



North Kent Methodist Circuit

Circuit News and Preaching Plan

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ROLLER COASTER RIDE
STEPPING OUT IN FAITH
THE DANCING PREACHER**

Issue Two
May 2017

Like a Wedding Day...

What does it mean to be “received into the Connexion” and ordained as a minister in the Methodist Church?



On 25 June, Kan Yu will be one of several dozen men and women being ordained and “received into the Connexion” of the

British Methodist Church. This gala day, roughly the equivalent of a wedding ceremony between the Methodist Church and its ministers, will be the culmination of many years of hard work, soul-searching, and “formation” for the Ordinands and the Church. Like the wedding day, it will come after an extended “engagement” period of at least two years “probation”, and it will mark the official beginning of a life-long union. It’s the day when the church declares to its Ordinands: “You have been tried and tested and found worthy of becoming a minister in full connection with the Methodist Church and to be ordained to the Ministry of Christ’s holy Church”.

“Received...”

In our British Methodist system, this ceremony has two distinct parts, carried out in different venues, one in the morning and one in the afternoon of the Sunday at the beginning of the Annual Conference. The morning service is the Opening Worship Service of the Conference. Methodists from across the Connexion gather, grand and glorious hymns are sung, prayers are prayed and the newly-elected President of Conference preaches the sermon. Near the end of the service the President calls the names of all those to be received into the Connexion.

Most of these to be “received” will have recently finished their probation and been approved by their district and the Connexional Candidates committees, but some will have been ministers in other denominations or other Methodist Conferences around the world. The gathered Conference is asked if it will formally “receive” these ministers “into



the Connexion”. Being “received” means that the minister is fully under the discipline of the Methodist Church and ready and willing to be used wherever and however the Connexion desires. The affirmation by the Conference is done by a standing vote. For the nervous Ordinands standing in front, there is a moment of wondering, “Will anyone find a last-minute objection?” – and then comes the sound of several hundred feet hitting the floor as the entire Conference body stands in silent testimony of agreement to these becoming full ministers. Whether you are being “received”, or the family member or well-wisher of one of those being received – or a minister remembering your own “reception” – there will probably be a lump in the throat and a dampness around the eyes... which makes it a little difficult to then sing “Love Divine, All Loves Excelling”, but everyone will do their best!

The service is followed by lavish amounts of picture-taking and hugs and well-wishes outside the Conference venue (as well as countless mobile phone calls as everyone tries to locate everyone else they want to congratulate in the midst of the exuberant crowd!). Then, on to lunch... and then find one’s way to the Ordination venue...

“...and ordained”

In the current British Methodist practice, Ordinations take place in smaller groups at various churches in the district hosting the Conference, which this year is Birmingham. Family and friends, members of Conference, and well-wishers will pile into cars and trains and coaches to get to the appointed churches by 3:30 pm. Another service full of uplifting hymns and prayers will follow, with a sermon from either a former President of Conference or a member of the Connexional Team.

At the time of the actual ordination, the Ordinands will be called forward to the communion rail along with their “assisting ministers”, each Ordinand having chosen a person who has been significant in his/her ministerial formation to be present at the occasion. The Presiding Minister will tell the congregation that the call of the Ordinands “has been tested in preparation for this ministry, and they have been found to be of sound learning and faithful to their vocation...” The congregation will then be asked, “Do you believe and trust

that they are, by God's grace, worthy to be ordained?" An earth- and soul-shaking affirmation rings out from the congregation: "They are worthy!" This is followed by the challenge from the Presiding Minister: "Will you uphold them in their ministry?" To which the answer comes: "We will uphold them."

Called by God

Then comes a series of questions and responses between the President and the Ordinands in which the Ordinands affirm themselves to be called by God to this ministry, accepting of the Scriptures, doctrine, and discipline of the church, and promising to be faithful in "worship... prayer...reading of the Holy Scriptures... and those studies which will equip... for ministry." Each Ordinand has hands laid on him/her by the President, a World Church representative, and his/her Assisting Minister as the actual Ordination takes place. Each receives a Bible with the certificate of ordination attached to the inside page. Holy Communion follows with the Ordinands and all the assembled congregation receiving the elements. The service finishes off with the singing of "O Thou Who Camest From Above" – and many happy tears of joy and relief!

That's what's happening this 25 June. Several of our circuit churches are planning to 'livestream' the Conference Reception into Full Connexion service in their Sunday morning worship services – check the Plan for details. We are also planning for a coach to take several from our circuit to Kan's Ordination service in the afternoon at the Queen Street Baptist Church in Coventry.

For Kan and others being ordained and received into the Connexion, it will be both the end of a long process of "formation", and the beginning, we trust, of an even longer time of full ministry to God and God's people through the Methodist Church. Our prayers and hearty congratulations are with Kan now and into the future.

Bonni-Belle



A record-breaking thank you!

