

Minutes of the Thames Valley Circuit Meeting held on Thursday, 17th September 2020, at 7.45 pm

This meeting was held on Zoom due to Covid 19 restrictions.

Note: CA – Church Action required.

Welcome and opening devotions

Glenice welcomed Rev Vicci Davidson, our new Superintendent, and Vicci responded and read from John 1, urging us to be beacons of light in our communities, and led the meeting in prayer. She welcomed everyone to the meeting including 3 new members.

Anne H then read a list of Circuit Members who have died during the Covid 19 pandemic, and we held a minute's silence in memory. It is hoped to hold a memorial service later. The names are listed in Appendix 1.

Membership of meeting and apologies for absence

- The membership of the meeting was agreed. It is recorded on the attendance sheet in the minute book.
- 36 members were present, 1 apology was received.

Agreement of the agenda; notification of items requested for AOB

No items were requested under AOB, and the previously circulated agenda was agreed, with three additions, one under property and two under Matters from the CLT.

Minutes of last meeting (as already circulated) and matters arising

- The minutes of the last Circuit Meeting (November 2019) had been agreed during the summer.
- The circuit telephone policy has had an additional word inserted to make sure that presbyters are not penalised for long work-related phone calls.
- Anne H asked that any amendments to the Circuit Directory which is now available, should be sent to both her and Pauline Poole.

Safeguarding

Kathy's report is attached as Appendix 2. She highlighted some of the problems that the pandemic and lockdown have caused, including the emotional impact. Future training, possibly on Zoom, is being prepared. Pauline will send a reminder when a member has to renew a DBS check.

The meeting offered its grateful thanks to Kathy for her hard and continuing work with this important and difficult aspect of our work.

Property

The Circuit Meeting approved Joy and Glenice to handle selling Salt Hill Drive.

Joy reported:

- The on-line annual returns are now available; if any property steward hasn't received the notification, please contact her or Pauline.
- Clarence Road manse is due its quinquennial inspection, and there are two other inspections due shortly. Contact Neil Barr.
- The circuit manses are in good condition, though some matters are still needing work. A carpenter is urgently required – please contact Joy if you can help with a name. CA
 - Clarence Road is awaiting another quote for the windows.
 - Sutton Avenue has problems over a fence with neighbours unwilling to supply details of quotes.
- Salt Hill Drive. There have been a number of offers. Joy and Glenice thought they had a buyer, but due to the offer being reduced significantly, they have refused it and are therefore back to the beginning.
- High Street asked for permission to relet 9 Crescent Drive, the current tenant having just given notice.

Vicci said we still need someone to be the Circuit Property Steward. CA

The meeting expressed its grateful thanks to Joy for continuing to oversee the circuit property situation.

Receive reports already circulated

The meeting received the report on Conference (see Appendix 4) and from the Local Preachers Meeting (see Appendix 3). The meeting expressed its thanks to our Local Preachers and Worship Leaders.

Matters from CLT

Josh. Glenice told the Circuit Meeting that since the vote in May on extending Josh's contract, the problems caused by Covid 19 and the lockdown had caused the CLT to review this decision. They had exploring and developed a new *lay worker* role for Josh (not his current *lay pastor* role), but with the new restrictions, this role would not be possible as it would rely on face-to-face meetings which are not possible for the foreseeable future. Glenice emphasised, and Vicci confirmed, that this was no reflection on Josh or what he has done, merely that with Carmel now doing the pastoral work, Josh's role is not needed. In the discussion that followed, it was emphasised that as a charity we had a duty to use all our resources wisely, and the circuit's financial situation is not good.

A poll vote was taken asking if the meeting would make the role of lay pastor redundant, and rescind the decision taken in May. 30 votes for; 1 against

A second poll was then taken to determine Josh's redundancy package. Members were asked whether

1. To just give the statutory package of three weeks.
2. To offer to the end of November plus the three weeks redundancy payment.
3. To offer full pay to the end of December

Members voted:

Option 1	2
Option 2	17
Option 3	8

Option 2 was therefore carried.

Vicci led the meeting in prayer – for Josh in particular, but for the circuit as well.

Before Glenice brought other matters from the CLT, Vicci asked for the financial report.

