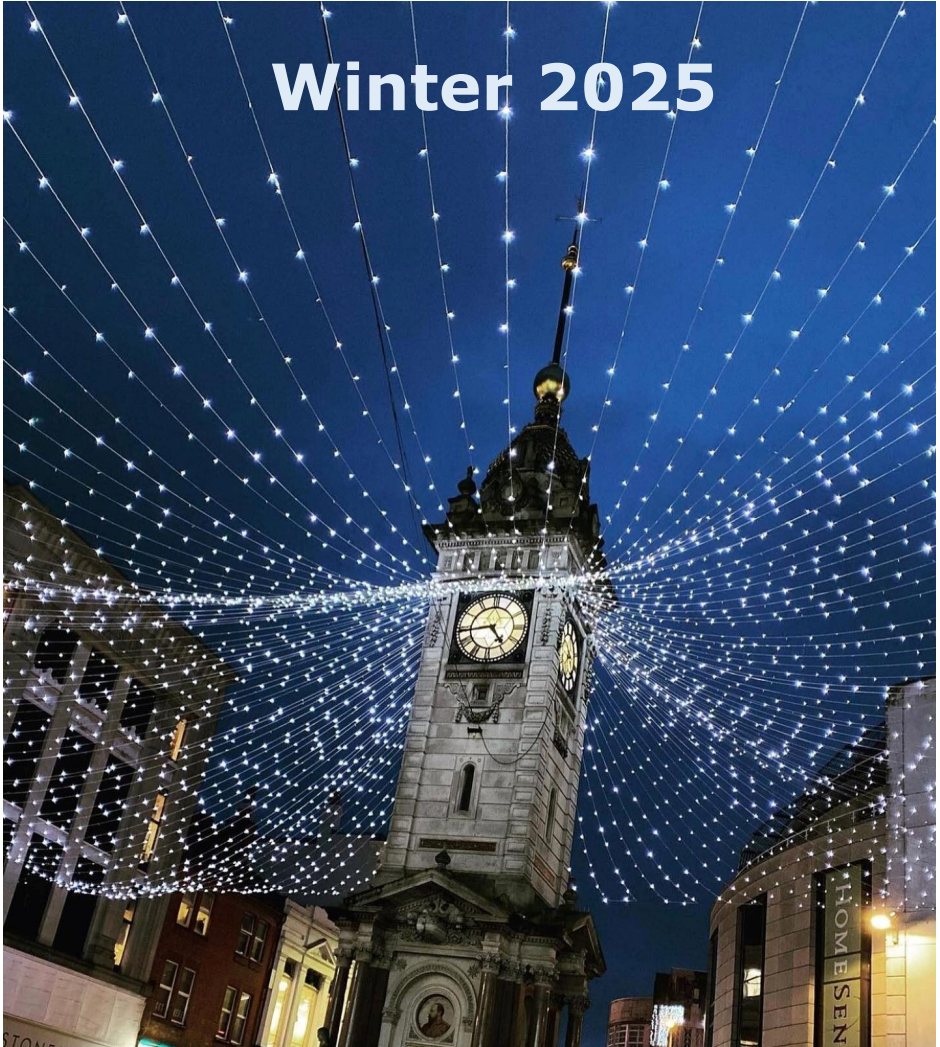


Focus

Winter 2025



**Peace and Joy from
Brighton & Hove Methodist Circuit**



Andy's Letter



Dear friends,

A lot has happened since I wrote my last letter for Focus and a lot will be happening in the months before I write my next one.

First let me say a special thank you to Karen for all that she did as Acting Superintendent for the Circuit while I was on Sabbatical in May, June and July. Thanks are also due to Steve who is proving invaluable in his role as Circuit Operations Manager in the support he gave her and his ongoing support of all the Circuit churches. Also to Heather, Cynthia and Kathleen and all our Local Preachers who filled our pulpits in my absence. I am very grateful to the Circuit Stewards and the Leadership Teams at both Dorset Gardens and Hove in all that they did so that the ministry of both Circuit and church was maintained. Thank you all.

I had a very restful sabbatical in the main. I read some books that had been waiting for me for a while though that has also resulted in more books bought and a taller pile waiting for me than I had when I started! I went to a three day conference called '*The uncontrolling love of God*' and I joined a Progressive Church group in Portsmouth for a couple of meetings. For something completely different I joined an Archaeological dig called the Culver Archaeological Project at Bridge Farm which is near Barcombe Mills. This is an ongoing project with a six week digging programme each year uncovering Roman industrial works as well as previously a Roman Villa. I thank you all and I thank the Methodist Church for the gift of Sabbatical. But that all now seems a long time ago. Catching up with things during August and then a busy September as it always is in the Methodist Church and a busy October this year have all kept me fully occupied.

One of the things that took some time on my return was the invitation process that Ministers go through a year before the end of their ongoing invitation. I thank the Circuit Stewards who with the Invitation Committee and assisted by Revd Dan Balsdon ran the process with care and diligence. I thank all those who gave feedback during the process and was delighted when I was offered an invitation to extend my ministry here in the Circuit for another

three years. It is a wonderful privilege to be the Circuit Superintendent here in Brighton and Hove.

At the Circuit meeting in September we had another wonderful duty to perform when we unanimously accepted the recommendation that came from our Local Preachers Meeting to accept Bob Winton and Paul Richards onto Full Plan as fully accredited Local Preachers. For them both this has meant dedication to study and preparation in the leading of worship and preaching within our Circuit. We celebrate their achievement and we give thanks for their faith and the journeys that have led them to this stage. If there are others who feel a call to preach then I urge you to speak to a preacher or a minister to see what is involved. We will be marking Bob's and Paul's achievements at our next Circuit Service. This is at Patcham Methodist Church on the 23rd of November when we will be joined by the Deputy Chair of District the Revd Dan Balsdon.

Also at that service we will be hearing about the adventures of three of our young people who spent a weekend away at 3Generate at the beginning of October, an annual gathering of the young people of the Methodist Church. A big thanks to the three leaders, Louisa, Jenny and Sam who accompanied Karen, Kezia and Georgia to Birmingham. They enjoyed a lovely relaxing weekend which started and finished with journeys by train and in between indoor camping and activities that went on till midnight! It was great to see a group going from this circuit and we hope that number will grow next year. *(read more about this on page 26)*

October also saw our biannual study day when we spent a morning and early afternoon being led and fed by Rachel Lampard and Rt Revd Nick Holtam. Rachel, a former Vice President of the Methodist Church who is currently the Director for Social Justice and Social Action for the Methodist Church and a member of the ecumenical Joint Public Issues Team, led us in thinking about '*Politics in the Pulpit?*' Revd Nick led us in thinking about '*Study this age, sense its need, preach to its condition.*' It was a very good day and attended by over 35 people mainly from this circuit but some from other circuits including South Kent, the Mid Sussex United Area and the Coast and Downlands Circuits. *(article on page 26)*

So now a big event at Hove to celebrate diversity in 'Voices of Power' as we remember Black History Month (full report next edition) and then Christmas! It's good to be back amongst you all.



