



The Methodist Church
THAMES VALLEY
CIRCUIT



ANNUAL REPORT 2014

(for the Church Year 1st September 2013 - 31st August 2014)



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CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>		<u>Page</u>
Introduction and Overview	3	Local Preachers and Worship Leaders	22
Ministers	4	Methodist Homes	22
Supernumerary Ministers	7	Methodist Women in Britain	23
Ministers from other Churches	7	Prayer Diary	23
Churches	8	Property and Health and Safety	24
Circuit Stewards Report	17	Safeguarding	25
Action for Children	19	Smaller Churches Support Group	26
Circuit Mission Committee	20	Website and Publicity	26
Circuit Teens	21	Windsor & Maidenhead Community Forum	27
Fairtrade	21		

Note: This Annual Report covers *every* church and organisation, etc, in the circuit. As the content of many of the reports does not change significantly from year to year, in most years, the circuit issues a short Annual Report contains reports from:

- The Superintendent Minister
- The Senior Circuit Steward

However, we also aim to reflect changes, as they occur, in the relevant section on this website.

The previous detailed annual report covering *every* church and organisation, etc, in the circuit was that for 2010. To see it, [click on this link](#).

Note also that the Circuit Treasurer's report is circulated to all trustees.

Websites

Circuit:	www.methodistthamesvalley.org.uk
High Street Maidenhead:	www.methodistmaidenhead.org.uk
St Andrew's Slough:	www.methodist-slough-standrews.org.uk
St Mark's Crescent:	www.stmarksmaidenhead.org.uk
Windsor:	www.windsormethodistchurch.org.uk

Introduction and Overview (Circuit Superintendent's Report)

This was a year of a settled staff team. Reverend Gary Homewood continued with pastoral charge of the two Maidenhead churches and was involved in developing the vision for two major development projects in Maidenhead: to give the churches there the resources to fulfil their mission. The circuit was pleased to be able to invite Gary to remain in the circuit for a further two years to build on the work. Reverend Sonia Hicks developed the work in four of the churches in the centre of the circuit, seeing the completion of the building project at Ledgers Road and the use of the building on a daily basis by a pre-school. The circuit was pleased to be able to accept Sonia's offer to be the Superintendent of the circuit from September 2015. Sonia and her family had to deal with the disruption of moving house within the circuit towards the end of the year. Deacon Andy Packer's work was focused in Slough, where he has developed links with the community and led the church in mission in the community; a highlight was the use of St Andrew's as a night shelter during the winter months. Reverend Margaret Dudley completed her probationary period, serving three churches in the Windsor section; there was much joy in her ordination at the Methodist Conference in Birmingham. I have served the churches at St Andrew's as well as those at Woodlands Park and Cookham Rise. I have had the collegueship of Reverend Malcolm White, who is authorised to minister, at Cookham.

At the end of the year Reverend Heather Noel-Smith, who had been residing here, left the circuit. She had been a friend to many in the life of the church here and the circuit wishes her well. Her manse is now occupied by Reverend Graham Hindle and his family. Graham is part of the Discipleship and Ministries Learning Network, and we look forward to him playing a part in the life of the circuit when he is able.

The circuit staff have met fortnightly during the year for mutual support, encouragement, reflection and planning. The staff take their place within the Circuit Leadership Team, which has been involved in the selling of the manse in St Mark's Road, Maidenhead, and the purchasing of one in Spring Lane, Cippenham. As the circuit invitation committee, the leadership team has also been dealing with the consequences of my indication that I shall leave the circuit in August 2015. A new plan for the staffing of the circuit had to be agreed and a profile written for a replacement. There is a commitment on the team, which means the staff feel well supported.

The theme for the year was "Being a learning church" and a number of churches took up the opportunity to learn more of what it means to be a Christian in these days. We have used some of the "Windows into . . ." material produced by Christians in Cornwall. Although numbers attending church on Sunday mornings have not declined during recent years in the Thames Valley, there is a concern about how we develop discipleship, when it is difficult for the Methodist people to make the coming to mid-week fellowship or study groups a priority. Churches have risen to this challenge in different (and sometimes quite creative) ways.

The smaller churches in the circuit continue to face particular challenges – chiefly that of lack of people to "do the jobs". There is a realisation that the circuit may have to be willing to support each other rather differently in the years which lie ahead. The smaller churches have found ways of doing innovative gatherings through the year.

Conversations began late in the church year concerning the possibilities of working together with the other six circuits in the western area of the district. A commission is being set up to consider where and in which areas of the church's life the circuits could work together to be more effective.

Messy Church has been a highlight in Maidenhead. *Open the Book* continues to feature in the life of a number of churches as they share with the local schools. There has been a degree of cooperation ecumenically with a response to homelessness, the need for Street Angels and Foodbanks across the circuit. There is a spirit of cooperation within the life of the Thames Valley Circuit, whereby those in need are listened to. There are challenging times ahead, but also many possibilities for a circuit which wants to take its mission seriously in this generation. A new circuit vision statement was agreed by the circuit meeting; and it is hoped that the reality of God's grace will enable a faithful fulfilling of God's mission.

I would like to thank all those who have supported me and the rest of the staff during this year. Thanks for the prayers and love which sustain ministry here in the Thames Valley.

Andrew Baker, Superintendent Minister

Ministers

Rev Andrew Baker

I have been the Superintendent Minister in the Thames Valley Circuit since 2010. I live in Slough with my wife, Jill, who is a Local Preacher. Our elder son lives with his wife in London, but worships in the Thames Valley Circuit, where he is a Local Preacher on trial. Our younger son died in 2012; and we continue to carry his memory with us.

I have pastoral charge of the two congregations which worship at St Andrew's in Slough and the churches at Cookham Rise and Woodlands Park as well as oversight in the circuit.

I have found recreation in walking the area, especially along the Thames Path, which I hope to complete in the autumn of 2014. A highlight was to walk the 100 Km Thames Path Challenge in 22 hours in July of this year. I look forward to spending the next year in the circuit "Travelling in hope".

Rev Gary Homewood

Now entering his fifth year in ministry in the Thames Valley Circuit, Gary has agreed to extend his current appointment to 2017. He will continue to have pastoral care of both St Mark's Crescent and High Street, and, from September 2015, he will have a measure of pastoral oversight of Woodlands Park as well, working alongside Deacon Andy Packer.

Gary continues to produce highly original worship material, and more recently he has branched out into secular literature with his first published novel.

The next three years promise to be well filled with the challenges of Gary's ministry to three churches, two of which will be pursuing major building projects, and one of which hosts a winter night shelter for the homeless. Gary will also continue to support and value the work of Churches Together in Maidenhead and the Windsor & Maidenhead Community Forum, whose annual faith gathering is hosted by St Mark's.

Gary is also a member of the District Candidating Committee.

Fortunately, Gary will be relieved of many of his domestic duties in the future – as his daughter, Sarah (aged 6 at time of going to press), is clearly preparing to take on the mantle of Head of the Homewood Family. Gary's wife, Vicky, will continue to do all the real work, and Gary will mostly do as he's told. So, no major changes anticipated there ...

Rev Sonia Hicks

The last year was very different from my first in the circuit. My husband, Conrad, returned from a year away in Mexico and so the whole family was once again on the same land mass. The last time this occurred was in 2008 before Nathan went off to University leaving the rest of the family back in Dublin. It was good to have Conrad around again sharing in all that family life entails. Conrad has pastoral charge of Aldershot and Farnham Methodist Churches in the Hants Surrey Borders Circuit. He also serves as one of the three Assistant Chairs of the South East District.

