

# VISION

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**2024  
LEARNING  
TOGETHER:**  
EDUCATION IN  
OUR COMMUNITY

[cte.org.uk/educationsunday2024](http://cte.org.uk/educationsunday2024)

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## ***MINISTRY TEAM:***

**Rev. Dr. Bonni-Belle Pickard (07590 564477)  
and all members of Union Street Church**

***SEPTEMBER 2024***



**Union Street  
Methodist Church**



**We would very much like to keep our congregation together. Please join us for both the on line services and at the various locations if you are able. If you require transport please see the weekly notices.**

**September 1st 10-30am Online**

**September 8th 10-30am Online**

**September 15th 10-30am Tonbridge Rd**

**September 22nd 10-30am Bearsted**

**September 29th 10-30am Week Street**

**Online Services**

*Details will be available on the circuit website  
Laurel will also keep us informed in the newsletter  
Please check the circuit website for details of services  
[www.nkmethodists.org.uk](http://www.nkmethodists.org.uk)*

In my last Minister's Letter for Vision, I wrote about what it was like to be a church (temporarily) without a building. As we start a new connexional year, perhaps we can start dreaming about what our renovated church will be like. We hope it will be drier and warmer, easier to maintain and more accessible, yet retain the parts we've come to know and love: its heritage, its presence as a place where we and others can gather to worship and fellowship. We've also got an opportunity to make it more attractive, for us and our community. Over the summer, I've come across several ideas from other places that make me wonder if we could use those ideas as well.



Heritage – we're hoping that we'll be able to reposition two of the stained-glass windows that would otherwise be 'hidden' in the new kitchen and office. The side windows closest to Union Street – the Ivens and the Wraith 'angels' window – would assume new positions on a 'first floor' level above other windows (still fully visible from the ground floor). The Ivens window would be above the similar Hewitt window; the 'angels' window would be above the other Wraith window which has no Bible roundel – closer to heaven!

Recently I had a discussion with the curator for the Methodist Modern Art Collection, which is the world's second largest private collection of religious art (after the Vatican). Owned by the British Methodist Church, it is a fascinating set of contemporary artwork available for display by local churches and galleries on a temporary basis. I wondered whether we could borrow a few of the earliest paintings – those from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, which would be contemporary to our stained-glass windows – to exhibit when the renovations are complete. This would give us an extra opportunity to invite the general public in to see both our heritage and our renovations.

We're also hoping to reposition the existing Memorial plaques ( that are too high on the back wall to be easily readable) onto the new walls that will connect the welcome area with the worship/fellowship area. They would then form a kind of Heritage Path of memory and information for those coming into the building.

Worship – the existing raised platform at the front of the worship area will be reduced in size considerably. We need to think of ways to use the historic wrought iron railings, perhaps sectioning off a communion area from time to time. Other ideas?

The wall behind the worship area is currently a dark, dull blue, and many feel a lighter colour backdrop would help. The beautiful panels at the new St Faith's church suggest we might commission some panels ourselves that could tie in with the stained-glass windows.

Front lawn – this is an area where there is considerable room (literally!) for better community use, especially when we will be able to have the front gate open more often with the user groups on site within the church. We could certainly expand the Community Garden and upgrade the Memorial Garden by refinishing the wooden park benches. Recently I heard of a church that regularly invited the public to make chalk drawings on its front walk about particular themes: Peace, Creation, Prayer, etc. Sidewalk chalk was supplied, and the front walk spray washed from time to time to encourage new creations.

I've mentioned before the Methodist/Anglican church in Guilford which opens its doors every Friday evening for prayer and candle-lighting by the general public on their way to (or from) Guilford's night-time economy. Recently, they saw a bit increase of those coming to pray after the Southport and other riots. As we're literally on the doorstep of Maidstone's night-time economy, could we not become a similar place of communal prayer?

These are just a few ideas that have come to me over recent weeks. I've also been contacted by several persons whose families were previously connected with the church and wanting to know when they might be able to visit again. What

do we want our new building to say to our community? I look forward to hearing your ideas!

