

Sutton Park Methodist Circuit

Living & Growing God's Kingdom

The story so far ...

... as at 3rd July 2017

**Sutton Park
Methodist Circuit**



October 2015

Circuit Leadership Team Away Day

The Ministers, Circuit Stewards, Lay Worker & Superintendent's PA met with our Chair of District, Rev Ian Howarth, and the District Evangelism Enabler.

That day we began a new journey for the life of our Circuit. We looked at strengths, weaknesses, hopes and dreams and had very open discussions about worship, congregations and visions for the future.

November 2015

Circuit Leadership Team Meeting

A meeting to brainstorm ideas to formulate plans and a vision statement.

January 2016

Circuit Leadership Team Meeting

We spent a while reflecting on our previous meeting and the Vision Statement we started with which was: 'Living and Growing the Kingdom of God'.

After a very thorough discussion we arrived at our proposal to the Circuit for a Vision Statement:-

“Living and Growing God's Kingdom”

We agreed that it was very important that we, as The Circuit Leadership Team, should have a positive attitude and commitment to the Vision Statement so that it flows from us to the whole Circuit. We are a multi-cultural Circuit and as we 'live and grow' together we embrace the statement together, as one body in Christ.

- The Plan was to launch the Vision Statement at a morning Circuit Service in October. This was a new initiative and quite a brave and courageous step to close all Circuit Churches on that day.

- A Four Week Bible Study would be prepared on ‘Living & Growing God’s Kingdom’ for every Circuit Church to take part in during the weeks following the Launch Service.
- Feedback would be invited from each Circuit Church for ideas/inspiration etc to take the Vision Statement forward.
- We would need to resource the project.

The last two years or so can be summed up in the following articles/Reports:-

1. Superintendent Minister’s Letter – Rev Alan Smithson

Dear Friends

At the beginning of this new plan you will be aware of a special circuit service, Celebrating God’s Kingdom, to be held at Bishop Walsh School on the 25th of September. This is to launch our new circuit vision, ‘Living & Growing God’s Kingdom’ and I am pleased that the Rev. Stephen Poxon a past president of the Methodist Conference will be preaching on this occasion and that our District Chair, the Rev. Ian Howarth will be with us.

**‘Living &
Growing God’s
Kingdom’**

A number of years ago I preached a sermon that contained a vision for that church but because I didn’t say it was a vision nobody recognised it as vision. To be honest as I preached even I did not realise that it was a vision!

But what is a vision for our circuit and our churches? The vision statement that has been accepted by the circuit meeting is just that, a statement which tries to encapsulate the vision. So what is a vision?

It is appropriate to start with a picture. You are on holiday in the Alps and you decide to climb a local mountain, the problem is that you do not have a map but that’s OK because just outside your hotel is a path with a sign post directing you to the summit of the mountain. As you continue on your journey you come to a series of forks in the path but it is still OK

because the finger posts keep directing you in the right direction until you come to a fork and the sign is missing. What do you do? Do you give up and turn back? Or do you make the decision to follow the path that seems to be going in the right direction?

You follow this path and it takes you into a thickly wooded area and you lose sight of the mountain but you keep going until you are out of the woods and you see the mountain ahead of you. Sometimes you may take the wrong path and have to back track, but that does not really matter for the mountain is still ahead of you.

A vision is like a mountain. You may feel you may never get there, you may never get there, but you carry on because we need something to aim at, a sense of direction. Jesus said that the Kingdom of God was like a merchant seeking fine pearls. The Kingdom was not the merchant, nor was it the pearl it was the act of seeking. We are seekers, and it is that which spurs us on.

When we stop seeking we are finished. When we stop travelling forward and decide to return to the hotel, we are finished.

To be a little more practical the vision is not what we want our circuit, or church, to be but what God wants us to be. It is not invalid because we do not see how we are going to achieve it, God does not hand out maps but just says, "Off you go".

So, on 25th September we stop looking at the mountain from the comfort of our hotel lounge and start on the path that is before us.

Grace and peace to you,

Alan

2. Celebrating God's Kingdom – Mrs Chris Higgs (Circuit Steward)

"So what's this CGK service all about? It's not for me; it looks as though it's for young people. Close our church on a Sunday morning? Where is Bishop Walsh school?....."

