



 North Kent Methodist Circuit

grapevine

CIRCUIT NEWS AND PREACHING PLAN



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Issue Forty
Winter 2026-27

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As I write this, autumn has just begun to encroach - the first leaves are turning red, and there is a slight nip in the air that makes me want to curl up under a blanket with a bowl of tomato soup. But writing an introduction to the winter edition of Grapevine reminds me that, as well as planning for Advent and Christmas in the churches I serve, I need to start making preparations for the three birthdays that take place in my house between December and January (just when ministers have nothing better to do).

Birthdays, whether you love them or try to ignore them, are important milestones. In this edition of Grapevine, you'll find stories that touch on the milestones in our journey of faith. The Apostle Paul, on several occasions, compares our faith journey to growing up - he talks about feeding new Christians with milk, instead of solid food, until they're ready for something more substantial (see, for example, 1 Corinthians 3:1-3). On that

Servants of God

As a matter of fact, my friends, I could not talk to you as I talk to people who have the Spirit; I had to talk to you as though you belonged to this world, as children in the Christian faith.

I had to feed you milk, not solid food, because you were not ready for it. And even now you are not ready for it,

because you still live as the people of this world live. When there is jealousy among you and you quarrel with one another, doesn't this prove that you belong to this world, living by its standards?

journey, we will experience different milestones - some joyous, some more challenging. Through it all, God is faithful.

In this edition, you'll read about the joyous day when Rev Robert's daughters chose to be baptised - a highlight in anyone's spiritual journey, when we die to our old lives and are raised again with Christ, and when we are welcomed into God's Church. Rev Rocky shares about a new 'Faithfuls & Curious' group that brings together those starting to explore faith with those seeking to go deeper. I'll be sharing a little about my sabbatical - an opportunity in my own journey of faith to step back, pause, and reflect (as well as to bake an extraordinary number of cakes).

Wherever you find yourself on your own journey of faith, we hope you find something in this issue to inspire and encourage you.

Every blessing, Rev Naomi

Faithfuls & Curious:

A Space to Explore Faith Together

Earlier this year, four of us from Spital Street Methodist Church began meeting to pray and to ask some important questions: What is God calling us to be as a church? How can we deepen our life together, while also reaching beyond those who already come? How can we create a space that is open, honest and welcoming – for committed Christians, for those re-thinking aspects of their faith, and for people who are simply curious? We kept coming back to the wonderfully simple invitation in John's Gospel: "Come and see." (John 1:46) Come as you are. Come with what you believe, what you doubt, and what you are still discovering.

Out of those prayers and conversations, Faithfuls & Curious was born, and we began meeting in July. Twice every month, we gather over tea and coffee and take one aspect of Christian faith and life as our starting point. Rather than beginning with an answer, we begin with a question. So far we have explored hospitality, care, service, justice, worship and prayer, asking questions such as: Where do you feel most at home? What does prayer actually mean in daily life? Are we just fixing people's problems, or are we actually loving them?

Most of those who have joined us so far are already part of the church – and that has reminded us that

we all need spaces to explore and re-think our faith. Being a Christian for many years does not mean that our questions disappear. Faith continues to grow as we listen, learn and encounter God and one another afresh. There has been laughter, honesty, disagreement, stories, Scripture and some unexpectedly deep conversations. Nobody has to pretend to have everything worked out. Paul's words feel particularly appropriate: "Test everything; hold fast to what is good." (1 Thessalonians 5:21) A living faith need not be frightened of questions. Sometimes a good question takes us deeper.

This autumn, Faithfuls & Curious continues with Scripture, stewardship, Sabbath, Communion, witness and Advent. Our hope is that it remains a valuable space for those already within our church community, while also being somewhere we can naturally invite friends, neighbours and others who might like to join the conversation. There is no expectation that everyone thinks alike or arrives at the same conclusion. We come to listen to Scripture, to one another, and to God.

Perhaps mission and discipleship are not as separate as we sometimes imagine. Sometimes both begin by opening a door, putting the kettle on, offering a chair, asking a good question and really listening. "Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them." (Matthew 18:20) That is our hope for Faithfuls & Curious: to be faithful enough to treasure what we have received, curious enough to keep exploring, and welcoming enough to make room for others along the way.