Our family have disbursed again with Olivia studying in Dundee and Nyasha studying in Grenoble and Tokyo for the third year of her Language degree. At least Nathan continues to live at home, commuting into London for work.

Most ministerial families move once every five years. We have managed four moves in eleven years! The circuit decided to purchase a manse and this meant another move for our family. There are still one or two boxes around the Cippenham manse but we are very grateful for the team of workers, across the circuit, who have worked hard to ensure the move was as painless as possible.

I have continued to enjoy having pastoral charge of Burnham, Eton Wick, Hampshire Avenue and Ledgers Road churches. Burnham and Ledgers Road continue to see growth in their Sunday attendance whereas the folk at Eton Wick continue to reach out into the community with luncheon clubs, ladies meetings, bible studies and toddler groups. At Hampshire Avenue there is a willingness to try different ways of meeting the spiritual and social needs of their membership. The latest of these is a fortnightly fellowship group led alternately by Andy and myself.

Rev Margaret Dudley

I arrived in the Thames Valley Circuit as a Probationary Minister in September 2012. The welcome and effort everyone extended was amazing and looking back now it is hard to remember I have been here for only two years. During those first two years I received so much help and encouragement as I worked and studied my way through the tasks and ministry before me. It has been gruelling, challenging, testing, rewarding, amazing, enlivening and incredible along the way – culminating in my ordination in June.

Yes! My journey led all the way to the Methodist Conference 2014, and there were many, many highs and some lows but it has been a privilege to work in this time and in this place. One of the many highs was my Testimony Service that so many of you shared, followed a month later by the Ordinands' Retreat, and then finally to Birmingham with so many Thames Valley folks arriving to support me at the full connexion service in the NEC, and then later in the day at the ordination service in Handsworth. I will quite simply say it was a blessed time that was 'the best of times' – an experience that changed me, enriched, equipped, empowered and awed me.

Deacon Andy Packer

I was asked recently, “How long have you been here now”? When I replied, “Two years”, there was a sense of shock: For myself that it really is that long and from the other person who responded, “Is that all? It feels a lot longer”! (I trust that was positive?!)

As a family we have settled well and Lynn, Leanne and Maxine have found their rôles and niches which they have fitted into. We were delighted when Leanne got engaged to Mat (from Peterborough) in mid-August. Like all families we have our ‘ups and downs’ but trust the God who is faithful to guide us in his way.

Deacon’s Report: Outreach in Slough

One thing I have learnt with Slough is that things are constantly changing. Community groups which I have become part of, will run for a while, then you hear nothing for several months and then, out of the blue, the group is up and running again! During the year I have been involved with:

- Chalvey Residents Forum
- Keeping Slough Safe: Police & Community Consultative Group
- Slough North Action Project
- Slough Faith Partnership and
- YMCA, who have recently seen their Director, with whom I worked very closely, move on.

My biggest concern comes from the Police & CC Group regarding the number of ‘Scams’ around and how easily people get conned. If you get a caller at the door, remember, ‘If in doubt, keep them out’. And you should **NEVER** give your bank details to anyone. The Police or your Bank will **never** ask for them.

The Slough Faith Partnership is well represented by the major Faiths within Slough and continues to work actively together to promote harmony and build greater understanding. The march by the EDL (English Defence League) on 1st February only strengthened our resolve to work closer together.

Within the Slough churches much has been happening:

- At Ledgers Road the *Pre-School* has settled in and we have developed an extremely good relationship with them. We are looking to work together at times such as Easter, Christmas and Harvest, so great possibilities lie ahead.
- The *Coffee Stop* which is run every Friday morning has not taken off in the way we had hoped but we are going to persevere until Easter and then review its viability.
- The *Men’s Breakfast Fellowship* continues to meet on the first Saturday of the month at 8 am, and welcomes men from the Slough Methodist churches. Any men are welcome to join us for worship, prayer and fellowship before enjoying breakfast together. In September we were delighted that some ladies joined with us as part of ...
- *Alive in Slough*. This was another successful time for the Methodist churches in Slough to join together and explore the theme of ‘Discovering God: Who is your God’. The feedback from the weekend clearly showed it was greatly appreciated.
- Hampshire Avenue continues to meet on alternate Wednesdays for its *Midweek Worship* which Sonia and I lead.

As I write we have just started a *Slough Teens* group at our home. This is a chance for young people to come together, chill out and talk about what concerns them, as well as celebrating the Christian Faith.

Andy Packer

Supernumerary Ministers

Rev David Smith

I am still very much involved in the life of the Windsor church, and take preaching appointments approximately once a quarter.

Rev Dr Malcolm White

I have settled into a Ministry in Windsor, which involves preaching in the Circuit and particularly at Windsor. David Smith and I assisted Margaret Dudley in a Service of Prayer for Healing once a quarter.

I lead the fortnightly Bible Study and take Holy Communion to the House-bound members of the Church.

In the Methodist Connexion I lead Conferences / Away Days about once a month in different parts of the country.

I am still a Director on the Board of the Company that runs the Conference and Business side of the Methodist Central Hall in Westminster, and Chairman of the Audit Committee, but this only involves about 2 days a month and will continue until 2016.

The rest of my ministry involves, when requested, dealing with issues and needs as they arise in people's lives.

Ministers from Other Churches

Rev Malcolm White

Reverend Malcolm White, a retired Anglican priest living in the Thames Valley Circuit, has had his "authority to minister" renewed by Conference for the coming year, and continues to be based mainly at Cookham Rise Church at an important time of their transition from a well-established pattern of community engagement and Sunday meeting, into a more unknown but potentially exciting future.

He has valued the ongoing desire amongst members of the Church to meet together to learn, pray and encourage each other in what is often a difficult process of adjustment. He was also moved to be told that the local Cookham Churches Social Action group (of which Cookham Rise is a member) would be focussing their activities this coming year on assisting refugees in the Middle East through a group known as "Hope & Trust", with which Malcolm has been involved since its creation in 2007.

Churches

Burnham

Membership 10

The present membership is 10. 3 members have moved away and we were deeply saddened by the sudden death early in the year, of a most faithful member, Mrs. Pam Webster. However, we have been very pleased to welcome 3 new members. Our attendance at Sunday morning worship is in the low 20s, but can fluctuate! We have been delighted to welcome several new attendees, including some North Korean friends.

We have a small Sunday School, and the Mothers and Toddlers group (the 'Lent Risers') which meets on Tuesday mornings, is growing steadily. The Thursday lunch group (Cameo) is up to capacity and we do thank those who give up their time and energy to serve the Lord in all the above ways.

We take a great interest in 'Lighthouse' the Christian holiday project, and support it practically and in prayer. The community outreach group 'The Well@Lent Rise' is based on our premises and several of our members and adherents have a strong involvement in this work, which include a 'drop-in' coffee morning where there are craft and other activities on offer and visits from advisory bodies such as the CAB. The Well also offers early morning hot drinks, bacon butties and croissants to secondary school students waiting for the school buses which stop close by.

Several members are exploring the possibility of offering 'Open the Book' to a local school which has professed interest and are visiting other schools to observe what goes on!

Our Church is not known as 'The Church at the Crossroads' for no reason! It is ideally placed, and of recent years not only have we seen a lot more traffic but also more people going to and from the local shops. The premises are busy every day, either with community or (more frequently) with Church based activities.

We do pray that our little Church will be a beacon of light in our Community of Lent Rise, Burnham.

