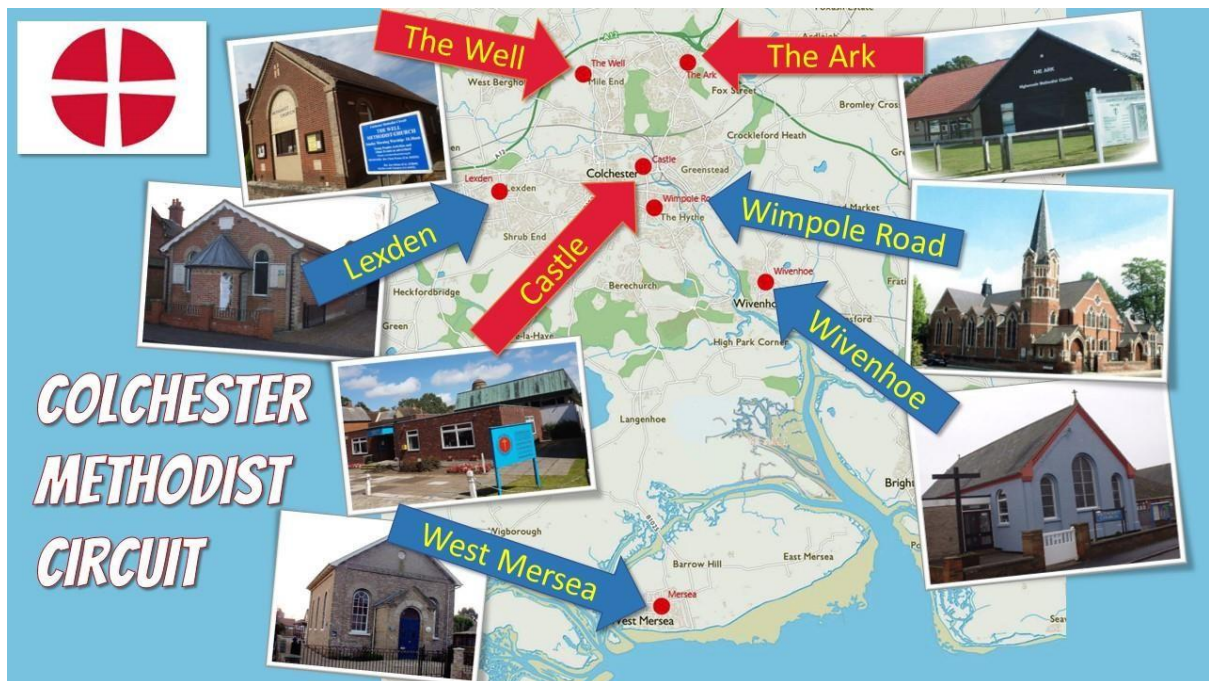


Colchester Methodist Circuit

Newsletter

Edition 9 – March 2025 (redacted version)



Letter from our Superintendent, Rev Chris Preece

Dear Friends,

Moving into March is a time where the days begin to lengthen and it feels as if the weather might be turning. This year, it is also the time where we move into the season of Lent. Lent as a word comes from the Old English word *lencten* which means to lengthen, and which is associated with the Spring season. As the days lengthen, we travel from Winter into Spring and into the longer days and, hopefully, better weather.

This newsletter also takes us through the season of Lent and into the Easter season, as we travel through the year. It is a time where our spiritual journeying takes us through different seasons.

During Lent we are encouraged to focus on our discipleship and to discover more of what it means to follow Jesus in our lives. We learn more about the nature and character of God. We follow the journey of Jesus recognising the horrors of Good Friday and the transformation of hope which come through Easter Sunday. The gift of salvation we are offered is so huge and significant that even now, after more than 2000 years, there is still more for us to process. Our journeys as disciples are ongoing as we seek to learn more of the God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit in all we do.

