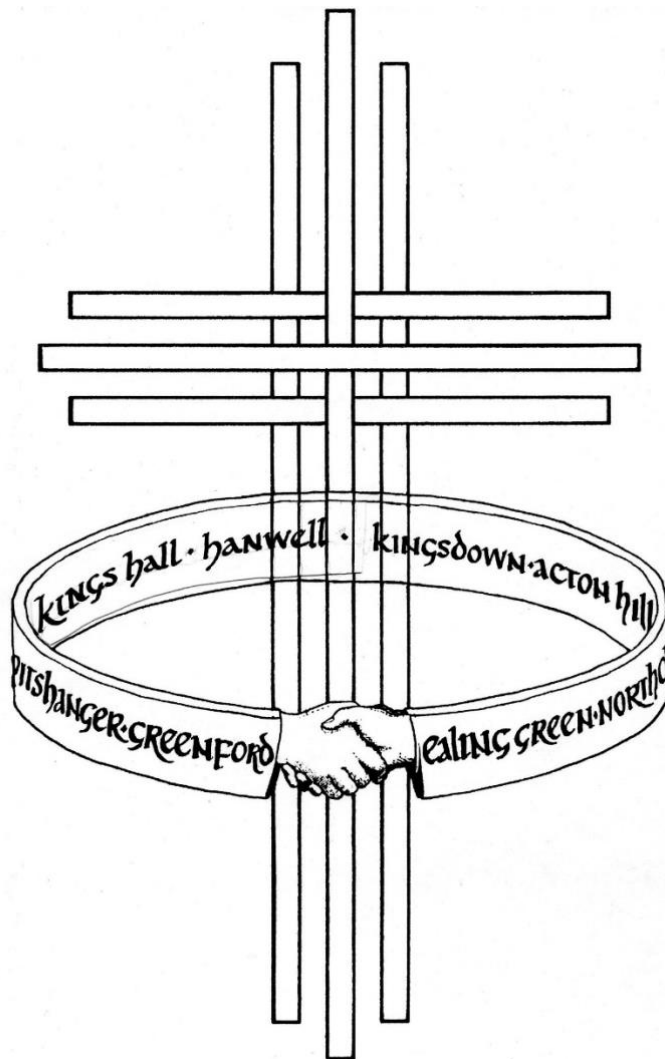


In-touch

No 99

September - November 2023



The magazine for *all* the Ealing Trinity Circuit.

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Circuit website: www.ealingtrinity.org.uk

Front Cover designed by Marion Narain

From the Superintendent

Dear Friends,

Happy Birthday!

We celebrate our 25th Anniversary as a Circuit on the first weekend in September. It's been a full 25 years:

- We've run a project to support schools in Southall;
- Partnered with MHA in the live at home scheme;
- Encouraged people to explore and pray with the Quiet Zones;
- Held more than 10,000 worship services;
- Enjoyed numerous social events;
- Welcomed people into our churches in night shelters and times for refreshment, company and conversation;
- Supported young people through uniformed organisations, Sunday Schools etc;
- Enabled the ministry and the closure of Moullin House;
- Given thanks for and closed Perivale Church;
- Celebrated the 100th anniversary of the Kings Hall and the 50th Anniversary of the Kings Hall Urdu/Hindi Church;
- Moved out of the King's Hall building and struggled to build a new centre there as a mission hub for the Circuit and church for that community;
- Worked towards the closure of Pitshanger, which we will mark in the middle of October

And so much more.

The last 25 years is told in our stories of joys, sorrows, rest and struggle, of people carrying heavy burdens for us all and of our support for each other. These are our stories but they are also God's story, a story of laughter and lament, of hope and love that exceeds our expectations and knowing.

And the story goes on...

In you and me, in parts of our life that are thriving and in those parts that are coming to their end and for which we need to mourn and give thanks.

Will you join me in celebrating our anniversary on the 3rd September?

Will you also join me in giving thanks for the life and ministry of Pitshanger on 8th October and will you continue to hold them in your prayers?

Throughout all that has been God has been with us
In all that is God is with us
For all that is to come God will be with us

May God continue to bless us as we travel together.

With love,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rachel".

25th Anniversary Circuit Service and Party

The 25th Anniversary Circuit Service and Party will take place on Sunday 3rd September at Hambrough Primary School in South Road, Southall, adjacent to the King's Hall building. Access to car parking is via St Joseph's Drive.

The King's Hall congregation are kindly providing a meal before the service. This will be served from 1.00pm with the service following at about 2.30pm.

The King's Hall congregation would appreciate help with serving and setting up ready for the meal and service. If you would like to offer to help, please contact George Masih at georgemasih@hotmail.co.uk or by calling 0771 889 8098

Pitshanger Methodist Church

With heavy hearts, the decision has been taken to close the church at Pitshanger. The final service at the church will be on 8th October at 2.00pm. All are invited to join the service to celebrate and give thanks for 110 years of ministry at Pitshanger.

