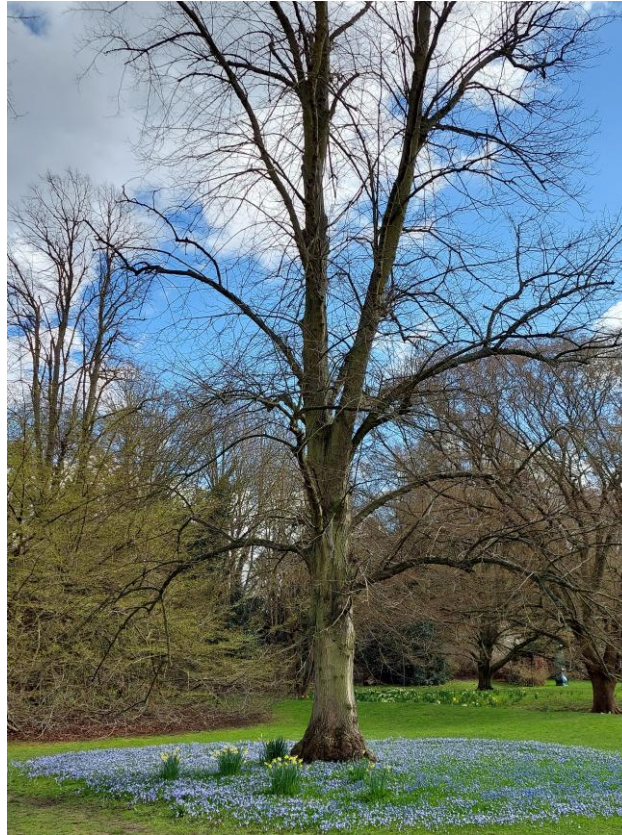




**Annual Report of the Trustees of the Peterborough Methodist Circuit
for the church year 1st Sept 2023 to 31st August 2024
(Registered Charity No 1135613)**



Produced by the Peterborough Circuit of the Methodist Church
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Our Mission Statement

“The Peterborough Methodist Circuit aims to be the people of God within our communities, sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ and showing God’s love through worship, witness and service.”

We seek to discover the needs of contemporary society and respond to it; working with our ecumenical partners towards creating relationships within the communities and sharing the word of God with those around us.

We seek to utilise and ensure the abilities and skills of lay people fully in the Circuit and encourage others to explore and offer themselves for service at all levels as equal partners in our work.

As a Methodist Circuit, we put into action the different elements of our Methodist Calling in our Worship, our Learning and Caring, our Service and our Evangelism, always striving to put Jesus first.

We have a heart for nurturing and shaping disciples. We are deeply committed to evangelism and social outreach. We have seen great things by working in partnership with other denominations.

Our vision statement for our children's and young people's ministry

“Providing loving and caring ministries that children and young people may come to know Jesus Christ”

Trustees during the year	
Revd Langley Mackrell-Hey (Chair)	Nigel Lightfoot
Paul Abel	Jo Marshall-Sully
Giles Armstrong	Valerie Octon
Karen Armstrong	Sylvia Parker
George Barber	Revd David Parkes
Sarah Bereznyckyj	Cathy Ruffles
Heather Black	Margaret Smith
Stephen Brown	Revd Douglas Stevens
Rhod Eaton	Monica Sturgess
Sue Gage	Revd Janet Titterton
Michael Goodman	Revd Graham Tooth
Revd Sarah Gower	Nicky Ward
John Hewitson	Denise Watson
Sue Holmes	Elizabeth White
Trevor Howlett	David Whiting
Sue Keeney	Peter Williams
Christine Kell	Wendy Willis
Sarah Kelly	

1 Our Circuit

- 1.1 Encompassing the heart of Peterborough and extending into three counties – Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire and Lincolnshire - we minister in the city, in towns, suburbs and in villages.

There are ten churches in the Peterborough Circuit. In addition, Methodist ministers and Local Preachers lead the service at Yarwell (an Anglican Church) once a month, where there is a Methodist class. Three of our churches: Whittlesey, Westgate New Church and Christ Church are Local Ecumenical Partnership's (LEPs).

The Peterborough Circuit is part of the Northampton District of the Methodist Church, which seeks to be a place where there is diversity and vibrancy, and a place where everyone can feel welcomed, a place where we can all flourish and grow in our discipleship. We have good links and regular communication with our District office staff.

- 1.2 Trustees of the Circuit Meeting met four times during the year and devotions were led by: In November 2023, Matt Forsyth (Local Preacher, and our District Mission Enabler) on 'You have Voicemail', using 1 Kings 2: 1-5; in January 2024, by Revd Sarah Gower on 'Working Together'; in May 2024, by Revd Kim Shorley from the District Mission Team. (Revd Kim's role is to encourage New Places for New People, beginning with FEAST groups (Friends Exploring and Sharing Together); and, in July 2024 by Paul Abel (Circuit Steward), on 'What does the Bible teach us about teamwork, or working as one?'
- 1.3 *Services - in person and online* - Live daily online 'Morning Prayers' and weekly online recorded Sunday morning worship continued all through the year. Despite, since Covid, the return of most

people to services in person, our online community has continued to be constant, with good relationships formed and strengthened through regular fellowship, with lots of opportunities to encourage one another in prayer.

1.4 Circuit Strategy

In the light of our challenging financial situation, we continued having discussions about where we are and developing a new strategy for a sustainable future. As a circuit, we began work on developing a strategy that looks forward several years – not just regarding finance, but also resourcing in terms of people. We encouraged people to offer to serve as circuit stewards, and someone to offer as Circuit Treasurer as Giles Armstrong had given his intention to stand down. We were pleased to welcome Karen Armstrong as his successor and were then able to start reviewing the finances across the churches and develop a far richer strategy as we looked towards the future.

Due to the budget shortfall this year, we decided action must be taken. The Circuit has been looking at cost cutting and further assets sales after the sale of Ailsworth Chapel. (The sale is going forward, albeit very slowly. Circuit will get a portion of the money from the sale).

The logical approach was to look at manse options and cut back on churches. Three tangible short-term options were noted as circuit cost reductions, additional share contributions and identifying assets to sell. There were a number of further options, proposed at the treasurers' meeting, and these need further work to be completed; scenarios with less churches, scenario with one less minister from 2025, scenario with an amalgamation with another circuit, scenario with cost reductions identified in the Peterborough Circuit, and a scenario with stretch target assumptions for Church Share contribution increases.

As we are all aware, the cost of living crisis affects everyone; essentials costing more means less disposable money. Added to that, the effect of Covid has had far reaching consequences.

Circuit is meeting costs by using reserves to balance the books. One result of this was looking at a Circuit with only one Minister in 2025. This was not a viable option as things were, and we needed to think out of the box as to how we can move forward, how we can raise more money and how we can cut costs. The way forward for this is for us to work together, to make suggestions and discuss options, to support each other, and hopefully to find a workable solution.

Our churches are doing great work, in worship and in the community. Supporting and caring are obviously very important, and we need to support and care for each other on the road to find a future that works for us and enables us to continue the Lord's work.

To help people through this process, a leaflet was produced which explains how churches, Circuit, District and Connexion work together and these are available from each church.

We decided to enter into a time of prayer in the Circuit, and everyone was emailed a copy of the Circuit Prayer initiative, prepared by Judy Robinson, with helpful prayer pointers to help us to focus our prayers. This was sent to all our local preachers and leaders of worship, and we formulated a prayer sheet that was circulated to all the churches. As we wanted every member of every church to be heard through their representative, people were asked to pray for anything as it is an open forum so, churches were asked to send in short, concise, pithy messages for inclusion. The Circuit Prayer team issued this Circuit Prayer, which we all prayed as we prayed, shared, and moved forward together:

"Where there is no vision the people perish". (Proverbs Chapter 28, verse 18)

Lord, keep us focused upon Your will for us, individually and corporately.

In our diversity, draw us together in unity and not uniformity.

Help us to reflect and to learn lessons from the past, both the good and not so good.

Teach us to discern the difference, show us Your way forward.

Remind us continually that we worship a Great Big God, a God of surprises, a God who holds each of us in His loving embrace.

"What does the Lord require of you, but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God". (Micah Chapter 6, verse 8)

Lord, create in us a capacity to wonder where You are leading us, and give us the faith to follow.

"You are the Potter and we are the clay". (Romans Chapter 9, verse 21)

Giles and Mark continued to do some work and look at other options and bring them to our collective Circuit gathering in January, when Matt Forsyth also spoke about how we radically change the nature of the Circuit and provide spaces where our work is more likely to flourish.

We worked with Matt Forsyth (District Mission Enabler) who gave us encouragement in leading focused conversations when we gathered in discussion and prayer, which was the most important thing to do to help guide us in the decisions we were making. These were called 'The Art of Sankofa Vision Mornings', held on Saturdays 27th January, 16th March and 18th May. We took time to listen and pray and reflect and think about where and what things we need to change and adapt, bringing together everyone's different skills and talents in different ways and focusing on prayer and renewal.

There was feedback regarding Sankofa concerning what we value and what we lament: We value preaching, the enthusiasm of coming together and what we think of ourselves as a circuit.

