



Westminster College Newsletter

Issue 3 – May 2020

A Thanksgiving and a Farewell

This is the final letter I will write to the Alumni and Friends as Principal. My journey in this capacity ends this summer as Jenny and I move on to pastoral ministry at Trinity-Henleaze URC (Bristol) and Thornbury URC. This will conclude 15 years at Westminster.

You will appreciate that it is an ending made all the harder by the current circumstances the world endures. Many of the ways in which we would have marked this transition have been postponed or cancelled and all of us are improvising new ways of working and being as we support others and care for ourselves. Wherever you are, however this time touches you, please know that you are in my prayers.

Thank you to all of you who have been part of the college's development over the years. Westminster is all about faithfulness in community. You have helped shape what we are and what we are becoming. Some of you have studied with us whilst some have worked here and others have served on committees or shared in events with us. Whatever your connections, thank you for your support and interest. Thank you for upholding us in your prayers as we uphold you. Thank you if you have already decided to help support Westminster's continuing work financially. Above all, thanks be to God whose place this always is, whose



mission we serve, whose Word inspires us, whose Saviour we know and whose people we welcome.

You will read here a little more about my successor, Revd Samantha (Sam) White. Many of you will know Sam as currently our Director of Pastoral Studies. I wish Sam and my magnificent colleagues across Westminster every possible blessing and inspiration as they continue to ensure that the college serves the URC with vigour, kindness and creativity. It has been my most tremendous privilege to be called alongside you and to have played a part in the story.

Yours in Christ,

Neil Thorogood
Principal

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Post-Easter Reflection: Hunkering Down

I was excited to experience my first Easter in England after moving here last year. Then the coronavirus arrived. Now I cannot join colleagues at work. My children cannot study at school. I cannot find friends at the pub. Although walking to church on Sundays could be our form of allowable exercise, we would find no one there either. As a result, I feel cut off from a building where I normally worship, from the community often found in it, from the ideals that both represent. And I feel afraid.

Feeling cut off from a physical place set apart for ministry and mission is not new. From their earliest days, some Christ-followers regularly gathered in synagogues alongside their fellow Jews. But eventually some others cut themselves off — or were excluded — from assembly and worship in that form. Still more met in homes as small groups to eat, pray, and ponder who Jesus was and why he still mattered, years after he died. A sizeable number joined in none of that but instead worshipped privately outside their cities, often underground, in catacombs and other memory-filled places. The fear that marks my current experience is not new either. It runs through our

tradition, all the way back. Indeed, at the very beginning of the Gospel of Matthew, the angel's statement to Joseph suggests that he feared taking Jesus's mother Mary as wife, presumably wondering how and by whom she was pregnant (1.20). Fear, so it would seem, was a part of Jesus's life early on, because it was present in those around him.

I take comfort in knowing that I am not the first, nor will I be the last, to live disconnected and afraid. But for a more constructive proposal, I turn to the Gospel of John. Following the execution of Jesus by the Romans in Jerusalem, according to John at least some of his disciples stayed in the city and gathered behind locked doors. They were afraid of those outside, perhaps worried that what happened to Jesus might happen to them. We might imagine them, like us today, hunkering down until a perceptible threat to life passed. Crucially, though, John's risen Jesus seeks them out and finds them. In their secluded, frightful state, his simple greeting summons what they need: 'Peace be with you' (20.21). Then he immediately adds a comforting charge. 'As the Father has sent me,' Jesus says, 'so I send you.'



These days, I suspect your experience might be like mine. So may we all sense and share Christ's peace, even in seclusion. Once we leave locked doors behind and return to more familiar rhythms of ministerial life, may we take up our work with renewed vigour. The risen Lord will seek, sustain, and send us out, as he did long ago and does even now, bearing life-giving good news to a world that longs for relationship, and will likely remain afraid for some time.

