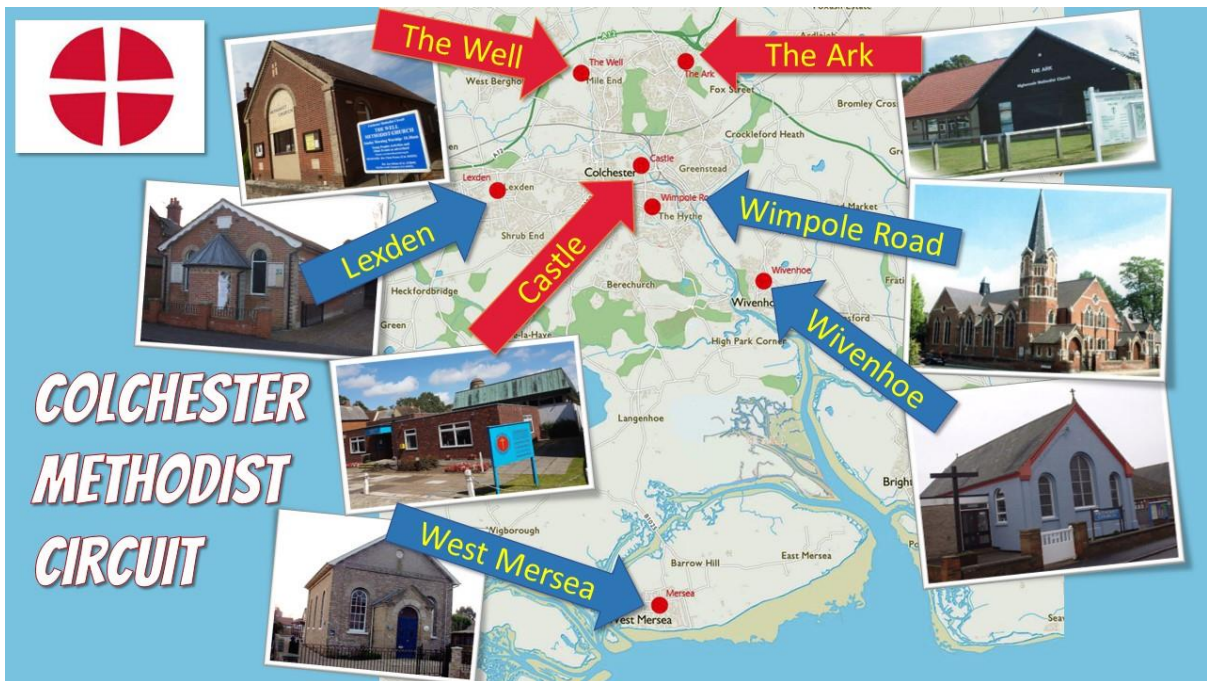


Colchester Methodist Circuit Newsletter

Edition 5 – March 2024 (Redacted)



Letter from our Superintendent, Rev Chris Preece

Dear Friends,

Travelling along we absorb lots of information, some of which will include road signs. Often the road signs we see are sending us a message. Where the road narrows and at the same time there is a double bend, it wouldn't be unusual to see the words 'Reduce Speed Now' either. I could have chosen any road signs but why these?

The season of Lent encourages us to reduce our speed and re-examine our relationship with God. It is a time to reassess our direction, and most crucially to find our identity with Christ. So often, we talk of giving something up or taking something on for Lent, but we should be finding ourselves in Christ. Yet, as Christians, we do not work in isolation. We need to think and be alongside one

another as church communities and as a Circuit as a whole. As we go through Holy Week, there are many double bends along the way and then the road narrows and the cross is faced on Good Friday, before the final pause and waiting for the joy of Easter Day. We then see the transformation and joy that comes through the resurrection.

As a Circuit, we continue to reflect on our mission planning. Consequently, we are naturally reassessing by asking questions such as, where are we? What do we need to do? What should we do next? These are significant questions to ask. As we reflect, we see that we need to reach certain priorities so that we are working most effectively in the way we believe God is leading us in this season. In effect, the road becomes narrower as we prioritise for this moment. To do this, we may find that there are a few double bends along the way. It is important that we don't take these double bends too quickly or we may find ourselves not quite in the right place. Equally, it's not a call to stop and do nothing. We must continue to take sure and steady steps.

As we read the next edition of this Circuit newsletter, I would encourage us to seek even more ways in which we can share significantly with one another. What are the threads of outreach that bring some of the churches together? Where might we be able to learn from one another in the activities we are doing? Where are we looking to branch out into something new? Is there a church which has started on this road where we can have a conversation? These are the overlaps where we might be able to learn and support one another.