25th Anniversary Greetings from Past Superintendents

We invited past superintendents of our Circuit to send a message of greeting on the occasion of our 25th Anniversary. Here are the messages from Rev Dorothy Lloyd Williams, Rev Roger Dunlop and Rev Canon Dr Jen Smith.

Greetings from Rev Dorothy Lloyd Williams

“Do you have cards to celebrate Diamond Wedding Anniversaries?” I asked the shopkeeper. “Oh, yes.” she replied. “We get more requests for them than we do for Silver Weddings.” It sounds as though 25 years is indeed a very special milestone.

Happy Anniversary, Ealing Trinity Circuit! As is usual with the birth of most new ventures, the decision in 1998 to merge two separate circuits into one required much thought, prayer, time, faith, and pain. We looked for inspiration to the complicated yet close relationships of the Trinity. Three in one. We tried to listen to each other, to appreciate and respect our differences, and to get to know and love one another. This determination meant that we were able to care for one another inside and outside our individual worshipping communities.

The fact that you now celebrate 25 years together is testimony to your desire to fulfil these working ideals. In Ealing, you can eat anywhere in the world. Schools have several hundred different first languages. In our churches, you can sit next to someone from a continent you have never visited or known much about. Yet you worship together. It is this legacy of love and devotion which binds you together to serve the London Borough of Ealing. Congratulations. Long may such outreach continue.

On a personal note, may I add that you have made a lasting impression on me. I look back on our time together with great affection, and I continue to pray for you, your work and your witness.

Rev Dorothy Lloyd Williams was the first Superintendent of the new Ealing Trinity Circuit when it was formed in 1998. She was succeeded by Rev Roger Dunlop in 2004.

Greetings from Rev Roger Dunlop

Many congratulations to Ealing Trinity on your 25th Anniversary! After serving in York it was wonderfully refreshing and a great privilege to come to such an interesting, diverse circuit, celebrating that in some highly memorable 'international evenings' amidst other events.

At the time Moullin House was still providing a 'home from home' for students, and the two congregations at King's Hall were still meeting in the cavernous auditorium. Both buildings a reminder of Christian outreach and service in quite differing communities. There were splendid celebrations with laden tables at them both and I was particularly impressed by the fellowship over food each Sunday afternoon at King's Hall. Yet both buildings were challenging to maintain: a reminder of our focus on people not on bricks and mortar, and that our calling and mission need to adapt and change. I look forward to hearing what happens with King's Hall.

I was based at Kingsdown coinciding with its impressive redevelopment. I'd sold the move from York to my sons by saying I was going to be minister of an indoor football pitch with church attached! The refreshed premises were well-suited to the young people's work and all else that was going on. It was such a delight this Summer to spend a few days on the 10th Ealing Boys Brigade Summer Camp as they continue to flourish.

The compact nature of the Circuit, with its excellent public transport links, meant that contacts between all the churches were better than in most other circuits in which I have served. And the church / minister ratio also enabled me to regularly share in worship in all of the churches, enjoying their distinct identities.

So thank you for my time with you and I pray you would continue to be open to God's leading, and growing in awareness of His love.

Rev Roger Dunlop was our superintendent from 2004 - 2008 and was succeeded by Rev Micky Youngson. He is now in the Telford Circuit

Greetings from Rev Canon Dr Jen Smith

Every congratulation to Ealing Trinity on being 25! The Circuit looks very different now than it did at the beginning, and also when I arrived first to serve Ealing Green in 2009. I became Superintendent a few years later, and also minister of Acton Hill; we certainly saw some times together. Although we are different now, the profile of work is nevertheless interesting, and the witness

alive. I think our churches have always punched above their weight, and you still change lives in your communities. Thank you for still saying 'yes!' God still surprises us and still works in the small and the unnoticed by the world, and this is true in Ealing Trinity as everywhere. And as for me, my bicycle still knows the shortcuts between Southall and Greenford, and the quickest way up the hill between Acton and Pitshanger; I'm so glad still to have folk from the Circuit part of my life too, as volunteers at Wesley's Chapel.

Blessings on all of you, and courage.

Rev Canon Dr Jen Smith was our Superintendent from 2012 – 2017 and is now Superintendent at Wesley's Chapel and Leysian Mission.

Circuit International Evenings

Gerald Barton, Editor

One of the social highlights of our Circuit has been the periodic 'International Evenings' which have been held at various of our churches. These were always fun times with a good number of people joining together from all the churches in the Circuit. A lot of work by many people went into organising these evenings with each church contributing something to the food and entertainment. In addition, the staff team would often put together a short humorous sketch.

Occasionally something a bit 'off beam' might happen. One of the first International Evenings I went to was at Acton Hill and included a raffle. The prize I won was a bottle of Harvey's Bristol Cream Sherry – an 'interesting' and unusual prize in a Methodist Church! Strictly against Standing Orders, of course. However, since Acton Hill is a local ecumenical partnership with the URC which does not have the same prohibition as the Methodist Church on alcohol on church premises, it was 'explained' that the bottle of sherry had sat in the URC part of the building. A bit of a 'fig leaf' explanation but it got a few people off the hook. Needless to say, I didn't open the bottle until I had got home!

