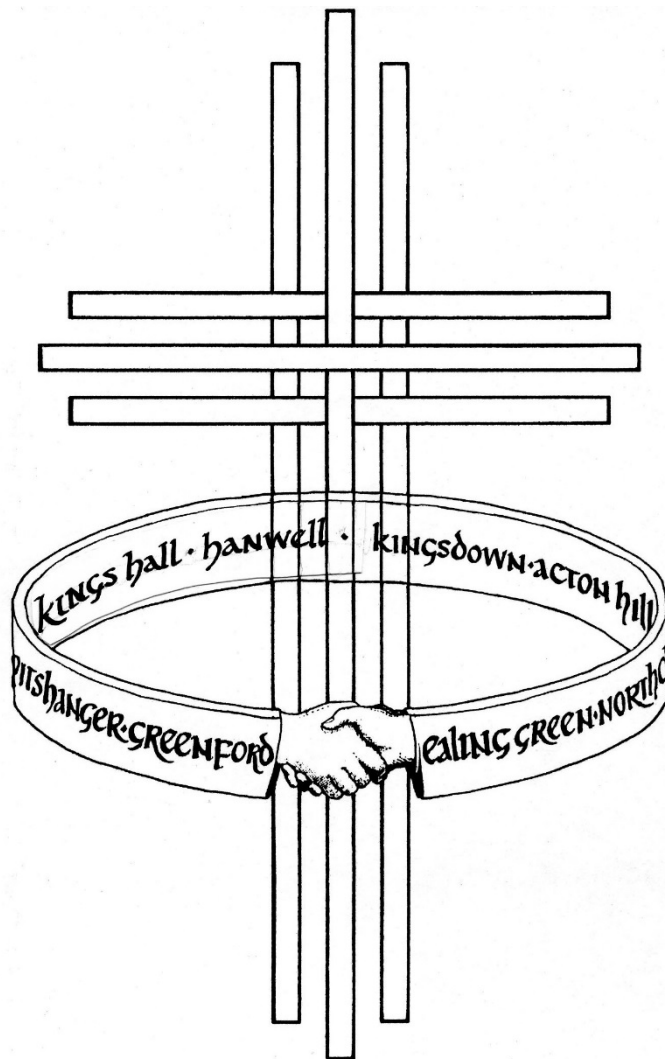


In-touch

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The magazine for *all* the Ealing Trinity Circuit.

IN THIS ISSUE

	Page
• From the Superintendent	3
• From the Circuit Meeting	4
• Southall Schools Project: Update <i>Rev Karen Greenidge</i>	6
• Putting our Faith into Action at the Mayoral Assembly <i>Alison Kemp, Acton Hill</i>	7
• London Mayoral Assembly <i>Gerald Barton, Editor</i>	9
• Christian Aid in Bangladesh <i>June Thompson, Kingsdown</i>	9
• That Referendum.... <i>Gerald Barton, Editor</i>	10
• Victim Support	11
• Arminianism <i>Gerald Barton, Editor</i>	13
• Is Going to Church Like Going to the Theatre?: A Response <i>Kathleen Loveridge, Kingsdown</i>	16
• Whence cometh my help....? <i>Gerald Barton, Editor</i>	18
• The Museum of Methodism, John Wesley's House and Wesley's Chapel: Volunteers Wanted	19
• Remember in Summer <i>compiled by Mary Newman, Pitshanger</i>	20
• Circuit Directory Update	24
• Forthcoming Events around the Circuit	24

Circuit website
www.ealingtrinity.org.uk

Front Cover designed by Marion Narain

From the Superintendent

Dear Friends,

Welcome to the Summer edition of *In Touch*, the magazine of Ealing Trinity Circuit! As I write, we have had the bizarre combination of sleet, hail, and bright sun that makes it so hard to decide what coat to wear in late April in the United Kingdom. I hope gardens and gardeners are well-wrapped, and trust that summer is coming.

This summer we will see a number of internal changes in the Circuit staff. As has been announced in Circuit Churches on Sunday 8th May, **Deacon Richard Goldstraw** has been appointed to take on a national role within the Methodist Diaconal Order, as Deputy Warden. This is an important role for the church, and although Richard's moving will place a burden here locally, we are thrilled that his particular pastoral skill has been recognised in this way. I know that our time with him has equipped him for the coming years, and that we will continue to pray for him. From 1st September he will be based at Methodist Church House in Marylebone Road, but will travel widely in pastoral support of deacons and circuits around the country: this means that Richard and Josh will move from the Circuit in early August into a connexional manse in north London. Richard was to have begun a sabbatical on 4th July, but that is up in the air at present and obviously has relevance to the Circuit, as we say goodbye to him with appropriate thanksgiving and celebration.

As is the practice with many of our national roles in Methodism, Richard was 'directly stationed' to this role, meaning that he did not apply for, nor seek it, but that the Office of the General Secretary and President of Conference (along with the leaders of the Diaconal Order) judged it to be of enough strategic importance to pull him out of circuit life. We are too late in the year for Richard to be replaced by another deacon, but there will no doubt be discussions about how the work he has been engaged in across the Circuit and at Acton Hill and Ealing Green particularly will be resourced during the next year, perhaps by a lay worker appointment or other local pastoral support. Watch this space!

As we know, this summer we will say goodbye to **Rev's Peter and Suva Catford**: the date of the Circuit leaving service is yet to be confirmed, but their four churches are having a special evening thanksgiving for their ministry on 16th July. I commend that event to everyone, especially members at Hanwell, Pitshanger, Greenford, and Northolt.

