



North Kent Methodist Circuit

grapevine

CIRCUIT NEWS AND PREACHING PLAN



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WHY TAKE 4 WHEN YOU CAN TAKE 9?!

Issue Thirty Nine
Autumn 2026

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**Dear friends,
When I was at
theological college
(otherwise known
as 'vicar school'),
there were certain
words that were
rather over-used, to the extent that
students joked that everyone should
have to take a shot of communion
wine (non-alcoholic for the
Methodists, of course) whenever
they were mentioned. One such
word was 'liminal.'**

A 'liminal' space is an 'in-between' space; a time of change and transition. My liturgy tutor would talk about rites of passage in the church that include a 'liminal moment' during which a boundary is crossed, which cannot easily be un-crossed. The curtains close over the coffin at a funeral, or the minister declares 'I now pronounce you husband and wife.'

As I write this in June, as a circuit, we are in something of a 'liminal space.' In the summer issue of

Grapevine, Rev Bonni-Belle shared her reflections as she prepared to say farewell to the North Kent Circuit and to sit down (Methodist-speak for 'retire'). By September, Rev Alex will have stepped into the role of Superintendent, and Alex and Rev Robert will have taken joint pastoral charge of Union Street Methodist Church.

Periods of change and transition can be unsettling; however, the Bible shows repeatedly that they are also periods when God frequently breaks in, bringing creativity and new life. God often seems to surprise people when they are on the road 'in between' two places, whether it's the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, or Jacob in Genesis 32 on the long and emotional journey back to his home country, when he met and wrestled with God and came away both bruised and blessed.

In this issue, you'll find photos and reflections from the Local Preachers' and Worship Leaders' away day,

from the sun-soaked circuit picnic, from Sarah Smith's accreditation as a Local Preacher, all in May. It's always wonderful, at these events, to see friends from across the circuit, and to be reminded that we are part of something bigger than our local church. It's good to remember, in these liminal seasons, that although the faces at these events will change over the years, our shared identity remains the same, because we are the Body of Christ in this place, with Christ as our head (Colossians 1:18).

So I wonder, as we go through this particular liminal season - where is God looking to surprise us, to bless us, and to bring about 'a new thing'?

**Every blessing,
Rev Naomi**

*He is the head of his body, the church;
he is the source of the body's life. He is the first-born Son,
who was raised from death, in order that he alone might have
the first place in all things*

Colossians 1:18 (GNT)

Local Preachers & Worship Leaders Away Day 2026

This year's LP/WL Away Day took place on 16th May. We gathered at The Friars in Aylesford, a change of venue from previous years. Unfortunately, there were a series of 'important' Stationing and Candidating meetings also scheduled for that day, although I would argue than none were quite as important as our Away Day. That meant that some people were unable to attend, but others were able to drop in for parts of the day.

Our keynote speaker was Rev Steve Rouse from the London Institute of Contemporary Christianity (LICC), an engaging speaker who spoke on the theme of 'Gathered to Scatter,' or 'Leading Worship with Monday in View.'

For those of you who may not have come across the LICC, their ongoing work is to remind and enable Christians to live out the Good News of Jesus Christ not only in church, but on our 'frontlines,' the places in which we find ourselves day by day: school, work, cafes, the gym, U3A, walking and so on.

Steve made the point that gathered worship is important but that there are three elements to consider: Upward Worship, to God; Inward Worship, to each other, and crucially Outward Worship to our frontlines. He suggested that leaders of worship invite the congregation to picture the places they frequent during the week as well as the church building whenever there is a 'here,' 'place' or 'presence' mentioned in a hymn.



As preachers, we should be mindful that everyone is important to God, and all people are key to God's Kingdom. If there is someone in your congregation who feels diminished because they 'only' work in an office and not for a charity or the church, we need to remind them that their frontline is as important as the next person's.

For instance, intercessions could include specific prayers for the scattered congregation - for the places they return to on a Monday. The notices could include the things that the congregation are celebrating: a promotion, a new job, a new baby. Church services could include a 'This Time Tomorrow' feature, where members of the congregation share where they will be tomorrow and this exact time, and prayers are said for that situation.

