

St Paul's Methodist Church, Crawley
Extraordinary Times
a magazine to help us through COVID-19
Issue 67 **July 18th 2021**

From the Minister and the Leadership Team...

Following the Government announcement that virtually all Covid restrictions will be lifted on July 19th, The Methodist Church published a Property Update, confirming that, providing everything proceeds as expected, Methodist churches across England will be allowed to open for public worship from Sunday July 25th. No restrictions are specified, but the Property Update suggests that ministers and leadership teams might wish to issue guidelines for individual churches.

Our church leadership team met this week and, in the light of these guidelines along with the increasingly high infection rate, carefully considered how to conduct our services from July 25th to help everyone feel comfortable and confident. We will continue with hand sanitising as we arrive, we will ask everyone to wear face coverings in the building, and we will continue to sign in just in case of a need to trace people afterwards. Other aspects, such as arrangement of seating in the church, length of services and how much singing we include, are being considered during this next week. We will let you know more details as soon as possible before next weekend.

Our Superintendent Minister, Rev Melvyn Cooke, will lead our worship on the 25th July so please put the date in your diary, and we hope to see you at St Paul's that morning for our 10.30am service.

What's On

Sunday 18th 10:30am in church and on-line with Mrs Helen Greaves

Sunday 25th 10:30am in church and on-line with Rev Melvyn Cooke

Find all online services on [St Paul's Facebook page](#) and [website home page](#)

For Kids and young people

Friday 16th 6-7pm Kids and Young People *Friday Funday*

7-7:30pm Young People's Singing Group

Note that this is the last session of the term for Friday Funday and Young Peoples's Singing Group. They will restart in September.

In your prayers

Pray for our church as we prepare to worship a little more freely, including singing together, from the 25th July. Pray for all our preachers, musicians and stewards as they serve us week by week. Ask God to help us set aside our personal desires and anxieties and to put Jesus at the heart of our worship.

Continue to pray for Neil, for Pam, for Lyn and Richard and for all others you know who need prayers at this time.

Send your prayer requests to ask.stpauls@gmail.com

Permission must be received from a person before their name is put on the Church prayer list

Methodist Presidency and Youth President condemn racism following Euro 2020 final

The Rev Sonia Hicks and Barbara Easton, President and Vice-President of the Methodist Conference, have issued the following statement responding to racist attacks against England team members after the Euro 2020 final:

"The hideous response towards the young black players of the England football team after the penalty shootout at the European cup finals is both abhorrent and deeply upsetting. Our theme for this year is *God's invitation to all people to take a place at God's table*. In her address to the Methodist Conference, Sonia spoke about the experiences of racism that had touched her and her family; Barbara spoke about diversity and inclusion bringing out the very best that people had to offer. We pray for the many who experience racism in their everyday lives and that we may all model ourselves on principles of love, compassion and respect for self and our neighbour alike."

Phoebe Parkin, Youth President, has issued the following statement:
"Sancho, Rashford and Saka represented England so well. The racist abuse directed at them and the toxic nationalism shown by some England supporters burning Italian flags, booing during the national anthem and attacking Italian fans is inexcusable. Football isn't the problem. The problem is that we live in a society where sexism, racism, nationalism and violence are enabled, where not enough of us (including myself) actively work to challenge even the lowest levels of sexism, racism and nationalism. Jesus showed us that we should be peacemakers and showed us that we should love others as ourselves, showing the same grace and compassion that God shows to us."

'Picnic in the Church': Circuit Service 1st August 2021 6.30pm hosted by Redhill Methodist Church

All are welcome to join us for this circuit service as we say farewell to Rev Felicity Al-Hassan and reflect on her contribution to the life of the circuit over the last 7 years. Join us, with your own nibbles and drinks (the church will not be able to supply anything at the moment) for a time of stories, songs and informal worship as we 'picnic in the church'. Depending on the restrictions in place at the end of July you may also need to have a face covering while you are not eating or drinking. You might also like to bring a pen or pencil to take part in the activities that Rev Melvyn Cooke is planning for us.

The plan is to seat everyone around tables in small groups. The tables will be separated on the restrictions in place at the time and it is likely that there will be a limit on the number who can join. Bookings will open on 19th July 2021 at 8.00pm.
<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/circuit-farewell-service-1st-august-registration-161911518711>

If you would like to be part of the service but would prefer not to travel or be inside the building it will be live-streamed onto YouTube and the link for that is:
<https://youtu.be/LhUdZgxz3H4>

How Rev Ralph spent his sabbatical leave

I said last week that I'd share some of what I got up to on my sabbatical. In the Methodist Church ministers are very blessed to be able to take a period of three months away from their duties, in order to recharge, reflect, and engage in new challenges or creative projects that their normal schedule simply wouldn't allow. This happens every seven years in the life of a minister, so having done 25 years I've now just completed my third sabbatical. Here's what I did with it.

