



North Kent Methodist Circuit

# Grapevine

CIRCUIT NEWS



*inside...*

NEWNESS BORN OF NECESSITY:  
CHANGES IN HOW WE DO CHURCH

Issue Sixteen  
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# Newness born of necessity: changes in how we do church

**Sometimes things are 'born' during inconvenient times, when we are forced to address the situation at hand without all the tools we'd like to have available. As we begin to wonder how on earth we're going to celebrate Christmas in the midst of a pandemic, my thoughts go to Mary preparing to give birth in the stable. Somehow, God provides! Perhaps the tiny COVID-19 virus is not to be accused of cancelling this year's Christmas but is forcing us to explore new ways of honouring the tiny baby in the manger who changed the world for millennia!**

While we can't predict all that will happen with this year's Christmas celebrations around the circuit, this issue of *Grapevine* is devoted to looking at some of the changes the virus has made to how we worship and fellowship and relate to our communities. For instance, when the 'new normal' forced all our lifestyles into smaller physical areas, many of us also learned much about communicating with each other

virtually. Church life has certainly gone online in many ways, including worship, fellowship groups, and most committee and council meetings. While some of these felt like they were make-do at first, we've now come to recognise that some of these new ways are better in terms of how we can stay connected and reach out to those who might not usually enter our church buildings. We've also realised that virtual meetings are better for the environment, especially in a large circuit like ours, where many of us often had to spend considerable time and energy driving.

Of course, we all miss being with friends and those family members who don't live with us, and that will be especially apparent in the holiday season. During recent months, many of us have missed the hugs and smiles and chats over cuppas at church. But I've personally also learned much more about some people through the weekly online gatherings where we talk and listen to each other together rather than in groups of twos or threes. Perhaps we

needed a good shake-up from our usual patterns to really listen to new voices and perspectives.

Our online worship has also been a powerful reminder that, like God coming to us as a baby in a manger, God wants to be with us in our own homes, places we might have considered too humble for the divine presence. While we might miss the chance to put on our Sunday Best for the online circuit services, it is good to recognise that God's presence is with us even if we're still in our pyjamas!

This issue of *Grapevine* also explores the new ways we have found to be church in these trying times. As the signs indicate that these peculiar times might be with us for quite a while, perhaps God is urging us to look again at what we're learning not just as a 'one-off' but as an important indication of how we might continue in the future. God still provides, and we are here to witness that God is with us – in all the ways we didn't expect.

Bonni-Belle

## Gravesham Pandemic Hero Awards

**As we read of the fantastic efforts of Vicky and her team, it will be no surprise to hear that she received the following honour from Gravesham Borough Council in recognition of outstanding community work at the Daytime Hub:**

*Dear Vicky,  
I am pleased to be contacting you to congratulate you on being selected as a winner for the Gravesham Pandemic Hero Awards.*

*We received a number of nominations for both yourself and the centre. Our panel of judges has made the decision to present one award to the Gravesend Methodist Church Daytime Hub with particular reference to yourself as the centre manager.*

*I am in the process of finalising details of how the presentations will work but the plan is for the trophy to be presented by the Mayor w/c 7 September...*

*Congratulations and I very much look forward to hearing from and talking with you shortly.*

*Kind regards, Kirsty Gaunt  
Community Involvement Officer  
Gravesham Borough Council*

**Gravesham Borough Council –  
Delivering for the Community**

**INVESTORS  
IN PEOPLE**

# *Zoomed Out to be Zoomed In:*



## *Learning to be church virtually*

### **Ebbsfleet Mission during the pandemic**

As the pandemic quickly forced a nationwide lockdown in March we had little choice but to look into how we might meet as a church online. Zoom was the most obvious choice and after a few meetings we discovered that the free 40 minute session was frustratingly short, so a subscription was set up and we continued our church life via this new medium. We met for Sunday Gather, Tuesday and Friday Connect Groups, and our now weekly Friday evening prayer meeting. This transition enabled us to continue to meet – however after the initial novelty wore off it became an increasingly difficult place to be community, particularly in the way we had enjoyed it before. It wasn't long before people began to feel a little "Zoomed out" and a sense of fatigue set in as we tried to maintain our community in the slightly awkward and artificial environment of the computer screen. Having said all this, I recognise that different churches and groups have had more positive experiences, and we do remain grateful that the technology was there to enable us to see and speak to each other in a way that otherwise would