Each year when I set the deadline for the statistics forms to be back to me at the office I am disappointed to receive only a handful and often only half completed. In 2016 a new record was set: by the deadline I received fully completed forms from 18 churches! Also a record number of five churches had completed their form on line.

Thank you so much to all of you who helped to collate the needed information. I enjoy working through the statistics forms each year as I get a background into what clubs are happening in the churches within our circuit. What disappoints me is the fact that the number of people attending these clubs remains the same each year. So I have a challenge for you all...

Notice your notices

Let's get more people attending our clubs by getting them noticed. Who sees your weekly notice sheet? Is it just the people that attended church on Sunday? Well, let's get these notices noticed.

Perhaps you might think about displaying your notices in your local library, schools and nurseries, newsagents. Yes, your congregation might know all the details of your clubs but the people outside our churches, who we want to welcome in, don't.

For example, your notices might read, "Monday at 12:00: Lunch Club". That tells people nothing. Instead write: "Monday Munchies" Lunch Club. All welcome. Arrive from 10am for a fun quiz, a game of cards or scrabble. Lunch served at 12 noon. £4.50 for

Thank You!

a hot main meal, an enticing pudding, followed by tea or coffee. Volunteers always welcome on a rota bases to help with laying tables, serving, washing or drying up – free meal provided. Lending library of jigsaw puzzles, books and DVDs available. Come along, we'd love to meet you."

Who might come?

So who might come along to your lunch club? The retired gentleman who pops to the newsagents each morning for his daily paper. The lone parent who has just dropped her children off at school. If she volunteers she will get a free hot meal like her children would at school, so that's one less meal to cook in the evenings, leaving her more time with her family. Maybe it's a less abled person who enjoys a trip to the library, who can't do anything too active, but might love to keep their brain active by playing scrabble or doing quizzes.

So my challenge is to get your notices noticed, get more people along to these clubs and let's raise the attendance figures on the statistics forms.

Angel O'Nyon

Roller-coaster ride



Beacon Church's vision comes to life at No.3 Coffee House

In 2012 Rachel and I, along with the Beacon Church, held several prayer meetings, asking the Lord to open a door for us to have a Coffee Shop on the Bridge, a place to meet neighbours and friends, but above all, a place where people would encounter Jesus. These days of prayer reached their climax when on a snowy day (18 January 2013) I prayer-walked seven times around the empty plot where the shops were planned to be built, crying out to God for a breakthrough. Two and a half years later, and continuing to pray, we finally secured a shop and began to make the vision a reality. With the generous support of the Circuit, both in prayer and resources, building work began in October 2015.

A time of learning

The fitting out of the shop was both exciting and hard work, with much of the interior work and décor being undertaken by church members and myself. I learnt very quickly that project managing is an art I had yet to master, and that things can take longer and cost more than you first think! It was a time of learning and not without its stresses, but God was good and the shop was ready to open in early February 2016.



The year since No.3 Coffee House first opened its doors that February morning has been a roller coaster ride with both its "ups" and its "downs", but God has been faithful and the missional rewards have outweighed the challenges we've faced. One of the major sources of our struggles has been learning to start a business from scratch; we had a little experience, but not enough to prepare us for the challenges of managing

people, overheads, and cash flow outside of the more familiar structures of a charity/church. However, we have made a significant journey towards becoming a self-sustaining missional work in the heart of the community, and thanks to the "ups" and "downs" we now have a better understanding of its strengths and weaknesses both as a business and as a place of Christian witness.

Over the year our shop manager Rachel Woodhouse has worked hardest in making the coffee shop function effectively. She has baked hundreds of cakes, hosted dozens of community events, and helped make the books balance better. She continues to be the heart of the project and keeps exploring ways the shop can be better used and more efficient at what it serves and provides.

Good news

There are many good news stories to share from this last year: becoming a meeting place for residents, home to a knit and natter group, starting a new mums meet-up, providing children's craft and cooking activities, a base for the police surgery meetings, hosting a memorial for Jo Cox in conjunction with the local Labour Party, holding the Alpha Course and Youth Alpha, many prayer meetings, presenting community discussion events we called Big Talk, and much more.

However, the greatest joy has been the countless opportunities both Rachel and I have had to share something about our faith in Jesus with those we serve over



that coffee shop counter. Conversations that range from a simple discussion about "Why would a church open a coffee shop?" to deeper exchanges where the gospel is shared and we are able to give our testimony, all whilst making a latte! It's these unplanned and often-unexpected conversations that excite me most about the whole project. It is a unique space, where we encounter people going about their everyday business, and when natural and unpressured questions can be asked and discussed within those few minutes over the counter. It is in these encounters that we see the Holy Spirit at work, and encouraged by these gems we continue to pray for a harvest, both within the new housing developments, but equally in the town of Dartford and beyond. Praise Jesus!

Bart Woodhouse



“Don’t thank me, thank God!”

