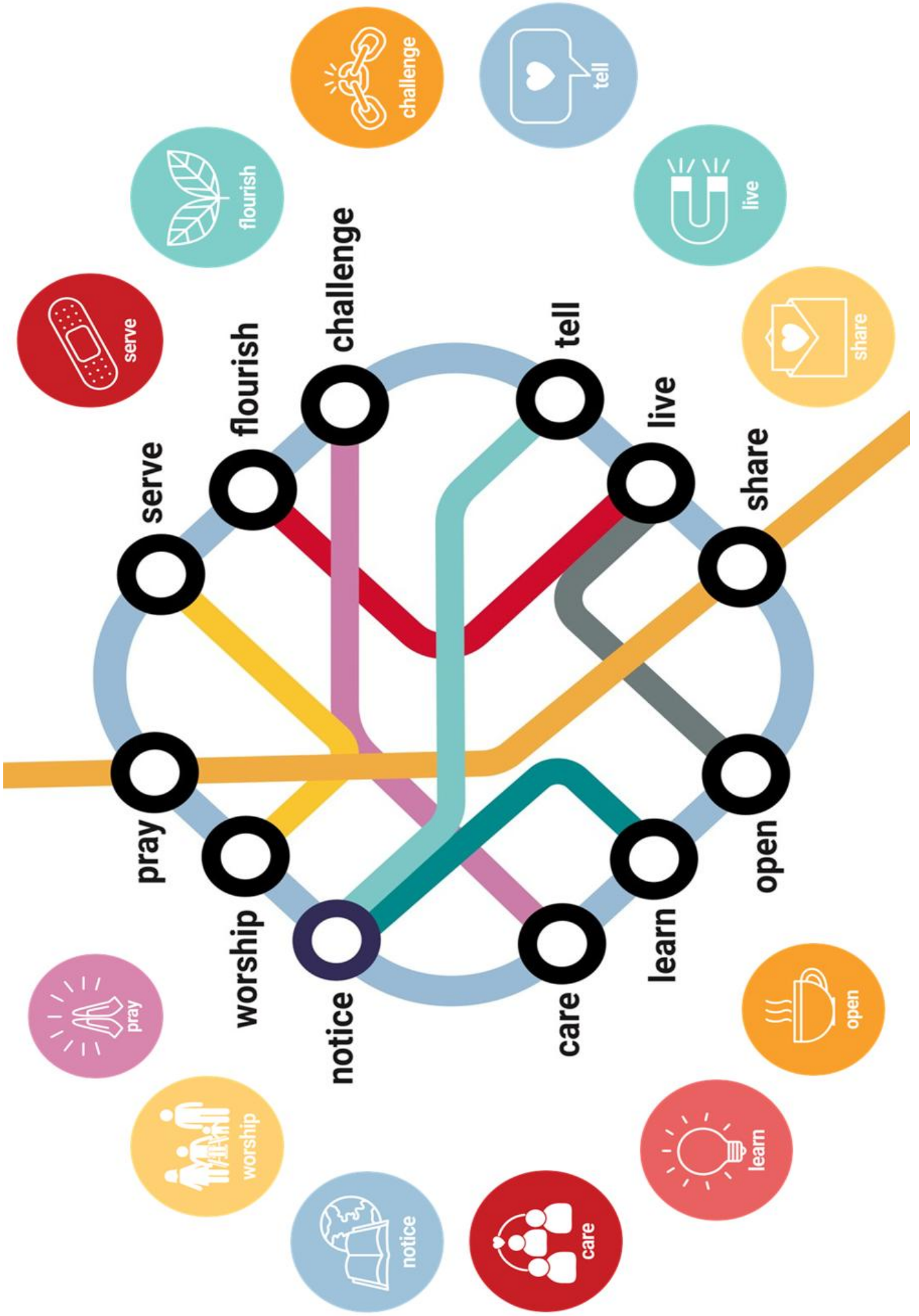


# Taunton Deane & South Sedgemoor Methodist Circuit



Churches Reports for the  
Circuit Meeting

June 2024



# A Pilgrim People...

Thank you to those who have compiled and contributed to these reports. The styles used have varied, but each gives an indication of the work and ministry of the church.

