

MEMO

Middlesbrough & Eston Methodist Outburst

DECEMBER 2017
FEBRUARY 2018



FROM THE COMMUNICATIONS TEAM

The winter season will be well and truly on us by the time you read this. Winter includes a wealth of celebrations from a variety of different times and cultures; from Wassailing (from times past) through Christmas to Chinese New Year, Purim and Holi and on to Lent.

Soon for us it will be Advent, that period of waiting. I like the anticipation of seeing the lighted candles on the Advent Ring each week until the central one is lit on Christmas day and also singing, hearing and thinking about events and people mentioned in associated liturgies. It is a time when the secular hustle and bustle of 'Xmas' can be left at the Church door. Of course, you may pick up the business of Nativity and Carol service preparation once across the threshold but the end product always makes the event worthwhile.

As you read on we hope you will find plenty to ponder upon and find out about. There are articles from our usual contributors and some from those who have been brave enough to submit their thoughts for the first time. It is comforting to know that there are other people who have the same thoughts and doubts that you do. If you are nervous about putting pen to paper you can always come and chat about it over a cup of

coffee – that seems to work well!

The Communications Team would like to wish all of you a peaceful time over Christmas and the New Year recollecting good times past and hopefully thinking of good times to come.

Every blessing

Anne,

On behalf of Elaine and Dave

Front cover picture taken at
Nunthorpe Methodist Church
December 2016

DEADLINE FOR NEXT EDITION OF MEMO

Please send all contributions to the
Communications Team
C/O the Circuit office,
Nunthorpe Methodist Church,
Connaught Road,
Nunthorpe, Middlesbrough TS7 0BP
Or email to mbrocircuit@gmail.com
by 2nd December

**Circuit
Service**



*Advent Songs of Praise
Trinity Methodist Church
Sunday 3rd December
at 6.00pm*



The Superintendent's Letter

A Very Busy Time Of Year!

Dear Friends,

I expect Una, Christopher and our ecumenical colleagues will soon be hearing, as I am, the phrase: *'Of course, it will soon be your busy time of year!'* This is usually said leading up to Christmas and Easter and drives me mad! It's a little like the implication that 'Parsons' only work one day a week!!!

Because we are so often the human face of the church, people expect to see God's representatives around at these major Christian Festivals. And just as we are expected to be more 'out there' at those times of the year, so God is also allowed out - with the tinsel, tree decorations and the nativity figures, with the chicks, eggs and Easter Bunnies. But, rather than being upset or annoyed that God is seen by many as no more than a sort of 'holy' Father Christmas, or a good excuse to eat their way through tons and tons of delicious chocolate eggs, we can actually use the wonderful opportunities which present themselves to us as people are more open and ready to engage with the message we have to share.

The shops, hotels and pubs certainly exploit the Christmas and Easter seasons and don't hold back from inviting people to get fully immersed in their special offers.

We know Jesus personally - we should be far more bold in offering people the real 'Reason for the Season.'

It's great to see different church families in the Circuit engaging with their communities in imaginative ways. We have the best news in the world to share: Here's the Special Offer available to everyone . . .
That in Christ, God came to be with us, to share being human, to

experience what it's like to be a vulnerable baby, a refugee boy, a questioning teenager, a low paid adult. He knew the emotions of friendship and loneliness. He knew physical pain and spiritual anguish and death, too young, on a Cross. . .and God raised him to life and he lives forever to be our Saviour. We can know this because his Spirit will come and live in us, if we ask him to. . .

We know Jesus personally - I ask again - shouldn't we be far more bold and invitational as we celebrate what God has done in the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ our Saviour and Lord.

So, take the opportunities of this Very Busy Time Of Year and use them in every way possible to share the best news ever - that in Christ there really is Hope for the world.

In the midst of all our business - We must all make time for this.

Christmas Blessings and Love.

Sue

In the Bleak Midwinter (H & P 107)

In 1872, Christina Rossetti [1830-94] received what she thought was a "princely sum of £10" for the words of what was to become this well-loved carol. First published in 1906 to Holst's mournful Cranham, and later 1909 with Harold Darke's alternative setting, it is the music which probably contributed to it being voted best Christmas Carol of all time in a poll of choral experts and choirmasters December 2008. Imogen Holst wrote, "The critical mind may reject the carol as sentimental but the carol singer finds it entirely satisfactory" If you sing it this season, what are you thinking, especially about the words?

