



Weybridge Methodist Church

Newsletter October 2022



**All good gifts around us are sent from Heaven above
Then thank the Lord, Oh Thank the Lord
For all his love**

The calling of the Methodist Church is to respond to the gospel of God's love in Christ and to live out its discipleship in worship and

Dear Friends,

By the time you read this the funeral of her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II will have taken place. Like many of you, I will have watched the service on TV – in my case for two reasons. One is that (although I regard myself as neither monarchist nor republican) I want to honour someone who sought to live by the teachings of Christ in the public eye. The second is because these major national occasions often influence the requests people make for their own funerals, just as royal weddings affect wedding requests. (Ask your friendly local organist how often they were asked to play Widor's Toccata following Charles and Diana's wedding.)

This prompts me to reflect on the purpose of a funeral. A college tutor of mine said that your answer to the question, 'Who is the funeral for?' will show whether you are Protestant or Catholic. For Catholics, the primary purpose of the funeral is for the deceased, in praying for the repose of their soul. The service may bring comfort to the bereaved, but the primary focus is on the deceased, and there is a view that their eternal state can still be influenced.

Protestant Christians do not see it this way. In Reformation theology, our eternal destiny is sealed at death. Nothing can change it now. Scriptures such as Hebrews 9:27 come into play: 'people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.' In rejecting the Catholic approach, for a long time many Protestants didn't even hold funerals when one of their number died. When Peter Howson served in the old Woking and Walton-on-Thames Circuit, he remarked that until recent decades that had been the case in Scotland (where he ministered before coming here).

But we have come around to funerals. However, we answer my college lecturer's question by saying that the funeral is for the bereaved, not the deceased. It is to help us with our grief, and to enable us to give thanks to God for the life of the one we have lost.

In recent times the trend has emphasised more the thanksgiving than the grief. We see printed orders of service entitled, 'A service in celebration of the life of [the deceased's name]'. I think that's a mistake. I believe we have things out of balance. We need the mourning as well as the thanksgiving.

One of my favourite Bible verses when it comes to funerals is 1 Thessalonians 4:13. It first hit home with me twenty years ago when Debbie and I lost a dear friend in a congregation to breast cancer. Carolyn was only 41. As I struggled for what to say in the funeral for Tim and her children (then both primary school age) this verse was part of a passage in the Lectionary for the Sunday beforehand

Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope.

Note that Paul doesn't tell the Thessalonians they shouldn't grieve, he tells them they don't need to grieve without hope.

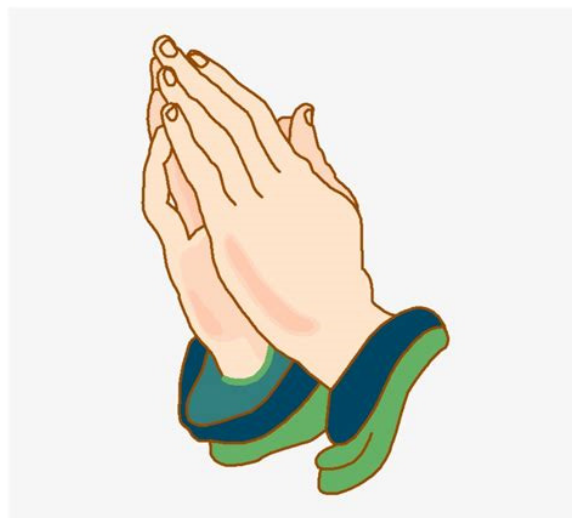
We need to grieve. As the late Queen herself said, 'Grief is the price we pay for love.' It is what we do because we can no longer show love to the deceased person.

But we also as Christians have hope. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ prefigures our own. It is why at a funeral we commit the person's body to be buried or cremated 'in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.'

Do not be ashamed to grieve. But grieve in Christian hope. Hold grief and hope together in tension. This is the path of healing that Jesus has given us.

Your friend,

Dave Faulkner



Worship and activities in October 2022

02nd October	10.30 am Rev Allan Taylor
19 th October	10 – 12 our coffee morning at Addlestone Methodist church. HELP REQUIRED: Paula is unable to cover this event with Linda. A volunteer is need to assist from 10 – 12 on this date
10 th October	10.30 am Local Arrangement
13 th October	7.45 pm Church Council in the vestry
15 th October	Circuit Mission Day (see page 6)
17 th October	10.30am Church Anniversary Rev Sydney Samuel Lake with Communion
20 th October	our turn to assist at the Old Folks Club
23 rd October	10.30 am Mr Graham Pearcey
30 th October	10.30 am Mr Dave Ingoldby

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Refreshments will be served after the services.