At our third Sankofa meeting we worked with Revd Kim Shorley from the district and explored how we might resource our churches differently, prioritising some centres for worship on a Sunday, and others midweek so we achieve some consistency, with maybe more churches offering an afternoon. We looked at centres of worship and centres of mission and different ways of working. We considered what we want from our Circuit lay workers, and how they work in partnership with ministers. We continued asking questions of the district and the Connexion, and we also spoke directly to Conference through a memorial regarding grants, questioning them about Connexional financial Support and asking the Methodist Church to consider how it supports circuits of churches who are in transition.

Our concern in Peterborough focuses on circuits like ours that are transitioning to something new and may benefit from a raft of supportive interventions. As our churches evolve their ministry and mission during challenging economic times, financial uncertainties can hinder creative and visionary thinking. Our memorial urged the Methodist Church to leverage its full resources, particularly emphasizing the 'Connexional Principle' - the tradition of stronger members and churches (financial or otherwise) supporting the weaker. The memorial which we submitted in March 2024 went to the Conference in July 2024 said: 'The Peterborough Circuit Meeting calls on the Conference to commission a review of how the Connexional Principle (mutual support, and the stronger enabling the weak) is being upheld across our Church, particularly in relation to finance, and how we help poorer Circuits and Local Churches through periods of transition towards growth'.

Our concerns have resonated with others within the Church and, In response to our memorial, which echoed concerns from other regions about how we are deploying resources in different areas of ministry, the Methodist Church is forming an Economic Justice Working Group. This will benefit us and others in the future. We are pleased that we have opened up a new channel in the district for support for churches in transition. Thanks go to all those who worked on the memorial and to Matt Forsyth for his guidance.

The Sankofa mornings gave us insights that are informing our Circuit strategy and this includes helping us to see the huge amount that is actually happening in our churches. We put the detail in our

Sankofa prayer, where we give thanks for all that is going on:

Dear Lord, Sometimes, our understanding of what you are doing is too small. We can be focused on struggle and decline but overlook what you are doing through us as a whole. Sometimes there is too much money in our thinking, and not enough faith in Jesus. Help us to balance our pragmatism and purpose with the truth that you give us and what we need to fulfil your mission. Help us to turn to you as we discern how you are calling us to support each other as a circuit of churches. We give thanks ...

For our just over three hundred members of the Methodist Church, with thirty in the past eighteen months/two years, and other new people who have joined us.
For our presence in over twelve communities.
For our capacity to welcome people with acute physical needs, and learning differences.
For our sixteen worshipping congregations - midweek and Sundays.
For our three Foodbanks, and our donation points (people give so generously), and for our community family meals.
For our Homeless Pod at Southside, and our partnership with Light Project Peterborough and the Garden House.
For our Preschool at Southside, and the preschool we enable at Dogsthorpe.
For our four Messy Churches.
For our three Toddler Groups.
For our five Sunday Schools.
For our working with five uniformed groups and three schools.
For our two After-School Clubs.
For our support of teenagers. (probably our weakest area, but there is a lot of mentoring going on).
For our eight Coffee Mornings.
For our fourteen Bible Study or Fellowship Groups.
For our eight Shared Interest Groups.
For our Livestream Witness of over 200 broadcasts since lockdown.
For our links with Methodist Homes, the Leprosy Mission, The Light Project, The Salvation Army, and Equipping the Saints.
For everything we have a part in enabling: The Peterborough Christian Bookshop, and Christian Options for Peterborough Schools (CROPS).
For our link with the URC and our partnering with the Christian Bookshop.

For the work we support by offering our premises to community groups that are so many and varied that we cannot do them justice here. Forgive us for the times when we underestimate what you are doing, and when what you are doing does not fit our neatly ordered categories. We give thanks that you will continue to grow this work in the future. Help us to find our part in that.

We created a video including all the above, which is available via YouTube. It is called the 'Prayer and Celebration Video ('Listening, Following, Changing'). It is a reworking and reframing of our Circuit Prayer, which we issued in May, in which we give thanks for how God is faithful - and how we can so easily overlook the positive things that are around us, especially in challenging times. The early (and new additions to the prayer) acknowledge how many of us struggle with change, but change can be for the better, and just because we may find something difficult does not mean that it will turn out bad. It dwells on the knowledge that we are on the rollercoaster of life but always moving forward). It has become known as the rollercoaster video, and it shows how someone changes as the video goes on.

We decided we want to uplift people about the movement that we are part of so, we produced a two-sided leaflet saying who we are and what we are about, and this can be given to people who walk into one of our churches to let people know who we are and this richness that we are a part of.

We drew in the threads that came from Sankofa, and some of the themes were that we are looking at transformation, we want to be financially sustainable, growth orientated, deeply engaged in

mission work, have a keen focus on deepening faith and increasing membership, deploying our resources widely and fairly and investing in the communities from which people are drawn and developing new forms of church. One of the underlying themes is that we are the kind of circuit that wants to talk about growth, not about managing decline.

Following the encouragement to explore all kinds of options and to enter into dialogue with the District, we decided to go into stationing for a full-time Superintendent. The Circuit Stewards have been working hard on the profile, creating one that has appeal to someone with a desire for a challenge, to enable the changes to move us to a more sustainable future. Thanks go to everyone and to the Working Party and the Prayer group, as their hard work and input has given us more insight into how our future will look and what needs to be done to get us there.

We had two working party meetings following the vision mornings, as part of which Revd Langley prepared a timetable of our plan ('Timetable for Transition') and what would be unfolding, and what we could all helpfully pray for as we journeyed into stationing.

At our September meeting we reported on the fact changes are required in how Circuit ministers to the churches and how there is a need to make a greater understanding of what our Circuit is and does. To this end we created and shared the "What is Circuit?" notes to begin encouraging the thoughts of all in determining what form such changes may take and how we can work together to deliver these. Since then, our main focus has been on the model of ministry from Sept 2025 linked to the fiscal projections, looking at different scenarios. CLT is keener than ever to involve all the churches and their members, and to this end District Enabler Matt Forsyth with his Sankofa initiative is an important step in engaging all.

CLT continued to act as Elton Church Council, working to ensure there were opportunities via the Sankofa gatherings and support in prayer to find ways to provide ongoing Methodist worship in the village.

The Circuit Leadership Team announced its eagerness to grow in number, to have a larger pool of people with their gifts and talents as we met to assimilate information from the Sankofa events and continued working to shape our Circuit's future.

We recruited the Circuit Invitation Committee and entered into the stationing process to find a new minister, as both Revds Langley and Janet are moving on at the end of July next year.

In terms of circuit policy, we have a rolling five-year financial projection (in operation for some years now). We are quite unique as a circuit in having this. Our Circuit Mission Statement and other documents are easily accessible from our web site.

1.5 **Circuit staffing**

Revd Janet continued with the oversight of the Methodist churches at Brookside, Dogsthorpe, Elton, Orton Waterville, Southside and Yaxley. Our Lay Pastoral Assistant, Suzanne Delegate continued her ministry in these churches under Revd Janet's oversight.

Our lay worker, Tim Wong, continued in his role as Children, Family and Community Worker at Whittlesey. This year, he focused on several key areas where the church's support can make a big difference. Firstly, a new volunteer leader and a helper joined Whittlesey's Sunday Children's Service, and it has been exciting to collaborate in reaching out to draw more families in. They planned four vibrant Messy Church sessions with the hope of attracting parents to volunteer alongside their children.

Discussions took place with a local youth centre about inviting young people with diverse needs to the church premises, where they explored ways to offer support and build connections.

They had a transformative project to redesign their pathway into a plant garden, a space that could encourage young people, both within and beyond their community, to participate and grow together, fostering a deeper sense of belonging. Tim began the year brimming with anticipation for

what God's kingdom can accomplish through these initiatives, and his eagerness and his commitment to see the church community thriving and making a positive impact has born much fruit.

Our Circuit Administrator, Sue Moore, continued in her role, which entails a variety of tasks including assisting the Superintendent Minister with his diary, producing the Preaching Plan and organising Circuit Meetings in her role as Circuit Meeting Secretary.

There is more information about Suzanne and Tim's roles later in this report.

- 1.6 *New appointments* - We started this Methodist year with just two Circuit Stewards, no Circuit Property Team Co-ordinator and no Circuit Treasurer, but we have been fortunate that two people have stepped forward to fulfil the roles of Circuit Steward (Paul Abel) and Property Team Co-ordinator (Rhod Eaton). Both worship at Whittlesey Queen Street Church, and they were elected in November 2023.

2 Mission and Outreach

This section includes different mission activities happening in the Circuit, and some examples of specific mission in individual churches.

2.1 Mission in our Circuit

- 2.1.1 We continued to run and support Foodbanks at Crowland, Dogsthorpe and Oundle. The number of users continued to be very high, so we are thankful to all concerned for their commitment to feed and support the many hungry individuals and families in our communities.

- 2.2.2 Church members at Southside Methodist Church continued to support the guests that resided in the homelessness pod in their church car park. The pods are provided by the local charity Light Project Peterborough and church members provide meals for the guests on a rota basis and give help, as needed.

Some church members are part of the Light Project Peterborough Steering Group ('Peterborough Christians for Social Action'), which is an ecumenical group, attending meetings and highlighting and contributing to local needs, liaising with the council and other local organisations to get things done and help to improve the lives of local residents. Some members are volunteers for the "The Garden House", which is a drop-in day centre for the project.

