

Shirley Methodist Matters



December 2020
Shirley Methodist Church

One of 'Churches Together in Shirley'
Eldon Ave, Shirley, CRO 8SD
www.shirleymeth.org.uk





Praise and Worship in December

**THE CHURCH WILL RE-OPEN FOR
OUR GATHERED SERVICES ON SUNDAYS AT 10.30AM
IF YOU PLAN TO ATTEND, PLEASE PRE-REGISTER EITHER BY EMAIL
smc2020kate@gmail.com OR PHONE 020 8405 3222**

SUNDAY DEC 6TH	ADVENT 2	REVD CHOI
	COMMUNION	
SUNDAY DEC 13TH	ADVENT 3	PAUL PARKINSON

SUNDAY DEC 20TH	ADVENT 4	BENNIE HARMS
CHRIST CHURCH FOR ZOOM CAFE WORSHIP AT 5PM		
CONTACT WENDY THOMPSON 8656 4287		

FRIDAY DEC 25TH	CHRISTMAS DAY	REVD CHOI
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**THERE WILL NOT BE A SERVICE AT SHIRLEY ON SUNDAY 27TH
DECEMBER BUT THERE WILL BE A YOUTUBE SERVICE AT 10.30AM**



**YOU CAN LISTEN TO THE SHIRLEY SUNDAY MORNING
SERVICE VIA THE WEBSITE - www.shirleymeth.org.uk
AVAILABLE AFTER 7PM ON THE DAY OF THE SERVICE.**

**IF YOU WOULD PREFER TO HEAR THE SERVICE ON CD PLEASE CONTACT
ROSEMARY JONES 8656 1915**

**THE WEEKLY NOTICES - INCLUDING REVD CHOI'S WEEKLY REFLECTION
ARE ALSO ON THE WEBSITE - www.shirleymeth.org.uk**

**ON 6TH, 13TH & 20TH DECEMBER THERE WILL BE A YOUTUBE SERVICE,
LED BY REVD STEPHEN DAY AT 3.00PM. IT CAN BE VIEWED ANY TIME
AFTER THAT. SEE THE WEBSITE (LOOK UNDER 'SERVICES') FOR THE LINK**

**MANY THANKS TO ALL THOSE PEOPLE WHO ARE MAKING
THESE DIFFERENT FORMS OF WORSHIP AVAILABLE TO US.**

From



the Editors

At the beginning of 2020
would have been to know

Church would be closed for gathered worship for at least six months! This meant, for the editors, much of the usual content of Shirley Methodist Matters was neither forthcoming nor relevant!

how surprised we all
that Shirley Methodist

However, many of you agreed to write pieces when we approached you; others unbidden have sent items for us to include! And we have our regular, dependable contributors – Elizabeth Smart, Bennie Harms and recently Leslie Griffiths – to whom we are really very grateful: to you all, and to our readers, many thanks for helping to keep us going.

Although SMM has been available online for some years, more of you are reading it this way now. Since April we have printed only a few hard copies for those without access to the internet. We have also started to use more photos and colour in the magazine's presentation – you may have noticed – hardly any black and white clipart these days!

We hope and pray for a return to a more normal life during 2021. As well as your continuing to read SMM, we'd love to continue getting contributions from our loyal readers!



Please contact us if you would like someone - or yourself - to be prayed for by members of our Prayer Chain. Names are only taken with the consent of the person concerned and stay on the chain for a week.

**Margaret King 8777 3770 Elizabeth Smart 8681 0057
or via the 'contact us' form on www.shirleymeth.org.uk**

Bennie Harms writes this month's Circuit Letter

What will happen?

The biggest question in everybody's mind will be – when will the current restrictions end? Or will they continue into 2021? What is the sensible way to meet together as families? Will we be able to travel – in and out of the UK?

Our family, is anxiously waiting for that announcement about what will happen. You see, our eldest granddaughter will be getting married after Christmas in the USA. We've looked at flights to and from the venue; calculated costs (should I have bought that gadget last week?!); wondered if our savings will be enough to get us to that wonderful event. We want to plan for that date. We've spoken about holiday plans and how long we can be away. Will we have to quarantine on our return? It'll be a "first" of such events in our family and we can't wait. And so we wait!

Around this time, according to our tradition, a young couple were also waiting for a "first

happening" in their lives. They'd already had a bumpy start in their relationship – what with an unexpected pregnancy; a number of dreams and visions of angels visiting both of them; being told who their son was and what his name should be. And to make life more difficult – we know, but they didn't! – they'd have to make the arduous journey to Bethlehem for an unexpected census and then flee to Egypt in order to save their son from the murderous actions of a desperate, wicked king.

There is a saying '*the best laid plans of mice and men' Often go awry*', from a poem written by Robert Burns as an apology 'To a Mouse' (1786) after he'd upturned the mouse's nest whilst ploughing a field.

***But, Mousie, thou art no thy lane
[you aren't alone]
In proving foresight may be vain:
The best laid schemes o' mice an'
men
Gang aft a-gley, [often go awry]
An' lea'e us nought but grief an'
pain,
For promised joy.***

The saying means 'the most careful plans may go wrong'.

Today is Remembrance Day 2020 and I've just watched the BBC broadcast commemorating the Centenary of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier or Warrior. It came about because of the actions of a Methodist Padre - Revd David Railton - in World War I. You can read an article (written by him) on how it all came to fruition here - <https://www.westminster-abbey.org/media/12819/unknown-warrior-origin-our-empire.pdf>

Revd Railton's plans were eventually fulfilled, and it made me wonder what plans are we busy making today? Plans for the future resulting from past experiences, being played out now; plans not just for yourself or even your immediate family, but plans that will involve and incorporate others. One thing we've learned from the Coronavirus Pandemic is how to look past ourselves and to look out for the welfare of others;



seeing the needs of our neighbours are met; communities coming together; ordinary people (and the not so ordinary like Marcus Rashford) who have gone far out of their way to help others and ensure they are looked after.

