



**The Methodist Church**  
**THAMES VALLEY**  
**CIRCUIT**



# **ANNUAL REPORT 2019**

**(for the Church Year 1<sup>st</sup> September 2018  
- 31<sup>st</sup> August 2019)**



Published by the Thames Valley Circuit of the Methodist Church

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**Note:** This 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 contains reports from:

- The Superintendent Minister
- The Senior Circuit Steward

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

Note: The Circuit Treasurer's report is circulated to all trustees.

## Websites

Circuit:	<a href="http://www.methodistthamesvalley.org.uk">www.methodistthamesvalley.org.uk</a>
High Street M'head:	<a href="http://www.methodistmaidenhead.org.uk">www.methodistmaidenhead.org.uk</a>
St Andrew's Slough:	<a href="http://www.methodist-slough-standrews.org.uk">www.methodist-slough-standrews.org.uk</a>
St Mark's Crescent:	<a href="http://www.stmarksmaidenhead.org.uk">www.stmarksmaidenhead.org.uk</a>
Windsor:	<a href="http://www.windsormethodistchurch.org.uk">www.windsormethodistchurch.org.uk</a>

## **Introduction and Overview (Circuit Superintendent's Report)**

This Connexional year has been another year of managing staff shortages and celebrating the lives of hard working and well-loved members of the Circuit who have been called to glory. Funerals are a time to say farewell to God's faithful servants among us, but they also give us time to thank God for fellow travellers of the Way.

Three new members of Staff have joined the team this year. Pastor Joshua Wilson has been working as Lay Pastor at High Street. Josh comes to us from the Pentecostal tradition and has quickly made the Circuit aware that Methodism has many gifts! On Easter Sunday Josh himself became one of these gifts when he took on joint membership.

In May we welcomed Pauline Poole who has become the Circuit Administrator. Pauline has certainly transformed my life and I know that others will soon appreciate her gifts for organisation around the Circuit. In May, we also added Rev Tasawer Samuel to our Circuit Team. Tasawer is employed for a few hours each week specifically to help with the Urdu-speaking members who meet in St. Andrew's Church. Tasawer will use this time to visit lapsed members, to help with governance issues and to lead worship twice a month. Tasawer is primarily employed by the Ealing Trinity Circuit with this Circuit 'buying' additional hours. This is a good example of working connexionally.

Another example of what it means to be a connexional church is having to part with Rev Mindy Bell who is now working as a chaplain at Birmingham University. Mindy and her family left the Circuit officially in April although Mindy began that role in January. The Circuit Farewell Service was held in March and the preacher was Rev Jen Smith, who is the Superintendent at City Road.

In terms of staffing, the Circuit has been supported by Rev Julie Underwood at St Mark's. We thank Julie for her friendship, humour and

guidance over the past two years and wish her well as our formal relationship comes to a close. We have also had valued support from Rev Richard Cattley, an Anglican priest, who retired to Maidenhead and has been assisting with Communion services on our Plan. We continue to benefit from the presence of Dr Malcolm White, a supernumerary minister in this Circuit. We look forward to two new members of staff joining us in September and to fresh impetus for the work of God among us.

For the second time, the proposed re-alignment with the Staines & Feltham Circuit has been postponed. However, we continue to work together in terms of running the Circuit Training Day. The Thames Valley Circuit is grateful that Rev. Andrew Reed, Superintendent in the Staines & Feltham Circuit, has generously agreed to be the tutor for the Local Preachers on Trial here.

This year, Rev Margaret Dudley took a sabbatical from mid-February to mid-May. Margaret has already been sharing with different groups around the Circuit something of what she did during this time.

I would like to end by thanking all the office holders, both in terms of Circuit and local Churches. Over the last year, I have greatly appreciated your friendship, your prayers and your love.

Sonia Hicks, August 2019

## **Ministers**

### **Rev Sonia Hicks**

Due to the current staff shortages, as well as being Superintendent, I am also the minister in Pastoral Charge for St Andrew's Urdu-speaking Church, Woodlands Park, St. Mark's, High St Maidenhead, Cookham Rise, Burnham and Ledgers Road churches. I am grateful for the support of Deacon Andy Packer, Rev Julie Underwood and Pastor Joshua Wilson

who have assisted me in the Maidenhead sector. I am also grateful to the church stewards who have taken on additional work at this time.

I continue to cherish being part of a multi-ethnic Circuit. It is great to be part of such a diverse community. Not many ministers could boast of living in Slough and yet being in close proximity to Windsor Castle, the River Thames and Cookham Moor!

This year, Conrad, my husband, became Director of Global Relationships which has meant commuting into London. Nathan has continued living and working in London, where he is a Cover Supervisor in a primary school. Olivia is in the final year of her PhD in Dundee. She hopes to complete it by the beginning of next year. Meanwhile, Nyasha is enjoying teaching French in a Birmingham secondary school.

### **Rev Margaret Dudley**

It will come as no surprise to most that the subject of my report is the “sabbatical” which took place between February and May this year. It involved two projects – one short and one long. Both these courses were distance learning and therefore I could be flexible as to where and when I completed them, so I opted to go to Malta. So, six suitcases in hand, I set off with clothes, paints, canvases, Greek texts, theological reference books and much more.

Whilst I was away a new kitchen was fitted in my manse thanks to the hard work of Glenice White and Joy Brown. I finished clearing the kitchen at 3.10 am on the 16th and left the country a few hours later. The repairs were completed, the extra problems that arose solved, and all the work carried out in time for my return. I am extremely grateful for all Joy and Glenice did as they worked very hard and supervised the workers doing an excellent job.

In Malta I spent a few days sleeping and relaxing before study commenced. In addition I visited a local monastery (we would call this a

convent) and debated the idea of women as priests with the Mother Superior (in Malta called Madre). She was an amazing woman – one of the most gracious, generous ladies I have ever met. I found our discussion stimulating and we covered ground she had never considered. This was an inspiring time and I am continuing my links with the community. I had hoped to be able to talk to the community as a whole but I think Madre thought I was a little too revolutionary for the sisters.

