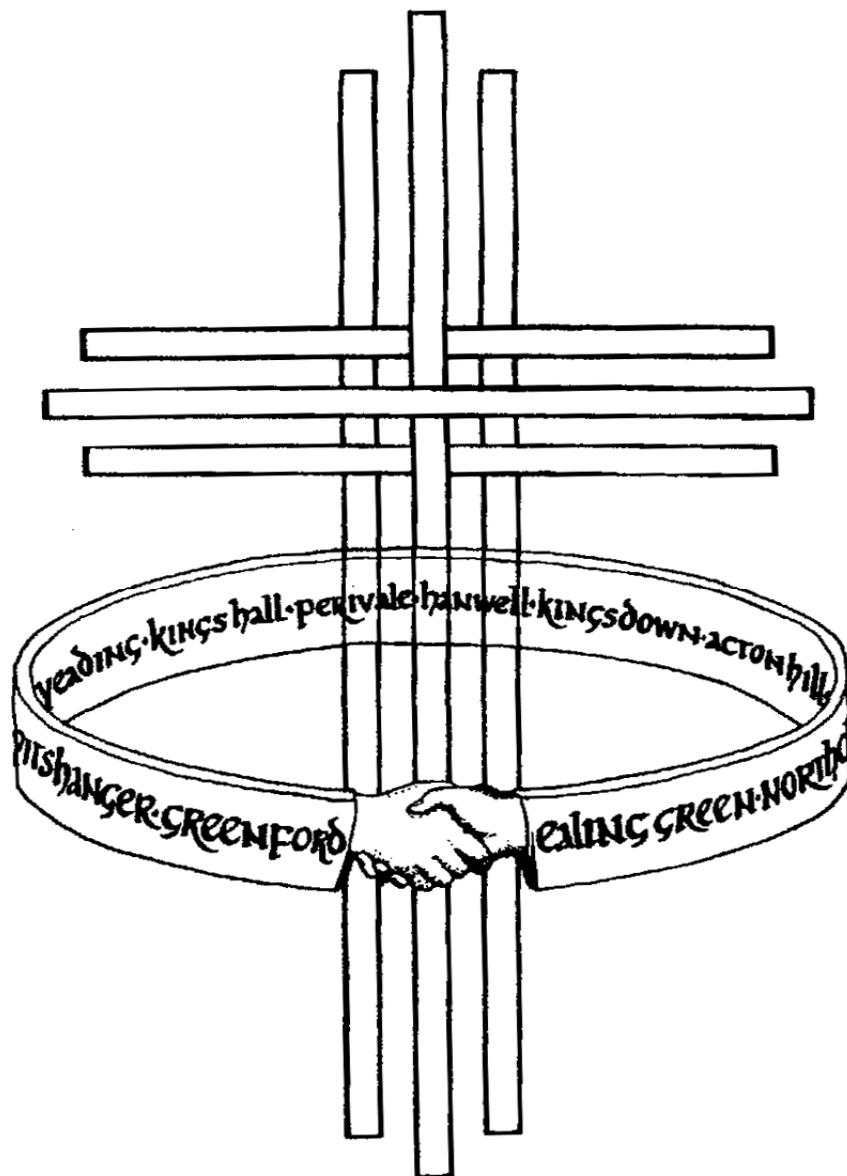


In-touch

No 57

September - November 2011

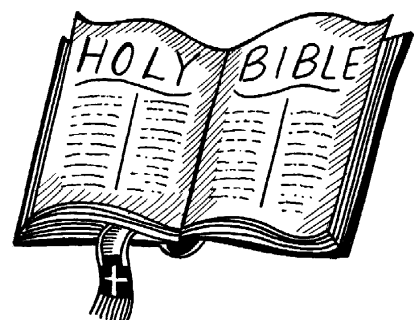


The magazine for *all* the Ealing Trinity Circuit.

IN THIS ISSUE

	Page
• From the Superintendent	3
• The Circuit Office has moved	5
• Rev Micky Youngson appointed District Chair	5
• New e-mail addresses for Rev Micky Youngson and the Circuit Office	6
• New Circuit Steward and Lay Reps to Synod	6
• Minister for Acton Hill	6
• From the Circuit Meeting	6
• Circuit Website	8
• Mission – <i>Donald Burling, Acton Hill</i>	8
• Waiting – <i>Ray Garnett, Hanwell</i>	10
• Watch Out, there's a Mystery Worshipper About <i>Gerald Barton, Editor</i>	11
• News from Street Ministry – <i>Rachel Kamara, Pitshanger</i>	13
• The Reluctant Evangelist – <i>Donald Burling, Acton Hill</i>	14
• Stephen Hawking and whether God created the Universe <i>Gerald Barton, Editor</i>	15
• Olympics 2012 and Your Church	17
• Mental Health & Faith – series of talks at Ealing Green	18
• Ealing Churches' Winter Night Shelter – Job Ad	19

**Celebrating 400 years of
the King James version
of the Bible in English**



Front Cover designed by Marion Narain

From the Superintendent

When we choose to follow Jesus we are placing our trust, our 'security' in the things of God, not the things of human understanding. This decision for discipleship can take us into all sorts of unexpected places and situations. In the Old Testament security was bound up with ideas of family, nation, land and the covenant relationship between Israel and God. The New Testament and particularly the story of Jesus offer us a different kind of security – that of living in the realm or kingdom of God.