Hilary Evans

Colnbrook and Poyle United Church

Membership: 13

Others for whom the church has pastoral responsibility: 9

Average congregation: 10

As well as being part of our circuit, Colnbrook and Poyle United Church is in the Chiltern Area of the Thames North United Reformed Church Synod. The church is located in the middle of the village of Colnbrook and has a small congregation of members and adherents who come from the village and nearby Langley. The church enjoys a really close relationship with Colnbrook Church of England's Church of St Thomas, and the congregations join together for joint worship once a month as well as some wider activities like Remembrance Sunday. In addition to the Sunday service there is a Fellowship Meeting each month to which all are welcome, and a number of friends from within the village join the members for the meeting which includes a small

message and finishes with tea. We enjoy a range of speakers as well as extra meetings for meals and Christmas carols. Some of last year's guest speakers included ones from the Thames Valley Hospice, MRDF (now *All You Can*) and we also had visits from our circuit staff team.

The congregation of Colnbrook's outreach programme includes contributions to Slough Foodbank on a monthly basis, and the support, when needed, of our local bed and breakfast community. In the last year we have supported four families as they went through hard times, and all of whom have now moved on to more permanent housing solutions. In the coming year the outreach programme is going to include Christmas card deliveries to targeted areas of the village.

Cookham Rise

Membership 32

2013-2014 has been a year of change for Cookham Rise Methodist Church. One of the most significant changes was the removal of the pews (which had been *in situ* since the church was built at the beginning of the 20th century) and the purchase of comfortable chairs, upholstered in red to pick up the same colour in the stained glass windows. The change has gone deeper than simply aesthetics: we can arrange the chairs around tables or in a circle or a horseshoe and put out just a few rows for morning service. And when the chairs are stacked at the sides of the church, we have discovered a space which is being well used by various groups. Our worship has been further enhanced by the purchase of congregational copies of *Singing the Faith* and by 4th at Cookham – alternative worship on the evening of the fourth Sunday of each month. Easter 2014 brought the usual Easter Prayer Vigil – and what a joy this year to have an open space in the church in which to construct prayer stations!

Another change was less welcome, as Rainbow Preschool, which had served the Cookhams and surrounding areas faithfully for 27 years, closed. We give thanks for all that Rainbow has been in the lives of children and families over the years and look forward to serving the community in other ways. So far we have two 'Come and Play' sessions every week for under-fives and their carers plus regular *Messy Church* and this Christmas we will reinstate a Children's Workshop for primary-school age children.

We have continued to raise money for various charities during the year, as well as our regular Action for Children fundraising and our ongoing relationship with the Whitechapel Mission. Our six-month charity from September 2013 to Easter 2014 was the newly reborn Re:charge R&R, which works with families out of three locations in Maidenhead. In addition, coffee mornings raise money for various charities. Kathy Rickman and I raised money for Water Aid by playing through the *Singing the Faith* hymnbook, and our Harvest Supper and Harvest Festival service swelled the total to over £700. The premises are also used by the jazz band and by Rainbow Guides.

Ladies Circle continues to meet – monthly rather than fortnightly. Coffee mornings and church lunches are still popular and the occasional Bible study series is well-received by those who attend. Every Wednesday morning a small group of us meet to pray together in the church and then have coffee in the new Costa in Cookham. Our treasurer was a little concerned about heating the church for this during the winter months, and Costa have kindly said we can hold the prayer meeting there – how wonderful to be able to pray in a place so well-used by the village!

The people of Cookham Rise Methodist Church continue to serve in the village community and the wider local community, being involved in youth organisations, the Day Centre, Street Angels in Maidenhead, an ecumenical team presenting *Open the Book* sessions weekly in Cookham Rise Primary School and the Christians in Cookham, and Social Action Committee meetings.

So what of the future? Cookham Rise seems to be in a time of transition, maybe even marking time a bit, as churches sometimes do. We want to be certain which way God wants us to go before we rush into anything new, and we have to be realistic and admit that we are very few and really need to work with existing groups wherever possible to maximise potential. But there are many things bubbling just below the surface, not the least of which are possible plans for refurbishment of the kitchen and other areas. The future at Cookham Rise may look very different to the past, but there is certainly a future.

Connie Jeffery

Eton Wick

Membership: 16

The Methodist community in Eton Wick is a small but active force in the life of the village. We continue to serve the surrounding community with the Wednesday Lunch Club. After a dip in recent years, the *Carers and Tots* Group is thriving and it is good to provide a welcoming space to them on Thursday mornings. We also continue to hold fortnightly Bible Study which has attracted regular attenders from other churches as well as folk from within our own church. The discussions are lively and challenging in equal measure!

Other fellowship groups have included the Monday Coffee Club (monthly), Thursday Fellowship (fortnightly) and the Ladies Meeting (alternate fortnights to the Bible Study). The once popular Pie & Praise Evenings have dwindled in recent months and the Church Council is reflecting on how best to re-vamp this particular outreach event or whether something else should take its place.

The church here continues to survive with a small but faithful band, who ensure that the welcome is always warm to old and new friends alike.

Sonia Hicks

Hampshire Avenue

Membership: 53

Last year saw a renewed effort, by the congregation, to keep the premises a welcoming and safe place in which to fellowship. With this in mind we held a “cleaning day” towards the end of the summer. On the actual day, as well as tackling the jobs that needed doing, the congregation found themselves deepening the bonds of love and fellowship that exist. A happy and fun time was had by all! A similar fun time was had on the Sunday School trip to the sea-side. On that occasion, we were joined by other members across the Circuit.

This year saw the commencement of a fortnightly Fellowship meeting for prayer and Bible study. The topics discussed are often chosen by the laity. So far, we have had a lively discourse on tithing which tied in well with the theme of “A Generous Life”. On other occasions, we delved deeper into the lectionary readings for the

coming week. It is hoped that we can perhaps look at studying a course, such as *A Purpose-Driven Life*, in the coming year.

Sunday School continues to have its ups and downs – especially with the shortage of regular teachers. This year, the room used by the children was refurbished with a new carpet and newly painted walls. Further improvements are in the pipe-line.

The LEP with St John's and St Michael & All Angels continues to be valued by all partners involved. The two Anglican congregations now meet on one site (St John's) and the other building is often rented out to other church groups. There are, however, serious problems with the St John's building and one idea is to sell off one site to provide the funds to redevelop the remaining one and to include a new rectory. As the North Slough parish is presently without a vicar, this seems an opportune time to make radical plans. We continue to hold our Anglican sisters and brothers in prayer. The joint LEP events have been scaled down slightly but we continue to come together for the Covenant service and the two Anglican patronal festivals. Also we have joint Lent meetings, one Harvest supper for the two congregations and a joint Carol Service. As always, both ministers conduct the annual Service of Remembrance for those who have been bereaved in the vicinity.

We continue to praise God in this part of Slough and trust that He will guide us in the year to come.

High Street Maidenhead

Membership: 158

High Street only looks the same from the outside – and that may soon change, too. High Street has been considering the future of its bricks and mortar for several years, but now the church family has a vision of the future that may well challenge us to pull a lot of those bricks and mortar down in order to build something radically new that will help us to help the people of Maidenhead in innovative, meaningful and exciting ways.

We already host a winter night shelter for the homeless, aided by other local churches and organisations, and we begin to foresee a time when we can host and facilitate a broad cross-section of community needs in a new, twenty-first century worship centre. We are currently engaged upon an extended feasibility study with a Christian church architect – so watch this space.

In the meantime we give thanks for the success of Messy Church, led by our Youth & Family Worker, which now takes place bi-monthly (running alongside conventional worship each second Sunday morning, as well as in its established afternoon spot each fourth Sunday.) We value our contacts with many children in Junior Church and Messy Church, although we are increasingly aware of the competition we face from a huge variety of other weekend family activities.

We also celebrate the renewal of the Music Group's ministry, alongside that of our choir and our considerable troupe of organists, giving us a rich variety of musical sounds in our worship.

