



 North Kent Methodist Circuit

# grapevine

CIRCUIT NEWS AND PREACHING PLAN



*inside...*

NET ZERO BY 2030?  
60TH ANNIVERSARY AT LARKFIELD  
MENTAL HEALTH

Issue Thirty Three  
Spring 2025

# Spring 2025

Preparing this Spring edition of Grapevine reminds me of the continual task of evaluating what we want to preserve from the past and what we will need to ensure a good future. That seasonal sifting-through goes for our personal lives, our homes and gardens, our churches, our communities. Looking back and looking ahead always involves making decisions in the present, taking into consideration what's feasible as well. The task of preparing the Circuit Plan four times a year certainly makes me aware of the fragility – and essential importance – of preparing for the future. Inevitably, plans change, but careful consideration in advance can provide a framework for dealing with the emergencies and the unexpected adventures that arise!

Sometimes we are reluctant to make plans, because those preparations also involve some personal commitments. Some might be tempted not to plan at all; some

would say 'it's all in God's hands; so why plan?' There's a much-loved verse in Jeremiah 29:11 declaring that God has plans to prosper and bless us all. That's comforting, but it doesn't let us off the hook for keeping in close touch with God to catch a glimpse of what those plans might be and how we are to prepare so that we can fully participate in making the plans a reality!

In this Spring edition of Grapevine, Monica Wilding from Larkfield has a piece about how her church made plans for celebrating their 60th anniversary – and how those plans have come to fruition. We hear from a few churches, Hextable, Dene Holm, Third Avenue and Union Street, which are considering how they will make their churches more environmentally friendly, in line with the Methodist Church in Britain's decision a few years ago that ALL Methodist property should be as close to Net Zero in its effect on the environment by 2030.

James Walker, our Circuit Operations Manager, has written an article about mental health in the UK and how our churches can help ease the public burden by accessing training in how to help people identify and get appropriate care for their mental health problems.

Finally, Oscar Siu writes about the pleasure he and his congregations get from interacting cross-culturally with each other. Indeed, if World Peace is one of the most important issues we face, then Christian hospitality and interaction with others is a vital way of building strength for the future!

Most of our Spring will be spent in the season of Lent, preparing for the celebration of Jesus' resurrection from the dead on Easter Day. How will you prepare yourself for full participation in God's resurrected presence in your personal and congregational life?

**Bonni-Belle**

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

# *From Laughter to Solidarity:* **Creating Connections in Our Diverse Stories.**

As I lead services in our local congregations – whether at St. Luke’s, Third Avenue, or Eccles – I am consistently met with an exhilarating energy and a level of engagement that leave me feeling both humbled and inspired. These services often transform from mere gatherings into vibrant tapestries of shared experiences, stories, and laughter, where the congregation actively participates in a dialogue that transcends cultural boundaries.

There is something profoundly special about a community willing to share its life stories – the humorous anecdotes of family escapades juxtaposed with the heartfelt histories of local church and community bonds. These moments not only enrich the service but also foster a strong sense of bonding that permeates our gatherings.

As a migrant, my personal experiences often serve as a bridge, allowing me to connect with congregants on a deeper level. My early struggles with Northern Scottish accents, for instance, evoke plenty of laughter as I recount my attempts to navigate a strong accent that felt entirely foreign to me. It is heartening to see the congregation lean in, wide-eyed and eager, as my tales unfold. These shared moments of laughter help break down barriers and remind us of our shared struggles, no matter our backgrounds.

In exploring cultural parallels, I often turn to something as quintessentially British as fish and chips, contrasting it with Chinese-style steamed fish and the significance of each fish dish within its respective culture. These culinary comparisons not only tantalize the taste buds but also serve as a metaphor for the beautiful diversity within the body of Christ – a theme that resonates deeply with many of us.

Beyond my own experiences, I find a profound connection with the stories of those around me. My time



volunteering to serve the homeless in Scotland, as a foreigner, has opened my eyes to the fragility of life. During services, as I share these stories, the congregation reflects on their own initiatives and community services, considering how they contribute to improving lives in their local areas. These discussions foster enlightening exchanges of ideas and inspire hope and action within our community.

