

Newsletter of the Smaller Churches in the Thames Valley Circuit

May - June 2013

Superintendent Minister's Letter

Dear Sisters and Brothers, worshipping in the “Smaller Churches” in the Thames Valley,

Greetings to you as we live in the season of resurrection!

The gathering on that first Easter evening was certainly a “small church” gathering. The disciples wondering about the future, joined by a few others (and – of course – one was absent). Talking about the past few years, the brilliant times they had spent in fellowship, learning, adventure. Now what?

Then they knew the Presence of the Risen One. That meant everything was different – and anything was possible. The small church caught the wonder of the reality of the Risen Christ, received the gift of peace as he greeted them and then knew the power from on high as he breathed on them. So may it be for us as we gather in our churches in the coming weeks. We may catch ourselves talking about “the good old days”, looking back wistfully ... now, look up – for the Risen Christ is in our midst, unseen for now, but offering a future filled with hope and possibility. We receive the astonishing gift of peace and the breath of the Spirit enables us to rise up ourselves.



Each church has difficult decisions to make about the way we are going to serve the present age, where we can focus our energy. There is always a new possibility though. It has been a great joy to share with you the sense of Christ's presence in the healing services in which we have shared over the last eighteen months: a sign of the reality of that Risen Presence.

As a group of smaller churches, we will continue to support each other as we explore the new possibilities, which the Spirit will open up for us in the coming weeks. We are an Easter people. As circuit ministers, we make ourselves available to stand with you, to laugh and cry with you, as we explore “what it means in daily living to believe and to adore”.

Peace.

Andrew

Minister's Letter

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

At this moment it is 7.30 am CET; as I sit composing this letter on our balcony in Qawra (pronounced hora) which is on the Maltese archipelago, having already done my early morning swim in the indoor pool, which I must be honest is heated. The sun is shining, the birds are singing and I would say it is peaceful but somewhere nearby there is someone using machinery to do with building. I can see the outdoor pool, from where I am sitting, which whilst looking inviting is very cold. Gradually more and more people are coming outside to enjoy the early morning sun, with the temperature at a very pleasant 13°. As people emerge they often wish those they see a "good morning", something that I am sure they would not do back in England, but here people seem to talk to each other more.

My daily early morning swim is a brilliant occasion because as I move around the water I find I am able to pray without any interruption. So far I have met no-one down there at 6.30 am, you may say understandably, so I find that I can spend quality time with God, which is much harder back in the flat or on the balcony. It is unbelievably wonderful to spend an hour praying whilst surrounded by water, muted light and pictures of ancient scenes. As I travel through this Easter time, I feel the presence of the risen Lord in a new way and this is both very encouraging and very moving which I had expected working through the Holy Week and Easter journey but in some ways it was also more than I had expected which is a joyful blessing.



I have found myself wondering if all my conversations about what it is like living and working in the Thames Valley Circuit as a minister has anything to do with that. Most of my friends in Malta are in fact Maltese and as such are Catholics and they don't quite get a "woman priest" – a dilemma I have been facing since I started my training – and now they don't quite get how said "woman priest" works in more than one church as this is also outside their experience. When I first arrived on this visit, for the first time, we had some difficulty because people spoke to me differently and I suppose started talking to me as they do their catholic priests and this was quite difficult. I did not see a difference but clearly they did and we had to work through that so they we could share news and fellowship as we always had.

I am amazed how often the theme of a journey is part of the conversation everywhere. We talk of our faith journey, our journey through Holy week and here I am recognising yet another journey we needed to travel to get back to our normal way of being here. I suppose in some ways our journey with God is like that especially during the Easter season when more than at any other time we remember what Jesus did for us and how that enabled us to enjoy a new enriched journey with God. So as we each journey through this Easter season I pray that we come to know God is a new, exciting and intimate way and we are filled afresh by the gift God gives us and the blessings that bring.

Wishing you every blessing during this Easter time.

Margaret

News from the Churches

COOKHAM RISE

Despite the seemingly endless winter, activities have continued at Cookham Rise, although Sunday congregations have been rather sparse on occasion as the elderly and/or unwell have found it difficult to attend worship when the weather is particularly bad. Nevertheless, we had a successful *Messy Church* on the afternoon of Sunday, 24th March when 26 people met for crafts, worship and afternoon tea on the theme of '**Treasure Seekers**'. The 'lucky dip', which yielded chocolate money, was popular, as were treasure boxes and 'jewel' necklaces. And the children had a great time painting a big rainbow with paint and rollers – a sign in the sky that we are God's treasure – and families enjoyed making muffins with hidden 'treasure' (chocolate chips, raisins or blueberries). We have 'regulars' now, who come to *Messy Church* each time, and seem to enjoy it. Kathy Rickman and I are hoping to attend a '**Godly Play**' training session this year so that we can introduce this method of storytelling at *Messy Church*. Unfortunately we had to cancel our Spring children's workshop on 12th April because of lack of interest – maybe the workshops have come to the end of their life.

While on the subject of work with children and families, we had a Guide/Brownie/Rainbow Parade Service on the morning of Sunday 24th March led by Rev Sonia Hicks, which was well-attended and which the girls enjoyed taking part in.