Dr Jonathan E Soyars
*Tutor in New Testament Language,
Literature and Theology*



Welcoming a Sister from Zambia

One of the exciting innovations of recent years has been our partnership with the URC's Wessex Synod and the Lusaka Presbytery of the United Church of Zambia.

Through this it is possible for exchanges to take place enabling individuals to pursue significant areas of research and professional development. Deaconess Albertina Muwowo was the third participant on the programme and spent the Lent term with us. Previously the college had welcomed a UCZ minister and the UCZ had welcomed a URC minister.

Albertina came to explore issues around the sharing and sustaining of faith across generations. She wanted to better understand some of the realities for the URC and wider Church in the UK in building inter-generational communities of worship and discipleship. We are in a very different context to the UCZ and the lack of children and young people in many of our worshipping congregations (if not in the life of local churches in other ways) was especially striking for her. The benefit of exchanges like this are that they enable someone to step well away from their own context, interact with someplace different, and thus look back into their context with renewed appreciation and perception. Through a combination of reading and study, interviews and visits, Albertina was able to discover something of our reality in order to return with fresh perspectives.

Whilst this sort of exchange is also challenging in its demands as we helped Albertina negotiate culture shock and being distant from family and friends, it was a great blessing to have her with us. Westminster has always benefitted hugely from its international community, especially through the Cheshunt sabbatical programme, and this link to the UCZ is a fruitful and significant one that we pray will continue to be a blessing for years to come.

Waiting rewarded

As I write this short article much of the world is in a period of waiting. Waiting during the Covid-19 pandemic means a variety of poignant things of course. Waiting for news of a loved-one, friend or neighbour who is sick. Waiting for time outdoors; the allotted one period of short exercise per twenty-four hours. Waiting to begin reconnecting with work in whatever forms that will take after lockdown.

In this hiatus period I offer some good news about waiting that ended in a positive way. During Lent term we were able to welcome Miss Tjanda Thihe to Westminster College to take a sabbatical as part of the Cheshunt Sabbatical Programme. Tjanda serves as an evangelist with the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa (UCCSA) and she was Cheshunt's first sabbatical scholar from Botswana. She had hoped to be in the UK in 2019 but unfortunately this didn't work out, so we were delighted and relieved when she arrived in January at last.

During her visit Tjanda was able to audit two courses in Biblical Studies and Pastoral Care, as well as attending a day event on contemporary methods of evangelism. In addition to this Tjanda was supervised by our New Testament



Tjanda Thihe (right front)

tutor, Jonathan Soyars, as she wanted to re-engage with some academic work that had been started some time ago. She became a regular member of our fortnightly bible study group and came to morning prayers held daily in the Chapel. Most memorably Tjanda shared insights and perspectives on life and ministry from a very different context, which impacted students and staff in ways that challenged and enriched us. She returned to Botswana and quarantine in March, but we're glad to know she arrived home safely after her longed-for trip to the UK.

More insights on Tjanda's stay, in her own words, will be posted on the College website (post-lockdown).

Sam White

Director of the Cheshunt Foundation



Lay Pioneers: The Gathering

The idea of holding "The Gathering" - a Learning Community for Pioneering initiatives – came out of a visit from Mike Moynagh to catch up and chat with me at Westminster College.

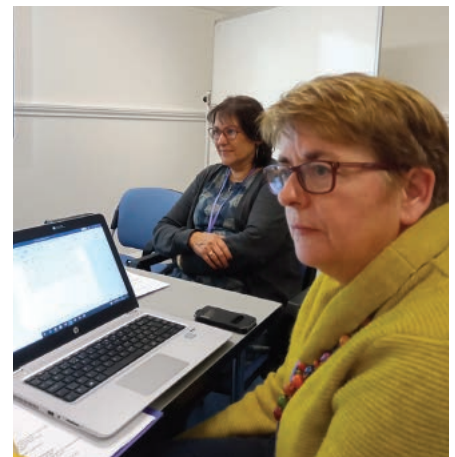
Mike has been a friend for many years, and as we bounced ideas off each other I spoke of the growing number of pioneering initiatives in the URC - and of a need for the projects and those leading and enabling them to find a home that would encourage and support them. Mike then shared some of his work in this area with the Anglican church, and from here the idea was born.

