



March - May 2009

Letter from the Superintendent Minister

Martin Smithson

Dear Friends,

I am very glad to be sitting at my desk in my warm study writing this today (6th February) looking at the deep snow through the window. At this time yesterday I was not at all sure I would be home by now.

Helen, Peter, Phil and I had gone on the annual **District Retreat** which is for Ministers and Lay Workers. This takes place each year at Launde Abbey which is the Retreat House for the Anglican Dioceses of Leicester and Peterborough. It is a lovely house in a beautiful setting but the rural location, and the fact that it is set in dip in the landscape, means that when it has snowed it is very difficult to get out! We spent all morning shovelling snow, gritting the road out and pushing each other's cars up the hill until we had all made our escape. I tell you this for no better reason than I thought it might amuse you to picture the scene!

The retreat was led this year by Rev. Alison Tomlin, our Chair of District, during what is her last year with us.

Our **new Chair will be Rev. Peter Hancock**, who was at one time Superintendent of the Hinckley Circuit. His Welcome Service will be some time in August but we do not have details yet.

Anyway, Alison chose '**Quo Vadis**' (meaning 'where are you going?') as her theme. The question is from the legend which tells of Peter, fleeing the persecution of the early Christians in Rome, meeting Christ on the road. Peter asks him: Quo vadis? Jesus replies that he is going to Rome to be crucified again. As a result Peter returns to Rome and is himself crucified. The theme enabled us to recognize that while we need to fully live in the present moment we need always to be seeking an answer to the question of where God is calling us to next – not always, or even mostly, in geographical terms but in terms of our Christian discipleship - and while this is a question for each of us as individuals it is also a question for us as a body – as the body of Christ, the church.

That ties in with the theme of my last letter and leads me to bring you up to date on a couple of matters:

I mentioned last time the 'Mapping a Way Forward' process, now being called **MAWF**. Some may prefer 'Morph', if you remember the late Tony Hart's little plasticine character – after all, MAWF is about Circuits changing shape. We now have a meeting arranged in March which will involve two representatives from each of the seven Circuits which currently include part of Oxfordshire. Michael Howlett and I will be going on your behalf and will report back.

I can now also bring you up to date following a major decision at **Grove**: After a long period of pursuing both options: (i) seeking to build a new church as part of the planned housing development on the old airfield to the west of Grove or (ii) extending our current premises, we have come to the conclusion that the way forward is to extend as soon as possible and to look for other ways to connect with the new housing development when it comes in several years' time. So we are moving ahead with the extension scheme which is costed at around £245,000. We hope that members of the Circuit Meeting will have an application to approve very soon and I know members at Grove are grateful for the Circuit's prayers and encouragement. Taken together with the now-completed works at Wallingford and Peachcroft and the schemes at Didcot and Wantage, not forgetting the recent work at Blewbury, we will, hopefully, in the space of a few years, have seen enormous improvements in a significant number of our buildings across the Circuit. All of this is for a purpose, of course, and not an end in itself and we need to focus just as much on how we use our premises to serve our neighbours and to glorify God as we do on the building projects themselves.

Finally, with apologies to those who have already read this:

One big event in 2009 for Judith and me, which I hope will be a positive experience for all concerned, will be a **Ministerial Exchange** for six weeks during July and August.

Last year I asked the Church Stewards of this Section, the Circuit Stewards and my colleagues if they would support my application to take part in an International Exchange of Pastorates organised by the World Methodist Council. I am pleased to say that all agreed so I applied and at the end of last year I learned that I had been

successful! I have been paired with Rev Bill Seagren who is Minister of College United Methodist Church in Philomath which is a small town in Oregon, U.S.A.

So for about six weeks during the summer we change places! We exchange, jobs, houses and cars(!).

Judith and I took part in an exchange in 2001 and it was such an exciting, refreshing and stimulating time for both Ministers and churches we were keen to be involved in another one. The World Methodist Council enables the exchanges believing that we all benefit through connecting various parts of the Methodist family in this way, sharing experiences and gaining insights.

Bill will be coming with his wife Jenny and their three children: Hannah (15), Nate (13) and Rachel (11). They are very excited about coming to this country and living in Wantage for six weeks. Although Bill will lead worship mainly in this Section he will see something of the rest of the Circuit. I am sure you will make them very welcome and give them a wonderful experience of this area and of British Methodism. While I am away Helen will serve as Acting Superintendent.

Every blessing,

Martin.

From Richard @ Trinity

Richard Bittleston

Community is always a key word in church life – and reaching out into the community is at the heart of any mission. In Abingdon, we (i.e. several churches in the Church in Abingdon) are looking at Town Centre Chaplaincy. It's been a part of my own ministry in every place I've been.

I thought I'd raise this one because my own experience is that this is a highly valued and effective outreach which all of us can do in some way or another.