One of the most poignant topics that arises during my sermons is the plight of persecuted Christians worldwide. These stories remind us of the realities faced by many believers from diverse backgrounds and cultures, highlighting the universal need for love, justice, and support. Bringing these stories to light not only educates our congregation but also galvanizes them into solidarity and advocacy.

Initially, I was concerned that my outsider status in the UK – not being born and raised in Scotland and England – might hinder my ability to connect with the congregations I serve. However, I have come to see this perceived disadvantage as a profound gift. My migrant experience allows me to view the world through a unique lens, potentially fostering deeper understanding and wider perspectives. It reminds me that each person’s journey is a vital thread in the tapestry of our faith community.

Overall, my time in the North Kent Circuit has been a remarkable journey of discovery. The engaging interactions and moments of shared laughter are testaments to our interconnectedness. As I continue to navigate my path in ministry, I cherish the privilege of sharing my experiences and encouraging others to share theirs. Together, we could create a memorable tapestry of faith, culture, and community, one story at a time.

**Oscar Siu**

# Net Zero by 2030?

## Hextable's progress

The Methodist Church set us all a target many of us I fear will not be able to reach, but we can try!

Having always been interested in keeping our costs down and energy efficiency we have tried over the years to be conscious in the changes made to our premises since the 1990s, when plans were drawn up for our church extension and the 2000s when the connection corridors, Vestry, storage and toilets were revamped. We are fortunate that these two projects allowed modern building practices/regulations to be used.

Having attended a webinar in 2022 and been pointed to a number of links on the Methodist Church website a basic study was done using standard figures from one of the links indicated an offset of £85/m on current use. The webinar advised assessing our buildings, making a plan with an idea of costings for the work needed then working on funding needed. We have documented the build specifications as best we can. No drawings or material specs exist for work before the 1950s.

Like many churches this came at a time when finances were strained due to the effects of Covid. We assessed what steps we had taken over the years to bring our older buildings in line with modern standards with upgrades to roof and cavity wall insulation, changes from single to double glazing and changes to heating and lighting and how we use them. Back in 2011 we considered solar panels, but without battery systems, which are now more readily available. At the time, most of our use was in the evening, hence most of what we generated would have gone back into the grid and not give maximum benefit from the investment.

We have had a plan to block off some of the wasted space in areas to reduce the volumes requiring heating to reduce the heat requirement, but funds haven't allowed.

Funding was going to be a problem as our Reserves and Reserves Policy only allowed essential work. Most of our fund-raising events had ceased over Covid and most essential work carried out by volunteers at minimum cost. We were ticking along for a number of years, but the old phrase "God will provide" came to the fore when the Church received a larger than expected gift from a members Will. Planning can now start in earnest.

I cannot remember exactly when the aim of doing away with gas heating by 2035 came into being. The banning of fluorescent tubes in favour of LEDs was more recent. Both of these require significant financial outlays but can help with the Net Zero target. Our main heating is gas and 95% of lighting is fluorescent fittings!

Like many older buildings, our suspended tongue and groove flooring is possibly a source of heat loss and the vaulted ceiling in our older part of the church. Although carpeting the floor or laying vinyl flooring has helped, I'm not sure this is the best solution. To get to Net Zero will remain an expensive challenge and the cost, and extent, of the work a debate to be had with the Church Council. Of course, legislation and established dates could be revised!

**Peter Matthews**

## Dene Holm



Here at Dene Holm we have an extensive garden surrounding the church, mostly grassed. Four of the Members have taken over the maintenance during 2024 and have started a wild flower area in one corner. There is not much to see at this time of year, but we hope to show the developing garden next spring. In the photo are our four volunteer

gardeners, Eileen, Christopher, Janet and Dave (in Sunday best not their gardening clothes!)

**Blessings, Sylvia**

## Third Avenue's move towards net zero

Around four years ago we sectioned off an area of our front lawn and established a wildflower garden with the intention of attracting wildlife and insects. The area is supported by volunteers from the church and the children from Kiddiwinks nursery are encouraged to actively take part in the general maintenance and in turn are taught the importance of having a facility of this kind available. We also take part in 'No mow May' where the grass is left to grow naturally and the first cut is delayed until June each year.