As we contemplate Christmas, celebrating the coming of Christ to this earth and then the New Year of 2021, celebrating God's goodness in allowing us to move into an unknown future year, can we combine the two? Let's allow Christ's coming to be celebrated in our lives by our acceptance and belief in Him, knowing full well that 2021, with all its joys and sorrows, will be even more fulfilling with Christ by our side, guiding and giving us strength to carry on. Yes, it's true, the most carefully prepared plans may go wrong. But we can hope and pray that our plans for the remainder of the year may come to fulfilment.

God bless you; may you have a blessed Christmas and a truly prosperous New Year.

**Bennie Harms,
Lay Pastor – Addington and
Shirley Methodist Churches.**

Prayers Fellowship

We will be meeting on **Saturday 12th December at 9.15 am.**
Please be assured that we do observe the rules of safe distancing

Below are some suggested prayers themes for your prayer time:

Pray for our health care workers, whether on the front line or behind the scenes working on the Covid vaccinations.

Please pray for all those who are mourning the loss of a loved one.

Please pray for Joe Biden as he takes over the responsibility of leading the United States of America.

Please continue to pray for all the residents and staff at Hall Grange.

Please pray for our council in Croydon, for wisdom and compassion in the decisions that have to be made.

Pray for the opportunity to speak with your neighbours to see if you can help.

Pray for our leaders in the decisions they take to keep our country safe.

As we travel through Advent the words that
can be helpful, whatever your situation may be:
Matthew's Gospel Chapter 1 verse 23



Brian Sherrell

Family News



Elizabeth Smart writes:

A year like no other, that's what 2020 has been for us all but the Church family have risen to the challenge and created wonderful ways of keeping in touch: speaking and listening to each other by telephone, sharing good news by email, walking together – two metres apart with our masks on, shopping for those shielding, surprise chocolate bars popped through our letterboxes! and many, many other ways .

The Knitting Angels have been continuing to knit all through the lockdown for the Special Care Baby Units at the Princess Royal Hospital and Croydon University Hospital; despite restrictions to our lives there have been many positive ways we have been able to connect with each other.

We have the good news of not one but three newborns! We were delighted to hear that Judith and Ray Roberts' grandson Oliver arrived safely on the 16th November; our love and congratulations to David, Geli

and brother William and to all the family. On 20th November Emilia Rose Long was born to Richard and Natasha Long, a sister for Ben, the first granddaughter for Jennifer and Howard and great granddaughter for Jean Cooper (at Hall Grange). STOP PRESS NEWS - another new arrival - Jose Riddiough's new great grandson Max, was born in Australia. Georgina, his mum is Jose's granddaughter. Our love and congratulations to you all.

We hope Simon Tayler will find on Christmas Day he will be reaching for the stars in his back garden – we send him our best wishes on his special birthday .

We want to say thank you to Ray and Judith for preparing and sharing the Remembrance images, some of which had been provided by members of the church family. We could not meet in Church for our Service of Remembrance and the unfolding images helped us to focus and remember and give thanks for the sacrifice made by so many.

'We will remember them'

Elliott Abadoo's death on 14th November has been a great sadness for our church family. Elliott faced his illness with such courage and with the loving support of Akos and their sons Joseph and Andrew. We shall miss his presence, always there to support and encourage us to put our trust in God. May he rest in peace and may Akos and all the family be comforted by God's Love as they mourn his passing.

We remember all our Church family and especially those who throughout the last months have been housebound. We pray for Akos, Joseph and Andrew Abadoo and their families,

Lambert Rae, Beth Fairbairn and her family, Danuta Plummer and Eunice Mutongerwa.

We were sorry to hear that two Hall Grange residents died recently - Tom Slater (whose wife Biddy lives at Hall Grange) and Charles Bastable. Their families and friends are in our prayers.

For all the Hall Grange family – residents and staff and their families – as they care for one another, keeping everyone safe, remember and support them in your prayers each day.

May you have a Peaceful Christmas, stay safe and hold each other in prayer.



Bibles are needed !

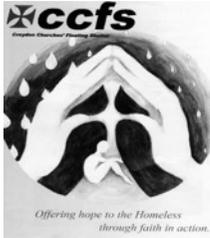
TWAM are appealing for **Bibles to be sent to Africa**. Any version in contemporary English would be gratefully received. Please put any you have in the TWAM DONATIONS BOX in the church porch. However if you prefer it, we could come and collect them from you.

TWAM says thank you for all your support through these tough times. The vans have twice been to our Church in the past two months. TWAM have dispatched two containers to Africa in September; one to Zambia and one to Uganda - a monumental achievement.

Bill & Elizabeth Smart 0208 681 0057



Shelter Matters



By the time you read this Croydon Churches Floating Shelter (CCFS) would normally have been operating since 2nd November, with SMC hosting on Sunday evenings during November and December. But of course we are not in normal times and the Shelter is not operating this winter as we cannot meet the conditions imposed by the Government, by running the Shelter in one building throughout as well as providing a single room or pod for each of our guests. Thankfully the Government has given money to enable local councils to house the street homeless in hotels and hostels until 31st March 2021, so we hope our prospective guests will be accommodated.

