

Wesley Methodist Church, Annual General Church Meeting, 23 June 2024

Ministers Report

Introduction

This report focuses on the year since the last General Church Meeting (GCM) of 30 July 2023. To quote our Superintendent Minister in a recent report, "As part of our covenant relationship with you...it is important that we work together to understand...where we are using our time and energy, which you are supporting financially... While much of our work is not seen by many people, it is important to know that we are sharing a common vision and goal for the kingdom of God."

Worship

Engaging in a variety of forms of worship has continued this year. These include our Carol Service, in which our gifts and talents are used to enhance the service and Youth services held once a quarter, when our children and young people help to prepare and lead a service. In November we celebrated our Church Anniversary, which included a Gift Day. We continue with Bible Month, an annual four-week study guide on a book of the Bible, which this year, focuses on Genesis.

We have had more Local Arrangement (LA) services this year. Thank you to Barbara Sparks and & Richard Hoyle who have led most of them.

Worship beyond Sundays have included the ecumenical Advent and Lent series, which involved Trinity URC, Wesley and The Avenue, on The Avenue Wednesday Fellowship Zoom platform. For Advent this year, we studied Journeying Through Advent with New Daylight and for Lent we joined Churches Together in High Wycombe for a brilliant initiative of sharing one treasure of each church. Wesley hosted the first series with a study of The Covenant Prayer, which I led. Sadly, the two ecumenical initiatives saw some, but very little representation from Wesley. Joint services with our Ecumenical partners have also continued this year. In January I led the service for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity hosted by Wesley. We joined Trinity URC for the Maundy Thursday service at which I preached and came together with URC and Union Baptist for the Good Friday service held at Wesley.

This year has seen some couples and families join us for services at Wesley, many of whom have arrived in the country either for study or work; mainly from Zimbabwe, Nigeria and Ghana.

Learning and Caring

At last year's General Church Meeting (GCM), about eight people indicated their willingness to start meeting for small group Bible Study. Four sessions took place, but, sadly, have been suspended due to a lack of attendance. Discussions are being had on how best to organise this during the winter months, without excluding those unable to access Zoom. It is my prayer that there will be a regrouping in the near future. The Reflections Group continues to meet on Mondays.

Another initiative agreed at last year's GCM was to hold lunches for specific groups of people. Efforts by stewards to host the first group, inviting ex-servicemen and women, did not take off.

Thank you to Sue Smart and Arlene Forbes who have joined the Pastoral team. Pastoral visits this year have focused largely on urgent home and hospital visits, where Communion is shared if required.

This year we have tried a number of initiatives to build our community up, including making myself available on Friday afternoons for conversation and prayer. We rebranded this as The Minister's Hour, but discontinued it after six weeks, because it was not well patronised. We currently come together on the last Sunday of each month to share fellowship over lunch.

In terms of Biblical studies, I ran confirmation classes in March/April which has led to two of our young people, Lyndsey and Nhyira, becoming members.

In addition to ministering and pastoring, I have been studying and training. I am currently a certified member of the Connexional Deliverance Team and a certified Supervisor, after having completed training in both areas.

Service

Two members have joined the steward team, so we currently have seven stewards serving. We also have new members on the Resource and property committee, which is very encouraging.

Service to the community has continued through services run at Hughenden Garden's Village (HGV) and The Royal Star & Garter (S&G). My colleagues Alan, Rachael and I lead services on a rota basis, supported by Lesley Hatton and Chris Green. On 6 June I led a service at S&G to commemorate the 80-year celebration of D-Day. At HGV we usually have a minimum of 20-25 worshipping (40-50 at Carol and special services) and an average of 15-20 at the S&G. My heartfelt thanks to all who regularly join us for services: Chris Green; Lesley Hatton; Catherine Green, Ann Higginbottom, Rev'd Alan Bolton; Rev'd Rachael Prince.

I have been active on Churches Together in High Wycombe (CTHW) and on Churches Together in Oakridge and Castlefield. Michael Bowker serves with me on the former. Where possible, I would encourage this model of lay and ordained working together to aid succession planning. I have also been volunteering at the Butterfly hospice, supporting patients and staff and the running of courses such as Alpha. This has been life-giving.

Evangelism and Mission

At last year's GCM, we finalised our mission statement, which we have displayed around the church: "We are a church that serves God by serving others, aiming to nurture and share our faith in Jesus Christ."

Following the Circuit Vision Day held in March, adverts have gone out for the recruitment of two Mission Enablers, who would support each church with their mission. I would like to

encourage us all to continue to think and pray about opportunities for mission. Being a town centre church comes with challenges, but many opportunities. The location of the church and being a gathered church should not discourage us from further thinking about how we can partner God in what he is already doing in our context.

With the support of a few parents and our children and young people, I started the Wesley Family Club in the Autumn, which runs on the last Friday of each month, excluding half term and holidays. We have recently started advertising this more widely - to URC Trinity and One Can. Parents accompany their children to the club. We engage in a range of activities, have some refreshments and come together to share and pray. We are grateful for the adults who support – all the parents, Michael Bowker and Lesley Hatton (from The Avenue). Our children and young people have a say in the running of the club and my thanks goes to them for their contributions.

On 28 July I say goodbye to you all and join the Wantage and Abingdon Circuit from September. Thank you all for your continued love, care and grace. Thank you for your prayers and the affirmative ways in which you have supported me in my ministry and for your rewarding partnership.

May God bless you all.

Rev'd Georgina Bondzi-Simpson
Minister, Wesley Methodist Church
June 2024