Such reports will always be incomplete, and there will always be more to add or adjustments to be made, but perhaps reading through the joys and opportunities identified by 'your' church and the churches of the Circuit will encourage you, even as you realise that the challenges you are facing are shared and understood by other churches, large and small.

I hope that it has been useful to take a snapshot of our churches' life at this time of reassessing our local community needs, and that we can use these reports to work on continuing our church and Circuit mission plans.



We are like those who move in a procession on a march through the darkness. The lights we carry are much alike, although each is individually our own. And when they are blown out in spite of our efforts to protect them from sudden winds, we need each other in order to continue the procession, to see the way ahead.

So we move on, our flickering light joining other lights in a communion of community that is indeed awesome and beautiful."

*Albert Schweitzer*

# TEMPLE



The news from Temple is good. We welcome between 60 and 70 most Sunday mornings and membership has remained fairly stable. It is always a delight to welcome new people and several have joined our congregation in the last year. There is usually a small group of children at the

morning service and they are kept busy with activities related to the theme of the service. One Ghanaian family who has become very much part of our church family will sadly soon be leaving Taunton but others attend who are on short term training placements at the hospital, in particular. A steady number of people (12-15) attend the Wednesday lunchtime service, as well as the monthly 9am Communion service in the chapel. There is also a monthly Cake & Conversation gathering on a Sunday afternoon to which one or two from other Circuit churches are welcomed. The 3-Church partnership with Taunton URC and St John's continues with joint study days/sessions in Lent and Advent, shared events, and 5-6 joint services during the year.

Other regular activities continue: Pop-In on Wednesday mornings provides a welcoming occasion and activities for a good number of people over the age of 50+; SaltPlus organises social activities open to all; the Thursday Group (formerly Vivary and Men's Forum) hold monthly meetings on a wide range of topics; there are film nights on some Fridays.

Music plays an important part of church life and we appreciate the range of music played by visiting organists and pianists. Quest, a group of ladies, continues to meet most weeks to sing together and enhance our worship. A small ad hoc group of musicians from a wide age range play for special occasions.

Involvement with Citizens Somerset is seen as an important element of our Christian witness.

Pastoral care is a vital part of our church life and there is a growing number of people who are unable to come to church regularly but who are equally important members of our fellowship.

So what is new this year?

- A group of people inspired by conversation at our General Church Meeting, to commit to the 'Flourish station', are working towards our becoming an Eco-church and bringing environmental issues to the forefront of our thinking.
- Prayer45: On alternate Wednesdays (either at 9.30 am or 6.30 pm) there is a new opportunity for any in the church to pray together
- The Chaplain at Queen's College is bringing students to Temple for seasonal events
- We celebrate the completion of the roof project and give thanks to God for the generosity that has enabled this
- The registration for same-sex marriages was finally agreed

It is estimated that around 500 people come through our doors each week – the majority to take part in the wide range of U3A courses, choirs, and many other groups who value the hospitality and the accessible space. This is possible thanks to the work and dedication of our Church & Community Worker, Joanna Rossiter, who is supported by a very loyal and regular group of church members.

Concerns:

- Financial – we continue to run a deficit budget. Whilst lettings income has increased this year over last year it is still lower than 4 years ago – with financial restraints affecting organisations such as Somerset Council
- The need for a Property Steward/housekeeper. Joanna Rossiter does far more than her job description requires and needs more help either from new volunteers or possibly from a paid employee.

## BRIDGWATER



Some of what we have to report is similar to last year and our challenges remain the same, but in many ways, we are in good heart and can report some signs of improvement, which is heartening.

One major change is that we have welcomed a Romanian Pentecostal Congregation onto our

premises and they use the Church on Friday and Sunday evenings for services and prayer meetings. It is pleasing that the premises are being used more frequently and the rent we receive has helped with our financial situation. We are receiving enquiries about hiring the premises from other organisations, which hopefully will result in increased lets and revenue.

We were happy to use the hall again in the winter, to reduce bills – the atmosphere was good and our preachers seem to approve! With the weather now warmer, we have reverted to holding services in the Church again. The new technical equipment installed in both the Church and hall enhances worship in both venues. We are now hoping to install a loop system in the hall, to help people with hearing issues. Having Wi-Fi on the premises has improved things for both our congregation and our users.