Where are the gaps where, as a Circuit, we might be able to do something new? This may be something we can't manage on our own but in coming together we can develop a new way of approaching things. There will undoubtedly be a need to navigate the double bends and, maybe, the road may narrow from the huge range of ideas we have. Reducing the speed is not about losing momentum but about ensuring we navigate the gaps successfully.

As we journey through Lent and Easter this year, let us take the time to reassess where we are with God as individuals and as a Circuit. Let's follow the journey of Christ as we are called to do as disciples. Let's focus on the joy of Easter Day and the resurrection as we invite the Holy Spirit to work with us, between us and in us once again.

God bless,
Chris

NEWS: from The Circuit

MORE than 50 people from around the Circuit gathered at the Ark on 2nd January this year to celebrate all that is Christmas.

On arrival everyone had the opportunity to test their Christmas knowledge as there were plenty of quiz questions around the room. In addition, there was another quiz on the tables based on Christmas food which could be completed at leisure. The winner of the Christmas wall quiz was Sheila.

During the three-hour programme we were entertained by various people including Chris who gave a wonderfully light-hearted talk about his life experiences and Margaret who recited two very enjoyable monologues by heart. We also had Geoff and Viv reading a letter of complaint from Joseph to his travel agent, and a very humorous response to the gifts of the Twelve Days of Christmas.

And thanks to Rev Paul we all sang his following re-working of the Twelve Days of Christmas:

On the first day of Christmas, This circuit sent to me, A fun time here at The Ark

...Two circuit ministers

...Three supernumeraries

...Four circuit stewards

...Five Greenstead roundabouts

...Six zoom meetings

...Seven church councils

...Eight treasurers counting

...Nine more committees

...Ten miles to Mersea

...Eleven Local Preachers

...A12 traffic jams

We also enjoyed some more community singing led by Rev Chris and Clive on the piano. Rachel and Judith gave us a song; there was a short pantomime, Aladdin a Manger, performed by the Circuit's scratch amateur dramatic team; and there was a small play about the Angel's Poinsettia and a spoof sketch by Judith and Ron about Ravioli's painting of the nativity for the Medici family.

There was a very good selection of food and drinks and above all a tremendous sense of fellowship. It was good to see people from across the Circuit come together and have a really enjoyable time whilst being very conscious of the birth of our Lord and Saviour.

I have already been asked if we can have another event next Christmas, and a couple of people even want something sooner and have suggested a summer picnic or BBQ. Please let me know your thoughts.

Finally, I would like to thank those who joined me on the planning team (Rev Paul, Chris, Ron, Judith and Christine) who ensured we had a successful event, and for those who came and made it such a memorable occasion.

Tony, Senior Circuit Steward

WITH thanks to all the churches who have been considering mission planning and submitted their responses to the circuit questionnaire, the circuit leadership team met for a face-to-face mission brainstorming session in January. The team was joined by Andrew who is on the circuit mission planning focus group (which comprises Rev Chris, Rev Paul, Sally and Andrew). The Saturday morning session was an opportunity to consider the individual churches' wishes, plans and concerns and to dream dreams.

The morning was considered a useful and most successful time together; the next steps are:

- Pray
- Leadership team to revisit the outcomes of the session and agree priorities
- Mission Planning group to begin to work on actions once priorities are agreed
- Priorities, once agreed, to feed into future Circuit strategy
- Feedback to Circuit Meeting
- Pray

CIRCUIT bible study continues via Zoom on a Tuesday evening from 7.30pm to 8.30pm. It is regularly attended by up to 30 folk from around the Circuit. Some like to just listen and reflect; others are happy to read the designated bible passage to the group; and some are happy to join in the conversation and discussion. The weekly session is led by Rev Chris and always concludes with a hymn or song to further reflect on the theme. The session is always recorded, and so there is an opportunity to listen at a later time if preferred.

THE New Town Road manse in Colchester and the chapel at West Bergholt have now been sold and the new lease of the chapel at Marks Tey has completed. Thanks to Edward and Geoff for all their work on these complex matters.

from Lexden:

WE continue with our first, third and fifth Sunday services. These are working really well. We have been contacted by a Pentecostal church wishing to use our premises on the Sundays we don't meet. Their request is currently under review.

