

Oxon Fourth



Oxford Anglican Cursillo®

Issue No 31

Anglican Cursillo® in the Diocese of Oxford
Affiliated with the British Anglican Cursillo® Council Reg US Patent Office

SPRING 2023

www.OxfordCursillo.co.uk
Registered Charity No. 1117925

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Welcome to our *SPRING* issue. I hope you will find it a good read. On Page 9 please see what I hope will be a regular new feature about our small reunions. I had hoped to receive information about several so I could use more than one per issue, but my appeal for information had a very poor response. Do help me make this magazine enjoyable and informative.

Please send articles and ideas to me, Vivien Leeming at
v.leeming05@tiscali.co.uk

Deadline for our Autumn issue is September 15th, 2023



A message of hope



Photo by Emma Womersley-Sharp

"Think of the lilies: they neither spin nor weave, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his splendour was not attired as one of these.

But if that is how God clothes the grass, which is growing in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown on the stove, how much more will He clothe you!"

Luke 12, verses 27 -28 New English Bible

Andrew, our Spiritual Director, commissioned at Christ Church Cathedral



Nine Cursillistas from Oxford Diocese gathered at Christ Church Cathedral on Nov 24th to support the Rev Andrew Foran as he received his commissioning as our Spiritual Director from Canon Sally Welch on behalf of the Bishop of Oxford. He will hold the office for three years.

The commissioning took place at a wonderful choral Evensong attended by members of the public. Andrew's fellow Cursillistas were asked if they would support Andrew in his task, and they responded enthusiastically.

An explanation of Cursillo was printed on the first page of the service sheet: *Cursillo, which originated in Spain in the 1930s, is one of many ways that Christians meet together to spend time in prayer, learn from each other, deepen their faith and study God's word.*



**Afterwards we met at a café opposite the cathedral
for a chat and refreshments.**

A festive Ultreya at Blackbird Leys



About 20 Cursillistas gathered at Holy Family Church Hall, Blackbird Leys, Oxford in an Ultreya organised by Victoria Mort and her team.

Canon Janet Proudman welcomed us all. Hymns were sung, and we had a Floating Reunion – small groups of us from different areas so we got to know each other.

Sue Campbell, pictured below, gave a very moving action talk on her faith journey, including her membership of Al- Anon, which helps people living with or affected by alcoholics. She has also become a member of the Third Order of St Francis.





Everyone had brought food for a bring and share supper The table was groaning with the range of goodies and we enjoyed ourselves meeting friends and making new ones.

Editor: Please send me reports and photos of Ultreyas and other events for our next issue.



**Cursillo is a movement of the Church
Providing a method by which
Christians are empowered to grow
through prayer, study and action
and enabled to share God's love
with everyone.**

HOW WAS YOUR LENT?

A message from our
Spiritual Director,
Rev Andrew Foran



By the time you receive this edition of OxonFourth we shall be almost out of Lent (Hooray! I hear you say). We look forward to Easter after the final days of Lent and Holy Week.

So how has your Lent been?

Near its beginning there were two Sunday readings to inspire us as we set out on the journey of Lent. We had the story of the great journeyman Abraham, or Abram as he was called then in Genesis chapter 12. He was pitched against one who was trying to make a significant spiritual journey for himself: Nicodemus of St John's Gospel chapter 3.

Abraham and Nicodemus

Abraham was called by God in that chapter of Genesis to continue his long journey. He had originally started out with his father from the ancient and still surviving modern day Iraq city of Ur. He had ventured up to Haran which is in modern day south Turkey (and not far from the area of the recent earthquakes). He was called by God to keep going, down through modern day Syria and Lebanon and into Israel – then called Canaan.

Abraham was travelling to find God, away from all the other cultures and deities he had been exposed to. He went to where God was taking him and where He would be blessed with the promise of birth of new nations and a new religious culture. Abraham is the origin of today's Jewish faith nation and of ours in Almighty God in Jesus Christ. Abraham was a great traveller. Distance and age were no barriers to him. He's an inspiration to us as we journey along in years.