As we have a relatively small congregation we feel limited in what we can do, but we are keen to try, and we still dream and pray. We are now beginning to see some signs of encouragement and are pleased to be working with our Minister, Rev. Annie Deche, who has been with us now for nearly two years. Our Sunday congregations remain steady, and we have continued to welcome new people to our Church, including asylum seekers, whom we are getting to know and are helping to support. We come to know all of them as friends, so when some are relocated, it is a great loss to us all. We were asked to lead a Carol service at the Hotel, where we were joined by friends from the Circuit, which also contributed towards Christmas gifts for all the children.

We are pleased to report that Messy Church has continued monthly from 1.30pm-3pm on the third Saturday of each month. Numbers of families attending has increased, and those attending enjoy the activities on a Biblical theme and the food and games provided. We also held a Messy Church party in the summer. We are grateful for the support and help we get from our congregation and we still hope to expand our Messy Church by creating special activities for our older children. We are continuing to develop our Messy Church Facebook page, which provides a link with our Messy Church families and is good advertising.

Outreach to the community in the Bridgwater area includes our Friday Coffee/Play break for toddlers and their parents and carers, allowing parents and carers to chat whilst their toddlers play together. This is going well and many children are brought by their parents. They also have a Facebook page.

Business meetings and groups held are:

Council Meetings, Finance and Property Committee, Planning Committee, Stewards Meetings, and a Pastoral Meeting, and some of our members participate in the Circuit Zoom Bible study group. We had a successful Annual Away Day for a time of Bible Study and fellowship and we have planned another one in September this year. We have started an evening 'Encounter Service' held at the Bridgwater Church House on the last Friday of the month, led by Annie. We look forward to a series of Circuit Bible studies based on the Bible month literature, to be led by Rev Stuart Innalls in our Church House on Wednesday evenings in June.

We have continued to hold our annual Christmas Tree Festival, which went well and we opened our premises to the Carnival crowds last November as usual. The latter was very successful and raised much-needed funds, but also provided a very welcome and much-appreciated service at the same time. We have planned to hold both events again this year and are thankful for many who come out to support us from the circuit on carnival night.

Social events include our Annual outing, weekly Coffee and Chat, and meals, either bring and share, catered for by congregation members, or enjoyed at local restaurants. A group now regularly has Sunday lunch together after the morning service.

We donate to Methodist and other charities, including Christian Aid, and annually, we have a Christmas collection of toys and gifts for local or national charities. We hold an annual quiz, to which other members of the Circuit are invited and all proceeds are donated to Christian Aid. Our Lent Appeal this year was for Water Aid. We continue to support the charity Embrace (formerly the Bible Lands Society), through funds donated for coffee and tea following Sunday morning services.

We still have very good ecumenical links within Bridgwater with the Baptist Church and St John's Church. Sadly, we haven't re-established our previous links with Eastover School, although many of our Messy Church children attend that school and the school distributes flyers for us advertising it. Northgate School in Bridgwater does the same.

Our biggest threats are financial and our relatively small congregation who care for a large, aging building. We currently have 35 members with an average weekly attendance on Sunday mornings of 20.

# ROWBARTON



## Strengths

As a congregation we love each other showing an inclusive, friendly welcome to all. This spreads into our supportive pastoral network.

Our membership and attendees are loyal with a good group of church and property stewards. We have some very generous members and attenders, so we have been

able to cover essential expenditure.

Deaf Church 3rd Sunday afternoon each month

Our accommodation rooms are warm, light, and airy, thus supporting activities such as "The Mix".

The buildings are well maintained.

We are willing to try new ventures within the community including involvement through The Pantry.

We support the circuit, work with the North Taunton Churches, joint services with St Andrew's, "Messy Church", "Easter Cracked" and "Nativity on the Green".

We actively support RAfT, TWR, the annual church charity and our Methodist funds

We have a dedicated excellent organist for services.

Skilled operators for our digital projection that can be used for services, training and any venue, giving variety.

Younger people who are attending the church.

Capacity to make further use of the premises

## Weaknesses

Our age range is unbalanced with a predominantly elderly congregation and no regular children. We do not have a Junior Church.

We lack a large car park.

Our geographical location is both a strength and weakness.

An aging membership makes completing tasks harder and falls onto fewer hands.

