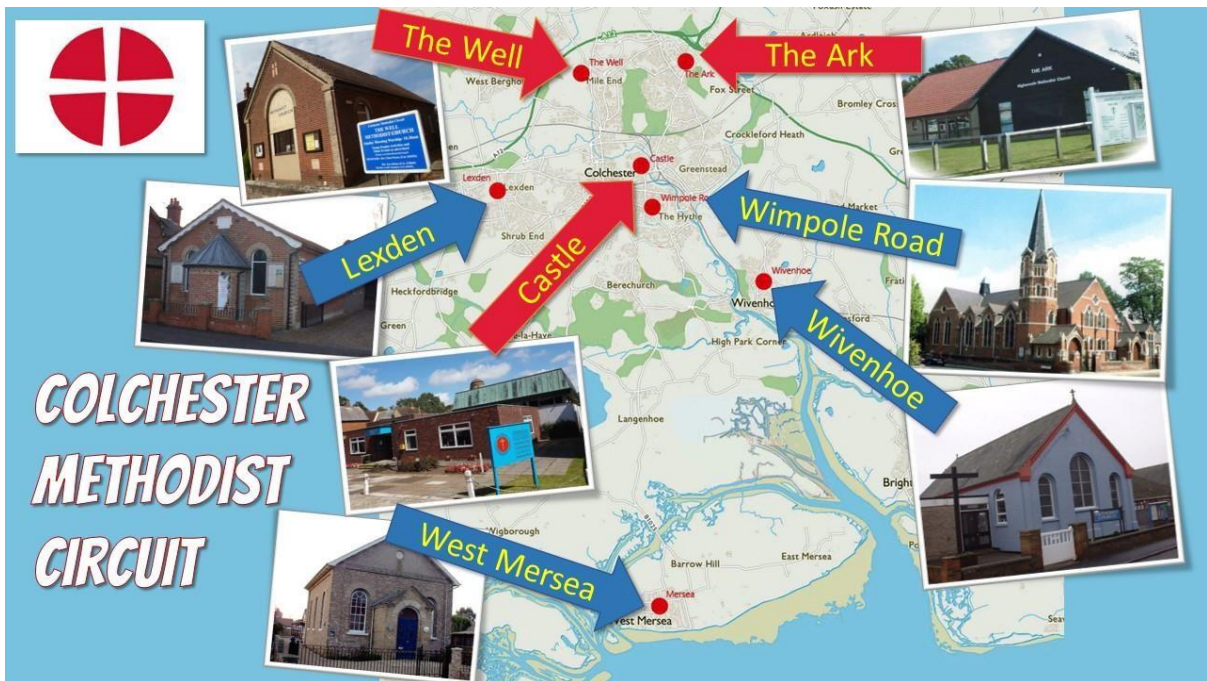


Colchester Methodist Circuit

Newsletter

Edition 8 – December 2024 (redacted version)



Letter from our Superintendent, Rev Chris Preece

Dear Friends,

The period of December through to February is one which covers some of the longest nights of the year. It is also a time of great contrast in the sorts of things that take place. Most of us can identify with the frenetic activity that takes place in all aspects of our lives in the run up to Christmas. For some, the period of January can then seem very long with very little going on. It can be a time where a sense of balance isn't easily found.

It is also through this period we prepare for Christmas, when we celebrate Christ's birth as Emmanuel which means God with us. God being with us is a promise we find in the Bible and should bring us great comfort, whatever we may be facing or working through. God is with us in the busy periods of preparation and in the long days and nights. God is with us in our joys and walking alongside us at the more difficult times of life. We should rejoice in this promise which was brought to us so clearly in the birth of Christ.

For the first time, this year there will be a Circuit Blue Christmas service. This is a service for those who find Christmas a difficult time. It may be as simple as finding the activity or increased socialisation a challenge. There may be situations which have been difficult at some time that you want to bring before God, recognising that God is with us in everything, and this is an opportunity to do so in the context of a quiet and reflective service. This year, we are holding the service at 3pm on Sunday 8th December at Wivenhoe Methodist Church. You may be aware of a friend or neighbour for whom this may be helpful, so please feel free to invite people to come along. All are welcome.