In all our journeys the presence of God can be found. God was alongside Jesus throughout his time in the wilderness. We can find comfort from Jesus' words to the disciples of the comfort and peace which comes only from him. The Holy Spirit guides us on our journeying as individuals and together as churches and the Circuit. As we seek God's direction we will be guided, and we should continue to do this together.

Our journey of life together as a Circuit is also ongoing. We rejoice in all we have shared together and the foundations which have been laid. The various small groups continue to focus on varying areas of life within the Circuit. Since our last newsletter, the Circuit Meeting agreed to the creation of the post for an Anna Chaplain, which is an exciting venture. Work to support creation care and climate justice continues. More on both of these can be seen in this edition.

Through this quarter we travel together through some significant parts of the church year. It is a time to reflect, both as individuals and as a Circuit, on where we are. We continue to journey together as we serve God here at this time. As we do so, we look ahead to the new life and hope of Easter as we celebrate the resurrection.

God bless,
Chris



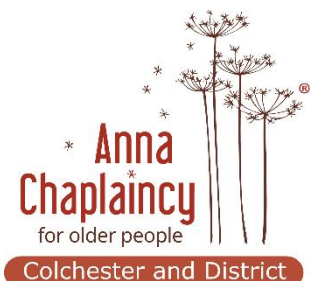
NEWS: from The Circuit

ANNA CHAPLAIN

THE Circuit is delighted to be preparing to recruit for an Anna Chaplain to work in the Circuit for 20 hours per week for four years. It is hoped that the person appointed will be recruited over the next few months to start in September.

Some information has previously been circulated regarding the role explaining what an Anna Chaplain is but just in case, here's a quick recap:

Anna Chaplains are named after the widow Anna who appears in Luke 2. Anna appears with Simeon and both are seen as good role models for older people. An Anna Chaplain is there to offer spiritual care and support to people who have a strong, little or no faith. Anna Chaplaincy is a national



network led by the Bible Reading Fellowship who provide support, induction, training and development for Anna Chaplains. Anna Chaplains are appointed, authorised and sent out, in this case by the Circuit, to support older people. To be recognised as an Anna Chaplaincy partner in the network, we have entered into a recognised agreement, meaning we now have our own approved logo - please see above.

Since the information about the work of an Anna Chaplain has been circulated it has been wonderful to hear such positive feedback for this missional role. The Anna Chaplain will be sharing the gospel message in various ways and the feedback is a real affirmation of this. Please do continue to pray we will find the right person for the role and continue to talk about ways in which the person can be supported by local churches.

If you would like to find out more about Anna Chaplains, the Bible Reading Fellowship run 'Introduction to Anna Chaplaincy' Zoom presentations. The next presentations are either Monday 7 April, 3.30pm-5pm or 30 June in the evening. The national team will share the vision and principles of Anna Chaplaincy with those present, followed by a time for Q&A. If anyone would like to join us, please email annachaplaincy@brf.org.uk and mention you are part of the Colchester circuit.

Following the outcome of the application to the District Grants Committee, the news hot off the press, is that we now have all the funding in place to enable us to recruit for a September start. This is excellent news and thanks to those involved in putting the grant application together.

This is a really exciting development for the work of the Circuit. If you would like to find out more, please speak to any member of the group who have been working on this: details available from our Circuit Administrator.

LENT RETREAT DAY – SATURDAY 22ND MARCH

WE are delighted to welcome Rev Dr Sheryl to lead our first Circuit Retreat Day which will be held at Mersea Methodist Church on Saturday 22nd March. Sheryl is an experienced retreat leader. We will gather from 9.45am for a 10.15am start and will finish at around 3pm. Please bring your own lunch.

The theme of the day will be around penitence, as we explore our discipleship during Lent. There will be some brief input in each of the sessions and then opportunity for reflection.

CHRISTIAN AID WEEK 11th – 17th May 2025

SINCE 2020 Castle has used an electronic envelope for donations in Christian Aid Week together with the familiar red envelopes to be used in church. This has meant that it is possible for those who wish to donate anonymously, to do so easily and with Gift Aid if appropriate. It also helps Christian Aid and church representatives administratively.

