



North Kent Methodist Circuit

Circuit News and Preaching Plan

inside...

WINNING THE HEARTS OF YOUNG PEOPLE

EXPLORING LIFE AND CHURCH TOGETHER

NURTURING THE SPIRITUAL DIMENSION IN SCHOOLS

GOD IS KEEPING US ON OUR TOES!

Issue Six
May 2018

Winning the hearts of young people

This quarter our focus for this magazine is “young people.” It seems a subject on which we should have plenty of stories to tell, but we all know that many Christians and we in particular have difficulty in communicating and connecting with young people. We are told continually by the secular and atheist media that Christianity is finished.

How the Romans must have hoped that was true when they allowed the crucifixion and burial of Jesus. “Job done – what’s next?” they probably said, even if they had their own private misgivings. What we know is that Jesus defeated death and that within a few hundred years Christianity had become the state religion of Rome. How was it that a faith in Jesus Christ could not be defeated by a state as powerful as Rome? Christians were killed in their thousands; the Roman catacombs are full of their graves. People were ridiculed, the thinkers and philosophers mocked the whole idea of Jesus, the resurrection and everything that the early Christians believed. How was it that in the space of a few years the state and Christianity became one?

It seems that the heart of what Jesus preached and promised appealed directly to the people of the times and this must have included young people. You see, young people always want and

need the opportunity to live out their lives in a place where they can have personal security, a home, food, good health and freedom to make their own life choices and decisions. This we can see in what we know as the Kingdom of Heaven or God. We could know it too as the Light or eternal life or the living water.

Dreams and visions

As Methodists in Kent, we have a wonderful message to share with our young people. The message is that their dreams and visions are closer than they think; that we too share their vision and that we can help them find their reality; that Jesus is the solution, not the problem; that integrity, respect and love of the law are the building blocks of a society where freedom of choice and opportunity flourish; that the enemies of a free society are self-interest, following untrustworthy models and putting oneself above all else.

When young people can see that their own personal aspirations match those that Jesus offers to us all, they will become followers and disciples once again. All new waves of thinking begin somewhere, but as the waves grow in size and frequency they will merge together into a tsunami of faith, just as they did in the first half of the first millennium. Let’s make this season of Pentecost 2018 become a wave of communication of Christ’s vision of the Kingdom of Heaven, first to young

people but then to everyone who lives and works in North Kent. Let’s make a start this Pentecost on the task of winning the hearts of the young once more.

Richard Vincent

God’s Dangerous Book

If you want to know more about the Bible and like me you don’t relish study, then *God’s Dangerous Book* by Nick Page* is the book for you. It takes us through the story of the Bible from the earliest times right up to the modern day. I found it thrilling and enthralling to read how the Bible came to be a living book, one that changed the world and people’s lives.

But the idea that inspired me more than anything else was the very idea that the Bible is a dangerous book – a book that turned the world upside down and caused people to want to destroy it because it is a threat to their way of life.

Unchanging

And so it remains, a threat to their way of life. In the struggle between what is righteous and what is evil the Bible stands as the arbiter. When freedom and peace and justice are in retreat, where can we find our salvation? To whom do we turn and where do we find him? In the night time we light the candle and open the pages of the good book. We read once again the stories of heroes and the struggles of nations and in the moment of crucifixion and resurrection we find hope and salvation. As Thomas said so powerfully, “My Lord and my God!”

Richard Vincent

* PAGE, N, *God’s Dangerous Book*, Authentic Publishing 2011

Growing in faith and confidence with Boys' Brigade

There is always something going on at Hextable Methodist Church, where children and young people meet on most nights of the week and a busy group for toddlers and carers is open all day on Wednesdays.

Creating a fun and safe space for young people to be themselves, yet also to feel part of a team, is the role of our amazing volunteer children's and youth leaders, and we have been blessed to see many teenagers deciding to take up our effective leadership training courses and opportunities, helping to stay connected with our youth groups even though some are away at university for most of the year.

For nearly 50 years the Boys' Brigade has been a partner organisation with our church, which has seen many generations of young people's lives challenged and changed for the better.

Whether it's life skills, sports, games and other physical challenges, adventurous trips, Duke of Edinburgh and other advanced awards, activities, residentials, camps and community focused engagement, we are always on the look out for opportunities for our young people to grow in confidence, skill, grace and also to deepen their faith and relationship with Jesus.

Active participation

A varied and adventurous programme is vital in engaging, holding and working with young people, but it is also important for leaders also to be mentors and to enable active participation and ownership by the young people themselves, so that they can be allowed to learn and develop their own way of doing things through



encouragement and empowerment. In this last year we have used the Youth Alpha film series and a number of other devotional materials to enable our spiritual life to grow. We have also run the Manmade Rites of Passage course (manmadejourney.com) giving us the opportunity to encourage our young people to go deep yet also work through a quality faith development programme.