Bonni-Belle

Stop press: On the Bank Holiday Monday at the end of August, some teenagers broke into our Community Centre mid-day, inspired by an online challenge to 'explore vacant buildings.' A vigilant neighbour called the police, who arrived quickly with a sniffer dog that quickly located two 14-year-old girls hiding on the premises. They (and a boy who escaped) had sprayed the floor with a fire extinguisher and wrote graffiti in the spray. They were arrested and taken home to their parents. At the time of writing, we are exploring options of offering them some manual work to do on the premises to help them realise what they were really 'exploring.' This incident reminds us of the youth work we could do with our renovated premises!



*in loving  
memory*

Geoffrey John Harris –  
3 July 1947 – 7 July 2024



At Geoff's funeral, we heard stories from David and Andy about Geoff's family life. The following are reflections on Geoff's life within the Union Street Church – which was very dear to him ....Indeed, Geoff was a very cheerful and welcoming person, often the first to approach a newcomer and thrust out his hand in welcome.

Geoff started out as an Anglican, attending the church in Herne Bay, but then he had his eye on a certain Sheila who went to the Methodist Church, and so he started attending and was later confirmed in the Methodist Church . Sheila has the membership certificate in his bible from 6 April 1980!

Meanwhile Geoff had joined the choir and helped out with the Junior Church in Herne Bay. When Geoff and Sheila moved to Maidstone – and particularly to Tudor Drive – in 1984, Rev John Makey, who lived just around the corner, was on their doorstep immediately, inviting them to attend Union Street. Indeed, the minister at Herne Bay had already sent their 'papers' to Rev Makey, and John knew he needed to make immediate contact!

Geoff soon joined the choir at Union Street and helped out with Jr Church as well, though, because of his shift work with the Fire Brigade, he couldn't always attend. Geoff became a Church Steward – and eventually a Circuit Steward as well. He enjoyed working with the Scouts when his boys were young, and then continued after they left, often providing the Carol and Harvest Services for the Scouts.

Geoff was a regular on the mowing rota for the front lawn, and helped with washing up after church meals. He helped the Property Committee for several years, especially with Health and Safety inspections.

Around 2006, he and Sheila started a House Group at their home, with Don and Carol Brand, Mary and David Rees, Pam Munn and Jo Graham, with Joan Henderson and John Butcher, and Mervyn. The group continued for many years.

In Clifford Newman's time, a new outreach initiative called Frontline was launched, and for Geoff and others, the pavement outside the Union Street was their Frontline, so they made themselves a welcoming presence to those walking past on Tuesday mornings.

Geoff and David Hitch also organised a 'Thought for the Day' on those Tuesday mornings, especially for any non-church folk who dropped by. Church folk were invited to bring along a sandwich to enjoy lunch with others. Eventually, the on-the-street outreach was abandoned, but the welcome and the talk continued.

During COVID, the Tuesday morning gathering was one of the first things to try Zoom, and it continues to this day as a kind of online house group with the weekly leadership circulating amongst those who attended. Geoff was always ready to fill in when no one else was ready. His favourite topic was 'On this day...' and he would regale us with stories about whatever famous (or infamous) person had been born or died on that day. We learned a lot! (Sheila was always on hand to give him an elbow nudge if he was going on too long!)

Geoff was a major organiser of Union Street's 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations in 2023. He worked long and hard to gather information and to encourage others to put together exhibitions. He was a major supporter of the proposed building renovations, proud of the church's heritage and always eager to share his understanding of the mission potential of Union Street's presence in the town centre.

Geoff had also agreed to be the Church Council Secretary when no one else would do it. Over the past few years, that became increasingly difficult for him, but he didn't want to let the church down, so he continued.

Pre-COVID, Geoff took part in the church's production of Joe Carpenter & Son at Christmas. He was always eager and willing to join in when a scratch choir was proposed! His strong and enthusiastic singing voice cheered many a visiting preacher!

Meanwhile, Geoff had trained as a Local Preacher with Don Brand as his Mentor. Geoff was accredited as a Local Preacher in 2010, and would go wherever needed to preach the Good News leading worship in many churches of the then Maidstone Circuit. One of his last new ventures at the church was becoming a Mentor to Ransford Grey, who was training to become a Local Preacher.