- 2.2.3 Individual churches raised money for particular charities in need of support including the Methodist Homes Association (MHA). Some churches kept MHA Sunday on 9th June (the theme shining a spotlight on dementia) or throughout that month; for example, Whittlesey had a special service, led by visiting preacher, Tony Hey, on 23rd June. The sermon video produced nationally was special to us as it was recorded in The Maples, our local MHA retirement living scheme, with MHA's long-standing patron and friend, TV and radio presenter, Pam Rhodes, presenting it and fronting the campaign. Marion Mahan (Chaplain to The Maples), moved to Derby to her new role as MHA Area Support Chaplain and was replaced by Karen Hales. The residents are also supported by visits from two of our Circuit ministers – Revd Sarah Gower and Revd David Parkes, and several Circuit members. Joanna Parkin continued at The Maples in her role as Activities Co-ordinator.
- 2.2.4 As ever, the churches responded generously to Connexional Funds. Over £3500 was sent by the churches to the charities involved for Property, Presbyters and Deacons, LWPT, MHA, All We Can and Ministers' Housing. We have had Connexional Funds Officers in the past, and churches used to send their funds to the Connexional Funds Officer and they would divvy up the funds, as requested. After Sue Keeney stepped down from the role last year, we approached someone new to take it on; unfortunately, that did not work out despite our best efforts so, the church treasurers and now sending their churches' donations in individually.

2.3 Mission Activities and Events in our Churches

2.3.1 A wide range of regular groups met in our churches, and these included:

Orton Waterville continued to be a hive of activity. 'Orton Friends' (drop-in for the retired) continued to grow, meeting on Monday afternoons, enjoying chat, refreshments, games and challenges. The Stitches Knitting for Charity Group also grew, as did the list of charities. They supply Barnado's with everything from premature baby clothes to about age five, blankets for cribs, cots, beds, prams, pushchairs, separation blankets for prisoners, toys, boots for ante-natal classes, knee blankets for two local nursing homes, worry monsters to Knit for Nowt in Beverley for use by counsellors around the country, memory box blankets for Sands, hats, scarves and gloves to the Mission for Seamen and Knit for Peace take anything else they have. The Chapel is also used by Peterborough Art Society for their committee meetings. Orton Waterville is an active member of Churches Together in the Ortons and a regular supplier to Peterborough Foodbank. They continue in close association with MHA The Maples.

Brookside Their morning worship has included a range of styles of worship, including café worship, All Age services and own arrangements led by church groups. Sunday Club met most weeks, except when there was All Age worship. They also had Messy Church and Café Worship sessions some Sunday afternoons. Joint morning services were held with Dogsthorpe Church. A mid-week Communion service was held monthly, and they have Tuesday Fellowship twice a month. Two Bible study groups meet - New Direction, which is an online weekly group, and Crossways, which meets face to face twice a month. In November 2023, they had a memorial service for bereaved family and friends. There is a PE4 partnership group with other churches in the area. The church's website is updated weekly. Their online notice sheet is sent out weekly and they have a monthly online newsletter.

Their team of pastoral carers supports members and adherents. Those who are unable to attend church are offered visits by Pastoral Assistants and home Communion if they would like it. Fellowship, social events and fundraising - after church refreshments following each morning service, the money raised is given to chosen charities. Church groups include Craft and Chat, Men's group, Ladies' group, and wellbeing coffee morning.

Social events over the year included church lunches to celebrate their Church Anniversary and Christmas, a band concert, a Christmas Fayre and a coffee morning for Christian Aid.

Mission and outreach - their pre-school meets during term time. Boys' Brigade celebrated their 50th Anniversary this year. Guides, Brownies and Rainbows met in term time. Other groups who use the premises are - Gamblers Anonymous, art groups, choir, slimming group and exercise groups, The building is also used for music exams and as a polling station - it is good to engage with people who use our churches in these different and meaningful ways.

Although it was started during the pandemic Lockdown as an attempt to keep the "fellowship" element of the church family going, after over 200 weeks there is still a desire for the Brookside Online Newsletter (now monthly), which is complemented by the weekly Notice Sheet for more immediate news and diary reminders. Thanks go to Chris Hardman for putting this together so professionally, to David for his proofreading and to all the regular contributors.

Brookside held a Remembering service in November, which was very moving and well attended. It is for people who have been recently bereaved, and it is held bi-annually.

Their warm space community hub is going really well – it is held on Fridays and there are hot drinks, jigsaws, books and games. A number of people come in and spend time together. They also have their fortnightly Coffee Morning, and a new fortnightly Bible Study group started in November is doing well. They had a successful Christmas Fayre is on 25th November.

Oundle have a service on the first and third Sundays and they continued with their "Gatherings" (times of fellowship, teaching and prayer) on the first and third Wednesdays, with eight ministers/local preachers invited to give reflections on a rota basis (Revds Langley, Janet, David Parkes, Dale Sherriff and Graham Tooth, Nigel Lightfoot, Monica Sturgess and Ann Tooth). Everyone on the Community Roll also gets a weekly email on a Saturday with detailed notices for the week. On the weekends when they are not meeting face-to-face (for a service), the email also includes an 'email service'. This is a service composed from 'The Vine at Home' but with the full Vine sermon. Hymns include links to YouTube and other parts are tailored to their own congregation.

The Gathering is proving to be a most valuable part of their life together - a time when they can share together more intimately than in a Sunday service (even with tea/coffee/chocolate biscuits after Sunday worship). The Gathering is much more informal and spontaneous and they value their fine cadre of leaders, some of whom they can engage with when they might not otherwise meet them (e.g. Rev Janet).

The Food Bank continued to operate from Oundle Methodist on Thursdays from 10.30 to 11.30am. It is part of the Trussell Trust network (Oundle are part of the "Stamford and Oundle Foodbank, but it was established by Methodist efforts and, initially, Methodist resources.

Oundle again supported the local Chattabox initiative for children and young people and attended its annual service in August at Oundle Primary School.

Crowland have put on various social events, such as Beetle Drives and concerts to raise money for their roof repairs. There has also been the opportunity for people to buy a roof tile for ten pounds and they get a certificate in return. They have Explorers; Toddlers group; Saturday morning coffee sessions with book stalls; Small fellowship / study groups: Wesley's Wayfarers; Stepping Stones (A study group for young people). Their 'Who Let the Dads Out' project continues to be successful. They continued to have a good relationship and monthly joint services with Crowland Abbey in the neighbouring Anglican parish and via its thriving MAP (Methodists and Anglicans in Partnership).

Westgate New Church continued to alternate on the Preaching plan with having a C4 service, which is an own arrangement café-style service, and then a service led by a minister or local preacher on the alternate week. People enjoy this pattern and the varied input and voices that contribute.

Langley continued to attend Churches Together in Central Peterborough meetings as Westgate continued under his oversight. Our Churches Together groups in Yaxley, the Ortons, and Central Peterborough used the material for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (WPCU), focusing on the 2024 theme 'The Good Samaritan', which encouraged us not to walk by when we see people in need, but to love them, engage with them and lift them up.

Negotiations and conversations are ongoing with the URC regarding the future oversight of Whittlesey and Westgate New Church once Revd Langley has left. (These are joint local Methodist/URC ecumenical partnerships).

Southside Although 'Footprints' no longer meets, 'Footsteps' continued, brilliantly led by Louise. Everyone who goes enjoys the different activities she organises. 'Footsteps' is a group for pre-school children (mostly up to 3 years). Mums and Dads are welcome at this group, which allows them the opportunity to socialise over refreshments whilst their children play, and there is some Christian input in little films and songs. Louise has also helped by selling tickets for Southside's fundraising events, and this is a great way to bring the community into church.

'Church 4 All' met on a monthly basis; they have found the older children are now busy doing other activities, although on occasions they have had everyone together, especially if it is a pizza night! Suzanne Delegate's vision is still the same - that 'Church 4 All' will one day be back to meeting on a weekly basis.

Whittlesey In September, Paul Abel was honoured to take on the duties of Church Secretary after Malcolm Boucher decided to step back in the Summer after many years of service, supported by the trustees. At the start of the new Methodist year we also welcomed Zoe Drury and Ejiro Maubane as new trustees and Ejiro has also become their new Cradle Secretary. In addition to Malcolm stepping back, they also gave thanks to Lyn and Tony Wright and Shirley Wilson, who continue working so hard as they do in other ways but decided to retire as trustees.

Rhod Eaton headed up the Property Team and is the liaison with the Finance Team, so helping the building of budgets for work that is needed to ensure their buildings continue to be fit for purpose. That purpose is primarily worship and the bringing to Christ of the next generation.

Tim Wong has explored which other groups are working for the good of Whittlesey's young people as well as working with the Girls' Brigade and their own Friends of God children. Members attended an inspiring meeting with Phoenix Youth Provision in early January, and they used the hall on Monday evenings with a session for young people (eleven to eighteen year olds), which majors on quieter activities such as craft and repairing things!

Tim also works with Churches Together in Whittlesey to bring Messy Church to Queen Street and they had six Messy Church sessions this year. Thanks go to Nick Drury as the Churches Together rep. They enjoyed the joint service they had in January. It is good to worship and have fellowship with other Christians in the town.

Christmas was fun as quite a few members worked to decorate the church. Tim had the Messy Church Christmas tree displayed at the St Mary's Church Tree Festival and both Rhod and Paul brought it back to the hall afterwards to be enjoyed by their many visitors from Slimming World, Girls' Brigade, Friday coffee morning, Saturday Friendship Club and the Film screening interval – such a super and varied number of things to get involved in throughout the week.