Rev. Rocky Chan
Spital Street & Medway Chinese
Methodist Churches





Faithfuls *and* Curious

2026

7 OCT	SCRIPTURE (GILL) <i>What makes an ancient book worth listening to today?</i>
21 OCT	STEWARDSHIP (ROCKY) <i>What do we do with what we've been given?</i>
4 NOV	SABBATH (TRACEY) <i>Why would God ask us to stop when there's still so much to do?</i>
18 NOV	COMMUNION (JOHN) <i>A meal, a memory, a mystery — and the possibility that something really happens?</i>
2 DEC	WITNESS (GILL) <i>How do you share what you believe without being annoying?</i>
16 DEC	ADVENT (TRACEY) <i>What are we actually waiting for?</i>

SAY HELLO!

-  **When:** 7:30pm–9:45pm (tea & coffee @7:30pm)
-  **Where:** Spital Street Methodist Church (43 Spital St, Dartford DA1 2DX)
-  **Note:** Welcome to any session. Feel free to leave early.
-  **Rev. Rocky Chan** | +44 7863 857441 (WhatsApp)



Reflections from sabbatical



Between June and September, I had the enormous privilege of being on sabbatical. Once every seven years, Methodist ministers are granted three months off work, to rest, to recharge, and to do something that will enrich our ministry when we return (lucky us!).

The idea of sabbaticals is firmly grounded in Scripture. In Genesis, when the Bible describes the creation of the heavens and the earth, we see God choosing to rest after six days of activity, setting a precedent for a rhythm of work and rest. Then, repeated throughout the Old Testament, including in the Ten Commandments, is the command to keep one day a week holy, and not to do any work - the idea of 'sabbath.' Sabbaticals are also tied to the sabbatical year described in Leviticus 25, where every seventh year the land was allowed to rest, with no sowing or reaping. These patterns teach that human beings, communities, and even creation itself are not designed for endless productivity.

Well in advance of a sabbatical, ministers are asked to submit a prospectus to the district outlining our plans. I decided not to set any particularly lofty aims, as I'd

To be sung to the tune of
'The Twelve Days of Christmas':

*In the twelve weeks
of sabbatical
the Connexion gave to me...
nine nights a-camping;
four days as a pilgrim;
three types of ciabatta;
sign language lessons;
walks in the Peak District;
muddy books at Greenbelt;
Nine whole books!
Time with my girls;
swimming in a lake;
coffee with my friends;
and a whole bunch of
Danish pastries.*

discovered that gaining two children and an extra church since arriving in North Kent means that life is enriching, rewarding, and utterly exhausting. Instead, I prioritised rest and spending time with God, with my husband Luke, and with our two young daughters. Thankfully, the district was very supportive of these aims.

You'll find some of the highlights from my time away in the song above. As a family, we went on holiday to Tenerife (where we went stargazing and whale-watching - although my eldest daughter's fondest memory is of an outing that went horribly wrong, on which she was car sick in her hat). We got muddy at Greenbelt festival, and visited family in Wales and the Peak District. I fulfilled a long-held ambition of undertaking two baking workshops at the Bread of Life Christian coffee shop and bakery in Strood - highly recommended! I'm delighted to say that I can now make





ciabatta and Danish pastries – but, sadly, I discovered that they take an awfully long time to make, so I've had to apologise for not turning up to meetings laden with baked goods. I brushed up on my British Sign Language, and finally finished some of the books on my reading pile.

One of my highlights was walking St Hilda's Way from Danby to Whitby early in September. I'd walked the same pilgrimage in 2019, as I prepared to begin my ministry as a probationer. Back then, I used the time to pray for all the people in North Kent whom I hadn't yet met. This time, it was a privilege to spend the time praying for all the people in the churches I serve by name. It reminded me how much I love my job, and helped me return to the busyness of ministry with a heart full of love.

Rev Naomi Oates



International service at Tonbridge Road



Over recent months and years, the congregation at Tonbridge Road has become increasingly culturally diverse. We wanted to ensure that this was reflected in every aspect of our life together as a church, and especially our worship. So on Sunday 7 June, we decided to hold an 'international service,' led by 10 members of the congregation, in which we invited people to share songs, traditions, and reflections from their own cultural context.