God’s work in the community at Gillingham Methodist Church Community Centre

Sanctuary

It’s 3.30 pm, the doors are closed, the washing machine has stopped and all is quiet at GMCCC. But in just a couple of hours it will be buzzing as the night shelter begins to welcome guests, prepare the evening meal, organise the beds and the shower rota, then settle down for a typical winter night. Sanctuary at GMCCC is now in its second year and is busier than ever; 159 guests have been welcomed altogether with over 80 calling during the day for showers, laundry, clothing or just advice and a cup of coffee. God has blessed Sanctuary with plenty so there is rarely a clothing request that can’t be met; food is available for the hungry and volunteers organise everything.

One day recently a woman who was clearing out her late aunt’s home arrived with a foodbank donation. She got talking to a homeless woman who was having a coffee and donated £1000 from her aunt’s legacy to Sanctuary to help re-house her. When we thanked her she said, “Don’t thank me, thank God!”

CXK

Three days a week the charity CXK provides educational opportunities to young people who have found it difficult to complete their schooling. It is really encouraging to see how young people who rarely attended school achieve almost 100% attendance whilst on the programme and gain important qualifications. They have a lively interaction with other guests and occasionally they provide language skills which make a crucial difference to someone’s wellbeing.

Recently a young homeless refugee arrived at GMCCC with a medical condition which required complete blood transfusions every 25 days. It was getting close to his next



transfusion and he needed a hospital to treat him. His English was poor but fortunately one of the young men with CXK was able to translate his needs and requirements so that we were able to arrange for Guy’s hospital to provide the treatment in time.

What will the next few months bring?

Over the coming months Sanctuary will change from offering a night shelter to a drop in meal. These meals are always well attended. It isn’t just the good food that attracts guests but the importance of feeling part of “family”. Even when guests are rehoused they often return to meet their friends and are always welcome to share food, companionship and fellowship.

Foodbank and clothing donations will hopefully continue to come in. Perhaps not with the abundance we saw at Christmas when one Saturday the foyer was filled with carrier bags of food donations from one small local company, but with regularity from the local community and local businesses.

Fund raising events are planned so that the second phase of building to provide further facilities for the local community may be a step nearer. We thank God that so many blessings have been given to GMCCC to enable God’s love to be shared with all the guests who use the Centre in whatever capacity they need.

Paddy Daniel,
Interim Centre Manager

Laying aside our thoughts

In the early fifth century the Christian monk and theologian Evagrius Pontus wrote “Prayer is the laying aside of thoughts”. What on earth was he talking about? Our minds are surely made to think, there is no stopping them. And yet Evagrius’ words continue to fascinate. Is it possible to find the space between the thoughts? And could that turn out to be a place where we rest in God and where we are a little more open to God’s presence and action?

Recently Pru and I went with a group of ministers on a retreat. This gave me an opportunity to have a go at taking Evagrius’ guidance seriously. So the silence of the retreat was not an opportunity to day dream, although there were times when I drifted into that. Neither was it even an opportunity for holy thoughts, nice though they might be. It was a time for intentional silence, for practising letting go of my thoughts.

Be still...

I also did a little reading. The book I took with me was *Open Mind, Open Heart* by Thomas Keating. In this, the way that became known as “Centring Prayer” was introduced. The plan is to be still and quiet. When you find yourself thinking, which you do pretty much immediately, you are invited to let go of the thought ever so gently by saying a sacred word of your choice. People choose words like “God”; “Love”; “Jesus”; “Spirit” or maybe even a couple of words like “Be still”. And that’s it. You sit, you think, you say your word as a means of letting go of the thought. Those who find this way helpful will ideally give twenty minutes to it, twice a day. A retreat gives the opportunity to practise it for longer.

Please don’t think that I found myself serenely settled in the place between the thoughts. Mostly I was noticing that I was thinking again. And sometimes I was noticing that I had drifted away for several minutes. Also, don’t let me give you the idea that the quiet was necessarily restful. Amongst the multitude of thoughts that bubbled

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Stepping out in faith



"Thank you so much for the hospitality and for allowing us to share the peace, tranquility and spirituality of this place, all of which we intend to take with us on our journeys."

The story of Hartlip Methodist Church and Retreat Centre

Hartlip Chapel was built and established by the Bible Christians in 1820, providing a place of worship for villagers wishing to follow Methodist traditions. Today, nearly 200 years on, Methodists are still regularly worshipping within its walls and enjoying its peaceful atmosphere and picturesque rural position on the edge of the North Downs.

In the years leading up to 2000, however, the chapel was sadly underused and the congregation dwindling and there was talk of closure. Keith Lemar, our minister at the time, and a few far-sighted members, turned the whole situation on its head with their vision of creating a day retreat centre out of the former Sunday school room (built in 1906). In faith, we as a congregation raised the funds necessary for the project, supported by additional funding from Central Methodist sources and the Friends of Kent Churches. The original school room was transformed into a simple but attractive retreat space with basic modern kitchen and toilet

"Yet again, you prepared for us in prayer, welcomed us in love as God held us in his care and sent us on, sustained and hopeful."

facilities. Outside, two pleasant gardens were laid, each side of the chapel. The ugly cement rendering was also stripped away, exposing the stunning Kentish flint walls.

