



North Kent Methodist Circuit

Grapevine

CIRCUIT NEWS AND PREACHING PLAN



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HOPE ON HOPE STREET
RETREAT DAY AT HARTLIP
CONFERENCE REPORT

Issue Thirty Two
Winter 2024-25

Winter '24-25

This edition of Grapevine tells part of the story of the Hope Street Church in Sheerness, a Local Ecumenical Partnership church - Congregational and Methodist - in our circuit which

traces its origins back 300 years and is still making an impact on its community. It's a reminder that creative use of a small congregation's resources can do much good for a deprived community.

Does your church have a story to share?

Bonni-Belle

Hope on Hope Street

By Janet Beake with Bonni-Belle Pickard
Photos by Rebekah Zachar



Blue Tree Social Club at Wingham Wildlife Park; Lunch would not be complete without a game of UNO



Blue Tree Social Club to Wingham Wildlife Park Summer 2024; participant did not qualify as a monkey so we had to bring them back



Heartful Art Club; 3D under the sea scene in cardboard, acrylic paint, textiles, pasta and other recycled materials

A congregational church was erected in the centre of Sheerness-on-Sea on the Isle of Sheppey in 1725. Nearly three hundred years later, the Church in Hope Street still exists, giving hope to a deprived community. In 2007, the Congregational church joined with a nearby Methodist church to become a United Reformed and Methodist Ecumenical Partnership. The Hope Street congregation is currently led by URC Lay Pastor, Lynne le Masonry, with Rev Robert Zachar as the Methodist link, and continues to serve its local community in the way of Christ.

Today Sheerness is one of the most disadvantaged wards in the country. Unemployment and homelessness are chronic and growing; many local people are worried about how they are going to manage this winter. There is a lack of basic amenities to support the population, so most community support is provided by charities and churches.

In the early 2000s, the Church in Hope Street recognized that its aging building was no longer fit to serve the needs of its community and set upon extensive renovations. It established the Lighthouse Coffee Shop and the Hope Street Centre on its premises

as outreach missions providing local people with a safe place to meet, inexpensive but nutritious food to eat, and friendship and support groups for youth, disabled, disadvantaged, and elderly people. It has become an important hub, a lifeline, for many in the town centre, assisting in job searches, computer skills, and opportunities in work experience.

During the pandemic, the Church and Community Centre went through a very difficult period, and the Circuit and URC Synod were asked to provide essential oversight to get the congregation and its outreach efforts back on sustainable footing. The



Blue Tree Social Club at Wingham Wildlife Park

restructuring took considerable effort over a period of about three years, but the future is now much brighter for the Centre, and the congregation is also beginning to breathe more easily. Several difficult finance, governance, and lay employment issues have been resolved, and people are free again to put their full efforts into serving their community. The URC regional Synod recently agreed to invest £10,000 a year into the community project and issued a letter of commendation for the hard work of the Centre and Trustees.

The most visible outcome of these efforts is in the Coffee Shop which underwent a full refurbishment at the beginning of this year. A new layout of the serving area and customer tables and chairs meant there was more room for guests and a better working area for the staff. New kitchen equipment meant the staff could do their work more efficiently. The décor was spruced up, and the grand opening brought in an excited public. The response from the regular users was wonderful. One man, John, said, "You have done this for us?"

The Coffee Shop attracts a wide range of customers from the ladies who lunch to those who are homeless and lonely; they can all enjoy a meal and

a welcome cuppa as well as much needed company and, of course, a warm space. The hard-core regulars are queuing up for opening time at 9am and do not leave until closing time in the afternoon. If you are in Sheerness please call in for a coffee and piece of homemade cake that is baked on the premises -- and literally sells like hot cakes!

The Coffee Shop staff try to keep the prices as low as possible but are intent on using good quality ingredients as they know that for some of our customers this may be the only hot meal they will receive that day. The all-day breakfast is a popular choice.

The Coffee Shop also provides hot meals and extra care for those in need if required. Abby Dewberry, the Centre Manager, is always seeking grant funding to provide hot meals and possibly some groceries for those who need it most.

At Christmas last year, the Coffee Shop staff cooked a Christmas lunch for more than thirty people, managing to get donations to pay for meals for those who were unable to afford it on their own. There are plans to repeat the Christmas lunch this year, recognising that for many this will be the only Christmas lunch they will



The Lighthouse Coffee Shop Christmas Dinner 2023; guests patiently waiting for their meal



The Lighthouse Coffee Shop Christmas Dinner 2023; look how happy they are now that they've had some food

have, especially the opportunity to eat their festive meal in the company of others.