Our church's Youth Ministry and Puppet Team this year has led worship and workshops both within our Circuit churches and services and also in a number of local churches of different denominations.

They have also fronted Pentecost in the Park and an action packed weekend away for hundreds of youngsters in Haringey, London.

Follow us at hextableboysbrigade.com or via Twitter: @HextableBB

Ian Packham



Working with students during my sabbatical

For 20 years Alfred and I were music teachers at Kodaikanal International School in South India, built high up in the mountains in 1901. It has around 500 students aged 5–18 from all over the globe and is an International Baccalaureate school consistently listed as No.1 or 2 for residential schools in India. When we taught there almost all students took music lessons and for 10 years I was head of the music department with its 15 teachers, 40 pianos, choirs, bands, and instruments (including the veena, a traditional stringed instrument). This Christian school, established and run on principles reflecting the life and teaching of Christ, welcomes students and staff of all religious backgrounds.



Bonni-Belle and Alfred at a Hindu wedding

During my recent sabbatical, Alfred and I returned to Kodai School as volunteers. We helped with the music programme, teaching some lessons, Alfred directing the church choir, and I was invited to preach and lead worship. Since I was also writing up my doctoral thesis on Interfaith Marriage, I took the opportunity to interview students whose parents had married someone from another faith tradition. I also interviewed and surveyed several hundred former students, many of whom had also 'married out' of their childhood faith tradition.

The prevalence of Interfaith Marriage is expanding greatly where globalisation and the advent of accessible and reliable birth control have changed the ground rules of marriage – what it is about and who can marry whom. Traditionally nearly all religions have opposed interfaith marriage and turned their backs – even violently persecuted – those who have 'married out'. My research involves listening hard to interfaith couples to hear how they are working out their spiritual development

in the 'in-between' space of interfaith. I am also looking for ways that our church can better support these couples who are often, innocently enough, working for world peace at the most intimate level.

Some findings so far

1. Forced conversions for the sake of the wedding are usually disastrous. Conversions that happen because of a personal (un-coerced) faith decision made during the course of the marriage are often (though not always) highly successful.
2. Interfaith spouses who actively respect and support their spouse's spiritual development in another faith often find their own faith development strengthened.
3. Children who grow up where parents actively respect and support both faith traditions often become spiritually very mature and are highly likely to publicly espouse one of (or both) those faiths in their adult life.

4. Many young people are especially averse to exclusivist religious claims (ie 'heaven or hell'), declaring themselves atheist or agnostic mostly because they don't want to get caught up in what they see as a meaningless debate. For them, religion has become a battlefield instead of a support for their own spiritual development.

As I resume my circuit ministry, I will be looking for opportunities to continue my research with and support for interfaith couples. I hope that at least one of our circuit churches will take up the challenge to work with me in setting up a series of workshops for interfaith couples. There will be an information session about this probably in early May. If you know of interfaith couples – whether or not they are connected with a church – who would be interested in being part of one of my workshops, please help me to connect with them.

Bonni-Belle Pickard

We're all in this together!

This is an exciting year for The Girls' Brigade as it celebrates 125 years. GB is calling it #HOPE125. I'm not quite that old but I do remember joining The Girls' Life Brigade (GLB) 63 years ago! We are following three themes during the year:

the **GIRLS'**
BRIGADE
ENGLAND & WALES



Discovering life to the full!

"Giving Hope" focuses on giving to the community. Our older girls have waited on tables recently at two Over 60s Luncheons here at Hextable Methodist Church and made and sold cakes to raise £100 for Demelza Children's Hospice. Last year they tried their hand at litter-picking round Hextable and were surprised how much they collected in one evening!

"Building Hope" focuses on building our membership at GB and church.

"Celebrating Hope" means celebrating GB by looking back and also forwards and having parties!

1st Hextable Company started in 1979 and belongs to the Meridian District of 11 GB Companies stretching as far as Bromley Common and Sydenham. Our girls enjoy meeting other Companies; recently 10 Juniors met with 50 other girls for an Activity Day. They had many activities on offer, including cooking, flower arranging, fondant icing modelling, circus skills, sewing an owl cushion, jewellery making and parachute games. Each June we have District Sports at Norman Park Athletic Track and every October the Swimming Gala is held at Beckenham Spa. The girls swam exceptionally well last time and won the Junior Trophy but they missed out on the Company Silver Rose Bowl by only one point, coming second. Later we realised that if a member of staff had been brave enough to take part in the Officers' Race we might have won, as for every race swum a point is gained! Oops!

