

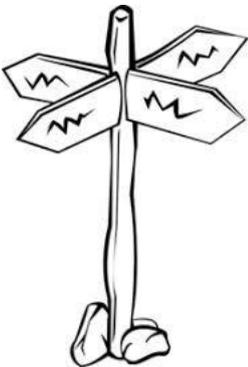
Methodist Church Thames Valley Circuit
Smaller Churches Newsletter
March – May 2018

Time to dream

Unless things have changed in the last few months, the Thames Valley Circuit will have been understaffed, in terms of the number of Presbyters, for almost two years. They simply aren't enough Presbyters to meet the demand across the Connexion. For many of you, classified as a 'smaller church' this has probably not affected the ministry you seek to offer on a day to day basis. Oftentimes, it is the smaller churches who do not feel the need to 'wait for' an ordained person to begin new initiatives. This is often a strength of a smaller church, but it can also lead to the smallest in this Circuit having fewer and fewer resources in terms of ordained ministry.



Why am I saying this to you now? I believe that Thames Valley is at a crossroads. As a Circuit, we can keep hoping for an additional full-time Presbyterian in the next Connexional year. We might be successful, but we may not. This year, the Methodist Recorder reported that there were fifty-six fewer Presbyters seeking to be stationed than the number of Circuits requesting one. Unfortunately, Thames Valley was one of the fifty-six unlucky Circuits. I am becoming acutely aware that strategically, we need to explore other viable solutions including the possibility of employing more lay workers.



The Thames Valley Circuit has committed itself to supporting the smaller churches. I think this is a laudable ideal. I believe it is laudable because God has always stood with the weakest and He demands that His people follow suit. Old Testament passages such as Ezekiel 34 come to mind: *“Therefore, thus says the Lord God to them: I myself will judge between the fat and the lean sheep. Because you pushed with flank and shoulder, and butted at all the weak animals with your horns until you scattered them far and wide, I will save my flock...”* [Ezek. 34: 20-21]

It seems strange to hold to the idea that the smaller churches in this Circuit are the weakest ones. It is from the smaller churches that many of the Circuit officers come; it is the smaller churches who are willing to travel around the Circuit to attend Circuit gatherings of all kinds; it is the smaller churches who often 'just get on with it'. These are admirable strengths that you all possess and, in my mind, the commitment of the Thames Valley Circuit to the smaller churches was a pledge to enable such assets among you to grow and flourish. Rather than have the answer to this question of required staffing levels imposed, I would like you all to engage in a journey of exploration within your fellowship:

- If we were to continue to have only three Presbyters rather than four, what other forms of ministry would enhance what God is calling you to in your communities? Would it be more diaconate ministry or more employed laity?
- What outreach are you presently engaged in that would suffer if there were fewer hours of ordained ministry available across the Circuit?
- Where do you think the Circuit should employ its resources in terms of paid staff?

I believe that many of the riches within this Circuit can be found in the villages that we encompass. Time and time again, the Methodist people in Woodlands Park, in Eton Wick, in Colnbrook, to name but a few, show in what they say and in what they do that God's values are relevant in our communities as well as in our churches. But I also believe that the Circuit will have to be creative in terms of how we deal with future staffing. I invite you all to think, to pray and to dream as we seek a way forward.

Sonia Hicks

News from Burnham

Last Christmas Burnham Methodist Church sang carols. In the car park. We had discussed the idea with our good friends *TheWell@LentRise*, who were all for it. 'What's more', they said, 'We'll provide the lighting'. More about that in a minute. We don't get a lot of passers-by along Eastfield Road, particularly in the evening, unless they are going to the chippy, so we popped leaflets through as many of the local letterboxes as we could. The Carols were also featured in the Churches Together Leaflet that was distributed on the High Street shopping evening. The evening came. We assembled, all six or seven of us. The hot chocolate was simmering, the mince-pies were doing whatever mince-pies do, and we had more biscuits than McVities. The carpark was lit up by an enthusiast in these matters, in various shades of brilliance. We looked like Buckingham Palace on one of their gala concert nights. Well, a bit. And yes, people did come, some from local churches to support us, and others who just dropped by for a few minutes. At one point we numbered nearly 30. And talking of high points, we even sang in parts once or twice, under the enthusiastic leadership of one of our musically-minded friends. It is very many years since Burnham Methodist Church have witnessed in the open air. Will we do it again next year? God willing, yes we will!



We are delighted to say that we now have a Friday morning Bible Study group, meeting under Revd. Sonia's leadership. This is something we have been hoping and praying about for years. The two Alpha courses which took place last year, generated interest from several folk who were new to Christianity. We know that they are being kept in touch, and we do hope to see them again.

The United Service to celebrate The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity took place at Burnham Methodist early in January. It was a delight to see a well-filled Church and to be able to share our fellowship with friends from the other local churches. Our next ecumenical event will be The Women's World Day of Prayer, held this year at the parish church, St. Peter's – again, a lovely opportunity for sharing our faith with each other.