Rev Shirlyn Toppin and **Rev Yemi Jaiyesimi** will be joining the Circuit in the first week of August to begin in September. Shirlyn is currently a presbyter in the New River Circuit in North London and will have charge of Hanwell and Pitshanger Churches; she will move into the manse at Church Road, Hanwell. Yemi is currently a presbyter in the Barnsley Circuit in Yorkshire and he will have charge of Greenford and Northolt Churches; he and his wife will move into a newly purchased manse on Dormers Wells Lane on the Greenford/Southall border – sale to complete mid-May. Both will, as all our staff do, have cross-circuit responsibilities in addition

to their pastoral sections, so you can look forward to meeting them wherever you worship in the Circuit.

Having reported to you on these internal headlines (there are others: the appointment of a new Finance Administrator as the Circuit meeting directed in September 2015, new faces on our Quarterly Plan and in our lay leadership, a goodbye to several wonderful local preachers) let me turn outward to our 2016 Summer Series, which will run for six weeks from 24th July through to the end of August.

This year I'm excited based on the soundtrack alone: the series will be called '**Singing the Blues.**' Over six weeks we will be recovering lament and joy in worship, and for our lives and work. As we figure out how to deal with our families, our jobs, our aging bodies, and our communities, this series is about the resilience of God's people. How can we be honest about life's difficulties without being downhearted? What is the difference between a whinge and a lament? What is it to be joyful, as opposed to happy or protected? Each week will use a central Psalm in worship, and a central song or other blues track – interpreting the genre broadly. Together we will answer the question asked in Psalm 137, 'How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?' As in previous years a full liturgy will be provided, along with the music: these we can feel free to use without amendment, or to use as a platform for local innovations and adjustments. But watch for more announcements! And for a taster, have a look or listen on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4tAb5rYRXvs>

Friends, these are exciting times for our Circuit: we welcome new adult members by baptism and confirmation, we continue to develop the Schools work in Southall, the partnerships at King's Hall, the MHA Live at Home scheme, Foodbank, Night Shelter, Street Pastors, and other work. And this year, we are sorted out to have a good posse of our youth attend 3Generate, the Youth Conference of the Methodist Church in November: in the midst of all, the still small voice speaks the words, 'Peace, Beloved.' Let us work to help each other hear.

With every blessing, Jen

From the Circuit Meeting

The most recent Circuit Meeting was held on 8th March at Northolt.

The meeting included reports about various Circuit initiatives – the Live at Home Scheme and the Southall Schools Project.

Graham Stonestreet, the Assistant Manager for the Live at Home Scheme told the meeting that a coffee morning is now being held at Greenford Church on Wednesday mornings and seated yoga at Shaftsbury House on Friday mornings. In addition, and in partnership with Ealing Council and StayActive4Life, Get up and Go

Strength and Balance classes are held throughout the Borough. Since last October, 27 classes have started and over 500 people have been able to attend.

The next set of Strength and Balance classes would be starting at the end of April and venues were being sought for the classes. Future plans for other groups are being developed and the Open Day on 29th February had been well attended by members of the local community.

Finally, a new treasurer will be required for the Scheme when Rev Peter Catford leaves and additional volunteers are also needed.

Gill Borg from Greenford introduced the new Interfaith Worker for the Southall Schools Project, Rev Karen Greenidge to the meeting. Karen was officially welcomed to the post at a special service at Emanuel Church on 17 January. Since then she has met the Chaplain for Twyford and William Perkin High School and has visited Featherstone High School, and has also taken part in the Quiet Zones sessions at Northolt High School with Rev Peter Catford. Her future plans include organising further Quiet Zones, participating in school assemblies, developing Youth Ambassadors and forming an Interfaith Panel.

Deacon Lemia Nkwelah gave the meeting an update on Ealing Street Pastors. On Friday nights Street Pastors assist people on the streets after the pubs and night clubs close. They do particularly good work in calming situations and helping the vulnerable with water and blankets. Street Pastors are well supported by the police. Rev Suva Catford currently represents the Circuit on Ealing Street Pastors' management committee. Following discussion, the meeting decided that we should continue having a representative from the Circuit, rather than representatives from individual churches, on the management committee.

Alison Kemp from Acton Hill spoke to the meeting about the hustings for the London Mayor being organised by London Citizens at the Copper Box Arena on 28th April. Everyone was encouraged to attend.

Action was continuing to purchase a new manse in the Northolt/Greenford area. Since the meeting, the Circuit has had an offer accepted on a property in Dormer Wells Lane. The purchase is to be financed from the sale of the former manse in Green Drive, Southall. However, this was being delayed because there were issues regarding termination of the existing lease. Following the meeting, an extraordinary Circuit Meeting was called for 3rd May to agree to the release of other funds so that the purchase of the new manse could go ahead.

At the time of the meeting, bids had been received for the redevelopment of King's Hall and selection of a preferred bidder was in hand. In addition, the Methodist International Centre had also shown interest in collaborating with the Circuit to redevelop the site. This organisation operates an 'ethical' hotel and conference centre near Euston station and would be interested a similar operation on the King's Hall site including worship space.

A structural survey of King's Hall had shown that the building is fundamentally sound despite the theft of some brick and pipe work. However, the roof parapets had been removed leaving the roof in an unsafe condition. Public Liability insurance remains in place to guard against the consequences of passersby in the street being injured at any time, but it was stressed that nobody should attempt to enter the building at any time.

The Circuit's annual report and accounts were accepted to the meeting. You can download a copy from the Circuit website – go to www.ealingtrinity.org.uk/treasurers-and-finance and click on the link.

Cathy Snow, the new Circuit Safeguarding Officer was welcomed to the meeting. Cathy highlighted the poor attendance from our churches at the Safeguarding Training Meeting - only four churches had attended the training. Cathy is willing to attend Church Council meetings to provide support to our churches.

