

Newsletter of the Smaller Churches in the Thames Valley Circuit

January – February 2014

Minister's Letter

When Jesus was a child, he went with Joseph and Mary to the Temple for the Passover festival. We are told that on one of these occasions, Jesus is left behind: "When the festival had ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it." [Luke 2: 43]. There can be no worse experience for a parent than mislaying a child. It happened to me just once but I hope it never happens again.

Olivia was about two years old at the time and I took her into B & Q to look for a piece of hardware. B & Q, as you know, are big warehouses and Olivia thought it fun to run away whilst I was looking at the shelves. Each time, I would scold her and tell her that it wasn't a game but, to her, it seemed like the greatest game in the world. It had happened for the umpteenth time, when I called out her name and no little girl came running towards me. I checked the aisles either side of me but no luck. Mary and Joseph also searched for their lost child. The Bible tells us: "When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him." [Luke 2: 45]. I can't remember how many times I wandered up and down those aisles calling out her name. I can remember desperately going out to the car and then into the previous shop we had been in but with no luck. My two year old had completely vanished and I started imagining scenes of trying to explain to the grandparents why I was such a careless



completely vanished and I started police, to Conrad and to the mother.

Eventually, I approached a store assistant

and explained my plight.

Mary and Joseph, after searching frantically had no choice but to travel back to Jerusalem the teachers of the Law. Our daughter was the assistant. She was very tearful, only a but I was so pleased to see her.

among their friends and relatives and there was Jesus, conversing with found within a matter of minutes by little less anxious than her mother,

Any decent parent will search for a lost child and God searches for the lost sheep among us.

He scours the highways and byways longing to bring us safely home. I have never been lost as a child but spiritually I think every one of us has lost our way at some time. We may have felt that we were fine but it didn't stop God scouring the highways and byways for us, as only a loving parent can. The proof of whether we are lost or not, is whether we are growing in the sight of God. When our faith has become stagnant and the Christian life holds no joy for us, then we have lost our way as surely as my two year old daughter lost sight of me. The good news is that God has not given up on us. He never will: "Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." [Luke 15: 10] May that same joy be in each one of us as we help to bring the lost in our communities back to be loving arms of their Father and our Father. AMEN.

Rev Sonia Hicks

The Thames Valley Circuit is committed to supporting its “smaller churches”

Although with comparatively few members, each of these churches is very active, and all are strengthened by working together. These newsletters tell of some of their exciting, on-going work.

News from the Churches

BURNHAM

You could be forgiven for assuming that Burnham’s now ‘traditional’ First Sunday in Advent service, *The Hanging of the Greens*, refers either to a rather radical disposal of our eco-warrior friends, or a vegetable-related celebration of the glories of sprouts, etc! No, all wrong!

The *Hanging of the Greens* is an Advent custom, brought to us by an American minister a number of years ago. Bible passages and other Christmas stories are read as the Church is decorated with items suitable to the reading. The younger ones take an enormous delight in helping with this.

You may not be aware that there are communion rail and only one correct morning – many thanks to Jo and Peter Brown for all the organisation.



100 ways of winding a garland round the way of unwinding it! We had a lovely Webb for providing the materials, and Joy

We were delighted to take part in the service – one of the first of many joint

first Churches Together in Burnham Advent ventures, we hope.

The Mothers and Toddlers held their first ‘Nativity’ since becoming a church group again, after many years. It was a joy to see so many little ones in the Church – thanks to Rev Sonia Hicks and to Vivienne Ely for making it such a joyful occasion.

Another ‘first’ has been the (very) local distribution of the Church’s own Christmas card. We do pray that the Christmas message to the Neighbourhood will continue to bear fruit, encouraged and supported by *The Well @ Lent Rise*.

It has been good to see new faces at The Well, and to have gained a new team member for *Wake up Wednesday*.

Please continue to pray for the school students we meet as they wait for the school buses. The bacon butties, hot croissants and chocolate we offer them are still very welcome, and we do rejoice that a number of the boys and girls are happy to chat with us. ‘The Well’ is so grateful for the prayers and encouragement we receive.

The Burnham community send love and prayers for a blessed and peaceful New Year.

Hilary Evans

COOKHAM RISE

Greetings from Cookham Rise and best wishes for 2014.