The Methodist "system" can mean it takes a long time before some decisions can be made.

Attenders are often cautious about becoming actual members.



## **Opportunities**

We are a neighbourhood church with a growing multicultural community.

Working together with other North Taunton Churches.

We have the ability to add to our worship using YouTube clips.

Providing the Pantry presents opportunities to engage more fully with the community.

Good social space for more events, groups, and meetings.

We are relatively well placed for transport links giving opportunity for wider attendance

To use the gifts of the younger people

Capacity to make further use of the premises

## **Threats**

The gradual decline in the size of the congregation due to age and ill health.

A lack of people volunteering to undertake roles and tasks.

The potential loss of Kilkenny Car Park.

There is some apathy – volunteers can be difficult to find.

A smaller, increasingly elderly congregation could impact on the upkeep of the premises and on ministry within the community.

Risk of burn-out for some members having to do too much individually.

## **LISIEUX WAY**

**We Commit Ourselves to : Great Worship + Loving Fellowship + Mature Discipleship  
+ Using our gifts in Service + Sharing Jesus Christ**

We are a small church, Membership is 30, and average attendance on Sunday mornings is around 15-20. We welcomed three new members this year.

## **Strengths**

Local Arrangement services, led by our Worship Enabler and by teams from the congregation [increasingly based on the Methodist Way of Life], are valued by the congregation; and we have our much-valued 'local' musicians who occasionally lead the singing with passion. While we have not had organists who come to play for us, we are grateful for one of our members playing the



instrument some Sundays, and we are now well used to using technology to accompany hymn-singing. Singing *a cappella* does not faze us and we have been known to dance in the aisles too....

Our 'Faith in Action' meetings have morphed into "Church Family", and a Day held in February was felt to be very successful in beginning to answer the question "where now?", and it also led us to embrace the 12 stations of the MWOL [see above]. Our "Church Family" conversations will continue, and hopefully will strengthen our commitment to our community.

The following are regular events: Bible Study Group, and Come and Sing when they can meet. The Women's Fellowship has celebrated its anniversary, with a consistent membership.

We continue to share regular Quizzes. We recently hosted a Repair Café. Members from our church supported Easter Cracked at Rowbarton and St. Andrew's.

Lettings are gradually increasing, after taking a downturn during and after covid.

Regular reports of our services etc. go into the Link magazine, courtesy of one of our members.

We have started running school assemblies at our nearby school once a month; this was suspended for some years.

Lisieux Way received a Bronze Eco church award last summer, and we are building on this and aiming at Silver. We have been instrumental in getting an 'eco' page into the website, and support the 'eco' pieces now appearing monthly in the Link magazine.

We are grateful that we have a retired Anglican vicar and a lay preacher as active members. Their knowledge and devotion to God's work cannot be underestimated in the daily life of our church and in the interactions with all they meet. One of them has recently taken on the onerous task of archiving material and has written a 25,000 word document on the history of the church, ready for our 30th anniversary celebrations in 2025.

We are also grateful that the Lord called our current treasurer to take over from the outgoing treasurer who retired after 21 years of faithful service.

The forms for the Solemnization of same-sex marriages have been lodged with the Registrar, but no response yet, [except to ask for forms that had been included] so we are in limbo here.

### **Weaknesses**

It is now increasingly difficult to man the church for Sunday services. Likewise, we seem to be continually looking for officers, but always manage to find someone – though at times the situation is stressful.

With dwindling numbers of available preachers in the circuit, two of our stewards who are also LPs are increasingly called upon to preach away from Lisieux Way.

### **Threats**

Finances are barely adequate and the church is suffering the same cost of living crisis as households, particularly on the heating front. However, since our last report we have had some new exterior doors fitted and large cupboards in the Meeting room. Maintenance and repairs are on hold till finances improve.

The age and, in some cases, increasing infirmity of our members is a concern for us, as it is for many churches.

### **Opportunities**

Rev Annie instigated a church outing last summer, and is organising an away day to Wachuset soon, working with members of the church.

The “Church Family” Day [see above] created a warm space to have conversations around the way forward to build our church relationships and all it takes to be church in the community – and this will continue to be built on.

