

Newsletter of the Smaller Churches in the Thames Valley Circuit

October 2011



Minister's Letter

There was some discussion at the recent Circuit Meeting as to whether all our smaller congregations could really be described as being in “villages”. Some are rural, others perhaps urban villages. My Chambers English Dictionary states that a village is *an assemblage of houses smaller than a town*. Generally a village is thought of as a discrete area separated from the next dwellings by countryside. To save misinterpretation, the statement describing our circuit for prospective new members of staff says: “The Circuit comprises the towns of Slough, Windsor and Maidenhead, and the distinct communities of Burnham, Cookham, Eton Wick, Old Windsor, Colnbrook and Woodlands Park, each with its own particular features.” Since coming to the circuit in 2004, I have been the minister in pastoral charge of five of our circuit’s six smaller churches and they are indeed very different and have their own distinctive contexts and traditions!

Each of the smaller churches has been given a copy of “Presence”, a workbook produced by the Methodist Church to help promote and sustain an effective Christian presence in villages and small communities. I know at least one of the circuit’s smaller churches has already started using this book.

I quote from the book:

The task of promoting an effective Christian presence in the communities of Britain is now beyond any one of the Christian denominations and therefore an effective Christian presence will always be ecumenical.

An effective Christian presence will be one in which a priestly, prophetic and evangelizing ministry is exercised.

Each of our smaller churches is a Christian presence but the difficult question which needs to be considered and answered is: Do we need to change to be a more effective Christian presence? The book encourages us to think more creatively saying: *an effective Christian presence may or may not be building centred and may or may not be a Sunday presence.*

May God bless, inspire and equip us to share in bringing in the kingdom.

Barbara McIntivey

What does the Gospel look like where you are?

On Saturday, 10th September 2011, eleven members from Cookham Rise and four from other smaller churches in the Circuit met at Burnham Abbey to spend the day thinking about how they could be the people of God and share the Gospel with the communities in which they live and worship. We were led by Rev Malcolm R White from Burnham.

We thought about what God is like and what he is doing in his world today, stressing that God is already at work through those who seek peace and justice; that the church is not the Kingdom; that God's Spirit is at work in the church and that there will need to be change – which may be challenging. It was interesting to look at the founding of Burnham Abbey, which was built during a time of political and social upheaval in 1266, to “bring the religious ideals of the monastic life into an urban setting” – a challenge to us to consider ways in which we could do the same. We looked at society, and how it has moved away from rigid structures, top-down organisation and set principles to a series of networks and communities which operate through co-operation and open-ended exploration and where respect has to be earned. We also looked at John Wesley and what his way of life says to us – his challenge to the values of the world, his bias towards the poor, his commitment to social change. I think Malcolm (an Anglican) was surprised by how little we, as Methodists, study John Wesley!

There was much food for thought during the day: how can churches change so that they are less about structure and more about relationships; less about targets and more about exploration; less about “one size fits all” and top-down organisation, and more about “liberating the local”? How can they do all this and still make disciples, still make a difference to the society in which they are placed, still sustain the sacred centre, still create vibrant Christian communities and shape confident leaders?

The day closed with a service of Holy Communion which we all helped to prepare. This is an exciting time for the smaller churches and we are grateful to Malcolm for giving us much to think about.

Burnham Abbey is a lovely place, and the room we were allocated was quiet and comfortable, with everything we needed – if you're planning a study day or similar, the Abbey is worth considering. The sisters are committed to a life of prayer and welcome prayer requests – see their website: <http://www.burnhamabbey.org/>

Connie Jeffery

Eton Wick

Future Events

- **9th October.** Sharing a mini-coach with Burnham - to Westminster Central Hall for *The Big Sing* celebrating the renovation of their pipe organ. (More details available from Jo Webb.)
- **11th October.** Start of *Pie and Praise* season. We hope the speaker will be Rev Janet Binns, Diocesan Chaplain for Olympics and Paralympics.
- **6th November.** We are hoping to join with members at Windsor 6.30 pm for a Service of Remembrance, led by Rev Barbara McIntivey, for those who have died recently.

Burnham

The internal and external re-decoration of Burnham Methodist Church is now almost complete. The one remaining task is to refurbish the small room at the end of the premises as a “quiet room”. It will be furnished as a sitting room with armchairs, a coffee table, bookshelves, and, possibly, some “quiet” games such as chess and draughts. We envisage it being used for people just wanting to have a “quiet half-hour”, a chat and a cup of coffee with friends, or, quite possibly, for private counselling.

The Christian outreach group based at St. Mary's, Hitcham, in addition to the Homework Clubs on two evenings and the Family Focus Group on Fridays, are now hosting a “drop-in” each Wednesday morning, with a different “focus” each week, including asking representatives from different sections of the community to make themselves available for advice and information where required. Two members of the Methodist church are working as liaison partners with the group ### known as “The Well at Lent Rise”.

Harvest Festival takes place on 25th September, led by the Rev John Newton. This Sunday is known, in some denominations, as “Back to Church” Sunday, and we hope to contact as many of our previous attendees as possible, and invite them to worship with us.

Other news ### well ### now we are looking so smart, we are hoping, just hoping ### now don't get too excited ### that we just might be able to put on a concert next year. So get your 2012 diaries ready!

Old Windsor

Open the Book

On 21st September seven rather nervous members from the Methodist and Parish Churches of Old Windsor met in the entrance of King's Court First School. We were there to present the first session of *Open the Book* ### the scheme which takes Bible stories into schools ### to the children.

We appreciated the time to familiarise ourselves with the school hall, lay out the props and watch the children, who seemed initially rather over-awed by the presence of seven strange adults. By the time we were half-way through the story there were giggles and laughs and a sense of anticipation about what was coming next.

Our preparations had been both careful and laughter-filled, and we had become a “team” in the short time we had been together. We really enjoyed presenting the story, and we hope the children enjoyed it too.

Anne Haggarty

Future events

- Our series of *Travellers' Tales* continues on Thursday, 10th November at 2.30 pm in the Church Hall, with a Scottish theme. Cost: £4 including afternoon tea Everyone welcome!
- Our next *Messy Church* will be on Sunday, 9th October, in the Church Hall.
- Don't forget that if you are in Old Windsor on a Tuesday morning, we are open for *coffee and a chat* between 10 am and noon, and we'd love to see you. The more the merrier ... and noisier!

Joint Events

Saturday, 29th October, 4 pm at Eton Wick

SINGING the FAITH

Come, Taste and (New) Sing!

A chance to learn some of the hymns and songs in our new hymnbook.

The provisional programme is:

4 pm Sing
4.30 A bring-and-share tea.
5 pm Sing again
5.30 (approx) Finish - in plenty of time for those wishing to go to the concert at Windsor!

For more information, contact Anne Haggarty or Connie Jeffery.

Please Support US!

If you can support our activities and events in any way, please do! Thank you!

Contact

This newsletter is edited by Anne Haggarty, the Secretary of the Smaller Churches Support Group. Please contact her with ideas and suggestions.