The Circuit Meeting has agreed to trial the use of an electronic envelope throughout the Colchester Circuit in 2025 and details of how this can be accessed will be circulated to Senior Church Stewards nearer the time. Red envelopes can also be made available if churches prefer.

Please contact Jan, at Castle, if you have any queries before then.

THE ENVIRONMENT MATTERS – THE COLCHESTER CIRCUIT CARES

SPRING is coming! Seeds are being sowed, the snowdrops are out, and we give thanks to our Creator God who made all things great and small, bright and beautiful. Throughout our Circuit there is a hive of activity in and around the churches which demonstrates how we care about creation and climate justice. It is a part of our Circuit Mission Plan, a part of our culture. **We have now registered and are actively working towards achieving Eco Circuit status.**

Jan, a member at Castle, explains more about the concept of Eco Church: 'It is a concept formed by an organisation called A Rocha which is a global family of conservation organisations, working together to live out God's calling to care for creation and to equip others to do likewise.

The Methodist Church encourages all circuit churches to engage with the concept of Eco Church to enable us all to play a part in the vital task of reducing the effects of climate change and achieving net zero - where the amount of environment-damaging carbon dioxide we add to the environment is no more than the amount taken away.

We are all feeling the effects of climate change – some more than others. We think of folk in countries without the infrastructure to cope with floods, droughts, increased temperatures, rising sea levels and other natural disasters. These are, on the whole, in countries who have played the least part in causing climate change.

The depletion of nature in our wonderful world is hard to bear – we all claim to love the natural world but have recently come to understand how much of it is being lost as a result of thoughtless economics and consumerism.

How will Eco Church enable us to see more clearly what needs to be done to mitigate these situations?

Firstly, the action can't all be left to other people: we have to acknowledge that we have to act and acting together as Christian people is an obvious way to progress. Eco Church suggests that we work under five headings:

- The **BUILDINGS** we use. Can we reduce energy consumption by using renewable energy and ensuring we have efficient boilers; insulate where possible; install double glazing and have energy efficient lighting? Or can each one of us help and put on an extra jumper when the weather gets cold and not grumble that the church is chilly?
- Is the **LAND** around our churches being used to best advantage for wildlife and/or the community?
- Are we emphasising our gratitude for God's gifts to us in our **WORSHIP**; praying regularly for environmental issues and seeking forgiveness for our failures in the past to act appropriately?
- Do we engage with our **COMMUNITIES**?
- Is our **LIFESTYLE** appropriate? Do we take part in litter picks, recycle all our waste efficiently, support various developmental, wildlife and environmental groups, buy Fairly Traded goods when possible and not buy things that we really **do not** need? The list is almost endless and provides opportunity for each of us to take action!

WIMPOLE ROAD is the first church in our circuit to achieve a silver Eco Church award. The Ark has a bronze award and West Mersea and Castle have both registered with A Rocha.



Wimpole Road achieved their silver award by hosting external speakers belonging to the Green Christian movement; always including care of creation in their intercessory prayers and including at least one hymn praising God and creation in their Sunday worship.

They are planning to set targets for reducing the carbon footprint for their church. Further steps taken and being considered are:

- A water butt for rainwater collection;
- Water saving devices in all toilets so less water is needed for each flush;
- Considering using recycled toilet paper when current stocks of paper are exhausted;
- Cycle racks to promote people using the Church to cycle;
- Putting flower planters on the tiny area of land next to the building and repurposing a stepladder to create a multiple planter for wild flowers;
- Considering installing a bird box or bug hotel; taking part in the RSPB great British bird count.

Other suggestions that churches could follow are organising a litter pick in the area surrounding the building; praying for a specific overseas environmental project; raising funds for toilet twinning; promoting the personal use and consumption of ethically-sourced goods such as Fairtrade; encouraging ethical investment of personal savings; including practical lifestyle tips and advice on caring for Gods' earth in church newsletters and websites.

