



 North Kent Methodist Circuit

grapevine

CIRCUIT NEWS



inside...

OUR METHODIST WAY OF LIFE
EVERYONE AN ENVANGELIST

Issue Seventeen
Spring 2021

Grapevine Spring 2021

A year ago, COVID was just beginning to make itself known in the UK and we were all wondering what effect it might have on our lives. I remember saying that I thought it might be Christmas before things went back to 'normal'. I didn't specify which Christmas! In the meantime we have learned much about new ways of doing and being Church and even more about being flexible with our plans (and our Preaching Plan!).

As we enter another period of Spring, we start looking out again for new shoots and signs of life. In this issue of Grapevine, we explore the work some of our lay employees have been doing in these challenging times and some ideas for what the future might hold. We'll also have a little closer look at the "Methodist Way of Life" document that many in our Connexion have found helpful over recent months. And we'll get a preview of part of the evangelism strategy that we will be attempting in coming months along with the whole of the Methodist Connexion.

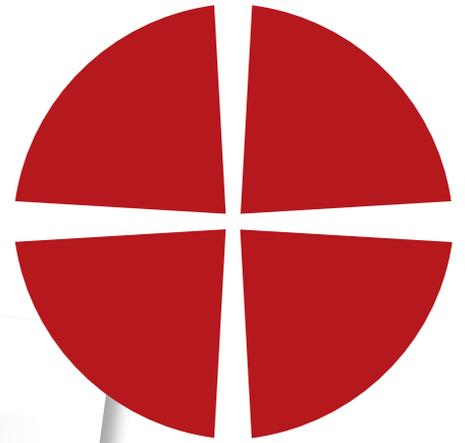
We continue to be grateful for the faithful contributions of so many across the Circuit during these difficult times. The financial giving of many has enabled most of our congregations to weather the storm successfully. Pastoral care by phone, post and email has increased significantly. Circuit worship services have continued unabated and led us into a new sense of who we are as a circuit – a fellowship of people called Methodists worshipping, learning and caring, serving, and evangelising all across North Kent. As John Wesley said,

*"The best of all is:
God is with us."*

Bonni-Belle



Our Methodist Way of Life



May we be a blessing within and beyond God's Church for the transformation of the world.

As Methodists we accept Jesus as Saviour and Christ. We inherit John Wesley's teachings on Prevenient Grace, Justification by Grace, Sanctification by Grace, the obstacles to Grace and the Means of Grace. We know the Kingdom of God and we are joined together with the Holy Spirit in our journey of learning.

What does this mean for me in 2021 living with the COVID-19 pandemic? When in 1738 John Wesley asked a similar question, it was answered in that heart-warming moment at Aldersgate. As a result, a society formed around John Wesley and he developed "The 12 Rules of a Helper." Part of his Methodist idea was that we should be aware of what we actually do and say in our daily lives and have some constant ideas about what that looks and feels like to other people.

In 2000 Conference introduced "Our Calling" which has appeared on membership cards ever since and has become familiar, but is familiarity sufficient for us as the inheritors of Wesley? He asked the members of his society to review how they lived on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis.

Today, the Methodist Way of Life is relevant to the lives of the people of the United Kingdom and the World. The foundations of life have been rocked as many people move away from the traditional core values of the 20th century towards a life with little or no

place for God. Now the virus has further isolated men, women and children and devastates the life of people and government.

To help us to maintain our Methodist Way of Life and share it with the world, Methodist Conference has expanded the "Our Calling" document with 20 new questions and statements. This new document which you received with your membership card is called "The Methodist Way of Life". We need to be learning it by heart and discussing it with God in our daily prayers and as often as we can with our friends and other people in order to show the world Jesus as Saviour and Christ.

A Methodist Way of Life

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 mission.

As far as we are able, with God's help:

Worship

- We will pray daily.
- We will worship with others regularly.
- We will look and listen for God in Scripture, and the world

Learning and Caring

- We will care for ourselves and those around us.
- We will learn more about our faith.
- We will practise hospitality and generosity.

