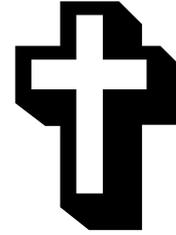


The Methodist Church – Bristol District

Upper Thames Circuit

Monthly Newsletter

No 35



December 2016/January 2017

This Month's opening letter comes from Rev Rachael Wilson, Minister at Abbey Meads, Blunston and Cricklade:

It's that time of year again when gifts are on our minds. The more organised people may have been buying Christmas presents for several months (or even since last January!), but over the next few weeks thoughts of gifts will be on many minds with increased focus. Some people we know are easy to buy for, and some are much more difficult. Sometimes we receive the kind of gifts that we really like and appreciate. Sometimes we receive things that puzzle us, or things that we don't want at all. Many gifts go straight to the charity shops in the New Year. What are we looking for in a Christmas present? Is it its size? Is it its cost? Is it its usefulness? Is it its appropriateness for us if we are the recipient, or for the person for whom we are buying the gift? Why give gifts at Christmas at all? Sometimes it seems like a lot of hard work and expense, and more of a duty than a pleasure.

The giving and receiving of gifts at Christmas in part reflects our Christian belief that at this time of year we are celebrating the special gift God gave to the world over 2000 years ago. God wanted to show the whole world how much he loves us and cares for us and understands us. So God's own son Jesus was born as a baby, and grew and lived and loved – and he showed us that God is with us; he showed us a new way to live.

The gift of Jesus is freely offered to each of us, but it's not a gift that is foisted on us whether we like it or not. We have the choice to accept it or not. God's love is tailor-made for us, because he knows us. And he continues to love us and to offer his gift of new life in Jesus to us, in the hope that we will choose to pick it up and unwrap it.

During this period of Advent and Christmas, may we each gain a deeper understanding and experience of the gift we have received in Jesus, and as we enter 2017 may we commit ourselves as individuals and churches to unwrapping more of that gift as we journey together as Christ's disciples.

Every blessing,

Rachael

NB: The deadline for items for the February newsletter is Wednesday, 25th January

DISTRICT AND CONNEXION NEWS/EVENTS:

NEWS FROM THE NEW ROOM

For news of Christmas at the New Room, please see Appendix 'A' of this newsletter.

CONNECTING DISCIPLES

The Connecting Disciples Lay Employees Conference, 6-9 March 2017, High Leigh Conference Centre

Bookings are now open for the Connecting Disciples conference for lay employees, which will take place on 6-9 March at High Leigh Conference Centre, Hoddesdon.

For further information and to book a place at the conference, please go to:

www.methodist.org.uk/connectingdisciples

Please note that an additional Connecting Disciples event will also take place at Cliff College Derbyshire on 9-11 June 2017.

Many thanks

Connecting Disciples 2017 Planning Group

NOTES FROM EMMA MILLS (District Youth Enabler)

District Youth Week-end: Fun Size

JUMP

Please see the poster and booking forms (attached to the email to which this newsletter is attached) for the "Bristol District Youth Weekend Fun Size" Day Event in March next year 2017.

There will STILL ALSO be the main District Youth Weekend in October next year 2017. Date & location to be confirmed very soon.

We really hope you and your young people can make this day event called JUMP. There is no need to wait until the booking deadline, feel free to send bookings as soon as you want!

All of the following info which I thought you might be interested in has come to me via Facebook.

I highly recommend you have a look at (and ideally sign up for notifications from) the Methodist Children & Youth Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/Methodist-Children-Youth-126895266084/>

AND The Methodist Discipleship & Ministries Learning Network Facebook page

<https://www.facebook.com/DMLN-Bristol-West-Midlands-334381623380567/?fref=ts>

As they both provide really useful information

HOLINESS & JUSTICE SESSION RESOURCE

In a time of turmoil we are called to do more than despair. Use this to explore Holiness and Justice with a children's or youth Group.