As church members we then set out our vision and mission which was to offer Hartlip Retreat Centre and Chapel as a gift to the community. We were adamant that it should not be run as a business and would be open to all comers, religious or secular – anyone, in fact, whom God sent our way.

A spiritual oasis

Over the last 17 years, the Retreat Centre has become a spiritual oasis for thousands of visitors. Many of these make regular return visits and written entries in our visitors' books reflect their deep appreciation for this special place. Welcome and hospitality have been pivotal to its success. We make it a priority to meet and greet people. We believe that this is fundamental to the wellbeing of those wishing to escape the stresses and strains of daily life or the workplace, or both!

The Retreat Centre is a fairly large room with comfortable chairs in which to relax (or fall asleep!). There is a well appointed kitchen area where food can be prepared and drinks made. We always offer tea, coffee and biscuits when people arrive and these are freely available throughout their stay.



Our beautiful chapel itself provides a perfect place for prayer, reflection and meditation.

All are welcome

Visitors arrive as individuals, couples, or in small or larger groups. Most are from religious backgrounds and from all denominations. Apart from during August, when the Retreat Centre (and those who coordinate its activities) are allowed to rest, the Centre is used continually throughout the year. Although no charge is made for its use, we welcome and often receive donations towards the upkeep of the premises.

We always remember visitors to the Centre during Intercessional prayers in our Sunday services immediately prior to and following their visits. We pray for God's blessing on their thoughts, deliberations and outcomes. In our annual Retreat Sunday service, all of the visitors from the previous 12 months are named in a "Roll of Honour Prayer", ensuring that God's blessing remains with them.

As coordinators for the Retreat Centre, we would be happy to answer any questions or help you to arrange a visit to Hartlip. Please call us on 01634 360106 or derek@thegalls.demon.co.uk

Derek and Heather Gallagher



Guides meet together for Thinking Day

Gillingham East Girlguiding District celebrated World Thinking Day with the congregation of Gillingham MC at a special service on 26 February 2017. A huge thank you to Deacon Pru who led the service with such enthusiasm and supportive encouragement and thanks also to the congregation who made everyone feel so welcome.

About 60 members of Girlguiding attended, including the County and Division Commissioners and also many families and friends. It was a lovely service that based around this year's World Association Thinking Day theme of "Grow". Laura Hanniford, leader of 14th Gillingham Brownies, shared her experience of travelling to Armenia with a Girlguiding Overseas project and we learnt that Girlguiding there has since grown from 200 to 1,200 with a waiting list – what a success! During the service members donated shiny pennies to the Thinking Day Fund which helps to develop Girlguiding worldwide. I am pleased to say the amount donated to the fund this year was £60.

Renewing our Promise

The girls really enjoyed taking part in the service and singing songs old and new. They even taught the congregation the song "This little guiding light of mine", complete with actions. The feedback from one of the leaders was that they especially enjoyed the lively worship song "My Lighthouse".

Our service concluded with a moving renewal of our Girlguiding Promise by past and present members and also a promise by the congregation to support us.

*I promise that I will do my best,
to be true to myself and develop
my beliefs, to serve the Queen and
my community, to help other people
and to keep the Guide Law*

It was a special joy to see so many of our church members stand to renew their Promise, reminding us all of the unique influence of the Association on the lives of young women which continues throughout their lives.

Helen Garland (aka Snowy Owl)

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Laying aside our thoughts

up were many which were very uncomfortable. However on each occasion the guidance is the same: say your word and let go of the thought.

Thomas Merton described this kind of prayer as a great gamble. You are letting go of everything in order simply to cast yourself upon God. After the retreat I

was left with the hunch that I needed to make sure that I had space to continue the practice. I knew that I had been refreshed. I hope that this way of prayer may be for us a means of resting in God and becoming more fruitful channels of God's self-giving in the world.

Tony Graff

How was Zat? Defiantly not OUT!

Celebrating what we have done and looking forward in faith at a circuit service at The Brent.

An opportunity to recognise all the good work that has gone on in the circuit since it was launched in September 2011, a celebratory service was held at The Brent with lots of people taking part from all over the circuit, including a very good band to lead the hearty singing as Methodists do. I was there, joining in to praise God and realising all the good things that are happening and will continue to grow across OUR Circuit.

A selection of people gave talks on their progress in ministry, ranging from those starting as a worship leader and those on Local Preacher training, together with Doreen Koffie-Williams on the ladder to hopefully becoming a Presbyterian.

Further talks on outreach and mission included projects for the care of the homeless at Gravesend making use of the refurbished rear area of the site; the running of foodbanks with which churches across the Circuit are involved at various levels; the Messy church at Union Street expanding to reach more children and young people; our churches not just for Sunday but all week encouraging football in our buildings.

