

Newsletter of the Smaller Churches in the Thames Valley Circuit

November - December 2012

Minister's Letter

It is easy to focus on numbers to the detriment of the Mission of God where we are. Jesus, talking about faith said, **‘If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, “Be uprooted and planted in the sea”, and it would obey you...’** [Luke 17:6] A mustard seed is tiny, miniscule. It would take several of them to cover the nail on my little finger! Yet, Jesus says that faith that small can still achieve great things. And what goes for faith is also true of our churches. Small churches can achieve great things if they focus not on the resources they don't have, but on the resources they do.

When I worked in Dublin, the smallest church in the Circuit was Skerries. Skerries sat on a spit of land to the North of the country. It had once been a thriving sea-side resort, and many people remembered going to Skerries in the Summer with their parents. The small chapel catered for these holiday visitors. Once upon a time, in the summer months, Skerries chapel would be full of worshippers. Ten years ago, all that was a distant memory. The chapel would often have no more than six people on a Sunday morning and that would include the preacher and the organist! They were tiny and no-one in Irish Methodism thought there was much of a future for them. It seemed their days were numbered.



But the members of Skerries didn't see it that way. One person who saw things completely differently was Victor Corry. Victor would open the church every Sunday and be the friendly face whenever strangers came. He loved to smile, and his smile welcomed many people into the small chapel. Victor was happy to try anything in order to keep God's Mission alive in that place. In the Church Councils, he was always willing to give things a go.

As the property prices in Dublin went up, more people moved out to Skerries and anyone who attended the Methodist church once, would come back again and again. Why? Because Victor would greet each one of them with the joy of the Lord. At his funeral, many people commented that it was Victor who had encouraged them to sign the visitor's book. It was he who had taken the time to show them which books to use. It was this man of God who often would gently persuade them to continue the fellowship with coffee afterwards.

Skerries is still the smallest church in the Dublin North Circuit but it is from Skerries that a Community worker has been employed to encourage people to be more community minded in the village and further afield in Drogheda and Dundalk. Skerries' approach to mission and outreach has left many larger churches struggling to keep up!

The Skerries congregation continued to believe that God has a plan for them and that they have to be ready to act. The plan for Skerries took many years to unfold but they didn't give up hope. Do we know what plan God has for our smaller congregations? What are we prepared to do in order that God's plan can be made a reality? In Advent we see that God's plans for an insignificant tiny remnant were fulfilled in the coming of His son, Jesus Christ. God didn't care that Israel was smaller than the vast Roman Empire. He still carried their hopes as He continues to carry ours of, one day, every person bowing before His throne in worship and adoration.

Sonia

News from the Churches

BURNHAM

It has been a great pleasure to welcome Rev Sonia Hicks to Burnham. She was 'introduced' to the community in a Churches Together service in which worship was led by Rev Malcolm White, Rev Nicola Pledger from St Mary's Hitcham, Rev Andrew Baker, and Sonia herself. Your correspondent had the pleasure and privilege of welcoming clergy and congregation, and it was an absolute joy to stand in front of a packed Church – every face seemed to wear a beaming smile. There was an overwhelming feeling of goodwill and the sharing of The Peace made us aware of how much we have to give – and receive.

The Super's message left us determined to deepen our commitment to our Lord's service and Rev Nicola's impressions of Burnham encouraged us in our service to the community. Members of other Churches took part in Scripture readings and at all times we felt that we were all one in the Lord. A most memorable start to Rev Sonia's ministry in Burnham!

Hilary Evans



WOODLANDS PARK

Woodlands Park Methodist Church is joining with St Mary's Anglican Church again on 15th December for another event in the community. It will be a Christmas Festival in the village – with food, games and singing. We rejoice to be sharing in mission with the other Christians in the village.

COOKHAM RISE

We have been getting to grips with the new pastoral arrangements for Cookham Rise since September: for those who are a bit hazy, Andrew Baker is our 'named' minister and has overall pastoral charge of the church, which is a great arrangement, and we are also delighted to have input from Rev Malcolm White (a retired Anglican priest who lives in Burnham) as well as from Sonia Hicks and Gary Homewood during the week. Malcolm is committed to lead worship once a month at Cookham and on his first service in September outlined how he saw his commitment to us and what he hoped our commitment would be to him – extending beyond Sunday worship to becoming involved in the life of the church. It is good to have him on board.

Our next family-orientated venture will be *Messy Church* on 20th October which Sonia has said she will be involved with – even though she's never done it before. This time we are taking the **Good Shepherd** as our theme – lots of craft possibilities there: sheepy biscuits, sheep masks, cotton wool sheep, pin the tail on the sheep ... etc. Not decided what we will eat yet not sure lamb curry would go down well with under-fives! Because schools break up for Christmas so late this year, we have moved our Christmas Workshop (for primary-school-aged children) to a Saturday (15th December). We thought parents might be glad of some free time for Christmas shopping! No details on that one yet, but I have written myself a reminder that whichever craft I am responsible for, will not involve glitter – I spent many weeks retrieving bits from clothing and carpets, etc last year ...!



