

Newsletter of the Smaller Churches in the Thames Valley Circuit

December 2015 – February 2016

Minister's Letter:

It's the bane of every parent/grandparent when you take small children out for a trip: "Are we there yet?" Young children find it difficult to wait the required hour or two to arrive at the final destination. Every pause at the traffic lights, every new signpost brings the dreaded phrase: "Are we there yet?" How much longer is it?" Children can often be impatient. Time stretches before them with no clue of judging the difference between one minute and one hour.

Already the shops are filled with mince pies, Christmas puddings and an assortment of gift ideas. Christmas is coming ... Christmas is coming. Soon we will be assailed by the tinny sound of Christmas carols over the supermarket loudspeakers as we buy our weekly shopping. Even I have succumbed to the collective impatience of retailers by relenting and buying a pack of Christmas cards. Christmas is coming ... Christmas is coming!

But there is so much more to this time of year than December 25th. We are in the season of Advent and it is a time to stop and pause as we reflect on our journey of faith. Where can we improve our relationship with God? In what areas is our discipleship weakest? Has our prayer life become stale and in need of a spiritual boost? In the early Church, Christians would fast during Advent as they did in Lent. It was a good way to prepare for the celebration of Jesus' birth. How will this happen for you and your church family? For myself, I usually buy a new resource and prepare an existing book on my shelf. It is my shopkeepers shrill call of 'Buy! Buy! still, small voice.



There is a story about a group of tourists visiting the Vatican. Their tour guide had told them about the famous Sistine Chapel: the place where the College of Cardinals meets to choose a new pope, the room whose ornate painted ceiling is Michelangelo's masterpiece.

One aspect of the Sistine Chapel comes as a surprise to most first-time visitors: its size. It's a rather small room. One young man was so eager to see Michelangelo's painted ceiling, he dashed in one end of the Sistine Chapel and out at the other end. He mistook the Chapel for some kind of antechamber. The tour guide had to chase after him, saying: "Come back, you missed it -- and this time, remember to look up!"

It's the sort of mistake that's so easy to make during Advent. It's so easy to confuse Advent with a waiting room: to rush through these four short weeks, arms laden with packages, eyes cast downward. Advent is a destination in its own right.

Advent is a time to focus on all that Christmas means for us as disciples of Christ. It is a time to practise mature spirituality which knows the value of waiting and can appreciate the journey as well as the destination. As we travel through the Advent season, let us reflect on the promises of God made through the prophets of old, to John the Baptist, to Mary and Joseph and finally in the Incarnation itself. Let us marvel at the God who does not abhor our humanity but lovingly renews and restores it as He continues to bring light and hope to our darkened world.

Advent is a time to slow down, to take our foot off the accelerator and obey the stop sign of the Season rather than dashing through these days in the mad rush towards December 25th.

Sonia

Editor's note / Contact

At a previous meeting of the Smaller Churches group we decided that each newsletter should have a theme. This time it is what we do with and for the elderly people in our community. All our churches have ageing congregations.

This newsletter is an opportunity for us all to share our experiences, our hopes and joys, our difficulties and disappointments, and also our ideas for the future.

I am pleased to say that the churches have responded in different ways this time. (Not just reports of activities!)

The theme for next time will be work among young people. I appreciate that some churches do not have active work at present – but you can always dream!

Copy for the next edition is required by Monday, 15th February, 2016. Please don't forget pictures!

Anne Haggarty

News from the Churches COOKHAM RISE

What does Cookham Rise do with and for the elderly in the village? Well, I am of the strong opinion that a smaller church in particular should not try to overstretch itself, but should concentrate on one or two things which it can do well and not attempt to dabble in too many things and end up doing none of them properly. We feel that at the moment that it is families and the under-fives which need us most as there is no health visitor or baby clinic in Cookham and mums and babies/toddlers need a safe place where their children can play and where they can meet and chat. It is this need which we are trying to meet with our Come & Play Sessions, our Bump Camp, our Bumps and Babies and the monthly Concertini concerts which we host.