We also continue to host a considerable range of activities, including the Wesley Golfers, the Art Group, a thriving Tuesday Toddlers, Brownies, Guides, Cubs, Beavers and Scouts, the Wesley Walkers, numerous house groups, a lunch club, coffee mornings, and, of course, the night shelter.

We are not alone in finding that our membership is ageing (gracefully, of course), but we feel this is not an excuse to stop being an *active* people of faith.

Gary Homewood

Ledgers Road

Membership: 64

Our much needed refurbishments are now completed and everyone remarks how light and bright the premises now look and feel. We are grateful to our brothers and sisters in the Circuit for their financial help and continued prayers. With our new look premises, we have welcomed a local pre-school in, and we look for ways to encourage this partnership in the future. So far, we were invited to their re-launch with the Mayor of Slough and Naomi Connor, our Senior Steward, helped to cut the ribbon on that occasion.

The weekly Coffee Stop seeks to provide an oasis on Friday mornings. This is attended by churchgoers and a few from the local community. This outreach is still small but we hope that it will flourish as time goes by.

We continue with our fundraising efforts including the annual concert, Christmas Bazaar, Summer Fête and Barbecue. These events continue to be supported by friends and neighbours alike. They also provide additional means for fellowship within our church family.

Ledgers Road members also took part in the *Alive in Slough* event alongside Hampshire Avenue and St Andrew's church families and we look forward to other means of bringing the Slough Methodist churches together.

We are grateful to all who hold office within our church, all who work tirelessly to support fundraising events and those who continue to 'cheer' from the side-lines. With the help of God, we hope to continue being a Methodist presence in Chalvey.

Old Windsor

Membership 11

Other for whom the church has pastoral responsibility 36

Average congregation: 10-15

The congregation at Old Windsor continues to worship in the village with a small, loyal group of members who welcome villagers to share in that worship. Some of our regular worshippers are members of other denominations but now worship in our church. The worship includes contributions from the congregation and is enhanced by Worship Leaders Anne Haggarty and David Alexander.

Old Windsor continues an extensive outreach programme to reach young and old in the village. Tuesday coffee mornings continue to be open to the village. Sadly, for the first time this century, we were unable to offer Saturday brunches during Lent to raise money for Missions. Travellers' Tales continue to be a regular popular feature of church life. The topics this year have ranged from Albania to Jordan, from weddings to cruises ... and always conclude with tea! The Thursday group meets to enjoy fellowship each month, under the care of Nicola Shaw, and during this year has said goodbye to some of its members. The Bible Study group

decided to study the Epistle of James – the great pastoral letter. This was followed by one of the ‘Windows into’ series and has focused on the ‘New Testament’ which will be finished in the new church year.

During last year we held two Messy Church sessions in our church. These sessions were very full as families enjoyed the activities offered. The short time of worship was greatly enhanced by the young people who played their musical instruments. The meal at the end was a noisy, happy fun affair ending our afternoons with a great family feel with those families eager to come back for another session.

This year our *Open the Book* ecumenical team, led by members of Old Windsor Methodist Church, was back for its third year. The Tuesday morning planning and rehearsal sessions enabled the team to work well and produce some really excellent sessions appreciated by the children – although I do understand that when a character died one week, a child disappointingly pointed out ‘they were still breathing’ – to which I say ‘thank goodness’! The fame of this group has spread with the props being lent to other groups and for other occasions. There have been so many stories of children and parents stopping members of the team to chat about how much the sessions are loved! The school has invited our team to return for the new school year, when it will re-start the series with year 1 of the *Open the Book* programme. The team are looking forward to revisiting the school and the stories that will be shared.

Members of the church are involved with Old Windsor United Churches’ Action Group and through such have been involved with the services at the Manor Care Home, Christmas around the tree, the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, the Women’s World Day of Prayer and Christian Aid Week.

Margaret Dudley

St Andrew’s English & Urdu

English

Membership: 135

This was a year in the life of the St Andrew’s Methodist Church, in which we saw new ventures, growing Sunday morning congregations and increasing cooperation between the different ethnic groups within the church family. The membership of the church remained at about 135 through the year and, as is a feature of life in Slough, people worshipped at St Andrew’s for a while and then moved on because of jobs or retirement.

The church learned towards the end of the year that the minister, Andrew Baker, would not be seeking a re-invitation to stay in the circuit, but would be leaving in 2015. This is an opportunity for St Andrew’s to move forward in new ways. Deacon Andy will continue to serve the congregation – he has made it possible for new opportunities to be established in the community.

The church has rejoiced in the number of people coming to church “early” every other month for “Big Church”. The style of the gathering has changed so that we engage together in the Wesley Hall, using different learning styles for an hour, before sharing in refreshments and then worshipping together in the sanctuary. The church leadership hopes this model of using the Sunday morning slot can be developed so that St Andrew’s continues to be a learning church.

More controversial was the use of the video FROZEN during the summer weeks as an aid to worship and inspiring the children to be part of church throughout the summer when there was no young church programme. Many appreciated the willingness to try something different!

Sunday worship is central to the life of the congregation, but there are other worship opportunities offered. Once a month there is a lunch time communion in the choir vestry. There is a weekly prayer-hour. Some members of the church go to the weekly evening service at Ledgers Road.

The church was opened this year for the first time during the winter months as a night shelter for those sleeping on the streets. There is professional support for this venture, but members of the church were part of the team which staffed the shelter overnight and provided food and drinks.

Members of the church are also involved in the ecumenical projects: Street Angels and foodbank. A new outreach venture was the opening of the church for four hours every Tuesday for "Create and Craft". A committed group of people have made this possible every week, providing a simple lunch and welcoming all who would come.

There has been a church awayday, regular Bible study sessions, a housegroup which meets for supper and discussion, a women's network group which meets fortnightly and a group meeting weekly which focuses on the needs of the members from Ghana. A Shona speaking fellowship meets on Sunday afternoons, with members gathered from Methodist Churches in the area; this group connects with the church family for special events.

The church building is well-used during term-time for youth work. Boys Brigade, Guides, Brownies, Rainbows meet on the premises and are part of the wider church family. A good relationship has been built up over the years with a dancing school and the small group called STEAM (*Slough Town Employment Action Movement*) have made St Andrew's their base during this year. The church building hosts a men's group and has been used by many people throughout the year. The caretaker, Jude, and his wife service the church building and are appreciated by the church family.

The congregation at St Andrew's is diverse in almost every sense of the word. The young church has grown throughout the year and is staffed by a committed group. A teenagers group was started towards the end of the year, which is meeting at the deacon's manse in Slough. "Alive in Slough" is a weekend held at the beginning of the year, which sets the tone for the year ahead. St Andrew's joins in this with the congregations at Ledgers Road and Hampshire Avenue.

As the new church year begins, the church "travels in hope", trusting in the God, who has been a Guide and Strength in the laughter of tears of this people of God.

Urdu

Membership 18

The congregation gathers weekly for worship, which is conducted most weeks in the Urdu language, with members of the church family taking responsibility for parts of the service, including a retired minister of the Presbyterian Church who is a member of the church. The minister in pastoral charge is Andrew Baker; he preaches in English about twice a month – and most of the congregation understand what he is saying most of

the time! The congregation shares in food and fellowship after worship and share in events together throughout the year – often including other Asian Christian families in the town.

Towards the end of this year a new family has committed themselves to the church's life and they will be received into membership in the coming year. A Sunday School is to be revived, and there is a sense of hope as the congregation looks forward.