We continue to appreciate the variety of preachers who come to us, and especially those who take on the challenge of our monthly Praise Service. Latterly, it has been good to see preachers choosing one or two hymns that are more easily accessed by a member of the congregation with learning difficulties - it has been especially appreciated, as we realize that hymn choice is an integral part of the message at a service, and finding alternatives poses challenges.

We have enjoyed Easter and Anniversary Lunches recently.

We continue our support of Action for Children and CRY, our donations to Open Door, and also collecting stamps.

We look forward to learning more about the 12 stations of the MWOL through local arrangement services and church family days [see above].

Outreach to a local care home continues by way of monthly services and we enjoyed a Carol Service with residents and their carers at our church at Christmas. Due to bad weather the Easter service was held at the care home instead. We hope to organise a Harvest event at the church in October.

Use of the Community Garden has been appreciated for our Christmas Carol singing. The monthly work parties are a great way to teamwork and boost mental health.

A new Lettings opportunity is opening up, with a community café hopefully being held twice a month on the premises – it is too early to be sure how this will develop, but we have hopes that it will allow for outreach.

### **And.....mixed blessings....**

It's hard to know where to put this! The garden provides a serene area for the community, and for the odd rough sleeper – it also attracts arsonists and gangs of youths who annoy our neighbours.

It is a means of us getting to know our community through working alongside them eg through the enhanced pond area. We have also met with neighbours to discuss and hopefully answer their concerns.

## **PAWLETT**



### **Strengths**

Our relationship with our Anglican friends continues to flourish. They join us on the third Sunday each month for morning service followed by tea, coffee and socialising. They enjoy sharing the covenant service with us every year and we always join them for the Lent Lunch,

for the Christian Aid coffee & cake morning in May, and on Remembrance Sunday. A new venture in December was Christmas Tea with Carols in place of singing carols round the village, with village folk as well as our own two churches. Two other new ventures were a Village Pancake Race and a Children's Scavenger Hunt. Both were well attended by people in the village and great fun was had! In May we celebrated the 5<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of our local ecumenical Covenant.

**Messy Church** is held at the local primary school as an afternoon club. This venture is continuing to be very successful with 20 children attending. 6 sessions were held in the summer term, and 7 sessions in the autumn ter.

### **Opportunities**

We still have the pre-school using the hall during school term and we hope that this will encourage families to come and take an interest. As we now advertise that there is a service every week.

Our window displays for Christmas encourage groups to decorate a tree. We have Brownies, Rainbows, Pre-school, and Messy Church but so far their parents have not come to see their handiwork.

Our notice board has been revamped and now clearly shows the services and events to passers-by.

### **Weaknesses and Threats**

Although we have been encouraged by some new faces in the congregation, we have to face the fact that we are small in number, and not getting any younger. A threat is lapsing into despair, but we refuse to do that, and will continue to prepare for worship as well as we can, and find more ways of relating to our village community, to hopefully encourage more to join us.

## **NORTH CURRY AND CURLAND**

During the past year, we have welcomed Ildiko Haraszti, Minister-in-Training from the Queen's Foundation, Birmingham, on a Circuit Based Learning Pathway. Ildiko spends 20 hours a week in Circuit, as her academic studies allow, and has been working particularly this year in two of our village churches, North Curry and Curland being one of these. Following our prayerful

exploration for a village worker over the previous years, Ildi brings a timely presence in which we see God's hand.

We have begun to address the priorities highlighted by the last quinquennial inspection, with priority being given to making the roof watertight and the roof space secure. We are grateful for the help and advice given by Alex Jeremy as that essential work was addressed.



We note the challenges for a small congregation with a Grade II listed building to care for.

### **Worship at North Curry Methodist Church:**

- Weekly Sunday morning services; occasionally afternoon services replace the morning, particularly at Harvest, Christmas and Church Anniversary which enables friends from the Circuit to attend
- Taize services to mark Advent and Good Friday continue to draw those who appreciate this quiet meditative worship from the village and Circuit
- A united Christingle Service for village families, and with a drama planned and delivered by Ildiko and her family attracted almost 40 people
- United village and area events mark Covenant Sunday, the World Day of Prayer, Pentecost, and Remembrance Sunday – with St Peter and St Paul's, Stoke St Gregory Anglican and with Stoke St Gregory Baptist Church
- We offer worship which builds on the 'particular' nature of North Curry Chapel, e.g. traditional, meditative, Taize, favourite hymn evenings
- Our worship accompaniment has been through the kind services of our organist, pianist, and through StF CDs
- Projection and sound facilities are available for leaders of worship.
- The removal of a pew allows space for a wheelchair (following a long process of obtaining the permissions required for a Grade II building)

