



Circuit Exchange

Quarterly Newsletter
of the
Wantage and Abingdon Methodist Circuit

September - November 2017



From the Manse in Wantage...

A happy New Year to you all!

September 1st marks the beginning of another 12 months of our travelling together as Methodists in this part of God's world.

The year ahead will be one of challenges and of opportunities as we continue to seek and discern God's will for us as a Circuit, as churches and as individuals.

It so happens that our thinking as a Circuit Leadership Team coincides with much that came to Methodist Conference this year and the subsequent challenge from Conference to us all.

At the September Circuit Meeting, we will be asking all of our churches to look closely at what they do, who they are, their priorities and where they see themselves in the next three to five years. We will be requesting them to fully engage with all who go to make up their church communities and to report back to the CLT with their findings and proposals by the end of June 2018.

The CLT has already started on that very same process for the Circuit as a whole with an away day which began the task of seeking to plan for long-term, viable ministry and to look at new and innovative ways of being and doing church in an age that is so

very different to that in which our churches were founded and built.

In parallel, the same challenge comes to us from the Methodist Conference who recently encouraged every Church Council to annually address and answer the question '*do you have a growth plan or an end of life plan?*' This is in the light of the report that the Methodist Church in Britain had a 3.5% year-on-year decline in membership over the past decade, with membership now at 188,000.

"What are the challenges and changes facing our community? What is each church and circuit's plan for responding to the urgent call on the Methodist people to share the love of God in Jesus Christ in word and action? How might we listen more carefully to the promptings of the Spirit, day by day?" is what they are asking of us.

The Methodist Conference also adopted Notice of Motion 2017/209, recognising "*the challenges and changes facing every community in these islands and the urgent call of God on the Methodist people to share the love of God in Jesus Christ in word and action.*" The Conference therefore called on every local church to launch the new Methodist year with a day of prayer and fasting.

Rather than simply have a one-off focus on prayer and fasting, the CLT strongly encourages everyone to use Friday as a day of prayer for our Circuit, for their church and for themselves during the whole of this Methodist year. Also, if they are able, to miss one meal that day as a way of expressing the discipline of prayer and fasting.

More details and suggestions can be found at <http://www.methodist.org.uk/prayer-and-worship/a-day-of-prayer-and-fasting>

As a Circuit we will be providing copies of the booklet “Day by Day – prayers for a spiritual ‘five-a-day’” for all church members as a resource to help them.

These are exciting times in the midst of the challenges of this age.

Let us therefore be bold, imaginative and fearless as we work out what is important and seek to respond to the world in which we live!

With love and God Bless,

Keith

Sale of Blewbury, Upton and Southmoor

Progress continues on all three chapels. Our coffers have been swelled by our share of the proceeds of the Southmoor sale. The best offer received for Upton was from the Plymouth Brethren, which we are obliged to accept despite the preferences of villagers, as it is so much higher than the nearest other offer. We expect contracts to be exchanged as soon as the Connexion approve it. Planning permission has been granted at Blewbury following a resolution to the boundary dispute, so this too will be on the market once the legal niceties are complete.

Thanks and congratulations are due to Mary Hancock for her persistence against all opposition in this task.

Anna Chaplaincy

Since moving to Wantage last August, many of you have been asking Keith about Anna Chaplaincy and wondering what it might look like here in our churches and Circuit.

We are delighted to be able to invite you to a special event to be held in Wantage Methodist Church on Saturday 30th September from 10:00am-3:00pm

The day will be led by former broadcaster Debbie Thrower, the very first Anna Chaplain who now leads the BRF initiative, 'The Gift of Years - resourcing ministry among those rich in age and experience'

Changing demographics mean there are growing numbers of people living in to their 80s, 90s and beyond. Responding to the phenomenon of longer life is a challenge for the ageing individual, for churches, and the towns and villages they serve.

This day unpacks the practical Anna Chaplaincy* approach to supporting older people and promoting well-being in old age.

It opens eyes to the possibilities of forging partnerships within communities, inspiring and equipping volunteers, creating 'church' where people are – whether they live alone, in sheltered homes, care homes or retirement complexes.

'Older People Matter'

'It's about embodying the love of God for people at every age and stage of their lives; countering anxieties about ageing and the prevailing attitude that getting old is almost a crime, and definitely 'downhill all the way'' says Debbie. 'Far from becoming invisible as we age we should be cherishing our older generations. Anna Chaplaincy is like planting a flag in town that reads 'older people matter.''

Debbie leads The Gift of Years programme to ‘resource the spiritual journey of older people’ for The Bible Reading Fellowship, BRF. She outlines a variety of community-based ways of building mission and ministry among older people and explore strategies to celebrate the contributions of people in the second half of life, while never under-estimating the reality of growing older in the 21st century and the fears associated with dementia.