Zoe Drury took the lead in the 'Cake & Carols' event in early December and was keen to explore how this event can be enjoyed by a wider number and the wider community in future. Zoe also takes a joint lead with Whittlesey Lions, the Salvation Army and other Churches Together folk to bring the fantastic August Holiday@Home three days and this year the invited guests commented that it was a pity it was a whole year before the next one. So, on 5th February they had a Holiday@Home day with a sing-a-long from local musician and singer, David Bailey, and various activities in a mini-Winter version of the full-sized August event.

During Lockdown, Whittlesey set up a WhatsApp group to provide connection and pastoral care across a variety of age groups. Members have continued to use this forum as a means to support one another and to request and provide prayers for one another.

Their church magazine – 'Fresh Horizons' - started during Lockdown as a means to maintain contact with the church family and this is still going strong. Their film showings with refreshments served continue to be popular. Voluntary donations provide income for the church. They meet on Saturday evenings and show up to date films. This has been going for about five years. In the winter months they have nine or ten movies. Numbers were dwindling so they moved it to another day and now it is full every time.

Whittlesey are excited about how the Spirit is working in their church and how busy the buildings are, Thanks go to all those who volunteer and serve the church and do the Lord's work.

In the summer, during their FoG sessions, they explored themes of discipleship and God's all-encompassing welcome. There were exciting additions to their team – a new leader and a joyous baby baptism from the same family. At Summer Messy Church in July, they worshipped to celebrate God's creation in a fun way and families and young people appreciated the work of God in nature. (Tim and the Whittlesey Team put on several Messy Church sessions at Whittlesey. This is a Churches Together in Whittlesey and District (CTIW) event. Everyone was welcome, especially with families. This CTIW initiative has proved really successful).

They held a potluck lunch for FoG families, sharing delicious food and enjoying fellowship together.

This lunch also served as a warm welcome to the new leaders, who joined the FoG team this year. Since April, Tim has been supporting Churches Together in the Salvation Army Studio on Tuesdays. He has helped out at their Art & Craft group, and when the minister was on sabbatical, he also lent a hand at their toddler group for families. They spend time crafting together, enjoying a cuppa and sharing lots of fun and laughter. It is a fantastic way to build a community where everyone can share interests and support each other. Through prayer and working together with so many other friends at Queen Street they are building a vibrant church that is an exciting place to be with so much going on, all with Jesus at the heart.

Rhod and Tim launched their Community Garden development, and the young people came, encouraged by Tim. This is a Remembrance Garden for the church, developed with the youth of the church.

More on Tim's work with children and young people

With some of our children's leaders stepping down from their roles, Tim has taken on the responsibilities of overseeing the Sunday Children's service, known as "Friends of God." His role involves providing support to the leaders and nurturing relationships with the children. He also leads some of the sessions while they actively seek additional leaders to join their team. In addition, he actively participates in the Girls' Brigade activities, engaging with the girls and occasionally leading activities. Furthermore, he has been building relationships with them and extending invitations to attend their church activities, such as Messy Church.

Family work Tim is committed to nurturing a strong church community. He has visited families and church members who find it challenging to attend regularly. He has also kept in touch with families to keep them updated about church events and news.

One of their main priorities has been the youth at Whittlesey church. In the past months, Tim has organised three evening youth gatherings called "Come Dine with Us." Despite having a small youth group, he is dedicated to making their church more welcoming for them and building stronger connections within their church community. He has invited them to these gatherings, where he prepared meals to encourage bonding and to discuss how the church can support them better.

Community Engagement A significant portion of Tim's efforts have been dedicated to the revitalization of Messy Church in Whittlesey. Their inaugural Messy Church event took place in October, centred around the Harvest Festival. They welcomed twenty-two children along with their parents or carers, totalling more than thirty attendees. The event featured various activities with the support of volunteers from Churches Together in Whittlesey & District, including a time of celebration, worship songs, and the storytelling of the Parable of the Rich Fool building a larger barn, as recounted in the Gospel of Luke. Refreshments were offered and they enjoyed a wonderful time together.

They held a Churches Together in Whittlesey Messy Church on December 3rd, from 4-6pm, focusing on the theme of Christmas and the significance of Jesus as the Light of the World. They have received positive feedback from participating families and anticipate their continued engagement.

Tim has proactively collaborated with community members to gain deeper insights into the needs of their community. A noticeable gap has become apparent between the community's needs and the currently available services, particularly when it comes to youth and middle-aged children, ages six to twelve. He is committed to dedicating the time to identify these needs and, ideally, initiating projects that can effectively address and enhance the broader community. This effort serves as a demonstration of how the church can better serve them.

They had busy months over Lent and Easter. Here are some highlights:

Friends of God in Lent and Easter Their children's service, Friends of God, offered a variety of themes around Lent and Easter. For Mothering Sunday, the Girls' Brigade joined in a heartwarming activity, making candle jars that symbolised the light of faith. The young people participated in the church worship meeting through some engaging activities held at the back of the church on Palm Sunday. Easter Sunday was filled with joy as they decorated doughnuts together, a delicious way to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Easter Messy Church On Palm Sunday, they warmly welcomed twenty-three young people and twenty-one parents and grandparents to their Easter Messy Church. The theme for the day was "Hope," celebrating the resurrection of Christ. The festivities began with an Easter Egg Hunt, where children searched for eggs representing the twelve events of Holy Week. They also created a "Hope Hanger," featuring elements of Holy Week and Easter that families could take home as a reminder that our only hope comes from God. The families expressed their deep gratitude for the event, which provided a joyful space to celebrate Easter together. They are also incredibly thankful for their fifteen dedicated helpers from Churches Together in Whittlesey & District, whose time and wisdom are invaluable in bringing the Gospel to our guests.

Good Friday Service (Churches Together in Whittlesey & District) They had their outdoor Good Friday morning service with the Anglican, Catholic, Salvation Army and, of course, Methodist Church. They began with a "Walk of Witness" carrying the cross along two routes. This joint Churches Together service offered creative reflection on Jesus' death. During the service, Tim participated in a short drama where he portrayed a sinful human, depicting humanity's sin and God's act of reconciliation through Jesus Christ. Warm hospitality followed with hot cross buns, hot drinks and warm chats at their Queen Street Church.

Elton Sunday worship in Elton Chapel continued on the second and fourth Sundays of each month, whether or not a preacher was able to be appointed to lead the service.

All midweek activities in the Chapel for villagers and wider afield were well attended. These continued to raise the profile and income of the Chapel and included: Weekly 'Knit and Natter', weekly Wednesday morning Cuppa & Chat @ the Chapel Hub, Wednesday Welcome afternoons with singing, cuppa & cake on the 1st & 3rd Wednesdays of each month (also attended by folk from around the Circuit), an Art Group, and ukulele lessons. A podiatrist gave professional foot-care on some Wednesday mornings, donating the consultation fees to the Chapel. The Chapel was registered as a 'Warm Hub' for the activities on a Wednesday. During the summer, a villager gave canoeing lessons on the adjacent River Nene, donating the income to the Chapel.

In August 2023 the Chapel benefitted from a Missional Grant of £1,000 from the Northampton District of the Methodist Church for the purchase of audio-visual equipment which was used successfully throughout the period for Wednesday Welcome, greatly increasing the enjoyment and active participation of all those who came.

The Chapel was an active participant in a 'Village Open Day' providing well-received refreshments on a Sunday afternoon in June. Also, from July to September, the Chapel was open to provide tea and cake to villagers and casual passers-by, especially walkers and cyclists.

Five 'Walks & Talks' were held based on the Chapel where local expert speakers took participants around the village and enlightened attendees about the archaeology, history, flora & fauna and trees of the village. The evenings ended with refreshments in the Chapel, and again the audio-visual equipment was used to good effect.

A Christmas Thrift Sale at the Chapel was well received locally and was financially beneficial. Once again, there was a very enjoyable and successful 'Cod and Carols' held in Elton Village Hall with Barnhill Band.

The organ has been played for some 'Wednesday Welcomes' and has this year has again received expert remedial attention from Brookside Methodist Church's organist. Elton resident and Chapel adherent, Robin Ackroyd, continued to clean the chapel regularly for which he was given an honorarium.

The annual fire extinguisher checks and the checks for the electrical equipment were undertaken. Also, the gutters were cleaned by a contractor. With those exceptions, all minor repairs were undertaken by villagers.

A member of the congregation together with a local paid bookkeeper continue to handle the recording of accounts. There was approximately £12,000 in the Chapel's Bank Account at the beginning and at the end of the period.

During the course of the year, the defibrillator fitted to an outside wall of the Chapel was taken out once but thankfully not used.

Back in January 2023, the Circuit Meeting gave authority for the CLT to take over the Church

Council at Elton because we had concerns about the capacity they had to function as a church. Revd David Parkes worked really hard to put in place a chapel hub to raise the profile of the chapel in the community and it being used for community events. The new church council is the Circuit Stewards, plus the ministers, plus one other representative from the church, and it was with regret that we voted to cease to meet. This was a sorrowful happening, but the legal position was untenable.

