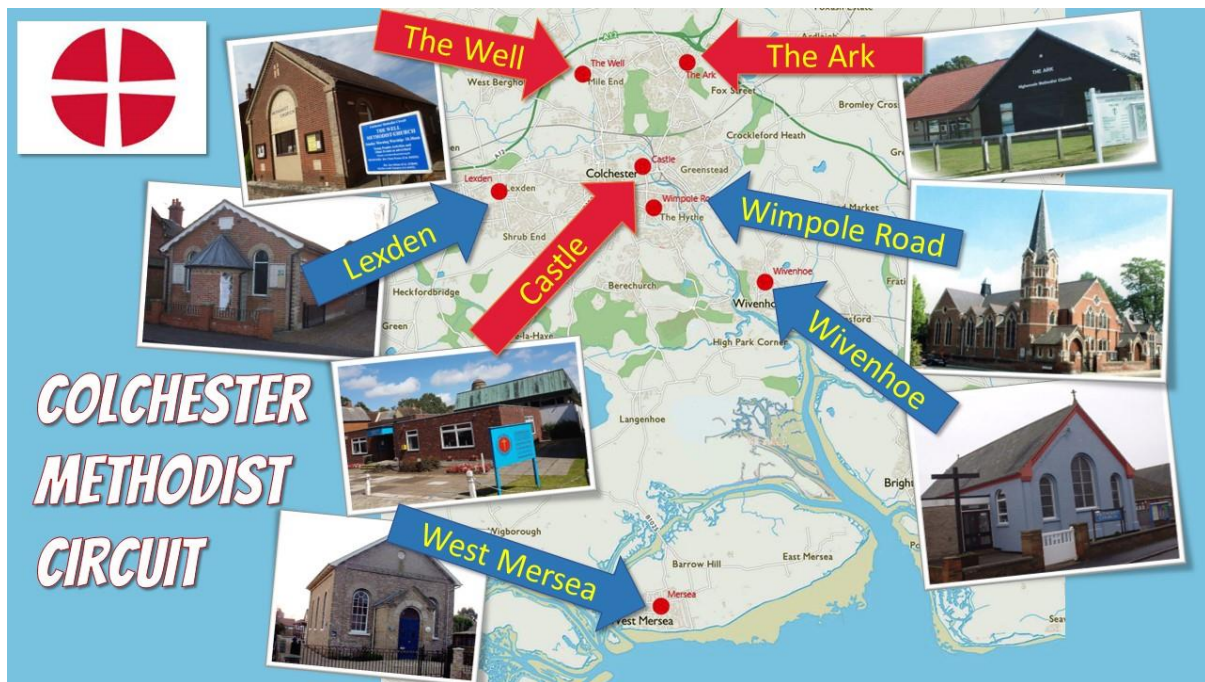


Colchester Methodist Circuit

Newsletter

Edition 2 - March 2023 (Redacted)



MISSION planning for all the Methodist churches in Colchester and its surrounds is under way and launches formally this month with a day of discussion, prayer and planning on Saturday 4th March at The Ark (Highwoods).

Everyone with a passion, vision or a simple suggestion for the further work of Christ in their own churches and beyond is encouraged to attend this event which is supported and led, in part, by the Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire and Essex Methodist District of which this Colchester circuit is a part.

The event will pause midway for a 'bring and share' lunch, and hot and cold refreshments will be provided by The Ark throughout the day. Stewards from all seven churches are co-ordinating donations of food and all are encouraged to attend.

LETTER: From Superintendent Rev Chris Preece

Dear Friends,

We undertake many journeys throughout our lives. On many days we travel from one place to another even if it is only to go to work, church or visit friends. Sometimes these journeys may be somewhat longer and for different reasons including travelling abroad on holiday. We also sometimes use the metaphor of journeying in an emotional or spiritual sense as well.

This letter will take us through the season of Lent and on into Easter. We follow Jesus' journey to the cross physically, emotionally and spiritually before sharing in the joy of Easter Day with one another. There is much on which we focus as we travel together during this time.

Lent is often a time where we reflect on our own discipleship. It may be a time where we deliberately choose to spend more time with God, or through Lenten devotionals consider particular aspects of our journey of faith. As I look back on the first few months of my time in the Circuit it is with deep gratitude and joy for the way in which I have been welcomed and supported. We are also journeying together with one another as we begin to think more about how we reach out to the communities in which each of the churches is based.

Part of our journeying is to come together for the SPA day which will be held from 10am to 3pm at The Ark on Saturday 4th March. This is an invitation to everyone to come as we begin to think through how we Serve the Present Age, hence the acronym SPA. This is a valuable opportunity for us to come together, to share with one another some of the things we are already doing, to get to know each other better and, above all, to seek God's voice through the Holy Spirit for where we may be being led together for the future. Further details about the SPA day have been shared with all of the churches with posters and information available.