It was on a Sunday in late May, when he was to preach at Bearsted, that he called me early morning to give the news that our mutual dear friend, David Hitch had died. He and Dave had worked on many projects together through the years, and I could tell from his voice on the phone that Dave's passing affected him deeply.

That morning he had accepted the difficult assignment of preaching on the topic of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch.

In true Geoff style, he had wrestled with the reading over many Days. In a way, it was a perfect scripture for Geoff, as it tells of a follower of Jesus who literally ran alongside someone who didn't know about Jesus and wanted to learn more. Who would teach him? That was exactly what Geoff had been doing for decades!



But as Geoff made his way to the pulpit at Bearsted, he was not quite feeling himself. He stumbled on the steps, and then his tongue stumbled again as he started to read. He tried sitting down a few times but kept getting up to try again. It was clear to everyone that something wasn't right, but no one realised that he was having brain seizures, which grew in intensity and frequency over the ensuing days and weeks.

We know now that indeed a cancer had invaded his brain and grew rapidly over the next two months. In the hospital, he was assigned to the Cavell Ward, named after the beloved nurse Edith Cavell, one of his favourite 'on this day' characters. His final days were spent at the lovely new Cavell Park care home. Again named after Edith Cavell herself. There he had excellent care, and there I was able to visit him a few hours before he died. At that point, he was not conscious, but still I prayed with him and recited the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm.

Sheila and the boys had known that Geoff had particularly liked Matthew 28. Soon after he died, Sheila and I looked it up to see what it was all about – certainly it was about sharing the gospel with all! Sheila and I also noticed the very last line, which indeed is the last line of Matthew's Gospel: "And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." And so, God has been with Geoff to the end of his good life and continues to be with Geoff as he has passed on to the next life.



Those of us who have known Geoff are richer for those relationships. The task is now ours to continue his mission

Of preaching and singing with great fervour,  
Of welcoming newcomers with a strong handshake,  
Of seeing the best in each of us  
And pointing us to the God who loves us all.

Well done, Good and Faithful Servant! Enter into your eternal rest.

(eulogy by Bonni-Belle Pickard)



Answers to the  
July  
Quiz

1. Philistines
2. Gilboa.
3. Dragon
4. Jebusites.
5. Joab.
6. 300.
7. 7.5 feet.
8. Berekiah.
9. Horses.
- 10 Cana.



Here are your nice and easy questions for September!

1. How many books are in the Protestant Old Testament?
2. On what day did God create man?
3. How many sons did Jacob have?
4. This man wrote the first five books of the Old Testament.
5. From what part of Adam's body did God create Eve?
6. What did David use to defeat Goliath?
7. Name one of the two birds Noah sent from the Ark.
8. What animal tempted Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden?
9. What gave Sampson his strength?
10. God asked Abraham to make a sacrifice to Him on Mount Moriah. What was it?



## TUESDAY TEA

The long-standing Wednesday Club has been continuing as Tuesday Tea since lockdown. From 3rd September we are moving to the United Reformed Church, Week Street, meeting each Tuesday at 2.30pm. There is usually a quiz, scrabble and a jigsaw, but other games may feature, together with tea of savouries and cakes.