Ray Borrett introduced the Work Place Mission chaplaincy team covering Bluewater and other sites across Kent. We were also able to hear about new projects for the future from Gary in promoting the Christian way of life in the development of the new town of Ebbsfleet. A puppet show by Hextable Youth Ministry Team, 'wake me up when the sermon is over', a very good light hearted pop song with changed words. How do we reach the younger generation, the future for OUR Church?

This was all followed of course by food and drink in the Hall and chance to catch up with old and new friends across the circuit.

Chris Chare

The dancing preacher



Carol looking at Billy's grave

Ian Sturt explores Methodist heritage in Cornwall

Some time ago a local preacher told us stories about Billy Bray, a Cornish tin miner and Bible Christian local preacher (an offshoot of Methodism), and how with God's help he built three chapels against much opposition. One of these, at Kerley Downs (the "three eyes" chapel, so called because it had only three windows and aroused much derision) still survives, although much changed.

Billy came across as quite a character. I wanted to find out more about him and bought a book, *Billy Bray in his own words* (2004). Born at Twelveheads, a mining village between Truro and Redruth, he was known as "the dancing preacher" because of his habit of picking people up during services and dancing around with them. He regularly walked 20 or 30 miles on a Sunday to fulfil his plan and was a noted wit: "If they put me in a barrel, I'd shout Glory out the bung-hole!". When asked by the Revd William Haslam how he could be so free in his worship he answered, "We have to be fools for Christ. Those with a lot of book learning have a lot to unlearn, but I have an advantage because I was a fool to begin with." Billy called converted people "happy".

Many "made happy"

Cornish Christianity, mainly Methodist at the time, was a very lively affair. William Haslam, vicar of Baldhu, tried to stop the liveliness and teach them how to be "proper churchmen" like himself. He was converted by his own sermon while preaching on the text "Who do you say I am?" A local preacher (I wonder



Billy Bray's three eyes chapel



Gwennap Pit

how he got in?) shouted out "Parson's converted!" and the whole congregation erupted into spontaneous celebration, which he was reluctant to stop because he now felt the same. When the uproar died down they found 20 or 30 people crying for mercy. Haslam built a church and a school and, working with Billy, many people were "made happy".

Billy's wife came from Gwennap, near where John Wesley had preached, and the more I read, the more I wanted to visit these places. In October last year, my wife Carol and I took a holiday in Cornwall and had the opportunity to visit Baldhu, Twelveheads, Billy's "three eyes" chapel and Gwennap pit.

A sense of joy in the place

When Wesley, Haslam and Billy were here, this area was packed with industry and people worked in appalling conditions. There is hardly a sign of that now – it's very sparsely populated and these places are hard to find, nestling deep off the beaten tracks. I particularly wanted to see the church where Haslam converted himself. It's now a house, but we could visit the graveyard, and we found a great bonus. We hadn't realised Billy's grave and memorial were there! The school opposite is now occupied by "Chuckles" day nursery. We think Billy would be amused.

Nearby we found Billy's remaining chapel. There is a painting of him behind the pulpit that has a twinkle of humour



Inside three eyes chapel

in the eyes and they seem to follow you around the room. I felt a great sense of joy in the place. From there we visited Gwennap pit where John Wesley had preached many times. Again, much had changed since then. Nevertheless, we got a very real sense of what it meant for miners who spent their working lives in the dark to "see the light". As you approach the pit, there are a number of decorated panels, one of which carries the Charles Wesley phrases "Let me commend my Saviour to you. I set to my seal that Jesus is true." I'd always thought of John as a fiery preacher, but I now wonder if this gives a different sense – that of inviting others to experience what he had come to know. Charles writes "Tis worth living for this, to administer bliss and salvation in Jesus' name" (StF 458). The Wesleys then were no strangers to joy in the spirit, witness some of the other lines in the same hymn: "what a heaven of bliss", "how unspeakably happy I am", "in a rapture of joy" and more.

It was a great blessing for us to experience the places where so many people had been "made happy". Wouldn't it be wonderful to experience such great joy in our own worship today?

Where to find out more

www.methodistheritage.org.uk/billybrayschapel.htm

www.methodistheritage.org.uk/gwennappit.htm

Singing the Faith (2011)
London: Hymns Ancient & Modern Ltd

Wright, Chris (2004). *Billy Bray in His Own Words*. Highland Books

A choir of angels at The Brent

On Sunday 19 February, we were thrilled to host a wonderful Circuit Celebration Service at The Brent to mark the fifth anniversary of the formation of the Circuit. We were joined by friends from churches all across the Circuit and our church was blessed with over one hundred happy worshippers.

We heard the most uplifting stories and testimony from so many people, including from the Food Bank, the Winter Shelter and some personal testimony. We had a large worship group which we somehow managed to squeeze onto our little raised platform and the music was absolutely incredible. I am quite certain that we were accompanied by a choir of angels when we sang all our favourites: In Christ Alone, 10,000 Reasons, And Can it Be and To God be the Glory. There will have been dancing in heaven that afternoon! All this was followed by a really enjoyable faith tea, with copious amounts of cakes supplied by the congregation.