Just some of the remarks that were heard when the Circuit service to launch our new vision statement “**Living and Growing Gods’ Kingdom**”, was first mentioned. It did seem radical, this was a very new initiative, but the Circuit Leadership Team were excited at the prospect of such a venture. How wonderful it would be for the whole Circuit to gather together for this purpose. As the weeks went by and more posters were produced, folk from each church came to meetings, the organisation was put into place and the anticipation began to grow. Everyone was encouraged to attend, there was to be something for everyone - even transport was to be provided. Yes, there was some apprehension - would all go according to plan? Would there be enough cakes? Would the people come?

A tremendous amount of preparation, work and prayer went into the planning, and for this we say a huge “THANK YOU” to everyone who helped in any way with the organisation of this venture.

And then finally, the great day came.

Cars began to arrive, slowly at first, and then more and more and the 600 chairs began to fill up. In the event, over 500 people came. Children went to have a great time with John Hardwick, Deacons Liz and Linda and their team; the young folk went and had an equally great time with Rev Malcolm, and his helpers. Meanwhile we in the main arena were also having a great time. Worship was in progress, and as time went by, there was a great sense of anticipation and excitement. One member from each church took along an item to share, which represented their church’s vision and mission. Follow on Bible study notes were distributed to each church, along with a packet of mustard seeds. Rev Stephen Willey rode in on his bike and reminded us of our vision statement, and that we are the church, not the building. Meaningful songs were sung with great feeling, led by the worship band and singers - something quite new for some churches.

Then Rev Stephen Poxon preached. He gave us 5 points by which we would recognise the **growth of the kingdom** – there will be generosity, compassion, justice, transformation and grace. He challenged us to stand if we felt we wanted to be part of this new vision. He was truly inspirational.

There was a sense of the Holy Spirit being at work.

Holy Communion, led by Chair of the District, Rev Ian Howarth, went smoothly, and the feeling of all being together as one Circuit was reinforced.

The final hymn “And can it be.....” was sung lustily and with great feeling. And then it was over, and we turned to our neighbours and there was a great buzz “Hasn’t it been great? I’m so glad I came. What a wonderful experience....” And we looked at our watches, 1.30 pm! Really, and the time had flown, but we all felt uplifted and ready to go out and really “Live and grow God’s Kingdom”. But not until we had shared tea and delicious cakes served by willing helpers.

We are already planning CGK2!

3. Methodist Recorder

Celebrating God’s Kingdom a journey of faith

On a cold winter day in January the Circuit Leadership Team of the Sutton Park Circuit (Birmingham District) made a decision to launch their new Vision Statement with a radical move to host a ‘never done before’ Sunday morning Circuit Service in September.

“The decision was made ... there was no going back now!”

The first challenge was to find a venue that would seat the thousand plus members of all thirteen churches within the geographical boundaries of the Circuit. This was not an easy task but after much searching the Sports Hall of a Catholic Secondary School in Sutton Coldfield was booked.

The Vision began to excite people and we began to ‘**live it**’ as we met together at different churches around the Circuit. We laughed, shared friendship (and most probably cried!) as we planned together every small detail of youth work, music, publicity, catering, stewarding ... the list goes on!

“Was this how the early church grew, by working together with one aim?”

We may not have been travelling from Corinth to Ephesus or Rome to Malta but the same aim was very real - ***to share the love of Christ*** - by using a huge Circuit Service as a springboard for our Vision:

Living & Growing God's Kingdom.

To publicise the service one of our Circuit Ministers, Rev Stephen Willey, offered to cycle around each Circuit Church one August Sunday afternoon. This idea soon '**grew**' into a massive fundraising event for our Refugee Project. A total of 14 cyclists shared all or part of the 45 mile journey and were welcomed at each church with cake (and more cake!) and with love and encouragement for the next stage of their journey. A fabulous £4030 was raised for the Methodist Church World Mission Fund working on the ground in Europe with refugees.

Members from across the Circuit also came together to form a music group and choir. Rehearsals were a great opportunity for everyone to get to know each other better, or even meet for the first time.

So, Sunday, 25th September finally arrived

That Sunday morning saw several new signs of unity and hope as all 13 circuit churches from Birmingham's inner city to the Warwickshire countryside presented an uplifting vision of hope and mission for the future. During the service a church brought forward a jar of Liquorice Allsorts representing the sharing of God's love throughout a diverse community, a 'hospitality tray' representing welcome and care for all who enter God's church, and a lantern - shining out as a beacon of Christ in the community – These and other signs expressed a desire throughout the circuit for the love of God to radiate through worship, word and witness.