There will be much information in this newsletter about the different events, carol services, Circuit Service and Christmas Celebration that are taking place. These are all times where we can come together, invite others and recognise God's presence with us. Christmas is a time where it is perhaps easier to speak of our faith than at some other points.

There is much in the life of the Circuit for which we can be so very thankful. The support that is there for one another in many different ways, and the increased collaboration there is, are all examples of the ways in which we come together to witness to God's presence.

As we approach this Advent, Christmas and on into the new year, let us give thanks for each other and for the prompting of the Holy Spirit. We come to celebrate the birth of Christ, God who is with us now and forever. Let us rejoice with one another in this.

God's blessings for a peace, hope and joy-full time this Christmastime,

Chris



NEWS: from The Circuit

COME and join the Circuit Christmas Celebration! Plans for a grand social event for all are well in hand and you are invited to come and enjoy some circuit-wide entertainment at The Ark on Friday 3rd January. The timing of the event is 4pm to 7pm – but come when you can and leave when you must.

The event will include quizzes, a sketch, musical items, community singing, party games and recitals. There will also be a mini House of Games-style quiz (the format of which should be familiar to those who watch Richard Osman's BBC show) for which each church is asked to supply one team of four players. A buffet tea will be provided with contributions from each church in the circuit.

Please look out for more information in your church notices and on your noticeboards and do add your name to the sign-up sheet which will be circulated to churches.

Last year's post-Christmas celebration proved very popular with all who attended. Please help to make this event an equal success!

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WHAT would we like to know?

As human beings we are curious people. There is always something more we would like to know. Different things appeal different people which is part of the richness of life.

Each church has groups of people who bring different skills, gifts and talents to all they do and things we wish we could do. In the mission plan there is a commitment to try to put together some training and development for people where the needs are identified. This is where you come in!

What is it you would like to know that could support the life of the church and Circuit? Maybe you would like to know more about how to put PowerPoint presentations together, how to use projection in a service, or Zoom. Maybe technology isn't your thing at all, but you're interested in learning more about pastoral care, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, Safeguarding or putting together Local Arrangement services. Or maybe....

There could be a whole range of areas you are interested in that are not yet known about, so please say! Please contact our Circuit Administrator in the first instance and we can then have a look at how best to facilitate any requests that are received. We can't guarantee to do everything as that will depend on the requests, but this is an opportunity for us to pool our skills, looking beyond the Circuit to the Learning Network or Connexion for additional opportunities where these exist.

Chris Preece

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ARE you called to be a Worship Leader or a Local Preacher?

Worship Leaders

In several of the churches across the Circuit there are appointed Worship Leaders. In different churches, Circuits and across the Connexion, the expression of Worship Leading may be varied. At its heart is a sense of call from God to the vocation of being a Worship Leader.

A Worship Leader supports the local church in the leading of worship. You may already take part in a service through reading the Bible for example but want to take a further step into the leading of a service, but not preaching. If so, worship leading may be something you'd like to explore.

There are a variety of training pathways for this. The form of the training takes into account what you would like to do and the way the role is expressed within the local church.

Unlike a Local Preacher, the appointment of a Worship Leader is made by the Church Council to the local church in consultation with the Local Preachers and Worship Leaders Meeting.

Local Preachers

Local Preachers are appointed and lead services in churches across the Circuit. A Local Preacher will be involved in the leading of worship but there will be an emphasis on the sermon, whilst a Worship Leader will focus on everything except the sermon. There will be a sense of call from God to sharing the Word of God through preaching.

The training programme for becoming a Local Preacher is set by the Connexion and is predominantly online whilst also working with a local tutor. The training and practical development of skills is overseen by the Local Preachers Meeting.

What next?

Being a Worship Leader or a Local Preacher is vastly rewarding and a way of expressing our discipleship. The formation and training which is undertaken helps to deepen personal discipleship and helps to build up congregations. The offices of a Worship Leader or a Local Preacher are different from one another but complementary. You may sense a vocation to one and not the other.

