In many ways, it arguably reflects a failure of creativity and imagination, largely on the part of leaders and teachers like myself. As a counterpoint, I'm mindful of something that our

colleague Peter Ball said at my interviews in November 2018 — the URC is at its best when its mindset is post-doom-and-gloom! There is, I think, a holy wisdom in acknowledging where we are and recognising the challenges before us, but then seeking to move beyond and to work with scripture in new and life-giving and life-sustaining ways that matter now. In other words, I concede the reality, but I don't concede that there is no opportunity. I think the Church will always need biblically conversant people who can work with scripture constructively and challenge those who cannot or who interpret the Bible in damaging ways. I think we, as theological educators, owe all people of faith such a vision and invitation, and here at Westminster, we are trying to do precisely that. I am excited to contribute to our common cause.



Reflections on my Sabbatical Summer 2019

by Alison Gray

This year I experienced my first sabbatical, so I wasn't quite sure what to expect, other than to heed the warnings that I wouldn't achieve half of what I intended to! This was indeed the case, but it was an incredible gift and blessing nonetheless. Since joining the Cambridge Theological Federation in 2014, I hadn't had such an extended period of time for prayer and reflection, independent study, and rest. I was able to find different patterns and places of work, and included long overdue visits to friends and family. I had the luxury of time to complete my portfolio for a Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, run by the University. This was an exciting opportunity to find out what research had been done into teaching biblical languages, to read about issues of professionalism in UK Higher Education, and to reflect upon my own practice of teaching in general with other lecturers across the university in different departments. I have been invited to present some of my research next summer at the Society for Old Testament Study.



Columbia Theological Seminary Main Campus

Westminster has an exchange programme with Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia, and I am extremely grateful to the CTS for a sabbatical grant that enabled me to spend three weeks with them over the summer. I was able to make a start on planning my next research project on the 'visual texture' of Deuteronomy, looking at the images that are woven throughout the book and form part of

its message and teaching. It was fantastic to forge closer relationships with our colleagues there, and to meet students from around the world. As a result of my visit we are hoping that an increasing number of students will come and take a 'study year abroad' with us to join and enrich our community at Westminster and to enjoy learning in the ecumenical context of the Cambridge Theological Federation.

Westminster at 120

At 9.00am on 17 October 1899, a small group gathered to pray and to celebrate Communion in Westminster's library. At 11.30am the College's opening ceremony began with a prayer by the Revd Charles Moinet, Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of England's General Assembly. Hundreds were invited and 665 people sat down to a

celebratory meal in the Guildhall at 2.00pm. Festivities continued well into the evening. There were three members of teaching staff (the elderly and aloof Dr Dykes, the scholarly and exacting Dr Skinner, the deaf and distracted Dr Gibb) and 26 (male) students. On 17 October 2019, a small group gathered in the chapel (which was not there in

1899!) to mark 120 years of the College's life. A much less elaborate affair, the short service began with Moinet's prayer.

Westminster today looks very different. The community is much more diverse and international than in 1899, with six teaching staff and over 40 others providing services such as administration, hospitality, bed and breakfast, conference and events, weddings and fine dining. Nevertheless, serving the Church remains at the core of Westminster's activity, equipping men and women for discipleship, witness, mission and service. As William Elmslie, former principal, said at a previous anniversary, 'May Westminster College ever flourish by preaching the Word of God in Jesus Christ'.

Here's to the next 120 years!



Funding Westminster's Continuing Work: Can You Help?

Westminster is a place of tremendous energy, commitment and creativity. In a host of ways we continue to develop and care for this amazing site whilst ensuring that we offer the very best theological education.

The building is increasingly busy as URC, Cambridge Theological Federation, wider Church and private and commercial gatherings come and go. It is a delight to see the place so fully alive; truly we are the Resource Centre for Learning the 2006 General Assembly called on us to become!

We are determined to maintain the college wisely and well so that it can be of service for future generations. Can you help us to do so? Could you join with those of our alumni and friends who are already giving money regularly to support our work? Could you make a legacy to Westminster in your will?

You'll find all the details for giving single gifts, setting up regular giving, and leaving a legacy, on the college website. Just click the Resource Centre for Learning link and go to the Alumni and Friends pages. A monthly gift of £15 becomes £180 every year, to which gift aid will add a further £45 at no extra cost to you. If ten of you do so, that gives us £2,250 each year. We have already received over £3,000 this way following the launch of the Association and are aware of legacies being established. Please consider joining with us to help fund Westminster today, and for years to come.

Your support truly matters.



Vocational Gap Year: an Update on Progress

Our first newsletter shared our hopes of creating an intentional residential community of URC 18-25 year olds at Westminster. Plans continue to evolve and we're delighted to confirm that the Education and Learning Committee have given us permission to approach the URC's Legacy Fund for initial support. We've had excellent input from experts in fundraising and those running similar schemes and are now putting together material to turn this dream into a reality. Please hold this scheme in your prayers and watch out for further news about it.



Coming up

Lay Pioneer — The Gathering

Tuesday 21st — Wednesday 22nd January, Friday 17th — Saturday 18th July and Monday 12th — Tuesday 13th October

URC Ministers' Refresher Week

Monday 16th — Friday 20th March



Westminster College
Cambridge

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