As part of the whole I was due to spend two weeks on Silent Retreat in France, but this changed due to work being done on my manse, so the retreat also happened in Malta. The short study, done on Silent Retreat, involved the exploration of both Epistles to the Thessalonians. It included Greek translation, exegesis, sermon preparation and general textual study. It was designed to take two weeks, but I am very slow at Greek translation, so it took me longer. I enjoyed the study and look forward to using some of what I learned in Bible studies and services in the future.

The main project of my sabbatical was prayerful painting, which included a full day art course in September, a theological study and actual art projects during the sabbatical. My aim was to develop beyond always resorting to “walking the dog” (happy to explain what this means, just ask next time you see me) every time I painted but as I did not have the skills to do this, hence the art lessons. Every day of the sabbatical, including the silent retreat, I painted prayerfully, and I have lots of completed canvases and paper pictures for use in the talks I have been invited to give (5 so far). The study included several different aspects including an exploration of creative prayer, what the Bible says about prayer, how prayer enhances our faith journey, as well as looking at specific passages including resurrection, the armour of God and Jesus’ prayer journey through his ministry. Only three of the finished paintings are examples of “walking the dog” so I achieved my goal as all the other paintings utilised what I learnt on the art course. On my return to the UK I spent a day with Stephen Skinner who originally introduced me to

the concept of Prayerful Painting more than a decade ago. Talking to someone who is a skilled practitioner of PP and reflecting on the experience was a brilliant end to the project. Well – not exactly an end as some canvases were only part finished, mainly due to drying time, and I have continued working on them since.

I enjoyed both aspects of the study but doing both was a mistake and I should have continued to keep Thessalonians for a Silent Retreat during the normal year pattern. The sabbatical was eye opening in more ways than I can record here but I succeeded beyond my expectations. Flying home was in some ways hard and in others eagerly anticipated. All in all, calling a sabbatical a gift from the church is somewhat accurate but an inadequate description for the things I learnt, experienced, loved and which I have loved sharing with those who have asked to see and hear.

### **Deacon Andy Packer**

As I write I'm just about to start my eighth, and final year, in the Thames Valley Circuit. It is amazing how quickly those years have flown by with all the changes and 'comings and goings' of colleagues.

In the past year I have had more care of the churches at Woodlands Park, Hampshire Avenue, St Andrew's and Windsor while Margaret was on her sabbatical. It was a pleasure to get to know those churches more closely. I've become more aware over the last couple of years of some of the challenges each church has to face: Indeed, all have both challenges and opportunities. Whether you see the glass as half full or half empty is influenced by our faith and our experience.

During the year most things have stayed as they are but there have been some changes. Chalvey Residents Forum continues to meet, as does the Slough North Action Project or 'S.N.A.P.' The Slough Faith Partnership struggles on and I still attend the 'Keeping Slough Safe: Police & Community Consultation Group', but it is meeting less often at the moment. Like the other groups, I have attended these less than I would

have done due to staffing levels.

I have lost contact with the YMCA as the replacement workers whom I met briefly, have all moved on.

I still have regular contact with the TeenyBoppers Pre-school at Ledgers Road, who were graded as 'Excellent' in their recent Ofsted.

The Men's Breakfast Fellowship which was set up in response to "Alive in Slough", meets on the first Saturday of the month at 8 am. It is an opportunity for men from the Slough churches to come together to pray, share fellowship and have breakfast together. All men welcome!

The Circuit Men's Walking Group or the "Thames Valley Journeymen" (TVJ) as we call ourselves, continues to meet on alternate months. We meet at 10.30, walk for 4-6 miles, then have lunch at a suitable pub. The group varies from three to ten with our peak of fifteen!

The Slough Teens Groups, which has now been rebranded as the Teens and Young Adults Group (T.A.Y.A.G.), for obvious reasons, has had some great discussions on our faith as we have worked through The Bible Course, from 'the Bible Society'. If you're looking for a video-based resource for a Bible Study on the whole of the Bible, I recommend it.

For me, ministry has always been about going to where the need is the greatest. (I think John Wesley said something similar ?!) This rarely seems to work in Methodism as usually the greatest areas of need are in areas where they can least afford the extra costs of ministry.

However, in the end, ministry is the responsibility of all of us and I'm grateful to all the lay people who have faithfully supported my ministry and that of the wider circuit year by year. Please keep up the great work you're doing and continue to 'serve the present age' with all its challenges and opportunities.

God bless you all. Andy

## **Supernumerary Ministers**

### **Rev Dr Malcolm White**

I take five Services on the Circuit Plan a quarter and generally, if I can fit it in, any other request that comes my way.

I have mentored Josh Wilson, the Lay Pastor at High Street, meeting with him once a month.

At Windsor Methodist Church where I worship, I lead the Bible Studies during the Autumn and early Spring, followed by the Lent Studies. I take Holy Communion to the House bound and those in residential or nursing Care Homes.

During Margaret Dudley's Sabbatical I worked with Andy Packer covering the Pastoral needs of Windsor Church, and other matters as they arose.

## **Churches**

### **Burnham**

Membership: 12

During the past year, Eileen Weekes, a faithful adherent of the Church, died. She became very frail, and eventually lost the battle. She is much missed.

Our Sunday congregations are still low, sometimes struggling to reach double figures. However, we have been encouraged by the regular attendance of 2 new friends – one of whom has been coming to The Meeting Place for some time. We are always ready to welcome children on Sunday morning. At present we just occasionally see the children from one family.

We continue to visit the local Primary School regularly to present “Open the Book”. This is well received by staff and students. The Tuesday Toddler Group attracts very good numbers. There is a theme each week based on a Bible story, acted out with songs where possible.

Although the Alpha Course finished earlier in the year, a number of participants meet for breakfast and a time of fellowship.

Our new front doors allow more light into the porch and the worship area. The community rooms are well used by local groups and we very much welcome their presence. The Cameo lunch club has grown and it is good that we now have a cross-over between Cameo members and those who attend The Meeting Place.