<http://www.methodist.org.uk/media/2286893/conf-holiness-and-justice-booklet-0716.pdf>

YOUNG PEOPLE & YOUTH WORKERS OPPORTUNITY TO MEET REFUGEES FROM CAMP AIDA IN PALESTINE

The Methodist Church is excited to be linking with the Amos trust to offer the opportunity for Methodist young people (aged 12-30) and their youth workers to meet with Alrowwad refugees

from camp Aida in Palestine. The refugees from near Bethlehem are visiting the UK for a couple of weeks in partnership with the Amos Trust and we would like to invite Methodist young people to come and meet them.

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/methodist-young-people-meet-alrowwad-refugees-tickets-25266194869?aff=es2>

Emma Mills

District Youth Work Enabler

Emma.YouthWorkEnabler@virginmedia.com Tel: 07989 496316

CIRCUIT NEWS/EVENTS:

Circuit Appointments

We are delighted to welcome **Mrs Carolyn Harmer as our Circuit Administrator**. Carolyn will be commencing her employment with us on 1st January and after an initial overlap with Bob Mawer, she will take on full responsibility for the Circuit's administrative arrangements, including production of the Quarterly Plan and Monthly Newsletter, Minutes of Circuit Meetings and will also develop and maintain the Circuit files as well as being the first point of contact for the Circuit. Carolyn will be based in the Circuit Office at Highworth Methodist Church and will be working flexibly to provide cover for 12 hours per week.

We are also delighted to welcome **Emily Young as a Local Preacher** in our Circuit. Emily has recently been appointed as the full-time Families Worker at the Defence Academy in Shrivenham. She has come from Enfield and is based at St Alban's Church in Watchfield, being employed by the Methodist Forces Board. She is a member at Shrivenham Methodist Church. Please note that Emily requires transport from/to Shrivenham.

Circuit Plan for December 2016 – February 2017: Amendments

Please note that the morning service at Cricklade United Church on 11th December will be taken by Rev David Newman and not Mr Ian Taylor.

Please also note that due to an error in printing, the line of entry for Fitzwarren Court is missing from the preaching plan for January. Andrew Fleet will be leading the service at Fitzwarren Court on 15th January at 6.30pm.

Calling all HR Professionals

The Circuit would like to hear from any member with recent professional experience in Human Resources (particularly employment matters). Please contact the Senior Circuit Steward, Mr Andrew Fleet on his home telephone number: (01793) 345320 or in the Circuit Office on a Wednesday morning: (01793) 764544, or by email: asfleet@ntlworld.com

Gospel Choir

When the Circuit Meeting in June met to consider steps that needed to be taken to become more outward looking, the vision of a **Gospel Choir** was placed on the table. The Circuit Leadership Team has been exploring this and seeking God's leading. In discussions the North Wilts Circuit expressed an interest in joining us in this exploration.

We have met with **Jim Fitzgerald Eddings**. Jim is a Christian from the USA, now living in Swindon and a musician who writes, sings and produces his own music. He has played alongside many of the UK's top 40 bands. He is a keyboard player and drummer and has a great interest in gospel music. He has worked as a musical arts developer and youth worker and continues to inspire people. He also coaches those who have an interest in developing their musical skills and talents. We have prayed and reflected and Jim has felt called to work with us on our exploration of "Gospel Choir".

Originally it was felt that the way forward might be to hold a Gospel Choir workshop either in the autumn of 2016 or spring of 2017. However, as a preliminary way forward Jim has offered in the New Year to **visit a range of churches to 'sow seed' for a Gospel Choir** and to engage with our people in further exploring this. God willing, this will happen early in 2017 in a church near you!

Please pray for this exciting initiative and watch this space.

If you are particularly interested in helping to develop this project please let the Circuit Administrator know and we shall keep you updated.

Circuit Bible Study Day

On 21st January we welcome Rev Paul Wilson who, with the help of Ezekiel, will lead us in a day of Spiritual Renewal at Highworth Methodist Church. The event has been well publicised and we are hoping for a capacity attendance between 10.00am and 4.00pm. Hot drinks will be provided and you are invited to bring your own lunch.

