Christmas Comes but Once a Year...

So they say, but doesn't it seem to come round quickly?! Soon polite small-talk will revolve around questions like: Are you feeling ready for Christmas yet? Have you written your Christmas cards yet?

Many of us of course are very much aware that getting ready for Christmas needs to be seen as less of a practical exercise and one which engages us spiritually. In the Churches of our Circuit our services and worship throughout this season will ensure that this dimension of Christmas is not overlooked. It's the whole reason that the Church annual 'spiritual calendar', starts its new year with Advent, (which translates in English as 'arrival' or 'coming'); a season of preparation as we mark the coming of Jesus into the world.

As we grow older childhood fantasies of magical gift-giving mature into a realisation that the meaning of Christmas must be about more than having a good time. We are challenged to consider what Christmas coming around again might really mean for us.

As I ponder this question once again I realise I have often wondered what it would be like to celebrate Christmas in Australia. Brian, who was my best man, now lives there and often has a beach BBQ on Christmas day - how weird I think to myself! It strikes me there would be many good arguments for allowing what is now a global Church to move Christmas to whenever their winter is (how very shocking!), but this reveals my western-centric perspective.

In worship that I lead I often point to the imagery of Christ being light in darkness or hope in the face of fleeting days growing brief as we get near the shortest days. There were very good reasons why early Christianity, promoted by the Roman empire centuries ago, commandeered the religious festivals of their times, but I've always wondered how that translates in other places.

I guess that's the thought I leave with myself and you though, as I turn this over once again. The coming of Jesus into our world has the power to translate itself wherever and however we might find ourselves in this world. Whatever our situation, the universal Christ can speak to each of us, whether our Christmas hope is 'in the bleak mid winter', or declaring 'shine Jesus shine', on the beaches of Brisbane!

May you know the peace and joy of Christ this season, Mark

A big thank you to all those who have contributed to our newsletter. It's great to see so much good work going on in the Circuit.

‘Share your news’
Deadline for SPRING to Karen by Mid February please.
'For He Himself is our peace!' Ephesians 2:14.

Dear Friends

I forget how many Christmas’ ago it was now. Possibly as much as twenty years. The local Baptist Church where I was in full time ministry and the nearby Anglican Church with whom we enjoyed an excellent relationship were out and about delivering our joint Christmas cards to the residents of the village of Sible Hedingham. A happy task which, once complete, offered the joyous prospect of the two fellowships coming together to celebrate late night communion. A time of remembrance and thanksgiving which we all eagerly looked forward to. Liturgy en al!

It was as I knelt at the altar rail in readiness to receive the bread and the wine that I became aware of a presence immediately behind me. His strong arms placed firmly yet gently upon my shoulders. One of the servers I initially thought, taking it upon himself to minister to me through the laying on of hands?! But a quick, casual backward glance proved beyond any shadow of a doubt that that was not the case.

As these invisible hands continued to rest upon my shoulders I felt a strong sense of my burdens being lifted, coupled with an overwhelming sense of peace and joy. I’ve since described the experience as ‘rivers of liquid love washing over me as well as through me.’ Why He (Jesus) chose that particular moment to come and make His beautiful presence known I will never fully understand. But that He did has become a memory etched upon my grateful heart ever since.

A heart that continues to acknowledge that in Jesus and Jesus only can perfect peace ever be truly found. As the plaque on the church notice board states - “No Jesus, no peace. Know Jesus, know peace!”

A blessed and peaceful Christmas and New Year to you all!

With love from us here at Christ Church

John Prothero

Doesn’t a warm welcome make all the difference? And isn’t it what church is all about? If we are not welcoming it is time to pack up and go home.

As the new Anglican minister at St Augustine’s it somehow seemed very appropriate that my licensing was on bonfire night - I am not sure why it seems appropriate really but we did have a fire pit and the children came back with evidence around their mouths that they had been eating melted chocolate biscuits and marshmallows! And there was a real sense of hope and a new beginning.

