

Newsletter of the Smaller Churches in the Thames Valley Circuit September – November 2015

Minister's Letter:

Hi Folks, What an end to the Methodist year! Three new local preachers welcomed into the fold after their extensive course of study and discernment, then farewell to Andrew and Jill Baker – two amazing acts of worship that both blessed and filled me, as I expect it did you, afresh and enthused. Not surprising really considering, “like a snow-cooled drink at harvest time is a trustworthy messenger to the one who sends him; he refreshes the spirit of his master” (Proverbs 25:13). What a summer! what a year! what do we have to look forward to? And then as if that was not enough, our circuit service where we finished our theme of ‘Travelling in Hope’ using worship entitled ‘Journeying Together’. We built our ‘cairn’, our marker to show ‘we was ere’, to mark our passing this way, to give us chance to reflect on our journey. The journey that we have embarked on with God as our constant companion, as Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 7:13 “By all this we are encouraged” – and encouraged we were! So many things spring to mind as I remember that we have a companion on this journey; we have someone to share it with; we have an amazing privilege as we move forward.

I have been told August is a quiet month ... really! Are you sure? Yes – August is a month apart, set aside, a time of refreshing and renewing. Glasgow; as Mindy, Ted and family Slough; as we look for signs of new renewing – we prepare. This then anticipation builds, when our feet are on completely hushed, there is a collective hear the starter’s pistol, waiting for that that signals the burst into action, that blocks and move forward into the race to surge so the crowd begins to roar and breath of anticipation has been exhaled to the start of this year. What will this New Year bring? Only God knows; we just have to see where he takes us next.



Here we are in September ready to welcome Sonia as our Superintendent and Mindy as a new minister and her family into our circuit family. I am reminded that it is “For in him we live and move and have our being”. “As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’”. (Acts 17:28). And so for Him who created us, brought us salvation and sustains us we stand ready, eager, full of energy and anticipation to see where we travel with him on this journey that he travels with us. Have you heard the bang, have you left the blocks, are you raring to go, are you bursting forth?

With every blessing

Margaret

The Thames Valley Circuit is committed to supporting its “smaller churches”

Although with comparatively few members, each of these churches is very active, and all are strengthened by working together. These newsletters tell of some of their exciting, on-going work.

Editor's note / Contact



Where do you realistically want your church to be at the end of this church year? I threw out this challenge to the Smaller Churches in order that we might all stop and think about the direction we are travelling. Some of us are making significant efforts to improve our visibility in our community, or making our premises available for community use. Some of us feel that, no matter what we do, the community doesn't want to know, and we are going nowhere, possibly even retreating from positions held. However, I have detected positive signs in all the small churches, some of them very tiny, but which are there to be built on.

The *Smaller Churches Awayday*, postponed from last May, will now be held on Saturday, 28th November. Details are listed later on in the Dates for Diary section. This should be a fascinating day exploring the relevance of John and Charles Wesley to us as Christian today. Please let me know if you hope to come. This event is aimed primarily at the group of Smaller Churches, but we are opening it to the rest of the circuit.

Have you joined *Thames Valley Voices* yet? We restart on Tuesday, 15th September. The choir is always on the lookout for new members, especially those who sing alto, tenor or bass. We have an interesting programme for the coming months, with contributions at some of the Circuit Services, and culminating in providing the music for the Pantomime being put on at St Mark's Maidenhead. More details



We have decided to produce newsletter quarterly. Copy (December – February) than 20th November, Thank you.

future editions of the for the next edition should reach me not later preferably with pictures!

Anne Haggarty

News from the Churches

COOKHAM RISE

"Where do you want your church to be at the end of this church year?" Quite a difficult question, as my mind immediately raced around all sorts of answers and possibilities!

As we are one of the churches in the Circuit who have had a change of minister this year, we would firstly like to have 'grown' a relationship with Sonia during this first year – so that she and the church members and friends all come to understand a little bit of what makes the other(s) tick and how we can best work together. We hope that the *Looking to the Future Group* will continue to do its worthwhile work of taking time, outside Church Council, to consider what we are currently doing, whether and why it works (or doesn't), and how we could progress or expand.

Then we would like to see some organic growth in what we are currently doing well, and maybe some changes too. Perhaps our successful *Come & Play* sessions on Tuesdays and Fridays might expand to



cover lunch, or afternoon sessions, with maybe visiting interested parties who could offer something extra to the mums and toddlers who attend. Then there's *Bump Camp*, which offers exercise to pregnant and new mums: there are many young mums in the Cookhams – maybe this could expand and become the meeting place we envisage, with an expanded crèche, visiting health visitors or whatever else the mums feel they need.

Personally I still hanker after some sort of midweek worship, but we have not yet managed to work out how or what this could be. Café church? A group for mums who want to explore some deeper issues?