Andrew Baker

St Mark's Crescent

Membership: 54

Where do we begin? So much has happened since our last report to the Circuit. Our highly successful Lunch & Leisure Club has been launched (in association with Age Concern), our Junior Church has once again begun to meet (on the first Sunday of each month), our latest pantomime – *Jack & The Beanstalk* – is already in rehearsal, but, best of all, we have received the Circuit's blessing for – and we have already launched – our brand new redevelopment project, given the highly appropriate working title, 20:20 Vision.

There is so much going on at St Mark's: a Nursery School, WEA classes, Tuesday Singers, Weightwatchers, the Lunch & Leisure Club, Messy Church, Talking Newspapers, Rainbows, Brownies & Guides, Pilates groups, a keep-fit guild, and monthly coffee mornings. We are in danger of wearing the building out. (It needs a new roof anyway!) You (the Circuit Meeting members) have agreed with us that we should extend our vestibule into a meeting place, enlarge one of our meeting rooms, replace our chairs, and renew all our kitchen and toilet facilities, all so that we can go on doing what we already do so well, serving the needs of the people of our community, perhaps particularly those of our older community neighbours who we hope will seek company and fellowship within our doors. [And we'll keep you posted on all the fun fund-raising activities we have planned.]

All things have their time and their season and our Boys Brigade Company – 1st Maidenhead – has sadly ceased to meet, but generations of boys have been wonderfully served by the untiring efforts of our brigade officers, and we salute them as they take a well-earned rest.

Sadly, we have lost a number of our dearest friends since last we reported to Circuit, a fact reflected in our reduced membership, but we remain no less enthused by the challenges and the opportunities that God continues to put our way.

Gary Homewood

Windsor

Membership 136

Other for whom the church has pastoral responsibility 50

Average morning congregation: 75 adults + 16 children

Average evening congregation: 20

During the year there have been 5 infant and 1 adult baptisms, 1 wedding, 2 members received by transfer, 1 as an extended member and 4 by Confirmation. 5 well-loved members have died as have two others connected with the church.

Last year we started a monthly evening café style church service and this continues to be very well attended; each month a member of the church shares a testimony of what God is doing in their lives. In September we started a quarterly healing service involving the minister and two supernumerary ministers working as a team. The service is on the 1st Sunday evening of each quarter and includes the ministries of Holy Communion, laying on of hands and anointing.

Windsor church has about 30 children and young people on the Sunday school register and some new volunteers to help with the lively sessions each Sunday. We need a Sunday School Superintendent but despite the vacancy have muddled along nicely. There have been 5 lively, productive *Messy Church* afternoons during the year – a pattern we plan to continue. The Mother and Toddler group is busy and thriving; because of its continuing popularity, there is always a waiting list. The Brownie Guide pack meets on Tuesday evenings enjoying a varied programme with a good team of leaders to keep the fun lively and productive.

We started this year by reviewing the pastoral groups and looking at new activities that could take place. This took some time and those activities are gradually coming on line. The new groups include a walking group, a film club, a 'senior space' afternoon and (hopefully) a new book club soon. Other groups include a fortnightly meeting of the Wesley Guild (2nd and 4th Wednesday evenings), and fortnightly Bible Studies – one on a Monday afternoon and the other on a Tuesday evening. There is a monthly women's circle, a monthly men's meeting, and an exercise class started but is in abeyance until a new leader can be found. Every Saturday morning 10.30 am – 12 noon a coffee morning is held and on the third Tuesday of the month *Coffee at the Crossroads* meets as a bereavement and carer support group.

An ecumenical prayer group meets on Mondays at 7 am for thirty minutes of silent prayer and on Tuesday evenings to pray for the town of Windsor. The small chapel is opened each day for those who welcome place for quiet reflection and prayer. Members of the church are involved in Churches Together in Windsor which has created the Windsor Christian Action charity to aid the work of a Homeless Project at the Baptist Church in Victoria Road, providing meals, shower facilities, help and advice two lunchtimes and one evening a week. This year saw the start of the Windsor Foodshare and the church contributes food to this each week.

We are looking forward to another year with a group working on the vision of the church. And we are hoping to introduce a midweek Holy Communion service, to hold Alpha courses and possibly a marriage course.

Woodlands Park

Membership: 23

Well, another year has passed and despite our size we still continue to enjoy friendship, fellowship, support one another and visit each other when needed and enjoy good "spirits" – if you pardon the pun. We may be small, but I believe, we do big things. *Open the Book* is amazing. The only problem being that I would love to see it. But working in a school means that is never going to happen, although perhaps we should video it so we could show everyone? Thought for the coming year.

We, of course, continue our outreach working with White Waltham Church, Housing Solutions, and St Mary's in Maidenhead. We contribute financially with a donation and also in manpower, and supplying a lot of cake! There were three events last year. The May Day one was very successful, particularly with the great weather (always a help) and the Cox Green School Bank. Some of us felt that the event in September, was an event too far, but we agreed to hold that again this coming church year at the same time and see how it goes. The event at Christmas time was very successful, with thanks again to all who have contributed, visited and helped in Santa's Grotto.

Our grateful thanks to all our members who collectively enabled our church to be successful ... What generosity and what cake at a House Group! The sterling work with the Toddler group! The raising of much needed funds for charity by running coffee mornings, and door to door collecting for Christian Aid – no mean feat! Where would we be without the organists, those who have looked after our property and our finances, produced our publicity or organised flowers for our church? And finally ... we are blessed with having Andrew as our main man. A constant source of support, spirituality, humour and mischief (in spite of trying personal circumstances). We are truly blessed.

Linda Harrison

Reports

Circuit Stewards' Report

It gives me great pleasure to be able to report on a very positive year in the Thames Valley. This stems in part from the leadership given by the Staff team, inspired by our Superintendent, but it also comes from the churches themselves. Andrew Baker's chosen theme of "being a learning church" has encouraged people to learn, and also to listen.

The outreach of the churches depends very much on the people available to contribute, but listening to churches telling their stories at Church Councils, at various meetings round the circuit, in fellowship before and after Circuit Services, there is a wealth of joyful news being spread round by the members of the Thames Valley Circuit.

However, some churches are really struggling due to the loss of so many able-bodied workers; I am frequently amazed by the quality and quantity of outreach work done by just a few people. The message we, as a leadership team, have been trying to put across, is to ask each church to think about what it could do well – and concentrate on that, and be positive.

We shared the joy of Ledgers Road with their refurbished premises, we recognised the hard work and dedication of those who organised and staffed Night Shelters, we heard the *Thames Valley Voices* (the circuit choir started in September 2013) sing the faith three times during the year, and we held circuit services monthly during the summer. One of those was a lament for the start of World War I, while another was a Teddy Bears' picnic! (There are pictures on the website to prove it!)

The whole circuit rejoiced when Margaret Dudley was received into full Connexion and ordained. Two contrasting but moving services in Birmingham; the most enormous smile from Margaret when it was all over! It has been my privilege during these past two years to support Margaret as she has developed, and grown in confidence, particularly since her ordination.

Circuit Stewards

At the end of the last Church year we saw the retirement of Phil Mount and Ruth James as Circuit Stewards, and welcomed Connie Jeffery and Elsa Daniel to the team. Connie joined the team during last year, while Elsa was appointed at the September Circuit Meeting, and began to find out about the work of being a Circuit Steward immediately, shadowing some of us for a while.

I am grateful to Phil, not merely for all the effort he put into being Senior Circuit Steward, but also for agreeing to continue to look after some of the “hidden” tasks of a Circuit Steward (Legal, Health & Safety, Charity Commissioners, and the like). He has also agreed to be the Deputy Treasurer, for the times when our Treasurer, Chris, is unavailable. Ruth, in addition to her duties as Circuit Steward, helped steer Ledgers Road through their building project, and I thank her for her time on the team.

