



Focus

Spring 2020

Brighton & Hove Methodist Circuit Magazine
& Circuit Plan

Andy's Letter

Dear friends,

Firstly, let me take this opportunity to say on behalf of the whole Circuit a massive thanks to both Ken Smith and Angela Millanzi for all they have done in producing this Circuit magazine.

It is not an easy task chasing up Superintendent Ministers for their letter, asking churches for their information and dates and requesting and receiving interesting articles from us all and then editing it in such a way that it fits the right number of pages. So, on behalf of us all, many, many thanks.

We are still working on the future of the magazine and would welcome any thoughts about it in terms of format, content and frequency but of course it will also depend on the abilities and available time of those who produce it.

Good news for our Circuit is that two of our local preachers have reached an important milestone in their progression.

Deeptima Massey has completed all the necessary study, trial services and interviews needed to become a fully accredited Local Preacher in the Methodist Church. Her accreditation service is taking place on February 23rd at Dorset Gardens. The service will begin at 4pm and refreshments are being served from 3pm.

Jonathan Gravestock is also fast approaching completing his training. He has completed the necessary studies and has just taken his final trial service which went well. He has to face his final interview at the Local Preachers meeting on March 5th and if that all goes to plan we will then have his accreditation service at Hove Methodist Church on May 10th at 6.30pm. We will confirm details when all is complete.

I urge you all to support them in their progression to being on Full Plan by attending these Circuit services. It is also an opportunity to show your support for all our preachers, to acknowledge the hard work that goes into becoming a preacher and the ongoing study and preparation necessary for worship services to take place across the circuit and the Connexion week by week. It is also a good opportunity to meet friends old and new.

Next a reminder that we have 2 consultation meetings about the 'God in love unites us' report on Marriage and Relationships. They are on Saturday 21st March from 9.30am till 1pm at Patcham and on Sunday 29th March from 1pm till 5pm at Woodingdean Methodist Church. Please come and share your thoughts on this important topic.

Finally, let me take this opportunity to thank you all for all you do in your churches and community. At Easter we celebrate that life and love are greater than despair and death. So live in hope and peace and share God's love in all you do and with all you meet.

Andy



God in Love Unites Us

Copies of the report and study guide are still available from the Circuit Office. There will be two opportunities to discuss this material and feedback to our District Synod and finally to Conference.

Dr Tony Leonard DGMC

One morning in December, on arriving at Dorset Gardens for worship, I was handed a copy of the winter edition of Focus magazine. My attention was also drawn to the Task Group's Report on Marriage and Relationships entitled "GOD IN LOVE UNITES US" together with its Study Guide. Later at home I read them both carefully and over the following days spent a lot of time thinking, particularly about the Task Group report, what it had to say and how it was said.

My initial reaction was that the Methodist Church had gone to great pains to address with sensitivity a variety of issues on which people hold strong and often quite different opinions and I commend members of the Task Group for their work.

But then I thought again. I am almost 81 and I am impatient to see changes introduced that will make a real difference to people's lives. Do we have to tiptoe around ideas and behaviours that are both discriminatory and hurtful? Jesus didn't flinch from challenging the religious practices of his day. The title of the report in itself should be sufficient.

My own views on marriage and relationships have developed over many years and are deeply grounded in my understanding of the nature of God. The God I know and experience daily is the living God of Creation and Love. I find it very hard indeed to show sympathy for a mind-set that defines some of my brothers and sisters in Christ as being of less worth, denies them rights or condemns and excludes them because of their gender or sexual orientation. It forces me to ask a number of questions. Are we not all children of God? Are we not all made in the image of God? Does God not love us all in equal measure? Should not that common inheritance permeate all our relationships? Kathleen and I have now been married for over 57 years and fail to see why others who share a loving relationship should be denied that same privilege.

I know it's not always easy to accept proposals that may challenge something you've grown up with, so it makes sense to seek guidance in making your decision. I hope we are all willing to do that, I certainly have. Referring to Scripture and/or

tradition can be helpful, but in my opinion neither is infallible. Relying on Scripture alone for answers simply begs more questions. For example, has God remained silent since the end of the 4th century when the list of books to be included in the Christian Bible was finally determined? Have there really been no prophetic utterances during the past two thousand years?

It is worth reminding ourselves that the Methodist Church is already willing to re-marry divorced persons and to ordain women as Ministers, each of which was once unthinkable. Both are also contrary to Scripture. I will always be grateful to our former minister, Rev. Cynthia Park, for her response to a vehement objection on Biblical grounds (Leviticus and Romans) against inviting into the Circuit a minister who was gay. She firmly, but kindly, stated, "As Christians we worship a living and loving God. We do not worship a book." I heartily concur.

Tradition as the guiding principle is also, to my mind, insufficient in itself. Traditions change over time as societies themselves change. The first recorded evidence of a marriage ceremony dates from about 2350 B.C. in Mesopotamia. Over time, marriage evolved and was embraced by the ancient Hebrews, Greeks and Romans. But for most of human history, a marriage contract had little to do with either love or religion; it was more often about property rights. In going against tradition, we Methodists can take comfort in the example of our founder himself.