One of the CCFS trustees also volunteers with Croydon Nightwatch and asked if we could support them in some way. Hearing that Nightwatch was spending £5,000 a month on sandwiches, all the pre-Christmas CCFS churches offered to provide 8 loaves of sandwiches on the nights when they would have been hosting the Shelter. **We are now providing 8 loaves every Sunday night until 27th December, thanks to 34 folk who agreed to help.** This includes SMC folk, friends from St John's and one lady who lives in Penge but heard about this via her sister's What's App group! Other CCFS churches will take over from 1st January 2021.

Some of the CCFS host churches and normal drop-in churches, e.g. St Mildred's and South Norwood Baptist Church, are now providing a hot meal for five people every day in the No Second Night Out (NSNO) hub, located in the grounds of Croydon University Hospital. It's a base for the homeless to be assessed and moved on within 72 hours. Before Covid-19 the hub could take sixteen people but that has been reduced to just five.

As you can see CCFS is helping the homeless but in a different way this winter.

Jonathan Baxter, Secretary and Trustee - CCFS

What's on at Guild?

Thursday 21st January at 8pm:

Malcolm Jennings of Surrey Wildlife Trust will be screening his wonderful photographs of the beautiful Gower Peninsula, accompanied by his usual highly informative commentary on its countryside and wildlife. This is an opportunity of a trip down memory lane, or perhaps another venue to put on your bucket list. Either way, there's the added attraction of the company of friends and an opportunity for an evening out in a Covid Secure environment.

Book the date and join us. We'll meet in the main hall, using the entrance from the car park. You are invited to wear a mask when entering, exiting and moving around the room. It is helpful, although not essential, to let me know that you plan to come.

Ruth Tayler

(Yes, you did read this in November's magazine. We hope it will go ahead in January!)

BENNIE WAS INTERVIEWED ON OCTOBER 31ST BY PREMIER CHRISTIAN RADIO AS PART OF THIS FASCINATING SERIES - WOVEN. IF YOU MISSED IT, GO TO <https://www.methodistlondon.org.uk/woven-and-premier-radio-series>

Woven
Presents

God's Story. Your Story.
Every Story.

Tales of faith, transformation, hope, repentance, healing and forgiveness from London Methodists will be coming to Premier Christian Radio this autumn. Series is hosted by award-winning radio and TV presenter, Hannah Scott-Joynt

LISTEN - SATURDAYS AT 5:30PM FROM 31ST OCTOBER 2020 ON ChristianRadio
NW 1305, 1332, 1413 & 1566 in London and Surrey
DAB Nationally, Freeview 725, iPhone and Android Apps.

BENNIE HABINS
Oxendon Circuit
FALLING OUT OF THE TREE
31st October

SUE MILLMAN
Redway Methodist Church
MY FAITH & POLITICS
7th November

HAYLEY FINUCANE
Fulham & Chelsea Methodist Church
NEVER GIVING UP - GOD REMAINS FAITHFUL
14th November

THERESA SAM
Greenford Methodist Church
MY RELUCTANT WALK WITH GOD
21st November

ABDUL BAH
Methodist Central Hall Westminster
MY JOURNEY TO CHRISTIANITY
28th November

LYNITA CONRADIE
Harrow and Hillingdon Circuit
WALKING BY FAITH NOT SIGHT
5th December

SPECIAL EPISODE
Featuring young adults from the London District
12th December

ZARINNA MENSAH-COKER
Kilburn Methodist Church
PURPOSE IN TEACHING

BILL TOPPING
Dorney Methodist Church
GOD CALLS US TO LIVE IN COMMUNITY

JASMINE YEBDOH
St Marks Methodist Church
BEAUTIFULLY BROSSEN

@LondonMethodist 020 7654 3850

LONDON DISTRICT OF THE METHODIST CHURCH

Thanksgiving in the USA

Margaret Chan writes:

I have celebrated Thanksgiving in America several times over the years – for those who don't know, my elder son and his family live there.

I am always struck by the fact that the Americans seem almost to make more of this festival than they do of Christmas. Certainly, many of them will take the week of Thanksgiving off work, whereas lots of them go back to work straight after Christmas Day – Boxing Day does not exist in the United States.

Thanksgiving was first celebrated by the Pilgrim Fathers in 1621 – to give thanks for surviving their first winter in America, an achievement that was in no small part due to the help of the native American tribe, the Wampanoag, on whose territory they had landed.

The settlers, usually called the Pilgrim Fathers, were a group of Puritans who travelled from England to Cape Cod, Massachusetts in search of religious freedom, sailing on board the ship, *Mayflower*.

Mayflower set sail from England in July 1620, but it had to turn back twice because *Speedwell*, the ship it was travelling with, leaked.

After deciding to leave *Speedwell* behind, *Mayflower* finally got underway on September 6, 1620 and arrived at Cape Cod on November 9, 1620, after enduring a miserable voyage of about 65 days. Because of setbacks, the settlers had arrived too late in the year to plant crops and would probably not have survived that first winter, had it not been for the help of the Wampanoag.



This year marks the **400th Anniversary of the Pilgrim Fathers' arrival** and a year-long programme of commemorative events had been planned - however, the coronavirus has prevented most of these from happening. My u3a writing group decided to celebrate the Anniversary ourselves, by writing about different aspects of the story. Here is mine!