We are also in the process of updating the full heating system in the community hall which includes a full replacement of the main gas boiler with a unit that is environmentally friendly and sustainable.

**Jim Hancock**

## Union Street

Having converted a large portion of our front lawn to a wildflower meadow with fruit trees and a small community garden in raised beds some years ago, we have also been working for many years towards renovating our 202-year-old Grade II listed Church. When the renovations are complete, we intend to be fully electric with a heat pump and solar panels installed. Our new kitchen will have an electric cooker instead of gas, and we will have underfloor heating. Finding ways to insulate the building that comply with heritage conservation standards has been a challenge, but we are persevering in our quest to make our building sustainably usable for at least the next fifty years!

# Learning more about mental health

Unfortunately, the issue of poor mental health is one that is growing at an alarming rate in the United Kingdom, and we are finding more and more people are coming to their local churches for comfort and support around these issues.

Last year in England there were 6.4 million referrals for people to get therapy for their mental health and a further 2 million people were on waiting lists for NHS support. Access to professional services is becoming increasingly difficult, and as a result poor mental health is costing the economy an estimated £300 billion every year and leading to increased number of people dying by suicide.

It isn't just adults that experience these difficulties either, with one in five school age children having a mental health difficulty and one in ten students missing more than 15 days of school.

Sadly, when people have mental health disorders, less than 25% get clinical help as they are fearful of the stigma and discrimination attached to this. The waiting lists are often so long that they simply cannot bear the idea of waiting so often turn to alcohol and substances to try and dull their pain.

Because of this it is important that as a community we are better informed in how to assist people that do approach us, either through our roles within the church or simply in everyday life; this is where we are encouraging everyone to access some of the training that the North Kent Circuit will be running throughout 2025.

We will be running several Mental health First Aid courses in the year which will include one day and two-day training aimed at supporting both adults and children as well as learning skills to manage your own wellbeing and those around you.

Our first training will take place at Larkfield Church on Tuesday and Wednesday, 25 and 26 Feb, from 9-30am to 4pm on both days. We will have sixteen spaces available, so if anyone would like to attend then please contact James Walker via email, [operations.nkmc@gmail.com](mailto:operations.nkmc@gmail.com).

We will be delivering other training both face to face and online throughout the year to try and reach as many people as possible and increase our understanding of the causes of poor mental health so we can spread the optimism of recovery for everyone.

**James Walker**



# 60th Anniversary Celebrations at Larkfield and East Malling Methodist Church



Back in April, as we began our Anniversary celebrations, Rev. Naomi challenged us to get sponsorship to do sixty things, in order to do some fund-raising. One such challenge was to sing "60 Hymns for 60 Years" on a Sunday afternoon. The idea was that we would sing just one verse of each hymn, unless someone sponsored their favourite hymn for £6, when we would sing it in full! We had lots of sponsored hymns! We were delighted that friends from other churches joined us which helped our voices no end. Starting at 1.30pm, it took four hours, including a much-needed half-hour tea break.



*Images:  
Larkfield's Anniversary Barn Dance,  
the Craft Group making 60 sets of  
"give-aways", Pentecost birthday cake,  
anniversary party at Messy Church,  
Christmas Tree Festival and  
Rev. Naomi visiting Circuit churches  
on her 60-mile sponsored bike ride.*

As Christmas began to enter our thoughts, there came the idea that we could do a Christmas Tree Festival with "60 Trees for 60 Years". Could we do it? Indeed we did, and if you counted every single tree there were many, many more than sixty. With trees in our Welcome Area, Church and hall, there was quite a variety, with trees representing church and community groups and from individuals. Highlights included a fascinating wooden tree from our local Repair Café with all sorts of tools and equipment, making me think about Joseph, the carpenter, earthly father of the Baby Jesus, and an amazing display of antique lights, which I admit took me back to memories of the Christmas tree of my childhood,



and a miniature felted animal nativity scene, with Baby Mouse Jesus asleep in a nutshell, and a flat-out, exhausted donkey.

Then on the Sunday afternoon, what else? - we sang "60 Carols for 60 Years", favourite carols, and long-forgotten ones were appreciated by so many of us and friends from the Circuit. We sang "Il est né, le divin enfant" all in French and "Stille Nacht" all in German. I have never heard

Silent Night being sung so loudly and with so much gusto!

