

LINK PLUS++++

February 2022

Dear Friends

Welcome to the New year.

In my Covenant Services I have been commenting how as God helps us to rebuild and restore our church congregations and activities, he is calling us to look carefully at how our churches are relevant to the post-COVID communities that are appearing around us. What do we want to retain, and what is it time to let go of, for the sake of God's kingdom? Now is the time for action!

In this we are not unique, either in this time, or in the history of the people of God. The words of the prophets call the people of the Bible to rebuild. I used the Covenant reading from Jeremiah 31, but I could easily have chosen something from other prophets such as Isaiah or Nehemiah. In the New Testament this theme continues. Jesus called the people to a new and living way. The Epistles evidence the struggles of the early church to find the true path of love in their time and experiences. In our more recent history, the church has had to reapply the teachings of Jesus to new and different circumstances. In a month in which we have remembered the suffering of the holocaust we remember the struggles within the church as it responded to those atrocities. Since then, we have seen modernism, post-modernism, and whatever 'ism' we are now in, challenging the place of church in society.

We are the result of all the ways in which people in the past have taken up the challenges that they faced. The church is as it is now because of how they faithfully responded to their situations. The church of the future will be shaped by our willingness to grasp these issues today. What is it about the message that Jesus calls us to bring to the world today, that gives us life, and light, and a reason for being? More than that, can we articulate the message in a way that modern society can recognise and understand; that will give life and light and a reason for being to our communities?

May the Holy Spirit inspire us in this task and provide for the church a bountiful future.

Steve

P.S. As church activities are starting to be arranged, please let me know as soon as possible so I can ensure that folk in the Link area are aware of what each church is doing. Thanks.

Brean

<http://www.breanmethodistchurch.org.uk>

We were all together for Covenant service towards the end of January. Brean, Brent Knoll and East Brent that is, twenty or so of us making our commitment to God for our faith and how we are to live it out in the coming year.

We three churches currently meet together on three Sundays over the winter months and it was a nice touch that we were all on the same enlarged table over coffee afterwards sharing our news and our thoughts. For who knows what the new Methodist Church arrangements passed by Conference will lead us into by the end of the year.

Representatives from each church had met to consider the situation earlier in the month. None of us were happy about it. We recognise

that we shall be able to continue as separate churches but not as a Church Council with trustee status if we fall below a 'membership' of less than twelve. Various suggestions as to how we might respond were discussed and these will be put forward for discussion and decision for each of us later this month.

As we enter February, Christmas seems a long time ago now. The Saturday before Christmas was a happy day as we gathered in our schoolroom to enjoy coffee and carols with friends from village and other churches. About 30 were there I think. Many will know that I am uncomfortable with the words and images of many of our carols but as we sang out, I became very much aware of the 'otherness' in what we were doing. The warmth and assurance that girded that spiritual presence was greater than any uncertainties in the words that we sang.

I was reminded of that a few days later. On Christmas Eve, 40 were present for our 4pm Carol Service, and as Anne read to us excerpts from Laurie Lee's account of Carol Singing in his Cotswold village, we heard how he and his young friends spent Christmas Eve trudging through snow and obstacles, (and the occasional skirmishes with each other,) until finally they arrived at the home of Joseph the farmer, perched high on the hill above their valley. They had just sung:

*'As Joseph was a-walking he heard an angel sing;
this night shall be the birth time of Christ the heavenly king.*

At that moment it all came alive in a new way:

*'And two thousand Christmasses became real to us then; the houses,
the halls, the places of paradise had all been visited; the stars were
bright to guide the kings through the snow, and across the farmyard we
could hear the beasts in their stalls.'*

In a magical way the words were no longer so precious. Another energy was abroad in and through their presence. It was as though they had touched the pulse of God and all was right with the world. After the disappointments of last year, thanks to all who made this Christmas season so successful, and that includes of course Steve and

Roy who erected our outside illuminated tree, and took it down again afterwards.

Over the period we raised £118 from our Christmas greetings scheme enough to contribute for a goat and a bicycle from All We Can's brochure; and £189 from our Christmas lunch and our Carol Service for Action for Children. Thank you to all who gave and all who worked so hard for these charities.

But now February looms. On Saturday 12th we are holding our yearly Bangers and Beetle night. Starts at 7 o'clock with Dingbats and Games, with Sausage and Mash at about 7.30. And then great fun with dice and beetles. Give your name to Judy on 751434 if you can come (and so that we can order enough sausages.)

Later in February is our Church Council, and by the end of the month I guess that Rosemary will be preparing for her lambing season. Then it will be Lent and the Church Year will be going its own inexorable way. Have a good month, everyone one, from us all.