The Smaller Churches Awayday, organised by Cookham, took place on 23rd February at the Soltau Centre and was led by Rev Dr Malcolm White on the subject of prayer. Twenty-four people attended, with nearly all the smaller churches being represented and, of course, Malcolm did us proud – I am sure if you asked those who went they'd be able to repeat quite a lot of what he said: he has the gift of making things simple and very memorable. And the Soltau Centre is a lovely place to gather – the snowdrops were popular and looked beautiful even in the occasional snow flurry!

During Lent this year we had five weekly group studies on prayer, to tie in with the Circuit theme this year, entitled 'Life Source', which looked at prayer as relationship, as enjoying God, as listening, as honesty and as care. Between five and ten people attended each session, and it was good to have time to pray as well as to talk about it. We were delighted that Rev Andrew Baker and Rev Malcolm White were able to attend most of the sessions. Our next study course will probably be in the early summer – this occasional five or six-session format seems to work best for us.

The annual Easter Prayer Vigil was held on the evening of Good Friday and the morning of Holy Saturday as usual, prayer stations being set up to enable people to think about the last week of Jesus's life on earth. Although not that many people came (we reckon about 20 altogether), those who did, seemed to find it very helpful. I certainly find it a very helpful exercise for Lent and Holy Week as I think about each station and prayerfully set up the stations in the church. Twelve of us gathered on Easter Sunday morning at 8 am for Holy Communion followed by breakfast – a favourite service for many of us. [Note for 2014: don't let me cook the boiled eggs as they were either almost raw or hard-boiled – there was no happy medium!]

The ongoing topic of discussion at Cookham Rise at the moment is whether or not we will replace the pews in the church with chairs – watch this space!

Connie Jeffery



COLNBROOK & POYLE UNITED CHURCH

At our March Fellowship Meeting, owing to Rev Margaret Dudley being unable to lead us as she usually does, we welcomed a very pleasant young lady from Thames Hospice Care to talk to us about the work they do at the Windsor and Ascot sites.

Amelia was her name. She is very knowledgeable about her subject and was very keen to answer questions from our members afterwards. Amelia gave us some of her personal history, in that she was in fact a Graduate in Journalism. However after trying unsuccessfully for some time to find a job within her subject, she worked for a while as a volunteer at the Windsor Hospice. Eventually she was offered a job by the hospice as a publicity worker. This was to be a turning point for her, she loved the job so much that she has now made it her career.

One of the most notable things she was able to get across to our members was to dispel the old notion that going into a hospice meant that you were never going home again. Rather, that you could just go for a period of respite for yourself and also give your carers a period of much needed respite. Most of their patients, though, are of course those who are terminally ill.

Amelia went on to tell us just how friendly all of the staff are, how well the hospice is organised and that it is funded mainly from donations and corporate funding.

All in all this was a very worthwhile and interesting afternoon. If any of our friends in the other smaller churches feel that they would like to have Amelia come and talk to them, please telephone the Thames Hospice on 01753- 842121

And of course any donation you make would be most welcome, though not compulsory!



ETON WICK

“It’s an ill wind that blows nobody any good” the saying goes, and we have been greatly blessed by the Circuit at a time when illness and other commitments would often have left our congregations very much depleted. Due to the closure of Ledgers Road for refurbishment, we have welcomed a number of their members, especially Evan and Bertha, and we are particularly grateful to Anne, who has very kindly offered to share her musical gifts with us on Sunday evenings until the work is completed.

It has been a great joy to have Meg Few with us, undeterred by the weather! Those who read the Methodist Recorder will have seen her photograph, taken in the chapel, along with our Minister, during the week of Meg’s 100th birthday. May God bless you, Meg, for all the years of faithful service you have given, especially to Ledgers Road, but also to the Circuit.

At the AGM. of the Thursday Fellowship we were able to report a small increase in membership (to seven!) but we remain vulnerable due to our average age being quite high! Members continue to support eight (mainly local) charities, and last year contributed over £114 to Methodist Women in Britain.

We intend to explore the possibility of interacting with other small women’s/mixed groups in the Circuit, to encourage and gain strength from each other, and would be pleased to know if there is interest in this, either joining us or inviting us to join you on an occasional basis.

We hope to be well represented at the Easter Offering dedication service at Windsor on Sunday, 12th May, and look forward to “hosting” the next meeting of the Support Group on Tuesday, 14th May, at 7.30 pm.



WOODLANDS PARK

We are again joining with White Waltham C of E Church to run a community event at Woodlands Park on Bank Holiday Monday, 6th May from 2 pm to 5 pm. It will be called *Mayday Mayhem*. There will be community games – BIG games for all and all ages to join in, crafts, a barbeque, tea and cake and (hopefully!) a bouncy castle to bring the community out. Please pray for good weather, it makes such a difference to these events! (We hope to include a report of this event and perhaps a few pictures in the next edition of this newsletter.)

Our *Open the Book* team continues to do great work at Woodlands Park Primary School and by all accounts each assembly with superb rôle play, costumes and acting by our enthusiastic team is considered a highlight of the school week. So congratulations and thanks to all who are involved!