Outings and badges

We enjoy our own outings each term too; while our Explorers (age four to seven) were at Bluewater's Build-a-Bear making their own teddies, rabbits or dogs before Christmas, the Juniors and Seniors went ice-skating at Ruxley Garden Centre. This term we took the Company to the local leisure centre, hiring half the sports hall for netball, whilst younger girls enjoyed skipping and ball games on one of the three adjacent Badminton Courts. A member of the public, playing badminton on the court beside them, asked me whether this was to be a regular feature each week. When I told him it was a 'one off', did I witness a look of sheer relief on his face? Other outings have been to Pets at Home, where they stroked a longhaired rabbit and touched a gecko, to Hobby Craft where they had an air-dry clay workshop, Crazy Golf at Flamingo Park and Ten Pin Bowling.

All girls follow a national badge system; younger girls have Sticker Books and need to collect at least three stickers to gain the badge which is pinned on their Badge Bags, which they love. Badges, trophies and awards are presented at our Celebration of Achievement Evening in the summer. Last time the whole Company performed different routines by dancing, clapping, tapping claves and using the rhythmic ribbons to one of their favourite songs, "We're all in this together", which seemed very apt! Our Band of drums and bells played. They are few in number but performed

extremely well. Their new tune, 'Pirates of the Caribbean' proved a big hit! All the badges are linked to Bible stories or Bible characters. Juniors took a badge called 'Inner Beauty', linked to the story of Esther. We'd talked about the beauty of God's world and the importance for us of being beautiful on the inside. They decorated mirrors with glass pens and made stained glass windows and held a fashion show for their parents, modelling designs made from black and white bin bags, blue rubble bags, parcel tape and even 'Fragile' parcel tape! For their 'Justice' badge, they looked at Amos's story and painted t-shirts for themselves with slogans about making the world a fairer place for everyone.

If you come along on our Company night, you will always see and hear the girls, enjoying themselves and we hope and pray that while they're here in our care they are learning about the love of the Lord Jesus and that they will one day be passing this on to others themselves.