It was an overwhelmingly joyful morning! The service included hymns in Siswati, Xhosa and Igbo; prayers in a variety of languages; worship music from Jamaica; and prayers using an inflatable globe. We listened to Revelation 7:9-12 read by one of our younger members (who then recited the names of every book in the Bible from memory!) and reflected together on this rich, multicoloured, multilingual image of life in the

kingdom of heaven. Our service was a tiny foretaste of that vision, where 'a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, will stand before the throne and worship Jesus.' We talked about some of the challenges facing British society today, and the protests that respond to our multicultural context with fear and hatred. We proclaimed that the Holy Spirit celebrates diversity, and transcends cultural barriers to help us share the stories of Jesus with gentleness and with respect.

One of the highlights of the service - unusually for me - was the offering. Members from Ghana and Nigeria showed us how to dance the offering to the front, accompanied by worship music, as an act of praise and thanksgiving. It was wonderful to see the rest of the congregation joining in (admittedly, the minister's dancing wasn't up to much).



People were encouraged to wear outfits from their particular cultural context, and the church was far more colourful than usual! After the service, we had a bring-and-share meal, and people brought a huge range of dishes - jollof rice rubbed shoulders with bara brith, and plantain chips with Kentish apple pie. A few newcomers joined us for the first time that day - and what a wonderful image of life at Tonbridge Road Methodist Church we were able to offer!

I am so grateful to everyone who took part in leading the service. We hope that it won't just be a one-off - in fact, at our recent Harvest service, the packets of pasta and tins of beans were once again danced to the front, accompanied by worship music.

Rev Naomi Oates



God is always at work

"My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working." John 5:17



This summer holiday we once again learned that God is always at work and this time we realised that he is indeed working even when we are on holiday. I would like to share a joy about how my two daughters got baptised.

We went to Slovakia for our summer holiday and it was a very special one this year as we somehow managed to be there all at the same time. There were six of us, and three of our children are adults so to get us all in one place and time is unique. As always, we spent half of the time in my home town Sereď and a good portion of time in the mountains. Our favourite destination is in central Slovakia - a place called Stare Hory. It is beautiful there, and its history inspired us to use our imaginations, as this was the place where gold and silver were mined, rich communities lived here and a lot of fighting took place. Some mountains are tunnelled through and through, and on the surface you can find remnants of medieval aqueduct systems to power the lifts and ventilation in the deep shafts. And as that was so long ago, the woods and wild took over and covered these ancient walls and marks, so it looks even more mysterious. The time in the mountains is ours, we do what we like and when we choose.

The time we spent in our home town was family time, filled with visiting, shopping and eating ice-cream, which



is also great but requires more civilised behaviour. It was Saturday and I began to think about Sunday. I was thinking about going to church, and to be honest I was looking for an excuse not to go. Walking into my home church where I grew up and where I brought my family while living in Slovakia is not an easy task. It is always emotional, and we are always asked to "tell us something," meaning a message, testimony or a prolonged greeting. So I was thinking about how to excuse myself and justify not going at all. Later in the day, we went to the town to have some ice-cream and, as it happens,



I met some people from the church. So we had a little chat and I knew what was going to happen before we departed: "See you tomorrow in the church." That was it - all my excuses melted down and all six of us marched to the church on Sunday morning. I was still very reluctant and unwilling.

But God had a plan for us that Sunday. It was a baptism service and there were seven people to be baptised by full immersion. There were beautiful testimonies of people committing their lives to Jesus. The pool was in the churchyard, so when it came to the actual baptism the whole congregation gathered outside and the minister walked into the pool. All seven candidates took turns and went under and when the whole group was done, the preacher called on the congregation: "Is there anyone else who wants to be baptised?" One lady raised her hand and then I saw my eldest daughter joining in too! As the two of them were baptised, the minister somehow did not want to end this soul-washing exercise and called again: "Anyone else feel the call? I will count to three." Very slowly he counted and no one responded. So he stopped, looked around, and pointed his finger into the crowd. And that was it: our second daughter walked in, tears and smiles because she really meant it. As it was, neither of the girls had any clothes to get changed, so we walked home soaking wet but blessed. It is a great joy to see your own children worshiping God, listening to the message and responding so bravely to his call.

