

Newsletter of the Smaller Churches in the Thames Valley Circuit

January – February 2015

Minister's Letter

I suppose I must begin by explaining what I was doing in the brothel in the first place ...

Ah, I see I have your attention.

I was still working for the National Health Service in those days. Christmas was just a few days away, a flu epidemic had cut deep swathes through our ranks, and I was rushing around trying to do about three different jobs at once.

The occasion I write about was a site visit to a "clinic". (Yes, indeed, a word that can conceal many variants of one's unsuspecting assumption.) The law regarding the disposal of clinical waste – any by-product of virtually any healthcare procedure that might conceivably carry with it the threat of infection – had just been ramped up, and those responsible for running clinics were now additionally responsible for ensuring that their clinical waste was stored in the correct puncture-proof containers, was collected by registered couriers in appropriately equipped vehicles, and then incinerated at registered incineration sites at a temperature of not less than 900 degrees Celsius. Failure to do any of these things could now result in heavy fines or even imprisonment. we were inundated with people clients. Our only requirement was and their own handling of the waste dictates of the new law, hence the site



It was early in the day, the "clinic", I currently open, and I was guided by the manageress ... around the various parts of what looked like a very odd healthcare facility indeed. There appeared to be no principal healthcare function, there was none of the equipment one habitually encountered, even in odd-ball places like tattoo parlours which were equally constrained by the new law. But there were a lot of almost identical rooms ...

My face was to let me down several times during the course of the visit. This time it must have been registering confusion because the "manageress" came clean and gave the clinic its more traditional nomenclature. The penny dropped with a thunderous, echoing clang, and I uttered the only word available to me – "Ah" – with a long, lingering resonance that clearly spoke volumes.

The lady was concerned that "Ah" meant she did not qualify for our service and I had to think on my feet and make a decision based upon clinical need and not personal ... what shall I say, blankness of mind? Actually, the conundrum was a simple one to unravel. If "they" produced clinical waste, someone had to process it for them. Why not us? (I was already imagining the very careful briefing of the driver who would call here at future times – when the clinic was SHUT – to collect the daily or weekly sealed bright yellow container and replace it with an empty one. Discretion, – oh pray God discretion – was a quality I was not absolutely certain that I would find in him ...)

So we agreed that we could agree on something, and then she led me to what I imagined was her office ... A desk, two chairs, in one half of the room; a pile of huge cushions, and what I can only describe as a small

shrine in the other half. There may have been one or two symbols of other faiths gathered there, I simply don't recall after all this time, but there was most certainly a cross.

My face spoke volumes again – would it never shut up? – and I received exactly the short, sharp lecture that my wayward features demanded. That they were human, like the rest of us; that they had feelings, like the rest of us; that they had faith, not necessarily like the rest of us. And hope. And a great need of something kind and loving in their lives.

Once we got past my face, she went on to explain that this was the quiet place, the place where they could come to find privacy, peace, time to reflect and to pray, a shoulder to cry on, a mother-figure to confide in. She went on to say that a clergyman had once presided at communion in this very room, and that a child had been “named” here. And I felt a great deal of shame – for myself.

There are two fundamental conclusions to draw from this brief foray into my past. One is to be reminded that no one, least of all God, ever placed any of us in a seat of judgement, so let's not! And the other is to be reminded that, very often, the most meaningful expressions and ministries of our faith happen, not in our churches, not in our preferred places of worship, however big and grand or small and humble they may be, but in the moments of “everyday”, in the here and now, close up to the coalface of life lived in all its gritty and earthy reality.

We signed on the respective dotted lines and we – the Trust – proceeded to service this particular “clinic” according to our contractual agreement, maintaining the fiction, and leaving the other matters of law for others to ponder.

I have never forgotten that room. I have often wondered what prayers, what confessions, what hopes and needs have been whispered in that place, and, indeed, what God has said and done in answer to them.

Do not sit too comfortably with your faith. That's not what it's for.

God bless,

Gary

News from the Churches

COLNBROOK & POYLE

Our Sunday Carol service was a big success with puppets for the younger people. Indeed, great fun was had by



We sang carols at our December meeting which included some funny sketches. A all!

success, and included a workshop for the younger people – which they really did enjoy! everyone.