We have had a lot to do during this last year. The Circuit Stewards take very seriously their duties of care for the ministers and their manse – an aspect of their work which is rarely seen by others.

Another major area for the Circuit Stewards’ team comes under the general heading of “Stationing”. It is our responsibility to check with any ministers who are coming towards the end of their appointment, *i.e.* in their fourth year, or more, to ask how they see their future ministry developing, whether to go or to stay. It has been my privilege to talk to Andrew and Gary about their futures. Andrew decided that he would not want to seek an extension, which, sadly, meant that we are looking for someone to replace him. Gary asked to extend his appointment for an extra two years. The Circuit Meeting agreed with enthusiasm. Andrew, in his report, has said more about the changes from 2015.

With Andrew leaving, and the Circuit gratefully accepting Sonia’s offer to become Superintendent, the leadership team had to think long and hard about how the circuit sections would be organised. Although this will not come into effect until September 2015, we had to be sure that we had the structure ready, and that Sonia was not stretched too far. We also decided that from September 2015, the Superintendency will not be based at St Andrew’s.

The Circuit Stewards continued to attend Church Councils and bring to our Stewards’ meetings any concerns, problems, and highlights about the churches with which they are in regular contact.

The current team

Anne Haggarty: Senior Circuit Steward; liaison rôle with District Chair; liaison rôle concerning Sonia’s manse; care of the manse at 50 Clarence Road, Windsor; leader of Stationing team; secretary of the Smaller Churches Support Group; member of Church Councils at High Street, St. Andrew’s (English) and Colnbrook & Poyle; Circuit Prayer Co-ordinator with District.

Chris Wren: Circuit Treasurer and member of Old Windsor Church Council.

Alan Crowle: Care of Priesthaus manse, Maidenhead; member of Church Councils at Hampshire Avenue (part of the year), Windsor and Woodlands Park.

Liz Tottingham: Care of Upton Road manse; member of Church Councils at Burnham, Cookham Rise, and St Andrew's (Asian).

Connie Jeffery: Care of Manse at Salt Hill Park, member of Church Councils at Eton Wick, Ledgers Road and St Mark's; liaison with Phil Clack over property, and very heavily involved in the sale / purchase of manses (thank you, Connie!). In addition Connie continues as our Local Preachers Secretary.

Elsa Daniel: Initially shadowing other Circuit Stewards, particularly Connie, to get a feel for where her talents can be best used. During the year Elsa became the Circuit Steward attending Hampshire Avenue's Church Councils.

The Circuit Stewards are there to help. If you have any comments or queries about the Circuit and its work, please ask one of us. We may not know the answer – but we almost certainly know someone who does!

Manses

Property matters this year loomed larger than normal.

At the beginning of the year, the Circuit owned five manses – four occupied by ministers in the Circuit; the fifth rented out. Our other minister was in a rented manse. Each manse has a named Circuit Steward who deals with any property concerns that may arise. During the year the situation with the rented manse became urgent, when part of a ceiling fell down, and water poured through the hole – caused by a leaking pipe. The result (!) was that we now have five ministers in five manses, all owned by the Circuit. The new manse became part of the Circuit late in the year, and Sonia and family moved in on 1st August! In order to pay for the new manse, the decision was taken – reluctantly – to sell the manse that we had been renting out.

Anne Haggarty, Senior Circuit Steward

Action for Children

This year has been overshadowed by the death of Ruth Williams who has been a fantastic leader of the Windsor group for many years. Her dedication to Action for Children (AfC) was second to none, and she is one of the few people who have been presented with the prestigious Stephenson Award for services to AfC (formerly NCH). She will be sorely missed.

Throughout the circuit we are losing workers through death, old age or moving away, and I urge younger people to consider taking their place.

I should like to thank all our loyal supporters for their work throughout the circuit. Brenda Hewitt has done sterling work with St Andrew's Home Collecting Boxes, and we wish her and Eric well in their move.

The Windsor Race Course collection went ahead this summer, and we are hoping for a Tesco collection during the 2014-15 church year.

Kim Appleby has taken over from Lauren Fitzgerald as the AfC fundraiser for this south area.

At Ruth's funeral, Katie Frisby from AfC reminded us that AfC cares for more children than any other charity. With this knowledge we should be encouraged in our work.

Evelyn Thomson

Circuit Mission Committee

The Circuit Mission Committee seeks to bring mission matters to the wider Circuit through the activities it supports. This year saw the introduction of a 24/7 prayer Event which was held at St Andrew's on 28th / 29th September 2013. 24/7 prayer movement is a global event which began in 1999 in Chichester when young people gathered to pray for their community. Instead of praying for the local community, we used the idea of the Methodist Prayer Handbook so that the various churches could prepare prayer stations using one Home area and one Overseas area. The larger churches in the Circuit were asked to prepare an 'extra' station which was allocated to them. A small group from the Missions Committee added two additional prayer stations. In the foyer, we had a prayer station looking at creation and in the Epworth Room we looked at Scottish spirituality. Due to the lack of 'stewards', we weren't able to go through the night but the Prayer Event was available from 4 pm to 10 pm on the Saturday and again from 6 am to 8 pm on the Sunday. In all, nearly a hundred people took the opportunity to visit the prayer stations with most coming on the Sunday afternoon. This new initiative will be followed up with a World Prayer Safari to be held in October 2014.

The Mission Committee has also been aware that our mandate is very wide indeed. Covering topics such as: Action for Children, Traidcraft, All We Can (the new name for Methodist Relief and Development Fund), Prison Chaplaincy, Mission Partners, Methodist Homes for the Aged and several other topics for mission. One possible way forward is to bring together interest groups rather than attempt to cover all these diverse areas in our meetings. Therefore, we were delighted that Tim and Hannah Baker were willing to lead the IOTA course at St Andrew's, over the Lenten period, which looked at justice issues. This is an excerpt from Tim's blog on his experience:

“...The lively group discussion, reflective prayer space and challenging resources drew us into a closer and transformative understanding of poverty: of how it is about more than numbers, about the human faces at the heart of the issues discussed, about how personal poverty is.”

You can read the full blog at: <http://timbaker89.wordpress.com/2014/04/18/change-we-need-reflecting-on-iota-2/>

The Mission Committee also continued with its usual events:

The Missions Quiz at High Street in March was well attended and we thank the folk there for steering this event for the Committee year after year. It was a fun evening and the questions were definitely easier than the year before!

Sadly, the Strawberry Tea event held in July at St Mark's was not so well attended and the Committee will be looking into possible reasons why in the year to come. We are still thankful to the St. Mark's congregation for again hosting this event.

The Committee meets twice a year and if there is an area of Mission that you are passionate about and would like to gather together like-minded passionate people, why not have a go? I would be delighted to hear from you and give any help/advice I can.

Sonia Hicks

Circuit Teens

The Circuit Teens group has continued to meet on the last Saturday of every month in Windsor with young people from Windsor and Slough churches. Some new young people joined this year, mainly from the Slough area and our average attendance for the year was twelve. In September we started the year with a bang because we not only had our usual meeting with the young people getting together after the summer break, but once we had finished we set off to St Andrew's to see the 24 hour Mission Prayer Vigil, and stayed there until mid-night. The young people spent time going round and seemed to really enjoy the stations ... especially those with food to try!