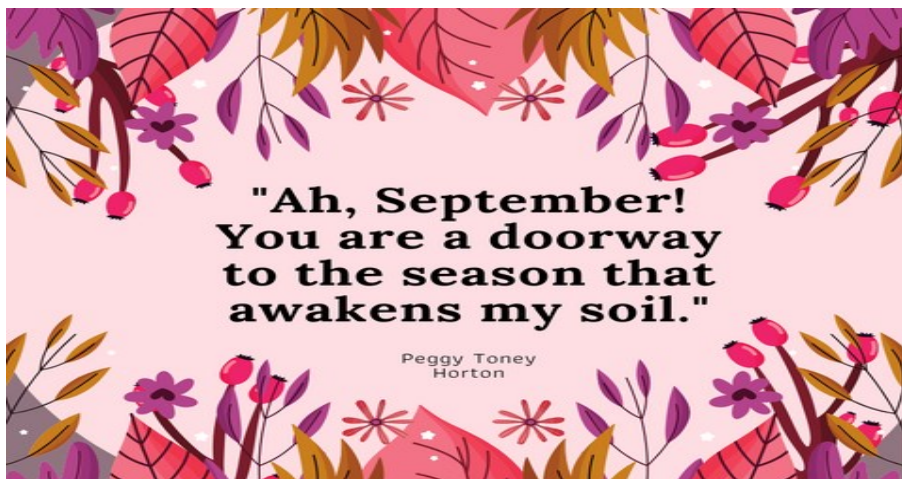
The objective is to provide a sociable gathering for older folk, particularly those who need help going out, as transport can be provided.

To be viable we need more members, but also cooks and drivers, either regular or occasional reserves. If you are interested please ring me, 01622 738272.

Anne Wates



JUST A THOUGHT



# Peace Sunday 2024

**Sunday 22nd September 2024 is Peace Sunday**

Peace Sunday is a chance for the church to pause and reflect on what it means to follow the Prince of Peace today. Churches are encouraged to have a service on the Sunday closest to the [UN International Day of Peace](#) (21st September).

The theme for the year 'vine and fig tree'. We should think about what the world needs to enable all to live in peace and we should challenge ourselves to think about our role in bringing that to life.. We should also take time to



## MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR



September is here already. Once again I have put a list of the churches which we will be joining for Worship and I really hope to see as many people as possible on these Sundays.

All the very best YOUR EDITOR DENNIS

# Sunday 8 September 2024 Education Sunday

## Beyond the Three Rs Mark 4:1-12

**By Samantha Dennis**

*Anglican Self-Supporting Minister (Diocese of Derby),  
Deputy Director of Education (Diocese of Southwell and*

**Context:** an evangelical church in an urban market town, the congregation are a mix of ages but primarily of retirement age

**Aim:** to consider education as a means to help each of us live life to the full

# EDUCATION SUNDAY



I wonder what springs to mind when you hear the word education. Perhaps your thoughts take you back to your school days. If so, I expect there will be a range of emotions in the room – some of you will have loved just about every moment of school, others will have hated every second and maybe the rest of you will be more philosophical, and remember the good and the bad. I expect you can also remember a teacher who had an impact on you.

## THE JOY OF TEACHING

Teaching is a demanding profession, but the rewards are great; helping pupils to grow as learners and as people is a privilege. The pleasure of working with and being with children is that it never fails to amaze us and amuse us. From the 3-year-old, having held 2 minutes silence on Remembrance Day, saying she thought of her uncle (a soldier) in her head and Jesus in her heart; to the 5-year-old consoling her teacher, when learning about the death of Jesus, by telling her not to worry as we get a new one every Christmas!

However, the challenges for our teachers are great too. Education in this country is a continually and rapidly changing landscape driven by the political party in power and the inspectorate. The foundations for these agendas are to improve exam results and close the achievement gaps between social groups – the haves and have-nots. So, a clear moral purpose but one that could go further...

## LIFE IN ALL ITS FULLNESS

... and it does!

Church schools have a vision for education that extends to the whole sector. It is a vision drawn from John 10:10, a vision for 'Life in all its fulness', rooted in wisdom, dignity, hope and living well together. Of course, our schools should be teaching the three Rs but so much more needs to be imparted for our young people to be the best version of themselves.

Today's schools are places where our young people are encouraged to explore spirituality, places that develop the whole child and go beyond the three Rs; places that aim to prepare young people for the rest of their lives. None of us are ever really the finished project, so our young people are also equipped to be lifelong learners.

Our schools should be places where our children can ask those big questions, explore their spirituality and discover what it is that they believe. The same is true of our churches. They should be places of good soil where everyone can continue to learn and flourish in the love of Christ.

