

LINK PLUS++++

June 2021

Dear Friends

By the end of this month all our Circuit churches will be open once more. I thank all those who have been so helpful in this difficult time; stewards, pastoral visitors, and all who have gone out of their way to help their sisters and brothers in Christ.

Although we are trying to get back to normal, some dates and plans have needed to be revised. Specifically, this month, the West Huntspill Anniversary will not be taking place on the weekend of 12th/13th June as previously advised. It will be rearranged for a later date, and I will keep you posted. There is still room for more scenes or characters, please contact Christine if you would like to do one.

Perhaps now is a time when we might want to be sharing diary dates around the link. I would remind you that Nikki still welcomes items for the Events Diary (although it has been empty for the last few months) and the Circuit website can help let folk know what is happening. I have started a diary at the end of this Link Plus.

I would encourage everyone to keep up to date with the changes to the things we can and can't do. This is available on the Methodist Church website (www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/property/coronavirus-guidance-for-property/). Several people have asked me when we might be allowed to sing in church, especially as singing elsewhere does not seem to be as prohibited. All I can say is that whilst a group of up to 6 amateur singers can sing from the front to a seated congregation, congregational singing is still not allowed by law. I wish it were different, and look forward to a time

when we will be able to lift our voices, as Wesley put it 'lost in wonder, love, and praise'.

Our thoughts now turn to the summer months; to the visitors that will come to this area, the holidays we might be taking, and the warmth of both sunshine and welcome.

As we return to some sort of normality, we cannot pretend that COVID never happened, nor that it will have little influence on our future, or the future of everyone's lives. COVID-19 continues to have a profound effect on our world and has impacted many people within our church and community. In church there will be the new challenges that being closed for such a long time will bring us, but there will also be new opportunities to speak the gospel message into the society that will develop out of the pandemic.

I think one of the problems with our pre-COVID church was that we perhaps concentrated too much on the 'who we are' rather than the 'what should we be doing'. As we move forward, the challenge is not to continually look inward on ourselves, but outward to see where God is present, to work with people of peace, and be part of this new society in a way that we did not before. This is our challenge, this is our future, this is what God requires of us...

'He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God' (Micah 6: 8)

Steve

Brean

Like some others in our Circuit I receive by email each day, the musings of Richard Rohr. a Franciscan priest and Director of a foundation in the USA which calls itself Centre for Action and Contemplation. I don't follow it every day but I did see it on the day of Pentecost.

Rohr's subject dwelt on Unity and Uniformity, topics that can mislead us for they are not identical. Uniformity tries to put a shield around

things to keep everything the same, whereas Unity contents itself with reconciling those differences while holding that those same differences should be maintained. The great Wisdom of Pentecost, says Rohr, is the recognition through the Spirit of an underlying unity amidst them. In a divided world especially, that is sentiment to be taken seriously. Preachers in this Circuit have met together on a monthly fellowship for many years now; there is no Agenda, we just let the conversation flow in a free and easy fashion, often, let it be said, amidst much hilarity. As and when Covid restrictions have eased, some of us have managed to meet together even during Lockdown. And many times, often after our midway cup of tea and slice of cake, we have got into quite deep topics.

No winds, no flames but as we listen to other people's 'tongues', it is the time that we realise how diverse we are in our understanding of God; some of us might be more traditional than others, some more radical. And yet there is no discomfort, no falling out, indeed you could say we are rather enriched in the unity of the process.

As I thought about Richard Rohr's meditation, I began to appreciate that Pentecost didn't simply happen two thousand years ago, far, far away in a sort of mystical unveiling, but in far more mundane circumstances in the here and now. Times of coming together in mutual respect such as those Preachers' fellowships, provide us with our own Pentecost moments. God speaks to each one of us in her or his own way, and through the rich diversity of that 'language' there is as Rohr insists in our hearts as we talk together, an underlying unity amidst our many differences.

Over the last year, we have at Brean Methodist Church, missed our cups of tea and coffee after worship. They have helped bring us together in all our variety and a couple of times recently we have been able to meet in our back garden. We are well blessed, for regular worshippers, returning holidaymakers and new faces joining together in all our differences, mean that our Sunday mornings can become our own Pentecost moments too. We know that however different we are, we are speaking in and through the unity of God's love.

Those of us who are taking part in Steve's Zoom study group on Wednesday mornings are also learning how each one differently interprets scripture. It can be very rewarding even for those who know a deal more than most of us. The session on Acts ends soon. You may feel it too late to join in on this one but perhaps it is time to think whether to look out for the next series. Details will be revealed shortly I am sure.

It has been good to be worshipping in our church again, and to add variety to the offering John T led us in a service where he used our electronic devices to good extent. We were all appreciative of his efforts and hope that such techniques will be included from time to time in the future.