Then, on 22nd April 2024 there was an open meeting in the Chapel chaired by the Circuit Superintendent. Those present were six Chapel members (a seventh member gave her apologies), six members of the Circuit Leadership Team (including the Chair) and five villagers. Following Devotions, the situation relating to the Chapel was described, viz there are fewer than the requisite twelve members of the Chapel, it is not possible to find the necessary office holders from amongst these people, and the annual income of the Chapel is insufficient to meet its commitments. Following robust discussion, it was regrettably agreed by those eligible to vote that the proposal for Elton Methodist Chapel be to 'cease to meet'. Five people were 'in favour', none were 'against' and two people abstained. The meeting closed with prayer for all affected and concerned by this momentous decision. At the time of this meeting, the Circuit Property Secretary already had oversight of the Chapel building and its utilities. This decision meant that the Peterborough Methodist Circuit then assumed full responsibility for Elton Methodist Chapel.

Thanks go to Revds Langley and Janet, and to Sue Holmes and Revd David Parkes who have been representing Elton Chapel, involved in gentle discussions, and journeying with the community. We have said to the community that, if there is a will, the Methodist Church is willing to explore doing a New Place for New People, but we are looking to find a different pattern of being church in this place as the current pattern is no longer viable there. So, we are journeying through those conversations. In July, the parish Council at Elton confirmed they would take Elton Chapel forward as a community asset. We pray for Elton's congregation, that they manage to find a spiritual home where they feel comfortable to continue their worship.

Yarwell Our Methodist ministers and Local Preachers continued to lead the afternoon service once a month for our Methodist members that attend St Mary Magdalene Church. We delight in this longstanding, gentle relationship and partnership we have with this Methodist class within this Anglican parish in the diocese of Ely, and are grateful to Revd Jane Tailby for her continued support.

Dogsthorpe continued to support the work of the Trussell Trust Foodbank as a distribution outlet on Friday and Saturday mornings. The Pre-school continued to meet five days a week during term time. 'Coffee Stop' met every Monday morning and is a source of help to meet the needs of Mums and Tots, which Suzanne Delegate supports. The leaders help the children and parents to grow in confidence and there are good links with the primary school next door. They have three choirs who use their premises for their rehearsals. They also have a band which rehearses on Thursday evenings. A small group of young people gather on Friday evenings with a schoolteacher for additional help with their education.

Christ Church held regular Messy Churches, which were well attended – there were 109 at the pre-Easter one. Sarah Bereznyckyj was commissioned as a school chaplain for the diocese of Ely and went into school with Revd Sarah Gower. Both were challenged by the deep and varied questions the children asked!

In addition to its Sunday 10am worship, Christ Church again held its annual Bereavement service in November, its Sunrise Easter morning service in the local community and its regular monthly Sunday afternoon services and evening Healing and Holy Communion services, and it continued as an active member of the ecumenical Churches Together in the Ortons.

Yaxley Their bi-monthly coffee mornings are well attended by village people; there are usually thirty to forty people there, including helpers, with a good mix of ages. It is a lovely atmosphere. The Busy Bees baby support group started in 2021 - all the babies were born during Covid times, and the Mums really needed the support and to meet face to face. It has since evolved and several families have now had their second baby. They have from a few weeks old up to four-year-olds who are accompanied by Mums, Dads and grandparents, so it is a lovely mix. They keep to about twelve

families and that ensures everyone is included; they have small group chats each week and vary between music, sensory, story time and general play sessions. Several parents have joined their coffee mornings and their Nativity services and also support the collections for the food bank, clothing for the homeless and other things that are organised.

The Nativity they held in 2022 was attended by twelve people but, this year, they invited the Baby and Toddler group to take part – old and new members – and they had over sixty-five people, the youngest of whom was ten weeks old. Parents and grandparents came and enjoyed tea and mince pies afterwards. They said, “Thank you for inviting us”. One grandad had not been to church to a Christmas service since he was a child. This made the church realise that they just need to invite people more, and they will respond.

- 2.3.2 As part of ‘*God for All*’, we continued to be mindful of three areas of focus: New Places for New People, Evangelism and Digital Mission. Part of this is growing disciples and we believe we have done this through new members and people stepping up into new roles and into doing new things. We are grateful to Revd Kim Shorley from the district who has worked with various churches, liaising with them in providing different types of worship and activities. We have focused more on the things that are intentional, encouraging people in their faith. We focused more on our invitation, as that is the way the local church grows. Our churches build when we invite people to new things. A successful example of this is at Yaxley with their Nativity and Christmas carol services.
- 2.3.5 Revd Langley has sent out ‘Bulletins’ from time to time; these include his thoughts and reflections and guidance for the churches, including information on topical concerns and local and national developments. These help to inform people about issues and give the Circuit a sense of connection. We are always seeking to improve our communication and to ensure those who are not on email are informed and included. Our thanks to all who have provided up to date information and assistance to those in their churches, including those who have produced paper copies, church newsletters and written reflections from preachers to those not on email.

2.4 Worship, Services and Prayer

- 2.4.1 Some churches took part in the international ‘Thy Kingdom Come’ initiative (9th to 19th May 2024). Our thanks to our County Ecumenical Officer, Caroline Hutchings, for always keeping us informed of ecumenical initiatives, events and services in the local area. Church members took part in the ecumenical World Day of Prayer services taking place at local churches on 1st March. This year’s theme was “I Beg You ... Bear With One Another in Love.” The service was prepared by Christian women from Palestine, and the theme was drawn from Ephesians 4:1-3.
- 2.4.2 The Circuit continued its subscription to The Vine’s ‘Twelvebaskets’ (set services for Own Arrangements), and this has again been a valuable resource for the churches when preachers were unavailable for any reason.
- 2.4.3 Having revitalised our small group and small teams structure last year, with Revd Dale Sherriff’s invaluable help and guidance, we saw many of these gaining new members and flourishing. Some that were started did not continue but experience was gained along the way. We were fortunate to have the support and wisdom of Rev Kin Shorley from the District in inspiring us to help our churches develop for new people in new places.
- 2.4.4 Members of the Circuit attended the many events organised by Churches Together in Central Peterborough (CTiCP) throughout the year, including the Advent Reflection Day at the Cathedral in December and the joint service as part of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (18th to 25th January) on the theme of the Good Samaritan. Also, the World Day of Prayer on Friday 1st March 2024, held at St Botolph’s, Longthorpe, with a timely focus on Palestine. Many churches explored how they could use this more widely and spread it further into the community.
- 2.4.5 Thanks go to Matt Forsyth and Revd Langley who continued to lead Circuit Livestream worship and ‘Morning Prayers’. Also to Nicky Ward, who continued leading Circuit online worship once a month. Thanks also to Sandra Hughes who still leads online Reflections on Friday mornings. There is

something provided every weekday. The Circuit Administrator contributed to the Livestream Team by liaising with Local Preachers and readers in helping plan the content for the worship leaders and their services. The readers are local preachers, church stewards and church members from across the Circuit, all adding a different voice.

A faithful number of people value being part of our online livestream community, supporting and being supported by others every day through our live 'Morning Prayers'. As these are also recorded, people can also catch-up later if this works better for them. Meanwhile, if people want to know more about where they can find their closest Methodist Church in the Peterborough area, they are directed to our Circuit website.

Our purpose on a Sunday for livestream prayers is to offer something for those who cannot make it to church because they are unwell, caring for others, working shifts or 'juggling family commitments'. We are not looking for large numbers, but some people do view these in addition to morning worship. Thanks again to those local preachers who offer to record their Sunday message for us so that we can achieve this and, of course, those who present the worship, and read for us.

We rejoice that we now have three Local Preachers "On Note"; One of our Local Preachers - Maureen Newcombe - has served "Fully Accredited" for seventy years. Her Recognition Service was at Christ Church as part of our Circuit Service on 27th May, 2024. Another preacher - Matt Forsyth - completed his course last year and, after his final interview at the Local Preachers' Meeting in January, is now A "Fully Accredited" Local Preacher. His Service of Recognition took place on August 25th, 2024 at Dogsthorpe as part of our Circuit Service.

We are pleased to report that Tim Wong was given a "note to Preach" and commenced the Local Preachers' Study Course. Zoe Drury continued with her journey of study as a Local Preacher.

We were delighted to vote in Maddie Whiting and Connie Hunt as new Local Preachers' Meeting reps to Circuit Meeting. It was good to widen our constitution slightly to include worship leaders in this role, as well as Local Preachers. Thank you to Nigel Lightfoot who continued as rep and as the Local preachers' meeting Secretary.

Our Leaders of Worship training is under review, and all Worship Leaders and Church Councils are respectfully reminded that it is important to be mindful of the requirement of ongoing opportunities for further training.

It will be noted that the list of active preachers on the Plan is not as great as it once was. There is ever a need for others who may feel "a call" to come and find out what is involved and if it is for people to pursue their inner voice.

In June, we held a couple of online meetings called "Local Preachers' Secretaries Drop-in". We underestimated the demand for these sessions, so we planned two more sessions in June. Each Zoom meeting was ninety minutes and included short introductions to topics of interest, time for informal discussion, and time for questions and answers. The sessions were informal and were held periodically through the year for as long as there is a need for them. Preachers were encouraged to keep informed with what is happening across the community of Local Preachers and Worship Leaders by reading the quarterly eNews.