May God continue to bless our Circuit as we move on in trust and faith, and may he inspire all our thoughts and decisions as we plan for our future.

Carol Sturt

Church Lite at Sutton

The last year has seen big changes in the life at Sutton-at-Hone Methodist Church. Four longstanding and much-loved members have left the church – Tom and Ann Wade and Mary and Derek Reynolds. We have had a change of Treasurer and Property Steward and instead of an organist, we now have the (dreaded) Singing the Faith CDs. However, we are working through this time of transition – we are thankful that Keith and Sylvia have taken on the vacancies and we are learning to sing faster with the CDs. We all wish the Reynolds and Wades well in their future.

I have recently started a new initiative at Sutton – Church Lite, the Twenty Minute Church Service. It occurred to us that so many other things now happen on a Sunday: the shops are open, football practice, car washing (well, that's always happened on a Sunday) that people don't have time

for church built in to their lives, but that's not to say they don't want to attend or feel the need to attend.

At Church Lite, we open the doors at 5pm for drinks, cake and chat, then the service starts at 5.30 until 5.50pm. We have done two rounds of leafleting in the village and at every service we have run, there have been people who would not usually come to church. We feel that God has spoken and is guiding people to the door.

The next Church Lite dates are: 21 May, 18 June, and 16 July. If anyone would like to come along and see how it works, they would be very welcome. I would also like to take this opportunity to mention the support that we have received from our friends at The Brent, Hextable and Spital Street and thank them very much – we are very grateful.

Tracey Burch

Coming soon to our Circuit team

We are delighted to say that the Revd Robin Selmes will be joining our ministerial team in September, with pastoral responsibility for the churches of Gillingham, Hartlip and St Luke's. Together with his wife Mandy and three children aged 15, 11 and six (at present), he will move into the manse in Homefield Drive, Rainham, ready to take up the appointment on 1 September. For the first year of his appointment he will work alongside Deacon Pru

in Hartlip and Gillingham, as well as at St Luke's.

Robin is at present in the Brighton & Hove Circuit, and currently enjoying his first sabbatical in ministry. Before that he served in the Bracknell and Wokingham Circuit. We look forward to getting to know them all, and ask that you hold Robin and



his family in your prayers over the next few months as they prepare for the move. The Circuit Service of Welcome for Robin and his family will be at 4pm on Sunday 3 September at Gillingham Methodist Church.

Monica Wilding

Walking to Emmaus

Below you will find part of an article I originally wrote in July 2008. Before you read it I will tell you what has happened since.

I have been part of the team running these Walks to Emmaus every year since as it is so rewarding to help others on their journey of Christian Discipleship. I now find myself as Lay Director of the South East Emmaus Community. We currently have 13 members in our Re-Union Group, the Kent Travellers (originally the Maidstone Mob of 3!) and we meet monthly at our home. There are also three Gatherings a year at different venues – a chance to meet up with others who have been on a Walk and they are amazing!

There is currently as I write, a Men's Walk at West Wickham, with three of our Group on Team and four Pilgrims from the North Kent Circuit. So when we welcome them back after the weekend we will be 17!

The next Ladies' Walk is also at West Wickham from 9–12 November 2017. Please consider whether God is nudging you to come! Bursaries are available.

A few years ago, my Spiritual Director suggested that I go on a Roman Catholic Cursillo. I made some enquiries but then it was felt that I wouldn't get the full benefit as I couldn't partake of Mass. I made further enquiries and found that there was a Methodist equivalent taking place at West Wickham in May, although open to other denominations. It wasn't quite that easy to get on it as you had to be sponsored by someone who had been on a Walk – a fellow pilgrim. However, after phone calls and emails I managed to wheedle my way in! Your sponsor prayerfully asks God to lead each step of the way as you approach your Walk.

A unique experience

No, this is not a walk in the physical sense. People come on it with a variety of needs, having travelled many roads in their pilgrimages of faith. One of the unique aspects of the Walk to Emmaus is that it asks you to give your undivided attention for 72 hours.



I arrived there at tea time and wondered how I was going to survive with over 30 women and three men for this length of time. Although it may not seem like it in church, I just love being alone and going on regular retreats and just resting in my Lord's presence. After dinner we had our first session – we had to remove our watches for the whole weekend and observe silence until breakfast the next day. This silence offered a focused time to search out our own attitude and examine our relationship with God.

It is impossible to describe my three day Walk to Emmaus, as each person who attends Emmaus has a unique experience. Many events during the three days were unplanned and unexpected but were God-guided

During the weekend there were 15 talks on Grace given by people both lay and ordained who had attended previous Walks. We had to summarise each talk in a sentence in our groups – I was on the table of Mary and there were six of us. We also had to prepare something after each talk but I am not going to spoil anyone's fun by divulging this, in case others would like to go. Just let me say, it was the most fun weekend I have had for ages. There was worship before each talk and Communion services in the chapel which were all wonderful!