We hope that the ecumenical work in the village will change and expand. *Christians in Cookham* has met monthly for many years, but maybe it is time to change the format, to involve more and newer people, to create a forum where we can really talk about how the churches in the Cookhams can work together. Maybe a lunchtime meeting at Cookham Rise Methodist Church with Bible study, worship and lunch on a monthly basis?

We will, of course, still have one eye on our ultimate aim of having a commercially-run community café on the premises, offering refreshments to those who meet there and to the people of the village. And hopefully our weekly prayer meeting will expand, attracting more participants, maybe branching out into prayer partners, triplets or chains, and underpinning all we seek to do with prayer.

Connie Jeffery

COLNBROOK & POYLE UNITED CHURCH

On 20th August Colnbrook said farewell to Peggy who has been attending the church and fellowship regularly for several years. The funeral service was very well attended both at Slough Crematorium and in the Thanksgiving at the church. On the one hand it was great to see so many in church but...

As far as the future is concerned, we were in the process of exploring separation from our URC partners. They had raised this idea just before Christmas, and we thought we were moving towards becoming a Methodist Church again. But the URC have changed their minds and have withdrawn the request – stating that the separation would be complicated and unwieldy with trying to sort out the financial side of things. So our future is back in the mix! Where do we go from here? At the next Church Meeting we shall debate this change and resolve this sticky dilemma but until then the Status Quo has returned.

The numbers attending Sunday worship have continued to be low; at the same time our monthly Tuesday Fellowship service is attracting new members. The fellowship is going from strength to strength and despite many people being away for the summer, we still had fifteen attending in August with two new members. We are looking forward to our first meeting in September when we plan to meet at the Langley Toby for a fellowship meal.



As to the future. Watch this space.

Margaret

BURNHAM

In response to our editor's request to say where we realistically want our church to be at the end of this church year, we say: 'well, we hope we're still here!'

On a practical note, we have a programme of repairs and renewals that should be completed – or at least well on the way – by the end of the Connexional year. We have for some time been looking for a new digital piano and would hope to have a suitable instrument in place before very long. We are keen to be using more of the 'modern' hymns and songs and a new instrument should be an encouragement!

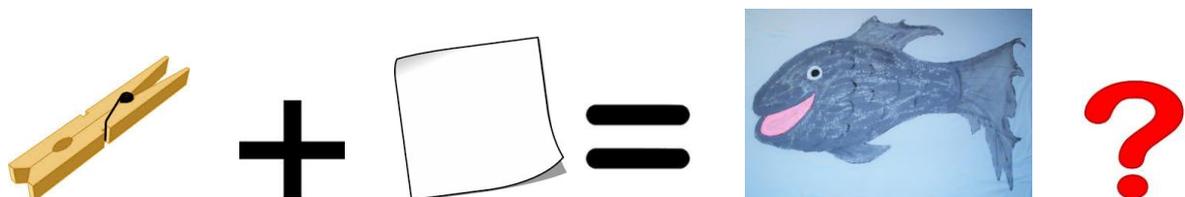
There has been much discussion for some time regarding a new outside noticeboard, detailing Church activities and, possibly, other uses of the premises. We need to advertise; otherwise we can't complain if people don't come along. We hope to make a decision about this soon.

At the time of writing we are unsure about the future of our Young Church activities. We are praying hard about this. With our small membership, it is difficult to provide leaders and helpers on a regular basis.

We need to focus, in the coming months, on ways to encourage our 'occasional' attendees to worship with us as frequently as possible. We need to establish stability and continuity in our congregation. This will enable us to move forward, not only in youth work but in witness to the local community as a whole.

We are hoping to start a mid-week Bible study group. This will be a new venture, and will probably be held in the day-time. Details aren't yet confirmed, but we hope this will be very informal and will encourage some of our newer Church friends to come along.

Our mid-week activities: The Mothers and Toddlers group, Cameo (the senior citizens' lunch group) and The Meeting Place (the Wednesday coffee morning under the auspices of *The Well@Lent Rise*) are doing very well. Our aim for the next 12 months will be to make Burnham Methodist Church a place of welcome, sanctuary, friendliness and a witness to God's work here on earth. Not for nothing are we called '**The Church at the Crossroads**'.



We have recently held another 'Messy Church' on the theme of Jonah and the whale. Yes, all right, we know it wasn't a whale, but it's much harder to sing songs about Jonah and an unidentified large sea creature than it is to sing about Jonah and the Whale! We had well over 20 children and everyone had a really great (if somewhat exhausting) time. If anyone wishes to know how to make a whale out of a clothes peg and a small piece of paper, please apply to the writer of these notes!

Hilary Evans

OLD WINDSOR

Our work in the local First School with *Open the Book*, which children and staff welcome, continues as we start our fifth year and look forward once again to getting involved. We are an ecumenical team, and we hope that volunteers may come forward, as we are working on very tight numbers. We take our rehearsals seriously, but with an element of fun and laughter, making sure that we enfold everything we do in prayer. We aim this year to develop the relationships we have built up – including David going in to the nursery class to introduce those just about to move up into the main school to what we do – those mysterious happenings in the Hall on Wednesday mornings!