Harvey Allen

Brent Knoll

Those of you who have walked, or driven past, our Methodist Chapel in the evening may well have noticed candles in our window. This is because we have made a conscious decision to keep our lights on until the 2nd of February - not because we have forgotten to take our Christmas decorations down! The 2nd of February traditionally marks the end of the Christmas season in the Christian calendar and is known as Candlemass, which commemorates the presentation of Jesus at the Temple. We thought we would keep our candle arch shining to mark the presentation of Jesus, the Light of the World, and also to celebrate the return of the light as we to look towards Spring. We hope we've helped to add a bit of brightness to the Village of Brent Knoll on these long dark winter nights.

There is no service here at Brent Knoll on Sunday 20th February as will be joining with our friends across the Link in a joint service at East Brent Methodist Church.

As the days grow longer and brighter, we continue to hold all our friends throughout the village, the Link & our Circuit, in our prayers. God bless you all, from all of us, here at Brent Knoll

Rosemary Krull

Burnham

We're on the move! Where are we going? We don't exactly know yet – but 'We're on the move'. Not rapidly racing along but taking small steps. Cautiously, prayerfully. Reflecting as we proceed.

Of what am I speaking?

Some changes at church.

Have you noticed any of them?

The choir is reforming. We thank Bridget, who has now retired, for leading it each week over the years. In the future the choir will focus on special events. Christmas; Easter; Pentecost; Harvest and more. There's an invitation for anyone to join for a particular event.

Some mature music makers are experimenting with forming a church band.

Chairs are in a gentle arc. As we gather in worship, we can now see one another a little better. Zoom worship isn't perfect, but it has shown us the benefit of visual communication.

Covid coffee in church has triggered tables behind the congregational seating. Why? To hopefully encourage more of us to stay after the service and chat with fellow worshippers.

There are some photographs of people in the entrance to the worship area. They aim to help newcomers more easily put names to faces.

We're on the move. We're taking small steps.

As we journey, it's worth reminding ourselves that in February, we are half - way between two major festivals: Christmas and Easter shout of God's love, forgiveness and forbearance towards us.

May God help us to echo his love, forgiveness and forbearance to one another in the challenge of our travels.

Linda [on behalf of the stewards]

East Brent

It was a joy to be allowed to decorate our Church again for Christmas after two years of restrictions. The huge tree in the front corner was decorated by the local school children with decorations that they had made themselves. The Carol Service lit only with candles was fairly well attended, lots of people told me afterwards how much they had enjoyed the service. The well known Carols were sung with such enthusiasm and it was such a happy evening. Thank you to all the readers who took part so willingly, and the mince pie makers and washer uppers. One good thing about East Brent is there's never any problem finding someone to help with any jobs that need doing.

It was good to meet up with family members, who had come home for the holiday at our Christmas morning service. Thank you to John Trebble who took our service so willingly.

We also stood a decorated Christmas tree outside where it was much appreciated by persons passing by.

Next month we have some big decisions to make about our Churches future at the Church Council Meetings. We have lost in 12 months 4 of our Church numbers, one has moved to Suffolk and three have died and we now have to recover from the shock and surprise at the way smaller Churches are being victimised. It would appear that those in

authority have no idea how smaller village Churches work. We pray that we will be led to make the right decision about our future, if we have one!!!

Jill Legg

PLUS +++ POEMS, PRAYERS and OTHER MESSAGES

First Sight

With lambing season nearly upon us, Judy Allen offers the following poem:

Lambs that learn to walk in snow
When their bleating clouds the air
Meet a vast unwelcome, know
Nothing but a sunless glare.
Newly stumbling to and fro
All they find, outside the fold,
Is a wretched width of cold.

As they wait beside the ewe,
Her fleeces wetly caked, there lies
Hidden round them, waiting too,
Earth's immeasurable surprise.
They could not grasp it if they knew,
What so soon will wake and grow
Utterly unlike the snow.

Burnham Church Choir Update

As you may know Bridget Christian decided to step down as Leader and Choir Mistress of the Burnham Methodist Church Choir after our Carol Service the week before Christmas. Bridget has led the choir, along with her late husband Tim as organist, for probably more years than she cares to remember. As a church we owe her a great debt of gratitude for all she has given to this church and members of the choir miss her knowledge and encouragement (and her gentle put downs!)

and the enjoyment we had at our rehearsals and performances on special occasions. We don't want to lose all that!

As a group we felt that we wanted to continue to sing within the church, so we suggested that for the time being we prepare to sing for specific occasions, Easter, Harvest, Christmas, circuit services and other special events as they arise. For these occasions we will invite anyone who loves singing to come and be part of the choir to create a joyful enhancement of our worship in praise of God.

It has been suggested that we should still lead the singing in church for Sunday worship and as Choir members we would like that. We have thought about it but as we are not sure how this could be achieved at the moment we cannot commit to that.