This is a day to help lay people and ministers alike see valuing age as a desirable necessity, to give them tools to respond to the unprecedented changes. In twenty years’ there will be double the number of people over the age of 85, in thirty years’ nearly treble the number there are now.

Looking after ‘orphans and widows’ is a Biblical imperative, so the day includes some gentle reflection on the missional impetus for working among older women and men - whether they have strong, little, or no faith at all- as well as offering plenty of practical advice.

*The name Anna is taken from the widow Anna who appears with Simeon in St Luke’s gospel.

***Debbie Thrower** helped pioneer the ecumenical Anna Chaplaincy model from 2010 in Alton, Hampshire with Circuit Superintendent the Revd Keith Underhill. Together they’ve seen the network of Anna Chaplains and those engaged in similar ministry stretch across the UK. Debbie remains an Anna Chaplain in Alton, part-time, and is a licensed lay minister, a lay canon and was, for many years, broadcasting for the BBC and ITV. You may remember her reading the news and presenting ‘Songs of Praise,’ but before you ask... she’s NOT related to Percy Thrower!*

To help us in our planning, please book your free place and register with keith.underhill@methodist.org.uk

Website

Work is underway on our new website at ThenMedia, who delivered Wantage's new site – see www.wantagemethodist.org.uk

Our aim is that people accessing the site from outside the circuit find it welcoming and can easily navigate it and find out about our circuit and its churches, and that people within the circuit can use it to find or disseminate information.

The relaxed approach of ThenMedia to the contract means we expect to have a basic version of the site for people to inspect in early September. This prototype site, which will share elements of the “look and feel” of the Wantage site, will allow us to fine-tune the aesthetics whilst continuing to add content and features – which we can continue to do, even after the site is officially launched.

Each church will have an entry on the Circuit site. These can link to a church's existing website, or be a self-contained “online poster” which requires minimum maintenance, or can be a “site within a site” with the same look and feel, but with a church's own menu and pages for news items, photos, forthcoming events etcetera. There will be user-friendly tools to enable people with minimal skills to update these pages, or material can be emailed to a Circuit Webmaster to be uploaded.

There will also be a Calendar, like the existing Circuit calendar but with entries for individual churches too; and behind the scenes, accessible to those who sign-in, will be the data currently held in the online Circuit Directory.

<http://dappleshire.chrestos.co.uk> is a demo website maintained by ThenMedia for a fictitious Circuit. Most of the Dappleshire churches have a simple page, but Privett Street has its own menu and mini-site. Have a look!

Safeguarding – further training sessions

Over a hundred people have now attended the Refresher Course for Creating Safer Space; at least one further session will be needed. If you are aware that you or other post-holders in your church missed the sessions, please contact Keith Underhill who will be making the arrangements. New postholders will need the full Creating Safer Space training which will be run as the need arises.

New recruit to Circuit Steward team

Our three remaining Circuit Stewards were heartened to hear that Carolyn Roche, from Wantage, has offered to serve. She will be easing into the role as she finishes her term as Senior Steward at Wantage.

This is good news – but Andrew is expecting to move away during 2018, and Mary Hancock is into “extra time” having agreed to extend her term until summer 2018, so we still need new blood to join the team. Our vision is of someone representing each of the larger churches – with a team of six, no-one's share would be unbearably large.

Please pray about this situation, and don't assume someone more suitable will step forward! There is scope to redefine the task if people are deterred by the commitment; but everyone who has been a Circuit Steward agrees that it is a fascinating and richly rewarding thing to do.

To find out more, talk to your minister or to one of the current team: ***Andrew Lockley (Senior)***

Mary Hancock

Alan Smith

Carolyn Roche

Stationing – seeking a replacement for Katherine

Whilst Rev. Katherine Pickering is still very much with us and making her mark in so many ways, she is preparing to move on, and we are also preparing to participate in the Stationing process in the hope that we will be matched with a Presbyter to replace her next September.

This is a carefully timetabled process. At present our Invitations Committee, which has members from each church, is compiling a Profile – a description of the Circuit and the role the new presbyter would fill here, of the churches, the local transport links and the manse – all in two sides of A4. This document has been submitted in draft form to Rev. Helen Cameron, now in her new post as Chair of the Northampton District, and the district lay stationing representatives. At a constructive and encouraging meeting at the District office in Northampton, Andrew and Alan as Circuit Stewards discussed it with Helen. We came away with a few suggested improvements, and she went away with a clearer picture of our needs and aspirations. We both feel she will be strongly seeking the best match possible for us in October, when the initial matches are made. The Invitations Committee will meet again in October to consider the profiles of the available Presbyters, and we hope we will be inviting a matched Presbyter to visit the circuit, particularly Didcot, Milton and Wallingford, early in November.