Our regular *Tuesday coffee morning* has declined over the last year – two major factors. The local Day Centre for the over 60s has begun to open for the whole day, four days a week, and the only day they don't cover is one where our members are unavailable. We did try and work out a way of filling the gap, but we all had regular commitments that would have meant major changes for us and the others who rely on us, and we decided that the upheaval would be just too great. We have also seen a number of our former regulars succumb to old age, illness, death and "cease to meet". We should like to build up our links with the community here, and are actively considering ways of working with the Day Centre, though getting responses from Age Concern Slough, who has overall control, is not easy.

Late news on this front! This last Tuesday a couple of "old" regulars were there, saying that the group of them who used to come, have missed coming, and they are working on the others to come back ... it may take a while, but just a tiny sign of hope!

Our regular twice-monthly *Bible Studies* will be continuing, and we look forward to the new series for this year. We appreciate the presence of members from Colnbrook & Poyle who join us regularly on Tuesday afternoons. We have experimented with a number of different approaches for Bible Study, and this year will be using several different styles. We have enjoyed the challenges in the past, and look forward to new ones. These studies give us the opportunity to learn at greater depth than is possible on a Sunday morning. We welcome Margaret's input when she is available. Our aim this year is to deepen our faith through the conversations and discussions that our studies provoke. Our *Maundy Thursday lunch* sprang out of the conversations at our Bible Studies, and we hope to repeat this in 2016.



Traveller's Tales, our series of talks about places people have visited, goes well, and is always popular. The title should be a giveaway! Illustrated talks on interesting places – interesting to the speaker, and always interesting to the rest of us by the time they have finished! We aim to have one about every two months, though the timing is more dependent on the speaker than on having a "regular" slot in the calendar! We have had talks from friends from Old Windsor Methodist Church, friends from Old Windsor Parish Church, friends from around the Circuit ... you may see and hear about somewhere in the British Isles, but you may see and hear something from more exotic places.

For many years there has been a mid-week, day-time meeting – our *Thursday Fellowship* – aimed in the past at those people not in regular work. Over the last few years this meeting has sadly declined, mainly due to the age of those attending, and to their changed circumstances – moving away or house-bound or through death. This year will be the time to consider its future, and whether a small gathering of three or four, most of whom need transporting to the meeting, is viable, sensible, a good use of people’s time, and whether it is serving a genuine need that couldn’t be met elsewhere.

Our *ecumenical work* has been faltering in the last few years. Among the laity there are many friendships, and considerable co-operation, but there had been a lack of leadership from the (previous) Vicar in strengthening the relationships that were in place, and nothing new was even thought of. However, Old Windsor now has a new Vicar, Rev Adel Shokralla, an Egyptian, who will be inducted on 7th September. He comes with his English-born wife and young family. We Methodists will be hoping for more joint work. At the moment, we have no idea how ecumenically-minded he is, so this is a question of ... watch this space!

Of course we have hopes and dreams for Old Windsor Methodist Church ... we should love to be more involved in the community, demonstrating our Christian presence and witness, and working with the large number of elderly people who live in the village. However, we have to be realistic – we cannot do everything, and we no longer have the active workforce that we had a few years ago. So we are forced to make decisions as to where we concentrate our efforts, and it is this which may force us to make choices about what we can and can’t do.

Anne Haggarty

Joint Events ... dates for your diary

The next meeting of the Smaller Churches Group is on Thursday, 19th November, 7.30 pm at Colnbrook.

September

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| Sat 5 th | 4 pm | St Andrew’s Slough | Welcome Service for Rev Sonia Hicks as Superintendent, and for Rev Mindy Bell and family |
| Tues 15 th | 7.30 pm | St Andrew’s Slough | The Circuit Choir, Thames Valley Voices, restarts. New members invited! |
| Thurs 17 th | 2.30 pm | Old Windsor | Traveller’s Tales: <i>Western Canada</i> with Chris and Ed Filmore |
| Sat 26 th | 2.30 pm | Eton Wick | Singing the Faith |

October

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| Weekend 17 th /18 th | | St Mark’s Crescent | Circuit Mission Weekend including Circuit Mission Service |
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November

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| Thurs 19 th | 7.30 pm | Colnbrook | Smaller Churches Meeting |
| Thurs 26 th | 2.30 pm | Old Windsor | Traveller’s Tales: Natural Wonders & Total Eclipse with Connie Jeffery. |
| Sat 28 th | 10 am – 3 pm | Saltau Centre | Smaller Churches Away Day led by Rev Claire Potter, talking about the relevance of the Wesleys today. |

If you can support the above circuit events or our activities and events listed under our individual churches, in any way, please do! Thank you!