I like that word "bleak" which calls up the quality of light, the sparseness in nature, the mood of mid-winter. The mentions of "iron" and "stone" and "frosty wind" all create a sense of physical touch, a feeling of gloom and harsh discomfort which prepares us for "snow" repeated five times. From this very depressing, down to earth verse, setting the Nativity in a northern winter, we move into more abstract theological ideas. God, through Jesus

comes into this cold material place because "...heaven cannot hold him". What could this mean? Is it that seeing the grim situation on Earth nothing would stop "Our" God from coming down, even though earth by definition could not "sustain" the divine. Or is it simply a way of expressing the awesomeness, otherness and transcendence of God? Even so, in complete contrast, a mere "stable place sufficed".

Rossetti writes of the incarnation, imagining this combining of earth and heaven [see H&P109], listing the many angels and archangels, seraphim and cherubim, ethereal beings who yet "throng the air". What a sight, if we could see them, worshipping all together in the confines of that stable! Jostling with each other to see the child. Something spiritual. In complete contrast the solitary earthly mother worships the holy child with a simple kiss. Something tactile.

In the last verse the focus is on responses: of shepherds, wise men and the "I" who wrote the words, and the "I", we, who sing them now. Rossetti herself was financially dependent on a brother, so in a material sense she was poor, relatively. Maybe too she had in mind human poverty in comparison to God's great gift. After all, the whole realm of nature is far too small [see H&P180] for a present. Like Isaac Watts' "my soul, my life, my all", Rossetti realises it is her being, her "heart" which can be given. Is this sentimental or simple realism? "Yet what I can, I give him..."

Rossetti an Anglo-Catholic, true to the last line of her carol, was one who gave her heart to her Lord. As well as composing a vast number of other devotional writings and poems, Rossetti spent some years volunteering in a charitable institution for "fallen" women and petitioned for legislation to protect children from sexual exploitation by raising the age of consent. In her middle age she had the odd habit of stooping in the street to pick up stray pieces of paper lest they had the Lord's name on it.

In her life she suffered ill-health including in 1872 a dangerous bout of Graves' disease. She developed cancer and 1892 underwent a mastectomy, amazingly, performed at her own home. The cancer returned and she died on 29th December 1894, in the bleak mid-winter.

Ruth Lewis



EVENTS AROUND THE CIRCUIT (not shown on The Plan)

AVENUE COMMUNITY PROJECT

Thursday 14th December - MAP's Carols and Nativity will be at Avenue at 6.30pm. We would love to invite everyone to this very special event which has a multi-cultural cast. We need YOUR help to sing the Carols.

ESTON GRANGE

Tuesday 5th December - Sectional Advent Meeting 10.00am
Monday 25th December - Christmas Day Service 10.30am

GROVE HILL

Saturday 25th November - Christmas Fayre 10.00am - 12.00 noon
Sunday 24th December - Christmas Eve Communion 11.30pm
Monday 25th December - Christmas Day All Age Worship Service at 11.15am with Rev Una McLean

MARTON

Monday 25th December - Christmas Day Service with Rev Sue Greenwood at 9.30am

NORMANBY

Tuesday 28th November - Sectional Advent Meeting 10.00am
Saturday 2nd December – Christmas Fayre 10am to 11.30am. Come see Santa
Sunday 10th December – Remembering Loved Ones Memorial Service 3.00pm
Saturday 16th December – Christmas Coffee Morning with Chocolate Tombola 10am to 11.30am
Monday 18th December – Carol Singing to the Housebound. Meet at Church 6.30pm. Refreshments afterwards
Tuesday 19th December - Sectional Advent Meeting 10.00am
Monday 25th December - Christmas Day Family Service 9.30am

NUNTHORPE

Saturday 18th November - Christmas Fayre 10.00am - 1.00pm

Thursday 14th December - Luncheon Club Christmas Dinner 12.30pm

Tuesday 19th December - Short Christmas Service before Coffee 10.00am

Monday 25th December - Christmas Day Service 9.30am

ORMESBY

Monday 18th December - Christmas Lunch Bunch at 12.30pm

Tuesday 12th December - Sectional Advent Meeting 10.00am

STANTON

Thursday 14th December - 7.00pm Stanton Music Listeners' Group meet in the Chapel for their Christmas Music Evening presented by Mr Peter French

Wednesday 20th December - 7.00pm Village Carol Service held in the Memorial Hall followed by mince pies.

Monday 25th December - Christmas Day Service with Rev Sue Greenwood at 10.30am

TRINITY

Thursday 15th December - 7.00 pm Community Carol Service at St. Martin of Tours followed by refreshments

Monday 25th December - Christmas Day All Age Worship Service at 10.00am

KEEPING FIT



I am very aware of the need to keep fit as the years advance!! I do like to get out for a walk every morning and I have done that for many years with a faithful dog as company and in recent years on my own. It's amazing how many other walkers and runners I see on my morning excursions. I did try the Gym but didn't like it, preferring to be out in the fresh air!! However I am aware that membership of gyms is forever on the increase.