If you'd like to find out more, you might like to read some stories of Worship Leaders and Local Preachers from around the Connexion (including stories featuring some from our Circuit). The details can be found [here](#) or via the Methodist website.

If you would like to explore either of these roles further, then please contact Chris Preece (chris.preece@methodist.org.uk) in the first instance for an initial 'no strings attached' conversation to discuss the options and training pathways in more depth which could include having a small group of people from across the Circuit all learning together from early 2025. It is the intention we will offer training on an annual basis, but please don't hold back if you are interested at any time as we can accommodate this too. It's about finding the best way of working together for each person.

from Lexden:

WE have just celebrated our 165th birthday by sharing a box of Celebration chocolates with the congregation following our Church Anniversary service.

The problem with growing old is that you start crumbling at the corners and this happened with us when our garden wall recently collapsed. This was over a foot wide at the base and made up with two sides of ornamental brickwork infilled with cemented builders' rubble and topped with more bricks.

But as with all things its time had come and so what is left will be demolished and replaced with a smart wooden fence.

from Castle:

WE recently shared in a joint, quiet study day with our friends at St Botolph's Church. It was led by our three Ministers, Chris Preece, and Chris and Emma and proved to be a very thought-provoking day. It was greatly appreciated by all those who were able to be present.

ON Advent Sunday we will be joining the congregation at St Botolph's Church to renew our Covenant of co-operation.

ONCE again, we have invited our young people to design our Christmas card which will be distributed to all our members and friends. We hope to support Action for Children with any donations we receive.

DURING Advent a Prayer Tree will be available in our vestibule for people to write their prayer requests on angel shaped decorations.

ON Sunday 8th December we will be holding our annual Gift Service, and this year we will be collecting hats, gloves, scarves and socks for asylum seekers currently housed at the Wethersfield Centre.

ONCE again we will be inviting those of our church family who no longer feel able to attend worship on a regular basis to come to 'Carols and Cake' on the afternoon of Thursday 12th December. This year we have prepared invitations to our Carol Service which is on Sunday 22nd December. These have been inspired by the Angel theme and will be distributed to our members to invite family and friends to the service.... and of course, we are looking forward to welcoming our friends from across the Circuit to the united service on Sunday the 29th December. On that occasion, we will also be joined by our friends from St Botolph's.

FOLLOWING a great deal of hard work and planning by the members of our leadership team and the dedicated help of our church members, everything is now falling into place for the future use and care of our building.

Hirers are now getting used to the new entry system and looking after themselves. The contract cleaners are doing a wonderful job in keeping the building clean and the flat is now ready to be let.

from The Ark:

THE Highwoods branch of Colchester Food Bank has settled into its new home at the Ark and the volunteer helpers are delighted with the space we have been able to offer not only for the storage of foodstuff and toiletries for distribution but also for chat and companionship in the room opposite the Food Bank which has also been made available to the volunteers and visitors. We were delighted to receive from pupils of the Gilberd School tens of boxes packed full of donations for the Food Bank as part of our harvest festival celebration. It is good to know that the wider community knows of the valuable work being done from our church premises.

The Ark is also the base for Home Start which works closely with families and children on Highwoods and is able to issue Food Bank vouchers to those in need. The manager of Home Start, will be talking about the work of that organisation at our morning service on 26th January next year.

FOOD plays an important part in fellowship at The Ark. We enjoyed a roast dinner after our September Harvest Festival service and were very pleased to be joined by friends from around the Circuit at a fund-raising evening meal in October which was prepared and served by two of our church members.

PUPILS from Brinkley Grove Primary School will be taking part in two Christingle events at the Ark during Advent. This was a regular annual event when we had an employed community outreach worker and we are pleased to have been able to restore some valuable links with the local schools. Many thanks to Rev Chris for her enthusiasm and school-related expertise!

THE three churches on Highwoods (The Ark, St Luke's and St Mark's) have had a combined Christmas card printed to tell the community about all the church services and events on Highwoods this Christmas. The cards will be delivered by volunteers from all three churches to 5,000 homes in the first fortnight of December.

