

# Newsletter of the Smaller Churches in the Thames Valley Circuit

May – June 2015

## Minister's Letter

Dear Sisters, Brothers, Friends,

To have a sense of belonging is something very special. I belong to a group of people around the world who still support Leeds United Football Club and Yorkshire County Cricket. I belong to the people who are called Methodists. With all the failings of Leeds United and Yorkshire cricket over the years, I have not given up feeling that I am with them in their success and failure. I am even more intensely so with the Methodist people. I belong in the Methodist family – with its strange ways and its failure to be relevant to many in all the years since I became a member of the Methodist Church in 1974.

What does it mean to belong? It means I offer to the church all the gifts, graces and resources I happen to have at any one time. It means that I am connected with brothers and sisters across Britain and the world in our worship and service. It matters to me when one suffers or another rejoices. I suffer and rejoice with strength by others who share in my find others who are struggling at this



To belong has meant that I have been making of the church family as it has to God's calling. I have found myself support in a time of tragedy and crisis.

away; colleagues have rallied round when I have not been well; I have received inspiration and encouragement from the rest of the Methodist family throughout the world.

them. When I am weak I am given belonging and when I am strong I seek to time.

welcomed to share in the decision-sought to find how it can best be faithful surrounded by a wave of love and I have been fed when my wife has been

The Methodist circuit was a piece of Wesley's brilliance, in which the sense of belonging is taken beyond the local church to a group of churches in a geographical area. This group will offer support and encouragement to each other at different times in their histories. When the one is weaker it is helped by the stronger. When there is opportunity for a new church to be planted or a new project to be started the circuit can identify these opportunities and put resources into their development. There have been sad times in the Methodist history when people have become "parochial" and thought only of their chapel; the sense of belonging to something bigger is lost, as is the sense of connectedness. I recall Wesley's words, "The world is my parish".

My membership as a Methodist minister does not belong in a local church or even a circuit. I am a minister of the Methodist Connexion – and I rejoice in that. Sometimes I tear my hair out in frustration at such a belonging, but I am convinced that I am called to be part of this Methodist family. The smaller churches of the Thames Valley have held a special place in my heart over these five years in the circuit – and I shall remember the characters in them as I journey on – proud to have been part of the life of these churches, which are a part of the Methodist family.

The Church is sending me to serve in Glasgow. New challenges and opportunities; new people to meet – and discover that they too are in need of the God of the warmed heart, the God of new possibilities, the God whose love is proved on a wooden cross and who proved the power of that love in Christ’s resurrection from the dead. I shall continue to belong, to come to the Methodist Conference from time to time, to pray for the church throughout the world and to say to all people, “If your heart be as my heart, then give me your hand!” I will also continue to wear my blue, yellow and white scarf too!

Peace and love.

Andrew

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***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.

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**News from the Churches**

**ETON WICK**

We are very grateful to one of the Local Preachers from the Thames Valley Circuit who has offered to “head up” some house-to-house visiting with us in the immediate area of the chapel during the summer months. Please pray that we shall be guided by the Holy Spirit as we make this approach to our neighbours.

We have continued to enjoy the support of Jo, Peter and Pam from Burnham at our morning services, and thank Jo for sharing the Vestry Steward’s duties.

One of our members suffered a very nasty fall on Easter Sunday, and is currently in hospital, having shattered her kneecap. Several members of our congregation have visited Evelyn, and we shall all uphold her in prayer during her slow but, we hope, eventual recovery.

I should like to include a “plug” for Methodist Homes Sunday, officially being observed on 14<sup>th</sup> June (but any convenient Sunday in 2015 will do!). This year’s theme is *Who is my Older Neighbour?* And focuses on the often “invisible” presence of older people in all our various communities. By holding a Methodist Homes Sunday Service, your Church helps MHA to do practical things that enable older people to thrive, not just survive. The emphasis this year is on the 70-plus community networks that provide company, friendship and neighbourhood support to older people living independently. All preachers should receive resources (for 14<sup>th</sup> June) or contact Lesley France on 01332 296 200 or email [Leslie.france@mha.org.uk](mailto:Leslie.france@mha.org.uk). Thank you for your support.