Service

- We will help people in our communities and beyond
- We will care for creation and all God's gifts.
- We will challenge injustice.

Evangelism

- We will speak of the love of God.
- We will live in a way that draws others to Jesus
- We will share our faith with others.

May we be a blessing within and beyond God's Church for the transformation of the world.

The Methodist Church

A Methodist Way of Life
A Methodist Way of Life encourages us to grow together. Make time to discuss these questions regularly with others.

Worship

- What is the pattern of your prayer life?
- How easy or hard do you find it to pray?
- What has spoken to you recently in worship or in the Bible?
- When, lately, have you felt close to God or distant from God?

Learning and Caring

- How have you practised generosity since we last met?
- How have you shown hospitality to others recently?
- How are you caring for yourself?
- How and what are you learning now?

Service

- How are you seeking to serve others in your communities and beyond? What has helped or hindered you in your service of others?
- How are you caring for God's creation? (including your financial resources)?
- How are you using God's gifts (including your financial resources)?
- What issues of injustice are you currently concerned about? What are you doing in response?

Evangelism

- When was the last time you were able to talk about God?
- What opportunities to share your faith have there been since we last met?
- How have you responded to opportunities to share your faith?
- Is there anyone you might invite to consider Christian faith?

How can we support each other in our Way of Life commitments?

Find out more - <https://www.nkmethodists.org.uk/>

If any of the above is confusing then please talk to a minister, a local preacher or a friend, because these ideas are important for your life in Jesus.

Richard Vincent

Everyone an Evangelist

As we begin to transition out of a difficult year and into a “vaccinated” 2021, my thoughts turn towards the challenges and opportunities the “new normal” will present. As a Circuit we have learnt so much about the potential of the internet and the importance of our church communities. Our churches have worked very hard to keep the Christian witness in our communities alive and visible even when the church building has been out of bounds. Most of this witness has been online, but also through volunteering in our neighbourhoods, supporting foodbanks and the most vulnerable as opportunities have presented themselves. In so many ways, we rose to the unprecedented challenges that 2020 presented and faithfully witnessed and served in creative and new ways.

However, as 2020 unfolded it also highlighted the vulnerability of many of our churches and the Circuit. The issues that face us and the wider Methodist Connexion became quite stark against the backdrop of the pandemic. They include the usual suspects of declining congregations, an aging demographic, a growing dependence on renting our properties, challenges in filling key roles, and a lack of new Christians regularly finding faith through our witness and evangelism. These issues are nothing new, but the past year has perhaps given us a fresh impetus to grapple with them, in prayer and seeking the leading of the Holy Spirit, and in taking obedient brave steps to follow the Lord and bring new health to his Church.

As part of my role I seek to encourage confidence in one of the areas highlighted above, namely evangelism and mission. Many of the challenges we face are symptoms of the fact that we are not seeing new Christians entering into the life of our congregations in the way they once did. Someone once said at a gathering at Cliff College, “New Christians are the petrol that fuels the engine of the Church. They put the fire

of God’s saving activity at the heart of who we are, but without them the Church quickly becomes a static caravan, a familiar place of rest rather than an ever moving adventure.” Familiar places of rest are needed and useful, but the Church has a mission and a life that causes us to be a people ever on the move, sojourners with Christ, seeking the lost and announcing the Kingdom. New Christians announce the power and transformative love of God in a way that nothing else quite achieves; their testimonies, tears, questions, and “first love” passion for Jesus encourage and challenge the Church in equal measure. They also offer their time, gifts, talents, and resources as they are discipled and the Spirit witnesses to their spirit that they belong to a new family – a family on a mission!

Over the coming months I hope to develop a number of resources and events that will form a loose strategy for growth within the Circuit. The strategy will largely reflect the priority headings of the Connexional Report “God for All” that was presented and affirmed by Conference this year.

The brief headings here (taken from “God for All”) give a rough road map of what route we may take in the coming year:

- A call to prayer – specifically for renewal and new believers
 - > Regular circuit and local church prayer meetings for growth. These may be over Zoom and/or move around the circuit.
- Embedding a culture of congregational testimony
 - > Use our newly embedded online presence to broadcast testimonies of church members and staff – on Facebook, YouTube and our website.
 - > To further encourage personal testimony to be a regular part of our Sunday meetings.