Linda Harrison

OLD WINDSOR

As usual, *Open the Book* has been our major outreach work. All the team members have enjoyed both the preparation and the delivery. It's good for us to work co-operatively sharing ideas and working out what is actually practical in the time we have available! Preparation time is valuable but limited by all of us being involved in so many other things as well (just what you would expect of busy people – also time for something else!) – and we have grown in numbers, and are hopeful that one of our team who had to withdraw through the illness of her husband will be returning. Good news on two fronts!

It's hard to realise that we are well through our second year – the time goes so fast. We do know that the children are still getting a lot from what we do, and the teachers also are appreciative.

The Smaller Churches Away Day last February was a most stimulating and interesting day. Rev Dr Malcolm White led us through different aspects of prayer. This was Malcolm's typical mixture of hard thinking and humour. All of us who went gained extra insights into personal and public prayer. A big thank-you to Malcolm, and to Connie, who organised the day.

Our series of Travellers' Tales has continued through the winter, and remains popular. Not even the bitter weather kept people away. Our next one is on 16th May when Jancis Sherriff will tell us about her trip to Thailand. Jancis is one of our *Open the Book* team. She looks after developing "costumes" for use, as well as the imaginative use of old curtains and towels!

We want to say "Thank you" to David Thomson, who after years and years has decided that the time has come for him to step down as a Church Steward, most of the time as Senior Steward. He leaves a "hole" which will be difficult to fill!

Anne Haggarty



Good Friday – Procession of Witness

It was a cold, cold morning, but at least it was dry, as we gathered at the corner of St Luke's Road near the shops, a group of folk from the Churches in Old Windsor, to remember the procession that took place so many years ago in Jerusalem on the first Good Friday. A Cross had been erected, at the spot where a few months earlier there had been a Christmas tree covered with lights, and it was there we heard some words from *The Message* to concentrate our minds on that important day before we sang "When I survey the wondrous cross, on which the Prince of glory died". Poignant.

We crossed the road to the shops, where we again heard words from the gospel account and sang a hymn before walking up St Luke's Road led by some of the younger members who carried crosses. We visited the three Church buildings in the road, listening to words from the Bible and singing a hymn outside each before returning to St Luke's Church for a short service followed by Hot Cross Buns and coffee.

David Alexander

BURNHAM

Those of us who attended the 'Awayday' at Stubbings led by Dr. Malcolm White will remember what a powerful effect it had on our attitude to prayer. It was a truly memorable day. One of the results from this day is that one of those who attended the day felt it was right to begin a prayer circle at Burnham. The newly-refurbished small room at the end of the corridor was just right for the purpose, and a small group now meets there every Monday morning at 8 am.

8 am is, of course, practically the middle of the day for those of us who are part of *The Well@Lent Rise's Wake-Up Wednesday* team as we start preparing the bacon butties, etc, for the school students shortly before 7 am!



The attached picture (well I hope it is ... [*Hilary – yes ... but you are testing my computer know-how to its limits! Ed*]) shows some of the students and helpers under and around the gazebo we set up on the grass opposite the Church, where the school buses stop for the Altwood and Cox Green students. You can't see the shivers, but I have it on good authority that the freshly made hot chocolate is very welcome!

We are delighted to report that due to the foresight and enthusiasm of two of our younger members, we are setting up a Sunday School! It is early days yet and there is lots to do, but please pray for this and all those involved, and we'll tell you more next time.

Preparations for Burnham Lighthouse are going ahead! It is the 10th year of this wonderful holiday outreach to the young people of Burnham and the surrounding area. Helpers are always wanted – contact me if you're interested and I'll put you in touch with the team.

Just to remind you that we are holding a Christian Aid Quiz at Burnham Church on Saturday, 11th May. We'll make sure all churches get full details. The following day is our Church Anniversary (we will be 106 – actually 106 and one month as the opening took place in April) and for the first time in many years it will also be a Gift Day.

We can't finish without recording our thanks to Cookham Rise for the quite Wonderful Easter reflections in the Church on Good Friday and Holy Saturday. They served to uplift the soul, calm the spirit and to make us consider in so many different ways the true meaning of Easter. Thank you.

Hilary Evans

Joint Events ... dates for your diary

The next meeting of the Smaller Churches Group is on Tuesday, 14th May, 7.30 pm at Eton Wick.

Dates for future healing services will be arranged at this meeting.

Saturday, 11 th May	7.30 pm at Burnham	A Christian Aid Quiz evening organised by Churches Together in Burnham
12 th – 18 th May	Christian Aid Week	
Sunday, 12 th May	5 pm at Windsor	Circuit Easter Offering Service Preceded by tea at 4 pm
Thursday, 16 th May	2.30 pm at Old Windsor	<i>Traveller's Tales</i> – Thailand by Jancis Sherriff.
Saturday, 18 th May	Cookham Rise	Coffee Morning and Cake Stall
Saturday, 1 st June	Cookham Rise	<i>Singing the Faith</i> Sponsor Connie Jeffery and Kathy Rickman who will be playing / singing their way through <i>Singing the Faith</i>

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!

Anne Haggarty

Please Support US!

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!