Steve finished with a quote from John Leeman:

"The church building doors should open and God's words should echo out the doors, down the street, and into the members' homes and

workplaces. The reverberations that began in the pulpit should be bouncing off the walls in dining rooms, kitchens, children's bedrooms; off gymnasium walls, cubicle dividers, and the insides of city bus windows."

The Away Day finished with the annual service of re-dedication for the Local Preachers and communion, led by Bonni-Belle. The Local Preachers and Worship Leaders of the North Kent Circuit were all mentioned and thanks given for their service.

We are currently in planning for next year's Away Day because we feel that it is a blessed time of learning, discussion and fellowship with our colleagues. Thank you to everyone who sent feedback. We have an equal number of 'the day should be shorter' and 'it should be a weekend retreat,' so we reckon we're getting it about right!

Tracey Burch,
LP Secretary

Recipe for North Kent



Ingredients:

- 60 assorted members of churches from around North Kent Methodist Circuit, including children and family members (and a dog)
- Abundant picnic hampers full of food
- Two large red Methodist feather signs
- 1 District Chair, Rev Conrad Hicks
- 1 Eastern Area Practical and Pastoral Support, Rev Gavin Hancocks
- Circuit 'Bingo' sheets
- Several Super Soakers (giant water pistols)
- Large rope for jumping

Method:

Combine first three ingredients at the edge of a large open field at the Friars, Aylesford. Distribute into camp chairs, benches, and picnic blankets under large shade trees. Gently fold in brief introductions of District Chair and EAPP. Share food and conversation abundantly. Stimulate further mixing with 'bingo' sheets.

Bake gently for two hours in sun with partial shade. Garnish with children racing across the field with Super Soakers and an adult jump rope competition. Just before removing from field, season with a scripture reading on Loaves and Fishes and prayer. Baking is complete when hearts are completely warmed and smiles are visible on every face. Release for service in the world.

Bonni-Belle Pickard



Circuit Summer Picnic



The Greatest Gift

Dear friends,

Not long ago I had an email from my former colleague from Slovakia. We were a great team of people leading a small Methodist community into many adventures and exciting opportunities which opened when the communist regime fell and the iron curtain opened. It was in 1990s as you may all know.

One of the projects we were supporting was a small studio in the basement of the Methodist headquarters in Bratislava, the capital city. This building was purchased for the Methodist mission in Slovakia sometime in the 1920s - 30s by United Methodist churches from the Texas conference. It was an old, old house, in the street under the castle hill. It was originally a Vinery house with as much basement space as there was space above ground. So in one of these basements which was regularly flooded my colleague Brano built a small studio and filmed a series of lovely puppet stories called "Brano and Kamila". These two characters travelled in different times, and helped children to better understand the message of the Bible and the greatest gift ever, Jesus Christ. These series were widely used on summer camps and made their way into the schools too. To me, being completely uneducated about making films, it seemed quite a miracle, because I saw a humble studio, often soaked from the last burst from the basement overflow valve. I remember how Brano cut large pieces of cardboard into shapes of an aeroplane, clouds etc, and asked a helper to move them around while he recorded everything and then did all the magic of editing and cutting. A movie came out. It was a time of digital cameras but no AI assistance.

Well it must have touched many hearts and it looks like the story still wants to make its way to another generation of children. Supported by a new team of devoted people there is a new children's book on the market. Brano



was originally asking me to organise a collection to support the project but by the time I came to do that, I had a message that fundraising had reached the target of 12,520 EURO within 38 days. Praise the Lord and now we only hope and pray that the true message of Christmas will be reaching out to children and families in Slovakia. I would say thank you for your support but in this case I can only say thank you for reading, and perhaps next time. There will be an English version coming out if there is sufficient demand, so maybe there will be chance to support it again.

I hesitated writing this since it no longer has its original purpose, but as an afterthought I see how meaningful it is that if you have an idea to help reach people with your talents you don't have to be the size of Disney or Hollywood. God uses everyone in all places.

This is the humble story of a small team of people who ran with the vision God gave them and didn't



give up. Thank you Brano and team for your determination.