Four part-time staff and a full-time Centre Manager run the Centre and Coffee Shop which also relies on wonderful volunteers, many who have learning difficulties. It has close links with Meadowfields School which is for pupils with leaning difficulties; they often come to the Centre for work experience working in the Coffee Shop and the reception. Several local charities are also based at the Centre contributing their services to the community and letting income to the Centre.

Many of the Coffee Shop customers join in the social groups held at the Hope Street Centre such as Blue Tree Social Group, a safe space where people can meet up to take part in various activities and outings. Assistant Manager Rebekah Zachar has established the popular Heartfelt Art Group where people can express their creative talents and learn new crafts.

Some say that people may take advantage of our kindness, and that might be so. A gentleman came in and asked for three bacon sandwiches

and three cups of tea for himself and his friends. He promised to pay us back at the beginning of the following week. Monday and Tuesday went by with no money in sight. However, on Thursday he came in and handed over £15 for the sandwiches and tea. He refused the change he was owed and asked for it to go into the charity box; it was only a couple of pounds, but for him it was a lot of money. He said Hope Street was a place where he knew he wouldn't be judged or asked to leave.



The Lighthouse Coffee Shop Christmas Dinner 2023; our favourite regular customers in deep discussions over matters of world peace (probably)

These days, the Sunday morning congregation at the Church in Hope Street is small, but the impact of their outreach into the community through the Coffee Shop and Centre is essential to the well-being of the whole community. The Church in Hope Street truly provides HOPE for its community.



The Lighthouse Coffee Shop Reopening January 2024; Lynne le Masonry happily cutting the red ribbon



The Lighthouse Coffee Shop Reopening January 2024; Lynne le Masonry even happier after cutting the red ribbon



The Lighthouse Coffee Shop Reopening January 2024; our regular customers first glimpse of the renovation



Blue Tree Social Club; Melvin practicing his archery



Blue Tree Social Club after playing Crazy Golf

Retreat Day at Hartlip

During the summer break, plans for a retreat at Hartlip were arranged for 11th September, when Sittingbourne's Rooted Bible Study members plus a few others would participate in a day of fellowship. When the day finally arrived and we reached our destination, there waiting for us was a warm welcome from our host, a hot drink, biscuits and a beautifully laid out relaxing room. The weather forecast hadn't looked very promising for the day we had booked but that wasn't the case; it was perfect. An answer to prayer.



The program for the day was centered around a book written by John Ortberg called "If You Want to Walk on Water, You Have To Get out of the Boat." According to the writer, walking on water means...

*Feeling your fear and choosing not to let fear have the last word.

*Discovering and embracing the unique calling of God in your life.

*Experiencing the power of God to accomplish what you would not be capable of doing on your own.

We had group discussions where we spoke of our fears and discovered fresh insights into overcoming them. Further understanding came when what had been discussed in the groups was shared with our minister, Robert Zachar. Between sessions Paul and Kathy Skipp our worship leaders gave us a sketch acting out the story of Peter walking on water through the eyes of two fishes, Sally Skate and Harry Halibut, in a novel and fun but poignant way.

During our half and half lunch break, there was an opportunity to get away should we want to either take a stroll to a nearby nature reserve or spend time in the chapel or garden until it was time to return and assemble for worship, Communion, and prayer.

Communion was prepared and after the service Robert gave a powerful message, which left us all feeling refreshed and blessed. The Spirit of the Lord was surely with us.

Hartlip is a very special place which I'm sure you may be well aware of. A big thank you to Derek, Heather and Glynis for the outstanding work you are doing.

Valerie Calder



Report from Conference 24

By Oscar Sui

This past summer, Oscar Sui attended the British Methodist Annual Conference for the first time. He reports it was a truly transformative experience, filled with rich discussions and enlightening insights that are pivotal to the future of our Methodist Church.

Throughout the conference, we covered a diverse array of topics that are crucial to our mission and functionality as a Church. These included the reception of new presbyters and deacons, the training of candidates, support for ministers, financial budgeting, pension schemes, and the emergence of online churches in our ever-evolving landscape etc.

Among these subjects, there are three that I believe stand out as especially significant for our future endeavors.

First and foremost is the mission of the Methodist Church. In light of the worrying trend of shrinking local congregations, I was particularly struck by a statement: "We will run out of people much more quickly than we run out of money." This stark reminder emphasizes the urgency of our mission: to be a Church that is dedicated to growth, evangelism, inclusivity, and justice-seeking. We are called to work tirelessly to welcome new disciples of Jesus and embody our commitment to being a growing Church in every sense.

In this regard, the "God for All" strategies were at the forefront of

our discussions. We celebrated the achievements thus far as part of the Church's strategy for evangelism and growth, which has now been reaffirmed for its next phase, covering the period from 2025 to 2032. This strategy ties together bold evangelism with our missional priorities in areas of justice and ministry in economically marginalized communities. Resources will find their way into projects like "New Places for New People", "Church at the Margins", culturally and linguistically specific fellowships and congregations (including the Chinese congregations), and the training of missional leaders. The conference has commended this report to the Methodist Church for ongoing prayerful discernment and action across the Connexion.