Talking about sharing – have you tried Connie Jeffery's parsnip soup recipe, to be found in the last Newsletter? Brilliant!

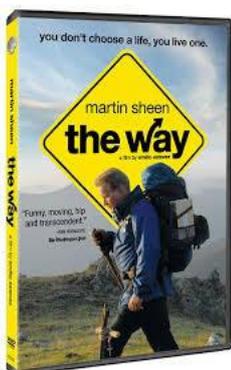
Blessings to you all from Burnham.

Hilary Evans

News from Cookham Rise



When the last Newsletter went to press, we were just beginning our 'Meeting Place' soup & sandwich lunches at Cookham Rise. I am delighted to say that they are going very well and on some weeks we have had over twenty people coming along. There is a new exercise class on Wednesday morning for mums called 'These Mums Can', where the church provides a crèche, and some of these mums stay on afterwards with their young children and babies for the lunch. In addition, church members come along as do ladies from Holy Trinity, the Anglican church in the village. It is becoming a place where friends meet for a bite and a chat. Church people are donating soup for the lunch, and most Wednesdays we can offer a choice of four or five different soups plus cheese, ham, tuna mayonnaise or egg mayonnaise sandwiches on brown, white or seeded bread.



For Lent this year we are following a course entitled 'The Long Road to Heaven' which is based on 'The Way' – a film directed by Emilio Estevez and starring his father Martin Sheen. It follows the journey of Tom (Sheen), whose son Daniel (Estevez) has been killed in a storm while beginning the 'Camino' (the 500 mile pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela, where the remains of St James are thought to be). Tom decides to do the Camino in Daniel's place and the film (and the course) follows the outward and inward journey of Tom and his three fellow-pilgrims as they face their own demons and come to realise that God loves them just as they are, how-ever broken they might be. If you haven't seen the film, do give it a go – it's worth it!

Otherwise, our other activities continue as usual, and having had both our boilers replaced, the next job on the agenda is the outside painting.

Connie Jeffery

News from Eton Wick

Around Christmas time, we enjoyed the traditional activities. The village highlight was a large crowd that gathered around the Christmas tree near the shops, where the school children enacted the Christmas story and we sang their favourite carols. The costumes were very impressive – especially the angel! Previously, on 2 December, at 5.30 p.m., a goodly crowd gathered for the official 'switch-on' of Christmas lights for the first time in the village. Refreshments were available at the village hall afterwards.

Now, of course, our minds turn to Lent and Easter, and with this in mind, we offer the following prayer from *Embrace the Middle East*:

Lord Jesus,
Prepare me to walk through your story again,
with a heart more surrendered to you.
I want to follow you more truly
and become more like you
as I trace your holy steps,
resisting temptation in the desert;
giving up security to serve the least;
celebrating the worth of the marginalised;

risking the consequences of challenging injustice;
facing opposition, mockery, and even the betrayal of friends
and suffering through the garden, the cross and the grave,
all to live a life of love and defeat darkness with light.
Amen.

Daphne Hogg

News from Old Windsor

Following our successful distribution of fruit (Harvest) and chocolate (Christmas) with a leaflet about church services, we shall again be present in the village, near the shops, on Good Friday and Easter Saturday.

Good Friday will see a change to our usual pattern of a walk through the village, ending at one of the churches for a short service. This year we shall start at the Methodist Church, with a prayer and possibly a reading, walk silently (more of a shuffle!) to St Luke's, for another prayer, and on to the small green area near the shops, where we have a cross erected, and there hold a short ecumenical service. While the service is going on, some of us will be nearer the shops, giving out (wrapped) hot cross buns and a serviette with the Easter message on it.



On Easter Saturday, the Methodists will again be by the shops, this time giving out small Easter eggs, each with a leaflet about our services. We are trying to show that we are not always asking for money, and that the church likes giving.

We are also changing our Maundy Thursday activity, but, at the time of writing, although an idea is in place, our Church Council has not yet given the go-ahead, so it's a question of wait for the word of mouth information! Yes – I know it's down on the plan, but we're not supposed to say!

Our *Open the Book* sessions at the local school continue to provoke a varied reaction from the children. This term has been difficult weather-wise, and some of the children have found it more difficult than usual to sit still and listen – even when there are plenty of their friends taking part. As I write, I think of the reaction we had this last week to the story of Solomon and the two women and a baby. The king ordered the soldier to cut the baby in half, and there were audible gasps from all round the hall, and one small voice shouting “NO!” before all became clear with the climax of the story.

Our usual activities – Coffee morning, Bible Study – continue; numbers vary, depending on how well people are and what the weather is like.

Anne Haggarty

Books

Lent will have started by the time you read this, but I thought it was not too late to include a few books suitable for Lenten reading.



Dust that dreams of glory by Michael Mayne
Canterbury Press, £10.99

This book collects together never-before-published seasonal material for Lent and Holy Week by the much-loved Anglican priest and writer Michael Mayne. Michael Mayne was one of Anglicanism's most compelling and attractive voices, a gifted preacher and writer whose works have remained popular. This collection offers material from Ash Wednesday to Holy Saturday, including a sequence of seven meditations on the words of Christ from the cross. These writings are offered as both a preaching and devotional resource at a time of the year when many seek fresh ways of opening up familiar texts.

