



# Weybridge Methodist Church

**Newsletter January 2020**



## Whither the Ecumenical Pilgrimage?

By Rev. Ian Howarth.

Reading Israel Selvanayagam's recent history of the Church of South India, 'The Greatest Act of Faith,' with his passionate advocacy of the importance of organic union if the church is to have any credibility in a secular world, I am led to reflect on the ecumenical journey as I have seen it over my lifetime.

Dr Selvanayagam finishes his book with a quote from Martin Luther King Jr., 'who at the heart of his struggle with the nexus of evil forces, declared: "We, the Roman Catholics, Orthodox and the Protestants, either come together as brothers and sisters or die as fools",' and I am left almost with a feeling of guilt that I cannot generate the enthusiasm for pursuing the goal of organic union between God's people that I had in the early days of my Christian faith. Dr Selvanayagam is adamant that coming together ultimately must mean organic union, but his book also outlines the danger of dominant partners using organic union as a means to assimilate smaller units into the larger, for which he cites the assimilation of the CSI into a province of the Anglican Communion, without discussion with the other partners as an example.

When I was confirmed in 1969, it was at one of the first joint Anglican/Methodist confirmation services, even if the school where it happened did have to import a retired bishop of a diocese in the Middle East, and we were actually confirmed in two queues one going to the bishop and the other to the Methodist school chaplain, who was standing in for the President of Conference whose train had been cancelled! It was the comments that it was a good job it was the President's train that had been cancelled and not the bishop's, which gave me one of my first insights into a key difference in our ecclesiology!

I began my presbyteral training at the ecumenical Queen's College, in 1982, and our first guest lecture was from David Edwards, the Anglican lead for the proposed English Covenant, which despite support from the Methodist Church and URC, had recently been voted down in the house of clergy of the Church of England, thus effectively bringing to an end the processes that might lead to an organic union between the churches. There was much wringing of hands and a sense that a dream had died.

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Throughout my ministry the quest for organic union has gradually slipped off the table, and the Covenant with the Church of England was seen by many as an end of the process. On the ground ecumenical co-operation has been patchy. Some flexibility in Anglican Ecumenical Canons has allowed joint work and worship in LEPs and across particular areas. Yet, I have become acutely conscious that ecumenical working at a local level relies far too much on the personalities and outlook of local church leaders – usually the ordained ones!

As I approach the end of my ministry, I have to say that I react to the current proposals of 'Mission and Ministry in Covenant' with a deep sense of tiredness. I cannot put my hand on my heart and say that I think this is at the top of the list of our priorities. The sense of banging a head on a brick wall is too strong.

As I look back over the story I have told above, I am conscious of how church based it all is. For all the talk of mission the discussions have become increasingly institutional, and the issues seem to resemble arguing about the number of angels you can get on a pin head. The things I thought important and exciting forty years ago, now seem echoes of a past age. They also speak of a world where the church was a much more powerful influence in society and the thought of coming together organically could have made a significant difference to the Christian voice.

So what do we do with that statement of Martin Luther King? And perhaps more important, what do we make of Jesus' prayer in John 17, that 'they may be one as you, Father and I are one, and they may be one in us?'

We can argue that that does not mean organic union but another sense of oneness, but meanwhile the church becomes more divided. The issues around sexuality threaten our oneness in a very different way from questions of episcopacy and church governance. The rise of independent churches with a Congregationalist form of governance has in many ways sidelined the smaller denominations like Methodism.

The question of whether we can be in unity with those with whom we profoundly disagree with theologically is a pressing one, which Methodism is currently struggling with on its own, let alone across denominations.

If I am honest, I think that organic unity will probably have to wait for the eschaton. However, I believe we have to find a new way of demonstrating our oneness across our divisions, and that can be a key witness to a divided nation.

That starts within Methodism. If we can show we truly can express what it is to be one in Christ with contradictory convictions around marriage, then we can have something to say to our fellow Christians in other traditions facing similar challenges, but above all, we can offer a witness to a world that sees disagreement as inherently leading to division, and we can truly preach a Christ, in whom there is 'no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.'

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## Thank you

- To Stan and the Smith family for organizing, erecting and decorating the Christmas tree.
- To all those who extended hospitality to the Posada during December
- To all those who supported the 'Reverse Advent' initiative. The food will be taken to the foodbank for the start of the New Year.
- To all those who contributed towards, and helped at, the Church family lunch on 15 December including those who gave up their time on the Saturday to set up. It was fantastic to have 30 of the church family present for lunch.
- To all those who took part in our Carol service.
- To all those who participated in our Christmas Day Service.
- To all those who continue to help out at services by providing music, undertaking readings and providing refreshments. Your help continues to be appreciated.



### Prayer Time:

The 'mobile' prayer group is open to all. Please add prayer needs as they occur to you. If you wish to be added to this group, contact one of the stewards.

**Please note that there will be a Circuit 24 hour prayer vigil on 18/19 January and we will be looking for volunteers to help fill our time slots when they are assigned.**

**Please pray for**

- Brenda & Keith who are now fairly settled in Devon but have yet to sell their property in Shepperton. Brenda has found a new church family.
  - Mary & Stan
  - Our church and Circuit
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To:

Sydney Lake (Jnr) and Allen Weedon who share a birthday on January 8<sup>th</sup>.