Rev Robert Zachar

This is the link to the original campaign which already finished but carries more details if anyone would like to have a look. English text follows after Slovak, scroll patiently :-)

<https://donio.sk/knizkanajvacsidar>



Why take four years when you can take nine?!



Well, I've finally completed my Local Preacher's training and had my accreditation service fittingly on Pentecost and Aldersgate Sunday. Whilst my journey to become a Local Preacher has taken longer than most, it's certainly something I feel God has called me to do! I grew up in a Methodist family with my three sisters and I going to a small chapel in Roade, near Northampton every week with our Dad whilst Mum cooked an amazing roast and had a bit of quiet time! Our Sunday School was led by two amazing brothers and was rich with quizzes, complex nativity plays, and Sunday School Anniversaries filled with beautiful scenes from Bible stories for us to collaboratively colour. I was an enthusiastic JMA and Sunny Smiles collector and was indulged and encouraged by the elderly members of the congregation.

At 18 I went to Cheltenham to train to be a teacher and had a brief period out of Methodism attending a United Reformed Church and engaging with and leading their youth groups. I became confirmed as a member there and alongside this also discovered a passion for multi-cultural education with a placement in inner city Birmingham. During this time, I also met my future husband, who completed his course two years before me so looked for jobs around the country. I must confess I was underwhelmed when he found a job in Kent as in the early 90s, this did not appear to fit my multi-cultural passion until I found Gravesend!

I moved to Kent in June 1992 and set about looking for a church to join. As I was renting in Cutmore Street near the station, I was initially intending to try the Baptist church but, as they didn't have the times of their services displayed out the front of the church, I walked through the doors of the Methodist church on Sunday morning. The warmth of the greeting and the feeling of coming home meant that I have never left!

I fully embraced life at Gravesend Methodist Church, attending a fellowship group at the Manse, becoming a youth leader, pastoral visitor and setting up a social group for younger adult members of the congregation which I cheekily called our 18-30s group! In 1999 and 2002 we welcomed our daughter and son into our family, and I brought them into our church family too - even if I did once halt a sermon due to the rain stick my daughter was playing with distracting the minister of the time!

In 2008 I changed schools and joined the senior leadership of a newly amalgamated school in Swanscombe where I progressed to Head over several years and job roles. In late 2016 and early 2017 I began to get the feeling through my daily Bible readings that God was calling me to be a Local Preacher and possibly even a minister. I tried to ignore it for a while, but the call became stronger and one Sunday morning I read my Daily Bread Bible Readings and decided that I must talk to my minister my when I next saw him. When I went to church that morning not only was Tony Graff preaching but he was also preaching on Numbers 22 v21-31, Balam's Donkey, so I gave in and talked to Tony about my call to preaching.

Tony then came to talk me through what this call to be a Local Preacher would mean for me, gave me my Note to Preach and fixed me up with my mentor Gill! Gill has been a great encourager for me - never flinching when I made my rookie

errors but quietly talking me through how to make adaptations to enhance my preaching and services, she was always patient when other things got in the way of me completing coursework but also a gentle nagger to get it completed! Congregations have also been so welcoming across the circuit and it's great to make these connexions which is such a strength of Methodism! My Tutor Monica has been an unbelievable support. From those early face to face group meetings, to the online version post Covid and then finally our individual online sessions to keep me on track to meet the extension deadline! Whilst there have been significant life and health events for me, my family and the whole world with the global pandemic, one of the key things that has slowed my journey is the all-encompassing nature of my role as a Primary Headteacher, in a school that when I took it on was in special measures. However, I now feel this part of my journey is over so I'm stepping away from this at the end of the summer to take time to explore what God is calling me to do next, whilst continuing to preach!

I'd like to end by saying if there is anyone out there thinking I wonder if God is calling me to become a Local Preacher, Worship Leader or something else - I strongly recommend you explore it - talk to someone from your church or the circuit and if you do embark on this journey try not to take as long as me!

