

Farewell Dear Tanya

Among the passengers when the liner Queen Mary departs from Southampton on 22 July, bound for New York, will be the five members of the Rasmussen family; Tanya and Joel, and their sons Kit Finny and Eli. They have become a valued part of our community since coming to live here seven years ago and they will be missed, and not only by the close knit congregation of the URO.



At the time of their arrival in 2008 the URC had no established minister, and it was fortunate for us all that Tanya was selected, from a large field, to share her ministry in Wheatley with the chaplaincy of Mansfield College. The manse in Littleworth was purchased and the boys have thrived at our local schools. So much so that Kit, who is taking his A levels this year, has had to choose between taking up a scholarship at Columbia University or a place to study PRE at Balliol. I think we should be pleased that he has chosen to come back to England in October to obtain a degree here before continuing his education, most likely in the US.

Kit will not be alone in Oxford as Joel will continue as the University's Associate Professor of Nineteenth-Century Christian Thought and as a tutor at Mansfield College (although he will live in Campion Hall, the Jesuit community at Oxford). Kit and Joel will return to the US three times a year, building up their air miles in the process. We can sympathise with Tanya and Joel, who have had to make the difficult decision to live apart for some of the year. It stems from Tanya's strong desire and sense of God's calling to continue her ministry in a single full time and challenging congregational appointment which is not available to her in UK, and because long term academic posts such as held by Joel are hard to come by.

Tanya has pursued her ministry in various places: in the US, in Denmark and Sweden; and here in Wheatley. She is ambitious, and is pleased and excited to have been chosen as Minister of the United Church of Christ in Hollis, New Hampshire. She will be the first female leader of this large town church, which has been in existence since well before Independence. She, with Finny and Eli, will initially live in the parsonage, but the family plan to purchase a home of their own.

Let us consider Tanya's tenure here in Wheatley and her contribution to our religious life at St Mary's. She welcomed the existence of Wheatley Area

Churches and our Local Ecumenical Project, and gave her enthusiastic support to both, often taking the lead in initiatives to bring our congregations together in worship, religious enlightenment and social activities, in doing so she followed in the footsteps of her predecessor Charles Brock who, together with our vicars Michael Farthing and John Fuller, was largely responsible for creating WAC and the LEP. While the WAC enables all our local churches to work together, the LEP recognises the close affinity between the Anglican and Methodist/URC communities and permits our ministers to lead both congregations in worship and celebration of the Eucharist. Thus John Fuller was able to be the minister at the URC following the departure of Charles, and we were able to invite Tanya to lead our worship at St Mary's during the recent interregnum.

We at St Mary's join with our friends at the URC and other Wheatley churches, and with all the people of the village, in expressing our thanks to Tanya for all she has done for us, and for the example and contribution of her loving family. We wish them happiness and success as they set out on their next great adventure.

Christopher Sprent