Mary Matthews, Team Leader

North Kent Circuit

Preaching Plan June - August 2018

		JUNE				JULY					AUGUST			
		3	10	17	24	1	8	15	22	29	5	12	19	26
		9th in Ordinary Time	10th in Ordinary Time	11th in Ordinary Time	12th in Ordinary Time	13th in Ordinary Time	14th in Ordinary Time	15th in Ordinary Time	16th in Ordinary Time	17th in Ordinary Time	18th in Ordinary Time	19th in Ordinary Time	20th in Ordinary Time	21st in Ordinary Time
BEARSTED	10.30	Hellyer	Daley-Lee	Newell	Pickard	Gallagher	Pickard <i>hc</i>	Trott	Pickard	us @ Tonbridge Rd	G Harris	Daone <i>hc</i>	LA	Pickard
	6.30													
BURHAM	10.30	LA	M Harris	Myles	Daley-Lee <i>hc</i>	Stunell	Gray	Wilding	Daley-Lee <i>hc</i>	German	Trott	Markova	Wade	Brown
CHINESE CONGREGATION	1.30	Yu <i>hc</i>	Beh	Yu	Mao	Yu <i>hc</i>	Yu	Kai	Beh	Yu <i>aa</i>	Yu <i>hc</i>	Yu	LA	Yu
DENE HOLM	11.00	S Pooley	Waldock	A Pooley	Yu <i>hc</i>	Sturt	Graff <i>hc</i>	Force	Gray	LA	Laity	Burch	LA	Graff <i>hc</i>
ECCLES	10.30	Yu	G West	Daley-Lee <i>hc</i>	M Harris	Crouch	E Vincent	Daley-Lee <i>hc</i>	Byard	R Vincent	Myles	Daley-Lee <i>hc</i>	LA	Wilding
GILLINGHAM	10.30	Selmes	J Cooke	Selmes <i>hc</i>	Muthalaly <i>ca</i>	LA	Watt	Selmes <i>hc</i>	Cahill	Selmes	M Harris	Willing <i>aa</i>	Crouch <i>aa</i>	Selmes <i>hc</i>
GRAVESEND	11.00	Graff	Luscombe <i>ca</i>	Campbell <i>hc</i>	Scott	Downs	LA	Graff <i>hc</i>	Graff	LA	Downs	Gallagher	Graff <i>hc</i>	S Pooley
	6.30	George <i>hc</i>	(Graff 3pm)			Graff <i>hc</i>					Graff <i>hc</i>			
HARTLIP	09.30													
	6.30	German	M Cooke <i>ca</i>	Selmes <i>hc</i>	George	Selmes	Cahill/Watt	Selmes <i>hc</i>	Gallagher	Brown	Cahill	Graff <i>hc</i>	Davies	Selmes
HEXTABLE	10.30	Downs	Graff <i>ca</i>	Rowland	Force	Campbell <i>pfs</i>		LA	Campbell <i>b</i>	Sturt	Campbell <i>fs</i>	S Smith	Scott	LA
	6.30	Watt	Campbell <i>hc</i>	LA	Graff	G West		Campbell <i>hc</i>	Graff	LA/ <i>ca</i>	LA	LA	LA	LA
HOPE STREET	10.30	LeMasonry	Gambell <i>hc</i>	Laity	Davies	LeMasonry	Morgan <i>hc</i>	M Smith	Robb	Morgan <i>hc</i>	Collins	LeMasonry <i>hc</i>	Morgan	LA
	6.00													
KINGSWOOD	11.00	LA/ <i>ca</i>	Tolhurst	<i>ang</i>	Baptist	LA/ <i>ca</i>	R Vincent	<i>ang/hc</i>	Baptist	<i>ang</i>		Wilding	<i>ang/hc</i>	Baptist
LARKFIELD	10.00	Daley-Lee <i>hc</i>	Wilding	Grady	Watt <i>aa</i>	Daley-Lee <i>hc</i>	LA	Lee	Newell <i>aa</i>	E Vincent	Daley-Lee <i>hc</i>	Yu	Shepherd	Myles
NEWINGTON	9.30	Cahill	Watt <i>hc</i>	M Smith	Robb	Laity	Grady <i>hc</i>	Collins	Stunell	M Smith	Waldock	Brown	LA	Trott
	6.30													
ST ALBAN'S	10.00	<i>ang/hc</i>	<i>ang</i>	Trott	us @ St. Alban's	<i>ang/hc</i>	<i>ang</i>	<i>ang</i>	<i>ang</i>	<i>ang</i>	<i>ang/hc</i>	<i>ang</i>	<i>ang</i>	Tolhurst
ST DAVID'S	10.00	<i>ang/hc</i>	<i>ang</i>	<i>ang/hc</i>	us @ St. Alban's	<i>ang/hc</i>	Byard	<i>ang/hc</i>	<i>ang</i>	<i>ang</i>	<i>ang/hc</i>	<i>ang</i>	<i>ang/hc</i>	<i>ang</i>
ST LUKE'S	10.30	Wilding	Selmes <i>hc</i>	Byard	Richardson <i>ca</i>	German	Selmes <i>hc/aa</i>	Davies	Selmes <i>aa</i>	Laity	Selmes <i>hc</i>	Stunell	G Harris	A Pooley
	6.30													
ST WILLIAMS	10.00	<i>ang</i>	<i>ang/hc</i>	<i>ang</i>	us @ St. Alban's	<i>ang</i>	Tolhurst <i>hc</i>	<i>ang</i>	<i>ang/hc</i>	<i>ang/b</i>	<i>ang</i>	<i>ang/hc</i>	Sturt	<i>ang/hc</i>
	6.30													
SITTINGBOURNE	10.30	Watt <i>hc</i>	Brown	Watt	Crouch	Watt <i>hc</i>	M Harris	Myles	M Smith	LA	Davies	Wade	Grady <i>hc</i>	Stunell
	6.00													
SPITAL STREET	10.30	Dove <i>hc</i>	Paine	Downs	Selmes	Graff <i>hc</i>	Paine	Cooper	A Pooley	Force	Graff <i>hc</i>	Paine	Gray	LA
	4.00													
STOKE	10.30	Laity				Waldock					Stunell			
STROOD	10.30	Waldock	Yu <i>hc</i>	Willing	Stunell	Wade	Yu <i>hc</i>	Robb	Crouch	Collins	LA	Robb	Yu <i>hc</i>	M Harris
	4.00													
SUTTON-AT-HONE	11.00	Scott	Campbell <i>hc</i>	LA	Paine	S Smith	Campbell <i>hc</i>	LA	Sturt	S Pooley	Burch	LA	Force	Laity
	5.30			Burch Church Lite				Burch Church Lite				Burch Church Lite		
SWANSCOMBE	10.45	Force	LA	S Pooley	Graff <i>hc</i>	Scott	LA	Downs	Rowland	Daley-Lee	Tolhurst	Graff <i>hc</i>	LA	Gray
	6.30													
TONBRIDGE RD	10.30	Shepherd	LA/ <i>pfs</i>	Yu <i>hc</i>	Byard	LA	Myles <i>fs</i>	G West <i>hc</i>	G Harris	Pickard <i>us</i>	Yu	LA	G West <i>hc</i>	E Vincent
	6.30	Graff <i>hc</i>				Tolhurst <i>hc</i>					Pickard <i>hc</i>			
THE BEACON	10.00													
THE BRENT	10.30	Campbell <i>fs</i>	LA	Sturt	Campbell <i>hc</i>	Burch <i>fs</i>	A Pooley	Campbell	Scott	Campbell <i>hc/fs</i>	Paine <i>fs</i>	Campbell <i>hc/fs</i>	S Pooley <i>fs</i>	Paine <i>fs</i>
	6.30													
UNION STREET	10.00	Pickard	G Harris	Lee	Shepherd	Daone <i>hc</i>	Daley-Lee	Pickard	Brand	us @ Tonbridge Road	Pickard <i>hc</i>	Newell	LA	R Vincent
	6.00													