If any of the churches in the circuit would like to hear a little more about this type of outreach, how it can work in smaller communities and what it takes to set it up – I'd be very happy to spend a little time with you to introduce this subject. I'll keep you posted as to how it shapes up in Abingdon, but why limit it to one town centre?

In memory of John Stanbury

Brian Mansfield

On Sunday 8th February, Chris Greenough, one of the organists at All Saints, gave an **organ recital** in memory of John who died just over a year ago and himself a competent organist. It was held at 5.00 p.m. and despite the cold conditions it was very well attended with about 50 folk who braved the elements. It was followed by refreshments and many folk stayed for the Communion service that was led by Peter Bennett. The retiring collection from the organ recital is to be shared between Contesa and Sobell House Hospice and each should receive more than £200.

For those of you who may be interested all the pieces that Chris played were favourites of John and they were:

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|-------------|------------------------------------|------------------|-----------|
| D Buxtehude | Praeludium in G minor | | BuxWV 149 |
| D Buxtehude | Ein' feste Burg ist unser Gott | Choral & Prelude | BuxWV 184 |
| J Pachelbel | Ciacona in F minor | | |
| J S Bach | Liebster Jesu, wir sind hier | Choral & Prelude | BWV 731 |
| J S Bach | Prelude and Fugue in C (The Great) | | BWV 547 |

Is That Like Cappuccino?

Fresh Expressions and other Circuit Development News

There's a great deal going on at the moment including two building projects in Grove and Didcot and following new estate developments despite the downturn, but I wanted to say something about mission in general and 'Fresh Expressions' in particular. Yes, I really did hear someone ask if 'Fresh Expressions' had something to do with coffee. If you've heard the phrase and wondered what on earth it is, Fresh Expressions is the Anglican/Methodist initiative linked to the influential Anglican Report, 'Mission Shaped Church'. It encourages new expressions of church and is part of the wider response (sometimes called 'emerging church') to the profound cultural change that has led to massive decline in church attendance. The Methodist Church has just launched an exciting new project called 'venture FX' which seeks to reach young adults with no Christian heritage. There's a fascinating piece on the Methodist Church website (<http://www.methodist.org.uk/index.cfm?fuseaction=opentoworld.content&cmid=2539>). If you're still scratching your head, wondering what all the fuss is about there is a splendid resource called Share which gives answers to many of the frequently asked questions (<http://www.sharetheguide.org/>).

So what has all of this to do with us? I don't want to gloss over how great a challenge we face. There has never been a greater gap between the life of traditional churches and the great majority of people in the wider community. If we are to bridge that gap we cannot wait for our non-Christian neighbours to come to us. I am totally convinced that this situation can be turned around and that our church could have a bright future but we should expect great change and more than a little pain before we get to that point. Over the past few months I have been working on a mission strategy which I hope will provide a starting point for helping our congregations grow and reach out to people who are distant from traditional forms of church. As I am writing (7th Feb) the first part of a report entitled 'How Does our Garden Grow?' (including a proposal for a 'fresh expression of church') is due to go to the Circuit Leadership Team next week. I aim to spend more time with our local churches and communities this year asking you for your views on where we're up to now and the way ahead.

Phil Wood

Wallingford events

Marlene Chalkley

Wallingford are continuing with their Fund Raising events and would welcome any friends from the circuit to join us for any of the following:

'Spring Fair' : Saturday 25 April, 10 am – 4 pm. Lots of stalls, gifts books etc. and different refreshments served all through the day.

We are hoping to arrange a **Flower Festival & Tea Dance on Saturday 16 May.** More details later but you don't need a partner, just come and join in the fun! Refreshments will also be available.

Wantage Project 21

Gill Skidmore

I have a set of **6 round white tablecloths for hire in aid of Project 21**, Wantage's church refurbishment project. They are suitable for a formal event such as a wedding or a special celebration of any kind. There is a seventh which I am also happy to hire out. It is not identical in pattern but completely complementary and could, for example, be used on the top table, or maybe on a serving table.

For further details, contact me by email at gill.skidmore@nuffield.ox.ac.uk, or by phone on 01235 766655.

Childrey News

Jean Cliffe

Christian love to all the Circuit

Childrey Churches Working Together:

Mothering Sunday Service: 22nd March at 10-00 a.m. in **St Mary's**.

Holy Week: Wednesday 8th April **Communion Service** at 7-30p.m. in the **Methodist Church**.