have been impossible. But it was not the panacea some had suggested it would be, and caused some to disengage from this area of church life, not as a reflection of the church, but of the manner in which we were meeting. Meeting virtually as a relatively young congregation had some huge positives, but long term it held some significant challenges.

### **Escaping to the outdoors!**

Once lockdown had started to ease we took the opportunity to meet outdoors, socially distanced and taking the necessary precautions. The weather was particularly kind and gave us the space to walk and talk together as we picked litter in the new housing community. We would begin in prayer and see our time out on the paths and roads of the development as a prayer walk with the prophetic action of removing the rubbish. These walks resulted in several conversations with our neighbours and got a very positive response on the Ebbsfleet Green Facebook Group. We now have a bit of a reputation as the litter-picking church walking round in our blue high-viz vests. Dartford Borough Council also support us and have supplied us with 15 litter-picking sticks,

bag hoops and liners, and are keen to involve us in the Keep Britain Tidy initiatives administered through the Council.

The Ebbsfleet Development Corporation has also been working with us to facilitate the delivery and management of a community garden on site. This is a great opportunity and one that was gathering tremendous pace before the lockdown. Since the start of the pandemic we have had to postpone the more serious planning and development of this project, but once restrictions allowed we again used the garden as a space to meet on a Sunday morning. For several weeks we would spend some time in prayer, read a passage of scripture and plant something new in the garden. On one Sunday of note, we read Luke 13:1-8 and reflected on grace, second chances, and the fruit of repentance as we dug round a failing pair of apple trees and added lots of compost and water. Two weeks later, and completely out of season, both trees blossomed and came to life! We not only heard the parable, we lived it out in the garden. We have also discovered the garden to be a fruitful space of



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encounter and conversation with the Ebbsfleet community. Still only baby steps until COVID conditions improve, but the garden is an organic and natural environment for a broad spectrum of the community to share in conversation and contribute to the colour and variety of the garden beds. Again, social distancing and the requirements of the restrictions have been observed, but two metres still allows for a good chat with your neighbour!

As Laurence Singlehurst famously said in his simple but timeless book on evangelism *Sowing, Reaping, Keeping*, the first and most crucial foundation to any effective evangelism is to gain the trust of those you're seeking to reach. Basically, sowing is as much demonstrating that you're normal, honest, and accessible, with a Jesus-

loving glint in your eye, as it is about handing out invitations to any evangelistic gathering. My prayer is that the litter-picking and the community garden project are laying the foundation for future outreach initiatives as we simply serve and meet people in Christ. As restrictions are lifted we plan to relaunch our Alpha Course here, which saw the miracle of spiritual birth in Christ for three people last time we ran a full course in 2019, and our prayer is the Lord will use this simple tool to bring many others into a repentant knowledge of salvation through Jesus Christ. There is tremendous potential here at Ebbsfleet, both to serve the community, to grow a new church from scratch, and to see the kingdom of King Jesus grow as new people discover his grace and his life-giving rule for themselves.

Bart Woodhouse

## Andrew In the Community!

As a relatively fit 64 year old I felt it was my civic duty to help house-bound people in the Maidstone area with taking and collecting prescriptions and doing shopping during the Covid-19 pandemic lock down. With the excellent and patient administrative help of Naomi I started my duties in early April of this year. I am retired and all of my volunteering responsibilities (After School club, cafe at the Heart Of Kent Hospice and a club for adults with learning difficulties) came to an abrupt end in mid-March, so I became 'prescription man'! With one or two slight hitches all the prescription duties and the one shopping trip went according to plan, with all customers being very grateful.