In God's realm as Jesus described it in parables and as he demonstrated it in his life, security is found in the small – a portion of yeast, a mustard seed. In God's realm meaning is found in the everyday act of sowing seeds or cleaning a room. God's realm is seen when the most vulnerable people are offered a place of honour at the table.

Where can we see signs of God's realm growing and flourishing in the Ealing Trinity Circuit? I'm sure you can think of many simple acts of kindness shown on a Sunday or during the week by church members for each other – and more significantly – to the community we live in. Perhaps you can see signs of God's realm in our work with Street Pastors and in the myriad of voluntary activities of church members – in charity shops, acting as Samaritans, caring for elderly and vulnerable neighbours. We are called to live as children of God and ambassadors of God's realm, making the ideas of Jesus Christ live in our world today.

The Circuit Policy Committee and Invitations Committee are making real the ideas and plans that have been talked about in the Circuit for some months now. As we look to the kind of ministry – lay and ordained – that will make God's realm visible in Ealing, we are asking the Methodist Church to provide us with new ministers to help make this happen. The Circuit Meeting will be asked to confirm that Jennifer Smith will be the Superintendent Minister from 1st September 2012 and that she would be joined by two presbyters, one probationary presbyter and, subject to approval, a Deacon. Jennifer has remarkable skills and gifts and I'm delighted that she feels able to take on this exciting challenge and will build on her work of training and development across the Circuit as well as continuing as minister at Ealing Green and Acton Hill.

The Deacon would be based in Southall and work alongside our congregations there in making links in the community and building confidence in the church. He or she would work with a presbyter, who would have oversight of Northolt, Greenford and King's Hall. The other part of the Deacon's work would be to offer pastoral support in other churches in the Circuit – most likely the Superintendent's section. The probationary presbyter would care for Pitshanger and Perivale, and it is hoped would have skills in pioneer ministry and evangelism that would help them to 'replant' the church at Perivale. We also hope that this person will have a responsibility for the development and support of children and young people's work across the Circuit. The other presbyter would have oversight of Kingsdown and Hanwell.

It is hoped that when we know who has been stationed to these posts and their gifts, we will find resources to take on paid or voluntary lay-workers who can bring other gifts into the mix.

The Circuit will continue to develop as a 'training' circuit, able to offer placements to students, support a probationary minister, develop lay-leadership and strive for excellence in worship and in hospitality. This is a really exciting time in the life of our Circuit. I hope that you will get involved in all sorts of ways in the months and years ahead. Our security as Christians is never in staying the same, but is in being responsive to God's call upon our lives.

I know that it will have come as a surprise to many that I am going to move into a new post in just over a year's time. It was something of a surprise to me! A number of people had asked me if I would submit my name for Chair of the London District and, to begin with, I didn't take them very seriously. After a time of more and more prompts – some from people I was surprised by I felt I should pay the idea some attention. A friend and very respected Methodist offered to nominate me if I was willing to have my name put forward. I prayed about this and talked it through with Sandy (my husband) and other trusted friends and, finally, agreed that I would enter the process.

Just before Methodist Conference in July I learnt that I had been shortlisted and that the interview day would be the Wednesday following Conference. The interview day was long and involved presentations, exercises, three panel interviews and a full interview – so they really were making sure that those of us on the list showed our true selves!

Later that day I sat on a bench in Westminster, watching a Korean couple have their wedding photos taken. I could see the Abbey and the Houses of Parliament and thought of all that living in London means to me – spiritually, emotionally, politically and as a family. I felt a real sense of peace that whatever the decision, this was the one city in the world I should be, whatever kind of ministry God is calling me to.

I received the phone call to tell me the decision and walked back to Central Hall in something of a daze. My uppermost thought then was 'Oh gosh, how shall I tell the people back in the Circuit?' You have all been very gracious and I will enjoy this next year with you and, whilst dreading leaving as Superintendent, will hold you in my heart as I take the next step of the journey to which God has called me.

Where is our security? It is not in the things that the world holds dear, it is in Christ, God dwelling among us, loving us, saving us and working in the world through us.

Every blessing,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Michael', written in a cursive style.

The Circuit Office has moved....

With the closure of Moullin House, the Circuit Office has relocated to Kingsdown Methodist Church. The new contact details for the office are as follows:-

Circuit Office,
Kingsdown Methodist Church,
Kingsdown Ave.,
West Ealing,
London
W13 9PR

tel/fax: 020 8579 1339
e-mail: office@ealingtrinity.org.uk

If you are visiting the office, there is an intercom system located at the entrance to the front vestibule of the church.