Have you looked in the 'Gazette' and seen the number of slimming groups there are available, many in churches, including Grove Hill! Keeping fit is very much the fashion at all ages. I have to smile when I see the expensive gear some of my fellow walkers and runners wear, maybe it makes them go faster.

However I also feel the need in my life of Spiritual Fitness. For me, as I exercise physically every morning, I also say my prayers. I really couldn't get through the day without either the walk or the prayer. Spending time being aware of God's presence is so important as often I forget as the busy day progresses. I am glad I can bring to God my concerns and also the many things I want to thank him for. I try to have a routine so I pray about different things each day. Maybe my prayers are not perfect, but I don't think God cares as long as they are sincere.

When I was teaching Prayer as part of R.E. lessons I used to say to the students remember ATPIC; Adoration, Thanksgiving, Penitence, Intercession and Confession. I don't stick to that in my prayers, but some people like a sense of order in their prayer time.

If your church has a Prayer Group it is the equivalent of going to the Gym, only a spiritual one!

I commented to one of my fellow church members, when we looked at how busy our slimming classes are at church, it's a shame people don't see the relevance of the spiritual fitness also on offer at Grove Hill! There is a vast difference in numbers between the two activities, and no prizes for guessing which activity has the most take up.

So in the New Year, I guess many of us will look at ways of getting fit again, shedding those pounds we have put on over the Christmas season. Maybe at Christmas we remember also, how much God loves us in that wonderful gift of his Son Jesus. We could respond by making sure we are fit to be his disciples, making certain our prayer life, our Bible study and our worship lives have the right amount of spiritual fitness to travel our journey.

Dave Elliott

**A thought for all church councils as the New Year begins:
“To err is human, but to really foul things up requires a
committee.”**

The Parish Pump



DEVELOPING PARTNERSHIPS

We all know that there is strength in teamwork, and that's something we have really been noticing at MAP this year.

Our Lottery funded partnership with British Red Cross, Open Door North East and Justice First started in earnest about 6 months ago. Collectively known as Ariadne, we are working more and more closely together to make it easier for people seeking asylum in Teesside to navigate between all the different services they need at various times in their asylum journeys.

Likewise, the football programme, delivered for us by Middlesbrough Football Club Foundation is really gaining ground as it establishes itself into its 3rd year now. Besides a regular weekly football training session, the programme has seen regular trips to the stadium to see Middlesbrough play at home, travel around the UK to enter our team into tournaments, and occasional special events...like a visit by 6 of the first team to one of our training sessions recently!

An unexpected consequence of the developing relationship with our Ariadne partnerships was our Café Marhabaan project this autumn. Arising from an idea floated with us by Open Door NE, and supported with funding from York City of Sanctuary we have been opening the Café at MAP to serve an affordable teatime meal on Thursdays, from 4pm to 6pm. All are welcome at this event, which we hope might become a regular feature after its initial run until December 2017. The aim is to create a space where people from all communities can sit and eat together on an equal footing, have conversations and spark friendships. If you are in town on a Thursday teatime, come and take a look!

Ailsa Adamson
Project Manager



*Visit to the MAP training session
by Middlesbrough's new striker
Britt Assombalonga*

Fired up.

Among my dwindling collection of books are a few written by, or about, that very special group of men who were fighter pilots at the outset of World War Two.



They faced overwhelming odds as they fought off the incessant attacks of the Luftwaffe air-force during the Battle of Britain and beyond. Many didn't survive and their stories died with them. But some managed to jot down the highs and lows of their dramatic involvement in between the periods of intense, death defying action.

One of them, Geoffrey Wellum, wrote a book called, 'First Light' years after the event, from which a film has been made. In it he was interviewed about his experiences and was asked how, after so long, he was able to remember the event so clearly. He replied, "How do you expect me to forget? You can't. I remember it vividly. It's not a question of memory. You see it – things – people - the experiences stay with you forever, and you can't do anything about it."

Over sixty years later he was still 'fired up' from his involvement in those dramatic, life changing events.

I'm using the phrase to mean having an experience that lights us up, energises and transforms us.

Many of the people who began telling the stories about Jesus after his death were also caught up in dramatic, life changing, events which fired up their telling of the stories.

It began during the surreal, confusing weeks after his death.

We sometimes forget, because we know the outcome, that they expected nothing further after his execution. Dead men don't come back. Even though he had tried to prepare them, they were convinced it was all over.

They had huddled behind locked doors, grieving, guilty, distraught by their own failure to stand by him, with no chance of reconciliation. Broken friends mourning a broken friendship.