aa	All-age	bb	Boys Brigade	cl	Church Lite	gs	Gift Service	jca	Junior Church Anniversary	nat	Nativity	p	Parade	tr	Team Rector
ac	Advent Carols	ca	Church anniversary	cov	Covenant Service	hc	Holy Communion	la	Local Arrangement	oys	Little Oyster	t	Teaching	un	United Nations
ang	Anglican (CofE)	cf	Cafe Church	ehc	Extended Communion	hf	Harvest Festival	lc	Lessons & Carols	pp	Prayer & Praise	tp	Themed Preaching	us	United Service
as	All Souls	cs	Carol Service	chr	Christingle	hm	Home Missions	ls	Lent service	pfs	Parade & Family Praise Service	(t)	Transport required	wfa	Women's Fellowship An
b	Baptism	cir	Circuit service	fs	Family Service	hpt	Hextable Team	om	Overseas Missions	ps		ts	Toy Service	ys	Youth Service

Exploring life and Church together

If I had been writing this report in 1906, I would have been able to tell you about the work the church is doing with many hundreds of children! However, over the past 112 years many things have changed. Whilst children's work during those years has included, amongst other things, Boy's Brigade, Girl Guides, Brownies, Youth Club, Saturday evening Youth Events, Sunday Youth Fellowship and other midweek activities, our main work with children is now on a Sunday morning while the 11am service takes place.

At **Gravesend Methodist Church & Community Centre** we call our Sunday morning club "Explorers" and anyone from the age of three to the teenage years is welcome to join us. After the first 10-15 minutes in the church service, we go out to our own activities.

We presently have 20 names on our register but our average weekly attendance is between eight and ten. All ages are kept together in one group so they need activities that will suit them all, both girls and boys, quiet and reserved individuals and lively, football mad youngsters – no problem, anyone could manage that! In addition, we have to remember that these are 21st century children who are well into technology and have a much greater awareness about society and the world than many of us had at their age.

I have found the following activities work well for our group:

- 1 General chat time for children to share what has been happening in their lives.
- 2 Singing – something lively, in modern day language, with optional

actions, sometimes using percussion instruments. We sing to CDs.

3 Story/devotional time with discussion (www.friendsandheroes.com*).

4 Prayer – adult or child led.

As we are fortunate to have the use of a big hall, the children can round off the session by choosing whether they wish to do a craft activity/box game/colouring or use soft, sponge footballs, skipping ropes, hula hoops, bats and balls, bean bags and occasionally table tennis in the Wesley Hall.

A useful resource

*For the past 18 months I have been using the excellent DVD series called Friends & Heroes for our story/teaching focus. I find it keeps the attention of all ages. They enjoy the drama, humour and character interaction and there's usually a big moan when I stop the DVD at a cliff-hanger point. The teaching points are illustrated by Bible stories which then lead us into a discussion or question time. The ages of those present will determine how long or deep the discussion goes. There are lesson plans which accompany each session and also a simple activity for the children to do. Other online activities are available, so it is a really useful resource.

I would like to commend the church family for their support of Explorers and thank my loyal group of helpers. There is always much appreciation for the times when they come back into church to give out daffodils (Mothering Sunday), palm crosses (Palm Sunday) and also when we lead the Sunday morning service on our anniversary.

Hazel Davis

Ask any question

One of my favourite things about working with young people has always been their inquisitive minds and the discussions that we have.

At **Gillingham Methodist Church**

I currently run a Bible Study with some young people aged 15+, and the conversations that we have are brilliant. It's becoming a bit renowned that we are very good at going off on a tangent on whatever topic we are talking about. However, I don't ever really see these discussion jumps as distractions, it's just that one comment or thought leads to another. We have discussed whether there are alternative universes, did Jesus have to die on the cross, or if there could have been another way; we've chatted about the TV shows and films they watch and how they can be linked to Christianity.

Profound questions

For me, it is important that our churches are places where young people can ask any question, about anything. As a youth worker, I believe there is no offensive question that can be asked about God. I just like it when young people explore their ideas and thinking. My role is to support them in this, guide them and in some cases give them a different viewpoint.

My young people have come up with some very profound ideas and thoughts over the time that I have been working with them. Although I am the "leader" they have said things that have blessed and challenged me in my own walk with God. It continues to be a real privilege to work with young people and walk with them on their faith journey.

Helen Young, Youth Worker



Nurturing the spiritual dimension in schools

It's a puzzle: I have two grandchildren and I love them dearly. They are still in the age of innocence and see everything the way God intended. They are very comfortable with the idea of Jesus and when encouraged by their grandparents will readily join in a prayer. Yet making relationships with young people in the 13 to 20 age range seems for us to be an almost impossible task.

A young man recently came to a Sunday morning service at Union Street to tell us how he had been called by God to go out to young people. James Alder felt that it was too difficult to get young people into church so he decided to go into schools.