A Quote that Sticks in the Mind

A quote that has stuck in my mind from one of our former Circuit ministers

"You can tell when a church is reviving – people start sitting near the front."

Think about it!

Acton Hill Church Community Meal for the Homeless

Charles Wiredu, Acton Hill

Over the years, there have been many activities and programmes that has been happening in Acton Hill Church to bring the community closer to God's love. There has been Messy Church, Flower Fair, Gospel Chorale and many more. All these events proved most successful in our community engagements.

One major programme that served the community in recent years until the pandemic, was the community meal/soup kitchen. This programme initiative came into being from the Saturday 21st April 2012 and lasted until March 2020. The purpose was to provide free meals to the community every Saturday. The target was the homeless.

This was an initiative by one of the prominent members of the Acton Hill Church, Donald Burling. His proposal was supported by the church then led by the Minister, Rev Jennifer Smith. I was made the coordinator as we partnered with a group of student volunteers from Imperial College by the name "Food Cycle". The group worked with the church for close to 6 months as most of the volunteers were in their final year. Acton Hill Church was to finance the project while Food Cycle contributed student volunteers. The church was able to continue after the group were unable to continue to volunteer due to the completion of their studies.

The community meal initially partnered with the Upper Room to supply fresh produce and other resources for cooking depending on the availability. This arrangement was made possible by Bruce Marquart, one of the Upper Room partners. The community meal also had supplies from the City Harvest after support from the Upper Room ceased.

The community meal relied on volunteers both from Acton Hill Church and Circuit - most especially from the Ealing Green, and external volunteers within the community and beyond. The community meal served meals to over sixty to seventy five people on every Saturday. Well over a thousand people benefited from the programme over the years. Community meal was a most successful outreach activity which served the community for 8 years.

Tea & Biscuits at Acton Hill

Acton Hill ventured into the "warm space" arena with a unique "Tea and Biscuits" session on Wednesday afternoons 2.00 – 5.00pm. It ran from

February 22nd to June 21st 2023 and during that time established a core group of both adults and school children who came weekly with many others who came and shared their lives with us.

What was so rewarding to see was how people interacted with each other forming friendships which will go far beyond the walls of Acton Hill Church. We were privileged to have children walking in during their exam period going straight to the front of the church and kneeling in prayer before coming for juice and biscuits. Many people just popped in to see the interior of the church, so even if we did not attract our original audience of homeless people, we managed to spread the well-known generosity of 'Acton-Hillers' to many other areas of our community.

The 'Tea & Biscuits' project was only made possible by the unstinting kindness and generosity of our volunteers both serving on the day and for donating such a wide and scrumptious fund of biscuits. It is hoped to re-start the project once the holiday season is over.

Iris Axon Concert Series at Acton Hill

Our nineteenth series finished with great aplomb with a rare piano-duet recital by the acclaimed pianists Petar Dimon and Damir Durmanovic. There is now a strong core of twenty-five attendees and these are augmented each concert by various followers of the artistes, some travelling some considerable distances.

Our performers frequently travel from Europe to perform with us, notably from Paris and Dresden this year. It is a very special moment seeing our young artistes perform knowing that many will become the great names of the future. Daniel Ciobanu, who first came to us some years ago as a student, now enjoys a fully active international career with his concerts often relayed on BBC Radio 3.

The acoustic at Acton Hill adds to the success of each concert with many performers saying they prefer it to the Wigmore Hall. The entry price has remained unchanged since we began - £6, £5 (concessions and members and Friends of Acton Hill and Circuit) and £2 children as our core belief is in sharing beautiful music with everyone where price should not be a barrier.

Our next series commences on **Sunday 3rd September at 4.00pm** with the pianist **Anna Vienna Ho** and every first Sunday of the month thereafter until July 2024 (see p23 for the full 2023 – 24 programme of concerts).

The Circuit's Annual Report & Accounts 2021-22

The Circuit continued to face challenging finances during the 2021-22 connexional year. Total income for the year fell by about £13,000 while expenditure rose by about £20,000 leading to an increased deficit for the year of just over £121,000.

The main reasons for the fall in income were lower rental incomes from let properties and no incoming legacies or donations, unlike the previous two years. On the expenditure side, there was an increase in staff costs (up by about £8,000) and property maintenance (up by about £36,000 – mainly on manses).

The results for the year are a reversal of trends in recent years which have seen reductions in the annual deficit. However, at £121,000 the deficit for 2021-22 remains significantly lower than it was in 2016-17 when it was around £200,000. That said, the continuing annual deficits are a cause for concern as unless the accounts can be brought into balance there will come a point when the Circuit can no longer sustain itself financially.