The journeying, of course, doesn't stop there. It will then be a time of reflection and, I hope, joy as we sense God's leading in the opportunities to share God's love to others in the areas in which we live. We can then begin to see how we can support one another as we seek to serve this present age and fulfil our calling as Christ's disciples.

I look forward to all that is to come.

God bless,
Chris

NEWS: From the Circuit

WE are delighted to let you know that we have been matched with Rev Hannah Chun who will be joining the Colchester Circuit as a probationer presbyter in September. She will be looking after the churches at Wimpole Road, Lexden, Wivenhoe and West Mersea.

Hannah visited 4 of the churches in the Circuit in January, taking the opportunity to chat and answer questions from stewards. She will be welcomed to the Circuit at a service on 1st September, which will be led by the chairman of the District, Rev David Chapman. More details will appear in the next edition of this newsletter.

A SPA day is not to be missed. This particular event on Saturday 4th March at The Ark, Highwoods, is an opportunity for us all to come together and think big and small about how within the life of the church we **Serve the Present Age**. As disciples of Christ we are all called to share the message of God's love to others but this isn't something we always find easy. Considering how we reach out to others and the plans we make for this is the principle of mission planning that we agreed at the September Circuit Meeting. To help all of the churches in the Circuit to consider 'where next' in terms of seeking God's leading and discerning where the hopes and dreams might be for the churches, we are holding a Circuit SPA day on 4th March between 10am and 3pm. This will be a day to 'springboard' our thinking and help us to come together, share with one another and begin to think about where we go next as churches and for this to feed into wider Circuit thinking. Angela Brydon (District Discipleship Enabler) and Steve Watson (District Property Officer) have kindly agreed to come and lead our day and we are delighted to welcome them and for them to share their expertise with us.

MONTHLY Circuit walks rather lost their way as a result of Covid, but have been resurrected on a Tuesday afternoon at the start of each month. The next will be a 4.5 mile walk on **Tuesday 7th March** which will start from Lexden Methodist Church at 1.30pm and will make use of mainly surfaced paths via Prettygate and Boadicea Way before skirting the military grounds to come out on Circular Road South and then crossing Abbeyfields to reach the city centre and Castle Methodist Church.

Because the bluebell flowering season is going to be early this year, the walk in April will be at West Bergholt so that we can walk through Hillhouse Woods which always has a spectacular display of bluebells. The date of the April walk will be at the latter end of the month but will not be finalised until the end of March.

A suggested pattern of walks through the year is to do two walks of approximately 5 miles in consecutive months and then to do one of nearer 3 miles before doing two more of c5 miles, etc. Please let organiser Derek at Castle know your thoughts on this suggestion and also advise him of any local walks which you have enjoyed which could be included in the programme.

From time to time, a day long/longer mileage walk may be organised. If you are interested, please contact Derek via Castle to be added to the list of interested walkers.

From Lexden

AS a Church Community we have now settled into a pattern of worship on the first and third Sundays in the month. When there is a fifth Sunday we have an own arrangement Songs of Praise Service. Members are asked to suggest their favourite hymns in advance. Unfortunately, we no longer have a resident organist but requests are fulfilled by pre-recorded music, hence the need for advance warning! Members willingly contribute with readings, poems and prayers.

Planning this Service in advance has enabled some of our housebound members to make their contributions and this was particularly a source of enjoyment for one of our retired organists. John was able to provide a hymn (and suggest the right tune!) as well as some background information which was of interest to us all. John was then able to see and hear the service via our DVD distribution arrangement.

From The Ark

SINCE November we have opened our doors as a Warm Space every Monday morning, offering free hot drinks and companionship, and are now able to offer free WiFi connection. We have been blessed with the support of staff at Home Start who are based at The Ark and regularly set up the worship area in advance for us. The event has received excellent publicity on FaceBook by the local councillor, on our own FaceBook page and via HomeStart who have good connections in the community. Leaflets have been made available in the Bluebell community centre next door, which houses the Highwoods branch of the Colchester Food Bank on the same day.

To date we have had a handful of visitors and for the last month we have had three regular visitors who have enjoyed the opportunity to come in and chat and enjoy the companionship we can offer. While we have no plans to continue Warm Space, as such, beyond the end of March this has given us the opportunity to consider further what more we can do to support our own church community as well as the wider community in Highwoods.

PLANS are in hand for an outdoor service, to be led by Rev Chris, on Sunday May 7th, after which there will be a 'bring and share' lunch to celebrate the King's Coronation which again will be outside if the weather permits. We are hoping to make this a community event and to welcome our neighbours to our service and celebration.

WE are pleased to have welcomed four more of our regular worshippers into membership at a special service last month.