Strangers in a Strange Land

My mother and the elders say I shouldn't visit the boy... that his people are dangerous to us. But how can that be? They are so weak, so fragile, trying to scrape an existence with their unsuitable tools, planting crops too late, which will wither and die before they can be harvested... And he is sweet faced – his skin pale and his eyes colourless - but his hair is golden in the early winter sunshine. It twirls around, doesn't lie glossy flat like mine. He wears the same clothes they all do – tight, uncomfortable, ugly - not like our deer-skin trousers and tunics which are warm, decorated with shells, patterned in dye. He has heavy shoes that clump through the

forest, send all the animals scattering in panic. No wonder his tribe can't hunt for their food. Yes, their fire sticks will bring down a deer – but the noise alerts the other animals and they can make only one kill.



They arrived in their huge ship, white sails billowing to drive them into our bay. We watched them come ashore in smaller boats ... thought they were maybe fishers, following the annual journeys of our cod. But, no, they came onto the land and set up shelters; later they cut down trees, made homes from logs. So impractical – how will they carry them when the caribou move on? They are like children, knowing nothing – but who will teach them the right ways to live?

The boy says he is called *Billy*. I ask him, “What are you named for?” and speak my own name, *Sokanon*, making the sign for rain

to explain its meaning - but he cannot get his tongue around the sounds I want to show him our ways: how to plant maize, how to catch the turkey birds in the forest – better than the sickly fowl they brought with them and which barely survive, refuse to breed. “Chickens” he calls them.

The wheel of the seasons turns and the cold days come. We move inland from the shore, but Billy and his tribe remain where they are, in homes they cannot shift. They are scarcely ever outside now, they hunch indoors, while we go hunting, fishing, gathering the woodland harvest against the days of winter. The fields our mothers planted this year have borne a good crop – we can survive the hard months – but how will Billy’s people live through them?

Once in seven days Billy’s tribe gather together in the biggest of

the dwellings and raise their voices in the unmusical sounds they call *hymns*. The elders say they must be praying to the spirits – but we don’t see them visit any of the sacred places... “They will die,” I tell my father. He shakes his head “What can we do, daughter? They are too foolish to survive...” I go to the Sachem and the elders and the Sachem listens. “You are right, Sokanon,” he says, “there has been enough death here - we should protect those who are weak...”

And we do – we take them supplies, show them how to lure turkeys with maize, how to move softly in the woods to trap the deer. Next planting season we will give them seed corn, squash and beans so that they can learn to live in this land. There will be plenty for us all, if we share together....

Keeping Knitters Knitting....

If you enjoy knitting, would you like to knit for the Special Care Baby Units - small baby blankets, hats and cannula gloves are needed.

Wool and needles can be provided and delivered and the finished items collected.

The SCBUs are so grateful for these and the need is ongoing. *Elizabeth Smart*



News from Hall Grange & from MHA nationally

Jennifer Potter, Chaplain, writes:

This has been a difficult year for Hall Grange and for MHA more generally but it's also a year MHA has enjoyed a raised profile in the media.

Chief Executive, Sam Monaghan, has been interviewed frequently on radio and television and two senior MHA staff currently sit on working groups of the Department of Health and Social Care relating to testing for visitors to Care Homes.

As of 23rd November, 50 MHA Homes are affected by coronavirus with 87 residents testing positive and 89 staff. There have been 36 deaths this second wave of the outbreak. Hall Grange has hardly been affected this time round - some staff have tested positive but the weekly testing has meant this has been picked up quickly.

Hall Grange residents and the Wilderness volunteers entered the Shirley Scarecrow Project - see pages 22 and 23.

Work on the Wilderness continues: large quantities of acidic soil have been scraped

off, new trees have been delivered and holes have been dug ready to plant them.

Well wrapped-up residents have been able to go for walks and use the information guides around the paths.



Enjoying a sit down & a cuppa



A service was held for Armistice Day - November 11th including the usual bugle calls and poems.

One of the residents read a poem that was particularly appropriate.



Currently there is no visiting at Hall Grange but, as we hear in the news, there are plans afoot for testing relatives so that they may visit over the festive period. This is a big logistical task to do this for all the country's Care Homes so we are waiting upon developments and the Tier into which London/Croydon is placed will also have an effect on whether visiting can resume.

So, Christmas 2020 will, undoubtedly, be very different for residents at Hall Grange though every effort is being made to make it a good time. MHA has recorded a Carol Service and a DVD will be sent to each home and it will be available on YouTube from early December.



It would be great if a group of people from Shirley Methodist Church could get together and come and sing carols outside in the garden and in front of residents' windows if only for a short time. (A portable keyboard would be an added bonus.)

As I am able to go into Hall Grange, I have organised to do a Sunday Service once a month with communion and this has been much appreciated as have recorded services from the Circuit which are shown to residents.

The best Christmas present for all residents and staff would be a vaccine allowing life to return to something like normal and for volunteers to be able to come back in again. In the meantime, please pray for all the residents and staff.

'I'm dreaming of a White Christmas'

A couple have become Mr and Mrs White-Christmas after tying the knot in a pre-lockdown wedding. Tilly Christmas and Kieran White, who met at school aged 12, married at the Roman Baths in Bath in November. Mrs White-Christmas, 20, said: "I wanted to keep the name going. It just so happens the man I am marrying has the perfect surname to go with it. It took us time to twig that our surnames came together as White-Christmas. We first realised at our secondary school prom when our friend uploaded pictures to social media using #WhiteChristmas!"

