



 North Kent Methodist Circuit

# grapevine

CIRCUIT NEWS AND PREACHING PLAN

## CIRCUS

### WELCOME TO THE SHOW

*inside...*

PRESENTING THE NKMC CIRCUS!  
BEING A CIRCUIT STEWARD  
UNION STREET AT 200!

Issue Twenty Six  
Summer 2023

# *“Ladies and Gentlemen: Presenting the North Kent Methodist CIRCUS!”*

**Some days I think of our group churches in North Kent as a ‘circus’ rather than a ‘circuit’ - a ‘three ring circus’ disguised as a ‘three-area group circuit’! As Superintendent, I wonder if I’m the Clown, the Sword Swallower, the Tightrope Walker, or the Lion Tamer! Some days, it feels like all of these...**

I do have a great team of supporters – from the paid and volunteer circuit staff and officers to the hard-working church stewards, property stewards, treasurers, pastoral secretaries, safeguarding officers and a host of other helpers. With all of us working together, we usually manage to keep all the circuit ‘balls’ in the air! Recently our team has been thrilled to have the Revd Rosemary Pritchard join us to oversee the Larkfield, Tonbridge Road, Eccles and Burham congregations while the Revd Naomi Oates has been on maternity leave. There’s an article about Rosemary in this edition; we’re grateful for her contributions over the past eight months and wish her God’s blessings as she travels on to ministry in Margate in September.

Often, ‘keeping the show on the road’ can be a challenge when officers come to the end of their terms and replacements are hard to find. In circuit terms, we’re especially struggling to find new Circuit Stewards for September. We’re

including a piece from our current Circuit Stewards about what they do, in the hope that someone else might be inspired to give it a try. We’re always willing to re-choreograph our trapeze-act of swinging rope to rope, but we do need people willing to keep the ropes swinging!

‘Keeping the show on the road’ is also a struggle when trying to fill the Preaching Plan; the struggle is to accommodate the imbalance between the number of ministers and Local Preachers available and the nearly two-dozen church sites that need Sunday morning worship and Communion services. At one point in preparing the Summer Plan, I had over 100 Sunday slots that could not be filled with any available preachers. Our circus has had to get very creative indeed!

One small way of addressing the imbalance in demand is by offering mid-week Communion Services. You’ll find a list of these services across the circuit in this issue of Grapevine.

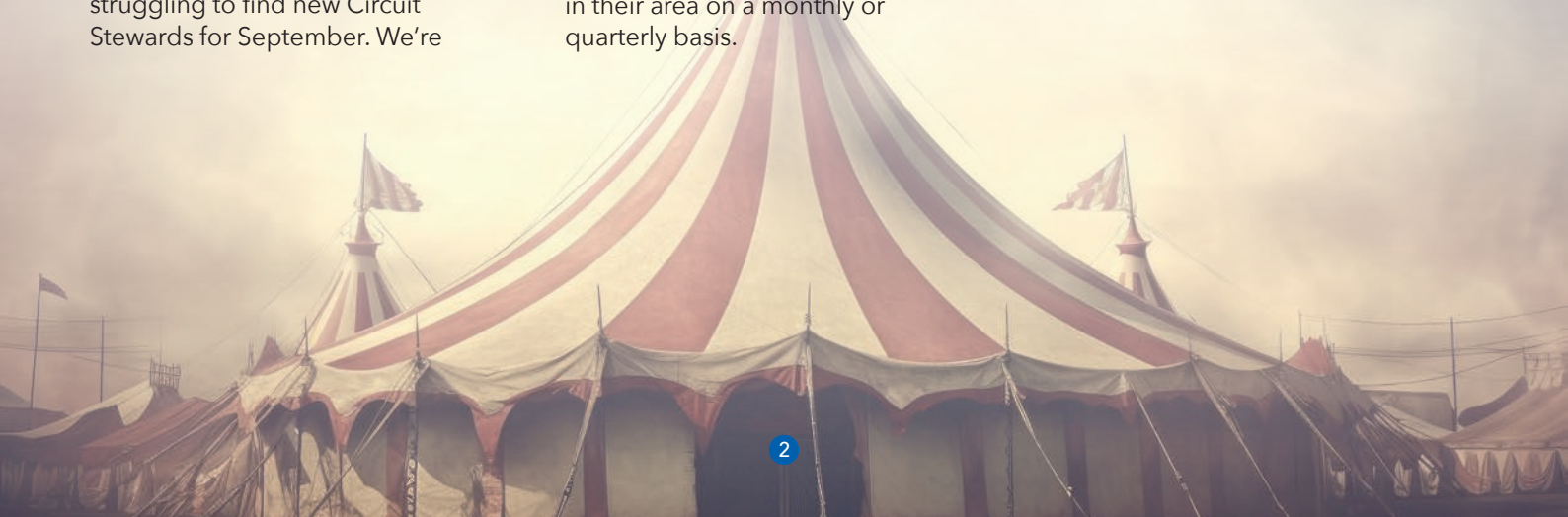
We are also grateful that the online Circuit service is still able to function each Sunday, as sometimes that’s all we can offer to the smallest churches. Several churches are trying to come up with creative alternatives, such as United Services with other churches in their area on a monthly or quarterly basis.