Ealing Trinity Circuit Accounts

	2021-22	2020-21	2019-20
Church Assessments	£204,458	£194,592	£189,814
Income from let properties	£109,083	£118,252	£108,017
Legacies & Donations		£14,664	£30,070
Other	£2,421	£1,436	£4,306
Total Income	£315,962	£328,944	£332,207
Staff Costs	£203,961	£196,103	£267,758
Minister relocation	£2,039	£6,343	
Grants	£6,596	£796	£1,296
District assessment	£45,036	£45,036	£41,084
Expenditure on manses	£112,207	£65,156	£41,224
Expenditure on let properties	£33,803	£24,118	£7,835
District Advance Fund	£13,270	£26,899	£13,722
Legal & professional fees		£10,609	
Audit & accountancy fees	£10,500	£10,500	£10,547
Other expenditure	£9,632	£30,949	£48,612
Total expenditure	£437,044	£416,509	£432,078
Suplus/Deficit	-£121,082	-£87,565	-£99,871

From the Circuit Meeting 7th June 2023

The Circuit Meeting on 7th June was unusual in that the first part of the meeting involved an open discussion to get us thinking about the future shape of our Circuit. To prepare us some questions had been circulated before the meeting:

- What resources, gifts etc do we have as churches, individuals and Circuit?
- What's already happening that furthers our mission?
- What are the issues we're facing or will face in the future?
- What are the issues we're facing or will face in the future?

The discussion was led by Sally Rush, one of the three Learning and Development Officers for the London region. Sally explained that part of her role is to support churches and circuits as they look at how they can adapt and re-shape their mission for the future. As she pointed out, the issues facing us are not unique to Ealing Trinity. Many, if not most churches and circuits are facing similar problems.

Firstly, we looked at the gifts and resources we currently have along with some of the things that are already happening. Some of the things people came up with were:

- Active and committed younger people (eg at Acton Hill)
- Spaces in our buildings which are often well-used for community activities and by community and other user groups
- Ealing Churches Winter Night Shelter at Ealing Green, Hanwell Homeless Concern at Hanwell
- Involvement of people from across the Circuit in the Night Shelter, Ealing Foodbank, hospital visiting and pastoral care
- Boys Brigade, Guides, Scouts etc
- Northolt's music group 'Shalom' involving a range of people
- Hanwell's regular Wednesday coffee morning which is well-attended.
- The Kingsdown Club for older people
- Pitshanger's afternoon tea club
- 'Community Days' and classical concerts at Acton Hill
- Online services and Bible studies

This list is probably not exhaustive – there are doubtless other things going on as well. The important point though, is that there is quite a lot happening across our Circuit.

We then moved on to think about the issues we are facing.

- Society has changed not just becoming more secular with fewer people attending church but also the impact of digitisation – the internet, social media etc. Few of us have the skills needed to make effective use of digital media. Sally said that the Methodist Church is aware of this and has just produced 24 YouTube videos to help people become more digitally engaged.
- The Church is just catching up with issues such as same-sex marriage while young people are now much more concerned about issues such as trans-gender rights which most of us have scarcely started thinking about.
- Declining and ageing congregations - fewer people available to take on key roles. Also shortage of people with the requisite skills to undertake important roles (eg property, treasurer etc)
- The continuing impact of the pandemic – some people have not returned to church, others have taken the pandemic as the cue to retire from roles they previously held
- Financial constraints – the Circuit is running 6-figure annual deficits and clearly cannot carry on like that.
- Our buildings may be well-used by various groups (yoga, dance classes, children's karate etc) but for the most part these have little to do with our churches. The income is vital for our churches in providing the finance to maintain our buildings and also for paying assessments but should not be confused with 'outreach to the community'.
- Buildings are places of memories, weddings, baptisms and funerals - these often make it so difficult to think about change

We then moved on to start thinking about how we might respond to these issues.

Firstly, it was noted that we currently have 8 churches worshipping in 8 buildings (this includes the King's Hall church which has been worshipping in Hamborough Primary School during the proposed redevelopment of the King's Hall building). When our Circuit was established in 1998 there were 10 churches in 9 buildings. Recorded membership in those churches at that time was 742. It is now 346, a drop of over 50%.

Merging churches together would focus resources and potentially make us stronger and more able to develop outreach and mission. However, our identities as individual churches is strong and congregations would need to find ways of coming together to build common identities. Although this would take time and be a painful process for many, there would also be opportunities to be grasped.

It was pointed out that Ealing Borough is a collection of 'villages' which have different cultures and communities. Bringing congregations together from different parts of the Borough may be problematic as a result. In addition it would be false to assume that all members (and adherents) would be happy to become part of merged churches. Some may opt to go to other local churches and some may cease attending church altogether. Inevitably there would be some losses. Also, if the Circuit aims to grow its membership, combining churches would look more like the Circuit is shrinking, not growing. However, there was an acceptance that change is necessary – we cannot just stay as we are if we are to have a future.

There will be a 'planning day' during September to continue the discussion and, hopefully, Sally Rush will be able to attend.

The meeting then moved on to consider other business.

Three new members of the meeting were formally welcomed, Martin Kingsnorth (Hanwell), Samuel Daniel (Greenford) and Brian Morris (Pitshanger). All three are now trustees of the Circuit.

