



The Methodist Church

**THAMES VALLEY
CIRCUIT**



ANNUAL REPORT 2021

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Note: Every year the Circuit produces an Annual Report.

Once every 4 or 5 years, the Annual Report covers *every* church and organisation, etc, in the Circuit. As the content of many of the reports does not change significantly from year to year, in most years the Circuit issues a short Annual Report (such as this in 2021), containing reports from:

- The Superintendent Minister
- The Senior Circuit Steward

and the Circuit Treasurer's report which is circulated to all trustees.

However, we also aim to reflect changes, as they occur, in the relevant section on this website.

The previous detailed annual report covering *every* church and organisation, etc, in the Circuit was that for 2019. To see it, [click on this link](#).

Circuit Superintendent's Report

How to report on a year that hasn't really happened? Not of course that the days have not gone by, or even that we haven't achieved things as a Circuit, but that all the things that one normally reports on have simply not been there. "Stop the World, I want to Get Off!" screamed the title of the Bricusse and Newley musical that premiered in London's West End in 1961. Sixty years later, the world really has stopped, and here we are wondering whether we will ever be able to get back on again.

I missed the teas. There would have been one I suspect, at my welcome service, but Zoomed as it was, I had the opportunity to share with many people and to see their faces close up, with names attached. And although I may occasionally miscall somebody "Samsung Galaxy 26" all the Zooming has been a huge help in learning people's names.

Harvest Suppers across the Circuit were missed, although many of us found alternate ways – perhaps a meal and a Zoom quiz as we did at Windsor – to celebrate, and the missed opportunities for mince pies and mulled punch were replaced inventively at Colnbrook and Poyle by "Cod and Carols" – a combination of fish and chips and solo singing and by carol

concerts and other safe and permissible events across the circuit. The joy of the running club when they heard the singing in the Burnham carpark was worth getting cold for!

And so we continued, each church finding ways of forming community, of looking after each other, of being the Church family. Zoom services brought the whole circuit together and allowed people who had been unable to leave home for some years to re-engage with their church community for worship. Bible studies were easier to manage and the Lent Circuit Bible Study attracted more than 70 people – a good crowd for a Sunday morning in normal times, unheard of for a mid-week Bible Study. The Pastoral Visitors, that band of often unsung heroes, worked tirelessly to ensure that we knew where people were, that they were safe and that they knew we were praying for them. Many of them falling for one reason or another, into categories that the government would recognise as vulnerable, they have carried the love of God into untold numbers of lives via the telephone and the letter box.

The Circuit Staff have been extraordinary in their development of online worship and the tremendous work put in by various churches as they explored ways of using new technology has been tremendous. The ability to live-stream from High Street has been particularly useful and we are all looking forward to picking up on lessons that they have learned through the pioneering of this work, while alternate offerings have seen a more relaxed sharing from manse offices with variety and creativity streaming out across the Circuit. Circuit Staff have sought to move things forward, to explore strategically, to stay in touch pastorally and to offer innovative ways of exploring relationship with God.

There has been grief as well. Much-loved members have died and left us saddened by their loss. I was once at a Circuit Meeting where a list of members was passed round to be signed and someone had died subsequent to the printing of the list. I wrote “Gone to Glory” in the space allocated for apologies. They are not lost; we know where they have gone. But we miss them, we really miss them, and our inability to share in that grief through worship has been hard.

The St Andrew’s Urdu-speaking congregation has ceased to meet as a separate church and has joined the membership of St Andrew’s English-speaking congregation while maintaining a fellowship group. This has been a good outcome, but not without soul-searching and the decision to cease to meet at Old Windsor, unanimous and absolutely the right thing to do, is nevertheless a sadness not just for the members but for all who have experienced their hospitality and worship over the years.

While some societies have ceased to meet, the strategic planning has been about exploring ways forward that will take the Gospel out into the community via a double-decker bus, and this meeting will have the opportunity to discuss a document outlining a study of the feasibility and implementation of this project.

Revd Carmel leaves us at the end of this Connexional year. Her section has thrived in the two years that she has served in the Circuit and it is difficult to put aside our sadness that she is leaving us so early. Home calls to all of us though, and when home is the other side of the world,

it is hard not to heed the call in a time when travel has become so stringently curtailed. It is customary in these times to note that “Our loss is Australia’s gain” and the commonality of such a statement makes it feel banal and somehow inauthentic. Yet it is the truth. Revd Carmel brings so much of the Good News worked out in her own way of living it that she will be both deeply missed by us and greatly welcomed by them. We wish her all the very best as she re-settles in the Antipodes.