Thank you to all those who help with refreshments.

Thanks to those who regularly set up the tables & chairs for refreshments.

Prayers for all who need our extra prayers:



For Paula as she continues to recover from a nasty bout of Covid.

For Dave who is recovering well from his recent surgery this month

For Carol who is still waiting for a date for her surgery.

For all those whose health is uncertain remembering in particular Anna & Nancy.

For Sydney Samuel following his successful re-invitation for a further year.

*During the summer of 2022 the Circuit Stewards Team undertook the Connexional process of re-invitation following the request by Rev Sydney Samuel Lake for a re-invitation subsequent to the end of his ministry in the Wey Valley Circuit in July 2023.*

*The process of consultation was followed and the Circuit Invitations Committee met to review the report. As a consequence a recommendation for a one year extension to Sydney Samuels's ministry was submitted to the Wey Valley Circuit Meeting in September 2022. There were no objections to the recommendation which was accepted.*

*Rev Sydney Samuel Lake will now serve in the Wey Valley Circuit until July 2024.*

*Thanks to all who took part in the process and contributed to the successful outcome.*

## Circuit Mission Day

15<sup>th</sup> October, 10 for 10.30 at Godalming United church  
Bridge Rd, Godalming, GU7 3DU

Bring your own lunch, tea/coffee provided.



Tom Lewis is a pioneer Community Chaplain working in a new housing area. He'll lead some creative discussions to help us rethink mission and discover some simple ways to be more missional in our everyday life.

"The Word became flesh and moved into the neighbourhood." John 1:14 (The Message). Long ago God became a man so that he could go and live amongst the people he loved. We, as his followers, are called to do the same! Our faith is not limited to Sundays or church buildings; All of us are called to live out the good news of Jesus in our neighbourhoods through all we do and say.

*Nearest parking is at the Crown Court, GU7 1HR*

# **Wey Valley Circuit Structure and Strategy**

## **Report to Circuit Meeting and subsequently to all churches from the Circuit Leadership Team**

“Come, build the Church - not heaps of stone in safe, immobile, measured walls, But friends of Jesus, Spirit-blown, and fit to travel where he calls.” (Brian Wren – Singing the Faith 679)

“I believe God's clock keeps perfect time. I believe God may have raised up John Wesley as much for the twenty-first century as for the eighteenth century...I believe that even though what we now call Methodism is in too many ways what Wesley came to get rid of, it need not come to this. Sometimes our solutions lie as much in the past as in the present or the future.’ I believe what historians call the 'Methodist Revolution' is an unfinished revolution.” (Leonard Sweet)

### **Introduction**

Over the past few months many of us have necessarily been focusing on the future of the Circuit, specifically in terms of finance and stationing.

It is worth reminding ourselves that the very purpose of a Circuit is for local churches to interconnect for ‘mission, mutual encouragement and help’. It is good as we start this process to be confident of our 'why' as Christians called Methodists. God is consistently working in new and surprising ways. Calling us out of our comfort zones to follow where the Spirit calls. John Wesley - when asked what the purpose of Methodism was replied - 'To reform the nation and the Church' and 'to spread scriptural holiness over the land.' That has been reaffirmed as our purpose as Methodist people time and again over the years by the Conference.

At the Circuit Vision Day in February 2022, it was agreed that the current structure and consequent administrative burden of the Circuit is becoming unmanageable. At the end of that session a group was formed to look at what changes might reduce the work load and at the same time generate enthusiasm and ambition for growth, and not simply how best to survive. Issues of finance and staffing (both prsebytral and voluntary) are inevitably essential components of this but strengths and opportunities are equally important. We need to look broader and deeper than hitherto to discern a sustainable strategy and structure for the Circuit, and to assist and support the churches in the same objective.

The rest of this paper provides an introduction to the practical issues we face and suggests a route by which we might approach our response to them with prayer and honest conversation.

## **Finance**

Inevitably our churches suffered financially through the pandemic but most have indicated significant recovery over the past year. Throughout this period the Circuit Assessment had been largely met and funding has been made available in response to specific needs, such as support for on-going ministry at St Michaels Sheerwater. Nevertheless, as reported to the Circuit Meeting in July 2022, the Circuit has been operating on a deficit budget basis in recent years (over £60k in the current year) which cannot continue. It should also be borne in mind that deficit budgeting disguises the true cost of operating and is ineffective as a basis for directing resources to where they can be most effective.

Various proposals were tabled in July and it was agreed that the Circuit must set a balanced budget going forward. Recognising that this will have difficult consequences for churches it was also agreed that the Circuit must be pro-active in identifying the opportunities and challenges which our churches face and offer support to resolve their situation - growth, merger or closure all being possibilities.