WE also have a short service every Thursday starting at 9:30am. This is a time of prayer and reflection using the Northumbrian Community prayers. Rev Ruth originally set this up during her time with us and it has continued ever since, except during Covid lockdown, and is now led by Alan. We would welcome anyone from across the circuit to join us.

from Castle:

EACH year we produce a church Christmas card which is distributed to everyone on our community roll. Anyone who wishes can add their own Christmas greeting. In previous years we have used a generic picture from the internet to illustrate the front cover, but this year we decided to invite members of our junior church to design the cover. We received four wonderful entries and rather than choose just one, we decided to use all four, printing a quarter of our cards with each design. They were a delight to display in our homes.

ON Advent Sunday we welcomed our friends from St Botolph's as we renewed our Covenant of co-operation. The service was led by our Rev Chris and the sermon was given by Rev Chris, recently appointed Priest in Charge of St Botolph's. What a joy to share in fellowship together.

AFTER our December soup and snack lunch, Rev Chris led us in a service of Holy Communion for Advent. We sat in a semi-circle around the communion rail and shared in the elements. Clive accompanied us on the piano rather than the organ, to accommodate a friend whose hearing disability prevents attendance at Sunday Worship. This was greatly appreciated.

ONCE again the members of our fellowship gave very generously at our annual Gift Service, supporting the work of Bridgeway Mission.

FOR the first time we held an afternoon Christmas tea party at Castle. We invited those of our fellowship who find it too challenging to attend regular worship. A wonderful time was had by all as we enjoyed carols, cake and conversation.

DURING Advent our worship leaders and friends led a carol service at Alderwood Care Home. This was greatly appreciated and we are looking forward to leading further acts of worship there during the year ahead.

WE asked a member of our junior church to read a poem at our Carol Service on Christmas Eve, but we were all very surprised and blessed when every member of the junior church came forward and performed the poem as a rap! They had prepared and produced this themselves and it was a wonderful witness to our Lord.

OUR Warm Space continues on a Wednesday and we are most grateful to those who volunteer to make this possible. Each week we are seeing faces old and new. Groups within the Castle fellowship also use Warm Space to hold meetings in comfort!

ON Shrove Tuesday we once again held a pancake party at Castle. Forty people came together to enjoy pancakes with a choice of savoury and sweet fillings, a wonderful time of fellowship was had by all present as we raised funds for St Helena Hospice.

WE will be holding a soup and snack lunch on Maundy Thursday from 12noon and this will be followed by a service of Holy Communion at 1.30pm, led by Rev Chris. On Good Friday we will hold a service of Meditation at 10.30am. On Easter Sunday we will be sharing in our service of Easter Joy to celebrate our risen Lord. We will decorate the cross with flowers and at the end of our service we will place it in the large window overlooking the park.

from The Ark:

AS part of our mission planning we continue to explore new ways of working with community organisations who use the Ark on a regular basis. In collaboration with Home Start, the family support charity which is based at the Ark, we had a very successful Christmas party with parents and young children which included craft activities for the youngsters, organised by Home Start, a visit from Father Christmas – arranged by us and ably assisted by Home Start - outdoor carol singing led by Rev Chris and very well supported by church members and circuit friends, and hot sausages in rolls provided by us. We look forward to more such joint events taking place in the near future.

WE are delighted to be able to offer a new home to the Highwoods branch of FoodBank which is open at the Ark for two hours every Monday morning. Regular visitors to the FoodBank easily found their way to its new location and the volunteers are delighted with their new base. We are able to offer ample storage for the FoodBank supplies and the use of the room opposite for fellowship and chat. Furthermore we are able to offer the use of our prayer/quiet room for Citizens' Advice who work alongside the FoodBank volunteers once a month.

We will be working closely with the FoodBank volunteers from St Luke's Church on Highwoods and will be exploring with them the possibility of extending the hours to another day in the week to accommodate more people in need of this vital service. More volunteers will be needed to help this happen, and some members of the Ark have already expressed an interest in offering their support. Many thanks to Rev Chris for encouraging these new initiatives and acting as a vital communications link to enable the discussions and plans to flow.

OUR Easter devotions and worship will focus on services on Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday (which service will follow an Easter breakfast communion).

from Wimpole Road:

WE reflect on a good start to the calendar year. On Sunday mornings, we welcomed back local preachers Eddie and Alan and also enjoyed our first service with Rev Amy, chaplain to the Forces, who led our worship on 14 January.

Our annual Covenant service at Wimpole Road took place on 21 January, led for the first time by Rev Hannah - an opportunity for us to recognise all that God has done for us, and renew our own covenant with God. It was lovely to see so many there, including some new faces that have joined our worship in recent weeks.