The organisation to which he belongs, **CAST (Churches and Schools Together, www.castmaidstone.org.uk)**, makes visits to a number of senior schools in Maidstone.

The task

In response to his presentation I offered to help staff a couple of sessions in a Prayer Space at St Simon Stock School for the whole of the following week. To be honest I didn't have to do very much – I turned up on Monday morning at the school reception where I was greeted like an angel from heaven. There was a warm smile, introductions, filling in the inevitable visitors' books and getting my label for the day. In a moment or two a teacher introduced herself as the staff member responsible for the project and took me under her wing. Shortly afterwards James Alder from CAST arrived. They showed me the prayer space, a magnificent tent erected in the room set aside as a multi-faith space. Inside the tent were six prayer stations and my role was to move and guide the young people, helping where they were



One student said:

"I enjoyed it as it was relaxing, calming and peaceful. I found myself being thankful and thinking about the things I have taken for granted. The only thing I would change is to be able to have more time, it was too short!"

confused and moving them along so they went to each prayer station in the allotted 30 minutes.

I acted as a guide for four groups of about 20 young people during the morning and at lunchtime I was free to go. I was inspired by the opportunity to work with such lovely young people who seemed to be very interested in what they were doing. The time they spent was half of their RE lesson after which they went back to their classroom to discuss what they had discovered. But I have to say that as I drove home I was wondering if it made any difference.

Feedback from the School

Not long afterwards I received the following email from James Alder of CAST:

"I wanted to thank you all for the time you gave last week to help host the Prayer Space at St Simon Stock School. The week went extremely well, with 615 students visiting the Space. We have received fantastic feedback from the pupils and staff..."

A teacher reported that the students were 'buzzing' on their return from the Prayer Space and wanted to spend the rest of the lesson discussing their experience..."

Amazing – 615 young people experiencing prayer in a way that I never experienced it until I was in my 60s! Amazing, what a team of disciples going on mission together can achieve.

The email was also addressed to 10 other helpers (one of whom was Luzia Watt, unbeknown to me at the time), a couple from CAST and some teachers from the school. What a witness, what a vision by the young James Alder, what imagination from the Churches of Maidstone to support the idea. Will it change the world? Probably not, but will it change some hearts and minds? In the name of Jesus we pray that it will.

Richard Vincent

God is keeping us on our toes!

Over the years, the Peninsula Methodist Church, Strood Centre, once a thriving church with activities and groups for all ages – theatre trips, days out, celebratory meals at church, children's clubs, youth clubs and of course Sunday School with visits to pantomimes, fireworks displays and much more – had declined in numbers. Our Sunday School dwindled and what remained was a small congregation consisting of people over 50 (except for our ever youthful Olivia and Ministers). We prayed to discern whether we should close or carry on regardless. Our collections were barely covering our expenses. What should we do?

We carried on and continued to pray for families to come along with children for the non-existent Sunday School. Olivia started to bring her granddaughter along so we made a space at the back of the church with some toys for her. Visitors would appear some Sundays, but we wouldn't see them again. However, over the last 18 months or so, we have had six young families come along quite regularly, some taking on roles in the church, and two children who live locally join us for Sunday School without their parents. We have therefore re-opened the Sunday School and now have 14 children on our register.

Help from several sources

A rota was set up with five leaders and seven helpers so that we had two people with the children each week – sometimes a parent will stay as well. It was a challenge to all of us and we found the experience very different from Sunday School of old. At first the leader prepared the lesson aided by the helper but after a while it was decided to use Scripture Union. The take home sheets are really appreciated, especially by the parents, but sometimes we find the suggestions do not really suit the group and adapt them as we go along. We had to add a reserve helper to the

rota as two children have autism. We are very thankful to Deacon Pru Cahill and Krysia Waldock who came along and gave us some help at the autism training day. We still keep to one group but wonder sometimes, because of the age difference, if we should split into two. Then we would need more leaders and helpers so we would have a bit of a problem.

At the beginning of our services the children sit together in the front row where they are near to the preacher if he or she wishes to talk to them. They leave after the second hymn and when it is communion return to sit with their parents before going up to take communion. We are so pleased that four of the children and a baby have been baptised and that three of the parents are now members. All the children get along very well with each other and with members of the congregation. They often help with jobs after the service – washing-up is a favourite, but they also put away the hymn books and occasionally get the carpet sweeper out.

Wow! Life certainly has changed at Strood – God is definitely keeping us on our toes! Each week is different but of course a joy, although sometimes we do feel as though we need to lie down in a darkened room afterwards! Now we wonder what else God has in store for us.

Thank you Father, for we know that you answer prayers and give us the strength to face each new week!

Ann Pearce and Janet Ball



There's more than you realise!