Family time You might expect it, really. My wife Adele is a nurse and has worked right through Covid: she needs a break more than I do! So, we made sure that we spent some good quality time together and visited both of our two daughters during sabbatical for a week each. This was easy enough for Phoebe, our youngest, who lives in Plymouth. We were able to combine our visit with some wonderful days on the South Devon coast, where we lived prior to arriving in Sussex in 2016.

Visiting our elder daughter Sally, along with her husband Sam and our two grandchildren Cassian and Merida, was an altogether different prospect. They used to live in a flat over a funeral directors on the busy main road through Sanderstead, and we used to see them all the time (we looked after the children every Tuesday!). But in January, right in the darkest depths of lockdown, they relocated to the island of Jersey, where Sally had accepted a job as youth and children's worker in an Anglican church. They swapped the flat above the funeral directors for a spacious stone built barn conversion on a farm, 20 minutes' walk from the nearest of many amazing beaches. Which is great for them, but we were obviously very keen to get over there ourselves and hang out with them for a week: which we eventually got to do in June. Lockdown regulations were a lot lighter on Jersey – shops and bars were open, masks were not compulsory, and the church was fully open. It was wonderful and quite emotional to be able to go to church and be greeted with handshakes and hugs. It was also fantastic to be able to sing together in worship. I hope you get to enjoy this same experience in our own church on July 25th.

Jersey is completely fantastic: the weather when we visited was hot and sunny, and it felt like we were in France as much as in the UK. I heartily recommend a holiday there if you've never been. And currently, if you are "double-jabbed", you can travel there without restriction on a 30 minute flight direct from Gatwick. Ironic that Adele and I are moving to the tip of Cornwall next month! But even there, we are able to fly from Newquay, so we will be travelling to Jersey regularly from now on.

Song writing I've made it a key feature of all three of my sabbaticals that I would spend some time attempting to write songs. Prior to becoming a minister, I was a professional musician and I made several albums through Christian record companies and production companies such as Kingsway. So this is part of my DNA really: but it doesn't come easy. In normal circuit life one never has the opportunity to take enough time out to get fully engaged in the creative process. On my first sabbatical I concentrated on writing worship songs for young people (because I was doing a lot of youth evangelism throughout the noughties). On my second I turned my focus to writing worship songs for adults, and I was blessed to be able to spend two weeks in a cottage in Brittany, belonging to a family from my church in Devon.

There was nothing but fields for miles in every direction, so I could really focus on the task in hand.

This time around I was hoping to escape again, but I'd set aside two weeks in April for song writing and Covid restrictions were still very tight. As it turned out I was able to go and stay at Holtwood, my former church in the depths of rural Dorset. I set up a recording studio in one of the church rooms and worked solidly every day (and often way into the night!) trying to come up with some ideas. I slept on an air mattress in the same room as the equipment each night. Fortunately, the church is fitted out with showers and an excellent kitchen. The work was intense and very challenging, at times I thought I was going to come home empty-handed. But I find that the best way to get work done is to set myself a personal deadline, so there is no opportunity for procrastination. I spent many hours sitting in the Spring sunshine outside the church door, asking the Lord for inspiration and reading the Scriptures.

It was a profoundly spiritual time, and I really felt the Spirit speaking to me. After all, the lyrics in worship songs are the most important part – they have to meaningfully convey the emotions and spiritual responses of the people, using the Word of the Lord. It's quite a responsibility to get it right! I finally emerged with a total of seven songs, all of which I'm very pleased with. I've been gradually posting them on my Youtube channel and Facebook page, and also on the church Facebook page. So by all means go and have a look and see if you like them. The songs are, of course (given that I wrote them) unashamedly contemporary in their musical style.

Hiking and Mountain Biking Some of you already know that I am keen on both of these leisure activities. I've enjoyed many hours cycling in the Surrey hills, the Seven Sisters country park, Bedgebury and Tilgate forest. I've also hiked over much of the Ashdown forest, and got to know it really well in the past five years. But I'm originally from the North East of England; and with the prospect of moving to Cornwall I wondered when I would ever get the chance to visit the region again! So maybe for the last time, I travelled up to hike the national trail following the route of Hadrian's Wall, from Carlisle to Newcastle. It was a journey of some 80 miles, and I first did it 40 years ago. So this was a nostalgic experience. I walked the whole trail in 4 and a half days, carrying my tent on my back and camping along the way. It was challenging; many shops and pubs were still closed due to the pandemic, so there wasn't a lot of food to be had. The trail is quite remote, only passing through tiny villages at best; so I often found myself pitching my tent by the side of the footpath each night, since there weren't many campsites along the way. The weather was mixed, with some hot sunny days and others (particularly in the higher areas) covered in mist and drizzle. I met lots of lovely people along the way, but a lot of the time it was just me, Jesus and the Roman wall for company. Once again, an amazing opportunity to spend time with the Lord.