Focus: People



Welcome to Revd Conrad J Hicks

The South East Methodist District welcomed Revd **Conrad J Hicks** as our new Chair of District at a special service at Redhill Methodist Church in September. He has moved from Gibraltar. If you missed the service you can view via YouTube at this link:

<https://youtube.com/live/jp7jGDfeEJQ?feature=share>.

Sarah Howell has joined the district as our new Regional Officer for Safeguarding. Her email is howells@methodistchurch.org.uk

Congratulations to...

- **Bob Winton & Paul Richards** as fully accredited Local Preachers.
- **Paul Richards** now candidating for the Methodist Ministry.
- **Andy Lowe** confirmed to remain with us until 2029.
- **Stella Goddard** celebrating 25 years as a local preacher.

Harrington Les Mis Triumph

Ann Collins wrote of **James Harrington** "Superbly proud of James. What an achievement. He was so believable, what a performance. The production was brilliant. I am just full of admiration for the whole gob-smacking achievement!!"

Farewell to Peter and Val Mooring



Peter and Val Mooring lived in Brighton for years before Peter went off and trained for the ministry. When Peter 'sat down', they returned to the area and Peter served as a supernumerary minister in the circuit and worshipped at Dorset Gardens. They kept busy helping at the Salvation Army midweek Café and DG Community lunches. Pete was a whizz at scrubbing the cooking trays and

Val was wonderful at meeting and greeting. They also worked late into the night as Street Pastors and opened up their home to young, vulnerable homeless people as part of Centrepoin when it was our Circuit Project. Peter's health began to deteriorate and a few years ago they moved to Eastbourne. They have been visiting their family in Sydney for an extended Christmas break for several years and now plan to move to Australia to join them. We wish them well on their journey down under.

Rosemary Cuthbert

Spotlight On....Revd Cynthia Park

Continuing our feature where in every edition we put the spotlight on one of our Circuit members and perhaps we will learn more about them. This edition we feature supernumerary minister Cynthia Park.

1. Tell me about where you grew up and what your family life was like

I grew up in South Bend, Indiana, a medium sized industrial town in the Midwest of the US. Born in 1947, I was the second of three girls. Our father was an FBI agent, a job he didn't much care for, but he had trained as a music and history teacher and both those fields were much more where his interests lay. Our mother was our school's secretary and a lovely seamstress, making most of our clothes.



My childhood was a delight. Our home was tiny but thanks to our dad's DIY efforts, it was a palace to us; our garden just a patch, but to us a wonderful playground during long hot summers and cold blizzardy winters. We attended the neighbourhood schools which were mediocre at best, but our parents were keen that our education

be as rounded as possible, so our home was full of books and newspapers and we were enthusiastic readers of our encyclopaedia. But we also had a huge supply of comic books and were fans of all things Walt Disney.

Holidays were a huge feature of my childhood. Wonderful family camping and caravanning adventures took in major historical sites as well as America's spectacular scenery and we explored the western states extensively, climbing every mountain we could. And three times a year we visited family in Iowa where my uncle still lived on the farm where he and my father grew up. These were delightful times for us children, spent mainly playing with the barn kittens and annoying our rather old fashioned grandmothers.



Church life was another major feature. We were members of a large town centre church, First Methodist, that loved its children. There was a busy Sunday School, a choir for every age group and a great MYF (American for "MAYC"). The MYF hosted dances every weekend, so "First Meth" was the coolest place to be in South Bend on a Saturday night!

It was a lovely, idyllic life. But in 1962, it was shattered when my mother had a swimming accident which left her a quadriplegic. She spent a year in hospital and more months in rehab, but when she came out, she was still a quadriplegic. These were days when people didn't talk about disability and disabled people were never seen. My mother however was not the sort of person who would be ignored just because she was paralyzed! She began campaigning for better care for disabled people and their families and opened a branch of the newly formed National Paraplegic Foundation in South Bend. They met with great success getting disabled parking spaces, lowered pavements and automatic doors. We were very proud of her endlessly positive approach to a devastating disability.

What do/did you do as a career and why?

Teaching was in our family, so naturally I trained to be a teacher: secondary school English. However, after a semester of practice teaching, I realised I would never survive it. I found the children's naughty antics too amusing! So I did post graduate studies to prepare for university teaching and taught drama and poetry to visiting American students in London and then became director of their programme. I loved it, but after 10 years I was burnt out. However, by then I was experiencing a strong call to the Methodist ministry. Happily, I was accepted and the remaining years of my working life were deeply fulfilling. Before coming to Brighton, I was in the Nottingham West Circuit where alongside day to day ministry, I focused on youth work and on building relationships with Nottingham's Afro-Caribbean community. And before that I was a probationer in the Bexhill, Hastings and Rye

With visiting minister from Australia in Wesley's pulpit at Winchelsea.



Circuit where I also focused on youth work and launching the Friends of Winchelsea Chapel.

Who have been the strongest influences in your life?



I'm a "Daddy's Girl" so from him I inherited a love of history and hiking in the mountains and lots more. But there were many others who were a strong influence. It was a fantastic school choir master, Mr. Fitzhenry, who believed even working class kids had a right to know about beautiful music. He taught me to appreciate Handel and Brahms and lots more. Then there was my role model in ministry, the Rev. Patrick McCluskey, who had been a probationer with the Rev. Dr. John Tudor. And I mustn't forget my husband, Murray! A gauche American like me had a lot to learn about all sorts of things at age 22

when we married.

What one word would you use to describe yourself?

"Blessed." I have had and am still having a wonderful life - and mostly thanks to the Methodist Church. As a youngster my church was the source of great friends and many adventures. Then I went to a Methodist University on a Methodist scholarship. That university allowed me a year abroad - which changed my life forever. And as a Methodist minister I have made more friendships, had wonderful experiences, and lived in beautiful homes. I am blessed indeed!

What has been the biggest obstacle in your life and how did you overcome it?