The next step was to talk to Francis Brienen, the URC Deputy General Secretary for Mission, and Linda Rayner, the denomination's Fresh Expressions co-ordinator. They had both been thinking the same thing, so now convinced this was of God we began to meet and pray together. It was from this that "The Gathering" was born, as a



joint URC Mission Team / Westminster College initiative. It feels exciting to bring together people full of energy for sharing the love of Christ in a wide variety of ways. We look forward to facilitating this group of people, and seeing where God leads them - and us - in the coming year.

The first meeting of "The Gathering", for pioneers in the United Reformed



Church, took place at Westminster College in January. It was great to have 30 people gathered together as a Learning Community and to offer mutual support and encouragement to each other. The group will meet again in July and October, Covid 19 allowing.

Peter Ball
Director of Church Resource Development

A Prayer in a Pandemic

In your hands, dear Lord, is held the whole creation.
It is your gift of fragile wonder.
It is ours to treasure as you do.
It is made more frightening now;
we who have been used to freedom are confined,
we who are used to controlling so much are floundering,
we who expect healthcare to work find it overwhelmed,
we who worship find our churches shut.

Now, we watch and wait and worry.
Grant us your peace today.
Send us signs of hope in the love that is shared and the kindness shown.
Help us to go gently with ourselves and with others.
Give fortitude and courage to all in the NHS,
all keeping essential shops and industries going,
all sustaining communities and neighbourhoods,
all in authority and power.

We are learning more about what it means to live together and apart.
We are learning more of the ties that bind our shared humanity.
So we pray for others suffering too,
especially where their resources are so much less than ours,
their strength already spent,
their homes a refugee shelter or a cold street.

We place ourselves and all we know and love into your safe keeping.
We pray for your protection and your healing.
We pray your blessing and your peace dwell amidst it all.
In the name of Jesus Christ,
and in the powerful presence of your Spirit.
Amen.



Art & Archives: Join Us Online

www.westminster.cam.ac.uk/urc/blog

In this unprecedented time where none of us can travel, we'd like to follow some of Britain's most impressive and amazing museums – but on a rather smaller scale! – by inviting you to join us virtually instead.

Read on to find out more about our art and archives collections online.

Maybe you'd like to begin with a tour in a virtual gallery of all our paintings at the College. All the URCHS, Westminster, and Cheshunt oil paintings are on the ArtUK website and are available at

www.artuk.org/visit/collection/westminster-college-cambridge-2552.

And if you'd like to know more, some of the paintings are discussed in a bit more detail in our current series of Portrait Of The Month blogs, on our website at www.westminster.cam.ac.uk/urc/blog.

If you'd prefer a more informal collection of images to browse through, check out the travel photos of Mrs Lewis and Mrs Gibson, Sisters of Sinai, indefatigable Biblical scholars, travellers, and generous benefactors of the College. Their images show monks at St Catherine's monastery, a lion in Cairo Zoo, and some fantastic shots of how to ride a camel in the desert in the 1890s! All their travel photographs have been digitised and are at the Cambridge University Digital Library website – <https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/collections/westminster/1>.

Alternatively, you might like to see the Westminster Confession. These beautiful images show the original manuscript document written in 1646 and submitted 'whole and entire' to Parliament for their approval. The digital volume also contains several other original contemporary documents relating to the Dissenting Brethren. It's also on the Digital Library website.