Finance (see Appendices 5 and 6)

- Sue said that the financial statement sent out with the calling notice is the current situation. She had not had replies from all treasurers and this information was needed urgently, at Circuit, District and Connexional level.
- Burnham no longer has a treasurer – members will do the day-to-day work, but need someone to do the financial aspects. If you can help, please contact Sue or Joy. CA
- Ed Filmore asked about restricted funds and repaying loans.
- Please let Sue know if there are problems at your church.
- Sue then asked for approval for the proposal sent out earlier, namely:

That once there is money in the Circuit Trust Fund from the sale of the Salt Hill manse after repaying the bridging loan, application is made to the Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes to withdraw funds to pay for:

1. Interest on the bridging loan.
2. The extra costs incurred on the Salt Hill manse before and in the sale.
3. Costs incurred on repair, maintenance and improvement of the Circuit manses incurred since the last ones claimed from Trust funds (last claim 2 August 2020).
4. The cost of employing a lay pastor to the end of 2020.

Votes were taken on each of these proposals.

- 1 for 36 (unanimous)
- 2 for 36 (unanimous)
- 3 for 31
- 4 for 32

Sue asked for an extra Treasurers Meeting to discuss circuit finance on Wednesday, 21st October, on Zoom.

On behalf of the meeting, Vicci expressed our grateful thanks to Sue for all her hard work.

At this point Glenice resumed **items from the CLT**.

Vicci and Margaret reported on the situation at Colnbrook and Poyle. The URC has given 6 months' notice of wanting to separate. They were pushing for us to allow them to do this sooner. Colnbrook has said "No", because this all has to go through Connexion. The URC has offered two options:

- Methodists buy them out, and keep the building (not an option for us)
- Sell the building – and a formal notice of 6 months will be needed to do this.

The church has voted for this second option, and is looking for a smaller building in the village, with the possibility of it becoming a community centre for the village with, for example a doctor's surgery and / or a post office. If this were to be so, they would be in a position to employ a treasurer. Because of the closeness of Colnbrook to the proposed new runway at Heathrow, there might be finance from there.

The meeting voted:

- The formal notice of 6 months for: 34
- Affirming Colnbrook & Poyle's approach for: 32.

Further matters from the CLT

- Glenice told the meeting that St Andrew's, Old Windsor and Cookham Rise were now open for worship on most Sundays. Hampshire Avenue, Ledgers Road and Windsor are making preparations.
- Glenice thanked the staff for the Circuit Zoom services and breakout rooms. A lot of work is required to do these well.
- While the Circuit Stewards look after the manses, there are also Manse Visitors – one for each manse – who check annually in October – that the manses are kept to a good standard. Glenice reminded them to check ceilings!
- Carmel – currently in quarantine in Australia – will be having her Sabbatical during April, May and June next year. She gave her thanks for permission to work abroad at this time.
- The meeting was asked to approve the appointment of the Circuit Administrator to witness the annual checking of the circuit safe. Approved with 31 votes in favour.
- Circuit Stewards. Glenice thanked the current Circuit Stewards, but said that the team could do with a couple more people. Liz Tottingham was asked to continue until at least a replacement for Connie (Jeffery) was found. The meeting approved Liz continuing with 32 votes in favour. CA
- Glenice is in conversation with the Conference Office to arrange for a circuit visit from Sonia during her Presidential year.
- Circuit Strategy. Vicci wants to move this forward, and is asking for two people from each section to join her in a group to promote ideas, so that – as soon as the Covid restrictions are lifted – we are ready to move forward rapidly. Names to Vicci by Friday, 25th September. One person from the large church, and one from the smaller churches in each hub. Contact Vicci with names. CA

Circuit Greetings

The circuit agreed to send a card of greetings and congratulations to Sonia on her election as President for 2021 – 2022.

Dates of next meetings (on Zoom unless restrictions lifted)

Tues 10 Nov 2020	Circuit Meeting	7.45 pm
Wed 17 Mar 2021	Circuit Meeting	7.45 pm
Thurs 13 May 2021	Circuit Meeting	7.45 pm
Tues 14 Sep 2021	Circuit Meeting	7.45 pm

The meeting closed at 9.30 with us blessing each other with the words of the Grace.

Appendix 1 – Deaths of Members during Lockdown

Maidenhead area

Bob Wardle,
Greta Woodbridge,
David Esling Senior
Eric Kitley
Wyonne Payne
Megan Cooke

Windsor area

Freda Pope
Laurie Hinton

Slough area

Glen Richardson
Evan Hughes
Qamar Dass
David Owusu
Harry Carty
Emma Quashie – Emma died in Ghana, unable to get back

Appendix 2 – Safeguarding

During the past six months safeguarding has taken on a broader perspective as we have been urged to keep each other safe, but also more focussed as the numbers of domestic violence incidents have risen sharply and as has the people suffering mentally and emotionally. As we open up our church premises, we all need to be mindful of the effect this pandemic has had on different members of our communities and be aware of the pastoral issues that may have arisen. It is a timely reminder that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and that there are vulnerable children, adults and indeed families amongst our congregations.

Please note the following information.