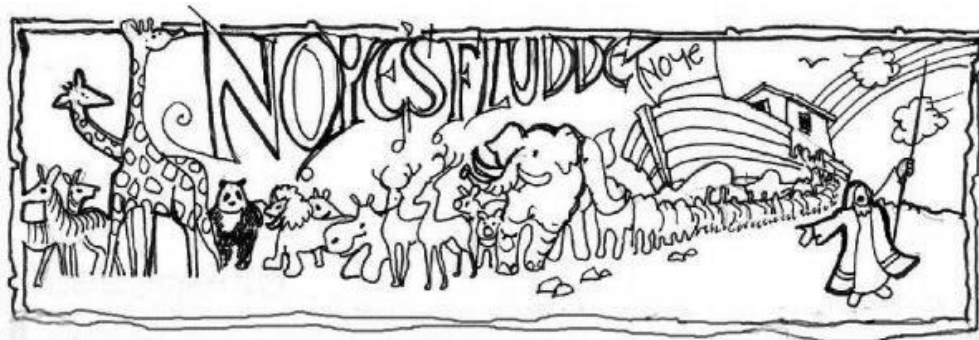
Pentocost Sunday: 31st May at 3-00p.m.: an **open-air service**, accompanied by the Salvation Army Band.

Saturday June 27th at 10-00a.m. until noon: **coffee morning** for the charity, **Little Hearts**, supporting the families of children with congenital heart conditions (www.littlehearts.net)

Advance notice: On **Thursday 15th October** we will be celebrating the **15th Anniversary** of the building of our new Church. Speaker: Rev.Peter Hancock, the **new Chair of the District**.

Blewbury Opera

Fran Espinosa



Noyes Fludde, by Benjamin Britten

PERFORMANCES AT ST. MICHAEL'S CHURCH BLEWBURY

Wednesday April 22 – Saturday April 25 at 8pm, Matinee April 25 at 3pm

Box Office opens Sat 7 March at Blewbury Village Hall, 10am –1pm,
then at Savages Greengrocers, London Rd, Blewbury Monday to Friday 9am to 6pm and Sat 10am to Noon

**** No more than 4 tickets per person per performance can be bought on Saturday 7th****

Tickets priced at £15 with a few restricted view tickets at £12 and £10.

This will be the 7th Opera performed in St Michaels, Blewbury. We began in 1970 with Noyes Fludde, which is probably the best known community opera. We have commissioned 5 more operas since then, and are now returning to Noyes Fludde once more. We all know the bible story, and the opera follows it, with a few additions – I don't remember Mrs Noah's friends getting her tipsy in their efforts to prevent her sailing off in the ark! In 1970 seventy of the village children played the animals, and we hope to match that again this time. The tickets for Friday and Saturday evening will go very quickly, and if you plan on coming don't delay too long.

News from the District

New district ecumenical officer

Subject to the approval of the district Synod, the Revd John Anderson is to be the new ecumenical officer for the Northampton District.

John currently serves in the Rugby and Daventry Circuit, and he takes over as ecumenical officer from the Revd Phil Taylor, who will become the superintendent of the Northampton Circuit in September. In announcing the appointment, the district executive said it wanted to thank Phil for all he had done to develop ecumenical relationships across the district.

Mapping a way forward

Please read this and note that changes WILL happen. We need to contribute to the discussions if we are to have a say in what happens locally. If you have suggestions or comments that you would like to make, please share them with one of the Circuit Stewards, who are currently engaged, with Martin, in discussions with neighbouring circuits (see Martin's letter).

(Ed.)

When it comes to Methodist circuits, the standard approach is for a number of ministers each to have a section, with a superintendent overseeing things. However, this is not necessarily the best way forward today, especially in the light of the falling number of presbyters. So, across Methodism, circuits are having conversations about what it means to be a circuit.

Much of this has been inspired by a report, "Mapping a Way Forward: Regrouping for Mission", which encourages these sorts of conversations throughout the Connexion. In our district, Paul Taylor (Director of Training and Development) and Tim Woolley (Director of Mission) have set up a group to support circuits in their conversations, and to explore how circuits throughout the district and Connexion are "being circuit".

The "Mapping" report, which the Methodist Conference adopted, explains the task ahead for the district and its circuits:

Over the coming five years or so, each district is to encourage holistic and wide-ranging circuit reviews in the light of "Our Calling" and "Priorities for The Methodist Church", with a focus on discerning and developing:

- ? sustainable and relevant circuit structures which will serve and oversee the mission obligations of the Church in the early decades of the 21st century;
- ? new ways for circuits to fulfil their responsibilities and purposes in line with Standing Order 500: "The circuit is the primary unit in which local churches express and experience their interconnexion in the Body of Christ for purposes of mission, mutual encouragement and help."

Such circuit reviews are to include strategic consideration of the availability and use of personnel, finance and buildings.

If you have thoughts about this process, or suggestions about how the structure of the Methodist circuit could change to serve "the mission obligations of the church in the early decades of the 21st century", please contact Paul Taylor (northamptondo@btinternet.com) or Tim Woolley (t.r.woolley.00@cantabgold.net).