The Friday Bible Study, led by Revd Sonia has proved to be helpful, challenging and instructive. We have been much encouraged in our Christian life.

Another fairly new innovation is Lent Rise Ladies Supper Club, which meets approximately every two months. This is a very pleasant opportunity to have a relaxing social evening.

On alternate Sunday afternoons a number of enthusiasts, led by two of our members, meet for table tennis in the main hall. The fellowship, as much as the exercise, is enjoyed.

Music – a pre-recording system has been put in place for when our organist is not available. However, we do miss the help of YoungKee, the gifted pianist who helped us out from time to time.

The Meeting Place (Wednesday mornings) is in very good heart with numbers continuing to grow. It is regarded in the community and further afield as a very welcoming and happy centre for good fellowship and charitable activities.

Hilary Evans

## Colnbrook and Poyle United Church

Membership: 10

The past 17 months have been a challenging time for our church. The time has been overshadowed by death and bereavement which has both challenged and changed our church family. During this period, we have supported one another and have grown through our grief to embrace forthcoming challenges. We have not been alone. St Thomas' also faced the challenge of an interregnum which ended in February this year.

We have continued to open our doors to the community on the first Tuesday of the month and have enjoyed a varied programme including inputs from circuit staff, members of our church, local preachers and even a representative of the fire brigade. We have heard a very interesting, illustrated talk from Margaret about her recent sabbatical and we are hoping to hear from a member of the Muslim community about the challenges they face at this time. Our fellowship numbers vary but we have a great time together, including sharing meals at particular times of the year like Harvest and Christmas.

In fact, sharing food has been a theme of our togetherness as we have celebrated the lives of those we have lost. We have seen our church packed to the gunnels including sitting in corridors. We have been grateful for the expressions of love and care and the meals that followed. The church family comes together for many reasons including to celebrate key birthdays such as a recent, surprise 80th birthday party.

Every month we share worship with St Thomas' Anglican Church, and we joined in the welcome of their new vicar in February. We continue to support village events including taking part in the Summer Fair for Colnbrook. Village life has been changing but both our churches encourage others to join in our activities. We value our relationship with our brothers and sisters in Christ and continue to do so.

We have really appreciated the way that the circuit leadership team and members of other churches have supported us through this year. We continue to worship together and know that we face change in the coming year and look to God to guide us through this change – whatever it may be.

Margaret Dudley

## **Cookham Rise**

Membership: 23

Our morning congregation has remained fairly constant in numbers, around 15, while the fortnightly evening services are attended by between 6 and 12 people. We have continued with our “4<sup>th</sup> at Cookham” alternative services. One member has moved and transferred their membership to another church. We will soon be holding a course for people who have expressed interest in becoming members.

We all work together to maintain the church, support the church family and welcome others on to our premises. We give thanks for all who work behind the scenes including our Property Stewards, Treasurer, Pastoral Visitors, cleaners, and all others who have a role within the church including those who organise and run the Coffee Mornings, Come and Play, Creche, Church and Soup and Sandwich lunches. Included in this team are the friends of the church who run the Cookham Community Allotment. This July we celebrated the Allotment’s fifth birthday. It has expanded in the size of the plot and the number of people who come to enjoy the company as well as growing vegetables. We have welcomed a new family who are cherishing the benefits to each of them.

We give thanks for three of our members have important roles in the Circuit – Connie as Senior Circuit Steward, Sue as Circuit Treasurer and

Kathy as Circuit Safeguarding Officer. Connie also runs the Thames Valley Voices, and four of our men go walking with Thames Valley Journeymen.

The Looking to the Future Group continues to meet and report to the Church Council. We are ever mindful that we have reached capacity with the number of members who are physically able to help with some of our community activities; new ideas are considered and we are seeking to draw others in to support them.

We have ceased having our own Newsletter, with contributions being included the Parish Magazine or in our weekly Church Notices.

Numbers at our weekly Prayer meetings have dwindled to three regulars, and it is time for a re-think about how more people can be drawn into the prayer life of the church. We have monthly Church lunches. People in Cookham who have been widowed recently have been invited to join us.

Regarding Ecumenical links, we are looking at how the Anglican Churches and our church might be able to share resources to the benefit of all three. Already we have a pulpit exchange for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, and ecumenical Lent Groups. We hosted the Monday service in Holy Week with Prayer Stations based on the paintings of the Stations of the Cross by an Ethiopian artist. Some members help at the Summer Holiday Club organised by Holy Trinity and a group presents Open the Book at Cookham Rise Primary School.

Traidcraft is undergoing changes and the weekly stall has not been set up. We hope this situation is only temporary.

We hope that our Minister, Sonia, has felt supported by the church here in Cookham. We continue to be blessed by her cheerfulness, her services and preaching, her care and concern, and her support of all that we are doing. We are mindful that ministry is not just about The

Minister but that we are all involved in the ministry and mission of the church.

Kathy Rickman

## **Eton Wick**

Membership: 15

Regretfully we are not able to report an increase in our membership, but our small faithful group continue to provide an active presence in the community. We are extremely grateful to those who support us occasionally from other parts of the circuit, both for Worship and lunch.

We continue to welcome all who choose to support the Lunch Club, and the regular attendance of our Minister has been greatly appreciated. Unfortunately, the number of diners has declined since the Eton group had to leave their premises and reformed in Eton Wick with the offer of lunches on Tuesday and Wednesday throughout the year.

Our premises are well used throughout the week providing a welcoming space for a Coffee Club, Ladies Group, Tots, Saturday Coffee morning, together with Minister-led Bible Study, and “hosting” Safeguarding training sessions.

The Church Council did discuss the outreach event known as “Pie and Praise” but felt the current format did not achieve its purpose any longer, and was putting unacceptable strain on our limited resources.

Daphne Hogg

## **Hampshire Avenue**

Membership: 49

Hampshire Avenue Church is a loving family of three generations from different cultures who care for one another and offer transport when needed. Mindy brought to us a new style of worship, Café style, which gave us the opportunity to have discussions around a table whilst eating and drinking during worship time. Children are eager to come out the front to read prayers or sing during morning service. We all enjoy homemade cake and tea and a chat afterwards!

