



## Circuit Exchange

The Quarterly Newsletter of the Wantage and Abingdon Methodist Circuit

December 2009 - February 2010



### Letter from the Superintendent Minister

Martin Smithson

Dear Friends,

This is the first *Circuit Exchange* to be edited by Adam and we thank him for taking on this task and thank Gill, our previous editor, for all her work.

The Circuit Meeting, back in September, decided to extend my appointment here until 2013, for which I am very grateful, and to apply for a Probationer Minister to come to the Circuit in 2010 to serve as Minister of our Didcot and Wallingford churches. We have since learned that our application has been successful. Even though we don't yet know who will be coming we do know that the **Welcome Service** will be on the evening of **Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> September**. Please make a note in your 2010 diary. We are not, of course, wishing the year away, least of all our time with Helen. We pray for her continuing recovery, for the stationing process and that she and we may all benefit from our remaining months together.

From 1<sup>st</sup> January we will have a new church in the Circuit: **Spring Line Church** – which is the new name for the new church which will be formed by the coming together of our Blewbury and Upton churches. This will involve the formation of one Church Council and one group of officers while retaining the two buildings. There are a number of examples of this happening in other Circuits and we believe this is a positive way forward for our work in these two villages and I ask your prayers for this new venture. From September 2010 Richard Bittleston will become Minister of Spring Line.

Meanwhile part of the premises at **Didcot** has been demolished (soon to be replaced!). **Grove** is planning to follow suit in the spring. Phil Wood (our Circuit Development Worker) – for whose health we also continue to pray following his return to work – continues to keep an eye on the timetable for the delayed start of the major housing developments both at Didcot and Grove. That's something we have to bear in mind when we come to plan for Circuit Staff in 2011. Not only does **Peachcroft** now have Lawrence Shama as Youth Pastor, **Trinity** has appointed Rosemary Perrow as their Education and Development Worker. Both **Wantage** and **Grove** are holding Vision Days in the New Year (led by Phil Wood) – in both cases to help us to reflect on the mission opportunities and responsibilities of new housing, growing populations and improved premises. **All Saints**, following a wonderful year of celebrations for their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, has been considering both worship life and wider mission. **Southmoor** is greatly encouraged by the arrival of new members Charles and Jenny Bone. Charles has already become Property Steward and a Church Steward and is behind the organization of the monthly evening service which you see on the Plan.

**Childrey** had a great time celebrating 200 years of Methodism in the village and are very grateful for support from around the Circuit on that evening. Our **Milton** church is the base for The Lunch Break – for Christians working on Milton Park – a venture which some have hoped and prayed for over a long period. **Wallingford's** excellent premises are proving to be an effective mission and ministry tool.

Of course I may not have mentioned what you consider to be the most important or exciting thing in your church and I am well aware that there are times when and places where we struggle. I am not wearing rose-tinted specs. I hope, however, that I have conveyed the sense, which I have, that things are happening! There are opportunities for us; we are not standing still; the Circuit is changing; these are exciting as well as challenging times. May God give us the wisdom and energy we need to make the most of 2010.

Every blessing,

Martin

### **Didcot's Church building re-development has started!**

*Michael Howlett*

The circuit very kindly awarded us a grant of £30,000 towards the cost of our redevelopment and it is high time we told you what is happening with your money. The funding package is in place and all the necessary legal agreements and approvals are signed and sealed – so we are ready to go. Well, actually we have started and if you were to go down in Didcot today you would find that the rear of the premises are no more, gone, consigned to the recycling bin for hardcore. Whoopee! That was the easy bit. The next stage of digging foundations and laying new drains will take longer. Whether anything will start appearing above ground by the time you read this article remains to be seen. Watch this hole!

Our contractors, Oakwood Builders and Joinery of Benson, are working round our various activities. There will be times when the premises are out of action but we will work hard to minimise this. All being well, and depending on weather and any other unforeseen delays, we hope to welcome you to spanking new, centrally heated premises in early April next year.