With the passing of Pentecost, Eastertide is now over. By that time all our regular congregation at Brean has returned, as have several of our summer visitors already. On top of that several local people have visited us for the first time. It all adds to the vibrancy of our local church. Now comes summer, and hopefully not only in the weather but in the welcome arrival of more visitors too. Rosemary and Anne tell us that more and more people are looking to buy caravans and chalets than ever this year. Not content with the uncertainty of overseas holidays, many are prepared now to put their roots down in holidays in our area.

Let us hope that within the next few weeks, our Government will feel confident enough to relax our Covid restrictions even more; and, as we look towards the wider world, our friends in India and elsewhere will find the means to reduce the suffering that this virus has caused them. I mention India knowing that the intense suffering of that country has become the symbol of what is happening across the world. Those of us who responded to the superb efforts of Liz and her team when they provided us with takeaway curries a couple of weeks ago were blessed by some excellent, tasty food. For which we say a hearty thank you Liz, it has been much appreciated.

Close to home, it is good to know that Brent Knoll, Burnham, then West Huntspill are all opening again. May Huntspill continue to prepare well for their Anniversary tableau.

So pray that the threat of Covid begins to be contained across the world this summer and that the resulting freedoms gives us a full measure of healing after the rigours we have experienced.

Harvey Allen

Burnham

Hi everyone, it's been a while since I've written a link.

We're all emerging from a strange world, but hopefully better times are ahead. Our church has re-opened, and I am looking forward to welcoming the congregation no matter how big or small.

Our scientists have enabled us to feel confident and to enjoy life again. Perhaps we will be able to enjoy Harvest, Christmas, singing, communion in the way we used to. Our minister Steve has been busy organising zoom meetings, also a new skill, takeaways, with money raised sent to India. Special thanks to Liz. We still have to wear masks and use sanitisers, but the rules are easing slightly. It was nice to have met John and Linda Trebble at a local garden centre.

Whatever you do, do the best that you can and do it with joy and good cheer. For each individual God has a plan, a mission, a job to do here. So find out the purpose intended for you, that nobody else could fulfil, and end every effort that aim to peruse, with all of your heart and your will. All other paths are but byways that lead, to failure frustration unrest. Find your own niche if you want to succeed, and richly your work will be blessed.

Your job in life.

Ann Smith

East Brent

We seem to be going back into winter weather, but we still have the pleasure of going to Church on Sundays and meeting our church family and friends for fellowship and worship.

We must be a friendly bunch because, since re-opening on Easter Sunday, most of the ministers and preachers who have been with us have admitted that we are the first church for whom they are taking a service in almost a year. We certainly hope they have all felt welcome and very much appreciated although we weren't able to offer the usual coffee and biscuits after the service and neither, of course, are we meant to hang around chatting! It still seems very strange to not be sharing the usual peasantries – roll on June 21st.

I enjoy reading normally but, like a lot of people, I have probably read a lot more recently. My usual choice would be a good 'who dunnit' or a forensic thriller and I would not choose an autobiography. I was intrigued to hear someone talking about Michelle Obama's book and bought a copy when I spotted it in Tesco's. I have to say that I found it quite fascinating, and I hope you'll bear with me while I share with you a paragraph from right at the end of the book

'I've been lucky enough to get to walk into stone castles, urban classrooms and Iowa kitchens, just trying to be myself, just trying to connect. For every door that's been opened to me, I've tried to open my door to others. And here is what I have to say, finally: let's invite one another in. Maybe then we can begin to fear less, to make fewer wrong assumptions, to let go of biases and stereotypes that unnecessarily divide us. Maybe we can better embrace the ways we are the same. It's not about being perfect. It's not about where you get yourself in the end. There's power in allowing yourself to be known and heard, in owning your unique story, in using your authentic voice. And there's grace in being willing to know and hear others. This, for me, is how we become.' Michelle Obama

She obviously wrote this in the context of her book, but I discovered that both she and Barack have a strong faith and it struck me that there are truths here that we could well take with us as we move forward out of lockdown and into whatever the future holds for us.

Greetings to you all from everyone at East Brent,
Margaret Scott

PLUS +++ POEMS, PRAYERS and OTHER MESSAGES

Circuit Saturday Night Take Away

I would like to thank you all, from the bottom of my heart, for the amazing response to the India Crisis Saturday Night Takeaway. I was really blown away by everyone's generosity. Whether people liked curry or not so many generously gave!