One word here too: myself. It is my own laziness, selfishness, ignorance, timidity and fear that have held me back. Overcoming this lazy, selfish, fearful, ignorant self is a constant battle and when it is occasionally achieved, it is only through prayer and self-examination.

What has been the happiest day of your life?

A Friday in May, 1978. That was the day when I met the grace of Christ and, like



Wesley in May, 1738, I discovered it was for ME. For months before that, I had been in a deep depression as much in my life had turned sour; but on that day I prayed a prayer in the BBC's daily service that asked God to "open our hearts to receive your gift of grace, the love that releases us from our bondage and gives us freedom...freedom from all that prevents our becoming what we can be and ought to be." I begged God for that freedom, and he gave it to me. The depression was replaced by a profound joy. I was "born again" and have never looked back.



Anne Frank once said that in spite of everything, she believed people were basically good. Do you agree or disagree?

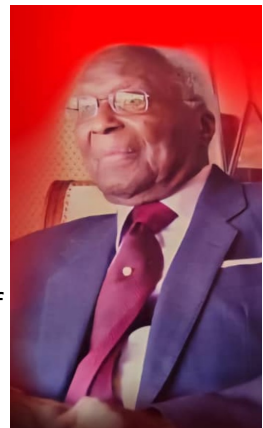
I agree, but looking at the world stage which hosts some major villains, it is complicated. We are all made in the image of God and have love in our core, but much can distort it. The evil people do can seem very powerful. But we must always believe in and seek the good that is somewhere in everyone's being. My mother taught us that you can't hate people. She thought it was an impossibility. One can hate what people do, but hating the doer would be hating God. And you can't hate love. I still hold to that as an absolute.

Cynthia Park

Focus: Features

Dr. F.L. Bartels: The Man Who Shaped Generations – Including Mine

When I first walked through the gates of Mfantsipim School in 1985, I was stepping not just into one of Ghana's most historic institutions, but into a legacy shaped by men of extraordinary vision and discipline. Among them, Dr. Francis Lodowic Bartels stands tallest. Not only was he the first Black



headmaster of Mfantshipim, but he was also the man who mentored, molded, and deeply influenced my father, a proud Mfantshipim boy himself from the Class of 1959.

A School with a Soul

Mfantshipim, affectionately known as “The School” or “Kwabotwe”, was founded on April 3rd, 1876 by the Methodist Church with just 17 students and an 18-year-old Headmaster named James Picot. Originally named Wesleyan High School, it underwent several transformations until one of its pioneer students, John Mensah Sarbah, helped rename it Mfantshipim.

Contrary to its literal translation “Mfantsefo Apem” (A thousand Fantes), Sarbah and his peers believed “Mfantshipim” should be seen as “The Soul of the People.” To them, this wasn’t merely a place for instruction—it was the incubator for the moral, intellectual, and spiritual growth of a future Ghana. And few embodied that mission more fully than Dr. F.L. Bartels.

The First Black Headmaster

In 1948, Bartels took up the mantle of Headmaster—a groundbreaking moment, as he became the first African to head a major secondary school in colonial Gold Coast. Before him, only European missionaries had held the post. His appointment was more than symbolic; it was revolutionary. It said to young Ghanaians: “We can lead ourselves. We can shape our own future.”

And he didn’t just lead—he mentored, challenged, and inspired. My father always speaks of him not just as a headmaster, but as a father figure.

Growing up, I didn’t know Bartels personally, but I knew his voice—echoing through the countless stories my Dad told, often quoting his phrases like scripture. And in many ways, they were scripture. One of the verses Bartels was famous for drilling into his students was from Matthew 6:33:

“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”



BLACK HISTORY MONTH 2025



To Bartels, the Kingdom of God was the School itself—its grounds, its sacred order, its mission. Righteousness meant following the rules, respecting the environment & living with integrity. He was known to scold boys for littering or walking across the grass—not because he was petty, but because he believed your character showed in how you treated the space around you.

That lesson stuck. My father, to this day, is an avid gardener, finding deep peace among plants and green things. He often says that in nature, we come closest to God. I now realise—he got that reverence from Bartels.

A Lasting Impact

Even after Bartels left, his influence continued to ripple through Ghana's education system. He served on national educational commissions, and later, as Ghana's ambassador to Denmark & the Soviet Union. For many old boys like my father—and by extension, for me—his greatest role wasn't on a diplomatic platform. It was there at "The School", shaping boys into men. When I joined Mfantsipim in 1985, Bartels had already retired. But the culture he helped build—the discipline, the reverence for tradition, the emphasis on moral uprightness—was still palpable. It was in the way we walked, the way we lined up, the way we addressed prefects, and even in the pride with which we wore our khaki uniforms.

A Personal Legacy

To me, Dr. Bartels isn't just a figure in a history book. He's part of my own heritage. He taught my father how to think, live and lead—and in doing so, he indirectly helped shape me too.

In a world that often overlooks the quiet architects of greatness, Dr. F.L. Bartels stands as one of Ghana's finest nation-builders. He wasn't loud. He didn't need to be. His life was a sermon. His leadership, a blueprint. And for us, the sons of Mfantsipim, he remains part of the Soul of 'The School' and by extension a Nation!

J.J. Baiden-Amissah

Diversity and Love

As we celebrate Black History Month we are encouraged to think about the diversity in God's Kingdom and the difficulties which that presents.

Whether that is racial equality, challenging the patriarchy, same sex marriages, transgender participation in elite sport or any other discriminatory situation. To adopt a stance requires taking a risk, because as Dr Anthony Fauci said during the Covid epidemic, "truth is a journey" so the idea you risked to espoused yesterday, may well not be tenable until the day after tomorrow.

We have come a long way since Martin Luther King Jr organised the Montgomery Bus Boycott, but a long road is still ahead. Racial profiling is still ongoing and the widespread adoption of facial recognition is unlikely to improve things in the near future.

Challenging the patriarchy within religion may seem to be an uphill battle, but change is possible. The Catholic church is still refusing to consider ordaining woman priests and the Taliban is refusing to allow girls access to education. And yet Bathsheba the mother of Solomon ensured that her son from Solomon inherited the Kingdom from David rather than David's eldest living son from a previous relationship. This was against all of the patriarchal rules at the time. It is relevant to add that some Islamic scholars regard Solomon, even as a younger son, as one of the greatest rulers in history.