It was certainly a massive eye opener for me to find out how many people in our community are completely dependent on others for their basic needs. My one big hope after seeing some of the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic is that as a Church, a community and a society we value co-operation and helping others. Let's all (especially me) look out for the needs of others whenever we can.

Andrew Massbery

# Prayer in a Pandemic

**In July 2019 no-one knew that by the beginning of September the following year we would be six months into special measures being taken to avoid the spread of COVID 19. Even before the start of lockdown some of our churches had cancelled services and stopped smaller meetings from taking place.**

Very quickly many of us started to gain new skills, looking at new ways to approach old needs.

Many of our churches have groups who under normal conditions would be meeting for prayer together during the week. Some churches already have prayer groups linked together with weekly or "as needed" text messages. These have been even more important as Sunday in-person worship has paused. Other groups have kept in touch by phone or have learned to use technology such as Zoom.

Churches who would normally have met in person have committed to pray separately at their usual time. One such group is Muffins and More at Larkfield. The congregation at Hartlip have agreed to pray for each other at our usual service time, mentally looking round the church and visualising the other members of the congregation. Weekly Zoom groups have started in Sittingbourne for both prayer and bible study.

A group of people from a number of churches have met together regularly in a way which would have been unlikely to happen in person, but we managed to meet up for a socially distanced picnic at Aylesford Priory before some restrictions were increased. The weather forecast was not kind but actually the weather was considerably better than the forecast.

In July 2019 a recommendation

to Conference suggested the Connexional Year 2020-2021 be a year of prayer. Conference agreed to that recommendation and we are now in that year.

Information of weekly prayer meetings on Tuesdays is on the Methodist Church in Britain website.

As there are still likely to be major restrictions because of Covid when this published it is important that we continue to persevere in prayer, as Luke writes (Luke 18: 1-8).

Let us continue in prayer, develop our own prayer lives and discover or continue new ways of sharing in prayer. New ways may recently have been born of necessity but may become invaluable in the future. If you find a fresh way of invigorating your prayers, why not share it with others?

Margaret Bowerman

# Working with street homeless people in Gravesend

On Friday 20 March I held an emergency meeting with several agencies involved with helping the homeless. It was clear that almost every service was closing down due to Covid 19 and I knew then that we needed to step forward and help feed and support some of the most vulnerable people on the streets.

On the 23 March we opened our doors when everyone else had to close theirs and welcomed those in need. My amazing team of volunteers worked every single drop-in (three days a week) and provided a cooked breakfast, showers, laundry and support. We brought in new measures to ensure social distancing and ensured everyone had their temperatures taken and hands sanitised. We also reduced the numbers we allowed in at any one time.

We witnessed grown men cry with relief that we had not abandoned them and showed them that people did care and would support them in any way we could. Sadly not everyone was able to get temporary accommodation and so relied very much on the Hub to meet their basic needs. Those lucky enough to have temporary accommodation only had a microwave and a kettle with no other facilities. We soon realised that many had no access to public funds and so needed a supply of food that they could heat up in their rooms.

This was achieved thanks to the support of many agencies. Foodbank volunteers would deliver supplies at the beginning of each drop-in, which allowed us to set up a mini foodbank with items they could use. Over the course of weeks thanks to our Facebook page [www.facebook.com/vicki.clarke.7927408](http://www.facebook.com/vicki.clarke.7927408) local (small family run) shops contacted me offering to provide



food, toiletries and drinks. The generosity was unbelievable.

I applied for a grant from the emergency Covid relief fund at the beginning of lockdown as I knew we needed to find a way to fund our breakfasts and we were lucky enough to be given £1800 to purchase the ingredients.

Porchlight have worked with the Hub throughout the pandemic and have been amazing at helping the guests. Together we have had a fantastic experience, watching the joy on guests faces when they arrive at what they class as a safe place. More recently the Council have joined us and work two days a week from the Hub to help with housing needs. The local police have been fantastic at keeping in touch with us and letting us know if anyone is in need of our help. During lockdown we have provided 657 hot showers, 1274 cooked breakfasts, 231 bags of laundry and 231 items of clothing.