I suppose the most important piece of news from our point of view is the arrival of the new chairs for the church on Thursday, 5th December – sixty of them, wood stained to match the rest of the church furnishings and upholstered (inappropriately for a Methodist church?!) in a wine-coloured fabric which picks up the red in the stained-glass windows. We



bought forty-eight chairs without arms and twelve with arms – we can always buy more of the latter if we feel we need them. I think the response has been a cautious 'yes': it has been great to be able to move them around for small evening services and to create a semi-circle for Godly play and for an extraordinary Church Council, and to push them back to reveal an area of carpet for Cookham Rise School to sit on when they visited. One church member said she was able to sit in church without pain for the first time ever – reason for rejoicing in itself. Several people have walked into the church and simply said ...'wow'...! We will meet in January to discuss ways forward and using the space for the community, and after Christmas is over we will also need to consider what action we might take about the heating in the church. But for now we are still admiring our 'new' worship area!

On the afternoon of Sunday, 15th December we held our 'Messy Christmas'. Five families attended, along with church helpers. We made angels, camel cakes (very popular, although I was a little concerned about one on a plate near me which appeared to be a mutant with four eyes!), table decorations, Christmas cards, clay Christmas tree decorations and silver stars to go round each person's neck. Kathy Rickman told the Christmas story Godly-play style, which went down very well, and everyone placed their stars in the crib scene as a sign of their desire to enter into the mystery of Christmas. Then twenty-eight people sat down to tea with all the usual party fare including jelly and ice-cream (and, of course, the camel cakes).

We had our Christmas Fayre on Saturday, 7th December and decided that this year we would not have two carol services, one hosted by the Ladies Circle on a Thursday and one by the church on a Sunday, but would just go for the Thursday evening option on 19th December, led by Andrew and Jill Baker. Christmas church lunch is on Sunday, 22nd December, when we expect a good number to sit down to turkey and all the trimmings.

2013 has been a year of change for us and we are looking forward to more changes in 2014 – what an opportunity to have a flexible space such as the worship area now is to offer to the community! Singing, knitting, sewing, baby clinics, Messy Church maybe and who knows what else! Watch this space!

Connie Jeffery

ETON WICK

We would like to thank Connie Jeffery and all the Advent Voices for a most enjoyable concert at St Andrew's on 26th November. "Singing the Faith" has been praised for the beauty of much of its "poetry". Tunes to which we were introduced were equally impressive, at least in the advent section.



Our traditional Carol and Mince Pie evening on 10th December was well supported and enjoyed by about 45 people, and raised well over £100 for Action For Children. Special thanks to Andrew Baker, representing the Circuit Staff, who, supported by Sonia Hicks (our compère) and Phil Clack, gave us a very spirited performance of "Ernie, who drove the fastest milk cart in the west" before our closing carol and prayer.

Marlow Blind Club came to our Eton Wick church on 11th December in place of their normal venue at Burnham Church as it was already booked. Jo Webb and her team worked their normal "magic", providing a lovely Christmas lunch for them, which they all enjoyed.

Our Candlelight Carol Service was held, as usual, on the Sunday Evening before the 25th and a short service with our minister, Sonia at 9.30 am on Christmas Day.

Weekly lunches start again on Wednesday, 8th January, and the first meeting of the Ladies' Club is on 14th January. February looks to be quite a busy month in the Circuit, and these events will be recorded elsewhere in the newsletter and will be supported by the Eton Wick members as far as we are able.

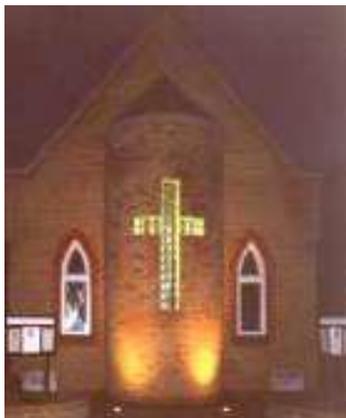
Daphne Hogg

OLD WINDSOR

Our *Open the Book* sessions have been going really well. Most weeks there is a queue of children wanting to take part. We have to tell them that their teachers choose! Now we are in year three, some of the stories are a little more difficult for the children to get the point. This was illustrated when the Head of Religious Studies sat in one week, and afterwards talked to children of different ages. We had just done the story of "The Widow's Mite". "What did you like about the story?" the children were asked. "I liked the very rich man and all his money", was the reply from one child. Not quite the point!