- Church Councils have a specific responsibility for safer recruiting of volunteers and lay workers with guidance and advice from their church Safeguarding Officer.
- DBS checks are now done online. Our Ministers and the Circuit Safeguarding Officers are the verifiers. A self declaration form is to be issued before the process is started. There are two forms on the Methodist website – one for new applicants and one for those whose DBS needs to be renewed. Self declaration forms will be stored confidentially by the Minister.
- Pauline Poole maintains the database of those who have had a DBS check. The database is arranged by church, name of certificate holder, certificate number and date of issue. Pauline will send out reminders when a DBS is up for renewal which is every 5 years.
- Applicants will be encouraged to register with the DBS update service, which is free to volunteers who are contacted each year to confirm they are still on the register.
- As at 20th May 2020 there has been a temporary change to safeguarding training requirements. Connexion agreed that for all those who have reached the four year point since they last undertook the relevant training, a temporary 6 month extension applies to allow for the current lockdown period and allow new training dates to be planned for the Autumn.
- Having said that, the Foundation Module has been updated and the new edition cannot be delivered by the course trainers until they have completed an online training.
- In addition, a working party is reviewing this latest edition of the Foundation Module and developing modifications that will ensure the course can be provided in an online form such as Zoom as well.
- A working party from the Connexion Learning and Development group is also looking at the Advanced Module to enable e-learning.
- Information about all training courses, dates, and participant lists will be sent via the District Safeguarding Officer and Circuit staff to our church safeguarding officers.

- I am aware that there are people waiting for the training courses. Please ensure that your safeguarding officer is keeping a list of those who need them in order to fulfil their role.
- The officers were informed last year about new posters which display clearly the Statement of Safeguarding Principles and also contact details as shown on the small card that all course participants have been given.
- Our District Safeguarding Officer, Philippa Read, has continued to support the Circuit during the year through clear guidance and easy communication.

Philippa attends our September Circuit Safeguarding meeting which has been postponed until after this meeting. Our thanks go to our church safeguarding officers most of whom have held this role for a good number of years now and are ready to retire if that is possible.

Kathy Rickman

Appendix 3 – Report from the Local Preachers' Meeting

1. Worship has been very different during the COVID-19 pandemic. We have discovered new ways of communicating with each other and of worshipping God. The weekly Circuit ZOOM services have been very popular, and there has also been the opportunity to join remotely with live-streamed services and to use service sheets and other resources at home.
2. Local Preachers and Worship Leaders (alongside members of our congregations) have shared in Zoom services by leading the 'ingredients' of worship including drama sketches, prayers, bible readings and reflections.
3. From September many of our church buildings will re-open for worship and some services will be held at most churches. These will run alongside ZOOM services. We are conscious that services will look and feel quite different, but we rejoice in being able to gather together for worship once more.
4. We have two new preachers 'on note' Josh Wilson and Mwadzipaura Magaisa, and we hold them in our prayers as they progress in their knowledge, conviction and competence. We have one preacher 'on trial', Elijah Kommu. And we pray also for him.
5. We have said goodbye to two staff members, Sonia Hicks and Andy Packer, and we thank God for their ministry in our Circuit. We ask God's blessing on them and their families in their new lives. We shall also miss Lynn whose active ministry as a Local Preacher has been much appreciated. We look forward to welcoming Vicci Davidson and her family.
6. We hold in our prayers and assure of our support those preachers who are no longer able to preach and lead worship.

David Ridley Local Preachers' Meeting Secretary August 2020

Appendix 4 – Report on Conference 2020

Conference like no other! Social distancing meant a huge loss of atmosphere, and an impression – totally wrong – that those leading Conference didn't like one another very much. Little laughter, very few smiles.

When Standing Orders were put in place, nobody could have visualised being unable to gather together to confer. This was the situation Connexion faced this year. In among the inauguration of the new President and Vice President all those “attending” via Zoom had to make decisions about how to “do” Conference in this manner, and yet be legal.

A number of Standing Orders had to be temporarily suspended, so that business could be done.

It felt very strange, sitting at home, looking at a computer screen and watching the ceremonial handover, with all the necessary precautions in place – social distancing, not touching objects touched by anyone else. Yes, we did the necessary, but something was missing – the physical greeting by handshakes and hugs, but also the emotional aspects; it felt a bit dry, a bit lacking in the usual warmth and enthusiasm of Conference Saturday afternoon.

Normally at this stage I should be bringing personal greetings from former members / presbyters of our circuit. However, three of our former presbyters have now “sat down” ie retired: Hazel Forecast is back in the District in the Redhill area, John Swarbrick is in the London District with the West London Mission, and Phyl Fanning is now in the Liverpool District on the Wirral. I was sad to learn that Jack Roberts has died.