### **Things are happening in Wallingford**

*Anne Baudry / Marlene Chalkley*

#### **Wallingford Medieval Evening - Thursday 3 December 2009**

This promises to be a really good evening. We will be serving hot festive food from **6-8pm**. The choir is already practicing seasonal songs and carols. The hand bell ringers will be with us again. The hall will be resplendent with all the Christmas decorations. Come and see our angels! A warm welcome to everyone. The town shops will be open late, so you could finish Christmas shopping at the same time.

#### **Strictly Come Dancing Evening - Saturday 23 January 2010 6.45 for 7 pm**

An evening of dancing - all types modern ballroom, old time and disco

Tickets £5 to include light refreshments

For tickets contact Anne Baudry 01491 826016 or [anne.baudry@virginmedia.com](mailto:anne.baudry@virginmedia.com)

#### **Giant Book Sale and Pancake Treats - Saturday 20 February 2010 10 am - 1 pm**

A chance to re-stock your library at reasonable prices.

Come and get your bargains and then enjoy freshly made pancakes with a cup of Fairtrade filter coffee or a cup of tea.

### **Messy Church!**

*Beryl Tillin*

**All Saints** and **Peachcroft Christian Centre** in Abingdon are planning to get messy in the New Year. Messy Church is a Fresh Expression of church and congregations are starting to meet all around the country (and the world) as a way of engaging families who cannot or do not feel able to attend a traditional Sunday service. A typical Messy Church gathering will enjoy lots of making and creating activities together, linked to a common theme. This is then followed by a short interactive time of worship and then a simple meal. Lots of helpers are needed to run it - welcomers, cooks, crafty people, musicians and more, and our team is beginning to take shape.

We hope to have our first Abingdon Messy Church at All Saints on a Saturday morning in early February. Please pray for the organisation to go smoothly, and that families will want to come along and explore the Christian faith in a different way, giving thanks for those who will be helping and the gifts that they bring.

You can find out more about Messy Church at <http://www.messychurch.org.uk/index.asp>

### **Lent Courses in Abingdon**

*Beryl Fudge*

Led by: Canon David Winter

Venue: Peachcroft Christian Centre

When: 5 week series on Monday evenings at 8pm, starts on Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2010

Parking: Car park next to the centre

Further info from Beryl Fudge 01235-523087 or [berylfudge@hotmail.com](mailto:berylfudge@hotmail.com)

## **“A Good Childhood Conversation”**

*Richard Bittleston*

On Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> October, Bob Reitemeier, Chief Executive of The Children's Society, visited Abingdon to speak about childhood in Britain today. He discussed the unrecognised poverty that exists in the lives of many young people in this country – not just financial, but, moreover, emotional. Government policies have proved no match for poverty of spirit learnt from an increasingly selfish society and Bob argued that our children will only be able to withstand negative pressures such as binge drinking if they have learnt self-esteem and respect from others.

“Training in matters of the heart” has traditionally been the domain of the church, but as our congregations age and become increasingly middle-classed, we have lost touch with the very children that need us most. Instead, it has fallen to teachers to try and solve society's ills - teachers who have classrooms full of children with different academic and social needs, timetables full of curriculum initiatives and mark-books full of value-added analyses. As Graham Russell (former Education Secretary of The Methodist Church) put it “Is it any wonder that the joys of learning and teaching are so often overshadowed by high levels of stress?”

Trinity Church in Abingdon has set up TrinityLearning, a project which aims to marry together the needs of children, schools and church. Trinity has few children, but large premises and a church that brims over with a very real sense of God's Peace and Love. They want to carry that peace and love out into the schools, into the lives of teachers and children. So they have employed an experienced teacher, Rosemary Perrow, to hold “a good childhood conversation”. Her job is to go out into the schools and find out how Trinity can help. After only a few weeks in the job, Rosemary has been overwhelmed by the welcome the project has been given and is brimming over with potential projects.