CASTLE'S CARE FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

It's long since we at Castle began to consider the way we care for our environment. As in many organisations, it began with notices asking people to turn lights off when leaving a room and keeping doors shut to keep in the heat! We began promoting Fairtrade in our church kitchen and in our homes.

But in the past few years we have recognised that the problems our environment faces are so much more serious and need more urgent and focused remedies.

We have tried to respond in many small ways. We have a regime for recycling items not taken at kerbside through links with ENFORM, Colchester's environmental charity: we have looked at ways our small garden can be more insect friendly and we have also supported some environmental campaigns. Some members of the Church Council took a petition to the manager of HSBC in the High Street asking that they stop funding oil and coal extraction and members contributed to a poster illustrating what they most loved about our environment which was sent to the COP meeting in Cornwall. A letter was sent to our MPs asking that measures in parliament to support the environment should not be watered down.

Eco Church is now part of our Serving the Present Age planning and is always on the agenda at Church Council meetings. There is now a small group to plan the way ahead. We have tried to share ideas with the wider congregation by including at least one eco article in our monthly newsletter and we have an eco notice board in the hall with suggestions and ideas for action.

We have installed timer devices on water heaters and more closely aligned our heating system to current need but there is still so much more that we can do to reduce our impact on the environment. We have just registered with A Rocha and hope that this contact will lead to more ways in which we, as a church and individuals, can take necessary care of the amazing world in which we live.

THE ARK'S ECO JOURNEY

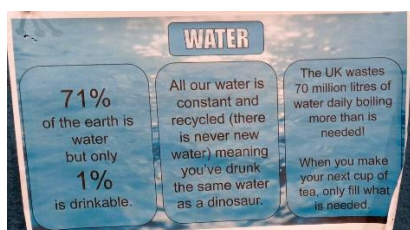
The Ark gained its Eco-church Bronze Award in 2022, having registered with A Rocha five months earlier. Three of us took on the task of completing the requisite survey and some of the tasks required to get us over the 25% compliance line (as it was at that time) in each of the various topics.

We don't have a lot of land around the church and most of that is concreted. But, full of enthusiasm in the spring of 2023, we planted young currant and strawberry plants wherever we could and set up tubs with flowers to attract bees. We held a Celtic service focusing on the environment and started to replace lights that failed with LED bulbs. Sadly, our fruit plants died in the early summer drought of that year, but packets of wildflower seeds planted at our homes did well. We have wildlife - birds, insects and brambles - that survive and even flourish in the ditch alongside the building.



Rather than aiming towards a silver award, currently our main aim is to increase the engagement and involvement of the congregation, while keeping an eye on the Connexional target of net zero by 2030. With that in mind, environment and climate justice are on the agenda at all church meetings; we share eco-tips via electronic notices on the screen prior to services (for the congregation), and on the noticeboard (for church users and hirers).

We continue to learn and to look for what we can do in caring for creation with the bigger focus being on our building. This year we will be able to turn to using green energy and we hope to bring in water-saving measures for the toilets. We have successfully applied for Circuit and District grants which will enable us to install a remote management system for the control of our heating to avoid inadvertent heating of empty space, to install percussion taps in our toilets to save water wasted by running taps, and movement sensors to control the lighting in the toilets.



MERSEA ISLAND

We have decided to become an ECO-church and have been working on the Bronze stage of this project. We found that we already fulfil some of the criteria for the award as we have new lights in the newer build and a new energy efficient boiler. The newer part of the building has double glazing

so we have been deciding what to work through next. The older part of the building is losing heat through windows and doors, as they are the original ones, so this is our priority.

Whilst working through the different areas, we needed to enhance our provision for wildlife. There is no garden around the church, however we have a hedge at the back and a border inside the perimeter wall. We have decided to make bug hotels and birdboxes to go in the hedge and insect friendly plants in the borders.