Fellowship meeting, which also included a hilarious time, much appreciated by

BURNHAM

According to our Advent candle, I should be preparing Rudolph’s refreshments today and having yet another look for the Sellotape – apart from more proper and dignified activities associated with Christmas Eve. This is what happens when candle-blowing out duties are left to another member of the household. However, all other time-telling resources tell me that it’s Saturday.

Breakfast anyone? We have recently started serving a light breakfast on Sunday mornings, and are delighted with the support we have received. The Utility people and the Buckinghamshire Highway people have been very evident in our area at the weekends (and not before time) and we were delighted last Sunday to welcome three of the workers who joined us for breakfast while on their break. Please pray for this initiative and particularly for those, who, seeing the notice, drop in to see what’s going on.

A couple of weeks ago a number of us took part in a whole day training – held at Burnham – with a view to holding *Open the Book* assemblies at the local primary school. We already have permission from the Head to do this. It was a very interesting, helpful and quite challenging day. Some of those attending are probably looking to do *Open the Book* in other areas, but we should have enough Burnham people to make this project viable. Your correspondent has seen it take place in a number of schools and the children (who take part) really do enjoy it.

We have had another *Messy Church!* Very enjoyable to old and young. Another is planned for February. Sadly, the Sunday School is dwindling away. It may be that the Lord is leading us in another direction. We would welcome your prayers.



The Art Exhibition organised by *The Well@Lent Rise* is still up and running in the main hall. It is really quite stunning and has been well received by all! If you are in the area, do come and have a look. Apart from Sunday mornings, the Community rooms are open every day, but Wednesday mornings are the best time to come along.

The *Lent Risers Toddler Group* held their Christmas party which included a nativity service in the Church and a visit from Santa.

The Church was decorated during our (belated) *Hanging the Greens Service* – a big thank you to Arthur Baker for taking this on at short notice.

All of us at Burnham wish you a happy and peaceful New Year.

Hilary Evans

Editor’s note / Contact

My thanks to all contributors for this edition! Unusually, no-one supplied a photograph, so we have simply used pictures of the churches.

The next edition will be coming out for the start of March. Please send in your contribution in good time ... including – *please* – a picture or two!

Anne Haggarty

COOKHAM RISE

It seems only a very short while since I was writing the last instalment of life at Cookham Rise – must be the time of year!

Our new Friday *Come & Play* sessions for under-fives and their carers seem to have really taken off now and there are usually between twelve and eighteen children and their carers: it's lovely to be able to use the church as well as the hall, and also the outside area with the slide and ride-on toys when the weather is good. There have been more people at the Tuesday sessions of *Come & Play* too. On Friday, 19th December we had our *Come & Play* Christmas party for both groups with singing, crown-making, party food and lucky dip. Sonia came (wearing her light-up Christmas jumper!) and told the Christmas story and enjoyed interacting with everyone there.

We have been overwhelmed recently by how keen people seem to use the premises. We now have a 'Diddy Disco' for toddlers on a Monday morning and a session on another day may soon follow as it is really popular. There are some very keen and energetic people who meet at 6.30 am on a Wednesday for 'boot camp' and the lady who runs this has also started a 'bumps and babies' group for pregnant and new mums, covering exercise, diet and other advice. In the new year there will also be puppy and dog-training classes in the Wesley Hall.

There were various events during the Advent season and in the run-up to Christmas. On the evening of Thursday, 18th December we held our Malcolm White – a very looked at signs of hope in more the birth of the baby in Bethlehem. church Christmas lunch, when thirty the trimmings, Christmas pudding or Everyone seemed to enjoy it and even merry Christmas', complete with verses sure that pudding did indeed appear! On Monday, 22nd December we held our children's workshop, *Christmas Express*, for primary-school-aged children. Nine children made Christmas decorations of various sorts from different countries, baked Christmas biscuits and heard the Christmas story.



About six of us continue to meet for prayer on a Wednesday morning at 8 am, and then adjourn to Costa next door for breakfast. Costa seem to like having us – even if things do get a little rowdy sometimes ... and even if sometimes they have difficulty keeping up with the variations on white toast, brown toast, jam, marmalade and marmite which we order! This Advent, between six and nine of us also met weekly, on a Monday afternoon, for four weeks to discuss 'Jesus: the voice that makes us turn'. The sessions were entitled *A crying voice*, *An other voice*, *A dying voice* and *A rising voice*. I think we were a little disappointed in the course as a whole, as it didn't seem very appropriate for the season and was a little difficult to get into at times; but it was good to meet together and talk and ponder and pray.