Highworth Methodist Church

A note from Lou Ashford:

On Wednesday 21st December, we at Highworth have invited The Silhouette Theatre Company to present "A Twist in the Tail"; this is a family show which tells the nativity story from the point of view of the Inn-Keeper. I have seen The Silhouette Theatre Company before and they are excellent. We wondered if **any of our Circuit Churches would be interested** in having them at their church either the day before or after? We can provide them with accommodation and the cost is £350 + travel which is reduced if more than one church books them to perform. The show lasts 1hour, 20 minutes.

We are also inviting Liz Babbs to bring her show "Cupcakes and Comedy" and wondered if any of the other churches would be interested in hosting her as well. I have information that I can forward to anyone interested.

Lou Ashford

(you can contact Lou by telephone: 01793 201703, or by email: louashford231@gmail.com).

Jesus' birth – no room at the inn



In Luke's account of Jesus' birth we are all familiar with the phrase 'no room at the inn'. The Greek word that is commonly translated 'inn' is *katalyma* or *katalumati*. Kenneth E. Bailey in his book 'Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes' explains "Literally, a *katalyma* is simply a 'place to stay' and can refer to many types of shelter. The three that are options for this story are inn ...house.....and guest room." Many scholars have hypothesised about each of these.

A superb model, over two metres in length, of an 'inn' or 'caravanserai/caravansary' will be at RWBMC during advent 2016. We are fortunate to have this model made by John Townsend containing over 100 figures. The model will be on display in the upstairs Wesley Room throughout advent. We hope it will inspire conversations amongst our church and community. We also plan to have a short video of the model available.

You will be able to view the model throughout Advent after Sunday services or on Tuesday and Friday mornings during term time. If you would like to book a viewing slot at another time then please contact the church office: (01793) 849241.

Jane Phoenix-Stone

Shrivenham Methodist Church

Café Inspire

The next Café Inspire will be held on Saturday 10th December in the Shrivenham Primary School, from 10.00am until 11.30am. This will be a Christmas Special, with a “Puppet Nativity” and a band of real people, so come along for a coffee, a bacon roll and/or some yummy cake or mince pies and a chance to party with and chat to folk of all ages who enjoy doing the same. Activities (creative and otherwise) are provided for younger and older children. Our first Café Inspire of 2017 will be in the same place at the same time on Saturday 14th January.

Crib-Fest and Open Church

The church will be open from 10.00am until 12.00noon on the 8th, 9th and 10.00 until 1.00pm on 10th December for visitors to see a wide selection of nativity scenes from around the world. Coffee/tea and mince pies will be served. The church will also be open to visitors on the 22nd, 23rd and 24th December at 10.00am until 12noon for anyone who would like to take time out from a busy schedule. Again, refreshments will be available and on Christmas Eve there will be a Silent Communion from 11.15am to 12.15pm.

Epiphany

Epiphany – but not as we know it! “Epiphany” is the collective name for a group of highly talented professional musicians, all of whom play with well-known groups and orchestras and who come together from time to time to tour and perform, both nationally and internationally. We are privileged to welcome them to Shrivenham (Watchfield) for the week-end of 4th & 5th February, when they will be giving a concert on Saturday evening in St Alban’s Church, Watchfield at 7.30pm and leading worship at the morning service on Sunday 5th at St Alban’s Church. Tickets for the concert are just £5 each and include a glass of wine. This is an ideal event to which you could invite your non-Christian friend and music-lover. The “Sound Portraits” in part two of the concert are improvised arrangements specially tailored for individual volunteers (no pressure at all) and, having witnessed Epiphany first-hand, I can highly recommend the evening. If you are able to offer accommodation to any of the members of Epiphany on the Saturday night, please let Bob Mawer know. Further details and tickets are available from Bob Mawer (tel: 07973 163337, email: robert.mawer@which.net) or from Jeremy Clare on the telephone number given on the poster at Appendix ‘B’.