Office hours remain Tuesdays & Thursdays 09.00 – 14.00

Rev Micky Youngson appointed District Chair

As many readers of In-touch will already be aware, our Superintendent Minister, Rev Micky Youngson has been appointed Chair of the London District from September 2012. Here the full text of the announcement that was made on Sunday, July 17th.

As part of the normal processes involved in appointing a new Chair of District, the District Nominations Committee, meeting with connexional representatives on Wednesday 13 July has recommended to the District Council that Revd Michaela Youngson be designated as a new Chair of the London District with effect from September 2012.

The District Council has now received and unanimously endorsed that recommendation. It will now be brought to the September Synod for District approval. Final ratification will subsequently be sought from the Methodist Conference in July 2012.

Once the nomination has been approved by the Synod, the District will work with the Circuit to secure new ministry for September 2012.

New e-mail Address for Rev Micky Youngson and the Circuit Office

Rev Micky Youngson has a new e-mail address – super@ealingtrinity.org.uk. Please use this new address for all e-mails.

The new e-mail for the Circuit Office is office@ealingtrinity.org.uk.

New Circuit Steward and Lay Reps to Synod

Mike Roskell stood down as a Circuit Steward at the end of the 2010/11 Connexional year. His place is being taken by Lynda Blackburn from Kingsdown. Lynda is well known to many of us in the Circuit and is also currently a Local Preacher on Trial. We wish Lynda well in her new role.

There have also been changes to the elected Lay Representatives to the London District Synod. Christine Green, Colleen Hicks and Elizabeth Sherman are standing down as Lay Representatives having served in that role for some years. Win Thompson is continuing as a representative and is joined by Peter Chadburn from Ealing Green and Barbara Williams from Hanwell.

Minister for Acton Hill

As from 1st September, Rev Dr Jennifer Smith will take pastoral oversight of Acton Hill. Jen is currently minister of Ealing Green, and this means that she will cover both our Local Ecumenical Partnerships.

From the Circuit Meeting

The most recent Circuit Meeting was held on 6th June at Ealing Green.

As readers of 'In-touch' will know, Moullin House was due to close at the end of August. The meeting was informed of progress towards closure including the process of informing residents and staff and sending the latter formal notices of redundancy. Cluttons, a major commercial estate agency has been developing plans for the site on the Circuit's behalf and were arranging a meeting with the Ealing Council Planning Dept to present ideas for the redevelopment of the site.

Associated with Moullin, the Circuit owns a large house converted to flats, Havelock House. Historically, this has been managed by the warden of Moullin. With the closure of Moullin the estate agent John Martin has been appointed to manage Havelock House on the Circuit's behalf. One of the flats, which is currently vacant, requires significant refurbishment costing about £25,000 before it can be let. The

meeting agreed that this would be financed by a loan from the Circuit Advance Fund. Once let, the cost of refurbishment should be recovered within about 2 years from rents.

The meeting heard that finance is an on-going concern. There have been particular financial pressures on the Circuit connected with the closure of Moullin House and the need for investment in Havelock House. The final bill for closing Moullin is likely to be about £30,000 to cover redundancy and the cost of securing the building. This excludes the cost of working with Cluttons to develop plans for the redevelopment of the site. In addition to the £25,000 mentioned above for refurbishment work at Havelock House, two of the Circuit's manses will require repairs before new ministers can take up residence in August 2012. In short, the Circuit is running into cash-flow problems.

There is however, about £250,000 in the Circuit Advance fund, although £200,000 of this has been 'ring-fenced' for King's Hall. Rather than borrowing funds or asking churches to increase their assessments, the meeting agreed to remove this 'ring-fencing' so that these funds can be used to meet current liabilities. However, once Moullin has been sold, the 'ring-fencing' can be restored. The likely gain from selling Moullin is not yet clear and depends on the attitude of Ealing Council to redeveloping the site.

As noted elsewhere in the edition of In-touch, the meeting elected new Lay Representatives to the London District Synod – Peter Chadburn, and Gill Standfield. Also, Win Thompson was re-elected.

Two of our ministers, Kip Bennett and Roger Dunlop are due to move on in August 2012. The meeting agreed on the composition of an Invitations Committee to oversee their replacement. The committee will comprise Rev Micky Youngson, Rev Jen Smith, the Circuit Stewards, Gill Standfield, Mike Chapman, Kamini James and Elizabeth Sherman.

Deacon Sue Culver gave a short talk to the meeting to describe the work of the Methodist Diaconal Order, which she described as the nearest thing to a monastic order in British Methodism. Deacons receive theological training and specialise in community work, including children's and youth work. Explaining the difference between deacons and ministers (presbyters), she described the role of ministers as 'shepherding the flock', whilst deacons aim to take the church out to the people and community at large. One of her visions is to take three vehicles to a pop festival – one with showers, one to provide tea, and the third to provide Christian teaching. Currently the order has about 50 students training to be deacons.

You can find out more about the Methodist Diaconal Order from its website at <http://www.methodistdiaconalorder.org.uk/>.