Covid 19 has been a horrendous time for everyone and I can honestly say the Hub has been truly blessed with the



kindness shown to us and the support we have received. Those who have been unable to help in a hands-on way due to circumstances have supported us financially, emotionally and with prayer.

I am so very happy/ blessed to have such an amazing team of volunteers who have worked tirelessly to support not only the guests but me as the Centre manager. The leadership team and Tony have been wonderful in allowing me to run riot in the Methodist Church and show the world exactly what Christianity is all about. Kindness!

I am very proud to be part of the Methodist Church community and all it stands for. Thank you for never doubting me.

Vicki Clarke  
Community Centre Manager  
The Daytime Hub  
Gravesend Methodist Church

# Daytime Hub at Gravesend



## *Christian Aid in Lockdown? But not locked down at Larkfield!*

Christian Aid Week sneaked up on us. We had put the diary dates aside when we heard that for the first time in over 50 years, there could not be a house-to-house collection on the streets of Larkfield or anywhere, and to be honest we had almost forgotten about it. Then, just about 10 days before Christian Aid Week would have started, an urgent email arrived. The need for money out in the field, to support some of the poorest people in the poorest countries in the world, was more urgent than ever. Please, whatever we could do to raise funds at this critical time would be so much appreciated.

What could we do? How could we do things differently, in such a short time? The thinking caps worked overtime.

Firstly, the Revd Naomi set up a JustGiving account for us and we were on the way. Information was shared through our extensive network of church email contacts and we were so grateful for the modern day wonders of the world – Facebook, WhatsApp, and Zoom! During Christian Aid Week itself, our daily prayer emails focussed on information and prayers from Christian Aid. An Auction of Promises was quickly arranged and in less than two weeks raised over £400, mostly for promises of delicious cakes and curries. On the Friday evening of Christian Aid week, Naomi organised a fun quiz on Zoom in which nearly 40 people participated, including guests from three other Methodist churches and four churches from Churches Together in Malling. We asked for donations of £5 per person,

**I just wanted to update everyone on how blessed we have been with support from both people and businesses. Our Hub bank balance is very healthy thanks to donations, crowd funding and standing orders.**

Morrisons supermarket has been a huge support with fortnightly donations of food, drinks and cleaning products as well as toiletries. They have also provided the Hub with a £40 gift card which allowed me to buy items in short supply. One of their staff members is now helping at the Hub weekly (in his uniform) as they have a huge charity initiative that we have been chosen for.

Asda have also donated gift vouchers. AJ fresh fruit and veg continues to supply us with fresh produce for the food bank, often bringing fresh bread, cakes and any other items I request.

We ran two crowd funders on Facebook at the start of lockdown and raised more than £1,200 in a few short weeks.

A fantastic group of volunteers from Meopham and surrounding villages

have provided the Hub with bacon, sausages, eggs and many more items since the beginning of lockdown. They continue to do this weekly and their kindness and generosity is outstanding. They also held a cake stand which four children arranged and baked for and donated £110 to the Hub. On top of this they gave me £50 to spend at Primark on clothing items for the homeless.

I am hoping that if everyone we know registers with Amazon Smile the donations will fly in. Those with an Amazon account simply need to register their account and choose the Daytime Hub at GMC and for every purchase they make Amazon will donate 0.5% of the bill to our charity at no cost to the shopper.

As you can see we have been very blessed. Once again I would like to thank you all for supporting me and my over-active brain!

**Vicki Clarke  
Community Centre Manager  
Gravesend Methodist Church  
& Community Centre**

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# Christmas won't be cancelled!