BLUE CHRISTMAS

THE Circuit held its first Blue Christmas service in December at Wivenhoe. The run up to Christmas can be a swirl of emotions for all sorts of reasons. Sometimes there has been something which has happened during the year which has been difficult to deal with. At other times, Christmas can bring into sharp focus bittersweet memories of times long past. In the course of a year, it's impossible for everything to have been a 'mountain top experience' but it can seem that the image of Christmas shown in the world is that this is the case. We may also feel the excesses so often associated with Christmas don't sit well with the celebration of Jesus' coming to the earth as a tiny baby in such a humble way and want to find a way of sharing this with God.

The difficult feelings and emotions which can be felt for any number of reasons can sometimes feel pushed out. A 'Blue Christmas' service allows a space for these to be brought before God. It is a time for quiet reflection and may also be a space to have a service which allows for greater contemplation.

Rev Chris and Rev Hannah led this service, which allowed time for personal reflection and prayer. It was deliberately a quiet service with the opportunity to bring prayers to God in whatever way was appropriate. The service allowed for people to come before God and to bring their own thoughts, concerns and needs, in whatever way was appropriate, at a time of year where quieter reflection together as a group can be more difficult.

The people of the church at Wivenhoe helped to facilitate the service in a kind and sensitive way. The time of refreshments afterwards allowed people to be alongside one another. Blue Christmas is an important space to enable people to bring their thoughts and feelings, in whatever form they may be, and maybe it's something you may want to come to next Christmas.

from Lexden:

FOR our Christmas giving last year we opted for a charity we'd not donated to before - the Link to Hope shoebox appeal. They provide help and support for families and the elderly across eastern Europe at Christmas. There was no pressure to fill a box because they were really grateful for all donations. We have just received confirmation that our gifts reached their destination along with thousands of others. There were pictures of happy children and absolutely delighted elderly people. We shall be making them our chosen charity again this year.

from Castle:

CHRISTMAS seems just a distant memory, but what a joy it was to celebrate the birth of our Lord with friends old and new and also have the opportunity to share in both worship and social activities with our friends from across the Circuit.

WE are now preparing for the season of Lent, culminating in our Easter celebrations.

On Tuesday 4th March we will prepare for Lent with our now annual Pancake party from 12 noon. Everyone is welcome to join us and once again we will be supporting the wonderful work of St Helena Hospice.

On Good Friday our District Chair the Rev Dr David Chapman will lead our service of meditation at 10.30am. We invite you all to join us; it will be followed by coffee and hot cross buns.

On Easter morning, we will once again invite our congregation to decorate the cross with flowers as we celebrate our Risen Lord.

from The Ark:

WE have some new banners to adorn the facing wall of the main worship area in The Ark as a permanent reminder to all those who regularly use our worship area for community events that this is a place of worship and Jesus is our Lord. Not only do they get the message across but they also brighten up the walls and have been well received.

HOME Start have their base for Colchester, Clacton and Jaywick at the Ark. This charity works with families and children in need and all the help they give and the events they arrange for the youngsters are free of charge. Shelley, who is Home Start's CEO in Colchester, gave an enlightening and very moving talk on their work as part of our Local Arrangement service in January which took as its theme the Ark's mission statement strapline **Serving God, Serving Others**. Shelley put together a short video of their work and talked us through the many events and actions they provide for some of the most disadvantaged in our locality and it was great to see in pictures how the Ark is put to such good use during the working week.

THE family of the late Ron, a long-serving local preacher in our circuit, have kindly donated a sum of money to the Ark in his memory. We have already bought a book stand for the communion table with some of the family gift and have plans for the remainder to discuss with the family in due course.

FOR our Holy Week and Easter worship we will be holding a reflective Maundy Thursday service; will join Castle for Good Friday; and start the Easter Sunday celebrations with a communion breakfast at 8.30am led by the chair of the district Rev Dr David Chapman. Our Easter Sunday service starts at the usual time and will be led by Eddie.