The meeting was informed that the Circuit leadership had agreed to release Deacon Theresa Simons-Sam to serve in another circuit where there was greater need of her skills. Theresa has been deeply involved in projects such as the Ealing Churches Winter Night Shelter, Ealing Foodbank, community hubs etc although this had not always been very visible to people in the Circuit. She will be greatly missed.

The Circuit's Annual Report and Accounts for 2021/22 was approved subject to some detailed amendments to the text. The meeting also approved the transfer of £35,000 to the Circuit's current account in order to meet its ongoing running costs such as paying ministers' stipends etc.

Regarding King's Hall, the meeting was informed that there would shortly be an on-site meeting to consider the façade of the building. To achieve our aims, the existing façade needs to be replaced. This will have to be agreed with Ealing Council.

There was some discussion of the future of Pitshanger. Methodist Standing Orders indicate that when a church has fewer than 12 locally resident members for 4 successive quarters, the Circuit Meeting must close the church (Standing Order 605A). Pitshanger's membership has been below 12 since 2020 and is therefore no longer sustainable. Any decision was deferred until the next meeting, however. The Circuit will also have to consider what to do with the building at Pitshanger taking into account the current range of user groups.

The date of the next meeting was agreed as 13th July at Pitshanger at 7.30pm.

From the Circuit Meeting 13th July 2023

The principal business of the meeting related to the church at Pitshanger. As noted at the previous meeting (held on 7th June 2023), Methodist Standing Orders indicate that when a church falls below 12 locally-resident members for 4 consecutive quarters, the Circuit Meeting must close the church. Pitshanger's membership has been below 12 since 2020.

The meeting celebrated the 110 years of the life of Pitshanger and people recalled some of the various activities that had taken place during that time including:

- The Centenary Flower Show
- Flower arranging courses
- Church fayres
- Sunday school anniversaries
- The Junior Choir with Sydney Wooldridge
- Scouts and Brownies etc
- Family memories – confirmations, baptisms, marriages etc
- Seeing the cross on the front of the church
- Church was very sociable and full.

It was with heavy hearts that the meeting formally decided to close Pitshanger church from 31st August 2023. Responsibility for the building along with any remaining financial assets will pass to the Circuit from the date. This decision was endorsed by a brief meeting of the Pitshanger Church Council. The Circuit will be responsible for deciding the future of the building.

The membership of the remaining members at Pitshanger will be transferred to Ealing Green although some may wish to make other arrangements.

The Circuit Meeting must now seek the approval of District Synod for public worship to cease at Pitshanger. Subject to this approval, the final service is planned take place on Sunday 8th October at 2.00pm – this is noted as a Circuit Service on the September – November Preaching Plan.

Musings after Circuit Meeting on 7th June 2023

Sue Garland, Kingsdown

After our meeting on 7th June, I found myself musing as follows –

Instead of starting from our current situation, what if you look at things differently? Imagine if there wasn't a Methodist Church presence already in the Borough of Ealing, what might we do? Ealing is a large, multicultural urban area with reasonably good public transport and quite a lot of other Christian groups from other denominations and we are about 350 (at the last count) members of the Methodist Church. How many churches would we need and where should they be? Maybe one central church with perhaps one in the east and one in the west of the borough or more?

Then I remembered that “church” doesn't necessarily mean “building”. At the moment my morning bible study readings are going through the first chapters of Acts when the earliest Christians met together in their homes and in the courts of the temple in Jerusalem i.e., in the part of an existing religious building available for public use. Actually, in Ealing we have a number of examples of other Christian congregations (e.g., Bless Community Church, various Pentecostal or ethnic churches) who meet not in their own buildings but in other religious or secular premises. Large gatherings can be supplemented by small class meetings or groups meeting in members' homes just as it was for the early church.

I've also reflected that at our meeting it became clear that of all the community social activities our churches are engaged in, it's particularly the “food and fellowship” type that stands out – all the coffee mornings, community lunches and tea with talks, etc. that are directed mainly towards

the older generation as well as being open to all comers, especially those who are economically and socially disadvantaged.

These activities are sometimes done in collaboration with other church or non-church organisations and, although they may take place on church premises, could equally well be carried out on non-church premises with appropriate facilities. The food and socialising aren't overtly religious in nature and many of those participating wouldn't want that, but it might be feasible to have bible study and prayer sessions before or after for those of us who would be interested.

These social fellowship activities happen, of course, on weekdays. So what about Sundays, given the increasing difficulty of finding sufficient leaders for all our churches' services? While it is lovely to be able to meet with fellow Methodists to worship together in person each week, the pandemic showed us that on-line worship participated in from home can also be very meaningful and we are fortunate in that there are usually excellent Christian services available on the radio and TV. Maybe not having our own Methodist services always available on Sundays could even be seen as an opportunity for us occasionally to participate in the services of other Christian groups in our locality since Ealing has quite a range of churches/congregations throughout the borough.

