



The Methodist Church

**THAMES VALLEY
CIRCUIT**



ANNUAL REPORT 2017

(for the Church Year 1st September 2016 - 31st August 2017)

Published by the Thames Valley Circuit of the Methodist Church,
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Tel: 01753 534079

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Registered charity no 1133442.

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Note: Every year the Circuit produces an Annual Report.

Once every 4 or 5 years, the Annual Report covers *every* church and organisation, etc, in the Circuit. As the content of many of the reports does not change significantly from year to year, in most years the Circuit issues a short Annual Report (such as this in 2017), containing reports from:

- The Superintendent Minister
- The Senior Circuit Steward

and the Circuit Treasurer's report which is circulated to all trustees.

However, we also aim to reflect changes, as they occur, in the relevant section on this website.

The previous detailed annual report covering *every* church and organisation, etc, in the Circuit was that for 2014. To see it, [click on this link](#).
And for the one in 2010, [this link](#).

Circuit Superintendent's Report

Staffing has continued to be the main issue in the Circuit. In February, Rev. Gary Homewood asked to curtail his appointment and with sadness, this request was granted. Gary has since been granted a recuperative year by the Methodist Church and the family moved to Kent in July. Our prayers are that the move might be a time of healing and new beginnings for Gary, Vicky and Sarah. We wish them well. The Circuit decided to cope with this change by seeking a Lay Pastoral Worker for High Street and employing a supernumerary minister to direct the development plans at St. Mark's Crescent. Both appointments began in September 2017. Ms Naomi Sharp joined the Circuit from Huddersfield where she had been undertaking a similar rôle. Rev Julie Underwood will be working for four sessions per week, which equates to a third-time appointment. We have also had valued support from Rev. Richard Cattley, an Anglican priest, who retired to Maidenhead and has been assisting with Communion services on our Plan.

It was with great sadness that many across the Circuit gathered at Windsor Methodist Church to give thanks for the life and witness of Rev. David Smith on December 13th. The following is taken from the obituary printed in the Minutes of Conference:

*David was both a scholar and a pastor. He used his considerable intellect in Greek and Hebrew to enhance his service to the church through a ministry built on pastoral relationships. This was always done with love, compassion and a great sense of humour. David was obedient to the call of God wherever that took him. He led groups on pilgrimage to the Holy Land and because of his knowledge and faith, the lives of others were transformed through these encounters. Even in his retirement, David continued to give active service. He led a Fellowship Group and was a keen supporter of the Circuit Healing Services. Always, he could be relied upon to give wise and prayerful counsel. At his funeral, the church was reminded that David sought to build his ministry on these words: **'God give me work till my life shall end, and life till my work is done.'***

Two days later, on December 15th, many of the same people were at High Street Methodist Church to acknowledge the passing of one of our faithful Local Preachers, May Tribe. Both services were full of warmth as we gave thanks for fellow pilgrims of the Way.

The Circuit theme was 'hospitality' and it was the subject for a series of services planned for the whole Circuit for four weeks. I would like to thank those on the Planning Team for their creativity. The Circuit Meeting also agreed to give a donation of £12,000 to the Slough Refugee Support group as a tangible sign of our commitment to be more hospitable. A number of us went along to their 20th anniversary celebrations in July and everyone was quick to tell us how grateful they were for the donation which went towards their rental costs for the year.

The Thames Valley Circuit was approached by the Staines & Feltham Circuit to see whether we were able to accommodate some of their congregations as the Circuit decided to re-organise itself. Some churches will go into the Teddington Circuit, which forms part of the London District, others have elected to close. At the present time, three churches: Staines, Egham United and St. Jude's have opted to join us. A vote will be taken in all the Circuits and churches involved during the coming year. When this happens, it will be another way of living out what it means to be hospitable.

Once again, the Western Area Circuits planned a joint Local Preachers and Worship Leaders Study Day. This took place in Woking. The guest speaker was Rev. Dr. Philip Luscombe, the Assistant Chair of the Eastern part of the South-East District. The day was very thought-provoking and it was good to see a decent turnout from Thames Valley.

It was with great joy and immense pride that we gathered in St. Andrew's to watch the video link from the Conference where Mrs Jill Baker took up the rôle of Vice President of the Methodist Conference. Her address made us laugh and cry in equal measure.

None of the work we do in this Circuit would be possible without the support and dedication of our team of Circuit Stewards. We are especially grateful to Mr Alan Crowle, whose term of office ended this year, and Mr Charles Buckman, who took on this valuable role.

Although the year began with staff shortages, we ended it in good heart. Our bonds have continued be strengthened under God and we know that whatever the next year brings, the Thames Valley will go forward together always attempting to be more attuned to the Will of God

Sonia Hicks
November 2017

Senior Circuit Steward's Report

2016-2017 has been a difficult year for the Thames Valley Circuit: we began the new Connexional year with just four members of staff as Rev Gary Homewood, who had had pastoral charge of the Maidenhead section since 2010, was unable to return to work because of illness, and indeed, in the late Spring of 2017, asked to curtail his appointment in the Circuit. The Circuit was saddened and concerned, but also realised that Gary's welfare and the wellbeing of his family would best be served by his taking a recuperative year (which was later granted by the Connexion).