Nicodemus, meanwhile, was a Pharisee and a leader of the Jews in Jerusalem. He came under the cover of darkness by night, to seek out the Jesus who was causing a great stir and commotion in Jerusalem. Had Nicodemus been witnessing from a distance and hearing about Jesus in Jerusalem, I wonder? Nicodemus was clearly being moved about Jesus, 'a teacher who has come from God' he declares before Him (John 3:2). Nicodemus must get to know more about Jesus. Is this Jesus really the Messiah and the Son of God that Nicodemus's religion held so highly as promised by God? Nicodemus needed to be brave and go and find out in person.

Abraham and Nicodemus are two quite different characters, separated by centuries of history and religious cultural development, yet they have one thing in common. They journey out in faith, they go out, they venture. Abraham and Nicodemus risked all to find God, because they had been excited about Him: God had excited them about Himself. They were called away from their familiar. Both set out into the dark of the unknown. Jesus calls Nicodemus to venture out into the life of the Spirit, through a form of re-birth, to be born again. Jesus invites Nicodemus into the dim unknown and away from the soft tones of the light of the known, the stable and the secure, the 'flesh' (the here and now, earthly).

Venturing out

All this mirrors what God was doing generally in Jesus. God in Jesus ventured out from his home in Heaven into the mess and mire of His creation to find us, groping in the dark, and to reveal Himself as the steady and strong true light. This is our focus at this time of the year, Holy Week and Easter. Jesus ventures out on his cross into the darkness of sin and death, reaching out into the destruction and negativity in life. He did so, that 'we may not perish but have eternal life' (Jn 3:16).

Has your Lent been calling you out of the soft tones of light of your spiritual comfort zones? The Church of England has not escaped this. We've had the recent General Synod and the debates on sexuality and the validity and recognition of relationships by the Church before Almighty God. (We might look more into this in a future Oxon Fourth). We in the Oxford Anglican Cursillo and in many other Diocesan Cursillos – we are not alone – continue to face enduring challenges. How should we shape our programme of meetings and Ultreyas and DDU's and a Weekend? How can we help our fellow Cursillistas re-engage after the severities of the lockdowns? We desperately want to move forward but we haven't the resources and our energies are spent.

These journeys may well call us into the uncomfortable and the uncertain, into the darkness of the unknown. But that's where we will find God afresh, anew, wherever, and however the journey takes us after the style of Abraham and Nicodemus. God's banner of a confidence boost is upfront. It is the cross, the banner emblazoning hope, leading us to the final finding, the finding of resurrection.

So let's pray to persevere and endure in trust and hope. Let's then continue our Oxford Anglican Cursillo journey, helping others find God through Jesus Christ and deepening our awareness of Him in our lives.

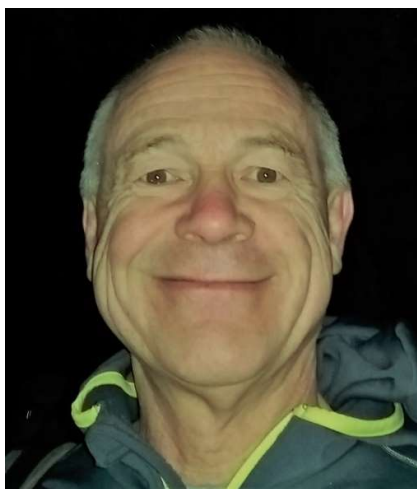
Every blessing - and Ultreya!