The next Circuit Meeting will be held at Pitshanger on Thursday 8th September at 8.00pm.

Circuit Website

Our circuit now has its own website –

www.ealingtrinity.org.uk.

The website is live now, but is a 'work in progress' and will be developed further as time goes by. Its aim is to provide basic information about each church in the Circuit so that, for example people moving to Ealing can find out where we are, when our services are and so forth, and to be a source of information for our members. So, apart from providing details of each of our churches, the site allows you to download the current plan, see notices sent out by the Circuit Office, find Circuit and other events in the Calendar and also download copies of In-touch.

Mission

Donald Burling, Acton Hill

"How can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent?" (Romans 10. 14-15 NIV).

What is your image of a missionary? An eccentric figure in a topee, urging native people to abandon their culture and take on "civilised" ways? That is of course a caricature, though it is probably true that some in the past have failed to distinguish between what is essential to Christianity and what is merely part of our culture. At the same time it is natural for genuine Christian converts to want to imitate the person who led them to Christ.

Missionaries are indeed eccentric in the sense that they differ from the norm. Most of us value our Christianity up to a point, but we do not let it interfere too much with the way we manage our affairs. A man like C.T.Studd, who gave up a cricketing career and gave away his family fortune so as to be dependent on God, was certainly out of the ordinary.

What characterises true missionaries is a sense of calling, of being sent. (The literal meaning of "missionary" is one who is sent - as is true of the word "apostle".) It is possible to get it wrong - John Wesley's early mission to the American Indians was a notable failure, yet he later found his true calling as an outstanding evangelist in Britain and abroad. Thomas Barnardo trained as a missionary to China, but found his mission was to the street children of London.

What about the rest of us? You do not have to be eccentric to have a concern for the unsaved. We may hesitate to use such words today, but the Bible is quite clear - after death there is judgement, and those whose sins are unforgiven will have to

face the consequences. It is a disturbing thought that most people around us are unaware of that. What can and should we do about it?

Operation Mobilisation (OM) and Youth with a Mission (YWAM) are two organisations that facilitate ordinary young Christians to spend some time in an overseas mission field. They give scope to their natural taste for adventure, at the same time making them aware of the frustrations and drudgery such work often entails.

However, overseas mission is not for everyone - and there is plenty of work to be done nearer home. We can begin by asking the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest field (Matthew 9. 38). Those who pray in this way are likely to find they are "sent" - if only to their own street. A lady curate used to cycle past a church that was without a vicar, and prayed that God would send a good person to take charge there. Later she was appointed to that church. As the bishop said at her induction, "Be careful what you pray for".

Are there not ways in which whole churches can be mobilised for mission in the locality? Some evangelistic activities, such as leaflet distribution, do not require any particular gift. Youth clubs, mother and toddler groups etc. can bring people into a place where they can be exposed to the Gospel. Some churches run coffee stalls, others have even organised public barbecues. Many schools are open to help with running assemblies, while singing groups may be able to get into places where preaching would be out of the question. Much depends on inspirational leadership. Telling Christians they ought to evangelise has limited effect; but if the leader can show he or she really believes it is worthwhile, many will respond.

Donald mentions Operation Mobilisation and Youth with a Mission – you can find out more by going to www.om.org and ywam.org - Editor

Acton Hill Church

Corner of High St & Woodlands Ave, Acton, London W3 9BU

Christmas Fayre

Saturday 26th November 11.00am – 2.00pm

Gifts, toys, books, tombola, homemade cakes,
international food and specialist goods

Children's activities - Face Painting, Game Zone, Santa's Grotto

Raffle prizes - Gift Vouchers from Boden, meals for two, Christmas gift hampers,
family days out and many more!

Entrance: Adults 50p Children Free

Waiting

A poem to the glory of God based on Acts 1:1-11

Ray Garnett, Hanwell

Last quarter's plan had us reflecting about Pentecost. I was asked to provide a meditation on the theme of "Waiting", but with preparation time short, I took to writing a poem from scratch. It's a shame to only use it once, especially when some people said that they liked it and thought it very befitting for Pentecost.

- ◆ Waiting, wondering, watchful,
Looking to the sky,
We couldn't go where **He** was going
And we sometimes wondered, why?

- ◆ It wasn't the time to go with Him
We'd got a job to do.
A life to live, a message to give
Send your spirit, help us through

- ◆ Expecting, anticipating, waiting,
Not knowing when's the time.
But knowing **He'll** be with us
Through **His** bread and wine.

- ◆ The message of His love and purpose
Is needing to be shared.
A job to do, a task or two.
A coming now declared

- ◆ Waiting, poised and ready,
Not knowing where or when,
But knowing and believing
That **He will** come again.

- ◆ The message that we have to share
It's a taste of things to come.
To deliver, from our giver
Your will, will be done.

- ◆ Waiting, wondering, watching
For when you'll come again,
Looking, listening, longing,
Waiting,
for Your power to reign.