(I am reading this at present - a wonderful book - Ed.)

The art of Lent: a painting a day from Ash Wednesday to Easter by Sister Wendy Beckett
SPCK, £9.99

This delightful book describes and interprets a series of paintings for each day of Lent. Artists often address subjects that our culture seeks to avoid, and Sister Wendy's brilliant and perceptive reflections will help you to read these paintings with a more discerning eye, and encounter deeper levels of spiritual meaning than may at first appear.

A Place for God: The Mowbray Lent Book 2018 by Graham James
Bloomsbury Publishing, £9.99

In this book the author writes about forty places, from the Flinders Ranges in Australia to Devil's Island (French Guiana) via the Holy Land, Center Parcs and Holborn Underground Station. Each chapter of **A Place for God** offers a daily reflection, beginning with a suggested Bible reading and ending with a short prayer, and employing an engaging combination of autobiography, history and spirituality.

Some of the locations are well known and others very obscure: what they have in common is the part they have played in the author's life, in enabling his 'discovery of the divine in the landscape and the built environment, and of a God who always locates himself in our world, supremely revealed in Jesus of Nazareth'.

40 Stories of Hope: how faith has changed prisoners' lives by Catherine Butcher and Justin Welby
CWR, £7.99

This is a book about transformation, restoration and true freedom. Collated stories from prisoners and their family members, these 40 remarkable testimonies speak powerfully about the reality of encountering Jesus. Readers can explore how we all can find hope in Jesus, no matter who we are. Ideal for Lent, these 40 faith-inspiring stories can be read daily in the run up to Easter. Created in partnership with Prison Hope, an initiative working to connect the Church with local prisons, 40 Stories of Hope is compiled by Catherine Butcher, the Communications Director for HOPE, and includes a Foreword by Justin Welby, the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Recipes for Easter

If you're feeling deprived after giving up things you enjoy for Lent, maybe these Easter recipes will tempt you! Yes, I know they're chocolatey and not at all good for you, but we are allowed to enjoy the fullness of life you know - and that includes chocolate!

Easter Egg Nests

Makes 24



- 250g butter, softened
- 100g dark brown soft sugar
- 2 eggs, separated
- 1 1/2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- 275g plain flour
- 175g pecans or walnuts, finely chopped
- 1 bar plain chocolate (or white chocolate)
- 1 large bag of mini chocolate eggs

Preheat the oven to 180 C / Gas mark 4. In a large bowl, cream together the butter and brown sugar until light and fluffy. Beat in the egg yolks then stir in the vanilla. Stir in the flour and mix well.

In a shallow dish, such as a pie plate, beat egg whites until foamy. Spread walnuts on a plate or greaseproof paper.

Roll 1 tablespoon of the biscuit dough into a ball; roll in egg whites then in walnuts. Place 5cm apart on a baking tray. Make a depression in each ball with your thumb.

Bake in the preheated oven for 12 to 15 minutes.

When the biscuits have cooled, melt the chocolate in the microwave. Spoon just a bit of the melted chocolate in the hollows of the biscuits, then place 2 to 3 mini eggs (depending on their size) into the hollows. Allow to cool long enough so that the chocolate hardens and the eggs are secure in the nests.

Chocolate Orange Fudge

Makes 20 pieces.

- 380g (13 oz) chocolate chips or chocolate drops
- 1 (397g) tin Nestlé Condensed Full Cream Sweetened Milk
- 60g (2 oz) chopped pecans
- 1 dessertspoon grated orange zest



Line a 20x20cm (8x8 in) square tin with baking parchment.

Melt chocolate with condensed milk in a double boiler or in a bowl in the microwave. Stir until smooth. Remove from heat and stir in pecans and grated orange zest.

Pour chocolate mixture into prepared pan. Chill 2 hours, or until firm, and cut into squares.

Store, covered, in the refrigerator.

Dates for diaries:

Sat 24 March 9.00 - 11.-00	Brunch at Old Windsor. Price £4.00 All profits to All We Can Disaster Fund.
Sat 7 April 10.30-3.30	Smaller Churches Awayday to St Albans Cathedral (all churches welcome, regardless of size!)
Sun 15 April 6.00 p.m.	Easter Offering Service at High Street Maidenhead
Thurs 19 April 2.30 pm	Travellers' Tales at Old Windsor: "Man: three-legged island" by Gerald Sherriff. £4.00 including tea
Tues 15 May 7.30 pm	St Andrew's 'Breathe on Me' - music for Pentecost with Thames Valley Voices
Sun 27 May 6.30 pm	Circuit Service: Aldersgate Celebration at Windsor

There is a strong possibility that this may be the last Smaller Churches Newsletter. If another one is produced, items for inclusion will need to be with Connie Jeffery by 13 May at the latest.