



## Circuit Exchange

The Quarterly Newsletter of the Wantage and Abingdon Methodist Circuit



June - August 2009

### Letter from the Superintendent Minister

*Martin Smithson*

Dear Friends,

At the end of the Spring Synod, which was held at Wesley Memorial Church in Oxford, we said a heartfelt thank you and farewell to Alison Tomlin as she moves on from being our **Chair of District** this summer. I mentioned in my last letter that we would be welcoming our new Chair, Rev. Peter Hancock, in August but did not, at that time, have the details. Peter's Welcome Service has now been arranged for **Saturday 15th August at 7:30p.m. at Christ the Cornerstone Church in Milton Keynes**. Everyone in the District who would like to attend is welcome. We will, of course, get to know Peter in the years ahead. He will be in this Circuit quite early in his first year because he has accepted an invitation to preach at the Church Anniversary Service at **Childrey at 7:30p.m. on Thursday 15th October** – to which everyone is also invited. Peter comes to us at what continues to be a challenging but also exciting time for the Methodist Church as a whole and for our District in particular.

One aspect of this time of change is our continuing work on **Mapping A Way Forward** which could lead to rearranging our Circuits. Michael Howlett and I represented you at a meeting which took place in Thame between representatives of the seven Circuits which include parts of Oxfordshire. We did not get much beyond familiarizing ourselves with each of the Circuits and arranging another meeting. We will continue to report back.

Meanwhile, of course, we are getting on with working as effectively as we can within our current Circuit in God's service. The Circuit Meeting agreed grants from the Circuit Advance Fund to **Didcot** and **Grove** to help with their building schemes and **Wantage** are hoping to bring a proposal for their scheme to the next Circuit Meeting. All of these schemes have come about because we are wanting to serve God and our neighbours more effectively. Meanwhile **Phil Wood** is working on the development of a circuit mission strategy with the Circuit Leadership Team.

I am looking forward to serving College United Methodist Church in Oregon while **Rev. Bill Seagren** takes my place in this Circuit. Bill's first Sunday in the Circuit will be 19th July. You will see from the Plan that he will be leading worship in a number of churches in the Circuit and I am sure he will receive a warm welcome in each place. His last Sunday will be 23rd August and his last service will be a Section Service at Childrey at 6:00p.m. I am sure others from around the Circuit, who are not committed elsewhere, would be welcome at that farewell service. I will be back at work here on 1st September. During my absence **Helen White** will be the Acting Superintendent. I am grateful to her for taking on that extra responsibility and to everyone who is playing their part in enabling this exchange to take place and I hope it will prove to be of benefit to all of us who will be involved.

When we come to September we will not this year be welcoming any new members of staff. Thankfully the team which came together last September is continuing! However, we will be welcoming a newcomer among the Circuit Stewards and to the Leadership Team. **Helen Carter** was appointed by the last Circuit Meeting. Helen is known to many of you already as a Local Preacher and brings many other gifts to the role. We are very grateful to her for agreeing to serve the Circuit in this new way. We are also very grateful to **Gill Skidmore** who is the retiring Circuit Steward and who has worked very hard and contributed a very great deal not only to the Leadership Team but to the Circuit as a whole over the last six years. I know she will go on contributing much to our life together but we wish her a happy retirement from this particular role.

Every blessing, *Martin*

## Perishing Visions and Scary Stories

*Phil Wood*

If we know nothing else about what the Bible says about 'vision' the chances are that Proverbs will come to mind: "Without vision the people perish..." (Prov 29:18). It's one of those occasions (like the 23rd Psalm) where nothing else than the King James Version will do. Vision is a matter of seeing where we are going but it's also a matter of knowing who we are. Bridge clubs are for Bridge, Manchester United is for winning the Premiership and the church is for [something]? I would like to put 'mission' in the previous sentence (alongside worship and community) but if we're honest there is sometimes a tension between who we are supposed to be and what we actually do. So, what do we do about it?

Vision matters if the church is to be outward looking and purposeful in relating to the wider community. With that in mind I'm encouraging our local churches to run 'Vision Days' where we have the opportunity to ask where are we now, where do we wish to go and how are we going to get there? A 'Vision Day' is an encouraging, challenging, enjoyable day where we have the opportunity to talk about what we hope for, what we fear and to say what our next few steps forward might be. At the moment two of our congregations have asked me to facilitate Vision Days but I would love to see more. Do get in touch with me for more information.

On a related matter I've been delving into a splendid little book by Janice Price called 'Telling our Faith Story' (1999). It starts by noting how scary many Christians find it to do evangelism. A friend of mine defines the popular view of evangelism as a 'confrontation with a reluctant stranger'. No wonder Christians don't want to do it and non-Christians avoid us like the plague. Janice Price describes a very different approach which aims to build up our confidence in sharing our faith in a non-confrontational way. Few of us will be called to preach or teach but everyone who is a Christian has a 'faith story' to tell. Price's book is very practical and she shows us how to run a faith sharing day (or it could be a few hours). So, if you're so excited by your Vision Day that you need to get out there and talk about it then why not ask me to run a 'telling your faith story' day. If you want to know a little more about it I've been blogging about the book at <http://radref.blogspot.com/search/label/evangelism>

## From Trinity

*Richard Bittleston*

By the time you read this, **Tony Garrard**, our organist for over 27 years will have retired. His commitment, contribution and unflinching attendance has been so appreciated by Trinity. Thank you Tony, and all best wishes in your retirement.