### JESUS THE TEACHER

The reading we have just heard begins 'Again Jesus began to teach ...'. The techniques Jesus used to teach are not overly different from those used today. Many teachers will use story to explain something new and complicated. And I am sure many teachers today can be heard to say 'Are you listening to this? Really listening?' when a pupil fails to concentrate. As they say ? some things never change.

Jesus was telling people to concentrate. He was telling them to listen beyond the words of his stories– to listen to the meaning within. He wanted them, and He wants us, to be like the good soil - fertile soil; ready to meet with God, to really get to know Him with the ultimate reward that fully nourished we will be able to flourish.

In Jesus we have a teacher who calls each of us, of any age, to continually learn. To be wise by reflecting on our experiences and by holding Christ at the centre of everything we do. To treat everyone with dignity and respect regardless of background. To live well together by disagreeing well and acknowledging we are not all the same. And he offers us hope, a hope of life beyond the here and now, a hope that in the darkest times, the light will eventually break through. A hope that everyone should know.

**2024**  
**LEARNING TOGETHER:**  
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# Circuit Walks

Members of the Maidstone Methodist churches meet once a month for a morning country walk of around 5 miles. This happens on the third Thursday of each month. If you would like to be involved, please contact the organiser for further information. **Organiser: Lesley Hitch (Mobile:07733 046915)**

Where did that bonus month of not having to prepare our contribution to Vision disappear to? I feel I composed the last one only days ago. It came as a shock when I realised that this month's deadline was upon us already. As the saying goes, "How time flies."

I am sure our organiser Lesley would be happy to feel time had flown by. She is currently frustrated at how little she is allowed to do for the next 6 weeks following her foot operation. This is particularly frustrating for someone who is generally buzzing around doing various things. Am I imagining it, but didn't the EU used to 'stop the calendar' by postponing year ends until they had agreed the next year's Common Agricultural budget? I am sure Lesley would greatly appreciate the converse – someone to tell her it was October already. We eagerly await her return to walking group activities, whether a post walk meal in the first instance but eventually to the walks.

I am grateful to Alan for leading June's walk whilst I was in Switzerland. Thanks also to Alan and his family editor for the polished report on the June walk.



## June Circuit Walk

For our Circuit Walk in June we were like children without teachers – Murray and Lesley were both unable to walk that day, so we set out without either of them (I don't think I've been on a Circuit Walk before walk with neither of them to keep us on the straight and narrow!)

Luckily they have taught us well, and left us in the capable hands of a prefect – AKA Alan – who led us on a circular walk from East Malling with the promise of a pub lunch on our return. Alan and I had walked the route a week or so earlier and found some of the paths overgrown with brambles and nettles, so long sleeves and trousers were advisable. Alan had also revisited part of the route a day or two after that and made a few adjustments, to avoid some of the less pleasant bits of the paths.

On the day itself, 6 of us set out south from East Malling in the sunshine, and made a gentle ascent into the downs. We walked through wheat fields and woods that were being coppiced, and then we were into the tricky overgrown parts of the path. KCC maintains the paths, but at this time of year vegetation grows at a somewhat faster rate than they can keep up with, on the allocation of hours they allow, so it's up to intrepid walkers like ourselves to battle on through the greenery. Of course, not all the new growth is brambly – there were also lovely foxgloves along the route and the conditions didn't cause us too many problems.



I had hoped we might have a refreshment stop at the North Pole (the pub, not the Arctic) around the halfway mark, but sadly it doesn't open until lunchtime. Nevertheless, we were able to sit awhile on the seats outside the pub and enjoy the sun as we got out our .

water bottles and then we were off again, this time towards Kings Hill. We saw the evidence of the old airfield, and then enjoyed the downhill walk past the Kings Hill Sports Park. A stretch through cool woodland followed, leading us to the spring head where the Ditton and East Malling stream starts – there used to be water cress beds there, and it's a very picturesque location. From there it wasn't too far to our starting point in East Malling, where we were joined by couple of non-walkers and had a hearty lunch in the garden of the King and Queen

Thank you to Alan for leading us safely out and back, and to all who came along, for their companionship on a sunny day.