On a personal note, my family and I would want to thank the Circuit Stewards for their tremendous welcome and care as we have moved into this new circuit in such strange times. Stewards from the churches for which I have pastoral charge have offered so much friendship and support, as have all the members I have had the opportunity to meet with or speak to. Stewards and members from other churches in the Circuit have been similarly welcoming and warm and it is hard to imagine that I could have been made to feel more welcome, even in normal times. But I miss the teas. I miss the church quiche and Mrs McReady’s famous fruitcake and the lady who sells home-made jam to raise money for Action for Children, and the gentleman who brings in apples and tomatoes from his garden and asks only that we will make a donation to MAF and all the other things that every Circuit seems to have in one way or another. This Circuit will of course be slightly different. Maybe you don’t do quiche at faith lunches and maybe Mrs McReady’s cake is chocolate here and the jams are sold for MHA and the produce for All We Can. But in this strange year where we have missed all of these things, I have realised how precious the church fete, the Saturday morning coffee, the toddler group and the Youth Club are. I have missed the amateur concerts, and the fundraisers and the time spent standing on slightly sore feet while juggling lukewarm coffee and a custard cream and hoping to catch up with as many of the congregation as possible before Sunday morning is over and it’s time to go home.

There is a plan as we move forward and as the country unlocks, and it isn’t just a plan for teas, although those of you who have read the reports will note that they are already cropping up! The Circuit Strategy Plan will doubtless move and change and develop into future iterations as time goes on. It may even end up not looking anything like the current plan but something will be implemented and we will grow: as individuals, as churches and as a Circuit. If we have felt somewhat like Noah, trapped in our houses with nothing but the animals for company, still the rain has stopped, the flood waters are receding, the dove has been sent out and has not yet returned. It is good to see the sun again.

God bless

Vicci

Senior Circuit Steward's Report

At the start of the Connexional year we welcomed Rev'd. Vicci Davidson as our new Superintendent. Her enthusiasm and joy in her role quickly became apparent and we realised she was going to be a great asset to the well-established Staff team. This consisted of Rev'd. Margaret Dudley, Rev'd Anne Ellis, Rev'd Carmel Ieraci and Josh Wilson, Lay Worker, ably supported by Pauline Poole, the Circuit Administrator.

In October, we said farewell to Josh as his contract came to an end after two years of faithful service at the High Street Church in Maidenhead. Fortunately, he keeps in close contact and remains part of the Methodist family there. We are very grateful for all his work at the Church and love it when he and Di, his wife, visit us.

Rev'd Carmel began her Sabbatical in March 2021 and left for Australia to reconnect with her family there and to work in the Wesley Mission in Sydney. Once there, for various personal reasons, Carmel made what she describes as the most difficult decision of her life. That was to curtail her work here and remain in Australia where she could support her family and serve Our Lord in another calling. Sad as it is to lose dear Carmel, we do understand, and she leaves the Circuit with our blessing and thanks. It has been a privilege to work, however briefly, with this loving lady who sets such a fine example of Christian service.

Covid has continued to present many difficulties during the year. We mourn the loss of several faithful servants. Zoom services have been a great blessing in the Circuit, as well as the new adventure of Live Streaming which means we have been able to watch some services on YouTube. All churches are now open for regular worship but remain mindful that Covid is still with us, so care is taken to keep worshippers safe.

The Circuit Lent Bible Study, courtesy of Zoom, was based on The Sound of Music. Who knew such theology was contained in those memorable songs? It proved very popular with 73 screens tuning in at one point.

So, worship, prayer and study have continued despite the difficulties. However, it is with great sadness I report that two of our village churches have made the painful decision to cease to worship during the coming Connexional year. Old Windsor Church will close at the end of September and Eton Wick Church will close after Christmas. Both churches have been blessed with faithful servants over many years. Our prayers of support are with those who serve the Lord there. The St Andrew's Urdu-speaking congregation has also made the difficult decision to cease to meet as a separate congregation and joined the St Andrew's English-speaking congregation. Our prayers are with these dear friends, too.