AND by way of an invitation to our carol service on 15th December, we have been making angels to attach to a little tag, to publicise the service. The angels totalled 80 in number at the last count, and have been knitted, embroidered, cross-stitched and cut from patterned paper by the crafty members of the Ark.

from Wimpole Road:

OVER the past few months we have been praying over our mission statement for direction in how to develop our mission plan. Through our 'vision for the future' meetings, Annual General meeting and Church Council we are beginning to work out our way forward.

One of the areas we feel led to follow is to focus on developing our fellowship after Sunday worship with the hope of enriching that experience, to bring opportunities for deepening faith and growing disciples.

If you have worshiped with us on a Sunday morning you will know that we invite everyone to join us for refreshment after the service in the school hall. We do have new visitors to our church which we rejoice in but feel that we could expand our hospitality and fellowship if we remained in the same place to share with one another where fellowship follows seamlessly as part of our worship.

It takes courage for anyone to walk into an unfamiliar place if you don't know anyone there, even more to take yourself into another new environment and start all over again. Some, if not all of us have probably experienced that in some form or other over the years and I can remember how difficult it was for me. Had I not attended with a regular worshipper of that Church and stuck to them like glue, I'm not sure I would have returned the following week, despite the warmth of the welcome. Most of our visitors come alone.

As mentioned in the last circuit publication, we are embarking on what has become known at Wimpole Road as 'The Project', where we can offer, perhaps, a more gentle way of inclusion by enjoying a more casual transition in getting to know one another.

Voted in favour by The Vision meeting, Annual Church meeting and the Church Council, the plan is this; To work towards adding a service area inside the church where the tech desk is now.

Plans have been drawn up and we are waiting for tenders so that we can finally decide the way forward.

Our idea is to sympathetically use timber from the pews to create some cupboards and a sink in that corner. Removing three pews from the back will not only enable a space to be used for meeting with a cup of something after the service but will also open up opportunities for different forms of worship and use of the church when other meetings or hires are being held in the school rooms.

In addition to that, to add an accessible toilet and vestry revamp to make the church area independent from the halls when they are in use, thus fulfilling some safeguarding requirements and regulations.

And there's more, it has also been decided to investigate a completely new PA system to enrich our services. It is not easy to see the screen from all areas of the church and we've had technical gremlins for far too long. It's frustrating and sometimes embarrassing when at the crucial moment for a response or hymn the screen goes blank and we're then flummoxed about what comes next. At some point we need to be dragged into the technical age that is the 21st century!

Please pray for us as we do for you, that we continue to seek God's guidance into developing personal faith, making worship relevant and accessible and creating an environment for a loving, caring fellowship with one another.

from The Well:

THE building project - we have received estimates for rebuilding or refurbishment of our premises but we do not have the funds to do everything in one go. It has been decided to do the work in two phases. We shall concentrate on the worship area as phase 1 and the hall as phase 2 (at a later date). With this in mind it was felt we should make the worship area as flexible as possible and allow for the possibility of community use during the week, whilst also moving the entrance to the front, as originally envisaged. We think this will give us the best return from the funds available.

We now have to maintain the hall for longer than previously envisaged. The gas fire heaters were condemned during half term as beyond repair and we are looking to install infrared panel heaters instead. We are grateful to Castle for the loan of three convector heaters to tide us over until the new heating is in place

THE Community Pantry and Warm Welcome continue during the autumn term and at the Warm Welcome on Tuesday 10th December we are having informal Carol singing from 2.30pm until 3pm with light refreshments, to which everyone is invited.

As part of Churches Together in Myland, Chesterwell Co-op has given permission for us to sing Christmas Carols outside the store on Friday 13th December at 6.30pm. We hope that as many as possible will attend to sing. We will be collecting for The Children's Society this year.

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

from Wivenhoe:

IN September we celebrated our Harvest Festival and were delighted that Caroline led it. Our harvest gifts were donated to Beacon House. Ken works there and he and Kerry prepared a very meaningful Harvest display linking harvest with the work of Beacon House.