Christmas Greetings & Blessings to you from these church friends:



Revd Choi and Sarah
Jean and Jonathan Baxter
Frank and Jean Brooks
Maureen and David Hunt
Margaret Reed
Heather and Mike Tarling
Tony Cane
Donna and Ella Webster
Adele Sluce
Fran Byard
Jenny and David Crook
Lis Black
Kate and Graham Marsden
Margaret Chan
Paul and Hazel Davies
Andy and Chris Graham
Reg Young
Dennis Blount
Bill and Elizabeth Smart
Carol and all the Demelza team
Ray and Judith Roberts
Cordella King
Steve and Alison Hunt
Anne Hatherill
Beryl Logan
Sue and Bill Gale
Maurice and Peggy Graham
Simon, Nicky, Will and Joe
Tayler
Okon and Nkoyo Edeke
Lorna Bennett
Colin and Karol Mercer
Ann and Bill Jameson



Jean Beecher
Mildred Pratt
Alan Frost
Jose Riddiough
Brian and Carolyn Sherrell
Christine Leonida
Ruth Dodoo
Enid Penlington
Tau and Hsin Wey
Lambert and Jasmine Rae
John and Pat Pritchard
Val Rutherford
Brian Reed
Margaret King
Jill Lipscomb
Fiona Daukes
Irene Owens
Brian Cantrell and family
Leslie and Margaret Griffiths
Marco, Adam and all the
Wilderness Team
Kibbs, Mary, Ashanty and
Caitlin Osafo
Sarah and Amelie Baleon
Joy Funnell
Dorothy and Roger Cox
Jennifer Potter
Dionne, Danielle, James and
Kayleigh Smith
Alfred and Felicia Topeng-Tuda
Alan Harper
Yvonne Powlett, Roslyn and Syon
Bob Wakefield



Katy, Harvey Beck and family
Derek Cooper
Keisha, Tony, Maya and Malik
Aidoo
Carol Schad and family
Bennie and Jenny Harms
Christine, Austin and Helen Elliott
Samuel and Rashida Katubu-
Wilson and family
Eunice and Kennedy Mutongerwa
Rosemarie and Stanley Nalliah
Rohini Herat
Denise and Peter Radford

Sharon Routledge-Brown,
Andre and Nicole
Pat Trafford and family
Abi, Maxine and all the staff and
residents at Hall Grange
Lesley and Anthony Vigurs
Thelma Maple
Alan Youngs
Lindsey, Alistair, Esther and
Daniel Macfarlane
Suzy Stoyel and the Shirley
Neighbourhood Care team

An Appeal for Somewhere Safe to Stay

We heard from the coordinators of the Somewhere Safe to Stay Hub (who we're involved with and we are providing home cooked hot meals for those using the facility), that they are hoping to provide Christmas gift boxes for the people who use the hub. As Shirley Methodist members are always so generous when it comes to these sorts of appeals, I thought I would ask if anyone can contribute items and Bill and I will deliver them to the centre.

If anyone would like to donate items to include in Christmas gift boxes for people using the Somewhere Safe to Stay Hub in central Croydon for homeless people, please contact Sue and Bill Gale - 020 8651 0717 or email billandsuegale@blueyonder.co.uk and we will arrange collection and delivery of donations.

Items such as toiletries for men and women, chocolates and sweets, individually wrapped biscuits and any other suitable gift items would be very welcome. All items must be new, unopened and in date.



A Christmas story

Leslie Griffiths writes:

This is a tale I tell as often as I think I can get away with it. It tells of an experience I've had only once in my life, one which I never expect to have again. And it was unforgettable.

It all happened over forty years ago when Margaret and I, with our three children, were living in Haiti. It was Christmas Day and I'd arranged to lead a morning service in Quartier Morin, an old French colonial township about ten miles outside Cap Haitien where we were living.

I remember that morning how proud I was of the sermon I'd prepared for the occasion. I'd taken great care writing it. I felt it was theologically strong and lavishly illustrated. To round it all off, like a good sauce on a cordon bleu meal, one or two tasty rhetorical flourishes to be proud of. Ah! The vanity of the preacher!

Little did I know that I was destined never to preach my little masterpiece. Something altogether surprising was lying in wait for me.

I expected to find two or three dozen people gathered in readiness for the service. But not the great milling horde that more than filled our humble auditorium that Christmas morning. There so many people I'd never seen before. Apparently, a large number of migrant workers had descended on our little community. They'd put up temporary booths and would stay around for a few weeks before moving back to wherever they'd come from.

Before beginning the service, I asked the congregation one or two questions and became aware of an astonishing fact. Our visitors had never heard the Christmas story before. Mary? Who's she? Joseph? Never heard of him. Quirinius? Haven't got a clue.

I became aware that the Very Fine Sermon I'd prepared was going to have to be ditched. It would ring no bells, excite no imaginations, kindle no faith amongst this raw congregation in front of me. Instead, I decided to tell the old, old story. With no frills. In all its simplicity.

To people who'd never heard it before.

I spoke of the decree that went out from Caesar Augustus ordering people to go to the town of their birth. There was a murmur of understanding among my audience. These were people ruled by decrees of one sort or another. They lived in a dictatorship and knew exactly what it meant to get an executive order from someone on high.



Then Mary and Joseph entered the story. The plight of a pregnant woman being asked to undertake the journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem was received with considerable sympathy as too was the sturdy reliability of Joseph. When I announced the nature of their lodgings and explained how they had to make do with an out-house because “there was no room for them at the inn,” there

was a voluble outburst of support. The people in front of me were all living in temporary shacks because there was no room for them at any inn. They were identifying with the story in an increasingly vociferous way.

So the baby was born and wrapped in swaddling bands. And the news was first announced to – shepherds! That detail raised the roof. Here was I telling what I claimed to be part of the most interesting story ever told about the most important person who ever lived and it turned out that he was born in inauspicious circumstances and the news of his birth was disclosed to field-people just like these migrant workers before me. They lapped it all up.