You can read other poems and reflections composed by church members from Hanwell at www.hanwellmethodist.info, click on the Worship button and choose the Reflections link.

Watch Out, there's a Mystery Worshipper about....

Gerald Barton, Editor

A little while ago, I was looking up the Sunday afternoon concerts at St Anne's church on Kew green. Its website didn't seem to be working (it only gave access to a set of statistics which wasn't a lot of use), so I rooted around a number of others to get the information I was after. One of the ones I hit on was the 'Ship of Fools' website and the link took me straight to a report on St Anne's by a 'Mystery Worshipper'. This didn't tell me what I wanted to know, but did tell me rather a lot about the Mystery Worshipper's experience at the church, which was, happily for them, pretty good.

You have probably guessed that the Mystery Worshipper is rather like the Mystery Shopper – someone who turns up incognito to see what things are like and then compiles a review which appears on the Ship of Fools website. They don't announce their arrival, of course, but they do leave a calling card in the offertory plate.

Ship of Fools has several hundred Mystery Worshippers around the world in places ranging from London to Cairo, and Los Angeles to Wellington, New Zealand. Their aim is to review the services at the churches they visit to give people an idea of what goes on in a wide variety of churches – and also to hold up a mirror to churches to let them see how they looked on a particular Sunday to a visitor from outside. Mystery Worshippers must have an eye for detail, be objective, and have the nerve to do it.

The reports are structured around a series of questions starting with a bit of background about the church in question – denomination, the building, the local community and the preacher. Then follows the real meat – how big the congregation was and how full the building was, were they welcomed personally, how comfortable were the pews, what the pre-service atmosphere was like, what books were used, what musical instruments were played, was there anything distracting during the service, what was the style of worship (stiff-upper-lip, happy clappy etc).

Then we come to the sermon – how long it was, in a nutshell what it was about, how good the preacher was on a scale of 1 to 10. What comes after the service also gets evaluated, including how good the tea and coffee was. Some questions give an overall impression of the service – 'which part of the service was like being in heaven', and 'which part was like being in... er... the other place'.

Finally there's an overall evaluation – 'how would you feel about making this church your regular' on a scale of 0 to 10, 'did the service make you glad to be a Christian' and 'what will you remember in seven days' time'.

All this is pretty thorough and their reports make interesting reading. Some are, of course glowing. Others, shall we say, rather less so. I had a browse through some of the reports on Methodist churches. Overall, the results, I would say were

'middling'. Some were criticised for their lack of welcome and poor singing (that surprises me – I'm not used to Methodists singing in a lacklustre fashion). On the other hand, others were praised for their warmth of welcome even if the service itself was a bit unexciting. Perhaps the most damning comment was about a church in Bristol – to 'did the service make you glad to be a Christian' the Mystery Worshipper commented '*No, just bored*'. That said, he did have an interesting conversation about the Anglican-Methodist covenant after the service, which he described as the 'best part' of his experience. Monmouth Methodist did rather better, to the same question the Mystery Worshipper said '*Yes, it did, and as I walked out into Monmouth town centre I felt glad to be alive*'. Good for them!

Sometimes, there's a funny side to things. After service coffee at St George's Hanover Square? No, champagne! Alas, the Mystery Worshipper couldn't accept because of a lunch appointment. Then there was the dog that yelped four times during the 52 minute sermon at Westminster Chapel (with a sermon that long, I think I'd yelp too), or the prayers at the Church of the Redeemed Christian in Tooting that sounded like a shortened version of the commentary at the Grand National, not to mention the four ladies chatting and heckling the preacher at Covent Garden Evangelical. The flamboyance of the music director at a well-known Methodist church in central London reminded the Mystery Worshipper of something out of the *Vicar of Dibley*.

Do Mystery Worshippers ever come to Ealing? Actually, yes. There's a report about an evening service at St John's in Mattock Lane, West Ealing. Fortunately for them, it was quite glowing.

Of course, now the \$64,000 question – how would our churches and services measure up? I'm not even going to attempt an answer to that one, but leave it to you, dear reader to form your own conclusions. Suffice to say, it's a question worth asking and all of us need to contemplate our part in making our churches and services what they are, whether we're preaching, stewarding, leading music or just being a part of the congregation. Would we be pleased or embarrassed to read a Mystery Worshipper's report on a service at one of our churches? Perhaps the very thought of it should spur us on to make our churches as welcoming and our services as uplifting as they could possibly be.

Incidentally, I eventually did find the information I was after about the concerts at St Anne's – chamber works by Mahler and Schumann, followed by tea in the church hall or, if you prefer sitting on a tombstone in the churchyard watching the cricket on Kew green. A pleasant way to spend a Sunday afternoon.

You can find the Mystery Worshippers' reports on the Ship of Fools website by going to <http://ship-of-fools.com/mystery/index.html>.

News from the Street Ministry at West Ealing between the Library and Sainsburys

Rachel Kamara

Once again I wish to give an update on the ministry. Thanks to all those who have been praying for this team. God has been doing great things during the past weeks and we give Him thanks that there have been additional team members which we regard as an answered prayer.