The women dealt with the initial sense of brutal finality by visiting the burial site to make a final loving gesture, the respectful anointing of his body. **(1)**

But there was no body.

Instead for the next seven weeks there was an unnerving confusion of events.

It began with reports of sightings and conversations. Trusted members of their inner circle of friends claimed to have seen him. In the burial garden, on a country walk. They thought they were talking to a stranger, gradually recognition dawned, in the familiar way he spoke, the special way he took bread at mealtimes. **(2)** Nobody was expecting anything like this. They couldn't believe their eyes or their ears. To begin with they were scared and disorientated. Unwilling to tell anyone. **(3)**

As the weeks went by more people believed they saw him, spoke with him, gradually becoming convinced that the unbelievable was happening. One minute they were alone, the next he was there, always knowing what has happened, always taking charge, until they never knew when they might become aware of him. He seems to be leading them through a process of disengaging with their senses. Relying on the promise of his presence without being able to see or hear or touch him, until gradually the friendship meant as much as it did when they could hear his voice, see his face, and hold him.

It all came to a head at the end of seven weeks, during the Pentecost festival. Those once broken men tried to describe in the vocabulary of storm and fire their overwhelming sense, that Jesus was permanently back with them. I sense their driving force was an overwhelming feeling of joy at being reconnected to a deeply loving and vital friend. **(4)**

They lived out the rest of their lives in the certainty that wherever they were, what-ever was going on around them, he was with them in it.

They told his story in that awareness. And those who followed them, not having seen or heard Jesus themselves, told the stories in the belief that he was with them also in the telling.

They were 'fired up'.

(1) Luke 24v1-3

(2) Luke 24v13

(3) Mark 16v8

(4) Acts 2v1-6

Len Karn

Rev Len Karn

Following on from yet another of Len's inspirational and thought provoking articles, I have to tell you that this will be his last!!

Len has decided for all sorts of reasons he is calling time on his contributions to 'Memo'

I am certain that all our readers have gained so much from Len's ministry of words in 'Memo'

He has shared his memories, his experiences, he has shown us new and exciting ways of understanding the life and teaching of Jesus and of his followers. He has made us think.

For all of this Len, we say a very sincere thank you and pray for God's blessing on your future.

The Editorial Team

Why Bethlehem?

A minister asked his Bible class:

'Why was Jesus born in Bethlehem?'

A student replied, 'Because his mother was there.'



SINBAD *the* SAILOR

When:

Tues 9th Jan – Fri 12th Jan.
show starts @ 7pm & Sat 13th Jan.
matinee @ 2pm and evening show @ 6pm.

Where:

Trinity Methodist Church Hall, Stainsby Road,
Middlesbrough, TS5 4JS

Tickets:

Adult £8. Child/Concession £5.
Family £22 (1 Adult & 3 Children or 2 Adults & 2 Children)

To book tickets visit

www.ticketsource.co.uk/event/185983

Email: ACTSGroup@virginmedia.com or contact Linda on 01642 882 673

A POINT OF VIEW.

What's the first thing you do when you sit in your pew/seat on a Sunday morning?

My husband checks the hymn numbers and I hear his comments which include, 'Don't know that one' or 'Good sing this morning'. I prefer a 'surprise' and wait until the hymn is announced by the preacher. However, when I see 315 Hymns and Psalms "God's Spirit is in my heart" on the board, my heart sinks.

The words of 315 are based on St Luke's account of Jesus reading from the scroll of Isaiah. Maybe I shouldn't take the words literally, but I do!

So, apologies to Isaiah, St Luke and Alan T Dale, I can't (or is it 'won't?') sing 315.

Joan Serginson.

Note from Anne Smith (Editorial Team) There is a PS to this – "I also don't like the tune!"

Vive La Transformation!

I have been inspired by a Baptist Missionary Society article I read, about their workers in France which is a highly secular country with a tiny minority of evangelical Christians. This made me realise how fearful I have become about naming Christ in conversations.

I am trying to say:

Sometimes we do have to name Jesus/ explain our faith as well as provide activities/help.

How important prayer is for lives to be transformed.

I've been challenged lately to re-find my boldness to share Jesus and especially to talk about him with people I meet who don't know him. I prayed today to meet someone this week who wants to know Jesus; someone to whom I can explain the good news of Jesus' love.

I did speak to someone about my faith during that week although briefly! God answered my prayer and now I'm praying I'll keep on being bold. "In your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give a reason for the hope you have... do this with gentleness and respect". 1 Peter 3 v 13-16" There's also the verse, "how will they know if we'd don't tell them?" Romans 10 v 14.