As was evident at the Circuit Meeting, coping with change isn't easy, although for us in the Ealing Trinity Circuit it is now probably inescapable. Fortunately, if it is possible to plan and adapt for change gradually rather than at a late stage in a rush, the experience can be positive, at least to some extent, and not just overwhelmingly negative. I know this from personal experience when many years ago my employer announced changes, coming within a few years, which would do away with much of what I had been working on for the previous ten years. After the initial shock, I was able to accept the inevitable and to devise and implement new and fulfilling opportunities for my work area, even though it meant giving up what many people would have regarded as the most interesting and attractive part of my previous role.

When the Lord starts to close one door, He may offer us the possibility of another, probably challenging but potentially rewarding if we are prepared to step out in faith.

Looking Back: Dare to Dream 2004

Gerald Barton, Editor

I first came into the Circuit when I started playing the organ regularly at Kingsdown not long after the Millennium. Sitting having coffee at the church one day at around that time I heard talk of an idea being floated for a 'super church' in central Ealing somewhere, possibly on a new site which would replace the existing churches in the Circuit. As I later discovered, this idea had been floated as part of the 'Dare to Dream discussions that had taken place in early 2004. This idea reminded me of what had happened with my brother's church in Luton in the 1980's.

Luton Central Baptist Church was formed from three Baptist churches in central Luton. They had decided to merge together and build a new church on a suitable site in the town centre. Although the initial idea had been for a new site, the new church was eventually built on the site of one of the pre-existing churches. Fortunately for them, they managed to demolish that building before Luton town council could put a preservation order on it. The other two buildings were sold off and re-purposed and the new church built.

I recently asked my brother how long it had taken for people in the three churches to accept that merging and forming one single church was the right thing to do. He thought 10 years, but his wife thought it was more like 20. Not surprisingly it takes a long time for people to accept that radical change is needed and that leaving the past behind, in that case by merging and building new, was the solution.

As it happens, The Dare to Dream discussions held at Greenford in February 2004 did not propose merging all the churches in our Circuit. One of the discussion groups suggested a merger for the churches in central Ealing, ie Ealing Green, Kingsdown, Hanwell and Pitshanger. The rationale behind the idea was that radical action was needed because of falling congregations and a perceived lack of commitment. Doing 'nothing' was not considered to be viable in the longer term.

Well, nothing much happened as a result and we're 20 years or so on with the same problems of falling congregations and a shortage of volunteers for key church roles which begs the question of how long we can really go on as we are.

A second group looked at the churches on the 'A40 corridor' – Greenford, Northolt and Perivale. Their idea was to merge the churches but keep worship and activities at all three sites. This is the idea of one church with one

church council, treasurer, property secretary etc on several sites. This is what happened in the Bristol South Circuit which some years ago transformed itself into the South Bristol Methodist Church – a single church with a number of different sites.

Prior to the change, the Bristol South Circuit had about 10 churches in all, but radical action was required because the circuit could no longer sustain ministry in all of them – as I understand it, the circuit had lived on its financial reserves for some years and was simply running out of money. Some churches were retained as worshipping communities, but others were to become ‘mission centres’ without Sunday services.

The South Bristol Methodist Church now consists of 4 churches with a single church council and one set of officers. How well this works I’m not sure as I can’t help but wonder whether there might be one treasurer etc with 4 times as much to do compared to a single location church. That said, the formation of the single church on several sites must have been done at least about 15 years ago, so has to be a workable proposition.

The third group at the Dare to Dream discussion essentially suggested keeping all the churches in the Circuit and looking to ‘build them all up’ as they were at the time. This wasn’t exactly ‘do nothing’ but as time has gone on and congregations have continued to shrink, it doesn’t seem to have produced much in the way of positive results either.

As far as I can tell, nothing very much happened to develop or consider these ideas further. Perhaps people just thought the more radical ideas were all rather ‘pie in the sky’ and that nothing would ever happen anyway. That’s a pity because the issues which people tried to grapple with at those discussions are still with us now, only more so.

I don’t suppose for a moment that when the idea of a single central Baptist church in Luton was first mooted people rushed to support it. I should imagine that quite the reverse was the case. However, through a lengthy process of talking, discussion and prayer eventually enough people came to see it as the right thing to do in order to provide a better future.

Moving forward towards a future that offers something positive for mission and our churches needs careful thought and prayer. Radical solutions may be necessary (and may be forced upon us at some point) but they need to be talked about and discussed openly as, whatever they are, it will take time for people to accept for themselves that the future cannot be just like the past.

The Athanasian Creed

Gerald Barton, Editor

Some years ago I was listening to an Anglican cleric talking on the radio about the Athanasian Creed. This is not one which I had heard of before given that the creeds most often used in services are the Nicene Creed which is included in services of Holy Communion and the Apostles Creed which I recall from Evensong. The speaker recounted how he had attempted to get his congregation to recite the Athanasian Creed during a service. The version of the creed used in the Church of England on those occasions when it is 'appointed' to be recited includes the line "The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible: and the Holy Ghost incomprehensible". When the congregation reached that point they dissolved into laughter and could go no further. This has left me wondering for years what this creed actually says. Recently I decided to investigate further.