For many centuries the church accepted that slavery was an acceptable practice; yet late in his life John Wesley challenged that. In his "*Thoughts upon Slavery*" he abandoned scripture and tradition in favour of reason, condemning slavery because it was so obviously wrong.

In this brief article I've expressed some of my own thoughts and I don't expect everyone to agree with me. I know that I do not have a monopoly on the truth (whatever that might be). Andy has asked that we carefully consider our position prior to the circuit discussions in March. I have done so, but want to conclude with an important additional personal statement.

I am not only very much at home at Dorset Gardens Methodist Church, but feel privileged to be a part of what DG stands for in Brighton and beyond. It is such an inclusive and welcoming society, more so than many I have experienced across the country. Naturally as members we disagree from time to time, but we do try to manage our differences in a loving and caring manner. God in Love really does unite us. May that long continue!

Dr Tony Leonard DGMC

People and Groups in New Testament times:

1. The Roman Empire

Mr Michael Hickman

This is the first of a series of articles that will look at a number of matters relating to peoples and groups in the Mediterranean world in the period c. 150 B.C. to 96 A.D.

Almost all of the people mentioned in the New Testament lived in the Roman empire which had a population of about 55 million. One exception were the 'wise men' (Mt 2 v 1) who came from the Parthian empire to the east (roughly modern day Iraq and Iran). The first emperor was Octavian, who had supreme power for 43 years (r. 27 B.C.-14 A.D.) dying peacefully of old age. In 27 B.C. he was given the title of Augustus (Lk 2 v 1). The last in this period was Domitian (r. 81-96 A.D.) who was assassinated in 96.

Augustus was a very astute ruler and was content with the reality of power whilst claiming to be restoring the Republic of Rome with rule by the Senate. His rule is called the Principate, and he termed himself *Princeps Civitatis* (First Citizen). He did not like being called 'Dominus' ('Lord') because that was what slaves called their masters. In contrast Domitian wanted to be called, 'Dominus et Deus' ('Lord and God'). John's Gospel, written at the end of the first century A.D. reflects this when Thomas calls Jesus, 'My Lord and my God' (Jn 20 v 26).

Romans and Greeks thought differently about themselves. Being a Roman had nothing to do ethnicity or language: it was a matter of being a citizen of Rome even though, like Paul, you may never have been there (Acts 16 vv 37-38). Romans saw themselves sharing a common value system which was respectful of social hierarchy (see Rom 13 vv 1-7) and took great care to perform the correct religious rituals.

Greeks saw themselves as a kinship group sharing a common language and worshipping a common collection of deities: Greeks had an attachment to their own city, of which there were many, which for centuries prevented them working together. As a general rule Latin was the official language of the western half of the empire and Greek that of the eastern half.

It is possible to think of the eastern half of the empire as a collection of city states under the authority of Rome. The largest was Alexandria (a Greek city) in Egypt with a population of about 500,000. Antioch, where the disciples were first called 'Christians' (Acts 11 v 26) had about 200,000, and Ephesus 150,000. Jerusalem was far smaller.

One of the interesting features of early Christianity is that Jesus and most, if not all, the twelve apostles, were rural or semi-rural Aramaic-speakers: whereas almost all of Paul's letters to churches were to Greek-speaking communities in cities, the only exception being that to the Galatians. The early church was based in the port cities of the eastern Mediterranean. It is worth remembering that the early church was primarily Greek-speaking, with a number of Aramaic-speakers in Galilee, Judea, Syria etc. The first Latin-speaking churches were in north Africa (modern day Tunisia) about 150 years after Jesus' death.

Outside Italy there were three different forms of province. First, there were those who governors were appointed by the Senate. Asia (south-western Turkey) with its capital at Ephesus was one of these. Secondly, there were provinces whose governors were appointed by the Emperor. These governors were called legates and often had legion(s) under their command. One of the most important of these provinces was Syria because it bordered the Parthian empire. Rome appointed its best officials to command here usually with three or four legions.

Some small areas like Judea had a prefect like Pilate appointed. Pilate was under the authority of the governor of Syria. to the east of the river Jordan. Thirdly there were provinces under the rule of client kings who had their own armies. During the early part of Augustus' rule the most important of these kings was Herod of Judea (r. 37 B.C. – 4 B.C.) who ruled controlled Galilee, Samaria, Judea, together with land to the east of the river Jordan.

Jesus and the early church lived and developed in a world under the authority of a single empire which covered all of North Africa: western, central and south-eastern Europe: and the western part of what we now call the Middle East. In their part of the empire the common language was Greek and so this was the language of the New Testament.

Mr Michael Hickman



Daffodil Day Rally 2 March

This annual Spring Festival of Renewal is on Monday March 2nd at Westminster Central Hall. I will be going as usual travelling by train from Brighton leaving at about 10 am. Please let me know if you would like to come too.

Cynthia Tudor

World Day of Prayer Service 6 March

It has been compiled by the women of Zimbabwe and entitled "Rise, take up your mat and walk" Friends from all our local churches will be sharing in this service including one from Zimbabwe. Please save the date and share with us in this special occasion and a fellowship refreshment time afterwards.