We join with our Local Ecumenical Partners, St. John and St. Michael, for special events in both Church calendars, such as Covenant Service, Good Friday Messy Church, Patronal festivals and Advent Sunday. Food on a large scale plays an important part in all these events! We also join together for Advent and Lent study courses.

Our Church Stewards work well together, and we have a list of readers available, but more stewards would always be welcome.

Visitors and newcomers always receive a very warm welcome.

Our big social events are a barbeque in the Summer under a gazebo, and a coach trip to the seaside.

May God continue to bless us.

Brenda Cheeseman

## **High Street Maidenhead**

Membership: 129

The last three years have been a difficult time, with our minister Gary suffering from ill health, and curtailing, leaving a vacancy for two years.

We are looking forward to welcoming Rev Carmel Ieraci in September as our new leader.

I was surprised to be appointed Senior Steward! I acknowledge and thank Pam Proctor, my predecessor, for her years of service. She steered us through these difficult years, tirelessly committed to the task and ensuring that today we are still a vibrant and active church in the community.

I must also thank the Circuit Staff. Our Circuit Superintendent, Rev Sonia Hicks has done everything possible to provide pastoral oversight and guidance in our time of need. We thank Deacon Andy Packer, Rev Mindy Bell, Rev Julie Underwood, Senior Circuit Steward Connie Jeffrey, our Lay Worker Naomi Sharp, and more recently Lay Pastor Josh Wilson.

Indeed, I thank all who help to make the organisation of our church run so smoothly.

When you look at High Street Methodist Church, what do you see? From the outside a fairly typical Victorian chapel at the top of the High Street in somewhat neglected surroundings, with a more modern suite of rooms. But come inside and what do you see? A beautiful church – a hidden and unexpected gem – a harmony of colour and furnishings, complete with stained glass windows. But is this all that our church is, a tired old building?

Look in on Sunday morning and see a worshipping community – all ages, members, non-members, and visitors. Look in again on Thursday lunch time and see a gathering of mid-week worshippers, or on Thursday evening, the music group rehearsing, or on Friday evening Choir practice. Look almost any day of the week and see young people: Junior Church, Junior Choir, Messy Church, Scouts, Guides, Brownies, Beavers, Toddlers, Film Club. And for adults? A Study Group, the Friendship Hour or an interest group: the Art Workshop, the Wesley Walkers, the Wesley Golfers, Flower Arranging ...

And why not join us for a cup of coffee on Friday or Saturday morning, or maybe the Friday Lunch Club?

In addition, we have our Committee Meetings: Church Council, Finance and Property, Pastoral, Mission and Outreach, and a Church Development Group. Something for everyone!

Nothing much happens here – it’s just a tired old building! Really? Has anything new happened?

Led by Naomi, we refocused our outlook as a church community under the banner of “Our Calling” with its four pillars of Worship, Learning and Caring, Service, and Evangelism. This is now being led by Josh and a small team of leaders, one for each of those headings. There are targets to be achieved this year and into the future, and there is a role for everyone.

The Mission and Outreach Committee led us through two significant fund-raising projects in the past five years. For Water Aid, we set the target at £3,000 and sent £17,000 ... For the Whitechapel Mission, we sent over £9,000. Both projects helped to bind our congregation together and gave us a sense of purpose beyond ourselves.

Our Worship Committee has a mandate to think around the big question of “What style of Worship?”

Over the period we have been holding talks with neighbouring churches to see whether there are opportunities for joint activity. These include:

- St Mark’s Crescent Methodist Church with whom we have held a number of joint services on Sunday Mornings, with more planned.
- The URC where we met for worship one Sunday, and with whom we are considering the prospect of study groups on Christian living based around the book “Holy Habits”.

- And with The River Church which is interested in using our building.

We have launched a new website and are looking into the possibility of screen-based digital advertising.

Our Church Development Group is researching the opportunities for our witness in the town of Maidenhead, whether on our site or elsewhere, and whether on our own or in co-operation with other churches.

Overall, we have seen a slight decline in membership through death or moving away – but are currently witnessing an increase in attendance.

In summary: We are alive and doing well. In the words of Charles Wesley, written for annual meetings and reports:

“And, are we yet alive to see each other’s face?  
Glory and Praise to Jesus give for his redeeming grace!”

Peter White

## **Ledgers Road**

Membership: 59

The weekly congregation has decreased in recent months as members become more elderly and more frail. This has coincided with the depletion of the Junior Church as families have many different demands on their time at the week-end.

Still, we thank God that we are able to continue with our fundraising efforts, including the annual concert, Christmas Bazaar, Summer Fête and Barbecue. These events continue to be supported by friends and neighbours alike. They also provide additional means for fellowship within our church family.

This year, it was decided to stop the weekly evening services. However, at the Annual General Meeting, there was agreement to launch a longer worship service with fellowship over food and a time of praise and testimony. This will enable those who are unable to come to the mid-week meetings to still strengthen their Christian commitment and witness. These 'Praise & Worship' services are due to begin in September.

The Men's Breakfast Fellowship continues on the first Saturday in the month as does the Ladies Group on alternate Thursday afternoons. The bi-monthly Bible Study group provides 'food for thought' on Thursday mornings.

Each year, the choir re-forms for the Carol Service. This is a joint venture with Woodlands Park and reinforces friendship and fellowship in the Circuit.

We are thankful to all who hold office within our church, all who work tirelessly to support fundraising events and those who continue to 'cheer' from the side-lines. So, with the help of God, we hope to continue being a Methodist presence in Chalvey.

## **Old Windsor**

Old Windsor Membership: 10

Although few in number (and getting older!) our members are active in our Church, our village and our circuit.

Our Tuesday Coffee Mornings continue to be attended regularly by other village folk as well as our own members, and visitors are not unusual! Similarly, our popular series of Traveller's Tales (with their hearty teas!) attracts members of other churches and villagers. Recent tales have included illustrated talks about such diverse topics as "a

Journey through Birmingham by Canal”, “The Isle of Man”, “Vietnam”, and “The Paradise Island of Rarotonga”.