From Wimpole Road

GREETINGS to you all. We are thrilled to have achieved an Eco Church bronze award, with many thanks to Sally who has been the inspiration behind this.

Eco Church is an A Rocha UK project which encourages churches to care for God's Earth. Following on from a 'Dreaming for the Future' meeting in July, a small group met to complete an Eco Survey which asked questions about four aspects of our church life. The first section was about our worship and teaching, which we scored highly on as we include care of creation in our services. Also, our leadership team have made a formal commitment to improving the environmental credentials of our church.

The next section was buildings. We achieved bronze standard because we are using a green tariff for our church gas and electricity supply and have some double glazing. In this section there is much we could do to improve, including calculating our carbon footprint, knowing our energy efficiency of the main boiler on church premises; making

sure that all our light bulbs are energy efficient and to consider generating renewable energy on/for our premises e.g., from solar panels or solar hot water.

The next section was about land. As we do not have any that we are responsible for, this section is not applicable and did not contribute to our award application.

The final section was community and global engagement. It asked if any member were involved in community projects such as litter picking, if members shared car lifts to church and whether we encourage people to walk and cycle to church if possible. We could really improve with more global engagement by participating in the Tearfund 'Toilet Twinning' scheme and registering with the Fairtrade Foundation as a Fairtrade Church. We scored well in that our church tries to use locally grown food and includes vegetarian and vegan options of meals we provide for community projects we run such as Make Lunch and Warm Space. Also, that our church funds are ethically invested.

The climate pledges we made as part of our worship together in October to show how we can continue to care for the Lord's earth.

- May we only use earth's resources we really need
- Drive less
- Turn heating down and ensure church heats more efficiently
- Recycle more
- Stop wasting water
- Examine where food items have come from and so reduce 'air miles'
- Reduce plastic in waste
- Encourage wildlife in garden
- Pledge to grow own food and fruits. Promote afforestation (plant trees in a new area)
- Not to eat food other than locally sourced whenever possible
- No buying plants in plastic pots. Never use peat
- Avoid consumerism, being mindful not to waste produce. Care for the voiceless animals of this world
- Grow lots of flowers for bees and insects. Save more water. Use less gas and electricity.

Thank you Sally for all your hard work.

NEXT time you visit Wimpole Road, we hope you will notice the front of the Church is beginning to look a little smarter. The ground has been cleared and we are waiting for a new resin surface to be laid; this surface is permeable so is part of our ongoing quest to become more Eco friendly. There may even be a few pots with flowers appearing to brighten up the space and bring a bit of colour. The front doors are next on the list, they will be sanded and re-stained in the hope the front of the building will look more welcoming and friendly. We realise this is long overdue and look forward to the 'new look'.

THE last of our news is that Joan has finished her Worship leader course and along with Peter from Lexden would like to send a big thank you to Rev Chris for her help and guidance throughout. Both Joan and Peter await the acceptance of their new role from the Local preachers' meeting and respective Church councils.

Congratulations to you both. Joan is raring to go and we look forward to your contributions to our worship. We pray God's blessing on your work.

From The Well

AT Christmas we had a new venture - something we inherited from West Bergholt. We sang carols on a Friday evening outside the Co-op on the Chesterwell Estate. This was well received and we collected £30 for Action for Children. We were grateful to Clive for 'working' the Circuit speaker system. Also, another new for us, was live transmission of our United Christmas Day Service on You Tube. We are indebted to Bob, Clive and Delia for making this happen.

WE envisage our Warm Space (weekly) and Community Food Pantry (fortnightly) to continue into the foreseeable future. We open from 11.15am to 4.00pm on a Tuesday and food is collected from FareShare Ipswich on the Monday afternoon of the week the Food Pantry is open. The philosophy is not only to provide cheap food but also to prevent food waste so that anyone in the community can become a member. It initially costs £5 to join and then for subsequent weeks, £2 entitles a member to fill a bag of food of their own choice. The economics are that we sell enough food to buy the next consignment from FareShare, so that it is self-sustaining - at present we are achieving this. We provide fresh, chilled and some frozen food, but, besides the provision of food, we look to provide a warm welcome and friendly conversation, as well as activities, free use of the internet and phone charging. Refreshments are also provided free. There is good ecumenical involvement and enough volunteers - God is honouring our vision and faith.

AS part of Myland Churches Together, for a number of years, members from our churches have met on Palm Sunday at St Joseph's Catholic Church, for a short service and the blessing of Palm Crosses. We then attend our own services bearing Palm Crosses for distribution to our congregations. There are four denominations involved – St Michael's, St Joseph's, New Growth Ministry (Baptist) and The Well. This year we are renewing our Covenant, a service of recognition and the signing of the Covenant is planned for Saturday 15th July.