One of our feature articles this quarter is the Holy Trinity Chatham LEP which began rotating services around its three locations during the pandemic. It has decided to continue this pattern indefinitely, which has meant that two-thirds fewer ministerial resources are needed, while the overall congregation feels encouraged with larger numbers attending each service. What other creative solutions are waiting to be tried?

Another feature article celebrates the two hundred years that Union Street Methodist Church has been ‘keeping the show on the road’ in Maidstone. As the congregation marks the bicentennial of the Church building, it is also active in considering how best to maintain its presence as a Sacred Space in the heart of the town centre.

Of course, our circuit is more than a circus – and that’s because God is our Ring Master, directing our steps and coordinating our actions as we do our best to keep God’s Kingdom show of love and joy and grace on the road! There is always room for more to join us under the ‘Big Top’ – how might your talents be used by the Ring Master?

**Bonni-Belle**





## These are the midweek communion services planned for June - August 2023

### Third Avenue, Gillingham:

Wednesdays at 11am: 28 June, 26 July (2pm), 23 August

### Spital Street, Dartford:

1st Tuesdays at 12 noon, 6 June, 4 July, 1 August

### Swanscombe:

1st Tuesdays at 10am, 6 June, 4 July, 1 August

### St Albans, Blue Bell Hill:

3rd Wednesdays at 10 am, 21 June, 19 July, 16 August

### MCMC (Cantonese):

Monday 17 July at 11 am, Union Street MC Maidstone

### MCMC (Mandarin):

Thursday 27 July at 10am, Rendezvous Restaurant Chatham

# Being a Circuit Steward in somewhat turbulent times

## A Duty and a Delight?

From the Midlands to Mid-Sussex to Essex and to Lancashire: these are the areas to which my professional life working within the state secondary education sector has taken me. Almost itinerant one might say, but there was no plan.

What Jill (my wife) and I did find in all these places was a diverse richness of welcome in new neighbourhoods and new church communities and coming to Kent was no different.

All the contexts in which we worked in various church, circuit and district roles were unique, but more to the point, they were all changing.

Upon becoming a circuit steward here in North Kent it was important for me to try to get an understanding of the context of individual churches and how they 'tick'.

Starting this in 2020/21 with all the Covid restrictions and everything happening on Zoom was not exactly helpful. Nonetheless, I really felt the support of staff and the other circuit stewards, who had a wealth of experience behind them.

## A visible community of stewards

The practicalities of gaining an up-to-date panoramic view of the Circuit does require circuit stewards to be out and about. Succinct reports to church councils and participating in their meetings are significant aspects of our role.

Sharing in Sunday worship in churches across the circuit is something I have found helpful, not only for the worship but also in terms of the conversations held afterwards over coffee. I have managed to get to nine services so far, juggling duties we have at our local church in Bearsted. These personal contacts are helpful in being able to understand some of the realities of individual church circumstances.

## Shifting sands

What we are learning from all this is that the contexts in which almost all churches are working are undergoing dramatic shifts. Memberships are declining, church attendance is decreasing, income is down, expenditure is up. The viability of some church buildings is highly questionable. The availability of people capable and able with sufficient energy to undertake key church roles is limited.

## A Big Ask

As well as the regular practical challenges, circuit stewards are also commissioned to share in formulating strategic leadership choices associated with all those shifting sands.

Despite all this we dare to believe there will be a few souls willing to answer the call to consider joining a band of circuit stewards to work with the staff team in helping to plot the course ahead.