### **Special events and missional activity:**

- During the summer of 2023, we held a short series of Praise services in the afternoon which were attended by Circuit members
- Anne Thomas led a very successful Arts Day during the summer holidays 2023, which attracted 20 people of all ages and abilities

- We share in the Benefice monthly prayer meeting at the parish church
- Ildiko has led a Pets Service this year as a new venture
- Ildiko is leading a Musical Theatre after-school club at the Primary School which is engaging children and families – they have been invited to lead a presentation at the Church Anniversary Sunday Service at the end of June.
- Deborah continues to take regular assemblies at the local (CE) Primary School
- Local musician will help us mark our Church Anniversary this year, with a group of young musicians for a Saturday afternoon concert.
- The Methodist Church is always represented at village events – Christian Aid support, the May Fayre, Remembrance Sunday Memorial Service
- The congregation engages fully with 'special Sundays' through envelope offerings

### **Strengths and Opportunities:**

- The people! Committed and faithful
- Warm and welcoming – some say 'special' – atmosphere
- The congregation is always open to new ideas and varied worship styles
- Good working relationships between Anglicans and Methodists
- Good relationship with the primary school
- Local musician uses the premises for rehearsals, and for local events
- Useful 'Upper Room' space for groups/meetings
- Secluded garden area has potential for developing as a spiritual space
- Well placed geographically for Circuit/and Joint Circuit (SP&C) events
- We advertise events through village and parish publicity

### **Weaknesses and Threats:**

- The majority of members/attenders live outside the village, thus there is an associated transport issue
- Declining and aging congregation
- Balancing annual budgets is a challenge - the dramatic increase in Circuit assessment in 2024/5 will hit this small congregation hard
- Managing a Grade II listed building
- Encouraging the village to 'notice' us alongside the 'Cathedral of the Moor' and the very insular Independent Baptist Church is an ongoing task!

# THE LEVELS METHODIST CHURCH AT MIDDLEZOY

During the past year, we have welcomed Ildiko Haraszti, Minister-in-Training from the Queen's Foundation, Birmingham, on a Circuit Based Learning Pathway. Ildiko spends 20 hours a week in Circuit, as her academic studies allow, and has been working particularly this year in two of our village churches, Middlezoy being one of these.



## Worship at Middlezoy

- 1st Sunday of the month, joint morning service. These are held alternately in Holy Cross and the Chapel. In addition, festivals and special events are usually united.
- 3rd Sunday of the month, Circuit evening service with Holy Communion
- Flexible worship space encourages worship which is interactive and accessible for 'seekers'
- Last summer hosted a series of conversation spaces on Sundays with pancakes

## Worship at Westonzoyland

- A quarterly united service with CE and Methodist clergy held at the parish church.

## Community use of the Chapel at Middlezoy

- Weekly village coffee morning
- Hirings – weekly Pilates, band rehearsals, and ad hoc meetings
- Land leased to the Village shop/PO which brings a monthly rental
- One of the two village defibrillators mounted on the Chapel wall
- Venue chosen for a wedding due to accessibility

## Outreach:

- Ildiko's involvement in weekly Coffee Morning building community relationships
- Village Nativity and Christingle held at Chapel
- Ildiko led a New Year's Eve Circuit event at Middlezoy



- Ildiko started the 'Peekaboo Gang' in February for under 3s and their carers
- Ildiko led a Pet Service in April
- Annual ecumenical Good Friday reflection for the village at the chapel
- Seasonal ecumenical family events arranged in church or chapel
- Fundraising lunches during the summer are great community events
- Free 'Fence gifts' offered to the village at Christmas and Easter – these are now looked for and appreciated

