

Methodist Church Thames Valley Circuit

Smaller Churches Newsletter

December 2016 — February 2017

Minister's letter: Small and Insignificant ? - Deacon Andy Packer

By the time you read this article we will be into Advent and the frantic countdown to Christmas will be speeding towards us, faster than excited shepherds racing to Bethlehem!

As 'Smaller Churches' we can often feel that we have little to offer compared to our bigger sisters and tend to reflect on the 'good old days' when our chapels were full, our Sunday schools were bursting at the seams with children and young people, and everything was happy and rosy !! (I think the reality might be slightly different?)

Although I grew up in a larger church we often returned to the home chapel of my mum and her parents. Situated just off the village square in Northlew, Devon (where tradition has it, the 'devil died of the cold') it was a central part of the life of the village, along with the Anglican church, 'The Green Dragon', primary school and the one village shop which sold everything. For me, this small country church taught me much about myself and faith.



We only have to get a bit of grit in our mouth to understand how powerful something so tiny can be or how the grit in the oyster becomes something beautiful. As *Gavroche* sings in *Les Miserables*, "It only goes to show what little people can do" which includes a reference to David & Goliath, a story we are all familiar with.

In Matthew 2:6 King Herod's 'advisors' quoted to him from Micah 5:2 which says:

*'But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
though you are small among the clans of Judah,
out of you will come for me
one who will be ruler over Israel,*

Jesus proved beyond any doubt that out of one the smallest and insignificant towns of Judah, came someone who would change the world. God demonstrated that in a tiny baby called Jesus the whole world would be transformed and, literally, turned on its head.

As Dr James Allan Francis wrote:

I am far within the mark when I say that all the armies that ever marched, all the navies that were ever built; all the parliaments that ever sat and all the kings that ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of man upon this earth as powerfully as has that one solitary life.

We believe that this one solitary life has done something amazing. Through his life, death and resurrection he has transformed despair into Hope, sadness into Joy, turmoil into Peace and death into Life. I'm sure you can remember someone who has had a major impact or influence on your faith; probably no one famous (possibly small and insignificant) but who has been a 'life-transformer' in your experience.

Sometimes offering the smallest thing – which we might consider insignificant – can be a life changing event. The moment when, with God's guidance, we find ourselves in the right place at the right time and can give what is most needed in that moment. Our Circuit theme of Hospitality this year reminds us that even if we only give a glass of water in Jesus' name, it is a powerful act of kindness or as Matthew puts it,

“Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”

So what are the effective and powerful things that a smaller church can offer ? First, we can show God's love by offering hospitality, especially to the 'least'. We can offer a listening ear, a place to meet or even a glass of water. (Please think about what you might be able to offer).

You might say, “What more can we do?” Let's not worry about doing more but doing what we can more effectively and doing it well, with an air of optimism, hope and belief in the future.

The love & forgiveness, the grace and hope, the life and light which the baby Jesus brought into our world is an amazing gift we have to share with everyone and although it may seem small, it still has the power to change lives.

Small and Insignificant ... ? **I don't think so !**

May God richly bless you as we celebrate Advent and Christmas.

Andy

News from Burnham

Your correspondent is sitting at the computer looking out on a most beautiful November Sunday - having recently returned from the Remembrance Day parade and service at Burnham's war memorial. As always - very well attended, followed by services in the parish church (St. Peter's) and the United Reformed Church. So - a time to look back and to reflect.

The first thing to do is to thank Bill Barnett from the bottom of our collective hearts for all the hard work he has put in during his many years of service as Secretary to the Church Council. The minutes have always been produced with enormous care for accuracy and it is quite obvious that he has devoted much time and research to ensure that the background information is always in place. Good-humoured and extremely patient (sometimes very necessary). Thanks Bill, what a star!

We took part in the prayer safari - on the theme of 'Hospitality'. Not as easy as you'd think. Your correspondent was advised (on insurance grounds) not to bring the over 100-year old teapot which

resides in the front porch. Our contribution was small - but - as we are sure you noticed - the only one in verse!

The Toddler group (The Lentrisers) are just bursting at the seams! Energetic and full of fun (and that's just the adults!), it is so much appreciated by the Lent Rise community. Thanks again to Joy, Viv, and Phil. They are delighted with the enthusiasm and help displayed by the parents and other carers. One of their pre-Christmas activities is to help the young 'uns make Christmas trees from drawing round their hands on to bright paper and then cutting out the resultant shapes and forming them into Christmas trees shapes. It is no secret that quite a number of adults from the Meeting Place (The Well weekly coffee morning) have also been having a go.



