

Newsletter of the Smaller Churches in the Thames Valley Circuit

April – May 2012

Minister's Letter

CHURCH? WHAT CHURCH?

One of the problems with using a term like “small church” is that it can become a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy, giving rise to a mind-set that is predisposed towards accepting the inevitable finality of an era of “being church”. Our numbers are reduced, our resources are constrained, our fabric is old, and therefore we are a small church and must think and act as a small church.

Says who?

In any given week I engage with a minimum of three congregations. Two of them you know about: High Street, in the centre of Maidenhead, and St Mark's, a mile and a half out of town in the direction of Pinkney's Green. If size matters, one would probably think of itself as quite a large church, and the other would probably call itself a medium sized church. But this is not their story.

I want to talk to you about the third congregation, currently one hundred and twenty-three members strong, and consisting of Christians, Jews, Muslims, humanists, and people of no obvious faith orientation. The members of this congregation hail from the United Kingdom, of course, but also from Eire, Germany, Australia, America, and Japan. Some members of this congregation are relatives of mine, and the age range of the congregation extends from ten to ninety.

I engage with this congregation daily. I need to. There is always someone in need of prayer, or advice, or encouragement, or sympathy, or comfort and love. Sometimes there are great issues at stake, matters in urgent need of discussion and resolution. Sometimes we talk faith, sometimes politics, occasionally football. Anything and everything can and will be shared among us. It is a diverse ministry, conducted among a diverse gathering of people.

Like any good congregation we feel and often operate like a family, and yet some of us – correction, most of us – have never met each other in the flesh, and never will. And yet we are in community, a vibrant, caring and growing community that is positive in its outlook, and ever hopeful of a changed and transformed world.

This congregation is my collection of friends on Facebook, linked to me and to each other via the internet from the ends of the Earth, and I reach it without leaving my study. I did not call this congregation a church, and yet it is so in all but name. No building, no fabric to grow old; just God at its heart, as always.

Just because one kind of church, mission or outreach shows signs of eventually coming to an end, don't think for one minute that you get the rest of the day off. There are always new beginnings, and God is nothing if not endlessly inventive. We have only just begun to understand what lies in store for us next.

And remember the mantra of the computer age? Small is beautiful!

God bless,

Gary.

News from the Churches

BURNHAM

Burnham Methodists sent representatives to the first meeting of the newly-constituted *Churches Together in Burnham* – at least we will probably adopt that name although the writer of these notes looks back nostalgically to the early 1980s, when the group of local churches members was called *ABC* (the Association of Burnham Christians). This was a “back of the envelope” suggestion passed to the writer at one of the first meetings, by Jack Jeffery, who, with his wife Joan, were such well-loved and hard-working Christians, not only within the Methodist Church at Lent Rise, Burnham, but within the Circuit and further afield.

We look forward to an ecumenical service for the Diamond Jubilee, on Saturday 4th June in St Peter's Church, Burnham, at 6 pm. On May 17th, during Christian Aid week, everyone is invited to a concert by the Heath Singers, at 8 pm, in the United Reformed Church. Contact Hilary Evans (keithandhilary@hotmail.com) if you would like tickets.

The Toddlers' Corner is set up at the back of the Church and has already been put to good use.

The Well @ Lent Rise, under its different names, goes on strongly. “The Meeting Place” on Wednesday mornings is a joy, and “wake-up-Wednesday” when we give (NOT sell) bacon butties, hot croissants, hot chocolate, fruit juice, and listening ears to secondary school students waiting for their bus or walking to school, from just after 7 am, is a really amazing experience of Christians from different denominations working together to serve our local community. “The Meeting Place”, which serves a slightly older age group(!), then begins at 9.30. Lots of activities (indoor bowls, anyone?), discussions, or just sit and chat. And – the coffee and cakes are brilliant!



COLNBROOK AND POYLE UNITED CHURCH

On Tuesday, 6th March, we enjoyed a cooked midday meal with our friends from St Thomas's. The cottage pie was superbly cooked by various members of both churches, followed by a choice of Fresh Fruit salad, Apple Crumble, Trifle or Eton Mess. All for the price of just £5.00.

After the meal most of the twenty-four folk stayed on for the second session of our Lent course, led on this occasion by Rev Barbara McIntivey.

The day was a huge success and we are looking forward to being able to enjoy a meal, on the first Tuesday of each month, when our Fellowship group meets.

If you would like to join us, please telephone 01753-542535 to book for catering purposes.