We are blessed in Cookham to have the Day Centre at Elizabeth House which has been in operation since 1980 and is staffed by volunteers, where the elderly can have a cooked meal each day, access to a hairdresser and chiropodist, sing, listen to talks, learn to use a computer, keep fit or go on outings. There is no way Cookham Rise Methodist Church could compete with this, or would even want to, but



we do have some input into what happens at the Day Centre as Kathy Rickman leads a service there once a month and various people from the church have volunteered there over the years. Of course, the Day Centre is not open at the weekend, so we do offer a cooked lunch on a Sunday once a month and a coffee morning on a Saturday once a month – both of which are very popular. In addition our Ladies Circle, which meets once a month on a Thursday afternoon, attracts older ladies from the village.

We are also, at Cookham, rightly proud of the pastoral care we offer to our members and large community roll, many of whom are elderly. Sonia has been heard to say that she has never known a small church with so many pastoral visitors! But we feel it is important to keep in touch, particularly with the sick, the elderly and the housebound by phone, card or in person, and our pastoral visitors are caring and diligent in doing so.

It may be that, over time, things will change, and that we may in the future consider offering more for the elderly – indeed we have discussed the possibility of a kind of 'weekend day centre' to fill the gap left by the closure of Elizabeth House at weekends. But at the moment it is only something we have talked about and put on the back burner. We are very aware of needing to go where the Spirit leads us at Cookham though, so anything is possible!

Connie Jeffery

COLNBROOK & POYLE UNITED CHURCH

ONE GOOD MAN

Twice a year at the beginning of Advent, a group of people meet in Colnbrook and Poyle church's vestry, to discuss who, how many people and how much people are to receive, in an annual Christmas gift of money.

Not from our own pockets or any church funds, but rather from a Mr Thomas Pitt of Colnbrook – a Mercer, who set up a trust fund in the year 1657. Made up from houses and land, the income less expenses, to be distributed to the "Poor and Needy" of Colnbrook High Street, or Colebrook as it was called in those days.

Today's trustees are in fact made up of 2nd and 3rd generation Colnbrook villagers.

Mr Pitt would be very pleased indeed to know that more than 350 years later, people of the village are still receiving his gifts.

Long may the people of his village continue to benefit from his generosity!

Keith Ayres

Our monthly Tuesday Fellowship continues to attract the older, non-church members of the village.



We have increased our number in recent months and will invite those in the community to our afternoon Carol Service on 1st December at 2 pm and to our "Carols and mince pies afternoon" on 15th December also at 2 pm. Pray with us that more of our neighbours join us to sing Carols and enjoy friendship over our refreshments! A joyful time leading up to Christmas! (This picture taken at the Circuit Prayer Safari shows "Tea after our Fellowship".)

BURNHAM

Do we see ourselves as others see us?

Many years ago, (possibly in the early 80s), the then Vicar of Burnham, David Thomas, remarked to me that he thought Lent Rise (as Burnham Methodist was then called) 'would always be regarded as the Church for older people'. He meant it, of course, in the nicest possible way, and, over the years, this remark of his has often come back to me.

At that time, the Sunday School was flourishing, we had a Boys' Brigade and a Youth Club (although that was tottering a bit). We had a Women's Fellowship, which attracted older ladies, and a Ladies Guild, which was more for young professional women, and those with young children. The writer once asked the question "Why do we call the older group 'Women' and the younger group 'Ladies'?" I don't remember ever receiving a satisfactory answer!

So why did Rev David make that comment? I really don't know. However, to the best of my understanding, when our Anglican brothers and sisters are ordained, they don't receive a crystal ball as part of their working kit. And here we are, in 2015, with practically every regularly attending member of the congregation in receipt of the State pension. Does that make us 'elderly'? Is elderly an age or an attitude? Turn to the property pages of the newspapers. You will see advertisements galore for 'retirement complexes' and the like. I read them and shudder. How can we have a balanced outlook on life if the people we meet in the 'daily round' are very roughly of similar age and background? Where is the broadening of our horizons? challenge, the interest, the



I am delighted when one of my grandchildren opens the car door for me, an arm slips through mine held at a Zebra crossing (not sure much more fun is when a game of family football is in progress, and the cry goes up 'Gran, your ball, your ball'!

grandchildren opens the car door on a long walk, and my hand is for whose benefit!) – but what is family football is in progress, and

What is elderly? How do we deal with it? I don't know. The ball is in your court!

Back to Burnham! We have a very thriving lunch club – CAMEO – which grew from a very successful coffee morning a number of years ago. It is attended by older people who welcome the friendship and also enjoy the occasional outings which take place. Two of our community groups also attract an older clientele. One of these is a very enthusiastic exercise group! So – in the words of one of our modern hymn writers – 'All are welcome, all are welcome, in this place'.