If you can't imagine what such a tree looks like – it's a bit like this – Ed.

You may read this before our traditional 'Hanging the Greens' service on the first Sunday in Advent. We often get visitors to this service, so do please pray for all those who are taking part, and those perhaps new to Burnham Church, as they hear the Advent message told in a slightly different way. We are planning a very informal Christmas morning worship, with plenty of dressing-up opportunities for all ages! This is already being made known in the community, so again, we would ask for prayers for all who participate in this.

We at Burnham send love and best wishes for a blessed and happy Christmas and a peaceful new year to all in the Thames Valley Circuit.

Hilary Evans

News from Cookham Rise

I know they say that as you get older time runs away with you, but 2016 seems to have fled by! I can't believe we are in a new Connexional year, almost in a new Lectionary year as I write this and thinking about Christmas already!

Cookham Rise continues to do all the things it usually does – cooked lunches once a month on a Sunday, coffee mornings on the third Saturday of each month (supported by our own members and friends plus friends from the other village churches and members of the Cookham community), Come & Play for under 5s and their carers twice a week plus a crèche weekly for exercise class and Prayer & Porridge every Wednesday morning. At Friday Come & Play we always cook with the children, making everything from vegetable soup to banana muffins, toast with various toppings, mini pizzas and other delights. Mums are always amazed that their children will eat vegetable soup at Come & Play but turn their noses up at it at home! Recently one of our Dads (yes we have Dads and Grandads as well as mums, childminders and grandmas!) took over and made delicious pesto squares (see the end of this article).

We have had a change of steward, with Kathy Rickman taking over as Senior Church Steward and Keith Le Page coming on board as her assistant. The Pastoral Visitors have been considering the course 'Encircled by Care' published by the Methodist Church and hope to study some of the units next year. Open the Book continues in Cookham Rise Primary School and is still enthusiastically received.

For our Advent Course this year we are using 'Living in the Light' published by York Courses, a straightforward Bible study looking at the various accounts of Jesus's birth and what they have to say to us. Our Carol Service will be on 15 December at 7.30 and on Saturday 17 December we will join with the other Cookham churches to sing carols in Station Parade.

We send Christmas blessings and good wishes for 2017 to all the other smaller churches.

Connie Jeffery

Pesto Squares – not really a recipe, just instructions!

Puff pastry (ready-rolled makes life even easier!)

Jar of pesto (ordinary basil pesto or any other variety you fancy)

Grated Gruyere cheese (or cheddar or mozzarella or anything else you like)

Rolling pins

Flour to sprinkle

Square cutters (about 2 inches square but bigger or smaller as you wish)

Baking trays, greased if not non-stick

A quantity of small, eager children (who will try and eat the cheese before it gets in the squares)

Preheat the oven to whatever it says on your packet of pastry. Roll out the pastry if not using ready-rolled. Cut squares from the pastry using your cutters. Put a teaspoon of pesto in the middle of each square and top with grated cheese. Moisten the edges of the square and top with a second one, pressing down around the filling. Put on baking trays and cook for about 20-25 minutes. Yum!



News from Old Windsor

Looking back since the beginning of the Church Year, the churches of Old Windsor, in the guise of their representatives who are involved in Open the Book, have continued with weekly visits to our local First School. Children and staff welcome us warmly, and we enjoy both the preparation / rehearsals, and the presentations in the school.

Since the last newsletter, we have held two very successful Traveller's Tales. Keith Le Page talked about Guernsey, and Beryl Rowland talked about her life on the Isle of Sheppey. Both were well supported, with different sections of the Circuit represented at these two. Our next one is 16th February, time, place and cost as usual. I (Anne) will be talking about Nottingham, the Queen of the Midlands, and there will be something else as well ...!

Old Windsor will be celebrating Christmas in its traditional way, plus!

By tradition, our Thursday Fellowship meeting has held its own Carol Service on a Thursday afternoon near Christmas (the date being determined by the availability of the leader / preacher). The Fellowship has ceased to meet regularly, but the carols were wanted. Last year, people didn't come to us, so this year ... we are going to them. Again at the Day Centre, this time when it is in session, on Thursday, 1st December at 1 pm, we Methodists are holding a short Carol service for the people there. This is a breakthrough, and we are hoping to establish stronger relations with the leaders at the Day Centre, and see what else we could offer them. Watch this space!

Our Christmas ecumenical carol evening will be on Thursday 15th December, at 7 pm, where we join with the other churches represented in the village, and sing carols on neutral territory. The Memorial Hall has been our venue for a number of years, but has been felt to be too large and too impersonal, so this year we are trying out the Day Centre as a less formal place to sing our Christmas carols.