Sarah Smith

Editor's note: *Huge congratulations on your accreditation, Sarah - you are a great blessing to us as a circuit. Please be assured of our love and prayers as you continue to discern the shape of God's calling on your life.*

North Kent Circuit

Preaching Plan September – November 2026

		SEPTEMBER				OCTOBER				NOVEMBER				
		6	13	20	27	4	11	18	25	1	8	15	22	29
														Advent 1
BEARSTED	10.30	SHEPHERD <i>Creation 1</i>	HOPWOOD <i>Creation 2</i>	WILDING <i>Creation 3</i>	READ <i>Creation 4 hc</i>	DEW <i>URC hv</i>	WEST	ZACHAR <i>hc</i>	LA	R GREY	ZACHAR	READ <i>hc</i>	ZACHAR	ZACHAR <i>us</i>
CHINESE	13.30	CHAN <i>hc</i>	KAY LAU	CHAN	FOO <i>ca</i>	CHAN <i>hc</i>	LAI	CHAN	CHU	CHAN <i>hc</i>	MING KONG	CHAN	TSUI	S LAI
DENE HOLM	11.00	TERRETT <i>hc</i>	LA	DOWN	LA <i>us</i> @ St. Mary	HUDSON-BEDDOWS	LA	S SMITH	LA	PATERSON	LA	ROWE	LA	HUDSON B <i>us</i> @ Spital Street
ECCLES	10.30	LA	WEST	LA	OATES <i>hv hc</i>	LA	READ	WILDING	OATES <i>hc</i>	LA	LA	WILDING	OATES <i>hc</i>	LA
GRAVESEND	11.00	G GREY	S SMITH	TERRETT <i>hv</i>	S SMITH	TERRETT <i>hc</i>	LA	LA	DOWNS	TERRETT <i>hc</i>	LA	HUDSON-BEDDOWS	DEBRAH	HUDSON B <i>us</i> @ Spital Street
HARTLIP	18.30	LA	SELMES <i>hc</i>	WATTON	TROTT	GERMAN	GALLAGHER <i>Retreat Sun.</i>	SELMES <i>hc</i>	STUNELL	LA	SELMES <i>hc rem</i>	GERMAN	LA	SELMES <i>us</i> @ St. Michaels
HEXTABLE	10.30	PATERSON	9am <i>bc</i> ROWE	G GREY	LA	Downs	9am <i>bc</i> OATES <i>hv hc</i>	HUDSON-BEDDOWS	Downs	IMBO	9am <i>bc</i> OATES <i>rem</i>	BURCH	S SMITH	Downs
HOLY TRINITY	10.00	ANGLICAN @ St. Albans <i>hc</i>	ANGLICAN @ St. Davids <i>mw</i>	ANGLICAN @ St. Williams <i>hc</i>	ANGLICAN @ St. Albans <i>mw</i>	ANGLICAN @ St. Davids <i>hc</i>	ANGLICAN @ St. Williams <i>mw</i>	ANGLICAN @ St. Albans <i>hc</i>	ANGLICAN @ St. Davids <i>mw</i>	ANGLICAN @ St. Williams <i>hc</i>	ANGLICAN @ St. Albans <i>mw</i>	ANGLICAN @ St. Davids <i>aa</i>	ANGLICAN @ St. Williams <i>hc</i>	ANGLICAN @ St. Albans <i>mw</i>
HOPE STREET	10.30	M SMITH	LA	3pm <i>Induction and Ordination</i>	LE MASONRY <i>hc</i>	ZACHAR	THOMPSON	LE MASONRY <i>hc</i>	LE MASONRY <i>Fallen Leaves</i>	ZACHAR	LE MASONRY <i>rem</i>	LE MASONRY <i>hc</i>	LA	LE MASONRY <i>Advent</i>
KINGSWOOD	11.00			MYLES				MYLES				MYLES		
LARKFIELD	10.00	9am <i>bc</i> LA	ZACHAR	SHEPHERD	R GREY	9am <i>bc</i> OATES <i>hv hc</i>	NEWELL	LA	SHEPHERD	9am <i>bc</i> OATES <i>hc</i>	LA	NEWELL	WILDING	OATES <i>us hc</i>