Janice Thomas (Nunthorpe Methodist Church).



“...and don’t’ forget we’re coming into Nativity Play season— make sure we have extra tea-towels in stock!”

Christmas carols as mis-heard by children

Deck the Halls with Buddy Holly
 We three kings of porridge and tar
 On the first day of Christmas my tulip
 gave to me
 Later on we'll perspire, as we dream by
 the fire.
 He's makin a list, chicken and rice.
 Noel, Noel, Barney's the king of Israel.
 With the jelly toast proclaim
 Olive, the other reindeer
 Frosty the Snowman is a ferret elf, I say
 Sleep in heavenly peas
 You'll go down in listerine ...
 Oh, what fun it is to ride with one horse,
 soap and hay

Thank you prayer

Father,
 You are almighty and all powerful.
 You created the universe and yet
 you love and care for each one of us.
 Thank you. Thank you for loving us
 so much that you sent your precious
 Son Jesus to save us when we
 couldn't save ourselves. Thank you
 for offering life forever with you to
 all who trust in Jesus and what He
 did on the cross. Thank you for
 today. Help us to use it to reflect
 your love to others.
 In Jesus name, Amen.

Daphne Kitching

The naming of Jesus

It is Matthew and Luke who tell the story of how the angel instructed that Mary's baby was to be named Jesus - a common name meaning 'saviour'. The Church recalls the naming of Jesus on 1 January - eight days after 25 December (by the Jewish way of reckoning days). For in Jewish tradition, the male babies were circumcised and named on their eighth day of life.

For early Christians, the name of Jesus held a special significance. In Jewish tradition, names expressed aspects of personality. Jesus' name permeated his ministry, and it does so today: we are baptised in the name of Jesus (Acts 2:38), we are justified through the name of Jesus (1 Cor 6:11); and God the Father has given Jesus a name above all others (Phil 2:9). All Christian prayer is through 'Jesus Christ our Lord', and it is 'at the name of Jesus' that one day every knee shall bow.

Smile lines

At the end of the Minister's pre-Lent sermon he suggested, as an example to the rest of the community, that the congregation should worship in an unheated church for the whole of Lent. As they made their way into the chill Sunday air the Minister addressed one member of the congregation, asking what she had decided to give up for Lent. "Church," she replied firmly.

The Parish Pump

Methodist Women in Britain

**Incorporating Women's Network and British
unit of the World Federation of Methodist
and Uniting Church Women**



Circuit Network Meetings

Friday 8 December 2pm Normanby
Christmas meeting Bring/Buy Stall

January No meeting

Friday 9th February 2pm Nunthorpe
Speaker Mrs Pam Stenson Bring/Buy Stall

MWiB Darlington District Event

Friday/Saturday 9th & 10th March 2018.

Minsteracres Overnighter at the Retreat Centre, Consett, Co Durham.
Facilitator: Deacon Myrtle Poxon

Commences with coffee at 10.30am Friday and ends with tea and biscuits at 4pm Saturday. All ladies are welcome at this event, you do not have to be a member of a group. Booking forms will be available through your Church Network Secretary or contact me for more information.

Your Church notice board will have more details of all Methodist Women in Britain events.

Kath Smithies

Circuit Methodist Women in Britain (Network) Secretary

Methodist Women in Britain Project News

The District Project for 2016/17 was in aid of The Samaritans and Teesside MS Therapy Centre. A total of £8,400 was raised and this will be shared equally between the 2 Projects. The amount sent from this Circuit was £943.50. Many thanks to all who contributed to this excellent total.

The Project for 2017/18 is an Overseas Project to support the work of John and Sharon Harbottle working as mission partners in Haiti. (John is brother of Arthur, minister in the Cleveland and Danby Circuit)

Haiti is a country in the Caribbean which shares the island of Hispaniola with the Dominican Republic. The Haitians were the first black nation to gain independence from the colonisers in 1804 but since then have had a troubled history. They had very unstable political situations for many years after independence with periods of internal violence and assassinations, preventing good development of the country

In 1815, a request was received by the missionary society in London from the Haitian President to send teachers to introduce secondary schools in Haiti and the first missionaries arrived on 7th February 1817. The Methodist Church in Haiti has therefore celebrated 200 years of a Methodist presence promoting development through education at primary and secondary and vocational levels including training of teachers, social responsibility, agriculture, health care and setting up small business initiatives. A total of 300 Local Preachers were to be accredited around the period of the bicentenary celebrations.

Haiti is in the Hurricane belt and regularly suffers damage from these, as well as significant earthquakes from time to time. The last major earthquake in 2010 destroyed most of the capital city, Port-au Prince, and many other places in the South. Thousands of people were killed and many more left homeless.