Keyboard, guitars, trumpets, violins, flutes, drums and singers enhanced and led the wonderful worship. Those involved in the music group, more used to smaller congregations, found real inspiration in the enthusiasm and spirituality of the occasion which lifted the whole event.

We knew Methodists are renowned for their singing but it was still amazing to witness over 500 people worshipping together, each out of the comfort zone of their own church, all embarking on this Circuit's journey of 'Living and Growing God's Kingdom'.

Living and Growing God's Kingdom was taken as a theme by our preacher Rev Stephen Poxon (former president of conference). He related his experiences in ministry – the love and challenges he had personally been involved with – to illustrate how, through Christ's love and forgiveness, people are able to come alive in their own relationship with God. Stephen challenged us to use our faith to make a difference in the world around us through generosity, compassion, justice, transformation and grace.

As older members worshipped through hymns and songs, readings and a challenging and inspirational talk, younger people had a wonderful time of blessing which will serve as a springboard for future circuit gatherings of our children and young people.

Children enjoyed the time of celebration. John Hardwick's praise party brought the Bible to life through songs, games and story-telling. Some children had the opportunity to try their hand at circus skills! John led a very lively and exciting hour for all present - including the committed team of children's workers. Older young people had the opportunity to engage in an event which culminated in the arrival of a very large globe, which had been the focus of prayer, bouncing into the worship area.

Everyone then joined together to share in a sung communion celebrated by Rev Ian Howarth our Chair of District. It was a delight to join in this Eucharist with friends and strangers from the same Circuit.

After the service, we shared tea and cakes and reflected on the experience of all coming together in this unique way in a completely different venue. Lots of people brought packed lunches and in this way our celebration continued well into the afternoon.

The whole event involved hard work, both in preparation and physically over the weekend moving furniture and equipment and setting it up. At times perhaps some had doubts. Was the effort worthwhile? Would it all come together? Would people come along on the day? However at the end when everything was cleared away we all felt uplifted and renewed and that God had been amongst us in a very real way answering our prayers.

Continuing the Journey

At the CGK Service, Bible Studies were presented to each church and many people have taken part in the study since September.

On Saturday, 28th January the Circuit held a Feedback Morning to gather thoughts on the Bible Studies to move us forward.

This was a thoroughly thought provoking morning which gave material for the CLT Away Day on 1st March when District Chair, Rev Ian Howarth and District Mission Advisor, Rev Trey Hall helped us continue the process of finalising our Mission Goals.

March/April 2017

Two CLT meetings took place with decisions made to create a new Circuit Structure and to finalise our Mission Goals.

Circuit Meeting 13th June 2017

At this meeting we introduced our ten year Circuit Structure together with our Mission Goals which can be summed up as follows:

News from the Circuit Leadership Team (extracted from Sept-Nov Newsletter which will be available at the end of July)

We are delighted that Rev Andrew Brazier will now be joining the Circuit in September as well as Rev Stephen Froggatt and Deacon Marilyn Slowe.

At the Circuit Meeting on 13th June, the Circuit's 10 Year strategy was announced, together with our Mission Goals to enhance and take forward our Vision Statement: 'Living & Growing God's Kingdom'.

The Circuit Leadership Team have made these decisions over months of prayer; discussion and consultation with the Circuit; help and guidance from our District Chair, Rev Ian Howarth, and our District Mission Advisor, Rev Trey Hall.

Going forward from September 2017, there will be two clusters across the Circuit, with the oversight of Rev Alan Smithson as Superintendent:-

Rural and Suburban Churches

Rev Alan Smithson - South Parade, Streetly & Superintendancy
Including Mission Goal

Rev Stephen Froggatt - Blackwood, Four Oaks & Kingsbury
Including Mission Goal

Deacon Marilyn Slowe - Blackwood & Four Oaks
Including Mission Goal

Urban and Estate Churches

Rev Stephen Willey - Boldmere, Falcon Lodge, Kingstanding & Nechells
Including Mission Goal

Rev Malcolm Oliver - Erdington, Stockland Green & Witton
Including Mission Goal

Rev Nic Blackwell - St Chads

Rev Andrew Brazier (Half-time)
Including Mission Goal

Missional Goals

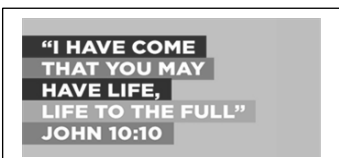
In order to meet our concrete missional goals (below) over the next five years, we will celebrate our diversity, plan strategically and resource Ministers and Lay People in relation to their gifts, skills and experience to:



Understand the needs of each community served by our thirteen churches and respond with at least one new initiative.