**After building up family worship with Breakfast Church and consolidating links with Junior Church, Café Church, the Brigades and Toddlers' Club, it was really hard earlier this year when everything fell apart. What could we do to retain contact and make the families feel valued and loved?**

Bags! Many moons ago, before lockdown was heard of, we were preparing for Breakfast Church at the start of Lent and we needed a short activity for the children. The Revd Naomi was doing a foodie activity, so this needed to be different. I was stuck, absolutely stuck until Naomi mentioned the phrase "Lent bags". Following some research, I set about gathering some bits and pieces which would help the children understand and remember the story of the temptations of Jesus and onwards to Holy Week. During our session we retold the story using the items which were then packed into pretty cloth bags, along with a printed version of the story. I was so touched to hear that one of our three-year-olds was able to retell the story to his grandma.

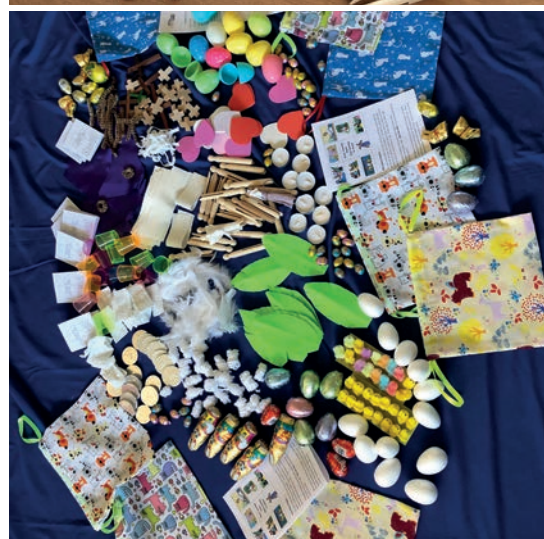
The next Breakfast Church was to be on Palm Sunday; the plan was for the

children to bring back their bags which would then be refilled with some Easter story items and activities, plus some Easter choccies, but lockdown put paid to that! So, we prepared 20 Easter bags, but how were we to get them out to the children during strict lockdown? Secret Easter Santa, of course (Sshhh!)

The feedback was amazing, so greatly appreciated by children and parents who were all struggling by then.

Who would have believed that now we are wondering whether we will get back to these groups before Christmas? So starting early, we are planning 30 Christmas story bags, hopefully getting the message of the "real" Christmas to our children. There will be the Christmas story retold using various little items, some straw in a matchbox, a cotton wool ball for a sheep (for the shepherds), a gold (chocolate) coin, tiny bags of myrrh and frankincense, and other items still to be thought of, an activity and of course some chocolate, all to be delivered in time for Christmas by Santa in his car.

Then another idea! What about vulnerable adults and older folks who can't get to worship with us – could we



do something for them too? A candle, a card, and some chocolate in a bag? So what if we are known as "the Bag Church"!

**Monica Wilding**  
Larkfield and East Malling Methodist Church

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but of course we brought our own snacks and drinks. Naomi led the quiz brilliantly, thanks to her sense of fun and her brilliant technical skills. She had us disappearing into break-out groups, running round our homes finding pineapples, plain flour, palm crosses and all sorts of things, as well as searching our brains for long-forgotten bits of information. (How many hearts does an octopus have?)

But the most amazing thing was the total raised on our JustGiving page – £1260! Huge thanks to everyone who

contributed to this total and to those of you who have contributed in other ways. If you haven't had the chance to give, please just look at the Christian Aid website to make your donation. Coronavirus has hit almost every nation in the world, but how much more difficult is it for the poorer countries to fight it, especially when they already have to cope with poor sanitation and water supplies, starvation and all the problems associated with extreme poverty.

God bless all of you.  
Keep safe and well, Monica Wilding

*Huge thanks, too, to Monica, Gwen and Valerie for their creativity and hard work to ensure that Larkfield was able to mark Christian Aid Week in new and creative ways, from helping us to pray and reflect to organising the highly successful auction of promises. Thank you!*  
Revd Naomi

# Worship at Hartlip during the Pandemic

**When all church buildings were closed at the start of this pandemic, I don't think anyone really expected that it would be over six months before some of them would be able to open again safely. What's more, rather naively, we may have assumed that we would soon be "back to normal" when the immediate danger was behind us.**

Of course, we now know so much more about Covid-19 and the devastating effects it has had and continues to have throughout the world. The churches certainly needed to stay closed to stop the virus spreading and at Hartlip, we felt a real need to keep our congregation connected from the very start.