Old Windsor is blessed with having two very competent Worship Leaders – Anne Haggarty and David Alexander. They participate on most Sundays and share in leading our Local Arrangements.

We have recently completed a two-year study of the Acts of the Apostles in our fortnightly Tuesday afternoon Bible Study Group led by Anne Haggarty.

Our church was again more than half full for our annual “Carols by Candlelight” service on Christmas Eve.

Our outreach in the village includes giving out gifts to shoppers at Harvest and at Christmas; taking part with members of other churches in the village Good Friday Procession of Witness, a monthly service at a Care Home in the village and the Old Windsor United Churches’ Action Group.

Our church is an active member of the circuit’s Smaller Churches Support Group and hosted a workshop for the District Western Area on Rural Outreach.

Ian Haggarty

## **St Andrew’s English**

Membership: 132

This year has been an eventful year for the Church Stewards especially with Mindy leaving us. This has meant more responsibility for the stewards and we are grateful to Andy for all the help and advice that he has given. By God’s grace we have a new presbyter who will join the circuit and be responsible for St Andrew’s in September. We are truly thankful to our Heavenly Father as a replacement for Gary at High Street

having been appointed, we thought that it would be very unlikely that we would also be successful.

St. Andrew's has been the venue for circuit meetings and the farewells to Mindy in March. This has meant that the stewards have been involved with others in the organisation of these meetings.

St Andrew's is used extensively by various organisations and the building is beginning to show signs of wear and tear. This will put a strain on our financial resources.

There have been social events – and just to mention a few: the autumn barbeque, spring ball and the monthly visit to a well-known eatery. Thanks to all who helped organise the events, especially Estelle.

We can't do it all and we are grateful for the time and energy that various people give in helping to run the church. However, we do need more volunteers to serve as Church Stewards, Aisle stewards, Introit and Scripture Readers. If you can help' please either talk to me or to one of the other stewards.

Finally, I would like to thank my team of stewards for all the help they have given me and to their rising to the challenges which being a Church Steward brings.

Dave Tottingham

## **St Mark's Crescent**

Membership: 48

In our last report 5 years ago, Rev Gary Homewood our Minister reported that much had happened since the last report. Well I cannot help but repeat the same sentiments this year! Unfortunately, Gary had to leave us because of illness and in the last couple of years we have

been guided mainly by Rev Julie Underwood, but also with the help of Revs Hicks and Dudley.

Our dream of getting our premises fit for purpose in the 21st century has continued and a fund-raising campaign, together with the Grants Application process, has seen our dream become a reality. On 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2019 the builders moved into St Mark's to begin work. Despite the limitation of using the premises, members and friends have accepted the issues and problems, and there is very little change in the number of community groups using our premises. The Nursery School, most of the regular lettings, the Lunch and Leisure Club and our monthly coffee mornings are all continuing. Sadly, our Junior Church ceased over two years ago but was replaced by a monthly Messy Church consisting of 5 or 6 families. We continue to review how we can meet the needs of children and families in our locality.

The building work is planned to last for over 6 months, and some of the worst disruption may yet have to be faced, but with prayer and determination, we are confident we can overcome the difficulties that may come our way and anticipate new mission opportunities once the building work is completed in the Autumn.

While this is going on, we look forward to welcoming Rev Carmel Ieraci in September as our Minister and look forward to her leadership and all the possibilities the future holds. We are now concentrating our minds on how we develop St Mark's as a real hub for all the community and are excited for the future.

Keith Machin and Julie Underwood

## Windsor

Membership: 99

At Windsor Methodist Church we held an extraordinary meeting to discuss the future of the church and what is needed for the coming year. In some ways this may seem a strange beginning but it was a fruitful and positive meeting with some good outcomes.

We held our usual events to celebrate Harvest, All Saints, Remembrance, ..., but the highlight of our year came at Christmas when we enjoyed an event called the "Live Nativity". It began several weeks before with a team of people ably lead by Marion Cathcart and Sue Trout making costumes for the event.

The Cornerstone Chapel was transformed into a stable by creative members of the congregation. The Falder Hall became a multipurpose zone with the costumes, Messy Church activities and a refreshment space. The donkeys, goats, sheep and chickens hung out in the car park. Over 250 people came through our church that day to take part in the activities. Folks were encouraged to dress up as Mary, Joseph, Angels, Shepherds, Wise Men or the Inn Keeper. The atmosphere was amazing, the whole church buzzing as young and old gathered to enjoy the event. We did try to persuade the donkeys to enter the stable but they weren't keen. However, the sheep and goats saw the straw and in they went. Exhausting work but the feedback was overwhelmingly "next year please!"

We participated in several activities within the town with Churches together in Windsor, including "Carols on the Hill", and the Good Friday Town Centre Witness. Thy Kingdom Come events were held in a variety of churches finishing with the Pentecost Picnic as a finale celebration.

Several members helped lead the Taizé 'Season of Creation' Service in September at St Agnes Church. This annual service is an amazing act of

worship where we join with our brothers and sisters from the town churches.

Throughout the year our worship, fellowship and business has been enhanced by regular activities such as Messy Church, Brownies, film club, coffee morning and Bible Study. We have enjoyed a lively Mothers and Toddlers group where we see families weekly during term time, and some joined us for a special family service in June. In the summer quarter several activities took place including baptisms, a wedding and various times of refreshment and fellowship.

Our Five Year Action plan comes to an end now. We are looking forward to evaluating where we are. and looking forward to our next strategic plan which will begin in September. We continue to face many challenges and pray that the Holy Spirit will continue to guide our endeavours.

Margaret Dudley

## **Woodlands Park**

### Membership 17

When I realised the time had come to write this report my mind went blank! So, on consulting last year's report I noted that much that happened last year happens every year: celebrating Harvest Festival, Remembrance Day, Christmas Day and the joy it brings – we may not be children, but it certainly makes our hearts sing. Friends from Ledgers Road join us for Carols – a regular highlight which we hope will continue. We celebrate Mothers' Day – and the daffodil posies this year were delightful – and Easter is a time of reflection and reverence.