- Equipping the whole church for evangelism
 - > To use training material such as “Talking Jesus” to encourage and equip local church members to be better able to share their faith in Christ.
 - > To encourage preaching that invites, emboldens and challenges us to be witnesses to the love and grace of Christ.
- Training and sending out dedicated evangelists
 - > To begin a process of training and permission-giving that recognises the gift of evangelism, framing and valuing it within the life of the Church. Discerning and promoting effective and sensitive patterns of evangelistic practice.
- Encouraging the use of established relational evangelistic tools
 - > No need to re-invent the wheel – we need to make better use of proven tools such as the Alpha Course, Christianity Explored... Many of our churches have used these tools before, but I believe that now is the time to revisit some of them.

It’s a simple outline and I fully recognise it is a “labour in vain” if the Lord isn’t the instigator, builder and sustaining power at the centre of all we do. That is why I strongly believe everything needs to be rooted and soaked in prayer and to find its foundation on the Lord’s leading, his gracious voice and edifying love. “Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith” (Hebrews 12:1-2).

Bart Woodhouse
Circuit Mission Enabler

The life of a Circuit Property Administrator

Since I was appointed as Circuit Lay Worker to provide administrative support in September 2016, much has happened. COVID was not a dot in the sky then, but it has affected us all in the last year. More on that later.

Among many tasks that have come my way, property sales have taken the most time and energy. I have now assisted with a house (manse) purchase in Ebbsfleet and the sale of two manses in Dartford and Gillingham. We sold the Sutton-at-Holm church and are now in the process of selling the former Wood Street Methodist Church (Rainbow Centre). These have all involved dealings with surveyors, solicitors, estate agents or auctioneers, and TMCP (Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes), the legal body of the Methodist Church in Manchester with its distinctive way of doing things. These have all been a learning curve for me, in some cases a long drawn-out one.

Before each property has been sold, it has to be in a state fit for selling. Sometimes this means keeping an eye on the property over a considerable length of time (2 years for Cox Gardens, Gillingham).

Each sale or purchase also means I have to set up an entry on the online Methodist Consents system which provides a detailed monitoring systems of property maintenance, sales, purchases and leasing of all church buildings and manses across the Connexion. As many of you who work with property at the local church level will know, before anything major is done to a Methodist property, it has to be agreed at the Circuit, District, and Connexional levels. The Consents system also provides a method of ascertaining where the finance is coming from for these projects.

Each legal document of purchase or sale needs the signature of two Managing Trustees once the paperwork has been put together by our solicitors and the TMCP people. Signing on behalf of the Circuit is quite a responsibility for me and a colleague.

Since the arrival of COVID, everything has changed: working from home and meetings on Zoom have increased,

while on-site visits and travelling around has dramatically reduced. A total change of lifestyle has come about as we all come to terms with a different way of doing things. Several of the professionals involved in our property sales have been on furlough or unavailable in their capacity, which has often caused frustrating delays.

As we wait to see what 2021 brings with COVID vaccines and Brexit, we anticipate a new year with more challenges.

Chris Chare
NKMC Lay Worker



A day in the life of a (virtual) youth pastor

Once I have got into the church office (or set myself up in my living room) and made myself a cuppa, I start my working day.

I check my emails and think ahead to what I have coming up that week. I have joined many Methodist regional training and pastoral meetings that have been provided online, which has been really helpful. All my meetings have gone online, so I have a few Zoom meetings most weeks.

Just before Christmas, I helped to run an online Youth Alpha across Medway, something that may have been more difficult to run in person. We are planning to start it again in February 2021.

I run two online youth groups and a Youth Bible study. Organising games and activities that can be done over video has become an interesting part of my job. We've done quizzes, Mastermind, Cluedo, Pictionary and The Chase to name a few. In the Bible study we are currently watching YouTube

videos called Middle Ground, (which show a topic and two opposing points of view) – we stop the video in various places and discuss the topic.