Like many churches we have a service of carols sung by candlelight. It is the highlight of our worship inside our building, but involves someone with a head for heights! Our candle holders are suspended from the ceiling and attaching them to the fixed points is a labour of love, as is putting the candles in the holders – each holder has 16 candles. Those less able to go up ladders make sure the candles are firmly fixed, and, once the ceiling holders are in place, distribute other candles along our window-ledges. Each time we use these holders, we are able to remember the craftsmanship of Mike Willcocks, who created them when our previous set of holders finally gave up the ghost!

Our Candlelight service is always on Christmas Eve at 7 pm, followed by Mince Pies and coffee, tea or a cold drink. This an occasion when some of our former members and friends come back at share worship with us. Unfortunately, age and infirmity has reduced the number of visitors returning. This eagerly anticipated service is the sign to all of us that it really IS Christmas!



This year, on Christmas Day we are holding a short Local Arrangement at 10.30 am. We have joined with Windsor for a number of years, but felt this year that it was easier for our elderly members to come to us – less travelling, and no stairs or lift required.

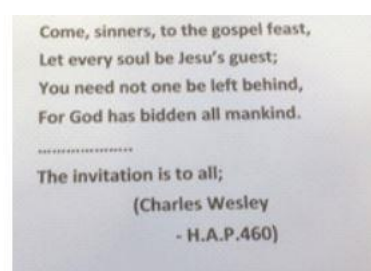
Anne Haggarty

News from Eton Wick

We are back to our weekly Wednesday lunches for the residents of Eton Wick who join us. Our team is working hard to welcome all who wish a good, home cooked meal in a friendly atmosphere of sharing and fellowship.



Like the rest of the circuit we took part in the Mission weekend. The theme was hospitality and we took for our approach from Holy Communion and included words from Charles Wesley (see below). Our key word come 'COME' and we are bid to do. We come to the Lord's Table and share together.



We continue to work together to offer a welcome to our worship and activities such as Ladies Club and Bible Study. These activities include people who participate in church life of different denominations and those who don't attend church regularly.

We have much to look forward to this December including attending the Thames Valley Voices on 6th December. This will be followed by our now 'infamous' Carols and Mince Pie evening on the 13th December. For the first time our village is going to have a tree and all the churches are coming together to sing carols, around the tree as a witness to the village. This event will happen on 17th

December at 11am and will include some of our local children who are joining us and we hope to have a good crowd to sing to all who are around and about. We are looking ahead with a great sense of anticipation.

News from Colnbrook & Poyle

Recently it was wedding anniversary time for three of our couples so; being typical of our fellowship, our celebration included plenty of tea and cake.

Then would you believe it food featured again. This time we celebrated the harvest with a meal and the folks from Old Windsor Methodist Church joined our Tuesday fellowship crowd for lunch and worship. This event raised money for the relief efforts in Haiti after Hurricane Matthew.

Just when you think there can be no more food in one quarter we had the prayer safari where the theme was hospitality. Our church table had the theme of Holy Communion and the display included Margaret's Seder Plate and unleavened bread silk holder to link the hospitality of the Last Supper with the hospitality of the Lord's Supper.



And as we look forward to Christmas we are having a pre-Christmas, I suppose you would call it and Advent, meal followed two weeks later by a carol and mince pie afternoon.

Prayer Safari 2016

The Circuit's annual Prayer Safari this year took the theme of Hospitality. Each church was invited to produce a prayer station to demonstrate this theme. As usual, the stations were very varied and colourful (see examples within this text). St Andrew's Wesley Hall provided the ideal space for the displays, with the individual churches taking over an area with some wall space, and, in the middle, several tables together giving space for making spice bags for refugees – at that time in the “Jungle” near Calais, but now being sent to other centres. The refugees receive a basic allowance of food for cooking, but they do not receive the spices with which they usually cook; this was an attempt to fill this gap.



Colnbrook & Poyle, and Eton Wick both concentrated their efforts on the hospitality WE receive from God, and had Holy Communion based displays. Burnham and Cookham Rise both concentrated on displaying what is going on for the communities in which they are based. Old Windsor had a bit of both!

The weekend concluded with our Annual Missions service, led by members of the Staff, with contributions from others about what is being done, both in the Circuit and further afield.