I felt so welcomed by a range of different people including ecumenical partners, members of the community and of course members of the church who had prepared a lovely spread and bought a splendid map of the parish in the shape of a gold heart with all the roads on it - I haven’t yet worked out quite how it works as the parish obviously isn’t heart shaped and yet we are able to identify roads and people have said, ‘I live here’ on the map. I found chocolates (from someone in the community) and flowers on my door step, which added to the sense of welcome.

The map says ‘wherever you at on your journey’, which is part of our vision. I am interested in how things will unfold as we walk together on this part of our journey with one another, and of course God, finding out what God is calling us to in this place at this time.

I look forward to meeting you and learning more about God together

Rvd Caroline Brown
Priest-in-Charge
St Augustine of Canterbury
North Springfield

Revd Caroline Brown
Priest-in-Charge
St Augustine of Canterbury
North Springfield
One of the hardest things I find doing is writing about myself, but it was not easy saying ‘no’ to this request, hence what follows.

My original roots are in the Gambia, a tiny nation yet the smile on the face of Africa. This is where I was born and raised in a Christian home of a Methodist brand. My paternal great grandfather and granduncle were pioneer Methodist Presbyters in the Gambia and my maternal ancestors were Methodist Local Preachers. Grandma Rose and Mum Cecilia were the equivalent of Lois and Eunice to me.

God found me at the age of 13, by which time I had discovered that being born in a Christian home did not make me a Christian. God has no grandchildren! I therefore confessed that I was a sinner, gave my heart to Jesus at a Mission Event in my local Wesley Church, held jointly with the World Evangelization for Christ, and became a child of God. Much of my being discipled as a young Christian is owed to Scripture Union.

Five decades and more later, I am convinced that this was the best decision ever made, because the relationship established has assured me of God in Christ’s presence with me every step of the way, in trouble and in joy. My call to preaching was also recognised by my Local Church’s Preachers’ meeting who not only gave me a note to preach at age 18 but assigned me to a Missionary Deaconess (now mission Partner) from the Methodist Church in Britain, to serve as my mentor.

Undergraduate studies took me to Ghana where I read Home Economics Education majoring in Foods and Nutrition. On My return to the Gambia in 1978, not only was a teaching job awaiting me at a Roman Catholic Girls High School, but I was also invited to lead the newly formed Youth for Christ Movement as a Volunteer. Kenneth and I were married four years after my return from Ghana and ours became a shared partnership in ministry while recognising our specific calls to leadership in the home and in the Church. Having taught for ten years, I retired on Marriage grounds to be home for and with our children. We ran a fully registered small Foods Business from home alongside Kenneth’s Health Care Service. It was also a great time to serve with Child Evangelism Fellowship in a Volunteer capacity.

In 1991, a call to the ordained ministry, which first came in 1979, was confirmed. Ministerial formation for me meant that I was sent from the Gambia to the Methodist Training institute in Meru Kenya. Further Theological Studies led me to New College, University of Edinburgh. Performing a pioneer role for Gambian women in the ordained ministry was however both a blessing and a challenge!

In 2002 Kenneth and I, like Abraham and Sarah but with our four biological children Stanley, Jai, David and Olive moved to the United Kingdom ‘not knowing where we were going’. In a miraculous manner, I was invited to serve in the Forest Circuit in the then London North East District, now the London District. Kenneth was employed as a Theatre Nurse Practitioner at the Homerton Hospital. It was a real privilege for me to serve in the Forest Circuit not only as a Circuit minister but later as Superintendent of twelve Churches with pastoral responsibility for Leytonstone Methodist Church, with our entire family offering their God-given gifts and talents, in a holistic type ministry bathed in prayer, and with an Inter-Generational approach. We had an open home and offering hospitality was not just a ministry but a means of relaxation.

By God’s grace, I sought to exercise the Ministry of Word and Sacrament within the context of the Priorities of the Methodist Church reaching all with the love of Jesus, a love which cannot ignore the truth of God’s Word, justice, reconciliation and peace.
Trinity, Chelmsford

COFFEE & FRIENDS

Starting November, on the first Friday of each month, Trinity will be hosting a coffee morning from 10am till midday.