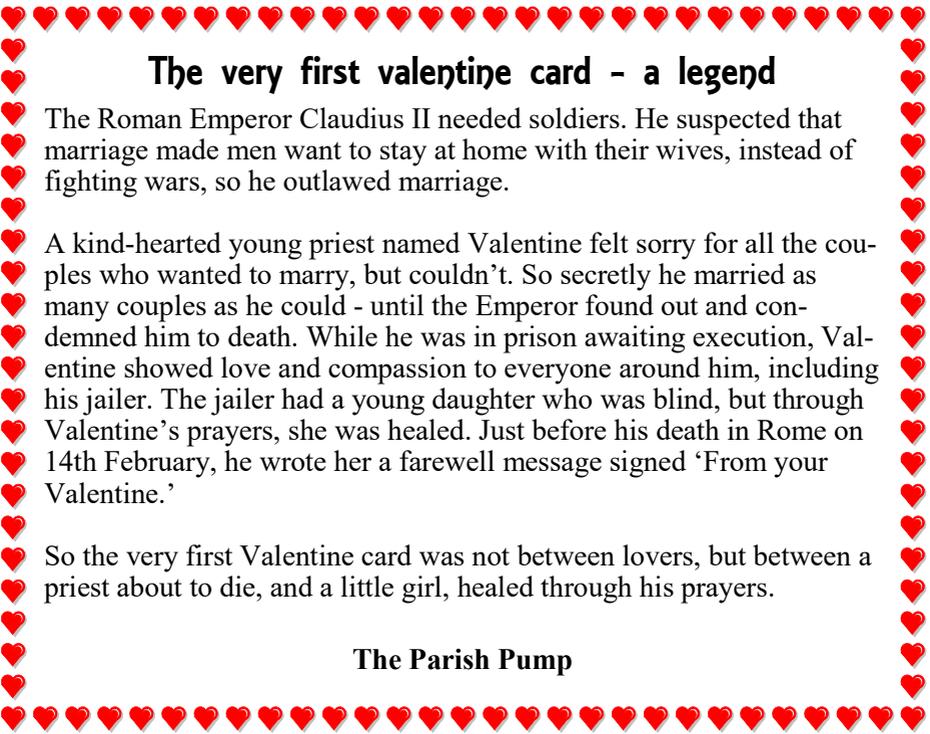
In 2011, the Methodist Church in Haiti asked the Methodist Church in Britain World Relations for John and Karen Harbottle to be sent out as mission partners from the UK to work with them in the recovery from the earthquake. They arrived in 2012, a year in which there was more damage from Hurricane Isaac and then serious flooding from Tropical Storm Sandy. In 2016, Hurricane Matthew, the most severe Hurricane in the Caribbean for many years, devastated the south west of Haiti leaving hundreds of thousands with homes totally destroyed and the flood water also contaminated water sources and caused an increase in diseases. Most

of the vegetation was destroyed and the Methodist Church in Haiti has been supporting these communities with food, seeds and health care as well as trying to maintain the current work it is doing.

John is helping to improve the coordination of health activities for the Methodist Church in Haiti, the recovery of clinics from the Hurricane and provision of care to remote communities with mobile clinics and giving community health education to enable communities to recognise and address things which cause their diseases. Sharon works in the Department of Christian Education, writing training materials and delivering seminars for all sections of the church including Local Preachers, Sunday School teachers, Stewards, Evangelists as well as contributing devotional material to the Youth, Men's and Women's Fellowship. Dr and Mrs Harbottle are expected to continue working in support of the work of the church in Haiti until 2019.

Please continue your generous support of this Project.

Kath Smithies



The very first valentine card - a legend

The Roman Emperor Claudius II needed soldiers. He suspected that marriage made men want to stay at home with their wives, instead of fighting wars, so he outlawed marriage.

A kind-hearted young priest named Valentine felt sorry for all the couples who wanted to marry, but couldn't. So secretly he married as many couples as he could - until the Emperor found out and condemned him to death. While he was in prison awaiting execution, Valentine showed love and compassion to everyone around him, including his jailer. The jailer had a young daughter who was blind, but through Valentine's prayers, she was healed. Just before his death in Rome on 14th February, he wrote her a farewell message signed 'From your Valentine.'

So the very first Valentine card was not between lovers, but between a priest about to die, and a little girl, healed through his prayers.

The Parish Pump

CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR.

I guess there are many people in our communities who dread this time of the year. Maybe they feel an even deeper sense of their loneliness as they see others celebrating and being together with friends and families. There are many parents who facing hard times, are unable to provide the kind of Christmas they would wish for their children. There are those who face this festive season, maybe for the first time, without a loved one to share it with.