TrinityLearning is not just about making life easier for teachers, whose vital role in society has for long been recognised by the existence of church schools and Education Sunday. Helping disadvantaged students to develop confidence and social skills help make the classroom a better place for everyone. New horizons open up, as Christian values are made more widely apparent. And, of course, the church can benefit, too. Trinity isn't expecting a sudden rush to the pews, although people outside the church community are already commenting on the value of the service that they, as Christians, are offering. And a new group of young people will be given a joyful, friendly, first contact with the church and its congregation.

## **News from Blewbury and Upton**

*Fran Esplin*

### **Christmas Coffee Morning**

The Christmas Coffee Morning at Blewbury will be at the Chapel starting at 10.30 am on Tuesday 24th November. We will be repeating last year's successful chocolate tombola, as well as a Christmas Raffle, gift and bring and buy stalls. So put the date in your diary now.

### **A new Beginning in the New Year**

There is going to be a big change for Blewbury and Upton Methodist Churches from 1st January 2010. We are combining to become one church. Although plenty of people come to the churches for community events during the week, numbers have fallen at Sunday Services, so we agreed at the recent Church Council Meeting to start the process of becoming one Church. This will be known as the **Spring Line Methodist Church**. It will have two places of worship, the Blewbury Centre and the Upton Centre, and services will alternate between the two centres. Why Spring Line? Well, we wanted a name that would express where the two villages are, and how they are joined historically. The two villages evolved where they are because they are sited on the Spring Line, the line where the chalk of the Downs meets the sticky clays of the Thames Valley, the line where springs emerge from the ground. Some of the Blewbury springs emerge on the South edge of the Cleve, so Blewbury Church actually stands on a Spring Line. The Methodist Church in Upton is near to Stream Road. Please think of us and remember us in your prayers as we prepare for this new venture together.

### **Covenant**

Our first covenant service as the Spring Line Methodist Church will be held on Sunday the 3rd January 2010 at the Blewbury Centre. We have invited St. Michaels Church in Blewbury and St. Mary's Church in Upton to join us for this special service and we would be very pleased if anyone else from the Circuit would like to come along and celebrate this new beginning.

### **Pastor's Progress – Grove and Wantage**

*Adam Hager*

10 churches in Grove and Wantage have joined forces and trained 24 **Street Pastors**. Their roll is to be present on the streets of Wantage and Grove late on Friday nights to help support anyone who might be in need of assistance, the Street Pastors patrol in a simple uniform so they are easy to recognise. They themselves are supported by a rota of people back at their base who make cups of tea and chat to them during their breaks, and pray for a quiet evening whilst they are out patrolling. This scheme has been on the streets since the 9<sup>th</sup> October this year, and has been very well received by the young people, who are now beginning to recognise the Street Pastors and to express their thanks for help given on previous evenings. The Pastors are also enthusiastically supported by the local police, landlords and ladies, we'll keep you informed as this great project develops.

### **Prisons Week**

*Helen Carter*

By the time you read this Prisons Week will have happened. However, as this happens every year, it is worth highlighting some news concerning Bullingdon Prison (near Bicester). Pam Martin and I met recently with the Anglican Chaplain there and are interested in developing an ongoing link. This idea came out of a worship consultation meeting where Prisons Week was being discussed.

Bullingdon Prison houses about 1100 men in 6 wings, and the Chaplaincy has a vital role to play within that setting. The Chaplain we met, Andrew Folan, is keen to encourage prayer support and to this end there is a prayer bulletin that is produced every 2 months. Churches can obtain copies of this and use the information in their prayers. This year, Wantage church is going to send about 100 Christmas cards that will be distributed to those who attend the church service on Christmas Day (about 100 men). Pam and I immediately picked up that that is a greater percentage of the population than will attend a Christmas Day service in the community!!