Alongside the Circuit assessment the single biggest cost item for our churches is running and maintaining their premises. Inevitably churches have and will continue to have 'wish lists' and requirements for maintenance work, in some cases involving significant cost. We need to consider where that money can be found and how we assess 'value for money' in the context of other ambitions and initiatives. The Circuit has an established process for awarding grants to churches (currently on hold) but has consistently sought to ensure that other than in exceptional circumstances these should be for 'missional' work and specifically not for repairs and maintenance.

Financial expertise is sadly in short supply. Some of our churches have been unable to find a Treasurer amongst their membership and so have had to 'sub-contract' that responsibility. This is plainly not ideal for such an important part of our stewardship

## **Human resources**

The Circuit has been well treated in stationing in recent years. We have managed to maintain a numerical strength of 6 presbyters (now 5 $\frac{2}{3}$  full-



time equivalent) as we had on amalgamation in 2016. Over the same period the membership of the Circuit has reduced from 895 to less than 700. The availability of presbyters in stationing is such that between 150 and 250 members per presbyter should now be assumed. It is inevitable that from September 2023 the Circuit will have one fewer presbyter with the potential of a further reduction in 2024.

The fact that our membership is spread across 13 churches means that the leadership and administrative burden is considerably greater than if concentrated in a few larger churches. As trustees we have a duty of care to our presbyters and need to have regard at all times to the responsibilities and workload placed upon them. How much time and energy is a presbyter able to put into mission and development (services to which they were 'called'), when they have the pressing administrative burden of 3 or 4 churches to oversee?

The preaching plan reflects the availability of both ordained ministers and local preachers. In recent Quarters there has been an increasing need for churches to plan 'Local arrangements'. On the most recent plan (June-August 2022) there were 21 of these, compared with 7 in the equivalent period in 2019.

Whilst many of our churches employ lay staff, the bulk of the work continues to be undertaken by our members on a voluntary basis. It is a trend in society as a whole that younger people seem less inclined than past generations to commit themselves to institutional life and the work of running organisations. Our churches are characterised generally by an older, and ageing, demographic profile which presents its own constraints. No doubt this is a familiar concern in many of our churches whilst at Circuit level we have been without a Property Secretary and Lay Worker Secretary for some time and urgently need to recruit additional Circuit Stewards.

This is more than an issue about finding people to do the practical tasks associated with running our churches. Over-burdened by the minutiae of church life we are apt to lose the sense of joy that should form an integral part of our life in Christ. Our time and energy is all too easily consumed by 'keeping the show on the road' instead of focusing on experiencing for ourselves and sharing with others the love of God.

## **Administrative structures**

Churches unable to sustain their established modus operandi might opt to combine for shared services, establish joint Church Councils, joint Trusts, or seek a full merger. Any of these may suit different situations but are not necessarily straightforward. It may prove difficult to recruit volunteers for joint Councils or Trusts representing more than one church society because of the greater individual workload and the need for involvement in the affairs of churches with which the volunteers do not feel any direct affinity.

If a small church decides to close, or its membership falls below 12, its members should become a Class of a larger church for pastoral care and support, with the larger church adopting the responsibilities of the Managing Trustees of the small church building. However unless any surplus buildings are sold such a merger will result in the overall workload and responsibility being shifted and not necessarily reduced.

The impact on Circuit finances also needs to be considered. If merger or closure results in all the Members transferring to another church within the Circuit the level of contribution by Circuit Assessment might be maintained. In practice however some reduction in membership is inevitable for various reasons. Circuit finances would then suffer unless capital funds released by the sale of property are used to reinforce revenue streams to support remaining churches – an ever-decreasing circle.

The closure of a church may represent the loss of a Methodist witness in that particular place, or may channel it in a different direction, but will set in train a potentially challenging consideration of future arrangements. This need not, and should not, become a discussion about decline but rather of opportunities for a new but different expression of Christian witness. There may well be ways, perhaps with new partners, to reduce the finance and effort demanded by some of our old buildings and refresh the church's witness in the community.

## **Conclusion**

The Circuit and its predecessors have initiated review processes in the past, asking churches to think about their future, how to develop their mission and identify, what would be needed to help them forward. The capital funds at the Circuit's disposal can then be used in the most effective way to further the work of God, rather than as a means to

maintain the status quo, which is effectively a cushion to manage further gentle decline.

The financial and human resource issues facing us mean that the status quo is no longer a sustainable basis for Circuit strategy. At the same time the pandemic has created new opportunities (most obviously through online activities) which encourage us to think and plan in new ways. We have to acknowledge that this may involve giving up cherished things to do with buildings and practices and adopting new relationships and arrangements.

