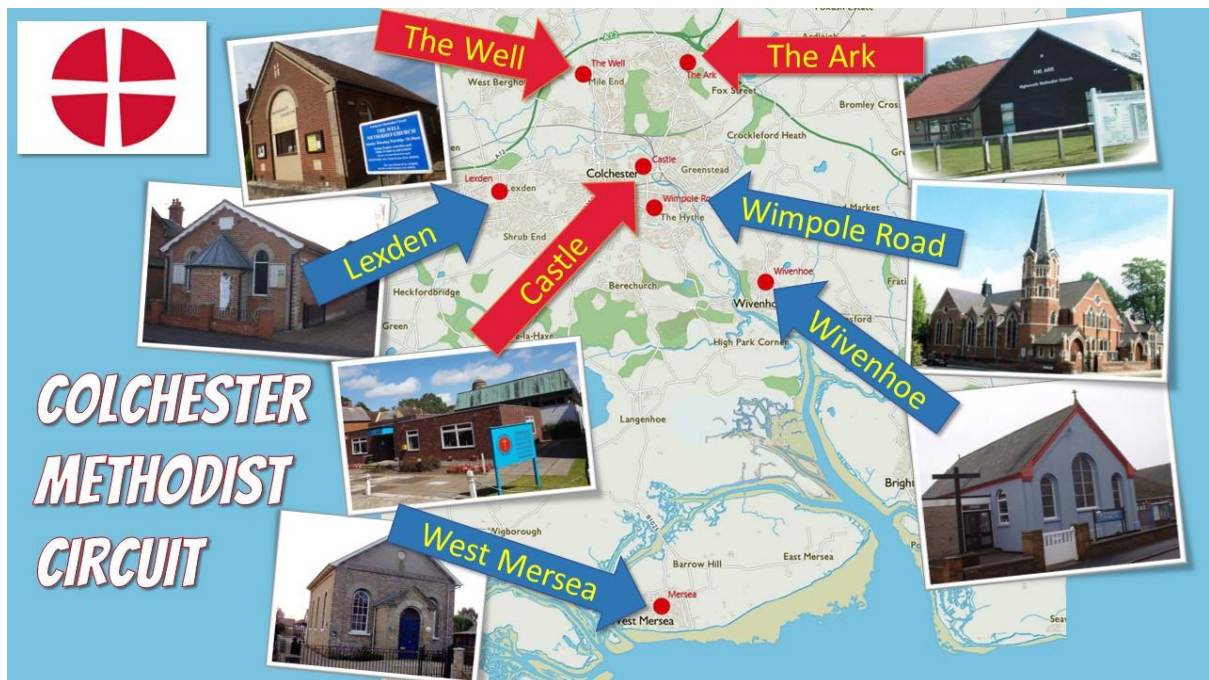


Colchester Methodist Circuit  
Newsletter

Edition 5 – December 2023

(Redacted version)



Dear Friends,

Looking out the window seemed to be a leaf storm. The wind was blowing hard and the leaves were swirling up all around. Had I been out in the car, I'd have expected to need to use the wipers to brush the leaves away. Whilst Autumn seemed quite late in arriving, it's well and truly here. At the same time, the plans for Christmas are being put into place and 2024 diaries are starting to be thought about.

Newsletters are often about both looking back as well as looking forward. We may share a little of what we have been doing, like harvest and the like whilst then looking forward to Christmas and beyond. This is often a time of year where we look back and look forward. It may be in the preparations that we look back to times already past but

also think ahead to all that is to come. It's easy to get tied up in the getting done all that needs doing. We can find ourselves very busy and just waiting for a time to stop once again.

We are approaching the season of Advent where we are encouraged to watch and wait for the coming of Jesus as a tiny baby at Christmas. By the end of February we will have entered Lent, another season where we reflect. Maybe in all that is going on we can stop and notice where God is working.

Do we see the compassionate character of Christ in the faces of people we meet? Do we see the glories of God's creation in the world around us, whether it's in swirling leaves or the stars in the clear skies? Where do we find the Holy Spirit offering care and comfort in the world around us? Are we too busy to stop and notice God?

As we reflect on all that has been happening in the life of the Circuit and in all that is to come, let's rejoice in the sharing of the gospel that we see. Let's not stop seeking to share the love of Christ with all we meet. In all that we do at this time of year, as well as at other times, let's also consciously stop and reflect on where we see God at work.

We continue to think about our mission plans and how we can support one another in sharing God's love with the whole city. We will continue to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit in what we are doing and should do in the future. We need to stop and notice where God is working so that we are guided in the right way in the actions we need to take.

It continues to be a great privilege to serve God here in Colchester. There are many exciting times ahead! I hope that as you read this newsletter you will feel the same. My encouragement to us all is to stop, notice and see where God is at work as we continue to discern our next steps together.