Bring along your crafts and simply enjoy meeting friends.

Small donation for coffee and cakes.
Raising funds for Trinity charities.

Our first coffee morning raised £85.00 for CHESS (homeless in Chelmsford)

I give thanks for all that God has enabled me to be a part of notably with Methodist Women in Britain (MWiB), Methodist for World Mission (MWM), the Race Forum, District Local Preachers assessment panels, Connexional Committees and the Methodist Council and the Methodist Conference.

The last four years have been quite stressful as ‘stormy winds’ have sought to destroy God’s purpose for me in ministry, but I have counted it all joy! I give thanks to God for the immense support received from family, colleagues and friends. In January this year, Kenneth and our family organised a service to celebrate my God-given ministry giving thanks to God for twenty-five years of Presbyterial Ministry within forty years of Extended Service of God. The preacher, the Revd. Dr Inderjit Bhogal spoke of new beginnings as evidence by the wine produced at the Wedding at Canaan in Galilee, a time for moving forward to new ventures.

To God be the glory for all that has gone before and for the great things God has done! As I ‘sit down’, I look forward to a time spent in rest and reflection awaiting direction as I begin a new chapter of journeying with God. Kenneth and I are grateful for the cards, email and phone messages received even before we arrived in Witham and to all who have prayed that we shall be happy in the Chelmsford Circuit.

Stanley, Jai, David and Olive, Hannah, Maame and Anthony our daughters and son-in-law, Janae, Joanna and Dylan and the expected grandchildren join Kenneth and I in wishing you all a Peaceful and Joyous Christmas when it comes, and a Happy and Blessed New Year 2020.

Love and prayers,
‘Femi’
NEWS FROM OUR MALDON SECTION

Hatfield Peverel, Maldon, South Wooden Ferrers and Witham welcome Sandie Hulbert to the ministry team. Sandie has taken on the role of schools, youth and family worker within the Maldon Section. Sandie is the one at the top of the ladder in an ‘open the book’ project which is Bible storytelling that brings the Bible to life for primary school children.

In Hatfield Peverel, St Andrews primary school we have been taking assemblies and together with Sandie and Ria Allen have started a ‘lunch time club’. The first one was around harvest and Sandie had the children making bird feeders out of apples and seeds that went in the schools forest garden. Below a report out of St Andrews newsletter.

Since then we have had craft and stories, interactive worship, made friendship bracelets and heard about wooden people called ‘punchinello, Lucia’ and their creator a wood carver called Eli. The children are having lots of fun and at the same time learning about Jesus.

The Methodist congregation in South Wooden Ferrers has started Open the book project which is part of the Bible Society. The project is headed up by Judith Grayson and Michael Clark. At present we take assemblies fortnightly at St Marys. The stories of the Bible are presented with eye catching visual aids and involve the children in the story. Here we are building the tower in the ‘tower of Babel’ story.

In the new year we are looking to expand this project to other schools within South Wooden Ferrers.

In Maldon Methodist we have began a knit and natter drop in group on a Tuesday morning and with the installation of new glass sliding doors we are able to leave the ‘blue’ front doors open and people are dropping in for coffee and a natter.

News from Witham

As we start thinking about moving from the old year to a new one, a really good piece of news within the Church at Witham is that we have started a Bible Study. This is being led by Ria Allen who brings a deep knowledge of the Scriptures and a passion for God’s Word. We meet on the first Wednesday of each month at the Church at 2.00pm. If anyone from the circuit would like to join with us in our journey of exploration you would be most welcome.

In addition, we are continuing our journey embracing modern technology! As many of you will know, we now use a laptop and projector during our Sunday services. The team of projectionists are weekly discovering new ways to use this and we hope to build on this in the coming months. Our rear hall has now been redecorated and is an ideal training room with magnetic whiteboard, plenty of display space and a projector for those with a lap top. If any circuit training would find this space helpful, we would love to be your hosts.