We still meet on Saturday mornings. As usual the morning starts with the experience of one of our team members, Hong Syms from Hanwell Methodist Church. She walks and travels around the area in the presence of the Lord. She sees all ages, able and disabled come from the library with books and some reading newspapers. Some come to Sainsburys carrying their shopping and some leave on bicycles. She prays for all and speaks with a few. The rest of the team meet at Burger King, have some refreshment and share experiences of the week through scripture or testimonies. After thirty minutes of devotion (we are currently looking at Acts), we leave for the street.

We have tried to keep the team work on a regular Saturday basis. We have made so many friends, including old regulars – an elderly lady called Maureen who used to sit outside when there were benches, but now waits inside Sainsburys has started to sit on the new benches with the fine weather. She always looks forward to seeing us. Arpie, another lady who has even spoken to some of those we minister to encouraging them to take heed of our message has unfortunately gone to the United States to care for a sister who is sick. Michael, who is always around when we get to the street has asked us to pray for his niece who is disabled. God has answered our prayers and she is doing well getting back to her normal activities. Praise God!!

We are out there to make friends and share the Good News with as many as we can and at times they request our prayers. For some time we have prayed, walked through the farmers' market who are serving the community and also for the work of the Salvation Army. A few times we have had to move to Dean Gardens where we have had useful conversations with various people.

Often we get visitors from churches overseas who join us in the ministry such as our friends from Lake View Baptists Church, Auburn, New York State, who have returned home, but whose stay was such a blessing. At the moment we have a set of friends – Marc Randall from Canada, Grace Nissley and Ryan Schiavo from the USA. Their personal testimonies and Christian walk have blessed the various conversations.

Recently we had conversations with a lady named Doreen who has great faith and told us she takes one day at a time. Another lady, Pamela, an ex school teacher was so impressed that she said we were doing a good job as there are so many

people who are lonely and do not have anyone to talk to. She told us of her missionary trip to India for many years. During this time she had come home because she was involved in an accident in which she broke her leg. She has received treatment and has almost recovered. She hopes to go back to see the children she has helped. Her exact words were, “*Even if they have to drag me there, I will return to see those children.*”

We keep a list of the people we have conversations with and pray for them during the week. We believe God has a mission as every Saturday is different the experience is hard to tell so ‘Come and see’ (John 1:46).

We usually give out tracts and copies of the Gospels. In this way we try to get outside of our church buildings to reach out to others who would not go to a church. We keep in touch with those whom we have met more than once and chat over what has been happening since we last met them. The traders – Bill who sells cards, Adrian who sells fresh baked bread and cakes, look forward to meeting us on Saturdays. We give God thanks for our overseas partners who come to help us. Anyone who is looking for an opportunity to live out their Christianity is welcome to join us.

The Reluctant Evangelist

Donald Burling, Acton Hill

Lord, do I love the people, as I go out to preach?
I know they need Your message, Your patient grace to each.
We sing of Your salvation, and try to do it well;
But how much does it pain me that they may go to hell?

Lord, do I love the people as I deplore their sin?
I am not here to judge them, but what a state they’re in!
They think it doesn’t matter, Your laws are there to break;
Yet they will have to answer for each wrong step they take.

I cannot love the people except as loved by You.
I’ve such a little concept of love so strong and true.
Grant me to feel Your radiance, the warmth of Your embrace,
Then speak with full assurance to others of Your grace.

Stephen Hawking and whether God created the Universe

Gerald Barton, Editor

Very occasionally I come across a quote that for one reason or another takes my fancy. Here are a couple. The first came from a comment book found in my university hall of residence. It refers to a comment made by a tutor to a student who had clearly not applied himself sufficiently to his studies. The second is that (in)famous remark by Donald Rumsfeld.

The trouble with you, X, is that you don't know enough to know how much you don't know.

There are known knowns. These are things we know that we know. There are known unknowns. That is to say, there are things that we know we don't know. But there are also unknown unknowns. There are things we don't know we don't know.

Both of these are about what we know and what we don't know and, furthermore, about knowing that there are things we don't know. Donald Rumsfeld got pilloried for this remark. However, had people stopped to think about it for a moment, they would perhaps have found it a bit of a statement of the obvious, particularly the bit at the end – there are things we don't know that we don't know (a bit like the hapless student from my hall of residence). When we think we know 'all about' or consider that human knowledge has developed to a point where the mysteries of the universe have been laid bare, we should perhaps pause. Just over the horizon may be phenomena that go beyond our wildest imaginings.

A couple of years ago I read Stephen Hawking's 'Brief History of Time' and a further book on the nature of reality, 'A Beginner's Guide to Reality' by Jim Baggott. Whilst I understood at least some, but by no means all of what the authors were saying, it seemed to me that the further we delve into 'reality' the more mysterious it becomes. The sheer plethora of sub-atomic particles, black holes, dark energy, the notion of the multiverse, higher dimensions and so on gave me the impression that the more and the deeper we look, the more there is to see. Furthermore, I was recently surprised to read that the laws of nature, which are assumed to be the same everywhere and to have remained the same from the moment of the Big Bang onward, may not actually be entirely constant.