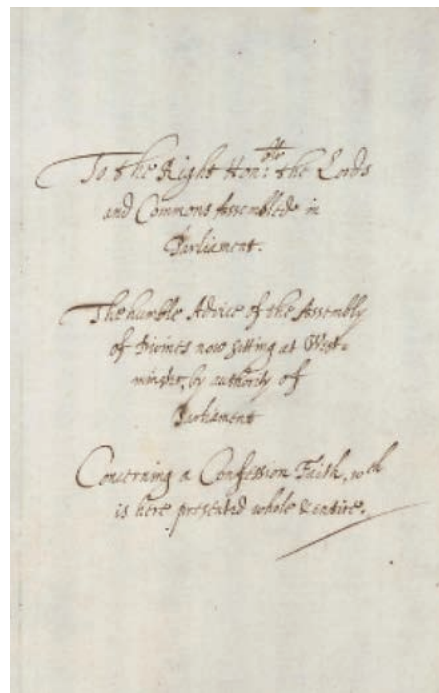
Or would you like something a little more bitesize? Consider our **#ArchivesFriday** series of tweets, where we've been posting a picture of something wonderful, beautiful or strange from our heritage and history collections every week since September. Hieroglyphic Bible? Three-alphabet typewriter? Advice on making a profit on your C18th rice plantation? No problem – step this way! Head over to Twitter and search for **"#ArchivesFriday @WestCollCambs"** and you should find them – you don't even have to have a Twitter account! And maybe tweet us to let us know what you think! We'd love to hear from you.

Helen Weller

Archivist for Westminster and Cheshunt Colleges



The Countess of Huntingdon (1707-1791) by John Russell (1745-1806) (with permission of the Cheshunt Foundation)



The manuscript of the Westminster Confession of Faith (with permission of the URCHS)



Image 346 from Mrs Gibson & Mrs Lewis's travel slides (with permission of Westminster College, Cambridge)



Churspacious

Peace, from our home to yours.

We are both Westminster alumni, Jo graduated in 2018 and Alex in 2019, and are serving as ministers in Yorkshire. For us, like so many others, lockdown has meant a big change in both our home and vocational life, and out of that change, Churspacious arose. Rewind a few months; Jo serves in three churches on the East Coast of Yorkshire, Alex serves part-time as chaplain to a project called Peter's House, where volunteers from around the world live and serve in local churches.

Fast-forward to the start of lockdown; Jo is wondering how to best serve her churches now that they can't meet in 'the way they have always done it' and Alex's volunteers have left... Both of us love the internet though and are starting to think through what 'online church' might look like. And that's when we came up with Churspacious.

We were very aware that there is a big difference between online church and church online. We could just stream or record traditional church services, and that is valuable and important but, for us, already interested in the potential depth of virtual connection, there seemed to be a call to do something different. We realised that social media operates in a very different way from traditional services. For a start, 2-5-minute videos are the norm! More excitingly, though, social media creates a real opportunity to worship, pray and think through the week and to be church together, in community, every single day; we could continue the conversations! What's more, we were seeing people



engaging who were un-churched or de-churched or just not really part of a 'Sunday morning congregation'.

Each week we post a short, unconventional, worship video and a series of images and words each day that hope to question, prompt, reflect and amuse. Lots of thinking, conversation and prayer is shared through the week. Some members have noticed that they feel able to share much more deeply and personally in this virtual church than they do face to face. At the moment we are considering 'The New (Not) Normal'. An opportunity to think about what the church should or could look like after this crisis ends. We hope there is no 'return to normal'.

Churspacious is a spacious church for everyone. You are very welcome to join us. Google us, or have a look on Facebook or YouTube.

We look forward to meeting you!



Westminster
College Alumni
& Friends

We need you!



Volunteers wanted

If you enjoy organising events and campaigns we would love to hear from you.

Phone the Alumni and Tutorial office on 01223 330632 or email admin@westminster.cam.ac.uk



Coming up

Lay Preachers and Worship Leaders

Monday 10th – Wednesday 12th August or
Friday 11th – Sunday 13th September

Not Forgotten – Meeting Dementia with Spiritual Care (with The Faraday Institute)

Saturday 7th November



Westminster College
Cambridge

A resource centre for learning
Serving the United Reformed Church

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Walking
the Way
Living the life of Jesus today