Cynthia Tudor and Kay Harwood



Around the Circuit

Evening Services 6.30pm:

- First Sunday: **Q Café Worship** at Patcham
- Second Sunday: **Thinking Aloud** progressive service at Hove
- Third Sunday: **Healing & Communion** see Plan for venue
- Fourth Sunday: **Meditation & Prayer Service** see Plan for venue

Dorset Gardens

- 6 March 4.30 Worship planning meeting
- 19 March 7.30 Circuit Meeting
- 22 March Mothering Sunday 9.00 Communion, 10.00 All Age Worship with Revd Deborah Cornish
- 3 May 12.00 Annual Church Meeting after service

- Service of Healing & Communion: 6.30 Third Sunday of month
- Bible Conversations: 2.00 Last Wednesday of the month
- Tearaway Tots (Parent & Toddler): 10 – 12.00 Thursdays
- Midweek Service of Prayer & Praise: 1.00 Thursdays
- Cameo (Come and Meet Each Other): 2.00 First and third Thursdays of the month
- Art and Craft Club: 2.00, second Thursday of the month
- Knitting Group: 10.00, first Friday of the month

Hove

- 7 March 11-2.00 Table-Top Sale in aid of Roof Fund
- 28 March 2-4.00 Big Cake Extravaganza raising funds for the Martlets in memory of Joy Loh & John Draper
- 7 April 11.30-1.00 CHOMP Half-term lunch and activities

- Monday Guild 2.30 Fellowship, friendship and refreshments
- Tues Lunch Club 1.00 Three-course meal, live music £4
- Midweek Communion 10.00 Thursdays (coffee and chat at 11)
- Thurs Lunch Club 12.30 Two-course meal £2
- Loving Hands 10.00 Fridays. Drop-in coffee morning support group
- Men's Social Club 7.30 Fridays. All welcome to our games night
- Film Club 7.45 First Friday of the month Sept-May

Patcham

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Thurs 5 March 7.30 Local Preachers Meeting in Upper Room
Saturday 21 March 9.30-1.00 God in Love Unites us discussion
Saturday 18 April 3.00 Circuit MWiB afternoon with Revd
Deborah Cornish and Carol Goodwin

Monday Circle: 7.30-09.00 Ladies group
Parents and toddlers: 9.15-11.15 Tuesday drop-in group
Short mat bowls club 9.00-12.00 Wednesday group
Girl's Brigade 6.00-9.00 Wednesday evenings
Art Group (beginners welcome) 9.30-12.00 on Fridays

Stanford Ave

Sat 14 Mar Murder Mystery Eve with meal (details Mags Bunting)
Fri 20 Mar 8am-7.30pm Prayer Vigil. Prayers said on the hour
and refreshments available
Sat 28 Mar 11am Spring Craft Fair details Liz Coblenz
Sat 25 April St George's Meal (Fund Raiser) details Liz Coblenz

Tuesday Fellowship: 2.30-4.00 on alternate Tuesdays
Beavers, Cubs, Scouts: from 6pm Tuesdays
Midweek Communion: 12pm, second & fourth Weds of month
Lunch Club*: 12.30 Weds, new diners always welcome
Girls Brigade: 6pm Wednesdays
Music and Meditation*: 7.30, third Wednesday of the month
Craft and Chat group: 2-4.00, second and fourth Thurs of month
*not during August

Woodingdean

Saturday 29 March 1.00 God in Love Unites us discussion (bring
packed lunch if you want to come straight after service)

Monday Club: Second and fourth Monday of the month
PenMo Film Club: 2.00, third Monday of the month
Men's Club: 2-5.00, Tuesdays
Cameo (Come and Meet Each Other): 7.30, first and third Thurs
of the month
Lunch Club: 12.00, third Thursday of the month

Circuit Dates

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Thursday 5 March Local Preachers Meeting Patcham
Thursday 19 March Circuit Meeting Dorset Gardens
Sunday 12 April EASTER SUNDAY
Sunday 31 May Pentecost Service 8am Ditchling Beacon

Circuit Leadership Team (CLT) update

- **Circuit Invitation committee**

Churches are asked to check and confirm who their representatives will be in time for next meeting (19 March).

- **Circuit Bursar Proposal**

The Circuit continues to explore how best to meet the challenges of the future. It seems likely that when Revd Deborah Cornish retires in 2023 we will only be allocated two ministers. There is already a concern that ministers' time is increasingly taken up with administration. In addition to overworking our ministers, we run the risk of non-compliance with essential church and Charity Commission requirements. At the Circuit Meeting last March the CLT outlined a proposal to develop an administrator/manager role with a view to centralising administrative functions such as Safeguarding, Insurance, Health & Safety, property schedules, line management of lay employees, Circuit Secretary role, to name but a few.

There have been extensive consultation and discussions since then, and a proposal will be coming to church councils and then the Circuit Meeting in March, when the final go-ahead will be sought.

How will we fund it?

The estimated cost of a full-time post is around £30,000 per year. It can be funded from the saving on a minister's salary when our number of ministers goes down, and CLT are exploring options for interim funding, which may involve a 'loan' from reserves which would then be repaid from the