But the biggest cheer came when I told them about the kings. They noted the fine presents which these eastern potentates brought but it wasn't that which brought the house to its feet. It was the fact that shepherds got in on the act first. They got down to that crib the same night. The kings only came later. For people who are always shoved aside by those more powerful than themselves,

this aspect of the Christmas story was radical, subversive, and a cause of great joy.



Then came news of the response of Herod and the slaughter of the innocents ordered by this megalomaniac. Once more, this resonated with so many atrocities they'd known in Haiti. They tut-tutted their displeasure so knowingly. And they moved into sympathetic mode once more as they heard of the flight into Egypt.

That morning, I became aware of the latent power of the story of Jesus's birth. We've wrapped it up with so much cheesy

tradition, so many layers of tinsel and custom. It's buried from sight and dulled by our familiarity with it. It's boring. Every year we look for some novelty to cheer the story up, to get us through another festive season, to keep the children quiet. It's become burdensome. And yet, at its heart, there is this deep freshness, as in a seed in the ground in wintertime, full of the possibilities of a new life.

As I said, I've only ever told this tale once to people who'd never previously heard it. But that was enough. All I want now is to help people who've heard it a million times to re-engage with it as if they were hearing it for the very first time. It will require a huge effort of the imagination. If we could do it, it might revolutionise our understanding of God's love and transform our commitment to the world he entered all those years ago.

**May we be filled with the wonder of Mary,
the obedience of Joseph, the joy of the angels,
the eagerness of the shepherds,
the determination of the magi,
and the peace of the Christ child.
Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit
bless us now and forever, Amen**



RESET THE DEBT

At the beginning of October, The Joint Public Issues Team* (JPIT) launched their new campaign Reset The Debt.

An estimated six million people in the UK have fallen behind on one or more household bills as a result of Covid-19, with the biggest increases in debt amongst the poorest households.

People who were previously able to keep their head above water are now in severe difficulty. Others, who had just been staying afloat, now face being overwhelmed by circumstances entirely beyond their control.

JPIT believes that this is an urgent problem that demands a solution. It is not right that those with the fewest resources should bear the heaviest burden of the lockdown, potentially for years to come.

Now is the time for a solution to be found.

JPIT believe people swept into debt by Covid-19 now need a

Jubilee. That's why they are calling on the government to Reset The Debt.

For further information visit <https://resetthedebt.uk/>

If you would like to run a small group session online to explore Reset The Debt, and some of the theology behind debt forgiveness, you can find a 45-minute session on the website under "Resources". Prayers for those experiencing household debt, and for a solution, are also available on this page.

*** *The Joint Public Issues Team*** (JPIT) is made up of the Baptist Union, the Church of Scotland, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church, working together for peace and justice. Their mission is to equip Christians to act and prayer on issues of justice; to resource churches to reflect and campaign effectively and to help our Churches to speak out with a distinctively Christian voice on injustice.

Shirley's Scarecrow Festival

Did you follow the Scarecrow Trail in Shirley in mid-November? **Thirty-eight scarecrow scenes** were set up by residents and businesses at the front of properties, each based on a TV shows theme. It raised well **over £3,000 for Demelza Children's Hospices**.

The Trail was perfect for the current times – a socially-distanced outdoor event. Luckily there was some sunny autumn weather (and a few wet stormy hours, requiring rapid repairs to some unfortunate scarecrows!)

Best Scarecrow 2020 winners: ***Business/Community group/ Education/Church***

1st No, No, No, No, Yes [→]
(The Vicar of Dibley) - St John's Church



2nd Chris and Michaela (Autumn Watch) -
The Wilderness Project [→]



Public vote

1st Shirley Poppins
[←] (Mary Poppins)

***Friends of the Earth prize
- Understanding of
recycling/climate change***



1st A Life on our Planet (David Attenborough) [↗]

2nd Chris and Michaela (Autumn Watch) -
The Wilderness Project

Individual/Home category

1st I didn't do it (Bart Simpson, The Simpsons) [→]

2nd A Life on our Planet (David Attenborough)



SHIRLEY SCARECROW FESTIVAL QUIZ

Can you match the names of the TV personalities and characters to the photos of the scarecrows?
(Answers on page 31)

1



2



3



4



5



6



7



8



9



10



11



12



[A] No soggy bottoms here

[B] Lock up your chickens

[C] Monty Don and his dog, Nigel (Shirley Methodist's entry)

[D] Funshine - who can fix it?

[E] No big ears here!

[F] Where have you Bean?

[G] Uncle Albert

[H] Paddington

[I] Spidercrow

[J] Claudia and Craig, darling! (Hall Grange's entry)

[K] Andy Pandy

[L] Where's Alan Titchmarsh when you need him?



Love Brings Hope this Christmas

Jean Beecher writes:

November is a month for remembering and looking back in my notes I discovered that in 1989 we had a special collection for Christian Aid. This involved making a donation every time we turned on a tap. It ended with £209 being raised – a tidy sum in those days.

Over thirty years later the need for clean water is still a priority for many, particularly in the poorest countries who suffer the most from the effects of climate change. October's church magazine featured Angela in Nicaragua who, with Christian Aid's help, is benefitting from climate-resistant cocoa plants. She can now put food on the table and buy her children clothes and medicine.

A big "thank you" to all who responded to this appeal.

This Christmas will be different for us all: since the pandemic began a dark situation has become brighter with the great outpouring of love for our neighbours in many different ways. Christian Aid invites us to

bring hope to our neighbours in Ethiopia. Many face losing their income because river beds are dry and no rain comes. Mekonnen is a herdsman; without water his livestock can't live much longer. His crops can no longer produce a harvest.