Local Preachers continue in their calling, and we are very grateful for their commitment and service. Josh Wilson and Mrs Mwadzi Magisa are both 'On Trial' and continuing with their studies. Elijah Kommu has become a Worship Leader – a role also much appreciated in the

Circuit. Rev'd Jon Garde has now taken up an appointment in Scotland as his years of initial study and training have been completed. We wish him and his family every blessing in this new chapter of their lives. We are grateful to Rev'd Andrew Reed, Superintendent of the Staines and Feltham Circuit, who continues to tutor our LPs on Trial, and to David Ridley, LP secretary, who has steered the ship with gentleness and calm over the past few years. David is stepping down from this role, and has our grateful thanks for his commitment. The Circuit holds all these people in its prayers as they continue the work of God.

The following words are taken from my last year's report, but they continue to be so appropriate. 'Safeguarding has continued to be a high priority in this Circuit. We have been ably led by Kathy Rickman, our Circuit Safeguarding Officer, and she has been supported by all the individual Church SG Officers. All the Ministerial Staff have made very clear their commitment to its importance. Although they are on hold at present, thank you to all of you who have attended the Creating Safer Space training courses It shows how seriously the Thames Valley Circuit considers Safeguarding to be.' I can only add the excellent news that Sue Clifford has agreed to shadow Kathy this year, so the SG team goes from strength to strength.

The Circuit Stewards' Team for this Connexional year has been Glenice White (Senior Steward), Joy Brown, Charles Buckman, Keith Machin, Liz Tottingham and Sue Le Page as Treasurer. I wish to say a personal thank you to all the team for their support of me and for all the hard work they do.

Liz Tottingham, who stepped into the breach whilst we looked for another steward, has agreed to continue on a permanent basis. Anne Haggarty is also joining the team, so the new year begins with a full complement. I wish Joy every success next year as she takes over as Senior Steward.

During this year Stewards' responsibilities have been:

Charles - particular care for Rev'd Margaret and her manse, Circuit representative on Hampshire Avenue, Ledgers Road and St Andrew's (Urdu-speaking) Church Councils.

Joy – particular care for Rev'd Vicci and her manse, Circuit representative on Windsor and Burnham Councils.

Keith – particular care for Rev'd Anne and her manse, Circuit representative on St Andrew's (English-speaking) and St Mark's Church Councils.

Liz –Circuit representative on Colnbrook & Poyle Church Council.

Glenice – particular care for Rev'd Carmel and her manse, Circuit representative on Old Windsor, Eton Wick and High Street Church Councils

Sue – Circuit Treasurer and Circuit representative on Eton Wick and Cookham Rise Church Councils.

Once again, with churches being closed for a significant part of the year, income from offertories and premises rental have been considerably reduced. This will have an effect on both local church and circuit finances. Particular thanks go to Sue, who has been monitoring and supporting where help has been needed.

Although this has been yet another year of challenges, it has also been a year of good news. Rev'd Sonia has begun her year as President of Conference, and we look forward to welcoming her back to the circuit for a visit in February of 2022. A Circuit Strategy group has been established. Their role is to be creative and bring their ideas to the Circuit Leadership Team and then, if appropriate, to the Circuit Meeting. Fresh ideas are always welcome in this Circuit! One exciting idea is to purchase a double-decker bus (brightly coloured!) to take our outreach and mission to the surrounding villages. Our support and prayers are needed as this idea is developed.

The Stewards have successfully sold 29 Salt Hill Drive. The funds raised from this sale have enabled us to repay the loan we took out to buy the Sutton Avenue manse. It also leaves a surplus which will be a help to us with our work in mission and outreach.

As 14 Poplars Grove is now vacant, it was decided to rent it out if possible. We are blessed with the arrival in the circuit of Rev'd Dr. Peter Phillips and his wife, Theresa. They will be renting the house until the end of July 2022. Pete is a Methodist minister working for Premier Radio and at Spurgeon's College. He will be helping the presbyteral team by taking some services and Bible studies. God really does move in mysterious ways.

It has been a very difficult, and, at times, frightening, eighteen months. The challenges are not yet over, but we go forward in faith. The Circuit will look different next year but we have pulled together and weathered the storm. With God's help and the leadership of the presbyters, we will continue to serve the Lord and our neighbours with love.

Glenice White

September 2021