The joint Community Project for Woodlands Park was its usual success with lots of events and people attending. However, we struggled to get volunteers and, although the community did gather on the day, it did

not achieve the original goal of bringing it together at any other time. It was agreed with other Church partners that we would go ahead with the Christmas event but that we needed to find out if there would be any chance of other Woodlands Park residents helping in running the activities.

We distributed 300 leaflets in the local area inviting those interested in helping or volunteering to come to a meeting to look to the future. Disappointed by the poor response, it was decided not to hold a May Day fun day this year,

However, the Woodlands Winter Wonderland event did take place and we provided Santa's Grotto with Chris Wren as Santa, Andy Packer as a helpful reindeer plus an elf! The celebration was moved to the Community Centre. We were delighted, thinking "nice and warm this year!" No such luck. Santa, Team and Grotto were in the car park in torrential rain!

Overall we estimated 250 people enjoyed the event.

We continued to support First Steps Pre-School as a committee, helping by washing up for the Mother's Day lunch and occasional cover if there was a staff shortage. We now move forward with the new regime and pray that we will have beneficial relationships with the new Wise Owls Pre-School.

We continue with our weekly Bible stories series at Woodlands Park School. We are now entering our 12th year of Open the Book. The members are very enthusiastic and we are joined by the Rev. David Atallah (Vicar at White Waltham Church of England St. Mary's), Kate Wheatley and Marielie May and from Woodlands Park Methodist Church, Janice and Chris Wren and Neville Walton.

We again presented Bibles to year 4 children; funded by a bequest to our Church to be used for the benefit of local children. It is by the

common consent of Head Teacher, who is present every week, her staff and children, that the weekly bible stories are greatly appreciated.

Have you noticed the border on the right-hand side of the drive? Thank you to the Wrens for the hard work weeding and planting.

And, finally, thank you to all the lovely people who make up the Congregation. You are truly amazing. Everyone contributes something. The size of the Congregation does not matter. The fact that everyone helps in some way is a true Blessing from God.

Thanks to your support we are truly blessed!

Linda Harrison

## **Reports**

### **Circuit Stewards' Report**

As the Connexional year 2018-2019 began, the Circuit was aware that in some respects it was not in a very good place. There would be no presbyter to replace Gary Homewood joining us and the Circuit would continue to be staffed by three presbyters - Rev Sonia Hicks (as Superintendent) and Revs Margaret Dudley and Mindy Bell – and Deacon Andy Packer. We had also had to say goodbye to the Lay Worker at High Street, Naomi Sharp at the end of the previous connexional year, but by the end of October we were delighted to appoint Josh Wilson to take her place – Josh is pastor of a church in Reading in the evangelical tradition, but is much taken with Methodism and has become a member of the Methodist Church. We also had continued support from Rev Julie Underwood and Rev Richard Cattley in the Maidenhead section of the Circuit, without which life would have been much harder. Thanks are due also to the Local Preachers who managed to slot more preaching appointments into their busy lives and to preachers from outside the Circuit who offered one-off appointments to help fill the gaps on the

plan. We also said goodbye to Rev Graham Hindle who had resided in the Circuit while holding a Connexional post, but who moved away when he retired: Graham too had been a source of support while he was here. Methodism is truly a Connexional body and we have valued assistance and support from our fellow Methodists: what could have been a bleak time has become one of widened boundaries and mutual encouragement!

There was another moment of potential crisis early in 2019, when Rev Mindy Bell took up the position of chaplain at Birmingham University. This was a blow, but we wished Mindy and her family well in her new appointment. We managed to allow Rev Margaret Dudley (and previously Deacon Andy Packer) to take a sabbatical, thanks largely to the sterling leadership provided by Rev Sonia Hicks, who has coped with these difficult few years with remarkable resilience, blue sky thinking and unshakeable good humour. We were delighted later in the year to learn that two presbyters would take up appointments in our Circuit in September 2019: Rev Carmel Ieraci, who would have pastoral charge of High Street, St Mark's Crescent and Woodlands Park, and Rev Anne Ellis, who would have pastoral charge of St Andrew's (both the English and Urdu-speaking congregations) and Hampshire Avenue. We were also delighted to appoint Pauline Poole, an Anglican, to work with Sonia as the Circuit Administrator. This appointment has been a long time coming, but it was worth the wait as Pauline has tackled the vagaries of Methodism with enthusiasm.

Property once again loomed large this connexional year: The Circuit Stewards have arranged the purchase of two new manses, one in Maidenhead and one in Slough. The existing Maidenhead manse, Priesthaus, has been sold, but at present the sale of the previous Slough manse in Upton Road is still pending. Joyce Brown has done a sterling job co-ordinating the upkeep of the churches and manses in the Circuit and although Joyce is stepping down as Circuit Property Secretary, she has offered to be a Circuit Steward. Also, on the property front, St Mark's Crescent has raised sufficient funds to begin their 2020 Vision

Project, which will see the church refurbished to meet the needs of the community and enable better engagement with it. To get to this stage has been a truly remarkable feat by St Mark's members and the May 2019 Circuit Meeting was delighted to hear more details. We hold the people of St Mark's Crescent in our prayers.

The Circuit Steward team for this Connexional year has been Connie Jeffery (Senior Steward), Glenice White, Charles Buckman, Elsa Daniel, Keith Machin and Sue Le Page, who took over from Chris Wren as Circuit Treasurer. Elsa steps down this summer after six years and we thank her for all she has done. The decision about which Circuit Steward is covering which manse and which church councils has not yet been taken, because of new presbyters and other present imponderables.

Because of staff shortages in this Connexional year, the strategic plan has had to be put on hold: the underlying guiding idea is still to have three 'centres' – Slough, Maidenhead and Windsor, with a presbyter in each, and possibly lay assistance, plus a Superintendent. This issue can be addressed once more when the new presbyters have settled into the Circuit.