As music is very much part of church life, long may our songs of praise continue.

Ann Hall on behalf of the Church Choir.

Mothers in Israel (Part 8)

As I said when I concluded the previous piece I had written under the over-riding heading of "Mothers in Israel," I would devote a section on the way in which the National Children's Home was founded, and the way the women who offered for service there gradually developed into two roles. One of these was the Diaconate Order that I have already covered, but the other focused on the work among children and become the Order of Sisters of the National Children's Home and that is the topic for this time.

Revd. Thomas Bowman Stephenson, an ordained minister in the Wesleyan Methodist Church was appointed to Lambeth in 1867. He became appalled by the number of destitute children who roamed the streets there and in other areas of London. He resolved to try to do something about this. With the help of a fundraising committee, and appeals in the Methodist Recorder, money was raised to rent a house

where a home for fifteen boys was established in 1868. These boys were to be cared for by a house father and mother, as Stephenson wanted the home to have a family style structure. The boys were given employment by chopping wood for fires.

In a book "Shadow and Sun" by Francis Horner (published I suspect soon after the First World War c. 1919 though there is no date of publication), there are graphic descriptions of the conditions in which the boys were found, the kind of lives they led, and the patience needed to help the boys realise that they could change the kind of life they had been living. As Revd. Stephenson was subject to the stationing system of the Methodist Conference, in 1871 he was moved to Bethnal Green. This was an opportunity for the original home to move to larger premises in Bonner Road. It was at this time that single sex households were established with girls being admitted for the first time. The scope for training the children grew wider as baking, carpentry, plumbing, and shoemaking were added to the ways in which the children were employed.

But along with the training for the children, the need was recognised to train those who were caring for the children. I found a very brief reference to a Brotherhood – but this never developed further, but in 1875 the Order of Sisters was established. Initially this was an encompassing foundation for all the women, but as time went on, the order took two different paths. One was the Order of Sisters of the People that become the Diaconate Order, but the other was the Sisters of the Children. Women from both orders were referred to as "Sister."

Initially some of those who came into the Order were girls who had been cared for by the Home in the first place, but they were joined by others who found this a way to express their sense of vocation.

The scale of the need for this kind of work increased as did the number of women who found that serving the church in this vocation was for them.

In "Alverstoke" written by Alan Hamblin in 2011 there is a list of the branches of homes, hostels, and training centres from 1869 until 1969 when the final branch was opened in Elmstead Woods.

As well, in that book are listed the names of the Sisters of the National Children's Home from its formation. The earliest name I could find was that of Louise Austin in 1875, and among them is that of Christine Thomas (nee Pearce, ordained 1965) who is a very active member of the West Huntspill Methodist Church in our Circuit. The Order was active until 1985 when government policy made a move from having children cared for in children's homes situations to that of fostering.

It was at the point that there was a name change from NCH (to which the National Children's Homes had been abbreviated earlier) to NCH Action for Children, and finally to Action for Children which is how we know it today.

To conclude I would like to quote from "Alverstoke": -

"At her Ordination, each sister was presented with a Bible, and a badge – coloured in white, navy, and gold. The present Sisterhood badge was approved by the Convocation of 1933 and incorporates the symbol of the Sisterhood Order from 1875" To seek and save that which is lost".

Alan goes on to say that a stained-glass window was placed at Highbury in 1999 to commemorate the Order, but on its closure, this was moved to Westminster Central Hall where it was rededicated in 2010, together with a memorial book with the names of the 1,366 Sisters who served the Order from its foundation.

I am very grateful to Christine Thomas for the loan of "Shadow and Sun" and "Alverstoke" that have provided details that I was unable to find elsewhere.

Joyce Pipet

Finally, please note
the deadline for
the March Link Plus is
27th February.

LINK DIARY

| Date & Time | Location | Event |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|---|
| Weekly | | |
| Wednesday 10.00am | Zoom | <u>Link Bible Study</u> Meeting ID: 842 8627 4955 Passcode: 358753 |
| Thursday 11.00am | Zoom | <u>Link Coffee Morning</u> Meeting ID: 854 3680 5731 Passcode: 419002 |
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| February | | |
| 12 th 7.00pm | Brean | Bangers Mash & Games |
| 12 th 6.00pm | Burnham | Food Night |
| | | |
| March | | |
| 1 st 4.00pm | Burnham | Pancake Party |
| 3 rd 2.00pm | Brean | Link Meeting |
| 22 nd 7.30pm | Brean | Circuit Meeting |
| | | |
| April | | |
| 2 nd | St Andrew's Bournville | District Representative Synod |
| 4 th 7.00pm | Burnham | Quiz Night |