Our thanks go to Nicola, Steven and Rebekah for hosting our Christmas Brunch.

We are aware that we are getting older, and many of us are having to cope with personal or family illness or problems. At the start of this new year, we remember those who cannot get out to join us on a Sunday morning, and also those who are having to care for relatives, friends and neighbours.



To lift your spirits during the dark days of winter, we invite you to join us for our next Holy Beetle Drive – always a time of fun and hilarity! – on Saturday, 8th February at 3 pm.

Please do join us also for the next in our very popular series of Travellers' Tales. On Thursday, 10th March at 2.30 pm, Rev Malcolm and Mrs Veronica White from Burnham will be giving an illustrated talk on the Holy Land and Jordan

Anne Haggarty

WOODLANDS PARK

Well for a small church we have been very busy! The Open the Book crew continue to go into school to spread the word. One Saturday a group of ladies did the coffee morning at High Street with scones and rock cakes galore. These were supplied by our hardworking ladies, and some of the men folk came to visit and conduct quality control ... to raise funds for charity!

On 12th December, the First Steps playgroup that uses our church had their Christmas party. With Andrew unfortunately not available, Neville Walton very kindly came and passed on the story of the nativity. Saturday, 14th December saw Doreen and Neville Walton take part in the Carol Singing in town. Jean Broome was tickling the ivories at Ledger's Road.

We also took part in the Woodlands Community Outreach Project – Woodlands Winter Wonderland. This began at 3.30 pm and finished at 5 pm with carol singing around the Christmas tree on the green. Margaret Cooke and her husband Bruce, with the folk from White Waltham Church, put up the marquees in the morning. Then we went up around 11.15 am and set about creating Santa's Grotto, before Jane and Gemma Collins and I donned our elf suits. All set and ready to go! Free food all round including barbecue sausages, buns, cup cakes, mince pies and hot chocolate. Games, including “throw Santa down the chimney”, “throw Rudolph's nose into a target” – with the prize of Nemo – proved extremely popular along with other side games. We had a circus team providing skills

and allowing children to join in, plus for reflections if people felt they

We were ready for the off and during that time we saw 179 in a moment of wild excitement felt off in the wind ... As a result Jane rest of the time holding it down! We circus performers working away, we played, the music playing, and at the end carols being sung, ... and still the children came! I understand the event went well, although by the time we packed Father Christmas off to the North Pole, dispatched Elves 2 and 3 with grateful thanks, it was dark and the tents were being taken down. And this Elf? Went home for a lie down in a darkened room!



big centre games. We also had a tree would like to leave a thought.

running for the next two hours, and children, distributed goody bags and rather exposed as the Marquee took Collins, Elf number two, spent the were so busy! We could hear the could hear the centre games being

We held a joint carol service with Ledgers Road coming to visit with Christingles and mince pies.

Whoever said smaller is inferior ... has obviously never been to visit the people at Woodlands Park!

Linda Harrison

Editor's note / Contact

My thanks to all contributors for this edition!

Stories, pictures, information for future editions will be much appreciated. Keep them coming!

Anne Haggarty

Joint Events ... dates for your diary

The next meeting of the Smaller Churches Group is on Wednesday, 5th March, 7.30 pm at Colnbrook & Poyle.

January

Tuesday, 28th 7.30 pm St Andrew's Slough **Thames Valley Voices** re-starts.

February

Saturday, 8th 3 pm Old Windsor **Holy Beetle Drive**
Wednesday, 12th 2.30 pm Colnbrook & Poyle **Circuit Healing Service**
Saturday, 22nd 10.30 am Saltau Centre **Smaller Churches Away Day**

March

Thursday, 10th 2.30 pm Old Windsor **Travellers' Tales** – Holy Land and Jordan
Rev Malcolm and Mrs Veronica White

April

Tuesday, 8th 8 pm St Andrew's Slough **The Voice of Passion** – an evening with words and music for the Easter season, led by Thames Valley Voices.

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!