Daphne Hogg



## COOKHAM RISE

Difficult to believe that Easter has already come and gone – 2015 just seems to be whizzing by! Our *Come & Play* Messy Church session in February went well, with some of our usual under-5s attending with their carers and their older brothers and sisters. The theme was the story of Zacchaeus and we made binoculars (to help us see!), friendship bracelets, a large collage of Zacchaeus up the tree and Jesus calling him to come down (wonderful leaves and tree, proportions leaving a little to be desired!), and cakes for tea; we also had a 'Zacchaeus House' rather than a Wendy House! Everyone seemed to have a good time and we told the story in a rather old-fashioned way using a flannelgraph: when the figures kept falling off we remembered why flannelgraph had gone out of fashion!

The Lent Course too went well: we studied 'Not a Tame Lion' which used clips from 'The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe' and 'Shadowlands' to explore the writings of C S Lewis and issues surrounding suffering, God's absence, judgement and other quite difficult subjects. We find courses using film clips very helpful in providing a way in to issues which we would struggle to get to grips with using traditional methods – plus films are accessible to all regardless of experience, ability etc. Between six and ten of us met each week.

We were also delighted to host the Women's World Day of Prayer service this year when Richard Poad, a Cookham resident who was born in the Bahamas, gave us some insights into the issues facing the islands and children from Cookham Rise Primary School assisted with the singing.



Holy Week was quite exciting this year. On Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> and Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> April we hosted the exhibition 'Illuminating the Shadows' – poetry and textile art by Ruth Sprague – in the church. Ruth's work was very moving and inspirational and to have Ruth herself with us, sitting quietly spinning yarn but ready to engage with visitors if they wished, was an added bonus. There was a steady stream of visitors over the two days and 20+ for lunch on the Thursday. The two days ended with worship on Maundy Thursday led by Rev Andrew Baker. Then on Good Friday and Holy Saturday we had our usual prayer vigil, when people were encouraged to use the prayer stations to ponder the last week of Jesus' life on earth. 8.00 Communion on Easter Day was followed by breakfast and morning worship when we laid flowers at the foot of the (now empty) Lenten cross.

We were saddened by the death in late March of one of our members, David Parr, who had been our Gift Aid secretary for many years and who was a leading light in the village. The church was full to overflowing on 8<sup>th</sup> April for his thanksgiving service – over a hundred people came to swell the congregation.

We continue to offer Sunday lunch to all who would like to come once a month and to support different charities each month via our coffee mornings. Between September last year and Easter this year we also supported 'Hope & Trust' – a charity supporting refugees in Jordan with which Rev Malcolm White is involved. The 'new' groups meeting on the church premises continue to thrive and we continue to seek ways in which we can serve the village community.

Connie Jeffery

## OLD WINDSOR

This year, our Easter celebrations were enhanced. We always hold a procession of witness from the shops to the two churches, followed by a brief Good Friday service. That happened as normal. We always hold a service on Easter Sunday. Normal – including this year, a service of Holy Communion (not always the case). So what was different?

**Maundy Thursday** was different. Rev Margaret Dudley had previously explained the background to our Communion services, and this year she organised a Passover meal for us to share in. Lunchtime, to fit in with the many other arrangements we all (including Margaret) had to work round. Appropriately, thirteen of us sat down to the meal, and, with the aid of the correct dishes and a PowerPoint presentation, we went through the various stages. We were not able to afford the amount of time that a full Passover meal would take, but we all had a feel for, and a flavour of it.



Grateful thanks to Margaret for all the preparation and presentation involved. Thanks to everyone who helped, and a special mention of our accompanist – Rebekah. Thank you to her for playing the piano.