Conference was made shorter this year – the representative sessions were on a mere three mornings. This made it much less easy to relax when the sessions were over – full concentration was needed at all times! And if we overran any session, that time was “lost” from the coffee break! Personally, I couldn't have coped with all-day Zoom sessions.

Ordinands were received into full connexion, but ordination services could not take place – so those who were probationers have moved on, but not to become full presbyters – yet. They are in a half-way state. Ordination services have now been arranged for 18th April 2021 in Central London. I have details if anyone wants to know.

One of the interesting tasks of Conference is, having just installed the President and Vice President for the year, to vote for those who will succeed them. This year we have been thrilled by the election of our (just left us) Superintendent, Sonia, as President Elect. Congratulations to her – we wish her well and offer her our prayers as she starts now on this interesting journey of representing the Methodist Church to the rest of the world.

Discussion about “God in love unites us” – the marriage and relationships report – had to be postponed. Lockdown had meant that many District Synods had not had their discussion sessions. However, there were a number of other very important reports to be discussed, and decisions made.

In order to encourage and support every Methodist member to engage in mission, a report “God for all” is being rolled out across the Connexion from September. There will be information in assorted media to help promote this. Watch this space!

Another report looks at our system of Trusteeship. Partly in order to come into line with what the Charity Commission says trustees have to do, and how a trustee body should be formed, we are going to have to change our model of working. We are being told that the number of trustees needs to be limited. Discussions are on-going, but there are suggestions that some small churches will have to think seriously about their future, as the minimum membership is likely to be increased, possibly to 25. It is hoped that by freeing members from some of the jobs they have been faithfully carrying out, they will be able to spend more of themselves on the mission of the church.

Conference frequently stressed the necessity for equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI), and is asking that its toolkit is more widely used by churches. In particular this will affect the Circuit Meeting, the Circuit Invitation Committee, and all Church Councils. All members of these meetings will need to do this training, particularly in relation to unconscious bias.

Many of the reports were prepared well in advance and assumed a “proper” Conference. Once notice was given that it would have to be “virtual”, most reports had an update (we had an unprecedented 3rd volume of the agenda!), effectively stating that Conference would take note of the work this year, but would postpone decision making until next year. There are already warnings that the Conference of 2021 will need an extra day!

Conference was, as always, interesting, but members all agreed that they missed the atmosphere of seeing and talking with each another, the connexionalism and worshipping together.

Anne Haggarty
July 2020

Appendix 5 – Circuit Treasurer’s report

The Circuit Accounts have not yet been affected by the Covid-19 restrictions as all churches have paid the assessment due for 2019/2020, however one church has already stated they will pay a reduced sum for the August first quarter payment for 2020/21. So thank you to all who pay in their collections electronically or by standing order and to those churches who have held events to facilitate the collection of cash in envelopes. The Circuit's 2019 accounts have been signed by the independent examiner and filed with the Charity Commission.

The assessment has priority over all other expenses for each church and reserves held for use in such times of difficulty. Our other principle is that we are a Connexion and are here for one another, so if warning is given as soon as there might be a need, we can work together to support each other. Please draw up your budgets for 20/21 and advise me as soon as your church sees it might not be able to pay its agreed share. This advice should ideally include the budget and the sums held on reserve.

To help the Connexion gain an overall picture Church Treasurers are being asked to advise me of the balances held in each of their church’s accounts as at 31st August 2020 together with the sums of loans outstanding. These totals will then be sent on to District and up to the Connexion who are working to see if there are non-essential costs that can be cut.

It is not only in offering money that we can support the work of the church but also by offering our time and skills and prayer. There is a need for someone to ‘keep the books’ for Burnham Methodist Church where the members are happy to continue to do the banking. Please include this need in your prayers and contact me or any one of the Circuit Stewards for further information.

Sue Le Page Thames Valley Circuit Treasurer 20 August 2020

Appendix 6 – Proposal re Circuit Trust Fund

That once there is money in the Circuit Trust Fund from the sale of the Salt Hill Manse after repaying the bridging loan, application is made to the Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes to withdraw funds to pay for

1. Interest on the bridging loan
2. The extra costs incurred on the Salt Hill manse before and in the sale.
3. Costs incurred on repair, maintenance and improvement of the Circuit manses incurred since the last ones claimed from Trust funds (last claim 2 August 2020).
4. The cost of employing a lay worker to end of April 2021.

Background

The sale proceeds will be subject to a levy on the sum not re-invested in manse property, in this case repaying the bridging loan. The balance can only be used for purposes set out under Standing Order 917 (2).