Jenny Jarvis
Witham
On Saturday 2\textsuperscript{nd} November we held our annual Christmas Fayre and it was a wonderful morning despite the downpour of rain at the exact time we were opening. Friends old and new braved the weather, however, and it was nice to see many new faces in our church and school room. Wendy brought her home-made Christmas cards and her daughter brought her hand-made Christmas gifts.

Marlene was on the bric-a-brac table as usual which seemed to groan under the many items on offer. Carol steadfastly manned the cake stall and we welcomed two ladies from St. Andrews Church who brought hand-made gifts and a children’s Christmas game and although there were no children present we are all “young at heart” and she was still pleased with her takings. The kitchen staff produced refreshments with warm sausage rolls made by Carol if required. A good time was had by all and our thanks go to all concerned with the event for their efforts.

Our next coffee mornings are:
- Saturday 1\textsuperscript{st} February 2020
- Saturday 4\textsuperscript{th} April 2020

Many thanks
Helen
Halstead

Blue Christmas
A time of quiet and contemplation for those who find Christmas difficult.
Broomfield Methodist Church
Led by Deacon
Ramona Samuel
December 19\textsuperscript{th}
6pm – 7pm
All are welcome
As I'm getting a little bit older, my hearing is beginning to deteriorate, in fact I have tinnitus probably due to noisy tractors as a youth! Consequently I wear hearing aids and often when watching TV now, I'll turn on the subtitles because "the actors are always mumbling these days" ;-) 

The other day I was watching a fascinating documentary about a Chinese manufacturing company who had taken over a closed down American factory. The Chinese boss didn't speak English and always had a translator at his side. What was fascinating at times was to compare how the translator's rendering of what the boss said compared to what the person who had prepared the sub-titles determined the words should be - they were nearly always slightly different!

It reminded me of the fact that there are now literally hundreds of English translations of the Bible, and that they're all slightly different! That reminded of a question I received the other day via social media from a man who'd recently started going to church: "I want to buy a Bible - which one should I buy?"

My response to him was to suggest that it really depends on how you're wanting to use said Bible. If it's to doing readings at Church, then ideally you'll want to use the same version that they have in seats at Church, as a lot of people like to read along in the service; many churches have the Good News version or the NIV (New International Version) in their pews/Seats. Alternatively if you primarily want a Bible to do some study I like the idea of using one that is reckoned to be as accurate a translation of the original languages as possible - for that I'd look at things like the NRSV (New Revised Standard Version - my favourite) or an REB (Revised English Bible). However, if you're trying to (for example) catch the gist of what the parables originally meant by using the 'language of today', there are a number of newer version of the Bible which are sometimes referred to as 'paraphrase' translations. They don't necessarily do a word for word translation of the original Greek (NT) and Hebrew (OT), but they use their own approach to 're-tell' the Bible in what they think are the most helpful and meaningful ways to a 21st century reader. This can be really helpful, but it is by its nature it's a very subjective business! The most popular of these currently is perhaps the 'The Message'

If my answer sounds like you need to buy at least three Bibles, fear not; there are a number of brilliant online Bible websites which allow you to look at dozens of translations (eg www.biblegateway.com ).

My view of scripture is that it's a wonderful insight into the people of God as they encounter the mystery of the Divine. The way in which people use and understand the Bible reminds me of the variety I noticed on TV from the translator compared to the subtitles editor; it wasn't necessarily a question of one being right and the other being wrong, but a reflection of the fact that diversity and difference is part of the beauty of life. Wouldn't the world be boring if we were all the same!

Rev'd Mark Pengelly, Methodist Superintendent Minister

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**What did you say? Translating the Good News (or 'which Bible should I use?!')**

We just wanted to say a big thankyou to everyone who participated tonight to make the event a very worthwhile and fun evening.