Month of Prayer, November 2017

World peace

Since I have become Overseas Mission Secretary I have initiated a Month of Prayer, each November, when those leading services are asked to include prayer along a particular theme in the intercessions. In 2015 this was for Syria, in 2016 – Reconciliation following Brexit. This year's Month of Prayer is dedicated to World Peace.

Most of the locations in the World where suffering through drought and famine is worst are places of conflict and are because of conflict. We are in a privileged position as Ambassadors of Christ to bring God's peace to a troubled world. I believe we can best start this task by praying together.

Prayers

5th November

We pray as a Circuit for a peaceful resolution to the conflict between the USA and North Korea. Christ came to us in innocence and goodwill. We pray that the men of power will listen to Him and keep to-mind the responsibilities they have to protect innocent lives and promote peace.

12th November, Remembrance Sunday

We pray as a Circuit for world leaders, that they put into practice the hardwon lessons that mutual understanding and tolerance are infinitely preferable to conflict. We remember the cost of war to our Country, paid in lives maimed and lost and pray that if possible, such sacrifice is not needed again.

19th November

We pray as a Circuit that the world will be a more equitable place. That leaders and the people recognise and seek to strengthen bonds of common humanity throughout the world. We pray that nations continue to work together to tackle injustice such as tax-avoidance by global companies; bring commerce to account over

environmental exploitation and co-operate with measures to reduce climate change.

26th November

We pray as a Circuit that we all recognise that world peace is built on foundations of peace with ourselves, with God and each other and persevering to overcome the obstacles to making peace between

communities, our nation and with other nations.

Mark Sandels, Overseas Mission Secretary

Local Preachers update

Congratulations to Frederick Obeng and Esther Woollgar who have both successfully completed their Local Preacher studies. Esther has also passed her final interview and Frederick is due to have his final interview in the LP Meeting in September. Subject to this and both being approved by the Circuit Meeting, they will be admitted as accredited Local Preachers at the next Circuit Service on 19 November at 6.30pm at Didcot. The service will include Holy Communion.

Message from the Editor of the Childrey , Grove & Wantage Sector Newsletter

Please note that our deadline for material for the Sector Newsletter is normally the third Sunday in the month. It would help if notices being shared around the circuit could be received by this date each month, as they will then reach a wider public and ensure publication as this cannot be guaranteed in the weekly notices. Our email address is : wantage.sector.newsletter@gmail.com

Update on Community Chaplains at Great Western Park

Sarah Ifill and Libby Hawkness-Smith started work on 11th May and are becoming a familiar feature on GWP with their van "Hope" (a small motorhome) proudly decorated with their logo as their mobile base and visible presence.



Many people from across the Circuit and further afield were at Milton for the inspiring service at which the two chaplains were commissioned. The motorhome, which will provide a mobile base for the chaplains, was blessed at the same service. Decorated with very professional logos, "Hope" will be a visible sign of the Chaplains' presence and allegiance as they serve the community and forge links across GWP.

Please pray for Sarah and Libby and those who work with them as they develop their new roles and extend their network of contacts. May they be assured of the prayers and encouragement of everyone in our churches as they seek to serve God in this new and exciting way. Please pray also for Katherine as she pioneers the extra role of line-managing the chaplains, and for the support group who help the team in so many ways.

More news from wider Methodism

If you use email, you can sign-up to a number of newsletters, some more frequent than others, which will keep you up-to-date on other parts of the Connexion.

Go to <http://www.methodist.org.uk/news-and-events/sign-up-for-e-newsletters>

CIRCUIT MEETINGS / EVENTS

Wednesday 13 th September, 7:30pm Wantage	Circuit Meeting
Thursday 14 th September, 8pm All Saints	Local Preachers' Meeting
Saturday 30 th September, 10am Wantage	Anna Chaplaincy awareness event
Sunday 19 th November, 6:30pm Didcot	Circuit Service to include Accreditation of Preachers

Don't forget the Circuit Calendar, with these and other events, can now be viewed on the Circuit website, or the Circuit Directory (<http://groupspaces.com/CctDirectory>). Send items for inclusion to Andrew as below, at any time.

Circuit Exchange is here to link all parts of our Circuit together – let us know what's happening at your church.

Items for December 2017 Circuit Exchange to a.lockley@tiscali.co.uk by 11th November 2017 please.

Wantage & Abingdon Methodist Circuit Churches are

All Saints (Abingdon), Childrey, Didcot, Grove, Milton, Peachcroft Christian Centre (Abingdon), Trinity (Abingdon), Wallingford, Wantage