Our monthly activities vary from games to craft, from sharing news to sharing a meal, from discussion to answering tough questions. So what were some of the things we did this year? We carved pumpkins to remind ourselves that Jesus is the one we celebrate as the light of the world. As it was the year of the football world cup, we had a discussion about how a Christian sportsman or woman should behave. Not surprisingly during Advent we discussed Christmas, with Andrew leading the talk about what they thought was the Christmas story and what it says in the New Testament. One of the talks we planned was pushed to this year and we are looking forward to another year.

Our plans this coming year include having some meetings in St Andrew's. Our discussions will include a visit to the World Prayer Safari, and there will be a visit from the local Police Community Support Office to talk about being safe on the internet. We are also going to start widening our games to include pool and table tennis. We have a fun packed programme. The good thing about circuit teens is our young people complain mightily ... when we don't meet ...!

Margaret Dudley

Fairtrade

The Thames Valley Circuit is a Fairtrade Circuit and all its churches use fair trade products in serving the congregations and communities. We urge all churches to encourage their outside users to be the same.

Fairtrade Fortnight is celebrated annually in many different ways, all aimed at drawing attention to the world's poorest paid workers.

At the time of writing, the position of Circuit Co-ordinator for Fairtrade is vacant. If you would like to support the circuit and Fairtrade in this capacity, please speak either to your minister, or to a Circuit Steward.

Anne Haggarty

Local Preachers and Worship Leaders

There are currently 29 accredited Local Preachers in the Thames Valley Circuit, of whom 23 are available to lead worship in any quarter. This year saw the admission of Dave Tottingham as a Local Preacher and there are four Local Preachers on trial and two on note. At the other end of the scale, at the Circuit Missions service in September 2013, Arthur Baker was presented with a certificate marking 50 years' service as a Local Preacher, and the contributions of Don Peake, Helen Banham, May Tribe and Daphne Hogg were recognised, although they were no longer actively engaged in leading worship. We rejoiced with John Long this year as he celebrated his 90th birthday and more recently mourned the loss of Don Peake and Gordon Franklin, both of whom had contributed so much over the years to the worship of the circuit.

In addition there are now ten Worship Leaders in the Circuit. We thank God for all those who have acted on God's call to lead worship and to preach. On 21st March 2015 there will be a Local Preachers and Worship Leaders' Sharing Day which will act as a 'taster' for those who might be considering whether God is calling them, and as a refresher for Local Preachers.

Our 2014 Study Day was led on 17th May by Rev Dr Mark Wakelin on the Circuit theme for the year of being a learning church.

The new LPWL course (Worship: Preaching and Leading) is being piloted from September 2014, and will be available across the Connexion from September 2015: it will run in tandem with Faith & Worship for the first few years. From September 2015, there will be the possibility of transferring to the new course from Faith & Worship, and transferring assessment credits. Worship Leaders will study the first four modules of the course and Local Preachers all eight.

Connie Jeffery

Methodist Homes

Methodist Homes for the Aged (MHA) has grown and changed with the times throughout its 70 year history. Today it is one of the biggest charities in the UK, providing services to more than 16,000 people in later life. It has won the trophy as the Best Residential Care Provider at the Independent Healthcare Awards.

A Radio 4 Appeal on Sunday, 6th July, presented by Pam Rhodes, a patron of the charity, raised thousands of pounds for the Music Therapy Fund. Over £350,000 a year is spent to provide music therapy for all those living with dementia. "MHA recognises that music, especially in the hands of a really skilled music therapist, is really able to find the person ... it touches emotions, it evokes memories."

MHA has several new developments in the pipeline including Swindon, offering a range of one / two bedroom apartments for sale / rent, with an alarm system linked to the 24 hour on-site staff team.

In the year to March 2014, the Thames Valley Circuit contributed £1,898.65 to the work of MHA for which they will be very grateful. But we can do better! How?

- By having a MHA representative in every church.
- By asking each Church Council to consider making an annual donation to MHA.

Apart from Music Therapy, charitable donations also support a Chaplain in each MHA care home and the running costs of all the Live at Home schemes.

Daphne Hogg

Methodist Women in Britain

Since being formed in 2011, Methodist Women in Britain (MWiB) has become an independent movement and is now registered as a charity. It is a movement within the Methodist Church led by a group of volunteers and funded by donations; at its heart is a spirituality which aims to connect all women in praise, prayer and social action.

In the Thames Valley Circuit, financial support to good causes has been given through MWiB projects. These have included Mission Aviation Fellowship, the Dementia Project, 4 Aurora and the Dalit Solidarity Programme. This last is still in progress and money raised, mainly through coffee mornings and other events, is being divided between the project and MWiB administration.

Study and quiet days led by Rev Barbara McIntivey, Jill Baker and Nicola Shaw, have been informative and thought provoking, and have been well supported.

The Easter Offering Services, held early on a Sunday evening, have also been a success. The congregations generously support this work with an average of £1,500 being sent to the Mission fund every year.

The MWiB committee members very much appreciate having Jill Baker meet with them. Her enthusiasm, interest and ideas have given great encouragement and support – we shall miss her when she leaves us next year.

Arrangements for 2015 include a Quiet Day on 28th February at St Mark's Crescent church in Maidenhead and an Easter Offering service at St. Andrew's Slough on 26th April. All are welcome to both of these events.

I have enjoyed my time as MWiB Circuit President; I step down in April. It has been a pleasure to work with the representatives from the circuit churches and I shall continue to offer my support in the future.

Ann Hardiment

Prayer Diary

The quarterly Prayer Diary continues to be a source of help and inspiration to all members of the Circuit. It helps us to focus on a particular Church for a whole week, and to recognise, in the section which asks for God's help, the different problems facing our Churches. The other section offers prayers of thanks, and it is good to be able to share in joyful thanksgiving with all our Churches.

Paper copies are available in all Churches, and the electronic version on the Circuit website has the same prayers. A picture of each Church is included at least once a year. This version is also published on the District website along with any special prayers.

It has been interesting to see how much more relevant to both the individual church and the church year the prayers have become.

Anne Haggarty

Property and Health and Safety

Maintenance of property within the Circuit continues to be challenging to Church and Circuit Stewards, with ever increasing checks and formalities on how property is managed and maintained. Last year saw a major change in the way property schedules are prepared, with annual returns being produced online. Information collected covered all properties managed by the Circuit and the depth of information increased. These online schedules automatically produced exception reports for Circuit and District, to highlight areas and issues requiring attention. In addition the online reporting included information such as management of church finance, energy usage and key church documentation, archiving and safeguarding. My thanks to all those in the churches who gathered this information and took part in the initial roll out. Your patience and perseverance helped to make this a very successful first attempt.

Churches

Our churches have been encouraged over recent years to look at mission and outreach and how our premises can best be used in our work to serve our local communities. Some of the changes are noted below:

- There is a buzz at Ledgers Road with increased activity during the week and higher attendance levels at Sunday services in the newly refurbished premises.
- The pews have been removed from Cookham Rise church and replaced by chairs as their first step to opening up the premises for greater community use.
- Last winter's Night Shelter at High Street Maidenhead has helped shape the members thoughts on future plans to develop the site.
- Members at St Mark's Crescent church have imaginative plans to convert part of their premises and increase room sizes to deal with the growing need within the church for space as numbers and activities outstrip the time and space available.

Manses

Our Circuit Stewards' policy is to maintain the manses in good order and to deal with issues speedily to minimise ministers' distractions from their tasks. However, it became clear, early in 2014, that the rented manse in Slough had shown a number of maintenance issues, over which the Circuit Stewards had little control, that were causing a major distraction and headache to the minister and her family. After careful thought about the structure and vision for the Circuit, it was decided to sell the St Mark's Road, Maidenhead, manse, which had been let to tenants, and to buy a new manse in a more central location, suitable for the ongoing needs of the Circuit, and to house the minister who was in the rented accommodation. This process started in February this year and ended with the minister moving into a newly purchased property in August. Thanks to Connie Jeffery for managing the property sale and purchase. Never an easy job and definitely not easy this time!