On a separate occasion during sabbatical I went up to Cleveland with my mountain bike, to spend a week mountain biking in the North Yorkshire Moors National Park. This was in May, and once again Covid made things challenging. Camp sites were open but were largely fully booked. So I had the bright idea of asking my cousin if I could camp on his back lawn (he lives in a town called

Guisborough). However, my uncle got in first, insisting that I go and stay at his house on the grounds that he was already "double-jabbed". My aunt sadly died 18 months ago, after a battle with a particularly aggressive form of Parkinsons. The ensuing pandemic had made the grieving process for my uncle very challenging; so reluctantly I accepted his offer to stay in his home. As it turned out I had an opportunity to spend some real quality time with my uncle, who was very lonely and feeling that he had nothing to get up for in a morning. I've not seen the Northern branch of my family for some years, so it was a rare and special opportunity to be there for him. Plus, I got to cycle all over the national park, and my cousin ended up joining me!

Visiting Penzance If you know how the Methodist stationing process works, you will be aware that I was offered the post of Superintendent of the West Cornwall Circuit way back in November 2020. But this was all on "Zoom", or course. Normally a minister visits the inviting circuit before accepting the appointment, but not this year. I accepted the post without ever having been to Penzance, which is kind of scary! So as soon as I started sabbatical, Adele and I were very keen to travel down to the tip of Cornwall to see what we had let ourselves in for. It was the week before the shops reopened in April – not for the first time on this sabbatical, food was not readily available, and we had very limited options. But praise God, at least we now know what our house looks like (it's a 6 bedroom Victorian townhouse, for goodness sake!); and we also managed to take a peek inside two of my churches. We are really looking forward to beginning this next chapter of our lives and ministries - this appointment is challenging and frankly I can't wait. I am currently minister of two churches, St Paul's and Trinity. In Cornwall I will be minister of six churches. Plus I will be superintendent of a circuit containing 18 churches in places like St Ives, Mousehole and Carbis Bay (where the recent G7 summit was held). Our current circuit has only 5 churches in total and has more ministers than I will have in my next. You might want to think on this if your ministers here ever complain they are overworked!

Hope you enjoyed sharing in my experiences. I'll be submitting my final minister's letter to you next week before I finish my duties at the end of July. God bless, *Ralph*

Churches' Reaction to Commons' vote on international aid budget reduction

The following statement has been released on behalf of the Methodist Church, the Baptist Union of Great Britain and the United Reformed Church following the vote in the House of Commons to reduce the UK's foreign aid budget and to impose new financial tests before restoring the legal commitment to spend 0.7 per cent of Gross National Income on aid:

"The decision to renege on the UK's international development commitment is unfair, unwise and immoral. The UK Aid programme plays a vital role in helping to tackle poverty and support sustainable development in the poorest places in the world. The shrinking economy in 2020 already meant that the international development budget would be reduced and cutting this further by reducing the

target from 0.7% to 0.5% has been devastating for many vital and necessary programmes. Plans to provide people with clean water and sanitation have been put on hold, programmes to support women in family planning have been savaged, and the UK's contribution to combat neglected tropical diseases has been slashed. Under the strict criteria set for a return to the 0.7%, the £4bn cut in annual funding is likely to be perpetuated year on year. This decision will undoubtedly cost many lives

"Other major economies have shown leadership during the pandemic by increasing their international development programmes. The UK government's cut in international development stands in contrast to its recent announcement of the largest programme of spending on defence since the end of the Cold War. As those called to love our neighbours as ourselves in an interconnected world, we regard yesterday's vote as heartless and self-defeating."

*Lynn Green, General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Great Britain
The Revd Sonia Hicks, President of the Conference of the Methodist Church
Mr Peter Pay and the Revd Clare Downing, Moderators of General Assembly,
United Reformed Church*

Farewell to Extraordinary Times

Now that times are becoming rather less extraordinary, I shall be pensioning off the *Extraordinary Times* weekly newsletter after next week's issue, dated 25th July. Having discussed how to continue a regular newsletter for St Paul's with the Leadership Team we have decided that, from the beginning of August, I shall produce a fortnightly *St Paul's Newsletter* which will be sent to the majority of our congregation by email as well as being posted on the St Paul's Facebook page and website. Members and friends who do not have internet or use email will receive it through the post as usual.

In between the 2-weekly newsletters, any extra important news and information will be sent by email and posted on Facebook and the website.

As editor of ET, I'd like to thank everyone who has been so encouraging and supportive over the past 15 months. Your messages have been much appreciated. In March 2020 I never dreamt that ET would get to issue number 68, as it will next week. *Joyce*



To Arthur Parish who celebrates his 96th birthday on the 24th July. i

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St Paul's website www.crawleymethodistchurch.org.uk

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