Thank you to all those of you who came from around the Circuit to join us. We are continuing to celebrate our Anniversary year until Easter. Do look out for future events and join us if you can.

**Monica Wilding**

**60 CAROLS FOR 60 YEARS**

Join us to sing a favourite Christmas carol - or 60!  
 Sunday 8th December 1.30pm to 5.30pm  
 Afternoon tea served at 3pm

# North Kent Circuit Preaching Plan March – May 2025

		MARCH					APRIL				MAY				
		2	9	16	23	30	6	13	20	27	4	11	18	25	
			<i>1st in Lent</i>	<i>2nd in Lent</i>	<i>3rd in Lent</i>	<i>4th in Lent</i>	<i>5th in Lent</i>	<i>Palm Sunday</i>	<i>Easter Day</i>						
<b>BEARSTED</b>	10.30	LA	KICHENSIDE	ZACHAR <i>hc</i>	LA	ZACHAR <i>js@SMC</i>	READ	LA	ZACHAR <i>hc</i>	PICKARD	LA	READ	HINCHLIFFE <i>ca hc</i>	LA	
<b>CHINESE</b>	13.30	OATES/SIU <i>hc</i>	HII	LA	HUI HOI MING	SIU	TERRETT/ SIU <i>hc</i>	SIU	LAU <i>hc</i>	SIU	PICKARD/ SIU <i>hc</i>	SIU	SIU	CHENG PO SHAN	
<b>DENE HOLM</b>	11.00	ROWE	LA	HUDSON- BEDDOWS	TERRETT <i>hc</i>	LA	BURCH	LA	LA	LA	HUDSON- BEDDOWS	LA	LA	LA	
<b>ECCLES</b>	10.30	OATES <i>hc</i>	LA	LA	SHEPHERD	LA	WILDING	OATES <i>hc</i>	NEWELL	LA	LA	LA	PICKARD <i>hc</i>	LA	
<b>THIRD AVENUE</b>	10.30	SELMES <i>aa</i>	SIU	SELMES <i>hc</i>	SELMES	LA <i>aa</i>	SELMES	LA	SELMES <i>hc</i>	WATTON	SELMES	LA	SELMES <i>hc</i>	LA	
<b>GRAVESEND</b>	11.00	TERRETT <i>hc</i>	LA	WATTON	PATERSON	TERRETT <i>hc</i>	LA	LA	BURCH	DOWNES	TERRETT <i>hc</i>	LA	HUDSON- BEDDOWS	LA	
<b>HARTLIP</b>	18.30	GERMAN	SELMES <i>hc</i>	LA	LA	M SMITH	GERMAN	SELMES	GALLAGHER <i>js hc @ St. Michaels</i>	GERMAN	LA	SELMES <i>hc</i>	STUNELL	LA	
<b>HEXTABLE</b>	10.30	PATERSON	<i>9am OATES bc 10.30 am OATES hc</i>	LA	BURCH	HUDSON- BEDDOWS	LA	<i>9am bc 10.30am ROWE</i>	OATES <i>hc</i>	LA	PATERSON	<i>9am OATES bc 10.30 am OATES ssa</i>	ROWE	LA	
<b>HOPE STREET</b>	10.30	LA	LA	LA	LA	ZACHAR <i>js@SMC</i>	LA	LA	LA	LA	LA	LA	ZACHAR <i>hc</i>	LA	
<b>KINGSWOOD</b>	11.00	LA <i>cc</i>	MYLES	BAPTIST WORSHIP	ANGLICAN <i>hc</i>	LA <i>ms aa</i>	LA <i>cc</i>	LA	LA	ANGLICAN <i>hc</i>	LA <i>cc</i>	MYLES	BAPTIST WORSHIP	ANGLICAN <i>hc</i>	
<b>LARKFIELD</b>	10.00	<i>9am OATES bc 10.30 am WILDING</i>	LA	NEWELL <i>aa</i>	WILDING	OATES <i>js hc</i>	<i>9am OATES bc 10.30 am OATES</i>	LA	WILDING <i>aa</i>	LA	<i>9am OATES bc 10.30 am OATES hc</i>	SHEPHERD	R GREY <i>aa</i>	LA	