The four remaining staff, Rev Sonia Hicks, Rev Mindy Bell, Rev Margaret Dudley and Deacon Andy Packer, have somehow managed to keep the ship of the Thames Valley Circuit not just afloat but sailing along very well – they have been amazing and on behalf of the Circuit I thank them all very much indeed, and especially Sonia whose leadership and unstinting giving of herself has been inspirational. Thanks are also due to the church officers at High Street, St Mark's Crescent and Woodlands Park who rallied round the staff and enabled activities, etc., to continue in their churches – in some cases these were changed in such a way that they grew into something quite different but worthwhile. Rev Mindy Bell has had pastoral charge of High Street as well as the two St Andrew's congregations and Hampshire Avenue, and Rev Margaret Dudley has had pastoral charge of St Mark's as well as Windsor, Old Windsor, Eton Wick and Colnbrook & Poyle. We have also been blessed with offers to lead worship in the Circuit from people outside the Thames Valley and outside the Methodist Church, and thanks are due to them too; and also to those who offered more substantial assistance on a part-time basis – Rev Richard Cattley and Rev Julie Underwood.

There was no possibility that the Circuit could become involved in stationing for 2017 so it was accepted that the Circuit would be short of a presbyter for a year and that a Lay Worker would be appointed for High Street on a one-year fixed contract beginning in September 2017. The

Circuit and the Church have been delighted to welcome Naomi Sharp to this rôle – she came to us from a similar rôle in the Huddersfield Circuit. Her official welcome service was in September 2017, when we also remembered and gave thanks for the ministry of Rev Gary Homewood in the Circuit.

There have been changes among the Circuit Stewards at the end of the 2016-2017 Connexional year too. Alan Crowle stepped down and we welcomed Charles Buckman (formerly Tubman) of Hampshire Avenue to the team – our thanks go to Alan for his contribution to the team over the last six years. The Circuit Steward team from September 2017 onwards therefore consists of myself as Senior Steward, Liz Tottingham, Elsa Daniel, Glenice White, Charles Buckman and Chris Wren. The stewards' responsibilities are as follows:

Connie Jeffery

Care of Spring Lane manse and Rev Sonia Hicks and family; High Street, St Andrew's (English) and Eton Wick church councils. Also care of Priesthaus in the interim before it is sold.

Liz Tottingham

Care of Upton Road manse and Rev Mindy Bell and family; St Andrew's (Asian), Colnbrook & Poyle and Woodlands Park Church Councils.

Charles Buckman

Care of Salt Hill Drive manse and Deacon Andy Packer and family; Ledgers Road and Burnham Church Council.

Elsa Daniel

Hampshire Avenue Church Councils.

Glenice White

Care of Clarence Road manse and Rev Margaret Dudley; Windsor and Cookham Rise Church Councils.

Chris Wren

Circuit Treasurer; Old Windsor and St Mark's Crescent Church Councils.

The Circuit events/services arranged under the auspices of the Smaller Churches Support Group continued during the year, with an Awayday at Guildford Cathedral being much appreciated by those who went – even though the Cathedral was literally 'under wraps' because of restoration work. Thames Valley Voices, the Circuit singing group has continued to draw singers from the majority of Circuit churches and to offer seasonal services to the Circuit. The Thames Valley Journeymen (a walking group for men in the Circuit) also continued and drew gentlemen from many of the Circuit churches.

Annual events in the Circuit continued this year. There was the Prayer Safari on Saturday 15th and Sunday 16th September 2016 at St Andrew's, on the theme of Hospitality, when churches in the Circuit each set up a prayer station on the theme. The annual Singing the Faith afternoon, when new material from the hymnbook is tried out, took place on Saturday 24th September 2016 at Woodlands Park.

The Circuit continued to explore different ways of worship and of presenting the Gospel. During February 2017 there were four weeks of themed preaching on Sunday mornings, also on the theme of Hospitality, using excellent material produced by a small group of Local Preachers and a member of the Circuit staff. It was well-received and helped people to think about God's hospitality to us and our hospitality to God, our neighbours and the wider world.

The Circuit also continued to be involved in and to offer training of all descriptions. There was a second joint training morning with the Staines & Feltham Circuit this year held in the Staines & Feltham Circuit this time, and some of the Local Preachers in the Circuit attended a LP Study Day at Woking led by Rev Philip Luscombe, which was very well-received. Safeguarding training continued to be offered and the Circuit's thanks go to Kathy Rickman, the Circuit Safeguarding Officer. Three Local Preachers on Trial continued to study the new Worship: Leading and Preaching course under the guidance of Rev Andrew Reed of Staines & Feltham. Rev Sonia Hicks and myself continue to be involved in the Western Area Development Group, looking at how the Circuits in the west of the South East District can work more closely together and share resources, etc.

Yes, this has been a difficult year in many respects, but there has been a willingness to pull together and to go the extra mile which has been inspiring and which has enabled life and outreach in the Thames Valley to continue, with churches in all parts of the Circuit involved in mission and making disciples. I look forward to serving as Senior Circuit Steward in the 2017-2018 Connexional year.

Connie Jeffery
Senior Circuit Steward
November 2017