	Café 15.00		LARKFIELD WILDING	BURHAM RAWLINGS/ OATES			LARKFIELD WILDING	BURHAM RAWLINGS/ OATES			LARKFIELD WILDING	BURHAM RAWLINGS/ OATES		
NEWINGTON	9.30	ZACHAR <i>hc</i>	STUNELL	LA	LA <i>us</i> @ St. Mary	LA	ZACHAR <i>hc</i>	M SMITH	ADOFO <i>us</i> @ St. Mary	M SMITH	LA	M SMITH	ADOFO <i>us</i> @ St. Mary	ZACHAR <i>us</i> @ Bearsted
PENINSULA STROOD	10.30	TROTT	WATTON	LA	SELMES <i>hc aa hv</i>	LA	KICHENSIDE <i>aa</i>	DEBRAH	SELMES <i>hc</i>	LA	ADOFO <i>aa</i>	HARRIS	SELMES <i>hc</i>	WILLING
ST. LUKE'S	10.00	WILLING	SELMES <i>hc</i>	LA	HARRIS	STUNELL	SELMES <i>hc aa hv</i>	ADOFO	WATTON	LA	SELMES <i>hc rem</i>	TERRETT	WATTON	STUNELL
SITTINGBOURNE	10.30	ADOFO	ROBB	ZACHAR <i>hc</i>	WATTON	DEBRAH	LA <i>hv ca</i>	CAN- TAMAKLOE	ZACHAR <i>hc</i>	TROTT	LA <i>rem</i>	ZACHAR <i>hc</i>	LA	ZACHAR <i>us</i> @ Bearsted
SPITAL STREET	10.30	BURCH	CHAN <i>hc</i>	HUDSON-BEDDOWS	CHAN	LA	CHAN <i>hc hv</i>	G GREY	CHAN	HUDSON-BEDDOWS	CHAN <i>rem</i>	LA	CHAN	HUDSON BEDDOWS
STOKE	18.30					ROBB					STUNELL			
THE BRENT	10.30	HUDSON-BEDDOWS	TERRETT <i>hc</i>	LA	ROWE	LA	TERRETT <i>hv</i>	LA	TERRETT <i>hc Baptism</i>	S SMITH	TERRETT <i>hc rem</i>	PATERSON	G GREY	HUDSON B <i>us</i> @ Spital Street
THIRD AVENUE	10.30	SELMES	GALLAGHER	SELMES <i>hc</i>	STUNELL	SELMES <i>aa hv</i>	HARRIS	SELMES <i>hc</i>	WILLING <i>live stream</i>	SELMES	GALLAGHER <i>rem</i>	SELMES <i>hc</i>	ROBB <i>live stream</i>	SELMES
TONBRIDGE RD	10.30	NEWELL	DOWNES <i>Street Pastor Present</i>	OATES <i>hv hc</i>	ZACHAR	LA	WATTON	OATES <i>hc</i>	LA	OATES <i>4pm Rem</i>	WEST	OATES <i>hc</i>	LA	SHEPHERD
UNION STREET	10.30	AT WEEK ST. URC	AT WEEK ST. URC	AT WEEK ST. URC	AT TON. ROAD	AT WEEK ST. URC	AT WEEK ST. URC	TERRETT WEEK ST. URC	AT WEEK ST. URC	AT BEARSTED	AT BEARSTED	AT WEEK ST. URC	AT WEEK ST. URC	ZACHAR <i>us</i> @ Bearsted
ONLINE SERVICES	10.30	ZACHAR	WALDOCK	HEXTABLE	THIRD AVE	OATES	WALDOCK	HEXTABLE	THIRD AVE	OATES	WALDOCK	HEXTABLE	THIRD AVE	ZACHAR

aa All-age / *bc* Breakfast Church / *ca* Church Anniversary / *hc* Holy Communion / *hv* Harvest
mw Morning Worship / *rem* Remembrance / *us* United Service

For the Winter issue: Please send contributions as a Word document, no longer than 500 words, to naomi.oates@methodist.org.uk to arrive by 20th September 2026. If you can, please attach a suitable high quality image, but do not embed it in a document.