Finally, Rev Rachel Bending was delighted to announce that Deacon Lemia Nkwelah will be ordained this year. The ceremony will take place at Methodist Central Hall Westminster on Sunday 3rd July. Congratulations were extended to Lemia.

The next Circuit Meeting will be held on 9th June at Hanwell.

Southall Schools Project: Update

Rev Karen Greenidge, Southall Interfaith Secondary Schools Educator

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. (Jeremiah 29:1)

Since the last Circuit Meeting (on 8th March), *Jeremiah 29:11* has been the verse that has kept me going, as God, continues to guide me with the plans for this project.

In the last couple of months, I have put together a ‘Southall Interfaith Schools Panel.’ The Panel is made up of a group of people from a Christian, Muslim, Sikh and Hindu background. As well as developing and offering appropriate assemblies and classroom sessions from a Christian perspective, the aim of the Interfaith Panel is to provide resources for secondary schools and students in Southall, to develop an awareness of different faith/religious perspectives on moral and ethical issues and to help ‘unite’ young people of all communities irrespective of their religious belief, cultural or social background. At present I am working on lesson plans and creating a leaflet for secondary schools about the Interfaith Panel detailing what we can offer them, such as Quiet Zones, Youth Faith Ambassadors, classroom sessions and assemblies.

I have made a good connection with Villers High School in Southall after meeting with the Head Teacher and a Governor. From June I am hoping to work with the RE teacher and do some classroom sessions and see where we go from there. In July, I will be hosting a visit from Featherstone High School at St John's Church Southall, as part of their 'Curriculum week - local places of worship' sessions. I will be sharing with them what Christians believe and show them around the church. This will be done in a fun and active way.

As I prepare for the work ahead, I leave you with this verse, which keeps me in good faith. "For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength."
(Philippians 4:13)

Editor's Note

There is a special page on the Circuit website where you can read about the Southall Schools Project. Reports by the Interfaith Worker, Rev Karen Greenidge will be added to the page on a regular basis. Go to -

www.ealingtrinity.org.uk/southall-schools-project/

Putting our Faith into Action at the Mayoral Assembly

Alison Kemp, Acton Hill

On 28th April, members of the Circuit attended the Mayoral Assembly at the Copper Box Arena in the Olympic Park, Stratford. Around 30 members from churches across the Circuit attended: Gerald, Sue and Rita Barton, Janet Bettaccini, Esther Brown, Rebecca Catford, Hannah Cox, Deacon Richard Goldstraw, Josh Goddard, Yvonne Hill, Nalin Jayasinghe, Rachel Kamara, Andrew Lavelle, Ed Moline, Angela Morlese, Sylvia Murray, Sandra Newman, Lemia Nkwelah, Joyce Scott, Vinnette Small, Rev. Jennifer Smith, Gill Standfield, David Walker, Catherine and Rachel Whitehouse, Barbara, Ben and Jonathan Williams, Charles Wiredu and Angela, and I think all found it a lively and thought provoking expression both of our faith and of our democracy at work.

The Assembly was organized by London Citizens, which brings together faith groups, schools, colleges and universities, together with other community organisations to raise our voices in a non-party political way on issues that concern our communities. London Citizens have organized Assemblies around Mayoral elections before, but this was their most ambitious event to date – bringing together 6,000 Londoners to show the mayoral candidates the strength of our feeling on issues that affect London.

The Assembly sought, and received, public commitments on affordable housing, living wage, youth employment and citizenship and integration from the 2 front-running Mayoral candidates, Zac Goldsmith and Sadiq Khan.

The Circuit had decided to participate based on our previous involvement with London Citizens on the housing crisis in London. This matters to our Circuit because a number of us are affected by the housing crisis, or know someone who is. Indeed we have lost members who have had to move away from the area because they cannot find affordable housing in London. Secondly, the Church has always had a conscience for social justice and been visible in the community on the basis of our faith. And thirdly, as a landlord ourselves, policies that support a fair housing market matter to us.

London Citizens made four demands of the mayoral candidates on housing which were met by both candidates. This is what our new Mayor Khan undertook:

- On Community Land Trusts, where the value of a the land is held in trust, significantly reducing the price at which affordable housing is bought and sold, London Citizen's asked the candidates to deliver 1,000 Community Land Trust Homes in London by 2020. Khan said he would be more ambitious, and aim for 1,000 by the end of his first year.
- To establish a permanent task force to address the issue of rogue landlords, with Khan pledging to name and shame rogue landlords.
- To support a Living Rent, where the rent in affordable housing will be based on average income in the borough rather than the market rate.
- And to support sustainable development standards to ensure that affordable housing provision is included in every development.

Personally, I was helping to staff the doors at the event, and I found it inspiring to see the wave of attendees from excited schoolchildren to elderly monks queuing to enter – knowing that there had been a cycle of church services around the venue prior to the event, and that Muslim and Jewish groups would share the floor of the venue after the event for closing prayers.

Now the Mayoral election is over, London Citizens will continue to engage with the new Mayor and his team, to ensure they live up to his commitments. If you would like to know more please ask me or, visit <http://londoncitizens.com>.

Summer will soon be here so get ready for Hanwell's

Beach Party

Saturday 25th June

A Beach Party and Teddy Bears' Picnic down on the beach with crafts and other activities including a sandcastle competition.

at Hanwell Methodist Church

London Mayoral Assembly

Gerald Barton, Editor

Along with a host of others, around 30 people from our Circuit joined London Citizens for the London Mayoral Assembly at the Copper Box Arena on 28th April. Thanks go to Alison Kemp at Acton Hill for organising our participation.