As a result of the Sankofa meetings, two groups were formed – one called Faith and Finance, and the other, Belonging and Believing. We had conversations at the Local Preachers' Meeting about what a circuit believing and belonging group looks like and how we do this across the Circuit. Revd Langley's vision is to think about how we work together with membership classes and faith refreshers across the Circuit, rather than just locating them in one church on an ad hoc basis. Also to consider how we pool our resources for the good of all.

Livestream worship Here are our Livestream Statistics: These stats are for the Peterborough Methodist Circuit's livestream, rather than its linked channels, such as Revd Langley's profile, MAP

(Methodist and Anglicans in Partnership), Crowland or Churches Together in Whittlesey - worship is often relayed to these sites as well:

Facebook

As a circuit, 334 likes, 395 followers (front page)

Reached 6.2K people (a reduction of 21% on the previous year), 5.6K content interaction (almost double the interaction), 271 Click links (signifying three times the engagement), 12.K visits (up approaching seven times, and suggesting that the core number of individuals returning to the site is increasing. Followers were at +62 across the year (which is a reduction on the previous year for some 22%). We are seeing a loss of followers overall, whilst welcoming new followers, and evidence that the Facebook user base that exists is becoming more engaged.

Facebook analysis does not permit us to visit the changes in audience over the period but, since the lifetime of the site, the largest age profile is 65+ then 45-54 and 55-64. Below the age of 44 the distribution is skewed towards a higher proportion of 25-34 year olds viewing. Across the distribution more women are engaged than men, apart from below the age of 34. The major towns and cities from which people view are Peterborough (24%), Whittlesey (6.1%), Louth (3.7%), Crowland (3.5%), London (2.8%) and Spalding (2%).

YouTube

The YouTube stats are not as reliable (because we use YouTube as a back-up), but it does provide another way for people to engage.

- 2.4.6 Circuit Services were held on 25th February at Brookside: 26th May at Christ Church, including the Recognition Service for Maureen Newcombe, who celebrated seventy years as a fully accredited Local Preacher; 25th August at Dogsthorpe, including Matt Forsyth's accreditation as a Local Preacher, and on 26th Nov at Dogsthorpe, when Steven Pettican (CEO of Light Project Peterborough), was the speaker. Revd Langley asked him four questions: How has God provided during Steven's ministry and how has he witnessed this provision? How has God helped him through periods of challenge and change? How is vision important within that?

In terms of special services, Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday and Ascension Day services were held at Christ Church, to which all were welcome.

- 2.4.7 Doing the Preaching Plan continued to be a challenge this year because of the availability of our preachers and supernumerary ministers, some of whom have ongoing health issues and family commitments. We continued to be more creative in our Plan-making, including holding more united services within church sections and introducing some monthly afternoon services in some churches. Thanks go to our worship leaders and other leaders who produce their own services using worship resources, such as 'The Vine at Home'. In addition, this year, we reorganised the churches on the Plan so that they reflect the pattern of mission (underpinned by joint worship) that we are seeing. There are three natural areas; River North (Dogsthorpe, Brookside), River South (Southside, Orton Waterville, Yaxley), and East/West Partnership (Crowland, Oundle, Westgate New Church, Whittlesey, Christ Church - with a small group at Yarwell). We are encouraging the churches in these areas to think about how they might work in increased partnership. We take care in leading worship because what we pray, preach, and say, shapes how people think.

We decided that, whilst we need to think about finance, the focus in churches needs to be on growth, and helping people put their faith in Jesus and follow. We decided we do need a plan moving forward - a vision for everyone to catch - but growth will always be at its core. Looking to the future, we met as a Circuit to discuss different scenarios going forward to make the way ahead affordable and practicable. A lot of work has been done to plan for Scenario 2, and Scenario 1 - which is what 2 or 1 'ministers' across the Circuit looks like, so that we are fully prepared for the future. Our superintendent encouraged us to help congregations focus on the positives, focusing on new people who are coming to faith, newcomers who are now contributing to the life of the church, and new possibilities. And, on finance, he encouraged us to focus on the whole area of offering,

which is about the time, energy, and financial gifts that we give to God. We give thanks that the District is supporting us in the appointment of a superintendent. We are looking at what grant funding is available from the URC. As worship leaders and preachers, we started to encourage people to be generous in their giving, to know that what they give is between them and God, and to stress that whatever they give enables the mission of the local church.

The scenarios opened up questions about how lay people may be able to serve in these ways:

Link Preachers - one of the outcomes from our 'Reimagine' focus a few years ago was that, if preachers gave us enough appointments, we could link them with a single church for two or three appointments a quarter. This is currently in place with Monica Sturgess at Oundle, and Nigel Lightfoot at Westgate New Church, but there is still this opportunity for preachers to develop a closer working partnership with a single church.

Lay Presidency - we explored this with our URC churches; it is part of their tradition but, moving forward, we are considering inviting a local preacher for a dispensation to preside at Methodist Communion services.

Lay Worker roles - If we do not find a URC minister, funding may open up for a further lay worker beyond the assistance that Suzanne gives (which would transfer over to supporting the Superintendent for a period).

Suzanne started to lead 'Lay Worker led' services on the Plan in the smaller churches to assist Revd Janet. Suzanne is supporting/coordinating the church in OAs. In so doing, this will help her make a tighter link between worship and mission in those centres. Suzanne is also an experienced Authorised Lay Minister in the Church of England.

Although the Plan is a challenge, we rejoice in that that we have new worship leaders and preachers in training. It was announced that Matt Forsyth will be installed as Vice-President of the Methodist Conference for the Connexional year 2025/6. We continue to celebrate Judy Robinson at Dogsthorpe and Maddie Whiting at Brookside who are training as Worship Leaders. We rejoice that our preachers "On trial" continue to make steady progress: Zoe Drury, from Whittlesey, and Paul Watkins from Southside continued to journey as a Preachers On Note. Thanks go to our mentors of those in training – Steven and Susan Halford, Nicky Ward and Nick Drury.

Thanks go to our three ministers, three supernumeraries, eleven active Local preachers (and three on note or on trial) and fourteen Worship leaders who lead or input to our Circuit worship. We are also grateful to our regular visiting preachers: Nigel Taylor from CROPS (Christian Options in Peterborough Schools), and Moyra Collins (Local Preacher from a nearby circuit). We were blessed last year to have visiting preachers from other circuits, including Tony Hey who faithfully and humbly regularly supported and inspired us, and from churches who did appointments on our Plan, including Yvonne Laws, an elder, from St Andrew's URC. We were pleased to welcome Revd Kim Shorley from the district who started doing appointments for us from our September to November Plan.

We continued to include 'Prayer Themes' in the Plan document; this year we prayed for our local preachers, worship leaders, ministers, supernumerary ministers, church stewards, circuit stewards, lay workers, children and young people contacts, our District Chair and District Office staff.

3 Staffing and Appointments, Stewards and Ministries

- 3.1 Sue Keeney, Sue Holmes and Paul Abel were re-elected as Circuit Stewards at our July meeting. Sue Keeney has now served twelve successive years as a Circuit Steward. Huge thanks to Sue.
- 3.1.1 Sue Keeney, Nigel Lightfoot and Mick Goodman were re-elected at our July Circuit Meeting as our representatives to District Synod. Nicky Ward stood down and we thank her for her faithful service. Synod members were reminded of this year's Connexional Presidential theme, which draws on the words from the book of Isaiah: "Learn to do what is right, seek justice, defend the oppressed" and, at the Methodist Conference in June 2024, the President (Revd Canon Helen Cameron) reminded

us that justice is what love looks like in public.

- 3.2 Suzanne Delegate continued in her role as Back of Beyond (BoB) Project Co-ordinator for Westgate New Church, which helps anyone in need. This group continues to grow and thrive, with every week having twenty plus people eating there. There are thirty-one now registered and coming on a regular basis, twenty-two being the average number, with Sometimes as many as twenty-seven people attending. They had Christmas lunch and Suzanne included various things to make the day a special experience for people. She continues to do her weekly 'Pause for Thought', which is overtly Christian and well received. This is sometimes read from her Bible or is something that she feels God is asking her to share. It has sparked religious conversations around the table and given an opportunity for people to ask Revd Langley questions they have around the Bible. Sometimes Langley is in the 'Hot seat' with questions being thrown at him. Suzanne sees this as a very positive movement. People are interested and this is encouraging. Bob is by far one of the most successful groups she has coordinated. Other highlights this year:
- They have monthly services and often have conversations around 'Our Faith.'
 - It feels like a church family and everyone looks out for each other, with friendships developing and people seeing each other on other days apart from Thursdays.
 - They have managed to accumulate a pot of money, used for doing special themed events around Easter and Christmas, so making these times extra special.
 - Some people who go to Bob attend other churches, some have not got any church connection at all, some are at serious risk of isolation.
- 3.3 Suzanne Delegate continued in her role as Lay Pastoral Assistant (LPA) role to Revd Janet.
- Her relationship has grown within three schools within the Circuit. She is a prominent presence with school and has built good relationships with students and staff, being able to offer pastoral care and prayers to both children and adults. She has started volunteering for CROPS as a mentor in the primary sector.
 - Suzanne has been put on the plan to help with Own Arrangements by doing a service and, through this, relationships have grown between her and local churches, and it enables her to widely advertise groups and events that are happening around the Circuit. These services have been well received with positive feedback.
 - 'Breathing Space' was a new initiative formed at Orton Waterville. It was a reflective space for people to think and reflect whilst doing a craft. Unfortunately, this group was not well attended but, the people who did attend enjoyed this space.
 - Being able to visit various groups has helped Suzanne to grow the community at Bob. She has recently been asked to talk with the POSH Academy, and this generated three new people to attend BoB.
- 3.4 As a valued member of CLT we congratulated Revd Sarah Gower as Christ Church was given parish status within the partnering Anglican Church organisation. She was officially welcomed as "Incumbent" in their celebratory Covenant Service in January.
- 3.5 Several members attended our District Chair (Revd Canon Helen Cameron's) Leaving Service in Oxford on Sunday 9th June, taking a cake to share. We are very grateful for the ministry, wisdom and guidance that Revd Helen has provided. She has been very supportive.
- 3.6 Some of us attended the Welcome Service in Northampton of our new District Chair, Revd Dr Sonia Hicks on 3rd August.