'The God in Love Unites Us report for the Methodist Conference in 2019 was a bold move to wrestle with a difficult topic. It did cause some dissent at the time, along with some ministerial resignations, but for many within our congregations today this is now classed as a "what's the problem here" topic. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for other denominations because it is threatening to sunder the worldwide Anglican Communion. However Pope Francis oversaw a change within the Roman Catholic church allowing the blessing for same sex relationships, as long as they are distinguished from marriage. In the same light he is reported a saying "*who am I to judge*" as a paraphrase for "people should be treated with delicacy and not be marginalised".



The rights of transgender athletes to compete at elite levels seems to me to be one of the first significant challenges to public policy of the Social Media age. It has roused immense passion and heat with, as is often the case, very little light. The aim of any athlete is to be the best on the day, all other things being equal, whatever the forum. But as it is easily demonstrable that pubertal testosterone gives men physical advantages over women in all kinds of ways, how can that lead to equality on the day in any sport?

I am sure that we have not come to the end of the journey for any of these topics and as Dr Fauci implied absolute truth is a problem. However, to be a Christian means that on occasions we have to take a risk and live with the consequences, in the same way that I have taken a risk & bought a wholly electric car partly because it is right for the environment. Unfortunately, we now have to plan how to get to Padstow to see our son and his family in a vehicle, which for the first time will require refuelling at least once during the journey. On a different level, few will remember now that in the dim and distant past Moya and I organised three church away weekends. I seem to remember Methodist Hotels in Weston-Super-Mare, Llandudno & Cromford. But probably the most difficult decisions that we had to make for any of those weekends was the room allocation. The hotel was booked to us so we had to choose. Well, we chose, took the risk and by and large it seemed to be OK, maybe no one told us. That's the advantage of dealing with friends, they try not to notice.

Maybe that is the Christian solution to all of these problems; to love extravagantly without counting the cost. Or as Graham Kendrick wrote in a hymn which we no longer sing as much as we should -

Come see his hands and his feet
The scars that speak of sacrifice
Hands that flung stars into space
To cruel nails surrendered

This Is our God, the servant king
He calls us now to follow him
To bring our lives as a daily offering
Of worship to the servant king

Peter Farley



Which is more important, freedom of speech or speaking the truth?

Freedom of speech is the principle underpinning the right of individuals and/or groups to articulate opinions and ideas without fear of censorship or legal sanction.

Article 19 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, states that "everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference" and "everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice."

Many democratic countries have enacted laws to protect freedom of speech and expression. John Stuart Mill in his essay 'On Liberty,' powerfully argued that "the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others." Those jurisdictions which broadly adhere to Mill's view use the 'offense principle,' to limit or restrict only those forms of expression deemed to be offensive to society whilst taking account of factors such as the extent, duration and motives of the speaker.

The phrase itself, Freedom of Speech, seems to have entered contemporary social and political life with little understanding of or reference to its origins. The words themselves are bandied about quite loosely and seem to mean vastly different things to their various users. For some, Freedom of Speech empowers them to articulate in public whatever comes into their minds, regardless of the law or the impact of their words on other people, whereas others consciously use the phrase to justify their own deliberate use of racist, homophobic, misogynist and/or hate filled language.

Christians cannot receive direct guidance from Scripture as the Bible makes no reference at all to Freedom of Speech. The life of Jesus, however, provides us with numerous examples of how he used his voice to challenge those in authority, to condemn hypocrisy and speak up for the poor, the oppressed, the outcasts and the voiceless.

Populists and right-wing demagogues like Nigel Farage have spent the summer claiming that Britain is being terrorised by migrant-driven crime. It's a powerful story which plays to people's fears and has gained a lot of traction. But it's a big lie. The truth is very different. Britain today is safer than it has been for decades.

Evidence from both the British Crime Survey and official Home Office statistics shows that:

1. Assaults with knives are at a 25-year low.
2. Hospital admissions for violent assault are half what they were 25 years ago.
3. Robbery is down by 60% in the last two decades.
4. Burglary has fallen by two-thirds.
5. Car theft has halved.
6. Overall violent crime has halved since 2005.

All of this has happened while Britain's migrant population was rising. If Farage's story were true, the numbers would be going in the opposite direction. Instead, they tell us clearly that migration has not driven crime.

So why does the myth stick? It sticks because fear spreads faster than facts. Social media is designed to reward outrage. On-line groups whip up hysteria, turning isolated incidents into crime waves. Internet platforms profit from clicks, so they push what gets clicks, not what's accurate.

Farage doesn't tell people the truth and he isn't a patriot. Patriots don't drag their country through the gutter to sell a racist lie. He's stoking disillusionment, selling fear, and exploiting it all to try to win personal power.



Britain doesn't have a migrant crime problem; it has a disinformation problem. A healthy democracy cannot survive in a world fuelled by lies and fear. Crime in the UK has fallen yet disinformation is going through the roof. That's why Christians **MUST** challenge

Farage's falsehoods. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life."

Yes, Freedom of Speech is an important part of our democratic way of life but, in my view, speaking truth is more important. A civilised society needs systems to check the spread of disinformation and transparency to hold those in power accountable. Every voice needs to be heard, not just the loudest and most extreme. Without that, politics becomes a race to the bottom, where liars prosper and trust collapses.

Jesus calls us to build something better; the Kingdom of God here on earth in which truth and fairness win out over cynicism and division and where politics serves the public interest. In my view, that's a future worth fighting for.

Dr Tony Leonard
Dorset Gardens Methodist Church

Worship: a JOB or a JOY

People started worshipping thousand of years ago. They worshipped the Sun, Moon, Earth or the Sea. Some worshipped many gods others, the one God. Worshipping began from fear of punishment or Divine retribution then developed to include prayers for comfort, safety and rewards. So it became necessary for both continual appeasement and supplication to establish regular worshipping patterns.

Early Christians worshipped in the Temple and Synagogue but gradually they had their own assemblies then later churches. Although worshipping can take place anywhere, the church became the centre for this religious practice so church attendance became a ritual, a tradition then later to many, a duty, a task, a JOB to be performed, before going back to their other activities, be it on a Sunday or Feast Day or both.

What a pity...

Worship is not just a duty or an obligation. It is a time to develop a personal relationship with God. It is expressing gratitude and greatness, awe and reverence. It is a gift, a blessing and a JOYous privilege. It is an acknowledgement and an appreciation of God's creation.

Man sees nature in black and white but God shows it to him in colour. So look around you and re JOYce in the beauty of nature. Worship should be an act of JOY to celebrate and to thank God for giving us our five senses so we can enJOY his endless bounty. Amen.