An interesting note – the Chaplain of St Alban’s Church, Rev Stephen Hancock (a Methodist Minister) has seen military service and has provided emotional and spiritual support to a number of serving military personnel in some of the most dangerous war-zones around the world. He came to the Defence Academy from Germany and brought with him a large wooden cross, which was recently erected at a special ceremony in the grounds outside St Alban’s Church. It is made from railway sleepers that were taken up when the railway line into the Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp was removed.

OTHER NEWS/EVENTS AND ITEMS OF INTEREST

Could you come to the rescue of a refugee child?

A campaign has been launched in Swindon to find caring people who could give refugee children a home. Following the Government’s recent commitment to help more unaccompanied asylum seeking children from other European countries resettle in the UK, Swindon Borough Council has agreed to try and assist with this pressing need.

The children may have been separated from their parents by war, while others have been orphaned. They are predominately teenage boys displaced from countries such as Eritrea, Afghanistan, Iran and Syria. Extremely vulnerable, many of them have experienced trauma and being at serious risk of exploitation, sexual violence, disease and cold in their current situation.

Age, sexuality, marital status and whether or not you have children of your own are no barrier to becoming a supported lodgings carer.

Carers receive free full training and ongoing support, as well as payment and allowances to help cover their time and expenses. Placements vary in duration from a few months to several years.

Please spread the word and if you are interested call 01793 464329 or email:

fosteringrecruitment@swindon.gov.uk

Dates for Your Diary

Wednesday 7 th December	Circuit Meeting, Toothill Church 7.30pm
Wednesday 11 th January	Local Preachers and Worship Leaders Meeting Shrivenham Methodist Church 7.30pm
Saturday 21 st January	Circuit Study Day with Rev Paul Wilson (MET*) on Ezekiel: "Seeking Spiritual Renewal" at Highworth Methodist Church, 10.00am – 4.00pm
Saturday 4 th February	Epiphany Concert, St Alban's Church, Watchfield 7.30pm

* Methodist Evangelicals Together

UPPER THAMES CIRCUIT CONTACT DETAILS:

Office hours: 9.30am – 12.30pm on Wednesdays and Fridays - please note the office will be closed from 12.30pm on 21st December, re-opening on Wednesday 11th January 2017

Telephone: (01793) 764544

Email: upperthamescircuit@gmail.com

Email: superkeithosborn@gmail.com

Postal Address: Highworth Methodist Church
Vicarage Lane
Highworth
Swindon
SN6 7AD



Christmas is coming and the New Room team would like to invite you to some special events in the chapel to celebrate the festive season.

Thursday, December 8th, 6.30-8pm: Storyteller Ken Luxon will be telling 'Tales Before Christmas'. Suitable for older children and adults. Free admission with a retiring collection for charity.

Thursday, December 15th, 7.30pm: Bristol Hippodrome Choir presents a musical version of 'A Christmas Carol' by Charles Dickens. Tickets £10 (£8 concs) available on the door or via info@choirbristol.co.uk

Friday, December 16th, 1pm: Carols and Communion – carols and readings and a short service of Holy Communion. Admission free with a collection for charity.

Friday, December 16th, 6pm: Carols by Candlelight – carols and readings in a very special candlelit setting. Admission free with a collection for charity.

Live classical music in
Shrivenham/Watchfield

Programme will include
some familiar favourites

Part 2 will include some
amazing "Sound
Portraits" performed
live for individual
volunteers

Tickets £5 each
(includes a glass of wine)

available from:

Shrivenham Post Office
or Defence Academy
Chaplaincy Office

Any questions?

Ring: 01793 783230

Concert at:

**St Alban's
Church**

Ironside Drive

Watchfield

SN6 8RL



4th February 2017 7.30pm

An evening with Epiphany

A concert of classical music... with a difference

Epiphany
Is coming soon!