As its name suggests, the creed has been attributed to Athanasius of Alexandria (296 or 298 – 373AD) although later scholarship has cast doubt on this for a number of reasons not least the fact that it probably wasn't composed until the late 5th or 6th century. Be that as it may, the focus of the creed is very much on expounding the nature of the Holy Trinity and the nature of Christ. To that extent, it may have been written to counter the heresy of Arianism. There are, of course various versions of that but simplistically Arianism considers the Trinity as a kind of hierarchy with God the Father at the top, Christ as subordinate to the Father and the Holy Spirit at the bottom subordinate to Christ. In other words, the three Persons of the Trinity were not considered to be equal.

The early church had extensive debates and arguments about the nature of Christ and the Holy Trinity before the leaders of orthodox Christianity settled on a common understanding. The Athanasian Creed is, in its way a pretty thorough-going attempt to clarify what the Trinity is all about. Reading through it one could be forgiven for thinking that's where the bit about 'incomprehensibility' comes in but that isn't the case.

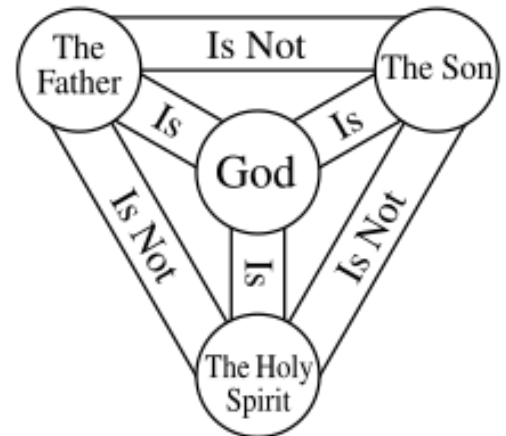
The creed was most probably composed in Latin and includes the line "*Immensus Pater, immensus Filius, immensus [et] Spiritus Sanctus*". The version used by the Anglican Church translates 'immensus' as 'incomprehensible' although other versions (such as the one at the end of this article) translate it as 'unlimited' (other translations of the word include immeasurable, boundless, endless, vast) When expressed that way it doesn't seem quite so crazy, but then it would be fair to say that to the human mind

anything that is unlimited, immeasurable or boundless is pretty much incomprehensible anyway.

So, what does the Athanasian Creed tell us?

Firstly, unlike the Nicene and Apostles creeds, it begins with an 'anathema', a statement that if you don't fully believe what's in the creed, you will "perish everlastingly" – 'believe or burn' as it were. Strong stuff. It then goes on to set out the god we worship:

- One God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity
- Three equal Persons – the Father Son and Holy Spirit who are all uncreated, unlimited, and eternal but stressing that there is nevertheless but one uncreated, unlimited eternal not three.
- Similarly, the three Persons are all Lord and God but there is nevertheless only one Lord and God



The Shield of the Trinity – a visual representation derived from the Athanasian Creed

Just to make sure, so we don't get muddled, it then reminds us that we worship one God in Trinity not three Gods.

Moving on in a similar vein it states that:

- The Father is uncreated and not begotten
- The Son is not made nor created but begotten of the Father alone
- The Holy Spirit is not made nor created nor begotten but proceeds from the Father and the Son
- All three are co-equal and co-eternal, ie none is greater than or less than the others and they have all always been

It then reminds us again that if we want to be 'saved' we must keep the Trinity in mind when we worship.

The next section sets out the nature of Jesus Christ as both God and Man (ie fully God and fully human) yet not two beings combined but one single being. As God, he is of the same 'substance' as the Father but as Man he of the same 'substance' as his mother (Mary) and therefore both perfect God and perfect Man. As God he is equal to the Father but as Man, inferior.

Then follows a few sentences that state that Jesus Christ died for our salvation, descended into hell, rose on the third day, ascended into heaven, is seated at the right hand of the Father and will come to be our judge. We'll all be bodily raised and will have to give an account of ourselves. If we've been good we'll get everlasting life and if not, everlasting torment. It then finishes with a final reminder that if we don't fully believe these things, we can't be saved.

The Athanasian Creed is accepted by both Catholic and Protestant churches and remains one of the three creeds approved in the Thirty-Nine Articles. Following the Reformation the Church of England provided for its recitation on 19 occasions during the year. However, during the 19th century growing controversy over those 'anathemas' (the 'believe or burn' bits) caused a decline in its use.

Reading through this creed I think it fair to say that it does feel rather mind-boggling if not somewhat 'incomprehensible'. Like the other creeds we are familiar with, it results from the debates and struggles in the early church over the nature of God and the nature of Christ as revealed in the scriptures and in the life of Jesus. To that extent the Athanasian creed is an attempt to make comprehensible the 'incomprehensible', to set down in terms accessible to the human mind the nature of what is, ultimately beyond our understanding.