COOKHAM RISE

Cookham Rise's latest *Messy Church* session took place on the morning of Saturday, 25th February 2012. The session was entitled "Rock & Sand", as we had decided to base it on Jesus's parable of the wise and foolish builders – it sounded suitably "messy"! The church had decided to target families with under fives for Messy Church and we were delighted that four families came along – numbers are increasing slowly with every session we hold. The church playgroup had kindly allowed us to use their outdoor sandpit, St Andrew's Boys Brigade loaned their Giant Jenga, and in addition we had various crafts loosely based around building – painting with chunky vehicle wheels, sand pictures, creating cardboard houses, etc, plus Lego, building blocks and playdough.

We've found that any kind of cooking goes down well, so this time we made rock cakes, and people also created pizzas on baps – both of which were eaten enthusiastically for lunch! The ten-minute session in the church gave us chance to sing "The wise man built his house upon a rock" (which the children still know from playgroup!) and to re-tell the parable – with rain provided by a watering can. All in all, an exhausting but enjoyable morning. We were glad Hilary Evans from Burnham came along to help and observe – might we see *Messy Church* in the Burnham area soon..?!

Watch this space for a report on our Easter Happening children's workshop on 5th April.

Connie Jeffery



WOODLANDS PARK

Woodlands Park Fun Day: Woodlands Park folk have joined in an initiative taken by Rev David Andrew, Vicar of White Waltham, to hold an "Open Crowd Festival" or "Fun Day" for the residents of Woodlands Park on Bank Holiday Monday, 4th June, on the green area in the centre of the housing estate. Others involved are representatives from the Residents Association and, hopefully, staff and parents from the local school. The event, presently in the early planning phase, will be for all ages and will include activities for adults and children and it will be entirely free. The event is modelled on "community festivals" developed by Fusion International (more information on www.fusionyac.org/foundations). We believe that this is a real opportunity for the churches to work alongside the community and to be sharing a presence with the local folk.

Some of us will be going to a similar event on Saturday 21st April, from 2 pm, "The Wheatley Open Crowd Festival" at Wheatley, Oxfordshire; this to get a feel and flavour of what an event is all about. Mentioning this, is by way of inviting anyone to come along as well!

ETON WICK

Do you know your Royals? Come to our *Diamond Jubilee Quiz* at **Eton Wick Methodist Church** on Saturday, 21st April at 6.30 pm. £5, including Fish and Chip Supper. Proceeds to Action for Children.

Join us at **Eton Wick Methodist Church** on Sunday, 3rd June, for “A *Big Lunch*” to celebrate the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee. Cost £5 Adults; under 12s £2. This follows our 10.30 am service. Or, after your own morning service, come along and join the celebration for lunch at 12.30 pm.

Celebrate the arrival of the Olympic Torch at Dorney Rowing Lake by joining in the **Fun and Games** at **Eton Wick Methodist Church** for our *Table Top Olympics*. All ages welcome. How many medals can you win? This will be on Sunday, 8th July starting at 3.30 pm, and will be followed by a celebration tea and a church service.

Tickets for all events will be available from Peter Morris and Daphne Hogg, or phone Laura Clack on 01753 852847 to book. All welcome ... but book early!

Cottage available for renting

Eton Wick Chapel has a lovely 125 year old semi-detached cottage in the heart of Eton Wick village available for renting. A major redecoration has just been completed. This two bedroom cottage would be ideal for a young couple just starting out on their own, or an older person or couple. It has a garage and a pretty garden. For more information please contact Phil Clack on 01753 852847.



OLD WINDSOR

Our next *Messy Church* will be on 1st April.

On Good Friday, the village United Procession of Witness starts at the Cross on St Luke’s Road / St Peter’s Road corner, and finishes at the Methodist Church for a short service led by Rev Barbara McIntivey. The procession starts at 10.30 am, with the service at approximately 11 am, depending on how slowly we walk!

Our next *Travellers’ Tales* will be on Thursday, 10th May, at 2.30 pm. Evelyn and David Thomson will be talking about “Classical Greece”. The cost is £4, including afternoon tea.

Joint Events ... dates for your diary

- Tuesday, 24th April. A Healing Service at 2.30 pm at Colnbrook & Poyle United Church.
- Sunday, 29th April. Circuit Service at High Street Maidenhead, during which the Easter Offerings will be received. Tea at 4 pm, service at 5 pm.

Please Support US!

If you can support our activities and events in any way, please do! Thank you!

Contact

This newsletter is edited by Anne Haggarty, the Secretary of the Smaller Churches Support Group. Please contact her with ideas and suggestions.

Wishing you all a joyful Easter!