Through prayer and careful discussion we need to seek the will of God for the Circuit and our churches. Accordingly the CLT wishes to facilitate discussions within the leadership of each of our churches to consider openly and honestly the impact and scope of their witness both now and in the future having regard to their geographic and demographic situation and the resources available. We need to identify opportunities whilst honestly recognising the challenges; hope must be tempered with realism. The organisation of Methodism expects us to consider at Circuit level how the strong may be able to assist the weak, but we should not be seduced into assuming that our larger churches are immune from the pressures that others face. On the contrary, the reverse may be true. Frank sharing of our positions may help to allay any fears.

A model for these discussions might be found in the following categorisation of churches (offered by a past President of Conference):

A place of Pastoral Care - a church that has got below critical mass and doesn't want to be made to try anything else new but just wants to be lovingly cared for towards the end of its life. (Therefore receiving loving but limited Circuit resourcing).

A place of Discerning - a church that isn't quite sure where it is heading and needs time, space and help to seek God's guidance. (Receiving a middle level of Circuit support and input as it decides - it might then move into either of the other 2 categories.)

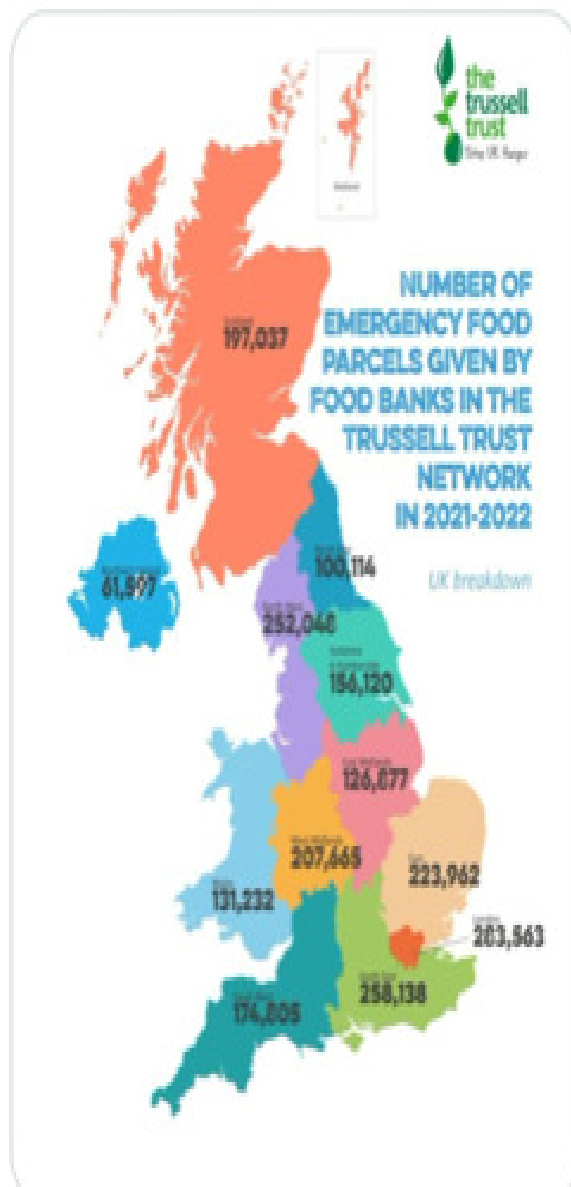
A place of Mission - a church with a clear and discerned way forward that needs help to bring this into being. (Receiving the highest level of Circuit resourcing as the work takes shape and moves forward.)

Finally, this cannot be an exercise in 'kicking the can down the road' for a few more years. Energy, time and finance will not permit that. But with your help we can seek to identify opportunities for 'mission, mutual

encouragement and help'. Moreover, we owe it to those who have gone before to secure a spirit-led and viable future for Methodism in Wey Valley.

### Recommendation

The Circuit Leadership Team recommends this process be taken forward by the CLT engaging with all Church leadership teams ASAP and in any event before the March Circuit Meeting



Thank you to all who donated Harvest Gifts for the Food Bank. They were very gratefully received on Tuesday last.

Here is a chart showing the magnitude of donations across the country during the period distributed June 2021 – June 2022

This December our church will be supporting the 'Reverse Advent' initiative because we haven't done so since pre Covid!

How it works: every day from 1 – 24 December place one item into a box so that there are 24 gifts by Christmas. These are then taken to the food banks ready for use in January, which is usually one of the busiest months of the year.

God has been good to us, we should go and do likewise.

*Thanks to Jean for the graphic.*