In fact, a little ahead of the rest of the Circuit, our Church Life Group took the bold decision to close our doors on Sunday 15 March. We have a high proportion of members over the age of 70 and it had become abundantly clear that almost all of our congregation were categorised as being 'vulnerable' or 'extremely clinically vulnerable'. We felt that we had a duty of care to keep everyone safe. So we shared the responsibility of informing all our members and adherents about this decision and promised to let them know what, if anything, we could do to provide a different form of worship in which we could share.

During that first week, we contacted everyone with a very simple idea. At Hartlip, as you may know, we usually worship at 6.30pm on Sunday evenings so we suggested that we could, at that time, pray quietly at home and think of each other by visualising the Chapel and the members of its congregation and then finish by sharing the Peace. We also suggested that every day, we might pause at midday to say the Lord's Prayer and think of each other. These ideas seemed to resonate with our folk at that time and continue to do so, several months on. They seem to have brought us closer together in spirit, despite being physically apart.

We were also delighted to be invited to join with many others from our Circuit and beyond for a regular live-streamed

service on Sunday mornings at 10.30am. This has become for us a really helpful and welcome worship resource in these turbulent times. We have been reminded that we are indeed part of a wider worshipping family and it has been comforting to see familiar names appearing in the live chat at the side of the computer screen throughout the service. The Intercessional prayer requests have become a very powerful and perhaps less intimidating way of contributing for some people.

However, not everyone in our church family has been able to join in this Circuit Service and we were very anxious from the start that people should not feel abandoned and isolated, particularly if they lived alone. A solution has been found whereby each week our minister, Robin, has produced a package of worship materials comprising the Connexional service sheets and other useful additional worship resources. Derek has also written a weekly letter to accompany this package so that our congregation has been able to keep up to date with pastoral news and information. All this has been circulated by email or by Robin, who has faithfully delivered it to those who do not have that facility. This combined ongoing commitment is a real labour of love.

We know how much it means to the members of our congregation because they tell us when we speak to them during the week. At 6.30pm each Sunday we all read through the service and sing the hymns, finishing with the visualisation I mentioned at the beginning of this article. And now, encouraged by the recent success of Zoom, we are considering using it to connect with our members for a virtual coffee morning once a month. If successful, this might be a good way for many of us to follow the Sunday service material together in due course.

For many years, we have distributed



the publication *Our Daily Bread* to our members. This little booklet, with daily readings and prayers has become a much valued resource and is another way in which we have always kept connected. Unfortunately, we were not able to obtain enough copies for everyone in the early days of the pandemic. Thankfully this week, after negotiating with the company, we have now received a good supply of the latest edition, so we can begin to distribute these again. Our members have told us that this act of daily Bible study helps to bring structure to their lives during these difficult times.

The congregation at Hartlip is our family and we look out for one another. We keep in touch regularly and support each other through the good and the not so good times. So it goes without saying that we miss physically worshipping together in our Chapel. However, we feel that new and inspirational opportunities have been opened up for us over the last six months, that are perhaps more flexible and wide reaching. Throughout this period of complex challenges, God has clearly moved in our lives by leading us to new levels in our faith journeys. Whatever our "new normal" will become, it would be a pity to lose all we have gained in the meantime.

**Heather and Derek Gallagher**  
Pastoral Leaders, Hartlip Methodist Church

## For the next issue:

Please send contributions on '*Hope springs eternal*,' so articles about plans for new ventures emerging during or after the pandemic would be welcome as a Word document, no longer than 500 words, to [bonni-belle.pickard@methodist.org.uk](mailto:bonni-belle.pickard@methodist.org.uk) to arrive by 20 December 2020. If you can, please attach a suitable high quality image, but do not embed it in a document.