One final point, the Athanasian Creed, like the more familiar Nicene and Apostles creeds sets out what the church believes. None of them say anything about the teaching of Jesus. So, while we keep in mind that we worship God in Trinity, we should also remember to "Love our neighbour as ourselves" (Mark 12:31).

Here is the Athanasian Creed in full

Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the Catholic faith. Which faith unless everyone do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly.

And the Catholic faith is this: that we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the Essence. For there is one Person of the Father; another of the Son; and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one; the Glory equal, the Majesty coeternal. Such as the Father is; such is the Son; and such is the Holy Ghost. The Father uncreated; the Son uncreated; and the Holy Ghost uncreated. The Father unlimited; the Son unlimited; and the Holy Ghost unlimited. The Father eternal; the Son eternal; and the Holy Ghost eternal. And yet they are not three eternals; but one eternal. As also there are not three uncreated; nor three infinites, but one uncreated; and one

infinite. So likewise the Father is Almighty; the Son Almighty; and the Holy Ghost Almighty. And yet they are not three Almighty; but one Almighty. So the Father is God; the Son is God; and the Holy Ghost is God. And yet they are not three Gods; but one God. So likewise the Father is Lord; the Son Lord; and the Holy Ghost Lord. And yet not three Lords; but one Lord.

For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity; to acknowledge every Person by himself to be God and Lord; So are we forbidden by the Catholic religion; to say, There are three Gods, or three Lords. The Father is made of none; neither created, nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone; not made, nor created; but begotten. The Holy Ghost is of the Father and of the Son; neither made, nor created, nor begotten; but proceeding.

So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Ghost, not three Holy Ghosts. And in this Trinity none is before, or after another; none is greater, or less than another. But the whole three Persons are coeternal, and coequal. So that in all things, as aforesaid; the Unity in Trinity, and the Trinity in Unity, is to be worshipped. He therefore that will be saved, let him thus think of the Trinity.

Furthermore, it is necessary to everlasting salvation; that he also believe faithfully the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. For the right Faith is, that we believe and confess; that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man; God, of the Substance [Essence] of the Father; begotten before the worlds; and Man, of the Substance [Essence] of his Mother, born in the world. Perfect God; and perfect Man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting. Equal to the Father, as touching his Godhead; and inferior to the Father as touching his Manhood. Who although he is God and Man; yet he is not two, but one Christ. One; not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh; but by assumption of the Manhood into God. One altogether; not by confusion of Substance [Essence]; but by unity of Person. For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man; so God and Man is one Christ; Who suffered for our salvation; descended into hell; rose again the third day from the dead. He ascended into heaven, he sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty, from whence he will come to judge the living and the dead. At whose coming all men will rise again with their bodies; And shall give account for their own works. And they that have done good shall go into life everlasting; and they that have done evil, into everlasting fire. This is the Catholic faith; which except a man believe truly and firmly, he cannot be saved.

Iris Axon Concert Series 2023-2024

Acton Hill Church
Corner of Gunnersbury Lane and High St, W3 9BU
Opposite Acton Police Station

First Sunday of the month at 4.00pm

- September 3rd** Anna Vienna Ho – piano
October 1st Hannah Shilvock – bass clarinet
November 5th Lewis Kingsley – piano
December 3rd Neus Perris Ferrer - piano

2024

- January 7th** Amber Emson – violin
February 4th Evgeny Soifertis - piano
March 3rd Alice Jones (cello) and
Tara Clifford (piano)
April 7th Joanna Kacperek – piano
May 5th Stavroula Thoma – piano
June 2nd Lance Mok – piano
July 7th Susie Gibbons – soprano

Programmes at the door **CASH ONLY**
£6.00 adults, £5.00 concessions, £2.00 children

Forthcoming Events around the Circuit

[as notified to, or discovered by, the Editor]

September

3rd Sun 1.00pm **Circuit 25th Anniversary Circuit Service and Party at Hambrough Primary School, South Rd, Southall**
Food will be available from 1.00pm and the service will follow at about 2.30pm.

3rd Sun 4.00pm **Iris Axon Concert Series at Acton Hill**
Anna Vienna Ho, piano
*Programmes at the door, £6.00 adults
£5.00 concessions; £2.00 children*

13th Wed 7.30pm **Circuit Meeting at Northolt**

24th Sun **Ealing Half Marathon**
There will be road closures around the route

October

1st Sun 4.00pm **Iris Axon Concert Series at Acton Hill**
Hannah Shilvock, bass clarinet

8th Sun 2.00pm **Circuit Service at Pitshanger**
This will be the final service at Pitshanger

November

5th Sun 4.00pm **Iris Axon Concert Series at Acton Hill**
Lewis Kingsley, piano

29th Wed 7.30pm **Circuit Meeting (venue tba)**

Articles for 'In-touch' Issue No 100 (December - February) should be sent by e-mail headed 'In-touch' to the Editor, **Gerald Barton**, or as hard copy to the Circuit Office.

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Deadline for next issue: 26th October 2023