4 Safeguarding

- 4.1 David Whiting continued as our Circuit Safeguarding Officer. Thanks go to all the Safeguarding

Team – David, Connie Hunt, Revd Janet Titterton and Revd Langley.

- 4.1.2 Three people from the Peterborough Circuit completed the online version of 'Creating Safer Spaces' Advanced Module (CSSAM). Five people from three of our churches have attended a "Creating Safer Spaces Foundation Module" course at Whittlesey Queen Street Church and Brookside Methodist church.
- 4.1.3 A Circuit-wide record of DBS checks was compiled and all our DBS and Safeguarding training was up to date.
- 4.1.4 We communicated that we are in need of more trainers to assist in the giving of the 'Creating Safer Space' foundation module course and would value more trainers generally.
- 4.1.5 The Circuit Safeguarding Policy for 2024 was amended and updated and agreed at our March Circuit Meeting.
- 4.1.6 The Circuit continues to abide by the GDPR (General Data Protection Regulations) and keeps contacts and posters accurate and up to date. All the churches are up to date and compliant with the District GDPR requirements. Some church reps attended the Zoom training sessions offered and led by the District Data Champion.
- 4.1.7 Since the last Circuit Meeting, two further people have taken the CSS Foundation Module course. We now have another qualified trainer to help when running a Foundation course, which will enable us to be more flexible when fixing dates for the course and lighten the load on the rest of the team.

District announced two dates on which they will be running the gathered session part of the Advanced Safeguarding course (CSS-AM).
- 4.1.8 Last year, as part of the Methodist Church's response to the recommendations of the independent inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse: Child Protection in Religious Organisations and Settings', an internal audit of all Methodist districts by the Safeguarding Committee was undertaken. The results from the Church Safeguarding Audit were collated and sent to District and, in combination from insights from other circuits, used to shape our immediate focus and changes to local policy. The results came through this year, and they showed that the audit was a very worthwhile exercise; in general, all our churches were shown to have a good knowledge of what is required and were applying them in a satisfactory fashion.

5 Finance

- 5.1 The accounts for the year ended 31st August 2024 were audited and approved. We agreed our updated Reserves Policy in January 2024.
- 5.2 Income for the year was £202,817. The expenditure for the year was £201,512. Our reserves increased by £1,305.
- 5.3 We had a revaluation of some of our shares because of Covid. Our Circuit Treasurer updated our 'Circuit Reserves Policy', and this was unanimously agreed at our January 2024 Circuit Meeting.
- 5.4 We have benefitted from regular income from the rental of the Birchtree venue manse, and not too much in terms of associated costs.
- 5.5 We know that times are challenging for our churches in the Circuit, and we are grateful for the shares that are received, with many churches continuing to match what they gave the previous year. However, our treasurer advised that, year on year this does have a detrimental effect on the budget and five-year forecasts. Ultimately it is not sustainable, and we really need churches to consider year on year increases in giving.
- 5.6 Huge thanks go to our Circuit Treasurer, Karen Armstrong, and our Circuit Book keeper, Mark Bedford, for all their hard work in producing documentation, summaries and financial projections for our Circuit Meetings, vision days and working party meetings, and in working with the CLT in producing questions and in drawing together the responses for the survey we sent out to the

congregations regarding the future of the Circuit. Thanks also to Karen for attending meetings, along with Revd Langley with the URC to discuss the future oversight of our churches in local ecumenical partnerships and how this would work financially and in practice, and trying to determine what staff and grant support might be available, affordable for the URC, and for us to look at our model of working.

Giles Armstrong produced a helpful document called '5-7 Year Strategy' including the useful 'Current Revised Outlook' to help us with our financial forecasts and planning ahead and deciding on the future pattern of ministry that is achievable.

- 5.6 *Mission policy* In this challenging year, we were grateful for our Mission policy which is continually held under review. Also, our helpful five-year projected budget ('Five-year projections: Projected Costings for 2021 – 2026') which has helped us to plan ahead and be aware and prepared regarding what the position will look like in the not-too-distant future, looking further ahead in terms of being able to sustain a minister.
- 5.7 Giles stood down as Circuit Treasurer. We are very grateful to him for all his hard work. With our Circuit finances looking increasingly challenging, we decided we needed to recruit a new treasurer as soon as possible and put on sessions for people to come and talk about the future. Thank you to Karen for taking up this role. Rev Langley put together some helpful resources to guide and inform us: 'What is Circuit and how do we all work together?' (This includes a question and answer sheet for local churches). And a 'Pointers for Thinking' sheet which included helpful guidance on what polity will and will not allow us to do.
- 5.8 We are, again, indebted to Giles and Mark for all their hard work throughout the year, particularly the helpful financial options they produced for us and the helpful financial projections. We were pleased to vote in our new Circuit Treasurer, Karen Armstrong, at our May 2024 Circuit Meeting.

6 Property

- 6.1 Mick Goodman and Simon Stewart continued on the Property Team and we were pleased to elect Rhod Eaton as our new Property Team Co-ordinator in November 2023.
- 6.2 Whittlesey's plans to modernise the front of the building so it is more effective for mission continued. They also created a memorial garden – a 'Garden of Remembrance' – they entered this into the Dobbies Community Prize Fund competition and they won and received a prize. The children have been planting seeds and have learned how to produce food and they have learned all about the cycle of growing and providing. The garden was formerly blessed by Revd Langley at a ceremony held there and enjoyed by everyone concerned.
- 6.3 We continued to let the Dogsthorpe manse in Birchtree Avenue. As last year, the rental income from this was used for work in the Circuit, and specifically for the Lay Pastoral Assistant role.
- 6.5 Quinquennials were carried out and a quinquennial company found. Rhod liaised skilfully with the churches, providing assistance and encouragement, and ensured all the annual property returns were submitted and in time.
- 6.6 All of the churches' property annual returns were completed. Rhod visited all the churches in the Circuit to complete our 'Property Checklist'. He also compiled a useful 'Funding' database, providing specific areas and contacts which will be a helpful tool when we are looking for companies to carry out particular types of work.
- 6.7 We invited the Peterborough Fire Service's Fire safety Officer to come and make recommendations on our churches' indoor fire doors and their current condition in terms of the new regulations. Whittlesey started putting together a 'Funding Directory', so they will now be able to produce a 'database' not only at local level, but also to produce a national list of funders and charities to approach for funding contributions for all Churches to access. Rhod negotiated changes of utilities supplies in three churches and all quotes received have shown significant savings in terms of usage relating to cost and have proved to be a great benefit.

- 6.8 Progress regarding the sale of Ailsworth chapel has been slow. This is ongoing and we extend our thanks to Paul Hutchings who has greatly helped with these proceedings and has also been a big support and source of advice for Rhod Eaton as he stepped into his new role as Circuit Property Co-ordinator.

In conclusion

Just as we have all been affected by the pandemic and the following global uncertainties and economic turmoil, so have the eleven churches of Peterborough Circuit and our Circuit itself been impacted. In the Circuit's consultation with its churches, it was encouraging to have a lot of people attending the three Vision Mornings and to have the opportunity to learn and have a voice as to the changes that will most certainly have to occur in the next couple of years. Change can be daunting and challenging, but change can also be exciting and worthwhile as we seek to steward resources to best serve Jesus' teachings and our Father's plan for us.

Although, this year, we have certainly been going through a busy period of change and looking forward, one of the significant highlights has been the way people have pulled together and worked faithfully together in stepping up and in supporting each other through the challenges. Despite the uncertainties and difficulties, there has been a lot of positivity and willingness to take on new roles and discuss new and different ways of doing things, joining in discussions and prayer to seek God's will and keep Jesus at the centre of all we think, do and plan.

With the wisdom and guidance of our ministers and Circuit Stewards, we have been encouraged to really focus this year on what the Bible teaches us about teamwork and working as *one*.

"Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms". (1 Peter 4:10)

We appreciate that everything we have is a gift from God. Everything we have from God is intended to be used for His will, which is to love one another, take care of other people, and share our unique gifts. Together, as a team, we have endeavoured to act as good stewards of God.

The Circuit Leadership Team is grateful to everyone for their support, prayers and contributions throughout this uncertain, busy and challenging year. As we give thanks for this year, and look ahead to a new one, we close with some prayers:

We give thanks for....

The new people who have stepped forward to serve in our Circuit Leadership, and within local churches, and their modelling what it means to 'give' themselves to the Lord's work.