"Shout with JOY to God, all the earth..." Psalm 66:1

Patricia Hodson
From Hastings, Bexhill & Rye Circuit



The Apocryphal New Testament

Continuing our look at some early Christian writings that are not in the New Testament

5. The Passion Narrative

The canonical gospels do not have an account of the resurrection, only of the resurrection appearances. Many in the early Church wanted to fill the gaps and much was written on Jesus's trial, crucifixion, and resurrection: at times with fantastical material. Here we look at two accounts, each called a Gospel and both written in Greek:

- a) The Gospel of Peter, and
- b) The Gospel of Nicodemus.

Each removes any blame for the crucifixion from the Romans and places it with the Jews, this was part of a general anti-Jewish trend in early Christianity. As before, except where is a direct reference to a Gospel, please do **NOT** think that any of what follows is what Jesus said or did!

1. The Gospel of Peter (GP)

GP is unique in that in the late 2nd century it was read in Christian worship alongside the canonical Gospels. We know this because Serapion, bishop of Antioch, at first allowed it at Rhossus in Syria thinking GP to be a genuine Gospel. But he then read it and thought parts were heretical as it stated that Jesus only 'appeared' to suffer and die. When he was crucified, 'he was silent, as if he were not in any pain' (v 10). So Serapion forbade its use. The text was re-discovered in 1886-1887 during excavations in Egypt.

GP includes episodes from the passion/resurrection narratives in the canonical Gospels: e.g. the penitent thief from Luke, and the appearance of the risen Jesus by the sea from John. We will look at some stories that do not appear in those Gospels.

GP states that Jesus' legs were not broken, so that he would die in agony. Apparently the Jewish leaders realized that they had done wrong and so asked Pilate to provide a guard over the tomb. There follows a curious account. A crowd came to see the sealed tomb and the soldiers guarding the tomb saw, 'two men ... in brilliant light', coming down from heaven, the stone, 'rolled away of its own accord', and the two men went in. They then saw three people coming out of the tomb, and a cross following them. The head of the third person rose up beyond the heavens and the cross spoke! The resurrection and ascension were combined. The text then follows much of John's Gospel and stops when Peter and Andrew go fishing.

2. The Gospel of Nicodemus (GN)

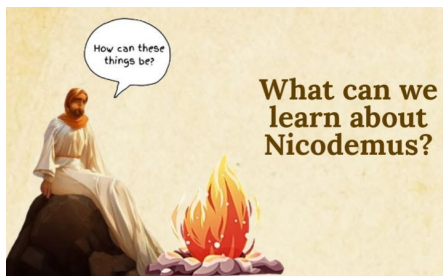
GN was well-known in the early Church. Over 500 manuscripts survive, mainly in Latin (over 420), but in Coptic, Greek, Syriac etc. as well as from the Middle Ages, including an extract in Cornish (this is one of the few surviving texts in Middle Cornish, as such it is invaluable)! It was perfectly plausible for Dorothy L.

Sayers to mention in one of her 1930s crime novels that an Anglican clergyman had a copy. Its genre is called 'pseudo-archive' where someone claims to have found an old document in a state archive and translated it. Also known as the Acts of Pilate, it probably comes from the 5th century and is in two parts, the second of which will be dealt with next time.

The first scene is a much-embellished account of Jesus before Pilate. At the request of the High Priest, Caiaphas, and others, Pilate sends a courier to fetch Jesus commanding that Jesus be treated gently (a word rarely associated with Pilate). The courier finds Jesus on a donkey with the crowds crying 'hosanna'! When Jesus arrives the Roman army standards bow before him. Pilate gets the Jewish leaders to select twelve strong men, six for each standard to hold them firmly. Jesus comes in again and the standards bow again. Army standards were of enormous significance in the Roman world and everyone would have understood the symbolism that Rome was bowing before Jesus. There follows an extended conversation between Pilate, Jesus, and the Jewish leaders; then Nicodemus speaks in Jesus's defence. This is followed by witnesses who had been healed by Jesus appearing on his behalf: including the paralysed man (Lk 5 vv 17-26), and the man born blind (Jn 9).

Eventually Pilate is told that Jesus is the child whose birth caused Herod to kill all the children in Bethlehem. This makes Pilate afraid (it is not explained why) and he decides to have Jesus crucified. The description of the crucifixion and burial is a merging of the gospel accounts but the description of the resurrection is similar to that in GP although less detailed, and with only one angel and no speaking cross.

This is followed by Jewish witnesses to Jesus's 'Great Commission' (Mt 28 vv 16-20) followed by further defences of Jesus by Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea. The Gospel finishes with everyone singing a hymn of praise and then going home glorifying God.



Mick Hickman

My journey through Biblical Hebrew

In the autumn of 2023, finding that I was tending to forget things, especially the names of people, places and plants, I decided that I needed to use my brain in a different way to exercise my memory. Being a modern linguist by trade, I thought that learning a new language, especially one with a different alphabet, would be a good idea, as it would require memorizing symbols and vocabulary. My first choice was to learn Ukrainian, but so far there is no accredited course in Ukrainian in the UK. So I turned to Biblical Hebrew instead, for which there is a GCSE course, thinking that it would be useful to be able to read passages from the Hebrew Bible in the original language rather than always in translation.

There are no published GCSE resources for Biblical Hebrew, probably because it isn't economic to produce a text book for a small number of candidates. Even Jewish schools tend to teach modern Hebrew rather than Biblical Hebrew. I bought two second hand books: a short basic introduction to reading Biblical Hebrew based on the first five verses of Genesis, which was perfect for a complete beginner, and a more comprehensive Hebrew grammar which came with a CD which gave me a rough idea of pronunciation. Apart from these two books, a Jewish Study Bible, the exam specifications and past exam papers, I used little else. I had no lessons. On one occasion I sat down for an hour with a local Jewish friend from the Progressive Synagogue, who teaches children to read passages from the Torah for their bar/bat mitzvah. But as she only needs to help the children to pronounce the words correctly and read fluently, rather than understand the syntax, she couldn't be of much help in solving my grammar problems. I could have approached a Rabbi, but I didn't have the courage and anyway, if they weren't familiar with the precise GCSE specifications, they probably couldn't have helped either. Biblical Hebrew is not easy. For one thing it has no easily recognizable punctuation to indicate full stops, names, direct speech and so on, so it simply appears to the uninitiated as an unbroken stream of hieroglyphics. For another, verbs don't work in the same way as in every other language I have learned; tenses indicate type of action (e.g. passive, reflexive, reciprocal, strongly urging) rather than past, present or future.