An architect has been engaged to look at **church development in Trinity**. Among other things, we're looking at the possibility of replacing our ageing heating system with a geo-thermal supply. This will be quite a pioneering move, but one that must be explored quite seriously. We'll report the possibilities as we go along. Alternative energy supply is part of a responsible response to our environmental negligence and a way of ensuring churches can continue serving the community in the future. If anyone has experience in this area – we'd love to hear from you.

I thought I'd share a conversation I've been having with many clergy and others. It is becoming increasingly difficult to find people who have the time and/or the motivation to fill the various posts traditionally assigned in our churches. Now, if I'm interested in something, I generally have no trouble setting aside some time for it. So, is it possible that our **traditional roles** are perceived as burdens carrying little of interest, little to capture the imagination? Might it not be time to ask people what matters to them, moving on from telling them what matters to us? I'm going to be asking this question quite a bit at Trinity over the next few months. Tradition is fine, but not if it makes our church life a chore, a list of things to tick off.

## Wallingford Carnival

*Marlene Chalkley*

On **20th June**, once again we are opening and joining in the town event. We will be serving **refreshments** between 10am - 2pm. All our Circuit friends will be very welcome.

The **procession** goes right past the church and is always great fun for all the family.

Come and enjoy a good day out. All proceeds to our development fund.

## **Blewbury Festival**

Fran Esplin

Afternoon Tea on **June 9th** from 2.30 to 4.30 at No. **4 Westbrook Green, Blewbury**. This is usually a really nice afternoon, and we have a bric a brac stall and a raffle.

### **Hymnalong: Methodist Chapel - Thursday 18th June 7.30pm**

No charge but donations for interval refreshments will be welcome.

This is your opportunity to choose the hymns and carols you want to sing and to enjoy singing them with others. You will be able to choose from both Anglican and Methodist hymn books. Organists from St Michaels and Didcot Methodist Churches will accompany the singing, and there will be a short performance by St Michael's choir

The choir will include one or two hymn tunes by two celebrated composers: George Frederic Handel whose 250th anniversary of death is this year, and Ralph Vaughan Williams, whose 50th anniversary of death was in 2008. Ralph Vaughan Williams was the musical editor of the first edition of the 'English Hymnal' in 1906.

**Festival programme** from Blewbury website. [www.blewbury.co.uk/festival/festhome.htm](http://www.blewbury.co.uk/festival/festhome.htm),  
(Chapel contributions highlighted), includes:

**Saturday 13th June** - 12 noon - Launch of Festival with Family Fun Day on Ticklers Folly field  
**(Chapel doing childrens' tombola)**

**Monday 15th June** at the **Chapel**  
**Talk about Shakespeare's theatre and 'Twelfth Night'** (the Blewbury Players' production this year)

**Thursday 18th June Hymn-a-Long** (*see above*) - **Chapel**

**Monday 22nd June Environment Group talk** by Mark Lynas (author of Six Degrees) - **Chapel**

**Thursday 25th June Flower Arranging Demonstration and Talk** by Veronica Sharley - **Chapel**

**Saturday 27th June & Sunday 28th June** Exhibitions weekend  
Art and Ceramics Exhibitions in St Michaels' church,  
**Exhibition to Commemorate the 500th Edition of the Bulletin** at the **Chapel**

**Saturday 27th June** only  
Environment Group Energy Saving Exhibition

'Glyndebury' Concert by performers from Guildhall School - Barn and Gardens at Hall Barn

**Sunday 28th June** Exhibitions Weekend continues  
Special Day to Celebrate 300th Anniversary of Charity School House / Millbrook Walk  
Festival Evensong and Close of 2009 Festival

For **full details** of all events, venues and ticket prices are in the 2009 Festival Programme, which will be available early in May from the Post Office, Savages and the Garage. The brochure will include a booking form to enable you to select the events you want to go to. **The Box Office opens in the Vale Room on Saturday 23rd May from 10am - 2pm.**

## **From The Buzz**

*The Buzz is the Connexional newsletter in which churches share their good news stories and ideas with the whole of the country. It is good to see Oxford featuring. [Editor]*

### **LEARNING & CARING – Church brings library fines to book**

From **Rose Hill Methodist Church**, Oxford

A great book, the latest DVDs and no fines! Bookworms in Oxford are in for a treat after the unveiling of a brand new 'community library' by the Rose Hill Methodist Church. Housed in our neighbourhood community centre, this booklover's paradise aims to unite people through reading. And what's even better is that fines have been scrapped! Locals appear to love the idea. We have been inundated with donations of books as well as a generous handout of £5000 from Oxfordshire County Council.

Our deacon, Stephen Richardson, said, "It will be a great place for people to look at books but we also hope to grow community links out of this. We want to serve tea and coffee and make people feel comfortable to hang around and talk to each other." So whether it's JRR Tolkien or JK Rowling, we're sure there's a book to please all tastes.

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