Using the Circuit website www.nkmethodists.org.uk/

Which hymn book do they use at Eccles? Who is the Circuit safe-guarding officer? Can we hold our wedding at The Brent?

Have you looked at the Circuit website recently? There may be more there than you realise. The site is our online presence to share with others and to keep in touch ourselves.

From the front page you can always find the latest Newsletter, Plan, Prayer Diary and calendar dates. There are also announcements of news and events in the Circuit and the wider world. The links at the top give information about the Circuit's leaders, all our churches, photos of church and Circuit events and many useful links for life, study and worship.

It is also a point of contact where those outside our doors can contact us. We often receive questions about weddings, christenings, genealogy and more.

Does that sound interesting? Go and have a look.

Does that sound boring? Come and help us make it better!

Do you have some photos, some news, a poem, some thoughts you would like to share? Or perhaps you would like to help with the website itself? Have a word with me at martinsmith1955@gmail.com

Martin Smith

The small church with the big heart

On 31 August 1887, six men (no women are mentioned in the minutes) met in a house in Broomfield Road and formed a trust to build a chapel, not to exceed a cost of £500 including all fittings and fixtures. The building opened in 1888 for worship as the Primitive Methodist Church.

2 Chronicles 34:33 All his days they did not depart from following the Lord of their ancestors.

Swanscombe Methodist Church will be 130 years old this year. There have been changes over the years, including the installation of an inside toilet suitable for people with disabilities (toilets were out the back, you got wet if raining), pews removed and moveable chairs put in their place. In the 90s we had no organist, so the organ was sold to someone in Italy who collected it – shame we didn't have to deliver it! The pulpit was no longer used so that was removed, thus putting the minister/preacher on a level with the congregation. The interior of the church was decorated in 2016 after extensive work on the south and north walls.

Matthew 4:19 And he said to them "Follow me and I will make you fishers of people".

Our premises are used most days by various organisations: Guides and Brownies, New Covenant Church, Redeemed Christian Church of God, Cross Stitch Club, Women's Guild, Bible Study and the Lent Course with St Peter and St Paul Church.

We are members of Ebbsfleet Churches Together and Swanscombe Fellowship of Churches and we regularly hold Songs of Praise services with these groups. Having a large floor space in the church, we have been able to hold family parties, meals after services and gatherings after funerals.

We have All Age Worship on Sundays at 10.45am and have started up a

Twenty Minute church service on the first Tuesday of the month, 10.30–10.50am.

Feeling blessed

God was working with those six men all those years ago and is still working with us now. We have had to do extensive work on the school room and kitchen roofs. Since September last year we have spent nearly £12,000 on

maintenance, financed by generous donations from friends and congregation and supported by prayer. We are a small church in the heart of Swanscombe with only 10 members, but we know God is working with us and has plans for our church. Our congregations on Sundays are not enormous, but we always leave after a Sunday service feeling blessed. This is not the end for us – we start a new chapter and ask for your prayers as we continue our journey with God.

Psalm 126:3 The Lord has done great things for us, wherefore we are glad.

Janet Errington

Different hats and bags

One of my hobbies is singing in choirs; over the years I've belonged to quite a few, and I have a different bag for each one, as I'm scared I will turn up to choir with the wrong set of music. Living on my own, I don't have a partner to help. We all wear different hats in jobs; for instance in my case it could be Worship Leader, treasurer of my church, working for the circuit or something else.

We do not have all the answers, and in my office job some of the things that I need to investigate can be varied and challenging. I attended the recent Circuit LP and WL meeting when "our calling" was touched on and it provoked me to think about this and what I do in response. I now know that I was not called to be a Lay Reader (C of E) or a Local Preacher but I have been called to be a Lay Worker using my career background and past experience. If you had said to me 10 years ago that I would be doing this now, I would not have believed you. God does move in mysterious ways that we cannot comprehend.

When we pray in worship or privately we offer prayers for those who need them and these may be answered as we wish or in unexpected ways – not what we think and not necessarily in the time span that we want.

I have attended a number of funerals recently (a sign of getting old, I suppose) and finding out about the different hats that people wore in their earlier lives and which I knew nothing about. It does seem sad that we only find things out after they have gone. Maybe we should be more inquiring with our friends and colleagues in our lives with Jesus. At the Lay Workers' Conference at Cliff College last year I attended a workshops which sounded interesting but was for Children and Family Workers so I thought I would be out of my depth; but no, I remembered when I was younger I ran a youth group – a hat I had forgotten about! So let's wear those different hats with pride and share God's love.

Chris Chare, North Kent Circuit Churches support administrator

Gravesend's Sanctuary challenges the Beast from the East

Did you see the two hour long Channel 5 TV programme on Friday 2 March, "The Big Freeze"? If not, you missed two live reports from Gravesend Methodist Church & Community Centre (GMCCC).