A LATE afternoon beetle drive with cake is planned for Christian Aid week on 17th May as a fun way to raise funds for Christian Aid. Further notice of this will be sent around the circuit in due course and all are welcome!

from Wimpole Road:

THE Stewards, along with Rev Hannah Chun, have been giving a lot of thought to preparing our Mission Plan, of which our Mission Statement "**We are here to worship God and to spread the message of His love for all, expressed in Jesus Christ**" formed the foundation.

The Church Council adopted the plan and our hope is that both as a church community and individuals, the aims can be followed.

In a similar vein to the words of our Covenant Service prayer - which we shared together earlier in January - some of these aims will come easily to us, collectively or as individuals, and bring us joy and satisfaction, whilst others might not come so easily to us and bring significant challenges. Our

Annual General Meeting and Vision Planning meeting in the next few months will give us a really good opportunity to discuss and explore any new ideas further.

AS we approach the end of February we are already looking forward to and planning ahead for the coming months. In all our planning we must stay focused on Jesus and the aims we have set out in the Mission Statement. As a church here at Wimpole Road we have so much that happens week in and week out along with a number of other annual events and activities, with our focus right now being on Lent and Easter, Pentecost, our support and involvement with New Town Open Gardens, Holiday Club, the Community Day and of course our forthcoming building project.

As part of our Mission Plan, we are praying about and working towards changing the way we extend our worship into fellowship on Sundays.

The aim:

- to grow disciples for Christ in this troubled world in which we live
- to share his love and Grace and work together to bring more into his kingdom

With this in mind, there is a short prayer in our monthly Newsround, which also forms part of our weekly services being shared with the congregation.

We will then as a community be sharing with each other in spirit if not in body to pray together that God will uphold us, strengthen us and draw others to Him.

from The Well:

WE started the New Year on a sad note with the deaths of three of our church family within one week. Though it was a shock for us, we give thanks for their lives well lived and that they are now at peace.

THE Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (18th – 25th January 2025) was celebrated by having as many united events as possible. On Saturday 18th January at The Well, a service was led by Rev Chris Preece with contributions from representatives from all the churches. It was well attended and was followed by a Coffee Morning for the Outreach Fund. On Sunday 19th January Rev Lynsey led a Forest Church in Highwoods and St Michael's had Morning Prayers on Friday 24th January.

REGARDING the Building Project, at a recent Church Council, and as part of our Mission Planning, three resolutions were agreed:

1. A drawing was approved as the working document from which the project would proceed
2. Planning permission process to be undertaken with delegated authority to the Project Team to oversee this, in conjunction with the architect
3. Grant funding applications to be made in relation to the project and for the Project Team to have delegated authority to make these applications on behalf of the Church Council

The project is in two phases: Phase 1 - the rebuilding of the chapel with a front entrance and with the potential for more community involvement, and Phase 2 – the rebuilding of the hall area, as funds allow. We would value your prayers as we seek to discern what God has in store for us.

IF anyone would like to join us, then the next three Charity Coffee Mornings are:

- Saturday 15th March – Colchester Debt Relief
- Saturday 12th April – Leprosy Mission
- Saturday 17th May – Christian Aid

from Wivenhoe:

HAVING celebrated Christmas ourselves we then hosted a celebration of the Chinese New Year at the end of January. Working with Friends International we made the premises available for Chinese students to organise their celebrations. Phil and Friends International volunteers were on hand to help and chat. Some students came at 5pm to start cooking. The kitchen was a happy hive of industry. Forty or 50 students were expected but by 7.30pm about 110 students had arrived to sit down to a meal and entertainment. Despite the numbers there was enough food and to spare. A good time was had by all as you can see if you look on the local Friends International Facebook site.

SOME of you may remember Bagamba who studied linguistics at the University. He and his family attended Wivenhoe Methodist Church. They became members and he was a Church Steward. He and his family returned to Bunia in the Democratic Republic of Congo to work on Bible translation. We continue to support them in their missionary and charitable work. They live and work in an area that has been war torn for over 25 years and is currently a very dangerous place to live. They may evacuate to Uganda if things worsen. Please pray for them and the people of Goma, Bunia and the surrounding area.