God's blessing to you all,

**Rev Chris Preece, Superintendent Minister**



# NEWS

## From the circuit:

**COLCHESTER** Methodist circuit took a slot at the Free Family Fun Festival in Lower Castle Park to reach out to some of the crowd of thousands of young people who attended in the late summer sunshine.

Rev Paul spent many hours in preparation of a large mural of the story of the feeding of the five thousand, to be created from many large pieces of plywood which pieced together as a jigsaw once the individual sections had been painted by willing young volunteers.

The activity proved so popular that the main section of the mural was completed by lunchtime, leaving the outer border to be finished off by the afternoon visitors.

Also on offer to the young people was a giant Connect 4 game and a prize-winning game of throwing balls into buckets - which attracted patient queues of youngsters waiting to take part.

It was good to be represented at the Christian-focussed festival, hosted by Colchester churches, with thanks to Paul and Keith and the volunteers who supported them. The event will be repeated next September and the Colchester circuit intends to take part again.

The pictures show Paul Howes at work attaching the individual painted sections to create the mural, and the finished article itself.



**PLANS** are in hand for a circuit social event – Colchester Circuit Christmas Celebrations - on 2nd January at The Ark. The aim of the event is to help build on the friendships which have been developing across all churches in the circuit and to get together as a circuit family for food, fun and fellowship.

The small planning group which is organising the event is looking for the following support:

***Can you co-ordinate food contributions?*** The event will run from 4pm to 7pm and each church in the circuit is invited to bring a contribution of finger foods (savoury and sweet). The planning group is looking for someone to co-ordinate the contributions to make sure that a wide range of food is provided. If you are willing to help in this way, please email Senior Circuit steward Tony at [thearkhighwoods@gmail.com](mailto:thearkhighwoods@gmail.com)

***Can you sing?*** Would you like to join a small group on the day to help lead some carol and Christmas song singing? Please email circuit steward Judith if you would like to help in this way, especially if you can sing a part to help harmonise without the need for prior rehearsal. The singing group will be given the music beforehand but current plan is for there to be a scratch choir on the day to help the harmony.

***Can you play an instrument?*** The planning group would also like to see a circuit band of musicians get together on the day to accompany the communal singing. Please tell Judith what instrument you can play so that appropriate music can be planned and provided. It will not be anything too difficult!

***Can you act, recite a poem or piece of prose or otherwise entertain?*** There will be an opportunity for all who would like to contribute to the entertainment. A circuit Christmas sketch is also among the items planned, with parts being taken by volunteers from every church who will have the opportunity to practice their parts at home beforehand - but who will have no further rehearsal before the performance! Further information will follow via church stewards.

**A FURTHER** face to face training session on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion for those church and worship leaders who are required to complete it, but have not yet done so, will be offered to the circuit on 10th February 2024. Full details will be made available to senior church stewards.

## **From Lexden**

**WE** are continuing with our services on the first, third and fifth Sundays of the month and this is working really well. There will be a Christmas Day service at Lexden starting at 9:45am led by Alan.

**WE** used to hold a Friendly Tea Club on a Tuesday Afternoon which closed after the leaders both left. Although we have lost some members since Covid those who remain would dearly love the club to start up again. We had teas and coffees followed by games, quizzes, memory boxes etc. Regrettably members of our congregation are unable to take on this task so we are looking for volunteers within the circuit. Please call Alan if you think you can help. Thank you.

## **From Castle**

**WE** were pleased to be able to support the work of the Colchester Food Bank at our harvest celebrations in September. We received in excess of 90kg of goods and also some monetary donations to support their important and much needed work. On 1st November we reopened our winter Warm Space and have been pleased to welcome visitors old and new on Wednesday mornings. A big thank you, to all who make this possible.

**AS** we look forward to the season of Advent, we will be using the material supplied by the Methodist Church entitled "Out of the ordinary" to focus our thoughts as we light our Advent candles each week. On Advent Sunday we will be joined by our friends from St. Botolph's Church as we renew our Covenant of co-operation, which we signed twenty-six years ago. Rev Chris Preece will be leading our worship and Rev Chris Smith will preach.

Throughout Advent there will be a prayer tree sited in our vestibule. We will be inviting the many visitors who use our premises during the week to write any prayer requests they may have on a tag and hang them on the tree. We will then present them collectively before our Lord during our morning worship.

At our morning service on Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> December, we will once again be supporting the work of the Bridgeway Mission charity at our annual gift service. In the afternoon we look forward to welcoming our Circuit friends, as we recognise the achievements of Sally and Joe on becoming fully accredited local preachers.