On 17th October we will begin a 4-5-week course (one evening a week) using *Presence* – a Methodist publication subtitled 'a workbook to help promote and sustain an effective Christian presence in villages' which seems to ask a lot of the right questions about village situations and how best to be a Christian presence there. The workbook includes six Bible study sessions – but I am going to have to condense it somehow if we are to leave a couple of weeks free before the beginning of Advent. We usually have four weekly Bible Study sessions during Advent – we haven't finally decided on material as yet.

Monthly lunches and coffee mornings continue (with an expanded Christmas coffee morning on 8th December) – and we would be delighted to see anyone from around the Circuit. Also this year we have decided to fund-raise for a particular charity again, after a break last year: this year our chosen charity is *Ludhianna* – a Christian medical mission which the son-in-law of one of our members is involved with. All our usual activities continue to take place – Ladies Circle, Toddlers, Rainbow Pre-school, *Open the Book*. We are also tentatively looking at the possibility of replacing some or all of the pews in the church with chairs – we are taking it very slowly and it may in fact never happen. Watch this space!

Connie Jeffery

OLD WINDSOR

We have started on the second year of *Open the Book* at Kings Court First School, and the children eagerly await what we tell them. It is very interesting, as we walk to the School, to hear what the children are imagining about the story to come. Particularly so when we have props to carry, even when they are well wrapped up! Last week, we took two long pieces of wood, and one child was heard to remark "It's wood; it must be about Jesus." In fact, the wood was to make a doorway! We love doing *Open the Book*; the children love us doing it. It's a win-win situation – but only as long as we have enough people to participate.

We have restarted our Bible Study sessions, now with Margaret, on the theme of prayer, on 2nd and 4th Tuesdays of each month.

Our next *Travellers' Tales* will be on Thursday, 22nd November when Mike and Betty Willcocks will be talking about Croatia. 2.30 pm in the Hall, tea to follow, cost £4 inclusive. This was postponed when Mike was ill, and we are so delighted that Mike is now well enough for him and Betty to give this talk. We have three others planned for the New Year.



“Come and join the celebration!” This Autumn we celebrate our 60th Anniversary of becoming a Methodist Church. On Saturday 27th October, the church will be open from 3 - 5 pm. Do come and celebrate informally with us; share your memories, and afternoon tea, which will be available throughout the session.

Rev Dr Malcolm White will be leading both our services on Sunday, 28th October. Our morning service will be our Celebration Service. In the evening, it will be the Circuit's Missions Service, when Malcolm will be talking about his healing ministry at Central Hall Westminster.

Messy Church – our joint venture with the Anglicans will be held in our Church on Saturday, 24th November starting at 3.45 pm.

Anne Haggarty

ETON WICK

Following our Diamond Jubilee and Olympics/Paralympics events, the remainder of this so called summer season has ended rather quickly, only giving us the opportunity to take the flags and balloons down!

However, the *Big Lunch* in June was so successful that Laura Clack and Jo Webb bravely volunteered to put on another one, which took place after the service on Sunday, 21st October, and was equally enjoyable. Thanks to both of them for all their hard work!

Sonia, our new minister, is quickly getting to know how demanding we are, as the smallest of her four churches! She has already graciously agreed to lead our fortnightly Bible Study group, and has also spoken at the small Thursday Fellowship meeting. We already are very much “at home” with you, Sonia, and thank you for all the encouragement you give us.

Eton Wick is pleased to be hosting a second session of *Singing the Faith* on Saturday, 10th November from 2.30 – 4.30 pm, followed by a “bring and share” tea. We hope the **larger** churches will join in, with their greater knowledge of the new book.

We shall welcome Dr Neil Coleman to the first of our new series of *Pie and Praise* evenings on Tuesday 13th November, 7 – 9pm. For everyone!

We hope to fill our chapel and hall for our major event for *Action for Children*, the traditional Carol and Mince Pie evening on Tuesday, 18th December, starting at 7.15 pm. Please come – and come early for the best seats!



COLNBROOK & POYLE UNITED CHURCH

Message from the editor as we go to press:

We heard with sorrow of the death of Ray Booker. We extend to Shirley, their relatives, and all at Colnbrook & Poyle our prayers and sympathy.

Joint Events ... dates for your diary

Tuesday, 30 th October	2.30 pm at Woodlands Park	Circuit Healing Service
Saturday, 10 th November	2.30 pm at Eton Wick	<i>Singing the Faith</i> - again!
Thursday, 22 nd November	2.30 pm at Old Windsor	<i>Travellers' Tales</i> – Croatia. Mike and Betty Willcocks
Thursday, 10 th January	2.30 pm at Eton Wick	Circuit Healing Service.
Thursday, 24 th January	2.30 pm at Old Windsor	<i>Traveller's Tales</i> – Kenya Evelyn Thomson

EDITORIAL

Please Support US!

If you can support the above circuit events or our activities and events listed under our individual churches, in any way, please do! Thank you!

Editor's note / Contact

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

Thank you to all contributors, and – *please* – keep the contributions coming! You don't **have** to wait for my reminder!

Anne Haggarty