Mekonnen digs for water in a dry riverbed

Thank you for your giving and may you have a blessed Christmas.

If you wish donate, go to <https://www.christianaid.org.uk/get-involved/campaigns/building-hope-just-recovery>

or send a cheque to Christian Aid, 35 Lower Marsh, London SE1 7RL together with a letter mentioning 'Christmas Appeal'

Please note: Shirley Methodist Church has been allocated the number OR2 77064.

Christmas Celebrations in India

Malar Lawrence, Chaplain, Hall Grange, writes:

As Christmas celebration in India is multifaceted, I shall share with you just one dimension, a much cherished Christmas tradition in the part of India I hail from. I come from Kulappuram village in the southern tip of India which is part of the Kanyakumari District. I belong to Christ Church Kulappuram, Kanyakumari Diocese of the Church of South India (CSI).

Christmas Carol Rounds is very dominant in our celebrations. It begins on Advent Sunday, even a bit earlier in some instances. Church members join together as a choir and visit the houses of members, neighbours and others, even people of other faiths, singing Christmas carols, offering prayers and greeting the families with Christmas and New Year wishes.

They gather at the church in the late evening with their musical instruments, sing a carol and offer a prayer. Then begins the Carol Rounds! They are well-received as they go out singing along the streets and visiting houses.



Christmas Carol Rounds is a sign of peace and goodwill in our village in which Christians and Hindus live side by side, building together community life.

I shall highlight two aspects of this ministry. First, it echoes the first angelic hymn: "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours!" (Luke 2:14). Second, it symbolises life and hope. In the 19th century our area was hit by Cholera, a deadly infectious disease. There was no medicine. People were dying in large numbers. People were afraid to go out and offer help. What a pathetic and atrocious self-imposed "lockdown"!

It was in this tragic circumstance that a group of Christians, missionaries and natives, courageously went out with hurricane lamps in the nights and visited the victims. It was the Christmas season and they went out singing and offering comfort and hope. It was indeed a faith journey! They dug graves and buried the dead. They extended solidarity to the affected and the frightened villagers in and through singing, prayers, conversations and help. Their presence in the midst of people offered light, hope and life.

Christmas Carol Rounds has thus become an irreducible core of our Christmas celebrations. No wonder, even some Hindus join in these Rounds in some places! Families make special offerings when the Rounds visit them; and some offer refreshments. Offerings are used for worthy charitable purposes by the Church.

Editor – Maybe Christmas Carol Rounds could be part of churches’ 2020 Christmas experience in the UK.

BENNIE’S



Exercise, yes!

I've always been of the opinion that exercise is dangerous for you. Recently, I've resumed walking in the morning and have set myself a daily goal of walking two miles. I have this 'app' on my watch that I set when I'm going for my walk. It tells me how many steps I've done, the total distance, total time and my average pace in minutes per mile. So, my morning ritual is to

get dressed in a tracksuit and cap, running shoes, headphones and my phone.



As I set off the app starts working whilst I talk to 'Alexa' asking her to play music for me on my phone. (She can be quite difficult sometimes and won't work properly.)

I used to walk around the block to complete a mile. But lockdown's effects on my physique have forced me to increase the distance to two miles. I have two routes that I take. either along the main road, using the foot-path, towards West Wickham which is nice and flat, or up Gravel Hill to the top and back. This morning I went towards West Wickham. I did the Gravel Hill route yesterday and nearly died! My return home today was against a gale force wind (well, I thought it was!) and because I have to reach a certain speed I really pushed myself hard. When I finally reached home and sat down my family were most concerned and almost phoned for an ambulance because I looked so bad.

It took my mind back to 1983. We were living in a town called Benoni and we were in the process of having a new church built. The builders we were using owned a gym in the town and invited me to try it out.

Early one morning, I attended my first and only aerobics class and it was great. Afterwards I sat

in the sauna, had a shower, got dressed and headed out of the gym to my car. It was only across the road, so it wasn't far. When I came to cross the road, I saw a truck approaching and started to jog across the road. Well, let's say I attempted to jog! I knew I had time to get across; my brain told my legs what to do and off I went, only to seize up in the middle of the road. My legs could only manage three steps after being annihilated during the aerobics class.



The truck swerved around me and the adrenaline got my legs working again, but only as far as the car. I got in and just sat there. I couldn't lift either of my legs onto the pedals they were shaking so much. I suppose an hour's aerobics, in my poor physical condition, was just too much! Needless to say, I didn't take up the offer of a discounted membership at the gym.

Seriously though, do you get enough exercise to maintain being a healthy, well-balanced individual? Luke, the gospel writer, speaks of Jesus growing spiritually, physically, mentally and socially. (Luke 2 vs 52) We often exercise our bodies and our minds. But lockdown has had such a damaging effect on our spiritual exercise - going to church and being sociable people. The dangers of Covid-19 are not just to our physical health but to maintain that full balance in life we need to keep in touch with God, and those around.



Jen and I listen to Letico 365 (more information at the end of this blog) in the mornings after breakfast. Those 10 minutes it takes are truly a blessing and

spiritually enriching. There are many ways to keep a balance in life of growing in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and man as described of Jesus in Luke 2:52; I would encourage you to find ways to do so. You could drop me an email about how you exercise to maintain that daily balance. I'm sure I'll find it both illuminating and encouraging.

Enjoy your exercise.
God bless you.
Stay safe! Stay well!