Singing the Faith Afternoon

This was a good afternoon, held at Woodlands Park in September, complete with excellent scones to finish the afternoon (thank you to Jean Broome). Numbers were quite small, but with a good representation from the circuit as a whole. Everyone enjoyed discovering new music and words in Singing the Faith. It has been suggested that next time a Sunday afternoon should be tried instead of a Saturday – but with the proviso that there are no evening services on that day. This is a day that is open to all the churches in the Circuit both large and small, but maybe that has not been stressed sufficiently.

Thames Valley Voices

Thames Valley Voices, the Circuit choir, started out as the brainchild of the Smaller Churches Support Group., but its membership has always been made up of people from around the Circuit, from small congregations and larger ones. Over the last 18 months we have ventured 'off piste', and instead of just singing items from Singing the Faith have tackled music of other kinds. We are always on the lookout for new singers. If you can hold a tune, we'll have you! You don't have to be able to read music—although if you do, that's a bonus! And if you have done some four-part singing and sing alto, tenor or bass, you would be very welcome indeed. Not all the things we sing are in four parts though—quite a few are in unison. Why not come and give us a try? We will meet again in January 2017—the date will be circulated later.



Connie Jeffery

From the Editor

Many thanks to Anne Haggarty for editing this Newsletter since its inception in 2011. She is now taking a well-deserved break and the mantle of Elijah has fallen on me! Many thanks to all those who do contribute. You don't just have to contribute thoughts/articles each month you know: other items are welcome. A recipe maybe? A good idea that works at your church? A prayer? A puzzle. Bring them on! The deadline for items for the next issue is Sunday 12 February 2017.

Connie Jeffery

Joint Events ... dates for your diary

The next meeting of the Smaller Churches Support Group will be on 12 February 2017 at 2.30 p.m. at Eton Wick.

13 December	Carols & Mince Pies at Eton Wick 7.30
15 December	Carols by Candlelight at Cookham Rise 7.30
15 December	Ecumenical Carols at the Day Centre in Old Windsor 7.00
17 December	Carol Singing in Station Parade Cookham Rise at 11.00
17 December	Carol Singing at the village shops in Eton Wick 11.00
24 December	Candlelight Carols at Old Windsor 7.00
16 February	Travellers' Tales at Old Windsor. Anne Haggarty on 'Nottingham, the Queen of the Midlands'.

Events in the future: there will be a Smaller Churches Awayday visit to Guildford Cathedral in the first quarter of 2017.

And if you have a free moment in the run-up to Christmas try this.....

1. What was the name of John the Baptist's father?
2. When Elizabeth sees Mary and realizes she is pregnant, Mary's response to Elizabeth is a song of praise often called what?
3. What is the reason given by Luke as to why Mary laid Jesus in a manger?
4. When the angel tells Mary she will conceive a baby, the angel tells her that Elizabeth, thought to be barren, is how far along in her pregnancy?
5. Bethlehem is also known as the city of whom?
6. Jewish law demanded that a male child should be circumcised how many days after his birth?
7. According to Matthew, how many wise men visited Jesus?
8. Mary and Elizabeth are often thought to be related in what way?
9. What were the gifts the wise men brought to Jesus?
10. A number of scholars believe the magi who visited Jesus were students of the Old Testament thanks to the lineage of Daniel being made chief of the wise men by Nebuchadnezzar. These scholars argue that the magi would have been aware of the appearance of the star in connection to the coming Messiah based on a verse from what Old Testament book?
11. Herod was troubled at the appearance of the wise men because of the title they gave to Jesus (which was the same title Herod used). What was the title?
12. What did the baby in Elizabeth's womb do when she heard Mary's greeting?
13. What was the name of the devout man who had been assured by the Holy Spirit he would not die until he saw Jesus and then had the opportunity to hold baby Jesus in the Temple?
14. Who was the governor of Syria at the time of Jesus' birth?
15. Matthew says that Herod's slaughter of the male children under the age of two was a fulfilment of a passage from what Old Testament book?

16. What happened to Zacharias when he failed to believe the angel who came to tell him his wife would become pregnant?
17. Apart from giving Jesus gifts, what did the wise men do when they saw Him?
18. What was the name of the angel who spoke to Zacharias?
19. To what country did Joseph and Mary flee to escape Herod's slaughter of the children?
20. The name "Immanuel" means what?
21. Who are the four women named in Matthew's genealogy of Jesus?
22. Joseph and Mary travelled to Bethlehem from which city?
23. Why were Joseph and Mary traveling to Bethlehem at such a late date in her pregnancy?
24. What was the name of the prophetess who never left the Temple and was present when Jesus was circumcised?
25. How old was the prophetess when she saw Jesus?