## July walk at Stansted

Roger Byard kindly offered to lead the July walk from Shipbourne. Having walked it out, the starting point moved to Underriver. A further visit to check the muddy sections of the walk went satisfactorily until, arriving back at his car in the pub car park, the manager rushed out to see Roger and tell him that he wouldn't be serving food that day; his chef would be on holiday. With the speed of mind befitting a lawyer, Roger quickly ascertained when the chef would be back and proposed we postpone this walk until August. Someone really has got his priorities sorted! No food, move walk! Given the popularity of our recently introduced 'after walk lunches', I doubt any of the current walking group would disagree with Roger's approach.

Deputising for Lesley, I agreed with his suggestion. And then came the offer no organiser can resist, an offer to check out another walk he knew in the short time before the date of the walk. And, what's more, he offered to lead the planned walk the next month. I fear I might wake up from the 'organiser's dreamland' rather quicker than I want to!

And so it was that on another fine morning we found ourselves meeting in the car park in Stansted. (No, not the airport car park in Essex, but the lesser known Black Horse pub car park in the North Downs behind Wrotham).

Yet again the leader had sorted out our priorities for us – we were not allowed to leave the car park until we had left our lunch orders in the pub letterbox!



Arriving in Fairseat, we had a brief break for a group photo beside the lychgate of Fairseat Chapel. The chapel is the second chapel, the first being built in one of the buildings of the nearby children's convalescent home. The church was built by Sir Philip Hickson Waterlow in memory of his family and other relatives who lived in the Fairseat. Sir Philip was chairman of the family company engraving bank notes, postage stamps and share certificates. His wife established the convalescent home, in the Old Manor House, to give free convalescence to children from London hospitals.

A few more fields and woods saw us at Hodsoll Street. The green is much changed since my last visit. There is now a gaping hole where once the Green Man pub existed, a lightning strike having caused a fire which burnt it down.

Turning for 'home', we moved into paths unknown to me. These took us to Ridley, previously a name on the Ordnance Survey map for me. Hodsoll Street and Ridley are two ancient settlements that are part of the Ash-cum Ridley Parish Council. Clearly Ridley is out of the way sufficiently to be able to have a 'trust shop' close to the church. Open 7 days a week, people can pop into the hut and help themselves to many things, from making an ice cream, acquiring certain foodstuffs to bundles of logs or even pottery and greetings cards, whilst hopefully leaving payment behind.

Moving a few yards onwards, we see the picturesque church. Opposite the church is the Bowdler's Well, overlooked by the Angel Of Ridley. The well dates back to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Its name reflects the fact that the then rector of the church directed it be dug to provide community water. The well is now sealed and its roof



structure has recently been rethatched. The Angel of Ridley is a modern structure created by an anonymous local artist. The editor's deadline precludes further surfing to find out about its origins. The plaque beside the Angel reads:

## Thoughts of the Ridley Angel

I am the Ridley Angel, and proud to venture forth.

Though not as posh as Gabriel, or the Angel of the North.

I sing in heavenly chorus, just two rows from the back,

But won't make Prima Donna, as I am made of scrap.



I hold the keys to Heaven, but not the Pearly Gate –  
The tradesman's entrance round the back we use when we  
are late.

There's regular inspections by order of Big G,  
The Archangel called Michael just scares the pants off me!

Don't let the cherubs fool you – the brats with smiles so wide,  
They wipe their noses on our frocks, then laugh, and run and  
hide.

But I'm your Guardian Angel – be careful what you do!  
'Cos when you're up to mischief – I'll be watching **YOU!**

And off to lunch we went. It would be rude to show you the  
photo of what one lady consumed before rushing off early to  
enjoy a cream tea!

**Locum organiser: Murray Gibson (07952 651577)**





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If you have any questions

On how you can continue  
to support the Homeless

Centre I am sure

Jan Hinchliffe would be

happy to give you

answers and she can be

contacted on 07976

444015 or 01622 735198



***Material Needed for the October 2024***

***Edition of Vision!***

Please send copy for the

October edition of *Vision*

to the Editor By Sunday 15th September

or by email to

**[vision@usmc.org.uk](mailto:vision@usmc.org.uk)**