Some of our church family have for many reasons felt unable to attend regular worship at Castle. We will be inviting them to come and share in carols, cake and conversation on the afternoon of Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> December. We feel it is important that they know that they continue to be an important part of our church fellowship.

We will be celebrating the birth of our Lord, with a service of lessons and carols on the morning of 24<sup>th</sup> December. We wish all our friends across the circuit a very happy and peaceful Christmas.

## **From The Ark**

**AFTER** many years of active service planning, prayer co-ordination and leadership at the Ark our dear friend Pat has retired as a worship leader. She remains active in her support of the leadership team and willing to lend a hand where needed, and our heartfelt thanks go to Pat for her many years of dedicated service to the Ark since the very beginning. We are thrilled that Rachel is currently working her way towards accreditation as a worship leader, under the supervision of Rev Chris Preece. Rachel already plays a key role in service planning and delivery and we are thrilled that she is taking the next steps towards full accreditation.

**OUR** harvest gifts this year were again in the form of contributions to the Colchester Food Bank, at which a couple of our members are regular volunteers. Two car boot

loads of goods were donated at our service of harvest thanksgiving, as well as gifts of money to the international development and relief organisation All We Can.

**INFORMAL** conversations are taking place with St Luke's C of E church to see how The Ark's building and resources can be even better used for the benefit of the community of Highwoods. It is acknowledged that there needs to be better joined up thinking by the various agencies at work on the estate and one of the projects in mind is a possible expansion of the Highwoods branch of the Food Bank which currently opens for just two hours a week in the adjacent community space. We are grateful to Rev Chris Preece for re-opening the channels of communication with our Anglican friends and look forward to working closer together where we can.

**WE** are planning to celebrate Christmas early with our neighbours and friends with fun, food and carols outside the Ark on 15<sup>th</sup> December at 6.30pm.

**BUT** before then we will be anticipating the coming of Christ into the world with our annual Advent service on 3<sup>rd</sup> December during which many members of the congregation will be taking a part.

**AND** on 17<sup>th</sup> December we will have our annual carol service with music provided by members of the Ark and friends coming together in the Arkestra, featuring Rev Chris Preece on keyboard!

## **From Wimpole Road**

We are so very blessed that here at Wimpole Road, we are a church that cares about so many things and may our church life long continue here in the New Town area. Let us not forget that whatever our age or circumstances, life can still be a time of making decisions, a time of exploration, a time to use any skills that we have, however basic we think those skills are; a time to share with others our concerns and happiness; a time to work together for the coming of God's kingdom on earth.

Recently we have welcomed our new minister Hannah Chun, her husband, and their children. It is a real joy to see the family worshipping at our church. Let us continue to remember them in our prayers. We are delighted to see that so far, the whole family have fitted in 'seamlessly' with all us 'Methodists' from the various churches, as well as anybody they meet up with - long may it continue.

Now at Wimpole Road, we have 'Sunday Stewards', who will assist the steward on duty and we now have a 'Prayer Post box' outside the church, where anyone can pop in a request for a prayer to be said for themselves or a loved one. Also Joan is now a fully accredited Worship Leader – we are grateful for her valuable contributions to our church life.

Wimpole Road has recently held the annual Harvest Festival. As always lots of hard work by various people - it was colourful and inspirational and a high point in the church calendar. We were very pleased the day after our Harvest Festival to have over 400 children in the church, when Rev Paul expertly led the 3 services, tailored for each age group.



We held our Community Day in September, where many people work so very hard for it to be the huge success that it was. The money made was divided between the charity 'Stepping Stones', and also our church. The amount that was received by both was the grand total of £315.

## **From The Well**

Our Mission Planning continues and at our October Church Council we agreed to continue with prayer to explore the feasibility of our mission by having involvement at District level and to form a Project Group which Rev Chris will lead.

We applied for section 106 money from Colchester City Council (paid by developers to be spent for Community benefit). We were successful and so we are buying new folding chairs and installing more efficient lighting in our hall.

As part of Myland Churches Together, we are singing Christmas Carols on Friday 8<sup>th</sup> December at 6.30pm outside the Chesterwell Co-op and collecting money for Action for Children. Anyone from the Circuit is warmly welcome to come along.

During the Christmas school holidays, Make Lunch Myland is planned for 2<sup>nd</sup> January.

We wish all our Circuit friends a peaceful Christmas and a blessed New Year.

## **From Wivenhoe**

October began with Phil celebrating 50 years as an Accredited Local Preacher at St Mary's Church Wivenhoe. Music was provided by Boxted Methodist Silver Band and other Local Preachers took part. About 150 people turned up – Methodists, Wivenhoe Christians, neighbours, family and friends. It was a truly special afternoon.