Value the uniqueness of each Church Community.



Ensure that each person we encounter is empowered to achieve their full potential.



Encourage everyone to enrich their faith by providing the 'right fit' resources.



Be a voice speaking out for justice in tangible and measurable ways.



Bring more children and young people to a knowledge and love of Christ.



Link each Church with at least one other Church.

These Missional Goals will incorporate the District initiative 'Church Without Walls' (see following).

The Mission Goals will cover the whole Circuit and lay people from our congregations will be actively involved in delivering them.



We will continue celebrating our diversity by linking churches across the clusters. So, each Church will be linked with at least one other Church.

Linked Churches

Nechells and Four Oaks
Witton and South Parade
Kingstanding and Boldmere
Kingsbury and Falcon Lodge
Stockland Green and Blackwood
St Chads, Erdington and Streetly

Commissioning Sunday

Sunday, 1st October

As Paul commissioned people in the early church, so a few people will be commissioned to worship with their linked church on the following "Networking Sunday".

Networking Sunday

Sunday, 8th or 15th October

A welcome will be given during the morning service for those commissioned from the link church and it is hoped that a simple meal will be shared afterwards.

Provisional Date for CGK 2 (to coincide with the end of CWW Mission Week)

Sunday, 29th April 2018

More information to follow.

Birmingham Methodist District Initiative

Church Without Walls (CWW)

Becoming a hub of new mission and ministry experimentation for 21st century Britain



When Peter stepped out and preached his first sermon on the Day of Pentecost what is known as the 'early church' began. The first Disciples had to 'imagine' how their new faith in Jesus could be lived out. They had a blank piece of paper and, filled with the Spirit of God, began to draw on it their plans for church ... in their context.

After John Wesley's heartwarming experience, the revival God inspired him to begin was different to the norm and challenged the established church. When John was excluded from Church of England pulpits, he 'reimagined' church in a new context, for a new generation and took to his horse and began preaching to thousands!

For our society today, we need to think very clearly about what 'reimagining' church looks like. People no longer flock to church; children aren't even familiar with the Lord's Prayer.

Rev Trey Hall who is the District Mission Advisor has recently launched 'Church Without Walls' (CWW) which is an initiative to provide the tools to 'reimagine' each and every Methodist Church in our Circuit and District.

Each church is invited to follow four pathways of (1) Welcome; (2) Growing Congregational Confidence; (3) Getting Outside the Buildings, and (4) Identifying New Congregations.

The Circuit Meeting has committed to this initiative, so please ask about it and find out how your own local Church is seeking to take part over the coming months.

Who will never be reached if we only
do what we're doing now?

Four Oaks Church Council - 15th June 2017 **Circuit Stewards' Report**

- It has been a busy time and a number of new initiatives are being introduced as part of a 10 year plan for the Circuit.
- There is to be a new Circuit structure due to falling numbers of ministers, which led the CLT to think innovatively.
- There will be a suburban/rural cluster of churches viz: South Parade, Four Oaks, Streetly, Blackwood and Kingsbury, under the care of 2 presbyters and a deacon (Alan, Stephen Froggatt and Deacon Marilyn). There will also be an estate/inner city cluster of churches viz: Kingstanding, Stockland Green, Witton, Nechells, Falcon Lodge, Boldmere, plus St Chads. They will be under the care of 2 presbyters plus a proposed deacon to be appointed in the future. (Malcolm, Stephen W plus a deacon, and Nic at St Chads.) Eventually, when Stephen W leaves, Boldmere will transfer to the suburban cluster.
- Each church will be linked with another church from the opposite cluster and there will be a Commissioning service on 1st October, followed on the 8th/15th October by the Networking, when 3 or 4 folk from each church will visit their partnered church. Four Oaks are linked with Nechells, Streetly with Erdington and St Chads, Falcon Lodge with Kingsbury, South Parade with Witton, Boldmere with Kingstanding, Blackwood with Stockland Green. This was agreed at the C Mtg.