The hymn writer Marjorie Dobson observes that:

*"Life for us is always changing  
in the work we share.  
Christian love adds new dimensions  
to the way we care.  
For we know that you could lead us,  
As you need us,  
Anywhere."* (STF 664)

## So being a circuit steward... a duty and a delight?

## Oh yes, and a privilege!

RJB

# *A nice problem to have!*



"We have never been so united... I hope we don't go back to the way things were." These are two phrases often heard in **Holy Trinity South Chatham** these days; phrases spoken by those who have been worshipping in this Local Ecumenical Partnership for thirty years or more. They refer to the fact that, since COVID, the three congregations of St Alban's, Blue Bell Hill, St David's, Lordswood and St William's, Walderslade, all meet together for worship every Sunday morning on a rotating pattern (see Preaching Plan).

In years past, a separate 10 or 9.30am Sunday morning service would be held in each church building in parallel. This worked when there were plenty of Ministers, Local Preachers, Church Wardens, Stewards and musicians to go around, but even by 2019 we were beginning to struggle. You might turn up to worship and find anywhere between 12 or 40 people in the congregation depending on the building. These days our numbers are solidifying at around 45 - 60 and as ever this attendance would be larger if everyone actually turned-up!

Now anyone who knows anything about church growth will tell you,

it is not about the numbers. It is worth pointing out that 45 - 60 people attending worship per week represents something of a decline in average attendance across the Parish as a whole when compared to the nineties, noughties and twenty-tens, but I return to those opening words: "...we have never been so united".

By joining together each week for worship, something in the spiritual atmosphere has changed. We are able to share the weight of ministry, better support each other in pastoral care, and demonstrate to new-comers - of which there have been many over the past few months - that here is a single body of people united around our Lord Jesus Christ, living out our faith with authenticity. Today when a new family, couple or individual walks in on a Sunday morning, they sense that something exciting is happening among God's people.

All this is not say there haven't been difficulties. Some have struggled with the pattern of joint services, wishing that church could be the way "it used to be"; a sign of mourning for times passed. But there are good reasons for this minority view which are not necessarily the result of decisions made by the Church Council or

those in leadership. The pandemic made people anxious about social interaction more generally. In some cases, those who are still anxious about returning to church are the same as those who are anxious about mixing in other settings. We also discovered that transport had become an issue. For example, people who were once happy to drive to Blue Bell Hill, negotiating the treacherous roundabout that intersects with M2 Junction 3, now no longer drive at all.

Throughout these changes, partly enforced by COVID and now slowly embraced, good communication has been key. With a Sunday service at a different location each week, we have to stay on top of publicity, and while it is not for everyone, social media has been a life-saver! Moving forward, a major challenge will be how we are going to continue to accommodate joint services in the two smaller church buildings when numbers exceed capacity. This question will need to be tackled at some point, but for now, to cite another oft repeated phrase in Holy Trinity South Chatham: "... it is a nice problem to have..."

**The Revd David Kichenside,  
Team Rector of Holy Trinity South Chatham.**



# *Holding us steady*

For some of us at **Tonbridge Road Methodist Church**, our first encounter with the **Revd Rosemary Pritchard** was when she attended our Friendship Lunch in December. She was warm and friendly and spent time chatting and getting to know us, our names and our connections to the church – or not, since we welcome anyone and have a few regulars who do not attend Tonbridge Road on Sundays.

Since then we have had the benefit of Rosemary's fellowship and faith

as she has, as she expressed it, "held us steady" for Naomi to return to.

More than holding us steady, Rosemary has picked up on the reflection of our mission plan, begun by Naomi, and is gently supporting and leading us to examine the reality and exciting possibilities for our future.

On a day to day basis, as well as leading Holy Communion and Sunday services, she has involved herself in all aspects of our church

life and regularly calls in during our toddler sessions to have a cup of tea, chat with the parents and carers, and help tidy up at the end of the session.

We are greatly enjoying working alongside Rosemary, our caretaker, during Naomi's maternity leave. We will send her off to Whitstable with our love and prayers in the summer.

**Linda Gander, Senior Steward**

*Thank*  
*Farewell*  
*& thank you*

**The Revd Rosemary Pritchard** has been a joy to have as our minister at **Larkfield** while Naomi is on maternity leave. She joined in all our various activities even before she was due to start in January. We saw her at our Auction of Promises, Breakfast church, Praise before lunch and taking a service for us all before Christmas! She was brilliant at speaking to everyone present and made a point of trying to remember people's names.

She has been a stalwart in times of trial, when we have all had to come to terms with the unexpected death of one of our stewards and then the death of a young man who was the son of another member of our church. She has been there for both

families as well as the other church membership. The time she has given willingly to help us all cope with these difficulties has been amazing and very much appreciated. Reorganising the pastoral visitors' lists and helping us to look for new stewards has been so helpful and a guiding light.