Andrew directed us to the Prison Fellowship, <http://www.prisonfellowship.org.uk/>, and specifically to the 'Staying in touch' section. There are 2 schemes that Pam and I are looking at for the future – the Angel Tree (funding presents from prisoners to their children) and the Sycamore Tree (Restorative Justice and Victim Awareness programme). Prayer support underpins both of these.

For us the thinking and acting is in its infancy, and who knows where it will take us. Some of you will know that my work took me into Bullingdon Prison on a regular basis for some time, and as you can imagine, I am passionate about supporting the work of the Chaplaincy in whatever way I can. If you are interested in following this up, please do get in touch with me or Pam. Thank you.

### **Gospel Singing Workshop at Wantage**

*June Grunwald*

There will be a Gospel Singing Workshop at Wantage Methodist Church on **Saturday 27 February 2010** - a fund-raising project for **Project 21** (Chapel refurbishment project). It is a long time off, but keen singers / musicians might want to block the date in their diary now! The workshop is going to be run by Jo Sercombe.

Further details from June Grunwald [june@nurdglaw.demon.co.uk](mailto:june@nurdglaw.demon.co.uk), 01235 760488

### **Poverty and Homelessness Week**

*Helen Carter*

Poverty and homelessness action week 2010 will run from January 30th to 7th February. Details can be found at <http://www.actionweek.org.uk/html/home.html> and there are free resources available.

## **EVANGELISM - Filey Methodists pelted with skate wings!**

From **The Filey Circuit**

In 1806 a few Methodists in Filey, Yorkshire, attempted to preach in the streets but were pelted with dried skate wings, one of the major exports of the fishing industry there. In 1823 the Primitive Methodists Society in nearby Bridlington almost gave up on Filey, knowing of its reputation for 'swearing, gambling, drunkenness, cock-fighting, fishing on Sunday and other heinous crimes'. John Oxtoby asked for a final opportunity to convert the people of Filey and thanks to him, according to Canon Cooper of Filey, the town was 'turned upside down'. The fishermen of Filey became staunch Primitive Methodists and started going out around the north of England, spreading the gospel in song, and this was the start of the Filey Fishermen's Choir.

Today, the Choir is still going strong and is based at Filey Methodist Church but visits churches and chapels of any denomination throughout the district and beyond. The Choir can take the whole service, and has its own organist. The Choir sing old hymns, many with the sea as the theme, and most are introduced by members, perhaps relating the theme to their own lives or maybe with a personal testimony.

The Choir members are no longer fishermen, although it does have some who are retired, but they consider themselves as 'fishers of men'. Because the Choir is something different, perhaps unique, it can attract people who do not worship regularly, if at all. The Choir has made several recordings which helps in furthering its ministry.



Maybe a visit from the Filey Fishermen's Choir would provide a great opportunity to invite friends and neighbours to your church.

**Website:** [www.thefileyfishermenschoir.co.uk](http://www.thefileyfishermenschoir.co.uk)

## **DISTRICT YOUTH ENABLER**

Are you aged 16 to 23?  
Are you looking for a gap year?  
... starting September 2010?

**YES! ... then becoming a District Youth Enabler might be for you.**

This is a gap year scheme that enables you to explore one particular aspect of the work of the Methodist Church as part of the **Methodist Church's Youth Participation Scheme**. You could be involved in some of the activities of your local church or a local project and some of the national events that the Methodist Church offers throughout the year, eg. Youth Assembly and Breakout.

This is a part-time, paid opportunity which allows you to complete a gap year alongside part-time study or other work or activities you are involved in.

For more details:

- Have a look at ... [www.methodist.org.uk](http://www.methodist.org.uk) ... and click on Youth Participation
- Or contact Paul Taylor District Director of Training and Development

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**All Saints, Blewbury & Upton (from January 2010 – Spring Line), Childrey, Didcot, Grove, Milton, Peachcroft Christian Centre, Southmoor, Trinity, Wallingford, Wantage**

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