Ealing Trinity's banner was carried into the Arena at the start of proceedings by Rita Safta and myself (that's us circled in the picture on the next page). Both being short, we did our best to carry it higher than the others!



Ealing Trinity's banner being held aloft at the opening of the Hustings

The Assembly was a 'civilised' affair with proceedings well controlled by the organisers. We were asked to clap and respond positively when the candidates committed themselves to the 'asks' put forward by London Citizens, and remain silent when they didn't. The two candidates invited to the Assembly, Zac Goldsmith and Sadiq Khan were also on their best behaviour. Both responded positively to London Citizens as an organisation and, in general also to what they were being asked to commit themselves to. Sadiq Khan pretty much accepted all of London Citizens' 'asks'. Zac Goldsmith, committed himself to most of them, but would not make specific commitments on certain aspects of housing policy – he said he would not commit to deliver what he could not be certain of being able to achieve. It wasn't quite what London Citizens wanted to hear, but was honest nonetheless.

The election has, of course already happened. We'll see how far the new Mayor, Sadiq Khan is able to meet his commitments over the next few years. Whatever he manages to achieve, the Assembly was a demonstration of how a well-organised group such as London Citizens can move the political debate.

Christian Aid in Bangladesh

June Thompson, Kingsdown

I was delighted to read in *In-touch* that Christian Aid is this year focusing on Bangladesh and in particular is flood-proofing homes. Having previously worked on Bhola, a small low-lying island in Bangladesh in the mouth of the Ganges Delta, I can vouch for the fact that floods are a terrifying part of everyday life there.

Although people on these islands work very hard and children are well loved and cared for, the continual flooding of their land and homes in addition to cyclones means poverty, disease and malnutrition continue to flourish. And no, they cannot just move to higher ground as there isn't any, and yes, Family Planning clinics are available but these have to go hand in hand with education and good health and knowing that the children you have will survive and grow up.

Incidentally, although Bangladesh is predominately a Muslim country the *Save the Children Fund* medical team I worked with employed ethnic Christians and Hindus as well as Muslim staff and everyone got on surprisingly well, including insisting that each religious holiday was celebrated by all staff. An idea that could perhaps be adopted by multi-cultural Britain.

Re: Mother Theresa becoming a Saint

I was also fortunate when working in Bangladesh to meet Mother Theresa. This came about when on a short break in Calcutta where I met a Catholic priest and an Irish volunteer working for CARE who had an appointment to meet her. They very kindly invited me to go along with them. Although the meeting was brief my lasting memory was the fact that while speaking to each person Mother Theresa focused her attention completely on that person and gave the impression that at that time only he or she mattered. A rare gift indeed!

That Referendum....

Gerald Barton, Editor

The forthcoming referendum on 23rd June on the UK's relationship with the European Union is simply too important for me not to make at least some reference to it. In-touch is not the place to argue for or against our membership of the Union, so I'm not going to make any comment about what I think we should do, one way or the other. Suffice to say that the result of the vote could have profound implications not just for the UK, but for the European Union itself.

If you are a bit bewildered by the claim and counter-claim of the campaigners, you may find the 'reality check' on the BBC News website helpful. It takes the claims made by both sides and subjects them to a little factual analysis. At times this exposes errors, factual inaccuracies and over-statement of cases by both sides. It's useful to get a better understanding of what's being said – go to www.bbc.co.uk/news.

In a similar vein, the Full Fact website sets out the 'facts', such as they are on a range of issues, checking over the claims of the opposing sides. Reading their analyses, not everything is quite as straightforward as some of our politicians make out. Go to <https://fullfact.org/europe>.

For straightforward facts and statistics, the European Referendum Facts website can also be useful – go to www.eureferendumfacts.co.uk. This website doesn't give opinions, just the basic factual information.

For a rather different perspective on the debate, the Joint Public Issues Team of the Baptist Union, the Methodist Church, the United Reformed Church, the Church of Scotland with the support of the Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office has produced a booklet titled '**Think, Pray, Vote: EU referendum resources for churches**'. This booklet is intended as a set of 'briefing notes' on various issues relating to the EU - the single market, sovereignty and subsidiarity, the free movement of people, peace and international relations etc, which can be used in discussions and/or personal reflection. It doesn't argue the case one way or another, but does attempt to view the issues from a Christian perspective. As the introduction says:

As Christians we are called to work, live and pray for a better society. This includes participating in the political processes that shape the lives of our communities, our country and our world. It is our identity as followers of Jesus that will both engage us in the referendum and shape our response. How, then, do we allow our faith to inform our answer to one of the biggest political decisions facing the United Kingdom?

Finally, a couple of quotations. Before the 1975 referendum, Jim Callaghan said something along the lines of, "Whatever you think, vote!" Clearly it's important that as many of us as possible do just that this time around, so do vote! Secondly, before the Scottish referendum in 2014, the Queen asked that people 'think carefully before they vote'. We should do the same now.

You can download a copy of the "Think, Pray, Vote: EU referendum resources for churches" by going to: www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/issues/eu-referendum/

Victim Support

I recently received an e-mail from Victim Support outlining their services. As it could be of interest, I decided to include it in this edition of In-touch - Editor

If you've been a victim of any crime or have been affected by a crime committed against someone you know, we can help you find the strength to deal with what you've been through. We are an independent charity and our services are free and available to everyone, whether or not the crime has been reported and regardless of when it happened.



Victim Support's Range of Services

What we do is similar to counselling, but it's not the same. Counselling is a very specific type of therapy practised by qualified professionals who analyse a person's entire life and history to help them understand themselves better. That's not something most victims of crime need – usually, they just need some help dealing with the emotional turmoil caused by being a victim.

If we think a victim does need full counselling, for example with problems such as post-traumatic stress disorder, we can help to arrange it.