A gift of love

Each talk, act, gesture – even silence – became a gift of love. Of all the

messages one receives in life, the affirmation of God's love is the most healing and nurturing. We experienced instances of being loved through both people and things. Agape describes unconditional love, freely given and unrelated to our deserving or earning it. It is a self-sacrificing love that reflects total commitment to the one who is loved. Few of us are called to die for one another, but all of us are called to sacrificial love on a daily basis. That daily sacrificial love – the life in grace – is the essence of the Walk to Emmaus. Agape is truly laying down our lives for others.

I am not going to tell you any more as it would spoil it for anyone wanting to go on a Walk! However, each pilgrim takes away from the weekend three essential thoughts: piety, study, and action. Following the three days he or she must constantly ask where God may be trying to use them in ministries of piety, study, and action. Congregations must be receptive to these renewed Christians and must be creatively resourceful in putting these people to work in vital ministries of the Church. The sole purpose in recruiting pilgrims should be to strengthen our own congregations.

I would like you to consider going on a Walk as I can guarantee you will never be the same again! Emmaus is a gift of love. If you feel you would like to go I can sponsor you.

Eddie Vincent

A place where all can flourish

Krysia Waldock reflects on the need to keep an open dialogue on autism in the church

Autism: it's a buzzword that we often hear in the news, in schools or maybe on social media. Maybe we know a little bit about it, or know someone on the autism spectrum. But as autism becomes more discussed in mainstream society, is it something that the church should be considering too?

The short answer is: yes! The current prevalence figures are set at 1% of the general population; this includes people from all ages, genders, ethnicities and social backgrounds. Autism isn't fussy in that way. This means we are all bound to know someone or have a connection to autism somewhere down the line, including those of us that do not think we do. This high connectivity is part of the reason Deacon Pru and I have been working on workshops for the church – our first at Hartlip and another at Gravesend – for us all to learn more with relevance to a faith based setting. As humans we are all social beings who can flourish best when listened to and our experiences and emotions validated, therefore it is crucial that we show this to our neighbour.

Stream of consciousness

Consider the scenario of the service having just finished:

People milling around... chatter... unable to tell people's voices apart, only a blur of white noise at normal chatter volume... lots of people moving around... feeling

disorientated... feeling alienated... wanting to reach out but do not know how... the prospect of someone who is not a good friend approaching as terrifying... someone approaching... not knowing where to look... eye contact as piercing... panic rising... strong smell of perfume... the strength of the smell as vomit inducing... brain feeling jumbled... being unable to articulate the panic... microphone being tested for next service... a jolt of pain stabs straight through... using all strength not to scream... how much longer will you take... wanting to have friends but brain so jumbled...

Similar streams of consciousness have been included in the training sessions Deacon Pru and I ran, showing how someone on the spectrum can perceive certain environments and situations.

Jesus loved all through his actions of acceptance and support and we need to do the same. Church should be a refuge and welcoming environment. We need to make sure that it is an accessible refuge for all, including those facing barriers we cannot see, to truly show God's love.

Krysia has a diagnosis of Asperger's Syndrome, is currently an MA student in Autism Studies at Tizard Centre, University of Kent and worships in the North Kent Circuit. She also leads the 'Attentiveness to Autism' project. If you have further questions regarding workshops or autism, please contact her on kew41@kent.ac.uk or krysia.waldock@gmail.com

had to be completed in two years, a much shorter time-scale than was usual for *Faith and Worship*.

Becoming accredited Local Preachers

Jason, Ian and Emmanuel are three of a group of seven students from the South East District, plus others nationally, who agreed to take part in the pilot. They have already passed their Trial services and Circuit Interviews, so they just need approval at the next Circuit Meeting, and successful moderation of their portfolios, before the service of Accreditation. This will be held at Gravesend Methodist Church at 4pm on 28 May. Also to be accredited on that day will be Elena Markova who has already completed all her training on the Faith and Worship route. Please book the date for this special service.

Worship: Leading and Preaching is in two parts: Part One is for Worship Leaders as well as for Local Preachers, and Part Two just for LPs. It can also be used for development for LPs and WLs, or for personal interest. The content of the course is really up-to-date and interesting. We are blessed to have a small number of people on the new course (not the pilot), in training as WLs and LPs, who are on the way to completing Part One.

Could this be for you...?

We also have three people who would like to start the course to train as WLs or LPs. So we are wondering whether there might be others of you who maybe interested in finding out. We are looking at having an Introductory Supper, where you can come along to find out more about the course, and to get you going online. This supper will take place on Thursday 13 July at 7pm at Larkfield Methodist Church. This will be with a view to starting the course in September. More information will be coming out nearer the time. If you are interested please do let me know. If you can't manage the date, again please let me know. So do have a think, talk to your minister, or a Local Preacher and start to consider whether you may have a calling in this way.