There are so many for whom the words, 'Happy Christmas and a Blessed New Year' fill them with despair.

Whilst not wanting to be a bringer of sadness to this happy time, I feel that we should be aware that there are those who will not look forward to the Festival and some of those people will be in our churches. We need to be aware of their feelings, of their needs and of our ability to offer comfort and friendship, as I am sure we do all through the year, but maybe at Christmas there is an even greater need.

Christmas does bring joy and excitement and anticipation. If we have young children in our lives they make the season even more joyful, as we share their excitement and their sense of awe and wonder. For many this time of the year brings family and friends together, parties and meals, social events are great for making people feel valued and included.

Christmas brings anticipation for us as we think again of the fact God loves us; He came into our world as one of us, to share our pain and our joy. As we sing the carols and hear the story, let us not be complacent as we have heard it so many times before. We pray that that message may really fill us with joy and anticipation, that we welcome again Jesus in to our lives.

So what about New Year? I have to be honest, I have always enjoyed Christmas more than New Year, but New Year is important. For many it is a time of celebration, 'First Footing' does anyone still do this? It is a time for making those resolutions to try and improve our lives. It can be a time of anxiety, wondering what a New Year will bring. I think for me it is about trusting every day to Jesus, and believing he is with me, all the way, New Year just emphasises that certainty.

So Happy Christmas and A Great New Year.

Dave Elliott

News from the Circuit Meeting 13.9.17

Circuit Meeting Reps

Julie O'Key is now a circuit steward with responsibility for property. Brian Glover, the retiring circuit steward will remain a member of the meeting as a circuit representative.

Mark Braithwaite was re-appointed as the Circuit Safeguarding Officer

Circuit Invitation and Stationing

The consultation which took place across our circuit churches and also the wider community gave overwhelming support for the Rev Sue Greenwood to continue as superintendent minister for a further period of two years up to 2020.

The process of finding a new presbyter for September 2018 for the Linthorpe Road, Grove Hill and Trinity churches has now begun, and it was noted that there are very many positive things going on in our circuit which will hopefully make this an attractive appointment for ministers looking to move in 2018

Trinity Family Friendly Church (TFFC)

The number of volunteers helping with this project has greatly increased which is good news as the local community depend so much on the services provided by TFFC

The Avenue Project

Avenue Church is used every day of the week and provides a community centre in an area where there is very little else. There is a strong team of volunteers which helps to make the project the success it is.

MAP

The project continues to deliver a broad range of services and activities, along with one off events. It continues to expand and develop, for example a reading group is being introduced in the autumn. The Ariadne project – a joint partnership with MAP, Red Cross, Open Door NE and Justice First is now operating with MAP running the Middlesbrough hub for Ariadne and offering various activities at Linthorpe Road on Thursdays.

Local Preaching News

Kate Dykes continues to do very well and her final assessment has been submitted. Results are due in November and it is hoped to present Kate to the March Circuit Meeting as a fully accredited LP.

Ruth Lewis is retiring as Local Preacher Tutor after several years in the job and the Rev Christopher Wood-Archer will work with Ruth, who although she is retiring, will continue to be involved in the role.

Social Justice /Feast of Fun

The event ran for 6 weeks over the summer holidays and worked in 20 communities across Cleveland benefitting 500 parents /children. It was supported by over 200 volunteers and 5000 meals were provided to families in need of support. This was an incredible success and the financial support from our circuit was gratefully received.

Book Review

A Thousand Splendid Suns, by Khaled Hossein

For almost three decades the Afghan refugee crisis has been one of the most severe around the world. War, hunger, anarchy and oppression forced millions of people like Tariq, Laila and their children Aziz and Zalmay, in this tale, to abandon their homes and flee Afghanistan to settle in neighbouring Pakistan and Iran. At the height of the exodus eight million Afghans were living abroad as refugees. Today more than two million refugees remain in Pakistan.

Khaled Hossein, the author, was born in Kabul, Afghanistan and moved to the USA in 1980. In 2006, he was named goodwill envoy to the United Nations Refugee Agency, whose mandate is to protect the basic human rights of refugees, provide emergency relief and to help refugees re-start their lives in a safe environment. UNHR also works in such places as Columbia, Burundi, the Congo, Chad and the Dafur region of Sudan.

The story includes the enforced marriage of Mariam, when only 15 years old to a man, Rasheed, 30 years her senior; her meeting with Laila, about 15 years old, who joins the household twenty years later and how Mariam seeks to protect Laila and 'mother' her. This unites them in a bond of sisterhood which survives all their deprivation and hardships. These included the Taliban rule over Kabul when life becomes a struggle against starvation, brutality and fear, especially for the women and children.