Our volunteers are trained to listen, give information and offer feedback. They help people make sense of what they've been through, tell them about the choices they can make and help them feel like they are getting their lives under control again. Talking to one of our volunteers gives victims and witnesses the chance to get things off their chest and let go of distressing experiences. We call this providing emotional support.

Being a victim of crime can lead to all kinds of practical problems. This can range from minor, annoying issues (such as damage to your property or having to fill in insurance forms), through to serious medical problems or the loss of your home.

While emotional support can help you deal with your feelings after a crime, practical problems often act as reminders of what you've been through and make it harder to get your life back under control. That's why we also offer help with sorting out the practical effects of being a victim. This can be as simple as providing help with filling out forms (for example for compensation claims), or getting broken doors and windows fixed. We can also help with bigger problems such as getting medical treatment, getting rehoused or dealing with the criminal justice system over the weeks and months of a long, complicated trial.

If you need more specialist help that we don't think we can provide ourselves, we can contact other agencies for you to help get the support you need. We work closely with a whole range of charities and other organisations with expertise that can assist you with a wide range of situations caused by crime.

Victim Support will help you whether or not a crime was reported. Our service is confidential, and we will not pass on information to third parties without consent unless we think someone is at serious risk of harm and urgent help is needed to protect them.

For more information or to request help, go to www.victimsupport.org.uk or call 0808 16 89 111.

Arminianism

Gerald Barton, Editor

A little while ago, when I was researching the article in the last edition of In-touch on the Jedi 'religion', I came across a reference to Methodism (amongst others) being based on the 'Arminian heresy'. "What!" thought I, "Methodism, based on a heresy! Surely not!" So, I thought I had better have a look at this out of curiosity if nothing else.

As I read a bit about Arminianism, my first reaction was that it was a piece of Reformation theology of a rather arcane nature which needn't bother us now – the kind of thing that people used to go to the stake for, but now doesn't seem quite so important. However, as I read around the subject a bit more closely, I found myself thinking "Yes, I agree with that", "I'm not sure about that" and so on. It then struck me that, not only did I have thoughts about these things, but also that I had a number of implicit assumptions about them which I had never questioned nor even really made conscious.

So, what is Arminianism all about.....

Arminianism is based on the ideas of Jacobus Arminius (1560 – 1609), a Dutch Reformed theologian. He was taught by Calvin's successor, Theodore Beza, but after his own studies of the Bible, he rejected his teacher's theology that it is God who unconditionally elects some for salvation. Instead Arminius proposed that the election of God was *of believers*, thereby making it conditional on faith. I confess that I've never really gone a bundle on Calvinism, especially the idea that God pre-destines some for salvation whilst, implicitly at least, pre-condemning the rest. Arminius clearly didn't like it either. To me, salvation should, at least in principle be available to all.



Jacobus Arminius
1560 - 1609

Dutch Arminianism was originally set out in the 'Remonstrance' of 1610, a theological statement signed by 45 ministers and submitted to the States General of the Netherlands. These articles asserted that:

1. Salvation (and condemnation on the day of judgment) was conditioned by the graciously-enabled faith (or unbelief) of man;
2. The atonement is qualitatively adequate for all men, "yet that no one actually enjoys [experiences] this forgiveness of sins, except the believer ..." and thus is limited to only those who trust in Christ;
3. "That man has not saving grace of himself, nor of the energy of his free will," and unaided by the Holy Spirit no person is able to respond to God's will;

4. The (Christian) grace "of God is the beginning, continuance, and accomplishment of any good," yet man may resist the Holy Spirit; and
5. Believers are able to resist sin through grace, and Christ will keep them from falling; but whether they are beyond the possibility of ultimately forsaking God or "becoming devoid of grace ... must be more particularly determined from the Scriptures."

Taking each of Arminius' five points in a little more detail –

1. Arminius believed that man's free will was impaired by the effects of original sin. However, God's grace (in this case also called 'universal prevenient grace') restores our free will so that we can choose to accept (or reject) the offer of salvation through Jesus Christ. As John Wesley stated quite forcefully, humans were in fact totally corrupted by original sin, but God's prevenient grace allows free will to operate.
2. In essence, whilst salvation is offered to all, it's up to us to decide whether we accept it or not. Whilst God foresees who will, and who will not accept salvation, the choice is ultimately down to us.
3. Christ's death was suffered for all people and benefits all people – it's universal and for all. Those who, through faith accept the offer of salvation God numbers among the 'elect'.
4. If people resist the offer of salvation, God does not seek to overcome their resistance as this would be a violation of their free will. The grace of God works for good in all people, and brings about newness of life through faith, but saving grace can be resisted.
5. Those who are incorporated into Christ by a true faith are given the strength, through the assisting grace of the Holy Spirit, to enable them to persevere in the faith. However, it may be possible for believers to fall from grace as free will is retained throughout life, thus leaving open the possibility of choosing to walk away.

This is about how we can come to faith and how we can receive assurance of salvation. In many ways, it is trying to square the circle between the idea that we, as human beings cannot achieve salvation by ourselves, or by any act of our own (unaided) will, with the idea that salvation is available to all. In contrast, Calvin held that salvation was an unconditional gift of God granted to those whom God chose to grant it to, and not others. For Arminius, it was only by God's grace that we could come to salvation, but that with the aid of the Holy Spirit any person could make that choice and receive salvation. However, salvation would only come to those who believed. The fifth article raises the question of how we maintain our position of salvation – once achieved (or should I say granted), would the Holy Spirit keep us from falling, or could we fall away from grace?