Maintenance on the other manses was at a low level after sustained investment in repairs in previous years with replacement of some of the fencing panels being one of the major outlays at two of the manses this year.

Quinquennial Inspections

These continue to be carried out by Neil Barr of Daniel Lelliott and Krause on a timely basis and provide professional information on churches, manses and other church property to assist in identifying items needing attention and areas that require monitoring as well as helpful tips on how to maintain property.

Health and Safety and Risk Assessment

Methodist Insurance has been pro-active in recent years in giving advice and information on how to keep those who use our properties, safe. From information gained from claims, etc., they have identified what the major risks are and how we can reduce them from impacting our churches – for members as well as visitors. Following inspections and reports from Methodist Insurance, several churches have seen changes to the way they operate and brought about improvements to buildings and equipment to reduce the likelihood of accident and injury. All churches are encouraged to take up this free assessment.

List of "Approved" Contractors and Professionals

Over the last few years a list of competent, value for money contractors has been built up, covering most areas of property maintenance. People on this list have usually been recommended to us and we have found them to be valuable partners in maintaining our premises. If you have had workmen at your church whom you would like to recommend, please contact me, and if you have the need for contractors with a particular skill, we are ready to share information. However, we accept no responsibility should anything detrimental occur!

Phil Clack

Safeguarding

2013-2014 has been a year of little change in legal and government terms; a year of 'maintenance' with plenty for the churches' Safeguarding Co-ordinators/officers to discuss and debate at the meetings held this last year. Sometimes it is difficult to sort out misunderstandings, conflicting information, differing interpretations and the reality of what is required by both the Government, through the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) and the Methodist Church in conjunction with the Churches' Agency for Safeguarding. All three organisations have helpful guidance and advice to give. Our Thames Valley Circuit safeguarding meetings provide a forum for mutual support and the sharing of information.

The Creating Safer Space Foundation Module was presented in October 2013, March 2014 and September 2014 with 21 people attending. It is the rôle of the church Safeguarding Co-ordinator, with the Minister, and on behalf of the Church Council, to ensure that all those who are required to do so, attend the course, and to encourage interested others to attend also, to raise awareness about safeguarding themselves as well as children and young people and vulnerable adults. Those who have been on the course can also encourage others to come.

The Safeguarding Co-ordinator will also be aware of who in the congregation needs to have a DBS check and those whose Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) check is now out of date and needs renewing. Online applications for a DBS check are being encouraged and the verifiers in the Circuit are investigating how to verify forms online.

The Thames Valley Circuit Safeguarding Policy was reviewed in September 2013 and 2014; an addition regarding safeguarding and the internet and social media has been proposed and is being considered. This generated a lot of thoughtful and lively discussion at this September's meeting of the Safeguarding Co-ordinators with a recommendation to be put forward at the Circuit meeting.

It is important that good safeguarding practices are maintained throughout our churches. These are audited through the Annual Property Schedule which is presented to the Church Council, and safeguarding should always be on the Church Council meeting agenda. The good practices are only effective if everyone in the church is aware of them, adheres to them, and takes responsibility for safeguarding themselves as well as others.

Kathy Rickman

Smaller Churches' Support Group

The Smaller Churches' Group has continued to meet throughout the year. The Group's aims are to support each other, to plan events specifically for the six smaller churches, to propose events which are for the whole Circuit, and to help each church to look positively and practically at its future.

During this church year we have continued to hold Healing Services; originally aimed at just the smaller churches, these services have now become Circuit Services – a positive development. Our annual Saturday afternoon session of *Singing the Faith* is always popular, and is an opportunity for members of the smaller churches to learn material from the new book, something which is not always possible for churches with limited musical facilities. This is run under the banner of the Smaller Churches, but is always open to the rest of the Circuit.

We held a Smaller Churches Awayday during the year, and, in June, we started a series of events called "Come and See". This one was a *Messy Church* aimed at adults, though children were welcome, and a few came! Later events will be different! And if you want to know about them you will just have to ... "Come and See".

The Smaller Churches newsletter goes from strength to strength. It illustrates some of the varied work that our smaller churches do regularly, some of the special events held jointly or individually, and some of our hopes and dreams. Now I have persuaded contributors that pictures add to reports, the newsletter looks much brighter! My grateful thanks go to all contributors, and also to the ministers – their letters are so much appreciated.

Anne Haggarty

Website and Publicity

Circuit Website

The Circuit website, <http://www.MethodistThamesValley.org.uk>, was designed and developed in the 2008-9 Church year, and went live in March 2009.

Over the years it has grown significantly, with new pages and features added each year. There are now around 120 pages of information. A "first" this year was the introduction of sound, and the events section –

primarily a photographic record – now contains a 70 minute live recording of the “Voice of Passion”, presented by the circuit choir, Thames Valley Voices in April 2014.

In the 2013-14 church year, the challenge of including a history of the circuit and each of the 12 churches was completed. All pages include photographs. Some of the earlier ones are fascinating, such as one taken in 1901 at the opening of a church, another church’s cycling club c.1910, and one of the church choir which won the local Methodist Churches' Eisteddfod during the 1920s! *[Can you identify the three churches involved!? For answers, look at the histories on the website!]*

Access to the site has continued to grow, with thousands of accesses every month. The most popular page continues to be the PREACHING PLAN, which has been expanded to include the Circuit Worship Directory, giving details of each church for the benefit of preachers.

It is not unusual for over 50 events, including 10 posters, to be listed in the DIARY. Please do continue to send items for the NEWS, DIARY and PICTURE GALLERY. (8 albums were added in the last 12 months.) Remember: Out-of-date information is useless; if the details given for your Church change, please ensure that the Circuit Webmaster is informed.

Our very grateful thanks go to everyone who supplies information!

Publicity

When your church puts on a special event, is it for your members only, or are you seeking to attract others? If the latter, remember that the Circuit has in place ways for spreading the news circuit-wide and further afield:

- Hard Copy. The Circuit **What’s On** news-sheet is published monthly and distributed to every Church for displaying on its notice board.
- Electronically. The Circuit **Website’s** Diary.

You are invited to send details of “open” events to the Editor or Circuit Webmaster (names and contact details are in the Circuit Directory). Contacting either is sufficient for your event to be included in both media.

Ian Haggarty

Windsor and Maidenhead Community Forum

The Windsor and Maidenhead Community Forum (WAMCF) is a local community forum that brings together people from all faiths and communities to promote community cohesion and to value diversity.

Our women’s group welcomes women from all faiths and none to their meetings with lovely refreshments on a Monday evening bimonthly. Topics this year have included:

- Ending violence against women: what can faith communities do?
- Spring festivals of different religions.
- Introduction to Methodism.
- The charity *Family Friends*.
- ‘Umeed’ (=Hope), a women’s help organisation in India.
- The festival of Sukkot.

Other activities have included a Tour of Marlow Church', looking at plans for the anniversary next year of Magna Carta, planning an interfaith concert by and for young people, and a faith walk in Maidenhead between the places of worship represented by our group. This started at the synagogue and visited the mosque, St Luke's, the Friends Meeting House, High Street Methodist Church and All Saints, before ending at the Gurdwara.

Sue LePage



Andrew and Tim meet Methodist supporters at Windsor Bridge during their epic on 19th July 2014 during their epic 22 hour 100 Km walk which raised over £16,800 for Papyrus.



*August 2014 Circuit Service ...
Bubble blowing at the Teddy Bears' Picnic!*