Sentences in Biblical Hebrew don't necessarily have verbs at all. Even to Biblical Hebrew scholars, the meaning is not always clear, as the language is so elliptical.

The Biblical Hebrew GCSE mainly involves reading and comprehension rather than writing in Hebrew. For the Language exam you have to read and answer questions on a number of passages drawn from anywhere in the Hebrew Bible (a far cry from 'Translate this letter from your penfriend' in a German or Spanish exam). Some of the questions test comprehension, others knowledge of grammar and vocabulary. You also have to translate into English two unseen passages, again drawn from anywhere in the Hebrew Bible. For the Literature exam I had to study three chapters from 'Judges' and three chapters from '1 Kings', be able to translate passages from both, answer questions on passages from both, and write an essay comparing and contrasting a particular theme in the set texts. If I had realised at the beginning how demanding all this would be, especially as my timescale was only 20 months and I didn't even know the Hebrew alphabet, I'm sure I would never have started. Finding an exam centre where I could take the exam proved almost as difficult as learning Biblical Hebrew. I couldn't find any local school/college that could accommodate one person for an exam that no one else was taking. I discovered that there are many 'dodgy' backstreet exam centres in the UK that keep candidates waiting outside rented halls and give candidates the wrong exam paper in some cases. So I decided to play safe and take the exam at a reputable centre in London or Oxford, the nearest I could find that would take a private candidate. In the end I decided to go to Greene's College in Oxford, as we have friends who live nearby, so at least I could mitigate exam stress with the pleasure of their company. The only problem was that I had to register and pay for the exam a year ahead to be sure of a place, but this spurred me on as the fee was non-refundable. I couldn't give myself more time to prepare because the following year the set texts were due to change and I couldn't face doing all that work again. So it had to be summer 2025 or not at all. The first exam (Language) on 8 May was a disaster. I didn't sleep a wink the night before. We were all kept waiting in a cold wind outside the exam centre and were late starting. My hand was shaking so much I could hardly write. The exam was printed on such flimsy paper that the ink soaked through onto the next page. I guessed many of the answers as there wasn't time to think for long. I ran out of time and hardly started the last

question which carried the most marks.

By the time the second exam (Literature) came round, I didn't really care. I went to Oxford mainly because I was meeting my friend again and we were going out for dinner. I didn't sleep again, but the exam was in the afternoon, so I had time to gather my thoughts in the morning and wander in the town centre. This time I tackled the major essay question first, and although I had to rush some of the other questions, at least I didn't miss anything out. I felt I had probably passed the Literature paper, but that overall I couldn't get more than a grade 3 (out of 9, grade 4 being a 'pass') as I had made such a mess of the Language paper. Still, even to get a number on the GCSE scale at all would be worthwhile and prove that I had at least learned something. So between May and August I forgot all about it. On Results Day an email plopped into my inbox soon after 8am telling me I had succeeded with a grade 5. I asked Jonathan to put his glasses on to see if I was really reading 5 and not 3. You could have knocked me down with a feather! I am still half waiting for another email telling me that there were two E.C.M. Gravestocks entered for this year's exam and that it was in fact the other one who passed, not me.

Well, was it all worth it? Yes, for me it was. It certainly pushed me out of my comfort zone. I can read enough Biblical Hebrew to know if a translation comes close to the original meaning, or if there is more than one possible meaning. I have found reading such ancient sacred literature in the original language a deeply moving experience, as it brings you close to the hearts of people millennia ago. I have studied some texts from the Hebrew Bible in far more depth and detail than I would have done otherwise. I have proved to myself that age doesn't need to be a barrier. My general memory has improved – but still don't expect me to remember your name!

I now fully appreciate what my grandchildren Arthur and Florence, and all their contemporaries, will go through in the summer of 2026. I only had to take two papers in one subject with about twelve days between the exams. They will be taking multiple papers in multiple subjects with hardly any breathing space. They will have my heartfelt sympathy. As for me, I've certainly gained a bit of street cred with them both.

Oh, by the way there are a couple of 'Teach Yourself to Read Biblical Hebrew' books sitting on our bookcase.....anyone interested?

Charlotte Gravestock

A Methodist Way of Life– A Summary of the Twelve Practices

Over the past three years, we've explored together the twelve commitments that form *A Methodist Way of Life*. These practices are not a checklist or a measure of our worth – rather, they are a way of responding to the good news that God loves us unconditionally, no strings attached. As individuals and as a church, these twelve ways help us live out our faith with intention, community, and joy.



Here's a brief reminder of the journey we've taken:

1. **We pray daily** - We stay connected with God in prayer, in quiet moments and busy ones – like breathing, it's a rhythm that sustains us.
2. **We worship with others regularly**—Worship brings us together to encounter God in word, song, silence, sacrament and community.
3. **We notice God in Scripture and the world**—We learn to be alert to God's presence, whether through the Bible, nature, daily life or the news.
4. **We care for ourselves and those around us**—Jesus calls us to love our neighbours – and that begins with caring well for our own wellbeing too.
5. **We learn more about our faith** - Being a disciple means being a learner. We grow by asking questions, reading, listening, and staying curious.
6. **We practise hospitality and generosity** - God's welcome is for everyone. When we open our hearts and homes, we reflect that divine generosity.
7. **Serve: We will help people in our communities and beyond**. It's a win-win situation. Helping is good for the soul.
8. **We challenge injustice** - Following Christ means standing alongside the marginalised and working for justice in our communities and beyond.
9. **Flourish: we care for creation and all God's gifts** The

earth is God's handiwork. We honour the Creator by tending to creation with care and urgency.

10. **We tell of the love of God** Evangelism is sharing our stories – how we've experienced God's grace, hope and transformation.
11. **We share our faith** - Faith becomes real when it's embodied and visible in community events, social action and everyday relationships.
12. **We live in a way that draws others to Jesus** By being authentically ourselves – shaped by God's Spirit – our lives can quietly speak of hope, joy and love.

In summary, A Methodist Way of Life invites us into a deeper awareness of God's love and a more intentional way of following Jesus. Each practice is an opportunity to grow in faith, serve others, and build a life that reflects God's kingdom.

May we continue to be transformed – not by striving, but by grace – as we walk this way, together.

"So that others may through me know for themselves God's love."

Focus: Autumn 2025

(A look back at recent events):



July: Action For Children at Stanford Avenue

The Saturday Coffee Morning of AFC weekend was a great success, with wonderful cakes, savouries and preserves provided by the Stanford Avenue congregation. It's a team effort from donations for stalls, making teas & coffees to selling the goods. There was good attendance from the circuit adding to the event's success.