Does any of this sound 'heretical'? Thinking about it, I find there's a certain sense of familiarity in the Arminian view. Perhaps this is not surprising, John Wesley and Methodism were heavily influenced by Arminius' thinking, so the kind of teaching and preaching I've heard down the years must reflect his view of things. Nonetheless, when Arminius' 'Remonstrance' was put to the Synod of Dort in 1618 – 1619 it was roundly condemned it as 'heresy'. Hmmm....

Looking at some of the reasons put forward for declaring Arminius' views 'heresy', I'm inclined to say that the basic problem was that he had departed from Calvinism. Of course, Arminians and Calvinists both support their views with reference to Scripture, but come to different conclusions. It's a bit of a problem with this kind of argument – Scripture can be used in many ways to support many different kinds of view without necessarily coming to incontrovertible conclusions.

Using various passages of Scripture as a base, Calvinists argue that God chose whom he would give salvation 'before time began' so that Christ's atoning work on the Cross was for the ones God had chosen and only them, not for all people. Furthermore because original sin left mankind 'totally depraved', there was absolutely nothing people could do to come to faith except as God chose. Free will has nothing to do with it with, or without the aid of God's grace. We don't come to faith by any choice of our own, but by God choosing whether we, as individuals are, or are not to be numbered amongst His 'elect'.

Underlying this is the idea that God is 'absolutely sovereign and all-powerful' and therefore what God decides *must* happen. This is a familiar idea and many of us would almost automatically agree with it, but it has the logical implication that everything humans do is determined by God and therefore human free will is irrelevant. If this is the case, God's grace is therefore irresistible, it simply cannot be refused. It then follows that if you are numbered amongst the 'elect' you cannot fall away.

To my mind Calvinism is pretty stark stuff. Having always believed that salvation and God's love are 'universal', ie that they are there for all, to hear it argued that they are not and are only there for those whom God has already chosen, paints God in rather unappealing colours. The implication has to be that God has willed into existence countless people who are not numbered in His 'elect' and are therefore condemned to eternal torment in 'the other place' with no chance of redemption. It makes me wonder why he didn't just create the elect, pop them into heaven and not bother with creating the rest. It would have avoided an awful lot of trouble and misery. Or maybe I'm just being heretical....

Both Arminius and Calvin argued from the basis of Scripture. However, they drew very different conclusions. As a 'plain man' I don't feel much in a position to adjudicate between the two, except with reference to what I feel I *can* believe. My personal starting point is that God's love and grace are there for all – I would find it difficult to believe in a God whose grace is selective, there for some but not for others. So, in conclusion and as far as it goes, I'm with you Mr Arminius and Mr Wesley.

Is Going to Church Like Going to the Theatre? A Response

Kathleen Loveridge, Kingsdown

'In many ways it is,' said Alan Smith in his recent article. But I would maintain that in many ways it isn't! Not least the fact that I've just paid £44 for a ticket to see 'King Lear' at the Barbican in November, and attendance at public worship is actually free (despite the fact that we have a collection plate waved in front of us every time we attend). For Christians, sharing in the life and worship of the church is not a choice as attending a theatrical performance is. It is an obligation, one to which we commit ourselves in our Confirmation promises. (See Methodist Worship Book, p 101)

However, many of the themes raised by Alan Smith are well worth consideration and honest reflection. Too often, perhaps, our attitude to worship is more like being a member of an audience – even a critic – than the participants we are meant to be. One of the primary impulses behind the Protestant Reformation was a resistance against being merely witnesses of something the priest enacted on the congregation's behalf, in a language that most could not understand in any case. In our Methodist tradition the contribution of the whole lay congregation has been a prominent feature from the start, in reading scripture and leading extempore prayers, in singing psalms and hymns and in preaching.

But more important still, surely, is each person's engagement with the moments of praise, confession, thanksgiving and intercession in an active way. Surely at church we should not behave as passive spectators of a show someone else has produced for us; our preparation beforehand, our attention during, and our reflection following worship are essential parts of the whole. Take the act of praise for example. How can we 'praise' God for the wonderful world he has created if we have not, during the week, taken time to look around us at the signs of the changing seasons or the vast beauty of the night sky, or delighted in the companionship of friends and family?

Or, if we have not paid attention to the daily news, taken notice of public and political events and formed opinions regarding them, how fervent can be the echoes in our minds when we are invited to pray for 'refugees, the marginalised, those who are less fortunate than ourselves'?

Similarly, we can leave a theatrical performance and think no more about it if we wish. But to go from worship without later reflection on the scriptures and sermon we have heard, no personal engagement in ensuring we act as Christ's hands and feet, speaking his words and showing his compassion for our neighbours, would seem to me to be a waste of our time.

In another way, however, I sometimes find members of the congregation behave much like the audience in a theatre. Few things are more disappointing when engrossed in a performance than being distracted by one's neighbours, whether it is their fidgety behaviour or their 'whispered' comments to their neighbour.

Regrettably in my experience this happens almost as often – sometimes even more frequently – in church as in a theatre. Does it matter? I would argue that it matters a great deal. Apart from the reverence each of us owes to God in his presence, do we not also owe it to our neighbours to ensure that their devotions are not interrupted by our irrelevant and distracting behaviour? Theatre authorities help by reminding their audience about switching off mobile phones and by not allowing late comers to enter until a suitable ‘break’ in the performance. But I confess that I do sometimes find myself irritated in church when it becomes obvious that some people are not paying attention to what is being said to them, as though they were not responsible in any way for creating and maintaining the worshipping atmosphere.