I plan, film and edit weekly videos for one of our Sunday school groups with one of my volunteers, Karen Willing. This has been a huge learning curve in planning how to teach when we don't see the children face-to-face. Also video editing is a skill that I never would have thought I would gain.

By the evening I am normally in my living room, getting ready for one of my groups. It has been hard not seeing my young people in person, but these groups have become a real blessing and lots of fun.

Some of my young people would not be able to make these groups in person, but technology has made it easier for

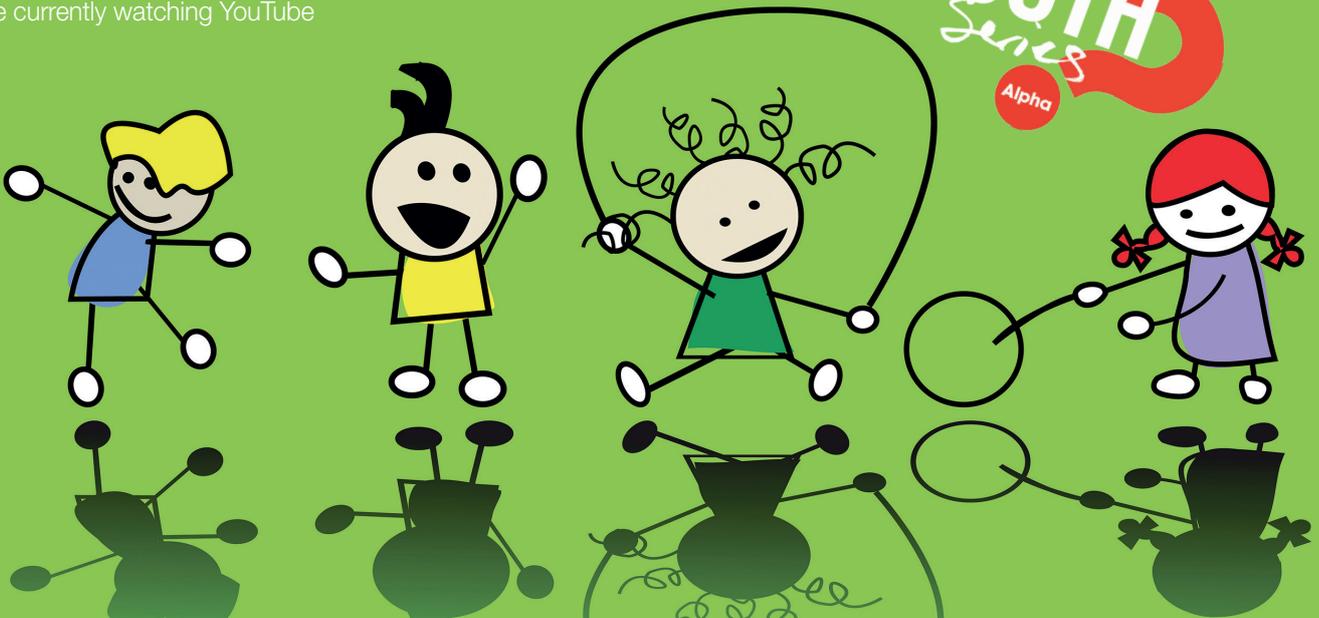
them to engage. With the Chinese church, we never had a youth group in person, as it was difficult to come up with a time when my young people could meet. But online it is much easier and I am able to see them regularly.

We end our sessions in a time of prayer and chatting through how they are doing.

A year ago, I would have never have believed that my youth ministry would look like it does now. This year has thrown up many challenges, but God has been through it all with us and I believe many blessings have come out of it.

Helen Young, Youth Pastor
(Third Avenue and the Chinese Church)

ALPHA
YOUTH
Series
Alpha



For the next issue:

Please send contributions on 'New Normal' as a Word document, no longer than 500 words, to bonni-belle.pickard@methodist.org.uk to arrive by 25 March 2021. If you can, please attach a suitable high quality image, but do not embed it in a document.