Hilary Evans

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.

ETON WICK

We have been “stretched” again for the last three weeks while Phil and Laura have been in Spain, so we are grateful for the support we have had from the Circuit. Laura returns to prepare for her Mother’s 90th birthday party in our hall on Saturday, 28th November. It appears that it’s a busy day in the Circuit generally, but we shall do our best to divide ourselves into several pieces!



Most of you will remember that Rev John Lines left the Circuit prematurely, having been directed by Conference to fill an appointment at Whitechapel Mission. Members of various churches have supported the Mission’s work over the years in different ways. On Sunday, 15th November we shared, by invitation, in their annual Thanksgiving Service at which the sermon was given by Rev Steve Wild, President of the Conference. It was amazing to learn how the Mission’s services have expanded since John’s time there, including Maths classes, a basic Cookery Course, an afternoon set aside just for women “guests”, a mobile dental van, TB chest x-ray and, of course, basic computer skills.

We trust all these services will contribute to many lives being turned around, and we congratulate the staff and volunteers, under the leadership of Tony Miller, MBE, for all that has already been offered in Christian service for the kingdom.

We hope to welcome many of you to our traditional Carol and Mince Pie evening on Tuesday, 15th December, 7.15 pm (but come early for the best seats!) and Christmas Day worship at 9.30 am
Joy and Peace to All!

OLD WINDSOR

As Old Windsor has one of the highest populations of people over 75 in the Royal Borough, and possibly throughout Berkshire, writing about what we do with and for the elderly of our community should have been easy. It isn’t! If you read back through earlier newsletters, you will see that the majority of our news has concerned *Open the Book*, and work with the children.

Our village has a Day Centre catering for the older people. This has made it consistently hard for us to find ways of offering something different – each time we have an idea, we discover that the Day Centre either already does it, or is about to start. This is discouraging for us. Some of our special events appeal to our older friends, but these are on church premises, and so transport (and parking!) becomes an issue.

We do have a monthly afternoon Fellowship meeting, and this is open to everyone, but numbers have declined, due to people moving away or increasing infirmity.



A couple of years ago we were welcoming to our weekly coffee morning older people on their way to or from the surgery, and then ... the Day Centre opened for coffee (something it had not done before), and numbers dropped. People were going for lunch, so it was simpler to go there for coffee as well. However, recently some former regulars have returned! We keep hoping and praying.

We are looking at the possibility of putting on events which will attract older members of the community onto our premises, including a Holy Beetle Drive (which has proved popular in the past). We are also exploring the possibility of going into the Day Centre and holding our fellowship Christmas Carol Service there – taking the friendship of our church to where the people are! In addition, on special occasions (such as Remembrance Sunday, Harvest) we hold a short ecumenical service at the Manor Care Home where many of the residents are elderly and often confused.

Perhaps the support we give each other is one of the ways we work with older people. It's very easy to think of what we should be doing outside the church building, but if we do not support each other (almost all our members and friends count among the "elderly") then we are failing to build up and nurture the church family.

We support each other because we care about each other, but if we forget to offer that support, we are failing to offer Christian love and friendship – and we do not always know how much that may be needed.

Anne Haggarty

Joint Events ... dates for your diary

The next meeting of the Smaller Churches Group is on Wednesday, 16th March, 2.30 pm at Eton Wick.

December

Sunday, 6 th	6.30 pm	Windsor	Circuit Healing Service
Saturday, 19 th	6 pm	Windsor	Blue Christmas
Tuesday, 15 th	7.15 pm	Eton Wick	Carol and Mince Pie evening

January 2016

Thursday 14 th	2.30 pm	Old Windsor	Traveller's Tales: California and Canyon An illustrated talk by Jancis Sherriff
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February

Wednesday 10 th	7.30 pm	High Street Maidenhead	Circuit Ash Wednesday Service
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March

Thursday, 17 th	2.30 pm	Old Windsor	Traveller's Tales: Journeys in Japan – taste of the Orient. An illustrated talk by Rev Sonia Hicks
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Sunday, 28 th	4 pm	Cookham Rise	Come and See: Rest and Reflect
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May

Sunday, 22 nd	4 pm	Old Windsor	Come and See: Sensory Worship
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July

Sunday, 31 st	4 pm	Cookham Rise	Come and See: Allotment 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!