Our livestream, our desire to engage with New Places for New People, and our lay employees as they find fulfilment in their roles, especially as they also open up New Spaces for New People.

We pray for....

Our focus as we press home the truth that we are called to help people give their lives to Jesus.

Our honest conversations within as we discern how God is leading us to reshape our circuit.

Our willingness to embrace change, which is part of life and our discipleship.

People to see the potential and have hope for the future.

Father, we thank You for the Peterborough Circuit. May we honour You by keeping Jesus at the centre as we look to our Father and remain open to the work of Your Holy Spirit. Reveal to us the

riches You have given us to serve You faithfully.

“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” (Romans 8:28)

Signed: *L Mackrell-Hey*

Revd Dr Langley Mackrell-Hey
Chair and Superintendent of the Methodist Circuit:
The Peterborough Methodist Circuit of Churches

Date: *11th June, 2025*

THE METHODIST CHURCH STANDARD FORM OF ACCOUNTS

PETERBOROUGH

**FOR THE YEAR ENDED
31 AUGUST 2024**

District	Circuit no	23/21
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Registered Charity - Charity Registration number

1135613

If not a registered charity Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs Gift Aid number

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(The HMRC number is equivalent to a registered charity number in terms of evidence of charitable status and may be used to give to donors or grant funders wishing to see evidence of the organisation's charitable status. Methodist charities in England and Wales that are not registered charities are excepted from registration under Statutory Instrument 2014 No.242)

Ministers:

REVD DR LANGLEY MACKRELL-HEY
REVD JANET TITTERTON
REVD SARAH GOWER

Circuit Stewards:

MRS SUE KEENEY
MRS S HOLMES
MR PAUL ABEL

Treasurer:

MRS K ARMSTRONG

SECTION A			Un - restricted Funds	Circuit Model Trust Fund	Restricted Funds	Totals this year	Totals last year
a1	RECEIPTS	Note	£	£	£	£	£
a2	Assessment/Share		138,434			138,434	128,243
a3	Capital receipts			10,171		10,171	(6,874)
a4	Bank and CFB interest and Investment income		3,461	4,736		8,197	7,738
a5	Grants		8,000			8,000	3,000
a6	Other receipts		32,515	5,500		38,015	18,295
a7	TOTAL RECEIPTS		182,410	20,407	-	202,817 (a8)	150,402

SECTION B							
b1	PAYMENTS						
b2	Stipends, salaries, NIC, Pension and travel costs		131,646			131,646	100,350
b3	Manse Costs		14,641			14,641	15,486
b4	Administration etc		6,947			6,947	6,087
b5	District Assessment		31,571			31,571	30,170
b6	Grants & donations		-			-	12,500
b7						-	
b8	Other payments		10,991	5,716		16,707	17,150
b9	TOTAL PAYMENTS		195,796	5,716	-	201,512 (b9)	181,743

SECTION C							
c1	NET RECEIPTS/PAYMENTS FOR THE YEAR	(a7-b9) -	13,386	14,691	-	1,305	(31,341)
c2	Total funds brought forward from last year		110,134	162,087		272,221 (c6)	303,562
c3	Sub total	(c1+c2)	96,748	176,778		273,526	272,221
c4	Transfers and adjustments		20,000	(20,000)		- (c7)	
c5	TOTAL FUNDS AT END OF YEAR	(c3+c4)	116,748	156,778		273,526 (c8)	272,221 (c6)

SECTION D						
d	FOR INFORMATION ONLY: MONEY RECEIVED AND PASSED ON TO EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS (these amounts should not be included in total receipts/payments above)					
d1	Balance brought forward from last year				-	-
d2	Offerings/Gifts - received for external organisations				-	-
d3	Offerings/Gifts - passed to external organisations				-	-
d4	BALANCE STILL TO BE PAID (d1 + d2 - d3)				-	-

SUMMARY OF CIRCUIT ACCOUNTS AND INTERNAL ORGANISATION REPORTING TO THE CIRCUIT MEETING

SECTION E

Please follow the Guidance Notes to complete this page

Summary of the Circuit accounts for the year ended 31 August 2024 and Internal Organisations reporting to the Circuit Meeting. Note that the funds of an Internal Organisation would normally be Restricted funds unless it could be clearly shown that they could be used for any Methodist purpose. This section must be completed to arrive at the gross receipts and payments totals of the Circuit. If gross income exceeds the Accruals threshold of £250,000, then the Accruals method of accounting AND A DIFFERENT FORM must be used to report the accounts (see Methodist website). Please refer to the guidance notes regarding transfers between the Circuit and connected Circuit Organisations.

INTERNAL ORGANISATIONS	Receipts	Payments	Net Receipts/ Payments	Adjustments	Opening balances	Closing balances
e1						
e2						
e3						
e4						
e5						
e6						
e7						
e8	Sub total of Internal Organisations funds				(e11)	(e12)
e9	Circuit accounts (totals brought forward from page 2 - totals column)					
	202,817 (a8)	201,512 (b9)	1,305	(c7)	272,221 (c6)	273,526 (c8)
e10	TOTAL CASH FUNDS HELD BY CIRCUIT					
	202,817	201,512	1,305	-	272,221 (x)	273,526 (y)
Continue on a separate sheet if necessary and bring the totals forward		TOTAL RECEIPTS	TOTAL PAYMENTS			

SECTION F

STATEMENT OF ASSETS AND LIABILITIES

CIRCUIT - CASH FUNDS HELD at 31 August 2024

	OPENING BALANCES	CLOSING BALANCES
f1 Cash in hand		
f2 Bank Current Account	101,120	92,071
f3 Bank Deposit Account		
f4 Central Finance Board	9,014	24,677
f5 Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes	162,087	156,778
f6 Other funds		
f7 SUB TOTAL	272,221 (c6)	273,526 (c8)
f8 Total funds held by Internal Organisations (the closing balance totals above) (e12)	(e11)	(e12)
f9 TOTAL CASH FUNDS HELD BY CIRCUIT	272,221 (x)	273,526 (y)

SECTION G

OTHER ASSETS and LIABILITIES

	At 31 August 2024	At 31 August 2023
g1 Investments (include Endowments)		
g2 Land and Buildings (see notes re Insurance value)	1,077,650	1,049,317
g3 Other Assets		
g4 Loan(s) - show amount outstanding at year end		
g5 Other Liabilities		

f4 Include only Funds held at the Central Finance Board

f5 Include only CFB Funds held at Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes

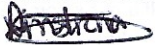
g1 Include any other investments (not the cash element of TMCP trust accounts this is inserted in line f5)

DECLARATIONS

Treasurer

I confirm that I have prepared the accounts from the records of the Circuit and that they include all funds under the control of the Circuit

Signature of Treasurer



Date

26/10/24

Name

MRS KAREN ARMSTRONG

Address

1, EATHWAITE GREEN, PETERBOROUGH PE4 6SZ


Presentation to the *Circuit Meeting for approval.

I confirm that the Accounts have been presented to the Circuit Meeting on

24/10/24

and were approved.

Signature of the Chair of the meeting



Name of the Chair of the meeting

REV DR LANGLEY MACKRELL MBE

Date

24/10/24

Independent Examiner's Report to the Trustees of the

Peterborough

Circuit

This Report is on the Circuit Accounts for the year ended 31st August

2024

Respective responsibilities of Trustees and Examiner

The charity's trustees are responsible for the preparation of the accounts. The charity's trustees consider that an audit is not required for this year under section 144 of the Charities Act 2011 (the Charities Act) and that an independent examination is needed.

It is my responsibility to:

- Examine the accounts under Section 145 of the Charities Act
- to follow the procedures laid down in the general Directions given by the Charity Commission (under Section 145(5)(b) of the Charities Act), and
- to state whether particular matters have come to my attention.

Basis of Independent Examiner's Report

My examination was carried out in accordance with general Directions given by the Charity Commission. An examination includes a review of the accounting records kept by the charity and a comparison of the accounts presented with those records. It also includes consideration of any unusual items or disclosures in the accounts, and seeking explanations from the trustees concerning any such matters. The procedures undertaken do not provide all the evidence that would be required in an audit, and consequently no opinion is given as to whether the accounts present a 'true and fair' view and the report is limited to those matters set out in the statement below.

Independent Examiner's Statement

In connection with my examination, no matter has come to my attention (other than that disclosed below*):

(1) which gives me reasonable cause to believe that in any material respect the requirements:

- to keep accounting records in accordance with section 130 of the Charities Act;

31-Aug-24

(2) to which, in my opinion, attention should be drawn in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

** Please delete the words in the brackets if they do not apply appropriate*

(3) I have/have not* obtained independent verification of all investments with the Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes ("TMCP") or held in other Trusts, Bank balances and Funds at the Central Finance Board of the Methodist Church ("CFB"), which are individually in excess of £10,000 (ten thousand pounds) at the balance sheet date.

** Please circle as appropriate*

Name

M. J. RUFFLES

Signature

M. J. RUFFLES

Relevant Professional qualification or body

FCA ICAEW

Address

4 BARON COURT
PETEBOROUGH PE4 724

Date

30/09/24

THE METHODIST CHURCH STANDARD FORM OF ACCOUNTS

PETERBOROUGH

**FOR THE YEAR ENDED
31 AUGUST 2024**

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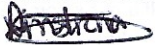
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Relevant Professional qualification or body

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