We collected £376.93 on the night, with the promise of a further £50. When recovered tax on gift Aided giving is added the total raised will amount to £488.18 which is a wonderful result. Please thank everyone who came and pass on the result of this evening’s effort for Tear fund.

Best wishes
David & Pat
Broomfield

Thanks to everyone at Broomfield, it was a great evening enjoyed by all and the welcome and hospitality were wonderful. Well done to the winners from Maldon.
CIRCUIT EVENTS - DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Saturday 18th January 2020
God in Love Unites Us
Venue: St Augustines
Time: 9am till 4pm
Bring your own lunches.
Tea & Coffee provided

Saturday 25th April 2020
Spring Synod
Venue: Christchurch Chelmsford
Time: 10am till 4pm
Tea & Coffee
Lunch: Soup and Bread

Sunday 26th January 2020
Thinking About Preaching & Worship Leading
Venue: Moulsham Lodge
Time: 4pm till 5pm

CIRCUIT MEETINGS 7PM FOR 7.30PM
Thursday 27th February 2020
Venue: Moulsham Lodge
Tuesday 19th May 2020
Venue: Halstead

Renewing Our Covenant With God (About the Methodist Covenant Service)

Many of our Methodist and Ecumenical Partnership Churches will have an annual 'Covenant Service', often in the new year. If you've always wondered what it's all about and why it's an important Methodist tradition which is gaining popularity in many other denominations - read on!

There are many things that we want to do regularly, but not perhaps frequently, and much of our pattern of life revolves around doing things annually - MOT-ing the car, servicing the boiler, but how often should we give our spiritual lives a 'checkup' to remind ourselves of the importance of our relationship with God? Being a methodical kind of chap, John Wesley, the founder of the evangelical movement of the 18th century decided it might be good to do this at least annually - he wasn't given the derogatory nick-name 'method-ist' for nothing!

The annual covenant service that is part of the life of every Methodist church, and increasingly appreciated by other traditions, traces its roots back not just to John Wesley, who arguably popularised the idea, but to a century before that and the writings of two men in the French Puritan tradition (although they were from Somerset I believe!). Richard Alleine, and his father-in-law Joseph write at considerable length on how one might "annually renew one's covenant with God". Richard wrote a set of 'directions' for those who were about to renew their covenant with God, and Joseph wrote a covenant prayer of commitment and renewal.

For these puritan disciples, and John Wesley and his followers, the idea of Covenant was recognised as a strong theme running through both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible. Their work brought alive the importance of the idea of Covenant in the Bible: Moses receives a covenant from God, which the people commit to; Jeremiah speaks words of hope declaring that God will commit himself to a 'new covenant' with his people; Jesus echoes these words at the last supper as he describes how he will bring about a 'new covenant relationship' by his blood. Throughout scripture God reaches out to people and commits to them using the language of covenant; they are invited to respond in kind.

Covenant services don't have to be in the new year, in fact the first such service Wesley led was in August 1755, where in his journal we hear that he "mentioned to the congregation about another means of increasing serious religion, which had been frequently practised by our forefathers and attended with eminent blessing, namely the joining in a covenant to serve God with all our heart, and all our soul."

When we join together for a covenant service we stand in a long tradition of those who are serious about committing themselves to God. The words of the covenant prayer are not easy to say, but they reflect the power of the relationship that God longs to have with us. I hope that you will find the Covenant service a helpful part of your spiritual life. On that first occasion of a service in Spitalfields, London, when 1800 people gathered to renew their covenant, Wesley concluded: "Such a night I scarce ever saw, surely the fruit of it shall remain for ever," May we all find renewing our Covenant with God bears fruit that will last for ever.

With every blessing, Mark

The Covenant Prayer
I am no longer my own but yours. Put me to what you will, rank me with whom you will; put me to doing, put me to suffering; let me be employed for you, or laid aside for you, exalted for you, or brought low for you; let me be full, let me be empty, let me have all things, let me have nothing; I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things to your pleasure and disposal. And now, glorious and blessed God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, you are mine and I am yours. So be it. And the covenant now made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven.'