The Theme of this year's Action for Children Sunday was "Driven by LOVE we take action for children" Sunday's service was led by Geoff Harrington, and I presented a talk around the theme.

Funds raised during 2025 so far £1,113 a really big thank you for that, and as usual I'm anticipating the proceeds from Stanford Avenue annual carol concert will also be donated to AFC. Added to this, is a very generous amount donated from the Girls Brigade 9th Company funds.

Thank you for your ongoing support of AFC, God Bless love

Gaynor Paul





(Above) Jean and Jenny on the cake stall. (Right) Gaynor at the Stanford Ave Sunday service.



Community Togetherness at Hove

What a fantastic day! On Saturday 12th July, our community came together for a sun-filled street party full of music, dancing, and neighbourly joy. Thanks to your support, we raised over £1,300 towards our new boiler — helping us stay warm this winter. Highlights included performances by DJ Chris Love, the Martlets Choir, Nam Yang Martial Arts, Vivi Mugunga, and a show-stopping finale by TJ Davis. (Below: enjoying the party)

J.J. Baiden-Amissah



Action for Children Garden Party

The Woodingdean Garden Party in aid of Action for Children was held in August. It was lovely weather, lovely venue, an overall lovely day.

Thanks to Corna and Dominic for the use of their amazing garden.



Terry Hammond

September : John Mann concert at Woodingdean

The concert was very well attended almost a sell out, and John Mann gave a splendid performance, both entertaining and inclusive, with audience participation on well know songs. it was just a lovely afternoon, the church ladies prepared a supper tea, and everyone went home happy. The display of mostly dry goods went as usual to the Woodingdean Food Bank, together with a sizeable amount of money.



An expectant audience at Woodingdean MC

Terry Hammond

Harvest Celebrations

The word harvest comes from the Old English word "haer fest" which meant autumn. The form of the our modern harvest festival started in Victorian times, as an annual thanksgiving service dating back to practices in Devon & Cornwall in the 1840s.

Margaret Taylor reported from Patcham on their "very generous display of gifts, and everyone enjoying the lunch we shared together following the service." Other churches celebrated too.



Art Appreciation



In September Sam Dyke on behalf of Tearaway Tots organised the PAN Club, an evening of painting and nibbles. Art supremo Shirley Veater tutored the willing attendees and as well as creating paintings worthy of

the National Gallery, there was plenty of food and laughter. A good time was had by all and money raised will fund future activities for our young people.

3Generate (see photo montage on page 23)

Well, 3Generate 2025 was an amazing experience for some of our youth and leaders! Keren and Kezia from DG, and Georgie from Patcham headed off to Birmingham with Jennie, Louisa and Sam for a jam packed weekend of worship, prayer, crafts, events and sports with 2000 fellow young Methodists and 800 leaders.

Everyone camped in the NEC and enjoyed a full schedule from a midnight finish on Friday and Saturday, starting with 7am breakfast and finishing with a 10.30pm communion service. The girls participated in dodgeball, tag rugby, football, basketball, climbing walls, caving, and inflatables. We also did journalling and bracelet making, surfing, star gazing, meet up with others from our district, storytelling, met some animals, and much, much more. It was definitely 'A Journey of a Lifetime'

Sam Dyke

Flower Pot Festival at Stanford Avenue

We were busy with visitors for most of the time it was open with everyone admiring the lovely "sculptures" and voting for their favourites. Knit & Knatter was voted as favourite of the adults.

Lis Coblenz



Spotlight on the pulpit

Dorset Gardens church hosted a study day focusing on the theme of *"Justice in Worship and Preaching"*. The half-day session which had grown out of the former local preachers' study day broadened out to welcome a wider circuit audience of around 40 who heard two guest speakers, Rachel Lampard, a former Vice-President of Conference and the Rt Rev Nick Holtam, retired Bishop of Salisbury.

Ms Lampard, who is Director for Social Justice and Social Action for the Methodist Church, spoke on *"Politics in the Pulpit?"* asking the question why does the UK feel the way it does. Four forces, she said, were at work in society: a crisis of trust, a feeling of exhaustion and struggle, a rising threat of insecurity and a loss of agency. It was a yes, she added, to politics in the pulpit but not party politics. It was about how we chose to live together and political decisions were about how we relate to one another. Methodism was striving in the world to be a justice-seeking Church.

Bishop Holtam said preaching began with prayer and preachers had to speak from the pulpit about things that matter. Preaching always must always point to the kingdom of God. He spoke about a range of issues including apartheid in South Africa and its aftermath, the question of present day attitudes to slavery, the environment, the political situation in the USA and the emergence of a new nationalism in the UK. Both speakers answered questions from the floor.



Pictured left: Revd Andy Lowe, Bishop Holtam, Rachel Lampard & Steve Preston.

The study day was hosted by superintendent minister the Revd Andy Lowe and was organised by circuit operations manager Steve Preston. Rosemary Cuthbert provided the lunchtime catering and audio visual support came from Sue Harrington and Heather Leake-Date.

Paul Harrington

Focus: Mission

Circuit Refugee Project Update:

What a lovely summer it was, and on the project front, it's always a little quieter, but things are picking up again now!

Looking back ...

In August the Network of International Women (NIW) had a table at the Patcham Duck Fayre selling their beautiful handmade items. The Circuit Refugee Project also had a table, generously gifted by Paula Bates of Patcham Methodist church, for which many thanks. We had a fun afternoon, raising £50 and lots of awareness through chatting with customers and families in the shared Patcham Methodist Church marquee.

The Circuit Study Day (reported on previous page) covered a range of issues which promoted heartfelt and lively discussion some of which were very relevant to our project. At Hove Methodist Church's Harvest service, non perishable food donations for Voice in Exile's (ViE) foodbank were gratefully received along with cash donations of £70. Stephen Cummiskey of ViE said "Thank you to everyone involved! What an amazing collection of food and goods, all really thoughtful items. We're currently supporting 119 people, including 63 children, with food parcels so this will make a huge difference." Dorset Gardens' Harvest Festival donations were also donated to ViE foodbank.



We wish to thank Cath Oddhayward and the Women of Note choir for a wonderful concert in aid of the Circuit Refugee Project held on Saturday 18th October at Hove

Methodist Church. With a cake sale and raffle a total of £700 was raised. Many thanks also to all the volunteers who helped on the day and everyone who came along and supported us so generously.