Rev Robert Zachar

North Kent Circuit

Preaching Plan December 2026 – February 2027

		DECEMBER				JANUARY					FEBRUARY			
		6	13	20	27	3	10	17	24	31	7	14	21	28
		Advent 2	Advent 3	Advent 4								Lent 1	Lent 2	Lent 3
BEARSTED	10.30	READ <i>hc</i>	WEST	ZACHAR <i>6.30pm c</i>	NO SERVICE	LA	ZACHAR <i>cov</i>	READ	LA	US @ S'BOURNE	WEST	ZACHAR <i>hc</i>	LA	SHEPHERD
CHINESE	13.30	CHAN <i>hc</i>	NG	CHAN	CHU	CHAN <i>hc cov</i>	SZETO	CHAN	LA <i>Family Service</i>	CHU	CHAN <i>hc</i>	LA	CHAN	SOON NGUANG
DENE HOLM	11.00	TERRETT <i>cc</i>	HUDSON-BEDDOWS	S SMITH	US @ GRAVESEND	LA	BURCH	LA	HUDSON-BEDDOWS	TERRETT <i>cov</i>	LA	WALDOCK	HOPKINS	TERRETT <i>hc</i>
ECCLES	10.30	10.30am LA 3.00pm OATES <i>Christingle</i>	ROWE	OATES <i>hc</i>	DOWNES	WILDING	LA	HARRIS	OATES <i>hc cov</i>	LA	NEWELL	GALLAGHER	LA	OATES <i>hc</i>
GRAVESEND	11.00	S SMITH	BURCH	TERRETT <i>cc</i>	TERRETT <i>us Big Sing</i>	TERRETT <i>cov</i>	HUDSON-BEDDOWS	LA	S SMITH	LA	TERRETT <i>hc</i>	S SMITH	LA	WALDOCK
HARTLIP	18.30	SELMES <i>hc</i>	SELMES <i>c</i>	10-30am LA <i>Members c</i>	NO SERVICE	GERMAN	SELMES <i>hc cov</i>	LA	GERMAN	SELMES <i>us</i> <i>with St. Michaels</i> <i>@ Hartlip</i>	GERMAN	SELMES <i>hc</i>	LA	GALLAGHER
HEXTABLE	10.30	LA <i>Toy Service</i>	OATES <i>ss Nativity</i>	4pm OATES <i>Christingle</i>	US @ GRAVESEND	LA	9am bc LA 10.30am OATES <i>hc cov</i>	ROWE	WALDOCK	WATTON	LA	9am bc LA 10.30am OATES <i>hc</i>	ROWE	LA
HOLY TRINITY	10.00	ANGLICAN <i>@ St. David's</i> <i>hc</i>	ANGLICAN <i>@ St. Williams</i> <i>mw</i>	ANGLICAN <i>@ St. Albans</i> <i>hc</i>	ANGLICAN <i>@ St. David's</i> <i>mw</i>	ANGLICAN <i>@ St. Williams</i> <i>hc</i>	ANGLICAN <i>@ St. Albans</i> <i>cov</i>	ANGLICAN <i>@ St. David's</i> <i>mw aa</i>	ANGLICAN <i>@ St. Williams</i> <i>hc</i>	ANGLICAN <i>@ St. Albans</i> <i>hc</i>	ANGLICAN <i>@ St. David's</i> <i>mw</i>	ANGLICAN <i>@ St. Williams</i> <i>hc</i>	ROBB <i>@ St. Albans</i> <i>mw</i>	ANGLICAN <i>@ St. David's</i> <i>hc</i>
HOPE STREET	10.30	GAMBELL	LEMASONRY <i>c</i>	THOMPSON	LEMASONRY	LEMASONRY	THOMPSON	LEMASONRY	ZACHAR <i>cov</i>	CASSELL	LEMASONRY	THOMPSON	LEMASONRY <i>hc</i>	ZACHAR <i>hc</i>
KINGSWOOD	11.00	LA <i>Café</i>	LA <i>Christmas Story</i>	6pm LA <i>Christingle</i>	NO SERVICE	LA <i>Café</i>	WATTON <i>mw</i>	BAPTIST <i>mw</i>	ANGLICAN <i>mw</i>	NO SERVICE	LA <i>Café</i>	LA <i>mw</i>	LA <i>mw</i>	ANGLICAN <i>hc</i>