IN our Vision for the Future meeting on 24 January, guided by Rev Hannah, we reviewed the work we are currently involved in at Wimpole Road as part of our Mission Plan and how this links to the calling of the Methodist Church through Worship, Learning and Caring, Service and Evangelism.

It was so encouraging to see how many active ventures there are, including Warm Space and Coffee Mornings, Toddler Group, Carpet Bowls, Thursday Circle, Make Lunch and Community Larder, Holiday Club, Community Day, Soup Run and Food Bank (at St. Stephen's).

These are all in addition to our worship on Sunday mornings and evenings (as part of Three Together), Prayer and Bible Study groups. We continue to look for ways to develop in the Church, including our ongoing work to improve our Eco Church credentials.

from The Well:

OUR Mission Planning continues, side by side with our Building Development Project. With regard to the building development, we have had initial conversations with two architects with a view to appointing one to give us a feasibility study as to the best way forward to develop our premises. The current thinking is to open up the front of the chapel to make it more obvious and attractive for the community and to replace our hall which is nearing the end of its life (Quinquennial Inspection 2023). We will need to make applications to various bodies for funding and grants for our project and these will require a Mission Plan. This document has just been completed and approved by the Church Council.

WE celebrated the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity with a united service at The Well on 20th January led by Rev Chris and leaders of the three other denominations in our area. There was a good turn out, and, at the coffee afterwards, £58.30 was raised for the Churches Together Outreach Fund.

WE were delighted with a baptism at a joyful morning service on 4th February. It is great to have her a new family join us.

from Wivenhoe:

WE have for many years been an active member of 'Churches Together in Wivenhoe'. It currently comprises the Anglican, Methodist, Congregational, Catholic and Community Churches. Together we organise a number of joint events throughout the year, particularly during Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter and Whitsunday. On Christmas Eve about 400 people turned out for the ever popular 'Carols on the Quay' and over £500 was raised for various charities, including Bridgeway Mission.

DURING Lent we are holding four events. You will be very welcome at any or all of them. Details are below but for more information please contact Phil.

Monday 4th March 12-2pm - Lent Lunch at the Methodist Church.

Friday 8th March 7.30pm - Film at St Mary's Church - 'Living' (2022) starring Bill Nighy.

Friday 15th March 7.30pm - Friends International presentation at the Congregational Church.

Friday 29th March 11am - A Good Friday service at St Mary's preceded by a Walk of Witness. Appropriate artwork is being planned for display around the town.

SADLY, on 1st January, Rachel died after a long illness. Rachel was a Local Preacher, in our Circuit, and we miss her unique preaching style. Prior to her illness she was also a key member of this Church; a Steward and organiser of Ladies Fellowship and Knit and Natter. We gave thanks for her life at a service on 9th February.

OUR Coffee Mornings, Ladies Fellowship and Knit and Natter remain well attended, and on Sunday mornings we get about two dozen for morning worship. We continue to support the work of Dr Bagamba and his family in the Democratic Republic of Congo. We remain involved with Friends International in their work with International Students, although we lack fit and able people to undertake the things that we did before Covid.

from West Mersea:

HERE at Mersea our Christmas was sparkling, starting off with our local jazz group getting us singing old carols to new tunes.

JANUARY is always dull after Christmas but Warm Spaces had us all getting together each week, the new menus are fabulous - have you ever had banana and raisin toasties for lunch? Why not join us on Wednesdays, have a snack lunch and follow it with a walk along the beach, that will lift your spirits and let all the worries ebb away.

AT the time of writing we are looking forward to a quiz night at the end of February, with an invitation to attend having been circulated around the circuit. An update will follow in the next edition of the Circuit Newsletter!

FROM THE CIRCUIT DIARY:

9 th March	Circuit Monthly Prayer Meeting at Wivenhoe from 9am
16 th March	Bible Month Training Day at Castle or online from 10am till 3pm
18 th March	Circuit Meeting on Zoom from 7:30pm
13 th April	Circuit Monthly Prayer Meeting at Wimpole Road from 9am
11 th May	Circuit Monthly Prayer Meeting at Castle from 9am
21 st September	'Save the Date' – Free Family Fun Festival in Castle Park

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, including details about Easter services, is available from our Circuit Administrator via colchestermethodist.office@gmail.com and also by viewing the Circuit diary at <http://www.colchestermethodists.org.uk>

DEADLINES!

Please submit your plan requests for June/July/August 2024 by Thursday 11th April via our Circuit Administrator at colchestermethodist.office@gmail.com

The next newsletter will be distributed at the beginning of June so please let Judith have your church news by Monday 20th May.