The Circuit still owes a debt of gratitude to its faithful Local Preachers, who lead worship week by week. Our three Local Preachers on Trial have been reduced to two, as Eddy Amponsah has moved his membership to the Aylesbury Circuit. We are grateful to Rev Andrew Reed, Superintendent of the Staines & Feltham Circuit who continues to tutor our LPs on trial in the new course Worship: Learning and Preaching. The Circuit also Holds Jon Garde in its prayers during his presbyteral training.

There were special services during the year led by Thames Valley Voices, the Circuit choir, and on Saturday 4th May the Easter Offering service was held at Windsor, when the speaker was Anne Browse, a former President of Methodist Women in Britain.

The pending integration of part of the Staines & Feltham Circuit with the Thames Valley Circuit is once more under discussion, as another Circuit has been found to take the churches not being taken by the Thames Valley. There is still work to be done, but it is hoped that it will be completed during the 2019-2020 Connexional year.

Despite the challenges this year, the congregations in the Circuit have remained in good spirits, although some are struggling with reduced membership and ill-health. The smaller churches in particular are vulnerable, as the death or departure of just one member can make all the difference. But all the churches are sure of their mission, and in some cases are facing a time of possible change. Please continue to pray for the Circuit churches, for our ministers and for the Circuit officials as one year ends and another begins.

Connie Jeffery, Senior Circuit Steward

### **Action for Children**

The Circuit's Action for Children committee meets annually, reviewing the previous year's events and financial contributions, and looks forward to the coming year, planning events. The members of the Committee are very loyal and energetic, though the number of churches represented is becoming smaller every year. This year saw just four churches represented, (though at least two other churches' representatives were not available).

This year, 2019, is the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of Action for Children and as a circuit we celebrated this anniversary with afternoon teas in two different places (Old Windsor and Cookham Rise) and a quiz.

The home collecting boxes continue to bring in significant amounts, and the Action for Children local fund-raiser is always very complementary about the totals raised. This past year over £4,300 was raised – thanks to all who contribute in any way.

One of the reasons why Action for Children has such a low profile in the circuit is that there are no projects nearby. This has made raising enthusiasm among congregations a laborious task!

During this past year we have not held any special events, as we were waiting for Action for Children to let us know about their 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations, and how we could join in. Unfortunately, their information came out too late. Reading through the suggestions, we realised that they were anticipating celebrations *from* the anniversary onwards, whereas we had been looking to work *towards* the anniversary date.

Anne Haggarty

## **Local Preachers and Worship Leaders**

There are currently 28 accredited Local Preachers in the Thames Valley Circuit, of whom 19 are available to lead worship in any quarter. There are two Local Preachers on trial of whom one has currently suspended his training. It was decided to present Mr Vincent Leslie with a certificate marking 30 years' service as a Local Preacher. We are grateful for the faithful service of all our Local Preachers in this Circuit.

In addition there are now nine Worship Leaders in the Circuit. We thank God for all those who have acted on God's call to lead worship and to preach.

Each year in the September Local Preachers Meeting there is a re-affirmation of the Promises that were made at the Commissioning Service. This reminds us of the great responsibility of preaching God's word to this generation. At this meeting we invite the Worship Leaders and have a shared time of training. We also celebrate the Sacrament of Holy Communion together.

This year the preachers have embarked on reviewing one another's services in small groups. This is part of the Peer-to Peer review approved by Conference last year. This does not have to be in place for three years, but the Local Preachers Meeting were keen to begin straightaway. This is a mark of the commitment to improvement and continual growth as Preachers.

David Ridley

## **Methodist Women in Britain**

In August 2018, the Annual Coffee morning at High Street raised £50 for Albanian Hope.

In September we held our annual Craft Stall at the Canal Boat festival, which as usual was very popular with customers and the volunteers who run it. It's a great fun day out and a good way to raise funds for needy causes which this year was towards the Alexander Devine Hospice. In total we raised £173.51 and decided to add to it by clearing out our funds from the MWIB account, which then amounted to £370.51 which left us with Nil in the account.

In May 2019 we held the Annual Easter Offering service. This time we held it on a Saturday with a meal after the service with Anne Browse as our special speaker. It was a successful afternoon with Anne, and the food was excellent. We would like to thank all who helped to make this event run smoothly. The flowers were provided by Alison Mount with a lovely display based on the theme of Lower Fences and Longer Tables. The meal raised a profit of £60.

We are now in the process of organising another Stall at the Canal Boat Festival. We would like to receive any handmade craft items for the stall. We do sell food, but it must be covered and labelled with a list of ingredients.

After this Festival I am stepping down as chair. Andy and I will be in the stationing process by then. I hope that someone will step up to take the chair and bring new ideas. If no one steps-up, then I envisage that a small committee will meet to organise the Easter Offering Service once a year. I have enjoyed my time as Chair, and I hope that it will continue.

Lynn Packer

## **Prayer Diary**

The quarterly Prayer Diary continues to be a source of help and inspiration to all members of the Circuit. It helps us to focus on a particular Church for a whole week, and to recognise, in the section which asks for God's help, the different problems facing our Churches. The other section offers prayers of thanks, and it is good to share in joyful thanksgiving throughout the circuit.

My thanks to all the regular contributors to the Circuit Prayer Diary for providing relevant prayers. This gives a personal touch to the contributions, and helps us all to be aware of the challenges and joys we all experience, as well as the things for which we want to give thanks.

The Prayer Diary is available on the Circuit website (with pictures of the churches), and paper copies are made available along with the Plan.

Anne Haggarty

## **Property**

Manse-wise it has been a busy year with the sale of Upton Road and the purchase of two new Manses: Poplars Grove, Maidenhead and Sutton Avenue, Langley/Slough. Both the new manses have been renovated to the required standard and are now occupied.

Clarence Road has undergone some major renovation and corrective work to underpin and stabilise the house. It has also had a replacement kitchen. There are still some minor works to be done there.

Spring Lane has some garden works to be carried out but is by and large structurally sound.

Salt Hill Drive is likely to be sold once vacant and there are only ongoing minor works to be undertaken there.

