

CHURCH ON THE TREES

A Short History

A clear out at the Community Centre which unearthed an album of photos recording the re-build in 2000, prompted me to dig out our own archives and to share with you some of the history of Church on the Trees....



It all started back in the late 1970's when the vicar, Fr Michael Newman, recognised the need for mission on the new estate of Willingdon Trees. In response to his concern, the Bishop of Lewes introduced him to a soon-to-be-licensed Parish Worker, Di Jones. She and her husband Tony, a Reader moved into the estate and set to work in October 1981.

The Centre not having been built at that time, people gathered in several home-groups on the estate. *Friday-at-Five*, a children's club began, also in a private home initially. (Later *Friday-at-Five* morphed into *Roots and Shoots*, the after-school club, which continues to this day.) The first service of what was called '**Church in-the-Trees**' took place on Whit Sunday, 1981. Home-groups continued as before, and *Friday-at-Five* moved into the Centre. It is interesting to note that in 1982 there were 60+ children attending!

In 1991, Di retired and a 'leadership team' was formed of the clergy and several lay members of the congregation. In subsequent years, the leadership changed several times. Of course, there were ups and downs, but overall Church on the Trees thrived and gave witness to the love of God.

Sadly, in May 1999 the community centre was destroyed by fire believed to be arson, and Church on the Trees experienced an unsettling few years. They continued to meet, but only during school holidays, at Oakwood Primary until the new centre was completed in 2001 when regular services recommenced on Advent Sunday (pictured). This was shortly after Fr Martin Onions' induction as Vicar. Martin's vision was, once again, to engage a full-time parish worker but sadly this was not to be, and Church on the Trees continued to be overseen by a variety of people. In 2017 I was invited by Fr

Kevin to come back to St Mary's and have a particular responsibility for 'Trees'. I feel privileged to be part of its continuing story.



Advent Sunday 2001

Over the years, so much good work has happened at Trees, often in the face of adversity and, in some cases, hostility. Apart from the regular worship and pastoral care, there have been study groups, children's and nursery groups, school ministry, parties and outings, services in Winchester House, adventure weeks (holiday clubs) arts & crafts events, musical events, coffee mornings, a lunch club, nativity & Good Friday processions. Most recently we launched *Café+Church* and were instrumental in establishing the *Wednesday Hub*.

But behind everything the beating heart is still this - ***prayer***.

I am particularly struck by the fact that it has been, and still is, largely due to *committed lay members of the church* that 'Trees' has survived. There are just too many individuals to mention by name! But I invite you to take a look at the archives and see and read for yourself (and in some cases, see and read *about* yourself!). I currently have these at home and will take the albums to *Café+Church* on Tuesdays. On the first page of the archive are these words written by the then Vicar in 1980:

“there are no plans to erect a church building. This is a situation in which the church goes out to serve the community...”

That is as true today as it is now. We serve in the name of Christ.

Revd. Merriel