Such an atmosphere can, of course, be created in many different ways. Attending a Cathedral celebration of Evensong, is completely different from an experience of Quaker worship, and different again from the traditional non-conformist ‘hymn sandwich’. Yet all are valid; and for some Christians a varied diet is more stimulating than the same again every week. We may respond to different styles of worship at different stages of our lives, or in changing circumstances. Consequently, I think the questions Alan asks about small congregations are perhaps too simple. I believe the variety available is a valid reflection of the variety of our personalities and needs; as long as the focus is on the worship of the one, true God, and the teachings are according to Christian doctrine as revealed to the Church, all things are acceptable – though I am likely to be more comfortable with some than with others. Too often, perhaps, we experience change as always less than continuity, and might find new insights and deeper spiritual experiences if we were more open to experimentation.

In questioning why we might attend a particular theatrical performance, and whether we might vary our church attendance on the same principles, Alan carefully avoids addressing one very contentious point. What part does the preacher or worship leader, priest or pastor play in our attendance at a particular act of worship? I have long maintained in principle that all those accredited and appointed by church authorities to lead worship deserve equal respect and an equal hearing. While some may prove more stimulating than others, or help me to approach God more or less easily, I find I always take something away with me. And I try to seek reasons in my own preparation, concentration or receptiveness if the worship leaves me with any feeling of emptiness. Having said that, human failings being what they are, I too have my preferences, my high and low moments. But only once, in sixty years’ experience, have I deliberately avoided worship because it was to be led by a particular preacher.

I do think Alan’s point about the critics is interesting. As a Worship Leader I often find it difficult to reply to the comment, ‘A lovely service. Well done.’ It’s not that I don’t appreciate people’s kind words, but I trust that their responses are not simply a dutiful acknowledgement of something done for them. A good review of a play will ask, and try to answer, such questions as, ‘How did the actors engage with the audience and make them think?’ What new insights into human relationships did the producer give us, for example by putting actors of a Shakespeare play in

modern dress, or casting a woman as Hamlet?’ As we leave worship shouldn’t we be asking, ‘How attentive have I really been to all the features that contributed to this ‘feel-good’ experience?’ ‘How have my opinions been challenged or changed?’ ‘Have I learned anything new through hearing a familiar Bible story in an unfamiliar translation? Or seeing it expressed through drama or dance?’

Perhaps even more important are such questions as, ‘Why did a particular aspect of the experience make me feel uncomfortable? Was it that I wasn’t concentrating properly, or, do I really disagree with the point being made? And why? Let me explore that further with the preacher, or in my fellowship group.’ And simply, ‘I prayed that the hungry may be fed; what shall I donate to the food bank this week?’

In his final paragraph Alan suggests that theatrical productions are successful when ‘the entire team responsible . . . (have) a single purpose’. I would like to make a similar claim for an act of worship, although in this context I would avoid the term ‘successful’. Worship that is ‘rewarding and inspiring’ is that which glorifies God and acknowledges all that has been done for humankind through the life, death and resurrection of his Son, Jesus. And our gratitude for this should mean that we each commit ourselves wholly and gladly to the experience. It’s not just the preacher and the organist, not just the stewards and the junior church, although each has a part to play. Surely, it is the contribution of every member of the congregation, every person present focusing on God that makes an act of worship a valid and appropriate offering to Him.

Whence cometh my help....?

Gerald Barton, Editor

At the start of April we spent some time in Catania in Sicily during which we visited Aci Castello, an old fishing village a short bus ride from the city. Whilst wandering around we were intrigued by a sign ostensibly directing you to the Tourist Office.

There is what looks like an entrance and there are steps going down, but the sign points resolutely upwards. So, what should you do if you want information or help?

As the sign is so clear as to direction, we could only conclude that you should, well, pray.

Let God be your guide!



The Museum of Methodism, John Wesley's House and Wesley's Chapel

Volunteers Wanted

The Museum of Methodism, Wesley's House and Wesley's Chapel are all 18th century buildings right in the centre of London. This stunning heritage site is one of the most important Methodist places in the UK and Wesley's House, his home for over a decade is one of the finest surviving small Georgian townhouses in London.

The Museum of Methodism tells the history of Methodism from John Wesley to the present day and its contribution to shaping Britain's political and social history. John Wesley's House stands next to the Chapel.

Interested in getting involved in Methodist heritage?

Meet different people from all around the world and be part of a close-knit team! Heritage stewards help in the museum, John Wesley's House and the Chapel; some also assist in the collections archive.

The Museum of Methodism is keen to recruit Heritage Stewards to help welcome and guide visitors, as well as Learning and Outreach Assistants to assist with running children's workshops and engage with the local community. No previous experience is necessary. Everyone is welcome.

Full training will be provided and the Museum will pay travelling expenses and also offer a volunteer discount in the museum shop.

For more information email museum@wesleyschapel.org.uk or call 020 7253 2262.

www.wesleyschapel.org.uk/museum.htm



Remember in Summer

Compiled by Mary Newman, Pitshanger

Praise to you, O faithful God!
You never fail those who trust in you,
But you allow them to share in your glory.
You fight for us against everything
That could attack us or do us harm.
You are our shepherd.
And free us from the snare.
You protect us who honour you, O God;
Great is the sweetness that you give.

Notker (c.840-912)

One of the best things to have happened in the past century in the Christian church is the way in which many denominations have come together to learn about the beliefs we have in common and the central core of the Gospel. I found this prayer in a Roman Catholic church in Holborn but it could equally have been written for a Protestant congregation.

Father,

Slow to anger, abounding in mercy.
You see us and run to us
when we are far away from you,
You find your way to us
when we cannot find our way to you,
You are always faithful when we are unfaithful.

Jesus Christ,

You entered the house of sinners,
You sat at the table of the poor,
You mounted the Cross, your throne of mercy.

Holy Spirit,

You pour your healing gifts over our wounds,
You anoint us to bring good news to the poor,
You send us out as missionaries of mercy.