From Wivenhoe

OUR Sunday worship continues with average attendance at about 20 mostly elderly people.

We celebrated Communion on Christmas Eve and were pleased to have Michael from Friends International in attendance with his daughters and an Indian student. Four Chinese students also attended. Sadly we no longer have the active members able to host students, run a monthly games evening and put on a Christmas dinner and party. We have worked with Friends International for over 20 years on these and other ventures and while we continue to have close contact with Friends International and have premises and equipment we are unable to run activities. This is a very important and worthwhile outreach and we would welcome assistance from the Circuit in providing more active support.

Given the advanced age and health issues of so many of our members, pastoral care remains a top priority for us. Indeed, two of our members have died since Christmas.

LADIES Fellowship on the 4th Thursday of the month and Knit and Natter on the 2nd Thursday of the month at 2.30pm and pre-covid numbers are slowly returning. Circuit friends would be welcome.

AN outside group of young mums, Bumps and Babies, meets alternate Thursday mornings. Up to 30 mums plus babies attend and our own Betty attends making drinks and toast and generally being a friend to them all.

OUR monthly Saturday Coffee Morning is on the second Saturday of the month from 10-12. It is always well attended by church people and the general public. It raises money towards the Beacon of Hope Charity run by our own Bagamba and Banage in Bunia, Democratic Republic of Congo. Banage reported recently that lots of fighting continues around Bunia. It is a very dangerous area. There are many orphaned children and widows in desperate need.

WE continue to play an active part in 'Churches Together in Wivenhoe' and our next joint activities will be a series of events over Lent followed by a Good Friday Walk of Witness culminating in Worship in the Methodist Church at 11am led by Rev Joe Adams.

From West Mersea

OUR Christmas services went well and prepared us all for a splendid Christmas time. As soon as January started we opened our church hall up for "Warm Spaces" where people can come from 10am – 2 pm every Wednesday to be out of the cold, chat and drink coffee and partake of a lunchtime snack. We are not the only church to run this event, the Community Hall is open on Mondays, us Methodists on Wednesday and the Free Church on Fridays.

THE Chairman of the District took the morning service at Mersea on 26th February. The World Day of Prayer will take place here in Mersea at the Catholic church on Friday, 3rd March, when members from all the churches play their part.

MOTHERING Sunday is 19th March and we always give our ladies a pot of primroses at the end of the service. After that we look forward to the Lent groups all churches take part in, then we look forward to Palm Sunday with the crosses then Good Friday and Easter Day with a sunrise service on the beach at 6am.

From Castle

WE have been heartened at Castle by the response we have had to warm space. We are currently looking at how we can keep the momentum going when warm space officially ends. We hope to restart our Wednesday coffee mornings to continue the work, with the hope we can attract more members of our local community.

WE continue to be joined by people of diverse cultural backgrounds at our Sunday morning worship. We are aware that we need to work hard to ensure our brothers and sisters feel welcome and included when English is not their first language, as they always appreciate the fellowship we share.

FOR the first time in some years, we are looking forward to celebrating the events of Holy week with face to face worship and fellowship. Following our April soup and snack lunch on the 6th Rev Chris will be leading us in a service of Holy Communion for Maundy Thursday. Then on Good Friday morning we will be sharing in a service of witness and meditation, again led by Rev Chris, as we recall the suffering of our Lord. This service will be followed by continuing fellowship over coffee and hot cross buns.

BRIDGEWAY MISSION is a small Christian charity working with Eastern and Middle Eastern refugees who have been housed in Colchester, and with refugees and asylum seekers who are living here temporarily. Bridgeway has been supported by Castle for nearly four years now and several members of the congregation work voluntarily with Bridgeway in the activities they provide for our families and single people.

They are looking for more volunteers. Craft sessions and English conversation need volunteers at present with more in future. Usually, it's for an hour or two at the Bridgeway hub in Colchester. If anyone is interested in volunteering (or just finding out more about Bridgeway) please contact our Circuit Administrator on 07796 077736 or via email at colchestermethodist.office@gmail.com to be put in touch with the relevant person.

FROM THE CIRCUIT DIARY:

04 March – SPA 'Serving the Present Age' Day at The Ark

27 March - Circuit members meeting

22 April – Spring Synod (district)

08 June - Circuit leadership team meeting

27 June - Circuit members meeting

16 July – Farewell service for Rev Joe Adams

1 Sept – Welcome service for Rev Hannah Chun

DEADLINES!

- *Please submit your plan requests to our Circuit Administrator at colchestermethodist.office@gmail.com by 17th April please.*
- *The next newsletter will be distributed at the beginning of June so please contact Judith via the usual means or get in touch via our Circuit Administrator at colchestermethodist.office@gmail.com if you have any news to share. The submission deadline is Wednesday 17 May 2023.*