SOME of our international student friends have been with us for a year and are now staying a further year. Other students now worship with us too. So, we decided to have a lunch after church on 20th October and we invited Alex of Friends International along too. It was a very happy time. Alex is looking for Christian families to host international students – invite them for a meal or take them out for example (not have them stay with you but rather provide Christian friendship). If you might be interested, give Phil at Wivenhoe a call or email Alex via info@friendsinternational.uk For our part, we are hosting a Friends International games evening on 22nd November.

LADIES Fellowship and Knit and Natter remain popular and our monthly coffee morning sees up to 50 people attending.

ONCE again Churches Together in Wivenhoe have produced a Christmas Card outlining all the local churches Advent and Christmas events. This will be delivered to all Wivenhoe households by the end of November.

WE look forward to seeing you at the Blue Christmas Service here on Sunday 8th December and we wish you all a joyous and peaceful Christmas and a happy new year.

from Mersea:

OUR Community Coffee/Lunch meetings have continued throughout the Summer and Autumn and we are now back to our Warm Spaces venture on Wednesdays from 10am until 2pm. It is a joy to welcome our guests who week by week share some of their life stories with us. For some it is their only contact with others as they do not have any close family.

THE Baby and Toddler group continues to flourish as we meet on Thursdays from 9am until 11.30. We have recently been joined by quite a few new mums and a young dad who brings his baby son. He is receiving lots of support from the "Group Family", it is so wonderful to see this in love in action.

WE held our Harvest Weekend in September with a Harvest Supper on Saturday evening for our church family with support from our friends in the Circuit. Followed by a "Call my Bluff" Quiz which was as usual both entertaining and great fun. On Sunday Rev Hannah took our Harvest service which was well received. We were asked to bring dry goods for the "Mersea Pantry" which is an island charity supported by Mersea residents.

AT our Church Council we agreed to become an Eco Church, and we look forward to working with Sally on the Bronze stage of this project. We found we already fulfil some of the criteria for this award, so we are deciding what we need to work through next. The church part of the building is losing heat through windows and doors as they are the original ones. So that will be our first priority.

WE have welcomed Alan and Pat, and Anne-Louise to our services. Earlier this year we also welcomed Roger and Margaret and their guide dogs Quiggley and Flo.

IN November during a very moving service, we heard their testimonies, as we received all five of them into the membership of our church. It was a joyous occasion and we are truly blessed to have them as part of our gathering at Mersea.

LOOKING forward, we will hold our Vision Meeting after the service on Sunday 19th January, looking at our Wants & Wishes List and Mission Planning.

WE hope that as you travel through the Advent season you will find peace and joy in the services in which you are a part.

ALL that remains for us on Mersea is to wish each and every one of you a Blessed Christmas and Happy New Year.

FROM THE CIRCUIT DIARY:

3 rd Dec	Circuit Meeting on Zoom from 7.30pm
8 th Dec	'Blue Christmas' Circuit Service at Wivenhoe from 3pm
14 th Dec	Circuit Monthly Prayer Meeting at Wimpole Road from 9am
29 th Dec	Circuit Service at Castle from 10:30am
3 rd Jan	Circuit Christmas Celebration at The Ark from 4pm
11 th Jan	Circuit Monthly Prayer Meeting at Wivenhoe from 9am
8 th Feb	Circuit Monthly Prayer Meeting at Wimpole Road from 9am
8 th Mar	Circuit Monthly Prayer Meeting at The Ark from 9am
13 th Mar	Lent Retreat Day – more information to follow in the new year

In addition;

Circuit Evening 'Zoom' Services take place on the 1st, 2nd and 4th Sundays of each month from 6:30pm

Circuit Bible Study takes place on many Tuesday evenings throughout the year (via Zoom). Please note there will be no Bible Study on 24th or 31st December.

All are very welcome and further information on any of the above is available;

From our Circuit Administrator at: colchestermethodist.office@gmail.com

By viewing the Circuit diary at: <https://colchestermethodists.org.uk>

DEADLINES!

Please submit your plan requests for March/April/May 2025 by 16th January via our Circuit Administrator at colchestermethodist.office@gmail.com

The next newsletter will be distributed at the beginning of March so please let Judith have your church news by 17th February.