Not just a grim exploitation of the realities of life especially for female refugees but also the story of love that triumphs over death and destruction, and how Laila helps in the rehabilitation of Kabul by working in a derelict school teaching the next generation of girls how they can survive and live fulfilling lives.

Vera Pearson

New Year, New Life



The month of January is named after the Roman god Janus, who is depicted with two faces. We may look back to the old year with sadness or regret, but how can we make a fresh start at the beginning of 2016? The apostle Paul writes ‘But one thing I do: forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus.’ (Philippians 3:13,14).

Firstly, if you want a new start, you need to forget the things which are behind. Paul pictures himself as an athlete running for Christ, yet not looking back. He refused to allow his past sins and failures to define who he was. By God’s grace, he no longer saw himself that way. The same can be true of ourselves, as we confess our sins and receive God’s forgiveness and new life.

Secondly, we need to focus on the things that lie ahead. The athlete is entirely focused on winning the race and gaining the prize. Like Paul, we have to be single-minded in making Jesus the focus of everything we do. How can we go deeper in our prayer life and Bible reading this year? What will it mean to better serve Christ in our workplace and career, or family and children?

Paul looked forward to the day when he would stand before God, and God will say, ‘well done, good and faithful servant’. In light of all that Jesus had done for him, Paul wanted to give his very best to Jesus. As we stand at the beginning of this New Year, let’s ask ourselves, ‘What can I do this year that will help me bring glory and honour to God?’

The Parish Pump

CIRCUIT OFFICE

The Office will be closed from
12.00 noon on Friday 22nd December
and re-open on TUESDAY 2nd January 2018 at 9.30am

MERRY CHRISTMAS AND HAPPY NEW YEAR.

ELAINE



EVENTS AROUND THE CIRCUIT

Saturday 9th December, Big Coffee Morning at Normanby, 10.00am to 11.30am

Saturday 6th January, Big Coffee Morning at Normanby, 10.00am to 11.30am

Tuesday 30th January, 10.00am to 12 noon Coffee Morning at Avenue Community Project, all welcome.

Saturday 3rd February, Big Coffee Morning at Normanby, 10.00am to 11.30am

Tuesday 27th February, 10.00am to 12 noon Coffee Morning at Avenue Community Project, all welcome.

PRAYER DIARY

December 3rd We pray for our Advent Songs of Praise being held tonight at Trinity. We pray also for the Preachers' meeting taking place on Thursday. Pray for Rev Sue Greenwood and Nunthorpe

December 10th We think today of the Advent groups taking place around the Circuit. Pray for Elaine at the Circuit Office and for Marton

December 17th We think today of the many special Carol services and Nativity plays taking place in our Circuit. Pray for Pat and her staff at the Linthorpe Road Resource Centre and for Linthorpe Road church.

December 24th We pray that on this 'Night of Miracles' we all may be excited by the great news of God so loving us that he became one of us in the form of the baby born in Bethlehem.

December 31st On this New Year's Eve we wait expectantly to see what the next year will bring in our lives and the lives of our family and church. We pray for a peaceful world. Pray for Stainton.

January 7th We pray today for all who are ill at home and in hospital those who care for loved ones and those in the caring and healing professions. We pray for Rev Sarah Ramsden, for her ministry at James Cook hospital and at the Hospice.

January 14th We pray today for those who are lonely, who feel they don't fit in anywhere, who feel different. Bless Alisa Adamson and her team in the work of MAP in caring for Asylum Seekers. Pray for

Eston Grange.

January 21st We pray today for the work of Chaplains taking God's caring love to wider groups of people. Pray for the Circuit Leadership team as they seek to carry out the work of the Holy Spirit. Pray for Normanby and for Rev Christopher Wood-Archer.

January 28th We pray today for all who work in our Circuit with children and young people and for those who work in our schools and colleges. Pray for Trinity and their action in the community. Pray for Rev Una McLean.

February 4th We pray today for Christian people who have influence in our communities, we think of those in Public Office, of Volunteers, of Councillors. We pray for Rev Lawrence Law and the Chinese Church.

February 11th We pray today for the start of this important season of Lent as we prepare to journey to the Cross and beyond. Bless all who are involved in Lent fellowship groups. Pray for Rev Len Karn and Grove Hill.

February 18th As we have remembered St Valentine's Day, we pray today for all who come to our churches to be married. We pray also for those who support people going through difficult times with all kinds of relationships. Pray for Ormesby.

February 25th We pray today for the Darlington District for the many diverse types of churches and fellowships and for Rev Ruth Gee, Chair of the District.