The second significant concern is our commitment to the young people within our Church, who represent the future of the Methodist community. Vital discussions were dedicated to the challenge of keeping our youth engaged and involved. We had meaningful dialogues about the "3Generate" program, which aims to support our youth ministry. The voices of our children and young people were heard during their participation at 3Generate, revealing their hopes and aspirations. It is both exciting and heartening to recognize how the Methodist Church can nurture our next generation as they journey in faith.

Finally, we delved into the topic of our online congregations. As many of you know, our circuit has embraced the idea of an online congregation with regular Sunday services, which is established to serve those who cannot attend Sunday services in person or who find themselves in churches without a preacher. Important discussions unfolded regarding the operational aspects of online churches, including pastoral issues, membership considerations, and the practice of online communion. Last year, the conference specifically instructed a committee to explore how we might best support predominantly online congregations. It is encouraging to witness the progress that has been made. This shows our commitment to understanding the increasingly vital role of online mission and ministry and integrating these congregations into the broader mission and governance of the Methodist Church.

In conclusion, as we look towards the future, let us remain steadfast in our mission, embrace opportunities for growth, and empower the next generation to lead us forward. Together, we can ensure that the Methodist Church continues to thrive in our ever-changing world.



North Kent Circuit

Preaching Plan December 2024 – February 2025

		DECEMBER					JANUARY				FEBRUARY				
		1	8	15	22	29	5	12	19	26	2	9	16	23	
BEARSTED	10.30	SIU	LA	ZACHAR <i>hc</i>	ZACHAR <i>6pm cs</i>	ZACHAR <i>js @ SMC</i>	ZACHAR <i>hc cov</i>	LA	PICKARD	WEST	ZACHAR <i>hc</i>	WEST	LA	ZACHAR	
CHINESE	13.30	PICKARD	SIU	SIU	LAU	LA	SUI & LAU <i>cov</i>	SIU	WATTON & SUI	LAU PUI KEY	HINCHCLIFFE <i>Lunar New Year</i>	KWONG <i>hc</i>	SIU	SIU	
DENE HOLM	11.00	G GRAY	TERRETT <i>aa</i>	ROWE	LA	NO SERVICE	PATERSON	ROWE	LA	TERRETT <i>cov</i>	LA	BURCH	LA	TERRETT <i>hc</i>	
ECCLES	10.30	OATES <i>hc</i>	LA	NEWELL	SIU	LA	LA	R GRAY	SHEPHERD	LA	OATES <i>hc cov</i>	LA	SHEPHERD	LA	
THIRD AVENUE	10.30	SELMES	LA <i>nat aa</i>	SELMES <i>hc</i>	<i>am LA</i> 6.30pm SELMES <i>cs</i>	LA	SELMES <i>cov hc</i>	LA	GALLAGHER	SELMES	SELMES	WATTON	SELMES <i>hc</i>	TROTT	
GRAVESEND	11.00	DOWNS	PICKARD	HUDSON-BEDDOWS	TERRETT <i>cs</i>	LA	TERRETT <i>cov</i>	BURCH	HUDSON-BEDDOWS	G GRAY	TERRETT <i>hc</i>	DOWNS	LA	HUDSON-BEDDOWS	
HARTLIP	18.30	SELMES <i>hc</i>	LA	SELMES <i>cs</i>	LA <i>10.30am cs</i>	GALLAGHER	GERMAN	SELMES <i>cov hc</i>	LA	SELMES <i>js @ St. Michaels</i>	GERMAN	SELMES <i>hc</i>	LA	PATERSON	
