UPDATE

March 2016



Circuit 26/4, **Southampton District**

Dates for your diary:-**Saturday 7th May** share your ideas and pray for the future vision of the circuit from 10am at Caversham Heights.

Sunday 17th July Circuit Gathering at Tadley Common, bring a picnic lunch from 1pm, Saturday 5th November Circuit Gathering at St Andrew's.

Did you miss the February Circuit Gathering?

There were a variety of activities throughout the day, but for me three things really stood out, the first being the opportunity to share in fellowship and conversation with Christians from other churches, most of which are quite different from our own.

Another part of the day that was really special was the worship. Led by a small band we sung a number of worship songs, one of which was new to me, but which I now find myself continually singing in my head — "Hear the Call of the Kingdom" by Stuart Townend

'... King of Heaven, we will answer the call, We will follow, bringing hope to the world, Filled with passion, filled with power to proclaim Salvation in Jesus' name...'

The Rev. David Shaw spoke about his recent sabbatical during which he set out to spend some time with each of his nephews and nieces, all of whom had a Christian upbringing. David said how much he had learnt from this experience and how he now has a much better understanding of how difficult it is for people with young families to fit church as we know it into their full and busy lives. It served as a reminder that we need to be more flexible and more willing to go out and meet people where they are. The worship also included a dramatised Bible Reading and an opportunity to engage in some creative prayer.

The real highlight of the day, however, was the guest speaker, the Rev. Ian Bell. During the day Ian gave two presentations.

The first presentation was entitled 'Towards the Edge: re-imagining mission today.'

Ian has a science background which came across clearly as he described the way the church has traditionally 'worked' as being like a centripetal force, drawing people to its centre. Nowadays this seems to be less effective. A more effective approach seems to be like a centrifugal force which moves from the centre outwards, out into the community. Ian continued by focusing on risktaking mission, posing the question as to how much risk we are prepared to take for the Kingdom of God. It was a thought provoking talk and those of us there were able to identify key points to take back to grapple with in our church communities.

Ian's second presentation was entitled 'At the Edge: pioneering mission for all'. This, of course, makes the assumption that we are at the centre; it also asks the question 'where is the edge?' Ian went on to remind us that pioneering is for all of us — it is not something that we can entrust to a small group. We need to remember we are following a missionary God and that pioneers help to break open a space ... in our case a space where conversations about God and encounters with God can happen.

The day ended with tea/coffee and home-made cake — perfect!! Marianne Sales.

Messy Church at Oakridge

Messy Church at Oakridge is held between 3:45pm and 6pm once a month at Oakridge Methodist Church and welcomes children and their families. Each session includes a mix of craft activities, a short time of children's worship, finishing with a shared meal. Messy Church is open for all families.

Regular helpers include Marianne Sales, Debbie Veel, Angela Smith and Joan Thomas along with others from our Circuit churches and also some from Basingstoke Community Church. Joan enjoys helping the children with crafts and all look forward to the time of children's worship and of course the meal, where the children are often involved in decorating cakes or biscuits in preparation for sharing together.

Debbie and Marianne are looking for more volunteers to help with Messy Church, age is no barrier for this role, it is a rewarding time for all involved. Please contact Debbie or Marianne if you would like to know more or would feel able to offer a few hours of your time to help at Messy Church.

The next Messy Church at Oakridge Methodist Church is on May 13th.

Separated families – a shameful situation

I want to tell you something about a shameful situation that exists in the UK today – a situation that is being ignored by Government but a situation that many have known about for years, a situation that is so bad that it may be hard to believe. But the facts are true and easily verified.

The situation concerns separated families and the rules set by Government to determine the child maintenance that should be paid by the parent who is not the main carer to the other parent. Unfortunately, fundamental mistakes were made in drawing up these rules. The result, for many parents, is that the calculated payments simply cannot be paid. They would be left without enough for their own survival.

Many of you will know of families where the parents no longer live together. It can be a difficult situation for all concerned – emotionally and financially. In many cases the parents are able to cooperate and make decisions together, in the best interests of their children – where the children should live, how much time they spend with each parent, how both parents can remain involved in the lives of their children, how to share the cost of bringing them up. But this is not always possible. If the parents can't agree on how to share the cost of the children, or want guidance, the parent with the main care of the children can apply to the Child Maintenance Service (previously the Child Support Agency). It will calculate how much the other parent should pay, according to a set of rules.

This is where things go wrong. Faulty legislation means that the amounts calculated are beyond the reach of many parents. The problem is particularly severe for those on low income since the two thresholds included in the rules to keep their payments affordable still have the values assigned to them in 1998! And no account is taken of the way in which maintenance payments interacts with welfare benefits. A crazy situation has resulted. A soon as a paying parent's income passes the lower threshold of £100 a week, they find that they lose money (up to 30p) for every extra £1 they earn. Parents in full-time work end up with less money than if they were unemployed.

The problems not only affect non-resident parents who live alone but also have a severe impact on the well-being of second families. If the paying parents complain they are told "That is what the law says, so you must pay." If they say they cannot pay, the payments are enforced, for

example by taking money direct from their wages or any bank account, or sending in bailiffs.

What is this to do with me? The situation was put in front of me early in 2011, through the case of a particular individual, and it was made clear that I was called to act. I have often felt inadequate and unequal to the task and know that by myself I can accomplish nothing. However, I am content to be a tool in God's hands and to trust the outcome to Him. Some steps on the way so far have included:

- A meeting with Maria Miller, the Minister then responsible, in June 2012.
- A Circuit Memorial to Conference in 2013 and subsequent Methodist Church letter to Government.
- Work with the Centre for Social Justice leading to exposure of the problems in their 2014 family breakdown report 'Fully Committed?' They recommended urgent action.

So far nothing has changed – the problems remain. So I continue the task I have been given, taking each new step as it is put in front of me. I thank God for the privilege of being called to this particular service. I give thanks for His guidance over the past years, for the increase in my knowledge and understanding and for the faith I have been given to trust Him for what is to come.

Knowledge of the problems has now been given to you. Please share it and use it in any dealings you have with separated parents. Please also include the situation in your prayers, remembering:

- children and parents in separated families, that they may learn to work together
- parents faced with impossible payments, that they may be believed and given support
- those who know that payments are unaffordable, that they may be emboldened to speak out
- those who seek to get the situation acknowledged, that they may be guided and strengthened
- Government, that it may have the courage to act to put things right.

Christine Dugdale

For more information go to Caversham Heights website;

http://www.cavhmc.org.uk/ch-sep-fam.htm

Contact Update editor:

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