Andrew



Focus on our Reunion Groups

MAIDENHEAD

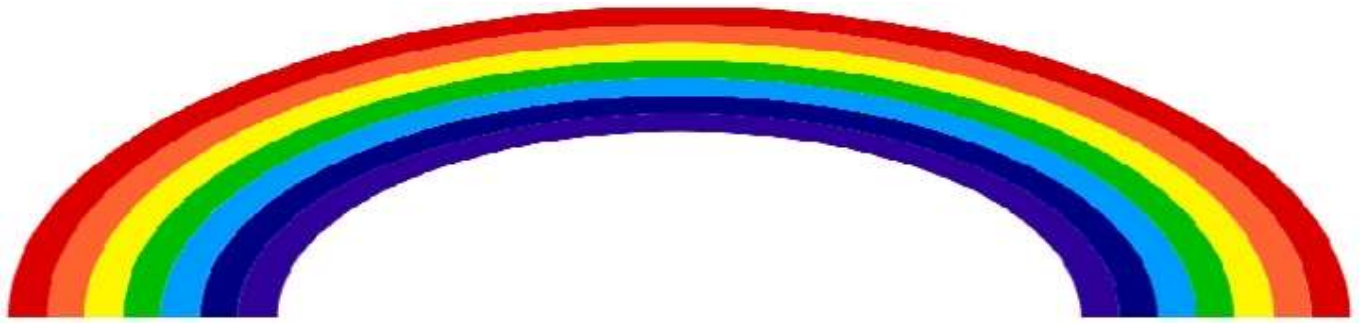


Our group currently includes six members from Burchetts Green Parish (Chris Gutch, Laura Smith, Elaine Mordaunt and Paul Sugden) and St Luke's Church, (Barbara Essam, Dorothy Strack-Hankey). In general, we try to meet about once every six weeks, and alternate between a 'remote' zoom call meeting and a face-to-face meeting at one of our churches.

In our first reunion after Christmas we met at Hurley Church and enjoyed a bring and share lunch together. At this reunion we were also joined by a special guest, the Rev Tom Etherton, who is the Vicar for the Burchetts Green Parish. It was a good opportunity for Tom to understand more about the purpose and scope of the Cursillo movement and how it can support the growth of Christian faith. At our next reunion group lunch we are hoping that Elaine Mordaunt, who is now based in Kent, will still be able to join us virtually via a zoom call.

Cursillo Reunion Groups have been running in the Maidenhead area for 15 years or more and so the members of the group have changed over time. Our former Lay Director, Peter Watsham was a member of the first group, and he sponsored me, Paul Sugden for Oxford 3 who has now been part of our group since 2007. The current group members have been meeting together for nearly six years and so we have become close friends and have shared many thoughts and anecdotes about our faith journey. And because we know each other so well, we all feel confident to be open with one another at our reunions and to offer support and guidance if it's needed. It has also been beneficial to share news from our different parishes and to exchange learning and ideas.

Paul Sugden



Cursillo in the digital age

By Matthew Caminer



For more and more people, if there isn't a web page or a social media presence, then 'it', whatever 'it' is, simply doesn't exist. Oxford Cursillo is no exception. In fact, one of the first things we did, long before we'd even launched Oxford #1, was to create a web page. Our Facebook presence followed much later. But, even if we do nothing else, when combined with our wonderful OxonFourth magazine, we already have an extremely strong outward-facing presence.

Why mend it if it wasn't broken?

Twenty years down the line, our web page was beginning to creak! It needed know-how and confidence to use the underlying software, the more so as there was no on-line help available. It also lacked the security cover needed to ensure that neither it, nor the people using it, could have their systems

corrupted. And thirdly, quite simply, much of the content was out of date.

We have now launched our new web site <https://oxfordcursillo.org.uk> and the process of transferring information from the old site is at an advanced stage. It uses the same service provider and software as the Diocese of Oxford and many other churches in the Diocese.

What are the benefits?

In the first place, the service includes back-up support from real people. Yes, really! That means that, having been set up, it no longer relies on a 'techie' to manage it, because support is always available. Secondly, it has security certification which means that the risks with the previous system have been eliminated. And thirdly, we have taken the opportunity to change the ending from **.co.uk** to **.org.uk** which is more in keeping with who we are.

Not just the web site: email too

Simultaneously, we recognized that our email system had its shortcomings. We could send messages to office-holders at, say, *secretary@...* but they couldn't reply with the same email address, but instead had to use their personal email addresses. Apart from the privacy issue, this was not good practice in terms of data management, for instance creating a substantial hand-over task at each change of office. We have therefore opened a new email account that is linked to our new web page, so in future each office holder will have their own dedicated Oxford Cursillo email address, which they can simply hand over when they stand down from their period of office, while protecting their privacy.