## **Safeguarding**

It goes without saying that in the last five years safeguarding has become one of the top issues and priorities for our society in general and quite rightly within the Methodist Church. The independent Past Case Review and the publication of the report *Courage, Cost and Hope* has identified 10 themes that the Connexional Safeguarding team has been working on. One result has been the development of the Creating Safer Space Foundation Refresher module. There has been a good response to this course within our Circuit and we have a rolling programme of training those who hold certain roles within their church, as well as Local Preachers, Worship Leaders and Presbyters. These last three groups will be the first to embark on the new Advanced Module training which replaces the Leadership course. Our thanks go to our trainers who give of their time to ensure that we are all kept up to date with all safeguarding issues including the 'emerging' forms of abuse.

The individual church Safeguarding Co-ordinators meet three times a year with Deacon Andy Packer chairing the meetings. As ever, these meetings are valuable for sharing information and giving support to people whose role has expanded over the years. They represent their churches and should receive support from their congregations as safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. Our thanks go to them too.

It is important that good safeguarding practices are maintained throughout our churches. These are audited through the Annual Property Schedule which is presented to the Church Council, and safeguarding should always be on its agenda. The good practices are only effective if everyone in the church is aware and adheres to them, and takes responsibility for safeguarding themselves as well as others.

Kathy Rickman

## **Smaller Churches' Support Group**

The Smaller Churches group continues to offer encouragement and support to individual small churches as they struggle with falling congregations, aging membership, and all the woes that being a small church brings! However, we are an enthusiastic group, always looking for ways of encouraging everyone and supporting the various events which we arrange.

Our regular annual "Singing the Faith" afternoon continues – and like most of our activities, is open to the whole circuit. It is good to learn new material, even if we have to recognise that some new tunes are beyond our individual church's capabilities!

This year we hoped to have an Away Day to the New Room in Bristol. Various problems meant this became a non-starter – but the idea hasn't gone away! We are looking again, possibly during 2020, to arrange a visit.

This year, on 11th May, the Learning Network held a Rural Ministries day at Old Windsor for the smaller churches of the Western area. While the day itself – many thanks to Kathy O'Loughlin – was a success, where were the smaller churches of the other circuits? Come to that, where were half the smaller churches of our own circuit? Kathy encouraged us to think about our impact on our local community and look at where there are gaps that could be filled. She also challenged us to look at what we do actually do, and in what situations – helping us to realise that between us we do lots of little things that all make a difference!

Anne Haggarty

## **Thames Valley Voices**

Sing Halleluiah! It is now five years since Thames Valley Voices was started. We grew out of an annual Saturday afternoon gathering to sing new hymns, led by the Smaller Churches Group, and are now a separate group, meeting regularly throughout the year.

We usually perform twice a year: a Christmas service of hymns, sacred music and readings, and one dependent on the time of Easter! This one can be solemn, leading up to Good Friday, joyful after Easter Sunday, or reflective around Pentecost.

We all enjoy our rehearsals – times of fun and laughter, of fellowship and learning, of musical mess-ups and joyful successes!

New members are always welcome, particularly altos, tenors and basses. If you are interested, either contact Anne Haggarty or just turn up to a rehearsal. We hold them on alternate Tuesday evenings at St Andrew's from 7.30 pm, and start on 10th September this year.

This report would be incomplete if I didn't acknowledge the enormous effort that Connie Jeffery, Tony Nicholls and Pat Crowle put in to find suitable music, teach us, encourage us and generally make sure we sound like a choir!

Anne Haggarty

## **Website and Publicity**

### **Circuit Website**

The Circuit website, <https://www.methodistthamesvalley.org.uk/>, has been in existence now for over 10 years. Each year new pages and features are being added, and there are now around 180 pages of information.

The most recent major change has seen the introduction of a members' only area. Access is restricted to Circuit Meeting members only. The password is available to *bona vide* members from either the Circuit Webmaster or the Circuit Meeting Secretary.

The site regularly attracts 1000s of visitors each month, not just from this circuit and country, but from as far afield as New Zealand and Japan. The most popular page is the Preaching Plan. We aim to keep this up-to-date at all times, with all changes to the quarterly printed plan being incorporated into the online version.

The challenge of including a history of the circuit and each of the 12 churches was completed about 6 years ago. A number of the histories have been updated this year, including – in the case of one church – details of a rebuilding project from decades ago. There are photographs on every page, including some fascinating ones from over 100 years ago! Please do be in touch if you would like extra material and / or photographs adding.

The website's Photo Gallery has currently 28 galleries. Sadly, only one has been added recently, and it would be great to receive suggestions and pictures!

Remember: Out-of-date information is useless. All churches and circuit organisations are encouraged to appoint a member to check their church's or organisation's page regularly and, if the details given for your Church change, please ensure that the Circuit Webmaster is informed so your page can be updated.

Our very grateful thanks go to everyone who supplies information! If you haven't seen the site yet, why not have a look?

## **Publicity**

When your church puts on a special event, is it for your members only, or are you seeking to attract others? If the latter, remember that the

Circuit has in place ways for spreading the news circuit-wide and further afield:

- “Please publicise emails” are sent to the circuit staff and a member of every church, typically the Senior Church Steward and the member who produces the weekly notices or monthly newsletter.
- The Diary on the Circuit Website.

You are invited to send details of “open” events to the Circuit Administrator and Circuit Webmaster (names and contact details are in the Circuit Directory). Contacting either is sufficient for your event to be publicised. Please also inform us if your contacts change!

Ian Haggarty

## **Windsor and Maidenhead Community Forum (WAMCF) Women's Group**

The Windsor and Maidenhead Community Forum was set up to strengthen understanding, mutual respect and trust between the different faiths within the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead. The Women’s Group is particularly active and friendly, welcoming women of any faith or none to their meetings which are in 2019 exploring the theme of pilgrimage. Topics have been very varied – but always thought provoking and accompanied by refreshments! In 2019 meetings have been held on a Monday evening bimonthly and a Wednesday afternoon on the alternate months.

For further information please contact Sue Le Page on [s.lepage@btinternet.com](mailto:s.lepage@btinternet.com).