I recently read a little about a physical constant known as the 'fine-structure constant' (or alpha for short). If this constant were a mere 4% bigger or smaller than it is, stars would not be able to sustain the nuclear reactions that synthesise carbon and oxygen atoms. One consequence would be that carbon-based life (ie every living thing) could not exist. Recent research however, indicates the value of this constant may vary depending on where you are in space. Maybe things aren't quite so fixed as we thought.

Stephen Hawking has striven to produce a Grand Theory of the universe unifying the laws of gravity and the laws of quantum physics. When he wrote 'A Brief History of Time' he thought that within 10 years such a theory would be possible. It appears he believes this is within our grasp. However, I can't help but think that there could easily be something out there that we haven't imagined (an unknown unknown) waiting to demonstrate how little we really do understand and how much there is that we don't know and have yet to discover. Humility should, perhaps be our watchword.

Incidentally, you might like to note that Hawking isn't the first to assert that we are on the verge of knowing all. In 1894, Albert Michelson, the first American to receive the Nobel prize in science, said that all the main laws and facts of physics had already been discovered. In 1928, another Nobel prize-winner, Max Born, asserted that physics would be completed *'in about six months' time*. Ah well.....

More recently I came across the notion put forward by various scientists that 'our' universe is not the first, nor will be the last. According to these ideas, the universe is essentially cyclic and there has been (and will continue to be) a series of 'Big Bangs' each followed by an expanding then contracting universe. The inspiration for these ideas isn't as crazy as it sounds because they also seek to explain certain aspects of the Big Bang that current theory doesn't cope with. A major problem for these ideas, however is gathering evidence to support them as it is necessary to detect particles left over from the previous universe – not impossible, just very difficult. Of course, not every cosmologist agrees with these ideas and some have pointed out problems which they would not be good at explaining. To a non-specialist trying to grasp some sort of 'big picture' of the universe and how it works, it's all very perplexing.

None of this is to belittle science and scientific explanation. In the past God was used to explain the workings of the physical universe, and some still try to use the concept of God in that way – if no explanation could be found, 'God' was used as a kind of catch-all to fill the gap. Scientific probing has gradually pushed out this so-called 'God of the gaps' and will continue to do so. 'God' is not, after all, a concept that can fit into any scientific theory, so it is hardly surprising the role of God, thought of in that way has diminished.

Where does that leave God – was it necessary to have a Creator to start the process that brought the universe(s) into existence or not? In many respects, scientific probing can't answer that. Even the notion of the cyclical universe just pushes the explanation for this universe back a stage to the previous one, and so on infinitely. In essence, either you believe there's 'God' behind it all or you don't. That said, the emerging picture we have of the universe does, I think have implications for our beliefs – at the very least, taking creation stories literally is untenable. If scientists need to exercise humility when asserting the validity of their theories, then so do the rest of us.

If scientific efforts to understand the nature of reality point in directions that seem ever more mysterious, how much more mysterious must the nature of God be?

Religious doctrines are often asserted with great certainty, but I often suspect they are but yearnings towards understanding a reality that is so vast and deep that we can at the very best just scratch at its surface – “seeing through a glass darkly”, if you like. Perhaps there are times when we should pay heed to the early 20th century philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein when he said, ‘*Whereof we cannot speak, thereof we must be silent*’.

Let me finish with another quotation, this time from Anthony Trollope’s lovely character from his tales from Barchester, Rev Septimus Harding. As he watches over the last moments of the elderly Dean of Barchester, Rev Harding muses to himself, “*I know that we are not meant to understand..... but I also know that we are meant to try.*” However mysterious God, the universe and God’s relationship with us may seem to be, we need to continue, with humility, striving to understand.

Olympics 2012 and Your Church

The Olympics and the Paralympics are the biggest peace-time event in the world. Athletes from 205 different countries are expected to compete in 26 Olympic sports and 20 Paralympics sports in 34 different venues across Britain in 2012.

So, are you wondering whether your church can get involved with the Olympics? Come to a special meeting to hear more at:-

Greenford Methodist Church Thursday 22nd September at 8.00pm

The main speaker will be Ish Lennox, the Methodist Church’s co-ordinator for the Olympics. In the meantime, here is the link for local churches wanting to get involved -

www.methodist.org.uk/2012games

Click on the ‘Pick and Mix’ icon for a range of ideas which a local church can choose to take up.

The Methodist Church is a sponsor of ‘More than Gold’ which was set up as a one-stop-shop to help churches make the most of the Olympic and Paralympic Games through programmes of outreach, hospitality and service. More Than Gold has united the Christian community for the world’s major sporting events since the 1996 Atlanta Games. It has the support of all the main denominations and over 60 Christian organisations and agencies.