- Each minister will also be responsible for implementing one of the 7 Mission Goals which are to be introduced as part of the Circuit plan to “Live and Grow God’s kingdom”. A lay person will work alongside each minister with these, and more will be heard of these as they are rolled out in September.
- Stationing. With knowledge of this proposed structure, Rev Ian Howarth, Chair of District, approached Rev Stephen Willey, acting Superintendent, with the offer of a part time presbyter, Rev Andrew Brazier, who will be stationed half time at Beacon church in the Birmingham District, for a 2 year initial appointment. It was proposed that he would work in the cluster with Stephen and Malcolm, prior to our appointing a deacon. This was agreed at the C. Mtg.
- Further stationing Rev Alan Smithson’s appointment is due to terminate next year. When he returns from Sabbatical, we will have a conversation with him about his thoughts for the future. Meanwhile a Stationing cttee has been agreed.
- District Initiative - Church without walls. Rev Trey Hall, the District Mission advisor, has led us in this and is asking that each Circuit in the District, and then each church within the Circuit, commits to a number of pathways to look out into the community. The Circuit has agreed to commit and each congregation has a number of leaflets explaining the details. Following on from the success of CGK, it is proposed to hold CGK2 on 29th April next year, as part of the Church Without Walls.
- Circuit website Action shots of each church are needed for this, with some words of explanation. Please send to Nikki Murcott, Jenny Wilkes or Brian Round.
- Refugee working party There is to be a fun day for refugees on Thursday 3rd or Friday 4th August. This is to be held in Sutton Park, and volunteers are needed.
- Circuit stewards There is an urgent need for at least one replacement CS. You are urged to consider this carefully.

NB At the Four Oaks CC – we committed to Church Without Walls.

(Attached is the Church Without Walls Flyer and the powerpoint used at the Circuit Meeting)

Deacon Marilyn Slowe - An Introduction

I am originally from Sierra Leone, and have lived in the East End of London for most of my adult life. I am a mother of two amazing young men and grandmother to two lovely girls and aunty to many.

Part of my Spiritual call is to feed God's people in mind, body and Spirit in the giving and receiving of hospitality.

I have always been a Women Enabler and passionate about lay empowerment and matters of social justice and equality.

I have maintained strong links with Poplar Methodist Church in the Tower Hamlet Circuit from where I candidate and St John's Maroon Church in the Freetown Central Circuit of the Methodist Church in Sierra Leone which I regard as my home Church.

As a member of a dispersed religious Order united by a common Rule of Life and prayer; the knowledge that my brothers and sisters are praying with me and for me give me strength through tough times and challenges. Living by a rule of life has proved a blessing as it provides a rhythm to my life that brings glory to God and blesses me to be a blessing.

I pray that God, who has set us on this journey together, will give us grace, fresh insight, love, understanding and patience as we go forth in his mission with our eyes fixed on Jesus Christ whilst sharing God's gifts to us.



Rev Andrew Brazier - An Introduction

The other day I fell over in the garage and dislocated my arm. Apart from identifying that the new arrival in the circuit is a bit clumsy it might seem like an odd introduction. If I tell you that I was trying to clear out the garage to make room for my large model railway it might begin to paint a picture. If I tell you that neither my wife nor my children were in the slightest bit surprised, it paints another.

The garage is currently full of all sorts of parts for my 1974 VW Beetle and donations for boot sales. Rebecca, my 16-year-old daughter, is off to Malawi and the boot sales were one of our fund-raising schemes. This is all a round-about way of saying that I see faith and ministry as a practical thing. I think that the things that excite and interest us are



the best ways of engaging those outside our churches. I am very much looking forward to meeting you all and finding out what funny hobbies and interests you have! Like Paul said “Ye shall know them by their fruits.”



The good news is that I was able to pop my arm back in straight away and was back on my bike a couple of days later – for cycling is another of my favourite occupations. Ruth, my wife, is a teacher and quiz show addict. My Son Ben is off to university in London studying maths and music. So much is changing for us. I

suspect a lot of things are changing for you all too? It feels like an uncertain time. I am excited about working with you all to figure out how we change and grow our church communities to fit this new world.