Bennie Harms – Lay Pastor

**[24-7 Prayer International |
Lectio 365](https://www.24-7prayer.com/dailydevotional)**

[https://www.24-](https://www.24-7prayer.com/dailydevotional)

[7prayer.com/dailydevotional](https://www.24-7prayer.com/dailydevotional)

LECTIO 365 is a daily devotional resource that helps you pray the Bible every day.

DOWNLOAD ON APP STORE (Apple)

Download on Play Store (Android)

Written by leaders from the 24-7 Prayer movement, and produced in partnership with CWR, this resource helps you engage with Scripture to inspire prayer and shape your life.

Layworker's Leaders

Christmas 2020 gives us a challenge - how do we share tidings of comfort and joy. Will this be Good News in the form of baby Jesus in a manger? Or that a Covid vaccine is available!

As the news spreads will it unite or divide us? Will we use goodness to end pain and misery, unite a world in one mission, or decide that we should only help ourselves?

Youth organisations encourage young people to think about others, research reflections and be change-makers, often with global consequences. Realising skills of leadership has been a purposeful aim between the generations, passing experience down from old to young. Sometimes we become aware



of one significant leader; most people know that Queen Elizabeth II was a Girl Guide, other times the effects of raising young leaders are less obvious.

Dennis Finch was a member of Downsview Church and served the Boys' Brigade as an Officer for over 70 years. By his steadfast service and sure love of Jesus, there are now hundreds of men and women who have gone on to employment in which they have taken a lead, as well as lived lives which benefit others. Their impact was made enormous by the example that Dennis set when they were young. The majority of those who currently lead 5th Croydon Boys' Brigade were nurtured in some way into leadership by Dennis who was instrumental in creating a community which has global impact.

Leadership in the 5th Croydon begins young. We begin by offering the opportunity of helping the 5-8 year old Anchors and 9 – 11 Junior groups. This means that each week we have two or three teenagers learning how to plan, prepare, communicate, encourage and ... tidy up! The younger boys learn, the teenagers grow and the leaders nurture the legacy.

Blessed by a number of volunteers, we have been able to give the teenagers a wide range of experience to help them develop leadership; teachers, administrators, engineers are represented in the great group of volunteers I have been blessed to work with, who pass on skills to a younger generation. One young leader was awarded a community service certificate by the Deputy Lieutenant of Croydon, another completed their Bronze Duke of Edinburgh Award with us. The teenagers' rewards are seeing how they have helped the younger boys play a sport, make a craft and learn about the world. It has been hard work, but delightfully rewarding.

Hard work has been going on in different groups all over the world to produce a world changing serum that gives others health and freedom. Not all of us have scientific skills, not all of us can lead others but all of us can walk in the ways of Jesus.

Wishing you peace, joy and season's greetings,

Lindsey Macfarlane & family

Croydon Circuit Youth Development & Safeguarding Officer

Lindsey@croydonmeth.org 020 8653 2424

The Leprosy Mission Prayer



**Almighty Father, the giver of life and health,
look mercifully on those who suffer from leprosy.**

Stretch out your hand to touch and heal them as Jesus did during his earthly life. Grant wisdom and insight to those who are seeking the prevention and cure of the disease; give skill and sympathy to those who minister to the patients; reunite the separated with their families and friends; and inspire your people with the task set before The Leprosy Mission, that it may never lack either the staff or the means to carry on its healing work, in accordance with your will, and to the glory of your holy name.

We ask this for the sake of Jesus Christ your son, our Lord.

As one of the charities SMC supports and with the uncertainty of an opportunity to make donations at church, please consider giving to TLM this Christmas.

<https://www.leprosymission.org.uk/>

An update on Shirley Neighbourhood Care's services.

Personal shopping – our volunteers are regularly making individual shopping trips for clients. If the client rings one morning, their shopping is delivered to their door the next day.

Telephone befriending – more than 40 of our clients are benefiting from a regular call from volunteer phone buddies.

Lunch club will be operating on 3rd, 10th & 17th December, while we remain in tier 2. Please call the Office by Tuesday midday to book a place, at £8. Otherwise frozen meals can be ordered & delivered.

200 Christmas Gift Bags will be delivered to elderly folk in Shirley in mid December. We would be grateful for donations of small gifts - Look at <http://www.shirleyneighbourhoodcare.co.uk/> for ideas & where to take donated items.

To contact *Shirley Neighbourhood Care* Tel 020 8662 9599

Email sncs@shirleyneighbourhoodcare.co.uk

Answers to the Scarecrow Quiz: 1K 2F 3E 4H 5C 6A
7D 8J 9L 10G 11B 12I

Shirley Methodist Matters

Each month's magazine will available at www.shirleymeth.org.uk. If you know someone who would like to read our magazine but does not have the internet - maybe you could print off a copy and post it ... or pop it through their door.

We are always grateful for your contributions

Kate Marsden will be the next editor

Kate Marsden katemarsden747@gmail.com

Jenny Crook jenny.crook@blueyonder.co.uk



**The FEBRUARY magazine will be on the website on
Sunday 31st January Please send contributions
to Kate by Sunday 24th January**

Shirley Methodist Church **one of 'Churches Together in Shirley'**

As followers of Jesus Christ, our mission is:

✚ *to honour God by our daily living as individuals and our corporate life as a church*

✚ *to offer God worship which is both lively and dignified*

✚ *to offer welcome and care to all, regardless of age, status, gender, ethnicity, social class, sexual orientation, ability or disability*

✚ *to stimulate one another to grow in our faith and develop our discipleship*

✚ *to work with our fellow-Christians in Shirley to serve our neighbours and share with others our experience of God's love*