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## Flower Rota

As a church we give heartfelt thanks to Carol who provides a splendid display of flowers in our church every week whatever the season. She does this on a very modest budget. A friend of mine is on a flower rota for a church where the budget is £60 per week. Carol will get six or seven weeks flowers for that! If you would like to sponsor a specific week to celebrate a birthday or anniversary or to remember a lost loved one or if you would just like to donate to the flower fund, please see Carol.

*Consider the lilies of the field..... Yet I tell you that even Solomon in all his glory was not adorned like one of these....*

## Dates for the diary

|                      |                                               |                                                                                                                                     |
|----------------------|-----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Sunday 5 Jan 2020    | 10.30 am Morning worship                      | Mr Patrick Coad<br><i>Steward – Carol</i><br><i>Music – i-pad</i><br><i>Refreshments - Paula</i>                                    |
| Thursday 09 Jan 2020 | 1.45 pm Old Folks club                        | Weybridge Centre                                                                                                                    |
| Saturday 11 Jan 2020 | 10.00 am Coffee Morning                       | Run by us at Addlestone                                                                                                             |
| Sunday 12 Jan 2019   | 10.30 Morning Worship                         | Mr Phil Beastall<br><i>Steward- Pru</i><br><i>Music – Jose</i><br><i>Refreshments - Lili</i>                                        |
| Saturday 18 Jan 2020 | Bedding & Clothes Bank                        | Church Hall                                                                                                                         |
| Sunday 19 Jan 2020   | <b>10.30 Covenant Service &amp; Communion</b> | Rev Sydney Samuel Lake<br><i>Steward – Jose</i><br><i>Music – Adrian</i><br><i>Communion – Paula</i><br><i>Refreshments - Linda</i> |
| Sunday 26 Jan 2020   | 10.30 am Morning worship                      | Mr John Oborn<br><i>Steward – Linda</i><br><i>Music – Adrian</i><br><i>Refreshments –Carol</i>                                      |
| Thursday 31 Jan 2019 | 1.45 pm Old Folks club                        | Weybridge Centre                                                                                                                    |

### Advance Dates

|                                     |                                                                        |                          |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Thursday 27 February 2020, 8.00pm   | Church Council                                                         | Vestry                   |
| Saturday 29 Feb 2020 - 6 for 6.30pm | Circuit Mission Supper<br>Speaker Mr Sam Monaghan –<br>Methodist Homes | Trinity Methodist Church |

### Weybridge Old folk club dates for 2020:

**09/01, 20/2, 12/3, 16/4, 21/5, 11/6, 10/9, 08/10, 22/10, 12/11**

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## God in Love unites us

Last autumn's representative Synod spent most of the day considering the Marriage and Relationships report '**God in Love unites us**' which comes from conference and looks at updating how the Methodist church defines marriage and relationships.

All churches are urged to discuss this report before the March 2020 Circuit meeting.

On January 5 2020 all church members will be given a copy of this report and you are urged to read it! The last Church Council meeting agreed that we would discuss this report over coffee after the Covenant service of 19 January 2020.

It will be a difficult session as we are asked to talk openly about our personal views on human sexuality and come to a consensus as to what approach our church will take towards same sex marriages on our church premises.

Our Circuit Meeting representative, Carol, will have the task of reporting our church view to the circuit meeting in March. Circuit eps to District Representative Synod will take on board the views of all 13 circuit churches. These reps then have the task of voting on the Methodist Churches proposals and the result of that vote will be forwarded to the Methodist Conference for further discussion in June 2020.

This will be an emotive subject for many and we will undoubtedly be uncomfortable discussing such things in the open.

Please review the report and formulate your thoughts so that we can have an open, honest and concise discussion.

We will time box the discussion in an hour. A small number such as ourselves should be able to reach a consensus if we have prepared in advance.

Please keep this subject at the forefront of your prayers over the next few months.

## The Methodist Church

The calling of the Methodist church is to respond to the gospel of God's love in Christ and to live out its discipleship in worship and mission. It does this through:

**Worship:** the church exists to increase awareness of God's presence and to celebrate God's love.

**Learning and caring:** the church exists to help people grow and learn as Christians through mutual support and care

**Service:** the church exists to be a good neighbour to people in need and to challenge injustice.

**Evangelism:** the church exists to make more followers of Jesus Christ.

**As we approach our annual Covenant service later this month (19/01/20) we reflect on the Covenant prayer of John Wesley**

I am no longer my own, but yours.

Put me to what you will, rank me with whom you will;

put me to doing, put me to suffering;

let me be employed for you, or laid aside for you,

exalted for you, or brought low for you;

let me be full,

let me be empty,

let me have all things,

let me have nothing:

I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things

to your pleasure and disposal.

And now, glorious and blessed God,

Father, Son and Holy Spirit,

you are mine and I am yours. So be it.

And the covenant now made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven.

Amen.