AFTER hosting 'Bumps and Babies' for several years it has now closed through lack of demand. Our Coffee Morning on the second Saturday of each month is very popular as is Knit and Natter and Fellowship on the second and fourth Thursdays respectively at 2.30pm.

A NUMBER of events have been organised by 'Churches Together in Wivenhoe' during Lent, including a Lent Lunch at the Methodist Church on 10th March.

You are very welcome at any or all of the above.

OUR current Church building was opened in 1901 and renovated in 1970/71. We need to think about celebrating its 125th anniversary next year, and look to its future, as major repair work is needed. Derek was a loyal and hard-working member of the Church who was involved in the renovation, and ever since. Sadly, he died recently after a long illness and he will be greatly missed.

FINALLY, we offer our congratulations and best wishes to Hannah as she prepares for her ordination.

from West Mersea:

OUR Warm Spaces continues 10am until 2pm on Wednesdays. Once a month we welcome our two Police Community Support Officers, who bring a wealth of information and reassurance to our guests. For those who stay on after lunch, there are the challenges of board games. Currently it's dominoes, where we have progressed from the normal game to a box set which goes up to double nine and in braille, where the spots are raised so that all our guests can participate. The competition is quite fierce at times!

BABY and Toddler group on Thursdays 9am until 11.30am continues to flourish. We have a constant attendance, which means that the group are very supportive of each other. They welcome new members to the group and are quick to notice where support is needed. They also bring in outgrown clothes and bedding to share, along with toys.

IN January we held our Way Forward meeting to formulate our Mission Statement.

Exciting times ahead for Mersea Island Methodist Church!

FROM THE CIRCUIT DIARY:

8 th March	Circuit Monthly Prayer Meeting at The Ark from 9am
22 nd March	Lent Retreat Day at Mersea from 9:45am till 3pm
10 th April	Circuit Meeting at Castle from 7:30pm
12 th April	Circuit Monthly Prayer Meeting at Castle from 9am
17 th May	Circuit Monthly Prayer Meeting at The Well from 9am

Please see page 12 for details of services and events happening around the Circuit during Holy Week.

Lent Prayers will once again be available on the District You Tube Channel. First prayers will be published on Ash Wednesday afternoon. Link to playlist for Lent 2025 <https://youtube.com/playlist...>

In addition;

Circuit Evening 'Zoom' services take place on 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)

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 June/July/August by 9th April 2025 (not 16th April as previously advertised) 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 19th May 2025.

HOLY WEEK 2025

MAUNDY THURSDAY

Lexden from 10am
Love Feast
led by Rev'd Hannah Chun**

The Ark from 6:30pm
Tenebrae service
by local arrangement

Wimpole Road from 6:30pm
led by Rev'd Hannah Chun

GOOD FRIDAY

Mersea from 10am
by local arrangement

Wimpole Road from 10am
led by Mr Jonathan Sparkes

Castle from 10:30am
led by Rev'd Dr David Chapman

The Well from 3pm
by local arrangement

**if interested, please contact Circuit Administrator for further information

EASTER SUNDAY 2025

THE ARK

Easter breakfast with
Holy Communion from 8:30am
led by Rev'd Dr David Chapman

Easter service from 10:30am
led by Mr Eddie Lansdown

THE WELL

Holy Communion from 10:30am
led by Rev'd Dr David Chapman

CASTLE

Holy Communion from 10:30am
led by Rev'd Paul Howes



MERSEA

Holy Communion from 9:30am
led by Mr Jonathan Sparkes &
Rev'd David Moody

LEXDEN

Holy Communion from 10:30 am
led by Rev'd Hannah Chun

WIMPOLE ROAD

Easter service from 11am
led by Mr Phil Bingham

WIVENHOE

Easter service from 11am
led by Mrs Sally Crafer