Our *Open the Book* sessions have continued with enthusiasm on the part of the group, and especially on the part of the children. Having spent much of the term “doing” some of the exciting Old Testament stories, we had just moved into a gentler series about the early life and work of Jesus (important, but not visually so easy to portray – baptising people in a river without any water, or letting a man through the roof when there is no way to do this!) when we arrived one morning to be greeted by “Ofsted is here!” So, we did our usual assembly with unnaturally well-behaved children, full complement of staff, and an Ofsted inspector, who sat at the back with an expression on his face that seemed to say “What’s all this about – you can’t impress me”. A bit unnerving!

Those of you who have visited Old Windsor church within the last few weeks will have noticed a difference inside the church itself. We have moved some of the chairs, made two spaces towards the back that can be used for small group meetings, space for the children (if only!), rehearsals for *Open the Book*. We have left the organ at the back, but moved the piano forward, so that there are now only five rows in straight lines facing the altar and cross. Time will tell if we are all comfortable with this new arrangement, but it seems to have met with approval from most people. And if we have a big service – a funeral or a circuit service – we can still put all the rows of chairs back!

Anne Haggarty

**BURNHAM**

Palm Sunday was DIY – sorry – LA! The dramatic talents of several members (talents never previously revealed) provided a wonderful focus to our Holy Week reflections as they acted out part of the Easter story. Thoughtful readings, songs and prayers led by members of our congregation drew the whole service together.

On Easter Day we were delighted to welcome Deacon Andy to lead our celebrations. The morning would not have been complete without an Easter egg hunt. How our young people found all the eggs within minutes is a mystery yet to be revealed!

Mid-week activities – *Lent Risers* and *Open the Book* continue to flourish and we do thank God for those who give up time and energy for these activities. Congregation numbers fluctuate – we have been as low as 12 – and up to nearly 30.

We have those who attend only occasionally, but seem very enthusiastic when they do attend. Perhaps we are not the only church in this situation!

We are very much in need of help regarding music. The Church organist (who is very closely related to your correspondent) is the only person among the congregation who can act as an accompanist to hymn/song singing. He (and your correspondent) do have calls on our time which we sometimes find difficult to fulfil. Can anyone help us?



Here is a picture of the organ at Birmingham Symphony Hall played by our church organist (a member of the Windsor and District Organists’ Association.) a short while ago. They go out on organ crawls. Enough said!

Hilary Evans

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Don’t forget:

**Farewell Service** for Andrew is at 6.30 pm on Sunday, 26<sup>th</sup> July at St Andrew’s Slough.

Also, the **Welcome Service** for Sonia becoming our Superintendent, and for Rev Mindy Bell and her family is at 4 pm on Saturday, 5<sup>th</sup> September, also at St Andrew’s.

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## Joint Events ... dates for your diary

The next meeting of the Smaller Churches Group is on Thursday, 16<sup>th</sup> July, 7.30 pm at Old Windsor

### May

Thursday, 14 <sup>th</sup>	2.30 pm at Old Windsor	Traveller's Tales: Round and About Llangollen, with David and Sylvia Alexander.
Saturday, 16 <sup>th</sup>	10 am at Saltau Centre	Smaller Churches Away Day

### June

Saturday, 20 <sup>th</sup>	2.30 pm at St Mark's Crescent	Strawberry Tea – Circuit Missions event
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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!*

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### **Editor's note / Contact**

This is the last edition with input from Rev Andrew Baker. On behalf of the group, I want to express our grateful thanks for everything he has done to encourage us – both as individual churches, and as a group. He has led the group with humour and drive, and made us think positively about the future instead of moaning about what we cannot do! Under his guidance we have started several new initiatives, the latest being our *Come and See* sessions. On a personal level, I thank Andrew for his encouragement with the newsletter.

Copy for the next edition of this newsletter (July – August) should reach me not later than 17<sup>th</sup> June, preferably with pictures! Thank you.

Do remember that Magna Carta is one of the many celebrations this year! Are you celebrating any of them? In particular we should welcome photographs of any special activities. Perhaps, also, snaps of the River Pageant near you! (It's on 13<sup>th</sup> / 14<sup>th</sup> June ... and the deadline for copy has been "adjusted" to come a few days after this event!)

Anne Haggarty

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