LARKFIELD	10.00	9am bc 10.30am OATES <i>hc</i>	KICHENSIDE	WILDING <i>c</i>	LA	9am bc 10.30am OATES <i>hc cov</i>	SHEPHERD	NEWELL	LA	OATES <i>hc</i> <i>us with</i> <i>Anglicans</i>	9am bc 10.30am WILLING	LA	DOWNES	WILDING
	Café 15.00		Lark'd - Wilding Burham - Rawlins/Oates <i>hc</i>				LARKFIELD WILDING	BURHAM RAWLINS/ OATES				LARKFIELD WILDING	BURHAM RAWLINS/ OATES	
NEWINGTON	9.30	ZACHAR <i>cov</i>	SKIPP	M SMITH <i>c</i>	ADOFO <i>us</i>	LA	DOWNES	ZACHAR <i>us hc @</i> <i>St. Mary's</i>	LA	US @ S'BOURNE	LA	SKIPP	ZACHAR <i>hc</i>	M SMITH
PENINSULA STROOD	10.30	STUNELL	SELMES	LA	ROBB <i>us</i>	TERRETT	LA <i>aa</i>	LA	SELMES <i>hc cov</i>	TROTT	STUNELL	LA <i>aa</i>	WATTON	SELMES <i>hc</i>
ST. LUKE'S	10.00	M SMITH	LA <i>Gift Service</i>	SELMES <i>c</i>	US @ STROOD	TROTT	SELMES <i>hc cov</i>	LA	GALLAGHER	HARRIS	ADOFO	SELMES <i>hc</i>	LA	HUDSON-BEDDOWS
SITTINGBOURNE	10.30	ADOFO	LA	ZACHAR <i>aa c</i>	US @ NEWINGTON	ZACHAR <i>cov</i>	SKIPP	ADOFO	LA	ZACHAR <i>us</i>	ZACHAR <i>hc</i>	LA	ADOFO	LA
SPITAL STREET	10.30	G GRAY <i>Scouts Anni</i>	CHAN <i>aa Brownies</i>	G GRAY <i>c</i>	HUDSON-BEDDOWS	LA	CHAN <i>cov</i>	LA	CHAN	LA	G GRAY	HUDSON-BEDDOWS	BURCH	CHAN <i>hc</i>
STOKE	18.30	LA	ROBB	LA	LA	LA	ROBB <i>Remembering</i>	LA	STUNELL	LA	LA	LA	LA	LA
THE BRENT	10.30	LA <i>Toy Service</i>	TERRETT <i>cc</i>	LA <i>c</i>	US @ GRAVESEND	LA	S SMITH	G GRAY	TERRETT <i>cov</i>	LA	HOPKINS	LA	TERRETT <i>hc</i>	HUDSON-BEDDOWS
THIRD AVENUE	10.30	SELMES	LA <i>aa Nativity</i>	SELMES <i>6.30pm c</i>	NO SERVICE	SELMES <i>hc cov</i>	STUNELL	SELMES	WILLING	SELMES	SELMES <i>hc</i>	LA	SELMES <i>aa Thinking</i>	HARRIS
TONBRIDGE RD	10.30	NEWELL	LA <i>Nativity</i>	10.30am LA 6.00pm OATES <i>c</i>	SHEPHERD	WEST	LA	OATES <i>hc cov</i>	WILDING	SHEPHERD	OATES <i>hc</i>	LA	READ	WEST
UNION STREET	10.30	AT WEEK ST.	ZACHAR @ WEEK ST.	AT WEEK ST.	AT WEEK ST.	AT WEEK ST.	AT WEEK ST.	AT WEEK ST.	AT WEEK ST.	AT WEEK ST.	AT WEEK ST.	TERRET @ WEEK ST.	AT WEEK ST.	AT WEEK ST.
ONLINE SERVICES	10.30	CHAN	WALDOCK	ZACHAR	ARCHIVE SERVICE	HUDSON-BEDDOWS	WALDOCK	HEXTABLE	THIRD AVE	ZACHAR	OATES	WALDOCK	HEXTABLE	THIRD AVE

*aa All-age / bc Breakfast Church / c Carols / cc Christmas Celebrations / cov Covenant
hc Holy Communion / mw Morning Worship / us United Service*

For the Spring issue: Please send contributions as a Word document, no longer than 500 words, to naomi.oates@methodist.org.uk to arrive by 20th December 2026. If you can, please attach a suitable high quality image, but do not embed it in a document.