Donations from a Takeaway I organised at Burnham Baptist Church the week before totalled an awesome £422.00. Our Takeaways from Burnham and Milton Methodist Churches, together with donations from family and friends, raised another enormous £1140.00. Many thanks to Rosemary for her help and support. Money was also received afterwards, and so we are sending an incredible total of £1,600.00 to our friend Bishop Probal in West Bengal to support the many affected by the Covid Crisis in that part of India.

Over the last 13 years we have visited some of the many community projects Bishop Probal has set up in the West Bengal region of India and know the money will be well used. Bishop Probal has also visited us and spoke at an event in Burnham a few years ago (when he helped us cook an Indian meal as well!) which some might remember.

Here is part of an email received from Bishop Probal recently which gives an 'on the ground' view of what is happening in India now:

We are going through a bad phase in our country. You might be reading in the news that over 400,000 people are getting affected by this dangerous virus Corona. In the State of West Bengal every day 25,000 people are getting effected.

The worse news is the people getting effected with Corona are not getting beds in the hospital and Oxygen and the drugs are in scarcity. People are making money by asking patients to pay double the amount. Most of the people in India have not got their vaccine.

Thank you all so much!!!

Liz Bennett

Friends of Burnham Hospital

Here is a recent editorial about the Friends who have used Burnham Methodist Church for fundraising over the last few years.

Chairman Bernard Spilsbury retires

Bernie has worked tirelessly for The Friends of Burnham War Memorial Hospital and has taken the decision to retire after 20 years on the committee, for the last 5 of those he took over the role of Chairman. During his time he has driven forward some innovative ideas, he also got involved in many outside groups and we have benefitted from those contacts for the good of the hospital. Whilst not always visible he continually worked diligently behind the scenes and that dedication will certainly be missed. Bernie has always been an integral part of the Burnham community and alongside him, his wife Mary, has always been by his side supporting him. Back in September 2019 Bernie was given a Civic Award for "Services to Charity". Bernie stated "Working with the Friends and being Chairman has been an honour. It becomes part of your life, it goes without question that I will miss the continual involvement in our Hospital, but I feel now is the right time to stand down" Although he is retiring from the work of the committee he has opted to remain on the 'volunteer pool' which is much appreciated by the current Vice Chairman Ceri Joyce who said "it's great that we shall still have him 'on board' he knows a lot of people!" Moving forward we hope to carry on his legacy and when times permit we will be running events to continue to raise funds for our much loved local hospital. Please continue to check our website for latest news and if you wish to join 'The Friends' it's simple to do. (friendsofburnhamhospital.org.uk)

Submitted by Dorothy & Cedric May

Mothers in Israel – Part 2

Last month I submitted the first part of this article to Steve. The next day Stanley and I had passed on to us the April 16th edition of the Methodist Recorder in which there was a full page book review entitled “A significant contribution to the history of women preachers in Methodism”. This was a book review of a second book that I had purchased at the same time as “Mothers in Israel”, entitled Women, Preachers, Methodists”. The first four chapters of this book explore “Susanna Wesley’s significance in her own right”. That amused me! In her lecture from Susanna’s Kitchen, Donna Fowler Marchant focused largely on Susanna, but in her book she details how the roles of women developed during John Wesley’s lifetime.

Not surprisingly, Susanna was to have a powerful influence over the life of her children all of her life. It is seen very clearly in the correspondence she had especially with John. It was his mother who convinced him that others might be called to preach as well as he – even if they were not ordained. Thus was instigated the role of Local Preachers.

However, it was a small group of women in Bristol who requested from John Wesley that they might meet together to support each other in faith on a regular basis that brought him a challenge. So, while we may remember John for his tireless itinerant preaching, this request enabled him to develop at an early stage an innovative, comprehensive and practical structure to enable that those converted by his ministry should have pastoral care, fellowship, and teaching once he had moved on. So began the structure - of the intimate groups known as bands, that might join at times to form a larger group – the class. Then the classes in an area would be known as a society.

This structure led to the development of opportunities for women that they would not have had previously. First, the bands would have given them opportunities to talk about their faith with two or three other women. It is clear that while the bands were single sex, when they met together in classes, these could be led by either men or women, providing there was no objection to a woman leading the group. However, this raised the question of worshipping together on a Sunday

as a society. Wesley encouraged attendance at the Anglican Church for Holy Communion, but there was also the desire to worship together. So, while on one hand there had grown up numbers of itinerant preachers, moving around the country, on the other there was the need for people to conduct service locally. In this way the role of local preachers developed.

Initially these were solely male, but the whole structure that was emerging was one in which women could find fulfilment in a variety of roles. They could visit the sick and those in prison; they could provide instruction in the faith in private, share testimonies, pray aloud in meetings, and provide hospitality. There were Methodist preaching houses such as at the New Room in Bristol, where women were the housekeepers. This was a role of considerable significance as much was expected of those women in such a position. It was a role for women of mature faith and understanding. Not only were they expected to manage the day to day running of these places, attending to the needs of visiting preachers among others, but also to give guidance and leadership over spiritual matters. They had to be prepared to lead worship, and care for the needs of those present.