### **Strengths and Opportunities:**

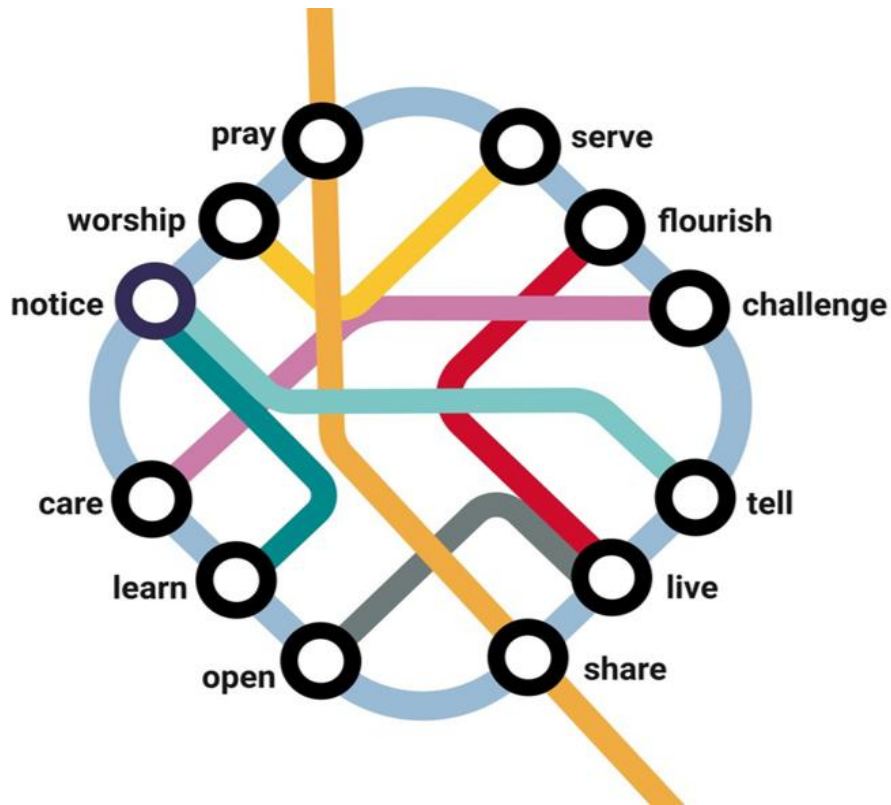
- The positivity and can-do attitude of the congregation expressed in 'holy risk'.
- Another new member in the last year, and another wedding!
- New supportive connections through Coffee Morning and parents from the Peekaboo Gang
- Excellent working relationships between Anglicans and Methodists in both villages – the Benefice will be undergoing changes following clergy retirement
- Very supportive members and 'friends of the Chapel' with good community links and good ideas
- Practical help from Circuit friends for events and activities
- Manageable premises, well situated, and well used by community of all ages
- Flexible inside, and good outside space – recently 'tidied up' with some great community help

### **Weaknesses and Threats:**

- Lack of people to take office or participate in outreach
- Balancing annual budgets is a challenge - the dramatic increase in Circuit assessment in 2024/5 will hit this small congregation hard

**All over the world, this Gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth. *Colossians 1 : 6b***

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## Something to do at your next GCM or CC:

### First:

Prayerfully read through your church report again, and put a tick alongside any of the 'stations' that are represented by what you have said about the character, the worship or the various areas of mission of the church.

If you have several ticks by one station, that might suggest the place your church is concentrating on for the moment.

For example, many of our churches might agree that they are '**Open**' – hospitable and welcoming spaces for their members and their communities.



It would be realistic for your church to have 2 or more 'stations' identified, but it isn't a competition for who can get the most – simply an acknowledgement as to where you are.

## Then:

Listen ..... to God, to one another, to your community

We often think we know the people in our churches really well, but might there be gifts in yourself or in others you may not have noticed?

How well do you know your community? What are some of the needs you see and hear about?

Who could you link up with? Other churches? Community groups? Individuals?

## Share together

Where do you sense the prompting of God is leading?

Is there another 'station' you don't travel to very often?

Is there anything that you are already doing that could be developed a little further or is there a 'next natural step'?

e.g. If we spend a lot of time welcoming others and providing hospitality, we will be listening to and sharing stories. Some of the stories we hear may be about injustice. Do these stories **challenge** us into action? Do some of our conversations give us opportunity to **learn** from others, or develop our confidence to **tell** our own story?



**Try to identify one station to travel to over the next year.**

This isn't necessarily about **doing more things**.

It is asking us to know **why** we do the things that we do

