

Words from John Wesley: “But if [God] made us, let us ask, and he will not withhold any good thing from the work of his own hand. Our Father: our Preserver, who, day by day, sustains the life he has given; of whose continuing love we now and every moment receive life and breath and all things. So, let us come to him, and we shall obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need”.

*From ‘A Meditation on the Lord’s Prayer’ cited in ‘The Work of God in This Place, Reflections for church meetings’ p. 16.*

Dear Friends,

Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> March was a red-letter day in this circuit with the virtual visit of the Vice-President of the Methodist Conference, Carolyn Lawrence accompanied by the District Chair Rev Dr David Hinchliffe. Traditionally, Presidents and Vice-Presidents of Methodist Conference visit the Connexion and beyond during their year of office. Obviously, this year has been different, though memorable. When I heard of the plans for the Vice-Presidential visit to the District, I was quick to tell the District Chair that we would be happy to assist the District arrangements in any way we could.

So it was that we hosted virtual meetings at Guildford St Mary’s, Sheerwater St Michael’s, and the University of Surrey Chaplaincy. I have been asked by the District Chair to pass on his personal thanks to everyone who made this possible, and I do add my own thanks as well. It was a very encouraging series of meetings as we reflected on the Work of God in and through the Wey Valley Circuit. What came across very powerfully was the diversity of social contexts and constitutional and governance arrangements. This diversity is both a challenge and an opportunity.

Starting at St Mary’s, with the support of the Revd Robert Cotton, Rector of HTSM, and the hard-working techie team at St Mary’s, we were able to celebrate the achievements regarding the re-ordering of the property and the mission of the congregation through the network of partnerships in the service of the local community. We saw the former Woodbridge Road Methodist Church window, now incorporated into the fabric of St Mary’s, the Methodist foundation stone now inlaid into the floor of St Mary’s close to where a beautiful figure of a mother and child is placed. This was carved by a Methodist local preacher. The support of the Connexion and Circuit were gratefully acknowledged, and reports were given from people involved in the many

mission partnerships. The VP closed the meeting with a prayer. Perhaps most touching were the gracious words of Mary Howard, church warden.

Our next stop was Sheerwater St Michael's. Here we were joined by the Revd Gillaine Holland, the leader of the Bishop's Mission Order (BMO), Rev Peter Hills, and church members. We learnt of the exciting partnership potential with Woking Borough Council, the vision for a new property and the joys and challenges of working in an area undergoing radical transformation. St Michael's works in partnership with local schools, and with MASCOT to support families who may be under pressure. The VP was particularly impressed by Gillaine's artistic creations which enhance worship.

Our final meeting was quite different. The Revd Duncan Myers, Anglican University Chaplain introduced chaplains representing Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism & Sikhism. Rabbi Alex Goldberg, co-ordinating chaplain, who has met members of the circuit Sabbatical Support Group, was unable to use Zoom on his Sabbath, and so sent a warmly encouraging video message appreciating the contribution of the Methodist Church to the Chaplaincy. Another encouraging video message on behalf of the University was given by Patrick Degg, Vice President External Engagement and member of the University Council (governing body). The head of the Wellbeing Department, Laura Smythson, attended and spoke to the VP about the contribution of chaplaincy within the Wellbeing Department, supporting students and staff during difficult times. I began the meeting using the words of John Wesley above. This elicited the humorous aside from Duncan that it is always good to quote an Anglican priest (John and Charles Wesley remained Anglican priests till their death). Seriously, this reminds us of our shared heritage with our friends in the Church of England. The VP engaged with the meeting and gave closing remarks. At each meeting, the VP was introduced by the District Chair.

Not everyone could attend these meetings, but Carolyn has recorded a sermon which is accessible to those with an internet connection. I hope the report above will suggest things to thank God for and topics for prayer.

God bless you,

Keith

Keith C. Beckingham, Superintendent Minister.