HEXTABLE	10.30	LA <i>ts aa</i>	OATES <i>nat aa</i>	LA <i>cs</i>	NO SERVICE	IMBO	LA	<i>9am OATES bc</i> 10.30 am OATES <i>cov hc</i>	LA	DOWNS	PACKHAM <i>mwol</i>	<i>9am OATES bc</i> 10am OATES <i>hc mwol</i>	PACKHAM <i>mwol</i>	DOWNS <i>mwol</i>	
HOPE STREET	10.30	COYNE	LA	LE MASONRY	LA	LA	COYNE	LA	ZACHAR <i>cov hc</i>	LA	COYNE	LA	LE MASONRY	LA	
KINGSWOOD	11.00	LA <i>cc</i>	LA <i>nat</i>	<i>6pm</i> ANGLICAN <i>christingle</i>	ANGLICAN <i>hc</i>	<i>10am</i> ANGLICAN <i>js</i>	LA <i>cc</i>	WEST	BAPTIST	ANGLICAN <i>hc</i>	LA <i>cc</i>	MYLES	BAPTIST	ANGLICAN <i>hc</i>	
LARKFIELD	10.00	<i>9am OATES bc</i> 10.30am LA	LA	SHEPHERD <i>aa</i>	OATES <i>cs</i>	ST JAMES <i>js</i>	<i>9am OATES bc</i> 10.30 am OATES <i>cov hc</i>	PICKARD	LA <i>aa</i>	R GREY	<i>9am OATES bc</i> 10.30am LA	LA	HUDSON-BEDDOWS	OATES <i>hc</i>	
	Café 15.00		WILDING					WILDING				WILDING			
NEWINGTON	9.30	ZACHAR <i>cov</i>	M SMITH	STUNELL	LA <i>cs with St. Marys</i>	ZACHAR <i>js @ SMC</i>	LA	ROBB	M SMITH	ZACHAR <i>hc with St. Marys</i>	CAN-TAMAKLOE	LA	ZACHAR <i>hc</i>	LA <i>with St. Marys</i>	
ST. LUKE'S	10.30	GALLAGHER	SELMES <i>hc gd</i>	WILDING	NO SERVICE	LA	STUNELL	SELMES <i>cov hc</i>	TROTT	WILDING	LA	SELMES <i>hc</i>	OATES	LA	
HOLY TRINITY	10.00	ST. DAVIDS <i>hc</i>	ST. WILLIAMS	<i>hc</i> ST. ALBANS 4pm <i>cs</i> ST. DAVIDS	ST. DAVIDS	ST. ALBANS	ST. DAVIDS <i>hc</i>	ST. WILLIAMS	ST. ALBANS <i>hc</i>	ST. DAVIDS	ST. WILLIAMS <i>hc</i>	ST. ALBANS	ST. DAVIDS <i>hc</i>	ST. WILLIAMS	
SITTINGBOURNE	10.30	M SMITH	ZACHAR <i>hc</i>	CAN-TAMAKLOE	ZACHAR <i>cs aa</i>	ZACHAR <i>js</i>	WATTON	ZACHAR <i>cov hc</i>	LA	ROBB	LA	ZACHAR <i>hc</i>	CAN-TAMAKLOE	LA	
SPITAL STREET	10.30	BURCH <i>Scout ser.</i>	S SMITH <i>Brownie ser.</i>	TERRETT <i>cs</i>	LA	HUDSON-BEDDOWS	LA	DOWNS	G GRAY	BURCH	LA	ROWE	TERRETT <i>hc</i>	LA	
STOKE	18.30	–	ROBB	–	–	–	–	STUNELL	–	–	–	ROBB	–	–	
PENINSULA STROOD	10.30	HUDSON-BEDDOWS	WATTON	LA <i>cs aa</i>	SELMES <i>hc</i>	ROBB	TROTT	AA	SELMES <i>cov hc</i>	SIU	TROTT	AA	GALLAGHER	SELMES <i>hc</i>	
TONBRIDGE RD	10.30	READ	LA	OATES <i>Christingle ts</i>	<i>10.30am</i> LA <i>6pm cs</i>	SHEPHERD	LA	READ	LA	OATES <i>cov hc</i>	NEWELL	SHEPHERD	R GREY	WEST <i>hc</i>	
THE BRENT	10.30	TERRETT	LA <i>ts Dept. Miss</i>	TERRETT <i>4pm cs</i>	G GRAY	TERRETT	LA	TERRETT <i>cov</i>	S SMITH	PATERSON	HUDSON-BEDDOWS	TERRETT <i>hc</i>	LA	LA	
UNION STREET	10.30	ONLINE	AT LARKFIELD	AT BEARSTED	AT WEEK ST.	AT TON. ROAD	ONLINE	AT ECCLES	AT BEARSTED	AT TON. ROAD	ONLINE	AT WEEK ST.	AT TON. ROAD	AT LARKFIELD	
ONLINE SERVICES	10.30	PICKARD	PICKARD	HEXTABLE	THIRD AVE	TBA	PICKARD	OATES	HEXTABLE	THIRD AVE	PICKARD	OATES	HEXTABLE	THIRD AVE	

aa All-age / *bc* Breakfast Church / *cc* Café Church / *cs* Carol Service / *cov* Covenant Service
gd Gift Day / *hc* Holy Communion / *js* Joint Service / *mwol* Methodist Way Of Life / *nat* Nativity / *ts* Toy service

For the Spring issue: Please send contributions as a Word document, no longer than 500 words, to bonni-belle.pickard@methodist.org.uk to arrive by 20 December 2024. If you can, please attach a suitable high quality image, but do not embed it in a document.