Her services have been enlightening and thought provoking, offering us a taste of her life in Burkina Faso. They have been well prepared and very enjoyable. She has also taken time to join us at our Warm space, Chuckles and Muffins, joining in and speaking with everyone present. We will be very sorry to bid her farewell and will really miss her. Our loss will be Whitstable's gain!



# *Union Street Methodist Celebrating*



The main church building of Union Street Methodist Church is 200 years old this year! The first Methodist Church in Maidstone was actually established in 1791, the year of John Wesley's death, and it was another 32 years before the grand construction was established in its current position near the town centre. At the same time, a Sunday School was established on the premises to teach working children who had only Sundays free from work; Sunday School was where they learned to read and write. Also established on the plot of land was the non-conformist burial ground that served as the final resting place for any of the town's citizens who weren't

allowed to be buried in the Church of England graveyard. Those three components of Union Street – a fine regal building, a concern for the poor, and a place of welcome for all – remain to the current day.

Union Street held an Exhibition on the weekend of 11-12 February 2023 with a wealth of displays on the church's history and plans for the future. There were photos, memorabilia and archive documents to explore, along with a PowerPoint presentation of wedding photos and interactive online presentations of the memorials, graves, and stained-glass windows; baptism and marriage





# Church Maidstone – 200 years!

registers were on hand to search, and there were musical memories to enjoy. We were delighted to welcome many guests from the community and circuit as well as the Mayor of Maidstone (who grew up just across the street from the back of the church) and former ministers John Makey, Roy Howard, Chris Esgate, and Clifford Newman, who joined us on the Sunday for a celebration service and the feast that followed.

The 200th celebrations also served to remind the congregation of the current needs of Maidstone town centre: for Sacred Space, a symbol of God's presence, a place of welcome

and concern for all. Many in the circuit will be aware that Union Street has been exploring options for renovating its church for several years now. The explorations had to be halted during the pandemic but are now regathering steam with help from the Connexional Property Development and Conservation officers and site visits from several property developers, particularly those who work with charities for people with various disabilities. We still don't know exactly what God has in mind for our building in the future, but we approach that future with a new assurance that God hasn't finished with us yet!