	Café 15.00		WILDING					WILDING				LA			
<b>NEWINGTON</b>	9.30	CAN- TAMAKLOE	M SMITH	LA	ZACHAR <i>js - St.Marys</i>	ZACHAR <i>js@SMC</i>	M SMITH	ZACHAR <i>hc</i>	LA	LA <i>js - St.Marys</i>	ROBB	ZACHAR <i>hc</i>	WATTON	LA	
<b>ST. LUKE'S</b>	10.30	GALLAGHER	LA	TROTT	SIU	SELMES <i>hc aa</i>	LA	STUNELL	SELMES <i>9.30am hc</i>	LA	TROTT	SELMES <i>hc</i>	LA	LA	
<b>HOLY TRINITY</b>	10.00	ST. ALBANS <i>hc</i>	ST. DAVIDS <i>mw</i>	ST. WILLIAMS <i>hc</i>	ST. ALBANS <i>mw</i>	ST. DAVIDS <i>hc</i>	ST. WILLIAMS <i>mw</i>	ST. ALBANS <i>hc</i>	<i>6.30am BLUE- BELL HILL ST. ALBANS hc</i>	ST. DAVIDS <i>mw</i>	ST. ALBANS <i>mw am</i>	ST. DAVIDS <i>hc</i>	ST. WILLIAMS <i>mw</i>	ST. WILLIAMS <i>mw</i>	
<b>SITTINGBOURNE</b>	10.30	ZACHAR <i>hc</i>	LA	STUNELL	CAN- TAMAKLOE	ZACHAR <i>js</i>	ZACHAR <i>hc</i>	LA	ROBB	M SMITH	ZACHAR <i>hc</i>	CAN- TAMAKLOE	LA	LA	
<b>SPITAL STREET</b>	10.30	WATTON	DOWNES	TERRETT <i>hc</i>	LA	S SMITH	DOWNES	TERRETT <i>hc</i>	HUDSON- BEDDOWS	LA	BURCH	LA	TERRETT <i>hc</i>	LA	
<b>STOKE</b>	18.30	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
<b>PENINSULA STROOD</b>	10.30	SIU	SELMES <i>hc</i>	LA	LA	ROBB <i>aa</i>	SIU	SELMES <i>aa</i>	SIU <i>(No hc)</i>	LA	STUNELL	LA <i>aa</i>	TROTT	LA	
<b>TONBRIDGE RD</b>	10.30	NEWELL	ZACHAR	OATES <i>hc</i>	R GREY	LA	SHEPHERD	R GREY	TROTT	OATES <i>hc</i>	SHEPHERD	LA	OATES <i>hc</i>	LA	
<b>THE BRENT</b>	10.30	HUDSON- BEDDOWS	TERRETT <i>hc</i>	LA	DOWNES	LA	PATERSON	LA	TERRETT <i>hc</i>	ROWE	S SMITH	TERRETT <i>hc</i>	BURCH	LA	
<b>UNION STREET</b>	10.30	AT WEEK ST. URC	AT WEEK ST. URC	AT TON. ROAD	AT LARKFIELD	AT WEEK ST. URC	AT WEEK ST. URC	AT TON. ROAD	AT WEEK ST. URC	AT WEEK ST. URC	ONLINE	PICKARD AT WEEK ST. URC	AT LARKFIELD	LA	
<b>ONLINE SERVICES</b>	10.30	OATES	TBA	HEXTABLE	OATES	THIRD AVE	TBA	TBA	HEXTABLE	THIRD AVE	PICKARD	TBA	HEXTABLE	THIRD AVE	

*aa All-age / am Annual Meeting / bc Breakfast Church / cc Café Church / ms Mothering Sunday /  
mw Morning Worship / gd Gift Day / hc Holy Communion / js Joint Service*

**For the Summer issue:** Please send contributions as a Word document, no longer than 500 words, to [naomi.oates@methodist.org.uk](mailto:naomi.oates@methodist.org.uk) to arrive by 20 March 2025. If you can, please attach a suitable high quality image, but do not embed it in a document.