All the time the roles women undertook were expanding. There was the possibility of movement from casual conversation to speaking or praying aloud in a band or class or even a society. They could be called on to give testimonies at a love feast, or give an exhortation for people to respond to a sermon. This could lead on to... and here the line began to get blurred – expounding – talking on a spiritual theme. At this point it is not easy to define where that ended and preaching began. Some women took that course of preaching - to take a text, put it in context and apply it. Initially Wesley did not wholly approve, but as he saw that this led to conversions, influenced by his remembrance of his mother's influence, we know of some who met his approval. Those of whom he approved needed to convince him of their "extraordinary call" to preach. There is a definite record of one – Sarah Mallett - being offered the right hand of fellowship.

“We give the right hand of fellowship to Sarah Mallett and have no objection to her being a preacher in our connexion so long as she preaches the Methodist doctrine and attends to our discipline”.

Sarah was aged 22 and this quote was part of a letter sent to her superintendent by John Wesley after the Methodist Conference of 1787, and while the sources cannot be verified, it is believed that at least forty women were acknowledged as preachers during John Wesley’s life time. Other names could be quoted who did tremendous work in a variety of fields, forming the basis of Methodist concerns for wholeness of life. Things were to change with Wesley’s death.

I shall continue the saga next time.

Joyce Pipet

Brent Knoll

When I was a child, we had a regular round of visits to various relations in the neighbourhood. We always looked forward to these occasions and to the variety of afternoon teas which different aunts provided. I’m sure that my mother enjoyed the opportunity to chat with her sisters in law while we children played with our cousins in the local park but there was also a certain tension in visiting the aunt who was particularly house proud and had the dustpan and brush always at the ready to follow any too carefree child! I was reminded of this experience when we at last reopened our doors for worship.

It said WELCOME on the door but as you entered there was the array of official notices: “Wear a mask”; “sanitise your hands”; “Maintain social distance”; etc, etc.

It’s all very strange! However, we have had our first opportunity to worship together again and that was at Pentecost, the birthday of the church and so a very fitting occasion to make a new start. As I know that you have all found, one of the hardest things is that we can’t stand up and sing. (So much for “Born in Song - his people have always been

singing!) I had wondered how we would manage this so in preparation for the day I had asked other churches how they were doing things and had visited Brean and East Brent to experience “worship during covid” for myself, so thank you to their church stewards who made me welcome. I can now understand better what a responsibility you have all taken on. Thank you too to all those who have helped make our reopening possible: to Steve who conducted the risk assessment; to Claraine, who arranged the deep clean, the pat tests and helped me with stewarding; to Ronny, who checked the sound system and replaced the batteries and made welcome notices; to Chris who printed and laminated the official notices; to Gill who has looked after our finances throughout and got the music machine going as if we had never been away; and finally many thanks to Janet and Rodney, who have faithfully called in each week to flush the water system and check that all was well. Rosemary and I are very grateful that everyone has been so supportive and although I know that some who would like to be with us cannot do so yet for health or family reasons we are all still part of one church family and we can still pray together. It is good that we are able to meet together again and we will continue to do so although we may be very few in number; we can learn from the experience and look for guidance as to our future, trusting in the promise of Pentecost that the spirit will be with us and will lead us. One of the good things about reading the hymns instead of singing them is that we have been able to think more about the meaning of the words and often use them in our prayers and this is a verse from Hymn 398:

May the Spirit fill our praise, guide our thoughts and change our ways.

God in Christ has come to stay, Live tomorrow’s life today.

Our love and prayers for you all, Margaret

Finally, please note....
the deadline for the
July/August Link Plus
is 27th June.

LINK DIARY

Date & Time	Location	Event
June		
10 th 7.00pm	Zoom	Circuit Safeguarding Meeting
15 th 7.30pm	Zoom	Circuit meeting
July		
August		
7 th 10.30am	Brent Knoll	Charity Coffee Morning
14 th 10.30am	Brent Knoll	Charity Coffee Morning
21 st 10.30am	Brent Knoll	Charity Coffee Morning
28 th 10.30am	Brent Knoll	Charity Coffee Morning
29 th 4.00pm	Brean	Open Air Service
September		
12 th 10.30am	Brent Knoll	Harvest Festival
15 th 7.30pm	St Andrew's	Circuit meeting
19 th 10.30am	East Brent	Harvest Festival
October		
10 th 10.30am	Brean	Harvest Festival