Bonni-Belle



# North Kent Circuit

## Preaching Plan June – August 2023

		JUNE				JULY					AUGUST				
		4	11	18	25	2	9	16	23	30	6	13	20	27	
		<i>Trinity Sunday</i>													
BEARSTED	10.30	BYARD	ZACHAR <i>hc</i>	MARKOVA	TOLHURST	WILDING	ZACHAR <i>hc</i>	KASONGO	WATTON	G HARRIS	LA	LA	LA	ZACHAR <i>hc</i>	
BURHAM	10.30	LA	–	NEWELL	–	LA	–	PRITCHARD <i>hc</i>	–	LA	–	LA	–	LA	
CHINESE	13.30	E LAU <i>hc</i>	SIU	LAN PUI KEY	SIU	YU <i>hc</i>	SIU	PICKARD	SIU	SIU	PICKARD <i>hc</i>	D LAI	SIU	HII	
DENE HOLM	11.00	–	ROWE	–	TERRETT	–	–	LA	LA	TERRETT <i>hc</i>	US @ GMC	US @ BRENT	US @ SWAN	TERRETT	
ECCLES	10.30	–	PRITCHARD <i>ca</i>	–	WATTON	–	LA	–	WILDING	–	LA	–	LA	–	
THIRD AVENUE	10.30	GALLAGHER	LA	SELMES <i>hc</i>	SELMES	J COOKE <i>ca</i>	LA (Series)	SELMES <i>hc/b</i> (Series)	SELMES (Series)	SELMES (Series)	WATTON (Themed)	M HARRIS (Themed)	WILLING (Themed)	SELMES <i>hc</i> (Themed)	
GRAVESEND	11.00	TERRETT <i>hc/aa</i>	LA	WOODHOUSE	DOWNS	TERRETT <i>hc</i>	LA	S SMITH	DOWNS	BURCH	TERRETT <i>hc</i>	US @ BRENT	US @ SWAN	US @ DHOLM	
HARTLIP	18.30	BOWERMAN	FUNNELL <i>ca</i>	SELMES <i>hc</i>	GALLAGHER	GERMAN	SELMES	BOWERMAN	LA	M HARRIS	GERMAN	LA	SELMES <i>hc</i>	LA	
HEXTABLE	10.30	WOODHOUSE	LBS <i>Scott</i> <i>hc</i>	GRAY	LA	HARFLEET	LBS <i>Scott</i> <i>hc</i>	HUDSON- BEDDOWS	WOODHOUSE	HUDSON-	ROWE BEDDOWS	GRAY	DOWNS	LA	
HOPE STREET	10.30	LA	LA	BOWERMAN	CASSELL	LA	LA <i>Sea Sunday</i>	WADE	ZACHAR <i>hc</i>	LA	GALLAGHER	LA	LA	LA	
KINGSWOOD	11.00	LA	METH TOLHURST	LA	ANGL <i>hc</i>	LA	METH BYARD	BAPTIST	ANGL <i>hc</i>	ANGL <i>us</i>	–	–	BAPTIST	ANGL <i>hc</i>	
LARKFIELD	10.00	WILDING	LA	PRITCHARD <i>aa</i>	WEST <i>hc</i>	PRITCHARD <i>pm service</i>	SHEPHERD	G HARRIS <i>aa</i>	PRITCHARD <i>hc</i>	US	WILDING	PRITCHARD <i>hc</i>	LA <i>aa</i>	KASONGO	
NEWINGTON	9.30	M SMITH	LA	M HARRIS	ST MARYS <i>us</i>	M SMITH	TROTT	ZACHAR <i>hc</i>	ST MARYS <i>us 10am</i>	LA	M SMITH	WADE	LA	ST MARYS <i>us</i>	
ST. LUKE'S	10.30	M HARRIS	SELMES <i>hc</i>	WEST <i>ca</i>	LA	SIU	SELMES <i>hc</i>	ROBB	TROTT	LA	KASONGO	BYARD	SELMES <i>hc</i>	LA	
HOLY TRINITY	10.00	ST WILLIAMS	ST ALBANS <i>hc</i>	ST DAVIDS PICKARD	ST WILLIAMS <i>hc</i>	ST ALBANS	ST DAVIDS <i>hc</i>	ST WILLIAMS	ST ALBANS TOLHURST	ST DAVIDS	ST WILLIAMS <i>hc</i>	ST ALBANS	ST DAVIDS <i>hc</i>	ST WILLIAMS	
SITTINGBOURNE	10.30	ZACHAR <i>hc</i>	LA	WADE	LA	ZACHAR <i>hc</i>	WOODHOUSE	LA	MARKOVA	ZACHAR <i>hc</i>	LA	ROBB	ZACHAR	BYARD	
SPITAL STREET	10.30	HARFLEET	DOWNS	KASONGO	PRITCHARD <i>hc</i>	ROWE	DOWNS	HARFLEET	GRAY	PICKARD <i>hc</i>	LA	LA	LA	LA	
STOKE	18.30	–	–	–	–	WOODHOUSE	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	
PENINSULA STROOD	10.30	SIU	ROBB	BYARD	WOODHOUSE	SELMES <i>hc</i>	M HARRIS	WOODHOUSE	WEST	TOLHURST <i>hc</i>	WOODHOUSE	LA	LA	TROTT	
SWANSCOMBE	10.45	LA	–	TERRETT <i>hc/aa</i>	–	LA	–	ROWE	LA	LA	US @ GMC	US @ BRENT	TERRETT	US @ DHOLM	
TONBRIDGE RD	10.30	PRITCHARD <i>hc</i>	WEST	ZACHAR	JONES	PRITCHARD <i>hc</i>	WEST	SHEPHERD	JONES	NEWELL	PRITCHARD <i>hc</i>	LA	WEST	LA	
THE BRENT	10.30	GRAY	TERRETT <i>hc</i>	HUDSON- BEDDOWS	HARFLEET	KASONGO	–	LA	TERRETT <i>hc</i>	HARFLEET	US @ GMC	TERRETT	S SMITH	US @ DHOLM	
UNION STREET	10.30	LA	PICKARD <i>hc</i>	M SMITH	G HARRIS	NEWELL	PICKARD <i>hc</i>	LA	PICKARD <i>Pets</i>	PRITCHARD	WEST	PICKARD <i>hc</i>	G HARRIS	WILDING	
ONLINE SERVICES	10.30	PICKARD	WOODHOUSE	LBS <i>Scott</i>	THIRD AVE	PICKARD	TBA	TBA	THIRD AVE	SIU	PICKARD	TBA	WOODHOUSE	TA	

*aa* All-age / *ca* Church Anniversary / *cc* Café Church / *hc* Holy Communion / *us* United Service

**For the Autumn issue:** Please send contributions 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 June 2023. If you can, please attach a suitable high quality image, but do not embed it in a document.