And so 2014 has come to an end and a new year dawns.

Who knows what God will call us to in this new year or where we will find his Spirit at work. We're praying that we will be alert and ready for all that 2015 brings. The church at Cookham Rise sends warmest greetings to the other smaller churches in the circuit.

Connie Jeffery

ETON WICK

According to the last illustrated newsletter, the smaller churches all made a good showing at the Circuit Prayer Safari. Thanks mainly to Laura Clack, our presentation was quite "hands-on", with creatures to paint and bottled water to drink. We were also happy for visitors to get their hands on the fruit on display!

For some years we have talked about having our communion table refurbished, and this became a reality when we received a very generous legacy from the late Violet (Vi) Cotton. Vi had her name on the flower rota for 14th December which coincided with the return of the table, and we were very pleased to welcome four members of Vi's family to that service.

Again, with great sorrow, we have to record the death of Gordon Paintin, aged 93, a most regular and generous adherent until he moved to shelter housing in Windsor last year. A service of Thanksgiving for Gordon's very active life was led by Rev Sonia Hicks on 16th December, when the chapel and hall were necessary to accommodate all who came.

Our *Carol and Mince Pie* evening was voted one of the best in recent years, and raised £100.50 for *Action for Children*. We are most grateful to Rev Gary Homewood who wrote the material that Deacon Andy Packer and Rev Margaret Dudley performed. Connie Jeffrey worked hard at the piano and performed a very amusing "12 days of Christmas", and we thank Rev Sonia Hicks for introducing each item and, of course, the Jokes and flashing jumper! Thanks also to Rev Andrew Baker for the loan of the projector so that we could see the Nativity Story performed by some children from New Zealand. Many thanks to the local folk who provided excellent refreshments and sang the carols with gusto!

We hope for good support from the Circuit when the wraps come off the second *Come and See* event on Sunday, 1st February 2015 from 4 pm - 5.30 pm.

On Wednesday, 11th February at 7.30 pm, we shall host the next meeting of the Smaller Churches Support Group.

Daphne Hogg

OLD WINDSOR

Our Thursday afternoon Fellowship meeting has normally held its carol service – as you would expect – on a Thursday afternoon in December. However, falling numbers caused the members to suggest a different time and day. So this year, our Thursday afternoon Fellowship met on a Monday morning for its carol service. It is sad to report that the change of time and day did not help, but those who were there had an enjoyable time.

Our annual Carols by Candlelight service followed its traditional pattern, and we were able to welcome quite a number of visitors and old friends. Afterwards everyone stayed for fellowship and mince pies (... but ... why was no one greedy??? We had SO MANY remaining afterwards!)





We completed a very enjoyable term of *Open the Book* at our local school with the first part of the Christmas story. We had a major panic when baby Jesus went missing! Cupboards were searched, all members were quizzed, all props and especially all costumes were opened and shaken. Still no baby Jesus ... all went quiet for two days, and then ... relief all round – found in a wardrobe which is used for storage, and was discovered only because Jesus’ feet were sticking out ...!

My abiding memory of this Christmas’ services, will be of the description of King Herod at a (different) school’s Christmas story, when he was portrayed as a Dalek!

Our regular Bible Study sessions restart on Tuesday, 13th January. This time we shall be starting to look at *Windows into the Old Testament*.

The village Week of Prayer for Christian Unity service will be held at our Methodist Church at 2.30 pm on Wednesday, 21st January.

Our next Traveller’s Tale is on Thursday, 29th January, at 2.30 pm, when we shall be hearing about Polish travels with Mary Sibley.

Anne Haggarty

Joint Events ... dates for your diary

The next meeting of the Smaller Churches Group is on Wednesday, 11th February, 7.30 pm at Eton Wick Methodist Church. *[Please note change of date.]*

January

Thursday, 29 th	2.30 pm	Old Windsor	Traveller’s Tales – Polish Travels – illustrated talk by Mrs Mary Sibley.
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February

Sunday, 1 st	4 pm	Eton Wick	<i>Come and See</i> – including launching the Circuit Week of Prayer.
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Wednesday, 18 th	7 pm	Windsor	Circuit Ash Wednesday Service.
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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!