The first report, exploring what it's like to live on the streets, included an interview with one of our Sanctuary winter night shelter guests and one of its leaders. The second report repeated the interview on the streets and then talked to our Community Centre Manager, Vicki Clarke. There is scarcely better publicity out there! As a result we're receiving increased donations of food and clothing, with some people buying new winter clothes in the town centre and bringing them straight to us. God is great!

Challenges

One challenge has been to keep up with the demand for washing our homeless guests' clothing and night shelter bedding. The two domestic machines installed as part of our C21st Phase 1 improvements have had seven bells knocked out of them doing thirty plus loads per week. But thanks to the

generosity of local churches, Gravesend Lions, Kent County Council and individuals, we raised £19,500 in a short space of time to cover the costs of our new Basement Laundry. We removed an old oil tank and converted part of the boiler room into a new laundry with commercial machines – not easy as this was below the level of our drains. Our volunteers now find it much easier to cope with the demand for the laundry service which is designed to last at least five years. Most of the works were carried out by specialist contractors with our DIY team chipping in where possible. To complete the works, we are having new stainless steel work units made at a cost of £2,200; any donations towards this would be gratefully received.

Other plans for the future

On Friday 16 March we met with Kent's Police & Crime Commissioner Matthew Scott, our local MP Adam Holloway and County Councillor Diane Marsh (Deputy Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care) to update them on what we do for the community at GMCCC and obtain their support for future initiatives. As a result we hope to be successful with a grant

application to fund training on Mental Ill-Health and how to recognise the signs, thus taking some of the strain off the Police.

Not only did the Beast from the East present challenges for our homeless people, but also for many of our other services: our Foodbank, Street Pastors, Washing off the City Colours, Sanctuary, Walk Tall counselling service, Mental health group, Coffee, Lunches, Language Schools and Fellowship Groups are all looking forward to spring-like conditions, not to mention our army of volunteers.

One of our main focuses now is to complete the fund-raising phase of our C21st Project phase 2 which will transform our main road frontage into an inviting building. The plans include a multifunctional new community café/ community room, a publically available accessible toilet, counselling room and improved access. We are now over half way through raising the £515,000 we need for this project. When completed we believe it will further transform the community work on this site, so please remember us in your prayers.

Eric Davis



Nearly completed new Basement Laundry



Before removal of old oil tank in basement

Spital Street celebrates a 100th Birthday!

Kathleen Hunt, who has attended Spital Street Church, Dartford for over 80 years, celebrated her 100th Birthday in January. The morning service on 28 January, led by Deacon Jane Paine, was an opportunity for the congregation to join together to celebrate and give thanks for Kathleen's long and happy life. Jane's presentation of how life would have been in Dartford during Kathleen's early years was appreciated

by everyone. The service included some of Kathleen's favourite hymns and bible readings by family members. Kathleen is pictured with Jane and Sheila Dann receiving a birthday gift. After the service members of the congregation enjoyed a slice of the birthday cake while chatting to Kathleen.

Thelma Bennett, Kathleen's niece



On their own turf

It is time that we realised that young people are not magically going to come to us, and that we need to pull out the stops and go to them.

We also need to realise that bringing the gospel to our young people may not occur on a Sunday. I can only relay my own experience to you, but it would sometimes seem that we are fighting parents who are unwilling to deliver their offspring to Sunday school as it is their only day off to spend as a family. There are also lots of things going on, as everything in this day and age is open on a Sunday.

So the question then is: How do we make contact with young people?

Perhaps we should look at Jesus and his disciples. Did they go to a specific place of worship and wait for people to come to them? No – they went to the people and produced outstanding results.

Good starting points

Although times have changed, this would seem to be the way. We should go and make contact with the

youngsters on their own turf. Schools are a good starting point and there is already Christian contact with some. Much more work is needed however, as there are many other places where we could find young people and quite possibly parents – various activity centres, playgrounds and pre-schools to name a few. Perhaps we should look at some form of advertising at these places and even look at possible visits. This should raise awareness of the church and the activities available in the area.

We obviously need to have things going on in the church that will interest young people. At **Union Street, Maidstone** we run Messy Church and a Youth Drop-In. These are both well attended and give us the chance to spread the Gospel or at least sow the seeds for the young people's later lives.

The more we can raise awareness in the community, the more likely we are to see more young people. We all need is to ensure that we never miss an opportunity to spread the word.

Dennis Makowski

For the next issue:

Articles for the next edition of the Circuit Newsletter, on the theme of Older People, should be sent to the Circuit Office northkentmethodistcircuit@gmail.com (not to the Editor) by Monday 2 July.. Please try to keep your articles relevant to the theme and think creatively about a title. Keep to one side of A4 and supply a good quality image if you can – send it separately, not embedded in a Word document. Include your name and a means of contact.

Some articles submitted for the present issue had to be pruned because they were well over length, others did not relate to the current theme. They will be held over for possible future use or may be posted on the Circuit website.

Thank you – *Editor*