Then we had the funeral of dear Joe. The Church was full and his life was truly celebrated. But since then we've been adjusting to a life without him, as he did so much for the Church. His were big shoes to fill, and he was the 6<sup>th</sup> member of our congregation to die since last Christmas.

But life goes on and our monthly coffee morning has become even more popular. About 50 people came to our November morning. Then on Remembrance Sunday we joined with the other Wivenhoe Churches, the Royal British Legion and very many Wivenhoe people at a Remembrance Service and wreath laying ceremony.

We are now looking forward to Advent and Christmas. Once again Churches Together in Wivenhoe are distributing a Christmas Card to all Wivenhoe households. This lists all the various churches services and events; including the ever popular 'Carols on the Quay' which this year will be on December 17<sup>th</sup> at 6pm.

We will be holding our own Gift Service on 10<sup>th</sup> December at 11am, when we will be donating toys for Community360 and food for Wivenhoe Foodbank. And we will be holding our Carol Service at 11am on December 24<sup>th</sup> and Communion that evening at 7.30pm.

## **From West Mersea**

In September we had the joy of welcoming the Chun family to our church on Mersea Island. Rev Hannah and her family have become good friends to us all. It has been a pleasure to have the family among our congregation when Hannah has been taking the service. We have already provided Hannah with the Strood Cam App for the Tides on Mersea!

We celebrated Harvest Weekend in October with a Harvest Supper at the church for all our members and friends from other churches. This was followed by a Beetle Drive which was great fun, Reyna was awarded the prize for the most "beetles"! On the Sunday Rev Hannah was our preacher.

At the request of our Visitors, we extended our "Warm Spaces" from April into the summer as "Community Coffee" from 11am until 1.30pm. "Warm Spaces" has now reopened on Wednesdays from 10am until 2pm. We offer soup and a roll, toasted sandwiches and hot snacks, tea and coffee. We are fortunate to be able to call on Mersea council for advice when we need it. Our local police community support officers call in regularly with offers of help.

Our Toddler Group continues to thrive, we are especially busy when the weather is cold and wet. Some new mums have arrived with their tiny babies and it's good to see new friendships begin as they settle into the group.

On Friday December 8<sup>th</sup> from 7.30 until 9.30pm we are holding a Jazz evening to raise funds for East Anglian Childrens' Hospice. We support them in buying Christmas presents for all the children in the hospices. The group is Serendipity jazz trio, who will provide their talents freely to enable us to raise more for EACH. Those of you who came to our Church Anniversary Concert will remember the hymn singing jazz style. Their offering this time will include some jazz styled carols!

On Sunday December 17<sup>th</sup> at 4pm it will be our Candle lit Carol Service 'with a difference', you will be more than welcome to come along.

As you journey through Advent lighting candles each week may you all find

Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love, as you prepare your heart for Christmas.



## FROM THE CIRCUIT DIARY:

- 5<sup>th</sup> Dec      Circuit Meeting on 'Zoom' from 7:30pm
- 9<sup>th</sup> Dec      Circuit Monthly Prayer Meeting at Wivenhoe from 9am
- 10<sup>th</sup> Dec     Admission Service for new Local Preachers at Castle from 3pm
- 31<sup>st</sup> Dec     Circuit Service at Wimpole Road from 11am
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Jan      Circuit Christmas Celebration at The Ark from 4pm till 7pm. Come when you can, leave when you must!
- 13<sup>th</sup> Jan     Circuit Monthly Prayer Meeting at The Ark from 9am
- 13<sup>th</sup> Jan     Mission Planning Meeting (for Circuit Leadership Team & Mission Planning Group) at The Ark from 10am
- 18<sup>th</sup> Jan     Circuit Leadership Team Meeting on 'Zoom' from 7:30pm
- 10<sup>th</sup> Feb     Circuit Monthly Prayer Meeting at The Well from 9am
- 10<sup>th</sup> Feb     Equality, Diversity & Inclusion training. Time & Venue tbc. Booking required via Circuit Administrator as detailed below.
- 29<sup>th</sup> Feb     Circuit Leadership Team Meeting on 'Zoom' from 7:30pm

In addition, Circuit Bible Study takes place on many Tuesday evenings (via Zoom) throughout the year. Please ask if you would like more details.

Further information is available from our Circuit Administrator via [colchestermethodist.office@gmail.com](mailto:colchestermethodist.office@gmail.com) and also by viewing the Circuit diary at <http://www.colchestermethodists.org.uk>

## DEADLINES!

Please submit your plan requests for March/April/May 2024 by Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> January via our Circuit Administrator at [colchestermethodist.office@gmail.com](mailto:colchestermethodist.office@gmail.com)

The next newsletter will be distributed at the beginning of March so please let Judith have your church news by Friday 16<sup>th</sup> February.