Donations to the NIW and ViE continue including wools donated by Efro at Hove which were shared between NIW and another charity who were meeting at the library who are knitting

blankets for the homeless. While the Sewing Collective are not taking large donations at the moment due to storage, they have very gratefully received the small donations we are still passing on from around the Circuit. We wish to thank everyone on behalf of the receiving charities for your continuing generous gifts.

Looking forward ...

Ruth and Sue are attending the Network of International Women's AGM & Celebration this October at Hove's Ralli Hall. On Saturday 21st February 2026 from 3pm, there will be a Ukulele Band concert raising funds for the Circuit Refugee Project at Woodingdean Methodist Church.

Although we will, in all probability, cease to be the 'Circuit Project' next year (in terms of fundraising), our application to renew Church of Sanctuary status is due in 2026. We have confidence we will continue to build on the network and connections within this sector, already embedded within our church communities. For example, our Circuit's year round welcome to all and support for Social Justice issues, celebrating Refugee Week in all our churches, hosting Jollof Cafe pop up dinners, supporting the Network of International Women's Sewing Collective, donating gifts to VIE foodbank at Harvest and Christmas, people from our community attending relevant community meetings and events, including AGM and celebration events for the local refugee charities we support. Who knows where these exciting connections, offering a welcome to all, will lead our community ultimately. As ever, if you, or someone you know, have any fundraising ideas, have a burning desire to take on a sponsored challenge in aid of our Circuit Refugee Project, do get in touch with one of your Circuit Refugee Project reps who are ready and willing to support, promote and encourage.

Thank you all for your continued support and generosity. More details on our Circuit Refugee Project and the 6 Brighton & Hove charities we support can be found on our circuit website at <https://brightonhovemethodistcircuit.org.uk/supporting-refugees/>

Sue Harrington and **Ruth Samur** project co-leads
Circuit Refugee Project Reps: Terry Hammond (Woodingdean), Kay Harwood (Patcham), Ann Collins (Stanford Avenue), Ruth Samur (Hove), Sue Harrington (Dorset Gardens).

Christmas & Craft Fair

Stanford Avenue Methodist Church

Saturday 22nd November

10:30am - 2pm

FOOD - TOMBOLA - RAFFLE - BOOKS & GAMES
HOMEMADE GIFTS - CAKES - HANDCRAFTED
ITEMS

Free event.
We hope you can join us!



LIGHT TRAIL

11TH NOVEMBER 2025
4.30PM TO 6PM

£7 PER PERSON
FOR THE TRAIL,
JACKET POTATO AND DRINK

PLEASE FEEL FREE
TO INVITE FRIENDS,
FAMILY, NEIGHBOURS

WELLIES & WATERPROOFS
RECOMMENDED

BOOK TICKETS HERE.



CARLTON HILL
PRIMARY SCHOOL
ENTRANCE ON
SUSSEX STREET

ALL TICKETS ARE
NONREFUNDABLE



JOIN A JOURNEY OF A LIFETIME WITH

THE ADVENTURERS

Brighton and Hove Circuit Youth
6 to 18 year olds

GET TOGETHER AND ADVENTURE ON

16TH NOVEMBER 1PM 3PM
1360

14TH DECEMBER 1PM TO 3PM
RAMPION WIND FARM VISITOR CENTRE

Sign up : samantha.dyke@dgmc.org.uk
Adventures funded by The PAN Club

Dates for your diary

- Saturday 1st November Circuit **All Saints Day Service** 7.30 pm at Stanford Avenue Methodist Church.
- Tuesday 11th November **Light Trail:** 4.30 to 6 pm at Carlton Hill Primary School (See left)
- 13th to 15th November **Treasure Island** (Barnstormers pantomime) at Patcham Methodist Church
- Saturday 15th November **Climate Justice Global Day of Action** March starting at the Peace Statue at 11.45am; with speakers including Sian Berry; walking along the seafront to Dorset Gardens Methodist Church [at around 1.05pm] where there will be hot soup & community stalls.
- Sunday 16th November, **"The Adventurers"** 1 to 3 pm at the i360; Brighton & Hove Circuit Youth, 6 to 18 year olds.
- Thursday 20th November **Circuit Meeting** 7.30pm at Woodingdean MC
- Saturday 22nd November **Christmas & Craft Fair** at Stanford Avenue Methodist Church (see left)
- Sunday 23rd November **Circuit Together Service** at 10.30am, Patcham. Preacher Revd Dan Balsdon.
- **Circuit Healing Service**, 6.30pm at Dorset Gardens.
- Saturday 29th November **Brighton Male Voice Choir Concert** 3 pm at Woodingdean MC. Suggested donation £6. Book tickets on 01273 304812 or 01273 887618.
- **Christmas Fair** at Patcham Methodist Church.
- Sunday 30th November **World Aids Day Service** at 6pm with Revd Michael Hydes and Heather Leake Date at Ledward Centre, 14A Jubilee St, Brighton BN1 1GE
- Saturday 13th December, **Women of Note Christmas Concert** at 3pm Patcham Methodist Church.
- Sunday 14th December, **"The Adventurers"** 1 to 3 pm at the Rampion Wind Farm Visitor Centre (see left).
- Sunday 28th December **Circuit Healing Service**, 6.30pm at Dorset Gardens.

Special Services this Christmas

Dorset Gardens

Sunday 7th December	10.30am	All Age & Gift Service
Christmas Eve	4.00pm	Community Carol Service
Christmas Day	10.30am	Christmas Celebration
Sunday 4th January	10.30am	Covenant & Communion

Hove

Sunday 7th December	10.30am	All Age & Gift Service
Sunday 21st December	4.00pm	Carol Service
Christmas Eve	2.00pm	Christingle Service
Christmas Day	10.00am	All Age Celebration Service
Sunday 18th January	10.30am	Covenant & Communion.

Patcham

Sunday 21st December	6.30pm	Carol Service
Christmas Eve	4.30pm	Christingle
Christmas Day	11.00am	Christmas Celebration
Sunday 11h January	10.30am	Covenant & Communion

Stanford Avenue

Sunday 14h December	10.30pm	Gift Service
Sunday 21st December	6.30 pm	Carol Service
Christmas Day	10.00am	Christmas Celebration
Sunday 4th January	10.30am	Covenant & Communion

Woodingdean

Sunday 21st December	4.00pm	Carol Service
Christmas Day	9.30am	Christmas Celebration
Sunday 4th January	10.00am	Covenant & Communion

Thank you to Marilyn Richardson for proof reading and for all contributors.
Please submit your articles & photos to Steve Preston for our Spring Edition by
16th January 2026

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