Monica Wilding



WORSHIP: *Leading and Preaching*

Congratulations to three hard-working Local Preachers in training in our Circuit: Jason Cooke, Emmanuel Scott and Ian Sturt have all completed their portfolios for *Worship: Leading and Preaching*, in time for the deadline of 31 March. W:L&P has been the pilot scheme for the new course which replaces *Faith and Worship*, the old

course for training Local Preachers. The new course is completely different in style and content to F&W, and the pilot scheme has been particularly pressured as we have had to get to grips with the technology of an online course, as well as coping with so much freedom of choice of topics and styles of portfolio tasks. Also, because it was a pilot, it

Goodbye and thank you



Ray and Deb Borrett are leaving soon for fresh pastures in Yorkshire

Deb and I never knew as we walked into Larkfield Methodist Church in 2008 that our lives were going to change as much as they did and that the churches of the Maidstone – now North Kent – Circuit would play such a role in both our lives.

I'll never forget the day we arrived at Larkfield. Having debated whether or not to go, we walked into a confirmation service being held before the main service. Once we realised we were actually in the right place and that the service we were hoping to attend was going to happen, we snuck into some seats at the back of the church and watched as the young people made their confirmation promises. The main service that morning was Larkfield's Covenant service. Deb had never set foot in a Methodist Church before and suddenly she was faced with the difficult promises we as Methodists make every year as we renew our Covenant promises to God. That morning set the tone for the rest of our church life as we grew into Larkfield and the life of the Circuit. Being a Methodist from South Africa, coming to Larkfield felt in many respects like I had come home.

Challenges and privileges

Most people will know Deb because of her piano playing and most will know me from my local preaching and my role as the Lead Chaplain to Bluewater. Together, we have had the privilege of being a small part of so many of the churches in the Circuit. There have been challenges: being told to wait before I could candidate for ministry and then having to leave our friends in Larkfield when I was accepted for ministerial training were two of the hardest things we experienced during this time. Being able to form new friendships and renew old ones as I settled into a new church for my training were just some of the best.

And now our time in the North Kent Circuit is coming to an end. My training as a student minister is coming to an end and in January this year, the stationing committee decided that the North Kirklees and Morley Circuit would be a good match for us. Part of the West Yorkshire district, I have been given responsibility for two churches in a circuit that is mirroring much of what we as a circuit have had to deal with already. Thanks to NKMC Deb and I feel better equipped to contribute to the conversations we will no doubt be having in our new circuit.

Support and friendship

There are so many people to thank for allowing us to be part of their lives and the lives of the churches. Firstly, my thanks to my ministerial colleagues (I can say that now!) for all their support and encouragement during our time here. Particular thanks need to be given to the Revd Gary Watt. This is all your fault! To Deacon Pru, the Revd Tony Graff, Rob and Monica, thank you. Deb wants to say thank you to all the music groups that have graciously allowed her to develop as a musician playing alongside them and growing together as friends.

So the cupboard emptying and packing has started. Deb is enjoying labelling boxes and I'm watching nervously as the decluttering begins. As the time to leave approaches with all the certainty of an oncoming train we value your ongoing prayers and friendship. You will always hold a place in our heart and in our prayers.

New Chaplain for Bluewater

As I will be leaving Bluewater to take up a new appointment in West Yorkshire, it was important that a replacement be found who could carry on and develop the Chaplaincy Service in Bluewater. After a long and exhaustive process, I am happy to announce that the trustees for Kent Workplace Mission have appointed Ms Ella Sibley to replace me as Lead Chaplain for Bluewater.

Ella is currently serving as an assistant chaplain to Roehampton University and has led the Roehampton team while the senior Chaplain was away on sabbatical. Ella is a Methodist and is a Local Preacher on trial. She hasn't decided if she is going to move into the Circuit, but as the Lead of an important piece of work being done in the Circuit she will be working with the Circuit Leadership Team.

I'm sure you will join me in praying for her as she steps up to a challenging but extremely rewarding time.

Ray Borrett

“Chuckles” at Larkfield

About four years ago, we had been looking at Life on the Front Line with the Revd Gary Watt and it occurred to me that Larkfield could do more to reach out to folk in the local community. We had a toddlers club for the little ones, so perhaps we could do something for older people, especially those who are feeling lonely – a place where you could come along, have a chat, drink tea, eat cake and play board games. Gary encouraged me with this idea and said to “go for it”. We started with just a few folk who felt they needed company on a Thursday afternoon. We decided to call our group “Chuckles” as a dedication to one of our members after he moved away to Yorkshire. He would often say he only came along to the group for a chuckle.

We meet from 2.00pm to 4.00pm and have 21 people who regularly turn up, many of whom are not church attenders.

Towards the end of last year, one of our group became a member of the church and another will be welcomed into membership at Easter.

If you are in Larkfield on a Thursday afternoon, do drop in and visit us.

Christine Malins