God of Mercies

Have mercy on us,
so that where sin abounds
your grace may abound all the more,
and we shall become like you, Merciful. Amen

At Christmas I was introduced to a woman who told me she goes to Ealing Abbey. I told her that I go to Pitshanger Methodist Church and she replied. "There are many roads leading from Damascus." How true!

A Gift of Life

When my husband was doing National Service in Germany he was taken in an R.A.F. lorry about 50 miles or so to give blood for a service man who had been in an accident, who like him, had blood of a rare group.

I wonder whether you read that on January 1st 2016 it was 100 years since the first successful blood transfusion, as we know them today – by using coded, stored blood, by the Royal Army Medical Corps. There was a desperate need to save men, who were literally bleeding to death in the front-line dressing stations from battle-field wounds.

What a wonderful gift of life that is just as important today to help men, women and children as it was a century ago.

(On a personal note, I was very disappointed, when I was 18 and went to be a donor to be given a letter to take to hospital, followed by another letter thanking me but telling me that I needed blood as much as they did!)

You Don't Need Two Kidneys to Knit

That was the headline that caught my attention in a recent news item. It was about an 82 year old woman who had given a kidney, not to a close relative or friend but to a stranger. Here was "an altruistic donation" and an unknown recipient who would be a tissue match, would receive it.

In spite of her advancing age she had been told she had 2 healthy kidneys and in an act of extreme generosity she had chosen to donate one. When asked about it she said, "You don't need two kidneys to knit."

What a wonderful gift of love!

Two Different People, Two Different Stories

Those of you who watch Songs of Praise may have seen Thea Bristow, who won £15 million on the Lottery one week. She could hardly believe it when she checked her ticket and realised her good fortune. She didn't tell anyone that evening not even her husband. Next morning she went to church as usual and after lunch told her husband. His immediate re-action was "That's good. Now we can take all the Cubs on holiday."

So that is what they did. They took the whole group to Canada. Her husband, a keen football supporter bought Torquay United F.C. and completely re-fitted the stands. They paid to have the organ in their church re-fitted and bought a beautiful wood for people to enjoy to save it from development. What a lovely story!

This is in contrast to a story told me by a friend of mine who lives in Lincolnshire. Her nephew suddenly sold his house and without any explanation to his friends or family bought a vast sheep farm in New Zealand. He had lived in a small village in England and it became known that someone from the village had bought a winning lottery ticket, and people soon put two and two together.

He didn't share his fortune with any of his family or friends. A sad story.

A Thought for Every Day this Summer

The Spirit of God gives each person a different gift. Use what is given to you as a gift to God.

Some Thoughts about Grace (taken from "A Gift of Grace" from the Methodist Church)

For grace is given not because we have done good works, but in order that we may be able to do them.

St. Augustine of Hippo

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God.

Ephesians 2 v8

If heaven were by merit, it would never be heaven to me, for if I were in it I should say, "I am sure I am here by mistake; I am sure this is not my place; I have no claim to it." But if it be of grace and not of works, then we may walk into heaven with boldness.

C.H. Spurgeon, 1834-1892

Writing the above made me think about my lovely cousin Joy Williams, and I hope you will forgive me for repeating what I wrote in an earlier 'Remember.'

In spite of operations and treatment for cancer, Joy's health was failing and she knew her time on earth was limited.

She asked the question of her vicar, "Do you think I'll get into heaven?"

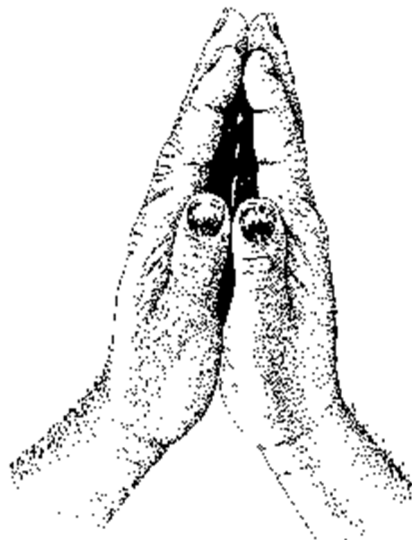
"Joy," came the reply, "if you don't, then none of us will."

I forget which of our lovely local preachers used this as a benediction. Why don't we all think of it each day this summer?

Give time to that which matters most.
Share your gifts with those who need the most.
Show your gratitude to those who have blessed you the most.
Be still with the one who loves you most,
And live the now of every moment and every day,
To the glory of God. Amen

Readings for Summer

A Hymn of Thanksgiving	Psalm 136
God's Offer of Mercy	Isaiah 55
Jesus Rejoices	Luke 10 v21-23
The Work of the Holy Spirit	John 16 v4-15



Circuit Directory Update

Churches will shortly be asked to update their entries in the Circuit Directory.

Forthcoming Events around the Circuit

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

June

9th Thur 20.00 **Circuit Meeting at Hanwell**

25th Sat tba **Hanwell 'Beach Party' & Teddy Bears Picnic**

July

Circuit Farewell Service for Rev's Peter & Suva Catford and Deacon Richard Goldstraw
Date to be confirmed

2nd Sat 10.00 **Kingsdown Book Fair**
12.30 *Proceeds to Action for Children*

August

None notified

September

Circuit Welcome Service for Rev Shirlyn Toppin and Rev Yemi Jaiyesimi
Date to be confirmed

17th Sat 10.00 **Kingsdown Book Fair**
12.30 *Proceeds to All We Can*

Articles for '**In-touch**' Issue No 77 (**September - November**) should be sent by e-mail headed '**In-touch**' to the Editor, **Gerald Barton**, or as hard copy to the Circuit Office.

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