Anyone can sign up as a Gold Champion for their church or circuit. You can find out more at www.morethangold.org.uk.

Opening Minds in our Community

Mental health and faith: Combating myths, facing stigma, living well

From depression or anxiety to bipolar conditions and dementia, mental health issues can often be a taboo subject: this series of free mental health workshops by professionals from West London Mental Health NHS Trust aims to answer questions and break down stigma. The Revd Dr. Jennifer Smith and others will raise questions from Christian tradition about how faith can aid resilience, or hinder it.

Open to people of all faiths, and none: bring a friend.

All at Ealing Green Church, Ealing Green, Ealing, London W5 5QT

8.00pm - 9.30pm

Mon 17 October **Dr Aideen O'Halloran**, Clinical Lead Consultant
general mental health issues: what is mental health?

Wed 2 November **Liz Fellow-Smith**, Consultant
depression and anxiety

Tues 15 November **Sarah Ghani**, Consultant Psychologist
dementia

Please note, there is no parking at the church, but ready access to public transport from Ealing Broadway and on-street neighbourhood parking.

This series is an initiative of '**Open Minds,**' a community outreach programme of the West London Mental Health Trust, in partnership with the Ealing Trinity Circuit of the Methodist Church. The professionals involved are generously donating their time. Become a member of the Mental Health Trust and make a difference to mental health care at www.wlmht.nhs.uk.

Ealing Churches' Winter Night Shelter

Ealing Winter Night Shelters (ECWNS) have a vacancy for a **Shelter Co-ordinator**.

Shelter Co-ordinator

ECNWS is an ecumenical project established in 2010, organised and supported by local Ealing churches to provide emergency shelter to local homeless people during the winter months. The Co-ordinator role is critical to the project's success, as it provides vital day to day partnership links between the participating churches and statutory and voluntary sector partners to ensure that referral and move on processes operate efficiently. In addition, the role involves overseeing the smooth day to day running of the Shelter, enabling an effective, integrated service to be provided for Shelter guests. Motivated by our Christian faith, we are committed to serving the needs of local homeless people and we seek to model the example of Jesus in all aspects of the Shelter's operation, demonstrating unconditional love to all.

About the Job...

The co-ordinator role is for between 15-25 hours a week at £11.00 per hour between the months of November 2011 and April 2012 inclusive (15 hours November, December, April; 25 hours Jan- March 2012). The working hours will vary but will include substantial evening working to liaise with the Shelter Venue co-ordinators.

The job involves the central co-ordination of all Shelter activities, ensuring that the Shelter runs smoothly on a daily basis. The post holder will be the central point of contact for referring agencies, venue co-ordinators, volunteers and Ealing Church leaders.

Reporting directly to the Shelter Trustees, you will need to be efficient, well organised, flexible and able to respond quickly to unexpected developments. You will enjoy working with committed volunteers over a range of Shelter venues and you will have a passion work with and help homeless people. Previous experience of working in this area would be advantageous but is not essential.

More information

More information, including the Job Description, Person Specification and application form can be obtained from Andrew Hillas at andrew@andrew.hillas.com. Interviews will be held on 28th September 2011 and it is hoped the successful applicant will start the role on 1st November 2011.

Closing date for applications: 19th September 2011.

Circuit Directory Update

The new 2011/12 Circuit Directory is now available

Forthcoming Events around the Circuit

[as notified to, or discovered by, the Editor]

September

- 8th Thur 8.00pm **Circuit Meeting at Pitshanger**
- 22nd Thur 8.00pm **Greenford** – meeting to hear about ‘More than Gold’
how churches can engage with the Olympics
- 24th Sat tba **Hanwell** Harvest Barn Dance
- 25th Sun 6.00pm **Hanwell** – Circuit Accreditation Service for David Street

October

- 17th Mon 8.00pm **Ealing Green** - Mental Health & Faith: Talk 1
What is mental health?

November

- 2nd Wed 8.00pm **Ealing Green** – Mental Health & Faith: Talk 2
Depression & anxiety
- 9th Wed 8.00pm **Hanwell** – Wednesday Club woodturning demonstration and talk
All welcome
- 13th Sun 3.00pm **Kingsdown** – ‘In Loving Memory’ – a service of remembrance
- 15th Tues 8.00pm **Ealing Green** – Mental Health & Faith: Talk 3
Dementia
- 26th Sat 11.00am **Acton Hill** Christmas Fayre (*see ad on page 9*)
- 2.00pm *Adults 50p, children free*

Articles for ‘**In-touch**’ **Issue No 58 (December - February)** should be sent by e-mail headed ‘**In-touch**’ to the Editor, **Gerald Barton**, or as hard copy to the Circuit Office.

Ealing Trinity Circuit Office
Kingsdown Methodist Church, Kingsdown Ave, West Ealing, London W13 9PR
office@ealingtrinity.org.uk

Office hours: Tues & Thurs 09.00 – 14.00

Deadline for next issue: October 28th