Where does this take us?

We now have a technical infrastructure that meets all our needs, and provides a solid and robust platform for the relaunch of Oxford Anglican Cursillo. Do have a look at the new web site, and if you have any suggestions for improvement, or find anything that does not seem to work, do get in touch with Matthew at TechAdmin@oxfordcursillo.org.uk, or add a comment to our FaceBook page [Oxford Cursillo | Facebook](#). By the time you read this, you should have received notification of the other new email addresses.



Unanswered Prayer?

A meditation by Rev Tony Price

The leaders of our parish church encouraged us to read a book by a famous and popular Evangelical author during Lent. I had read a couple of his books back in the day and really enjoyed them - was inspired and excited by them. But somehow I found myself strangely resistant to reading this one. It's a reissue of one of his most popular books. And the reason I was reluctant to read it is the description of what it's said to be about: the problem of unanswered prayer.

Let me unpack that. It's about the "*problem*" of "*unanswered prayer*". And I feel uneasy about both of those expressions.

I may be wrong (and I haven't read the book, remember?) but the impression those terms give me is that the book is about what happens when we ask God for something we want (*we want*) and don't get it. And we are disturbed by that and call it a *problem*.

There's one thing I have become more and more certain of over years of practice. And that is that prayer is not about asking God for what we want. It's about being in the Presence of God so as to learn what God wants. And then to want, to do, to embrace, or at worst (which may turn out to be best?) just to accept, what God wants. There are times when that is hard, of course there are. If what we're asking for is for someone we love to be healed, or to not die. But in God's world of mortal created beings, that isn't always going to happen: people we love are not healed, people we love die. And then what God wants is to give us peace, and the strength to carry on and live through the pain of grief.

These things are certain in life. We shall all die. And before that happens, it's probable that many people whom we love will die. To think we can avoid or change this is living in a fantasy world. And one of the purposes of prayer is to help us to live in God's real world. This is not a problem. It's a possibility, a promise, a joy, a fruit of knowing that God is a Father who loves us.

One of the prayers I use every day includes the words: Our Sovereign, do not turn us away empty from your presence, for you hear the prayers of all lips.

It's a beautiful prayer, because like so many of the most beautiful prayers, it asks God for what God always does anyway. If we have been in God's presence, we shall never leave empty. Even if we don't "receive" what we "want" and "have asked for". Perhaps there is after all no such thing as unanswered prayer. There's either the prayer where we immediately receive what we have asked for. Or the prayer where God lovingly says to us, "Not *that*, my Child, you don't understand, but *this*."



Prayer Corner



Heavenly Father, as we look around us, we see your faithfulness, even in this time of unrest. We are seeing new growth and blossom on the trees as we are coming out of winter and are reminded of your promise to Noah, that as long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease.

Thank you Lord, you are the dependable strong tower to whom we can run when we are troubled, for you never sleep or slumber, you watch over us day and night. You keep us safe wherever we are and whatever we are doing. For this Lord Jesus we raise our hands and with a hallelujah on our lips we praise your Holy Name.

As we look forward to celebrating Easter Father, we give you thanks for so loving the world that you gave us your son Jesus who died on the cross, separated from you as he took on the sins of the world, conquered death so that all who believe and trust in Him will have eternal life.

Jesus, we thank you for rising from the dead and that as you sit on the right hand of your Father we can lift our voices, joining with the angels in praising your Holy Name.

THANK YOU Jesus
Hallelujah and
Amen

The writer wishes to remain anonymous

Dates for your diary

Cursillo Leaders' Workshops

October 20th -22nd 2023: Wistaston Hall, Crewe

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**Thank you to all who have contributed to this issue of OxonFourth.
The next issue is planned for the autumn and items for inclusion
should be sent to: v.leeming05@tiscali.co.uk to arrive not later than
September 15th, 2023.
Please contact me with ideas for articles well before this date.
Telephone 01296 655342**

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