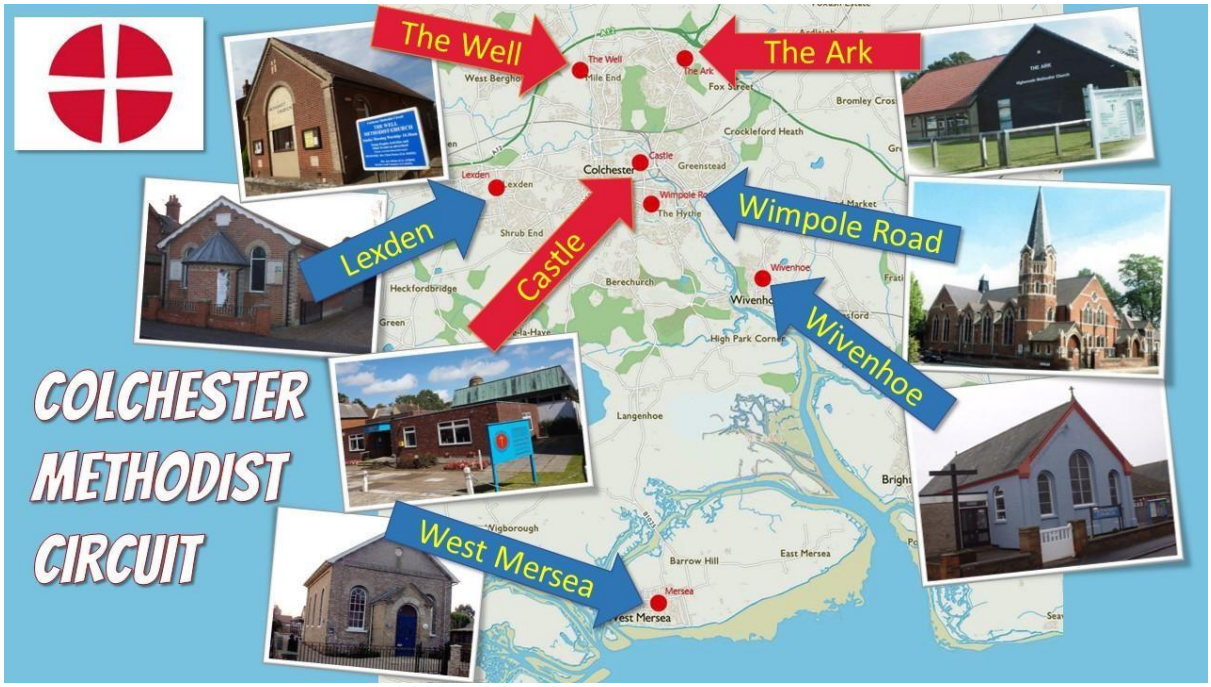
Colchester Methodist Circuit

Newsletter

Edition 14 – Summer 2026



Letter from our Superintendent, Rev Chris Preece

Dear Friends,

As I went out into the garden, the weeds which last week looked invisible now seem to be waist high. I'm sure that's an exaggeration but it didn't seem like it as the garden waste bin got added to in abundance. Whilst that was true for the weeds, it's also the case that the plants in the garden are doing the same. There has been a huge growth spurt over the last week or two. The garden now looks so much fuller and Spring is now giving way to early Summer as the flowers change from bulbs to Azaleas or whatever they might be.

A few of us were privileged to hear Rev David Goodall, the Director of Growing Churches in the Connexional Team, speak at the Spring Synod in mid-April. He talked of the importance of growth within the church. He stressed this isn't just about numerical growth, but about spiritual and missional

growth as well. The following week we had our Circuit Mission Planning morning where we came together to discern where we believe God might be leading us for the next couple of years as a Circuit. Those who had gathered considered various aspects of spiritual growth and outreach as we began to think through things.

As we move into June, we move into what is known as Ordinary time for which the church colour is green. The colours attributed to the seasons in the Christian year came into being hundreds of years ago when literacy levels were so much lower than they are today. Many churches no longer use these colours, although some do. Green is the colour attributed for growth.

Jesus talks in John chapter 15 of being the vine, we are the branches and the Father is the vine-grower. Growth comes when we develop and maintain a close relationship with God through Jesus. The branches need to be attached to the vine so they can grow. The vine reaches out to new places when it is healthy. All we have comes from God.

In the coming months we will be focusing on what it means for us to grow. This is about how we grow with God individually, as churches and as a Circuit. We are all part of the family of God, a church and the Circuit. Each is dependent on the others. To grow is to deepen our roots in Christ, to allow the Holy Spirit to lead us to new place and to new people. God the Father will sustain us and provide us with the nutrients we need.

As we come to this newsletter, we will hear news from the churches and from Jastine, our Anna Chaplain. Let's use these as an opportunity to bring together the growth we see in the garden, with the need for us to focus on growth as churches and a Circuit. We should rejoice with one another for all that is happening but we should always be looking for the next thing God is doing. We are called to be partners in God's work but we can only serve him if we are growing as disciples ourselves.

We give thanks to God for the life of this Circuit and for all that is happening. Let's continue to find the ways in which we can grow together in our worship, in the way we deepen our own personal discipleship, serving God and reaching out to others.

God bless,

Chris

Anna Chaplain – an update from Jastine Diaz

From Lent Seeds to Easter Hope

Just before Lent, we invited donations of yoghurt pots, which were generously provided by many of you. These were used to plant seeds as part of our Lent reflections. Over the weeks that followed, these small beginnings quietly grew, becoming part of a living visual journey through Lent.

As Easter approached, these plants were brought together into miniature gardens themed around "The Stone was rolled away." Each display became a simple but powerful reminder of new life emerging from darkness, and hope breaking through what once felt sealed and final.

There is something profoundly moving about watching life grow from something so small and ordinary. It gently reminded us that God often works in quiet, hidden ways before revealing new life in unexpected places.

I would like to express heartfelt thanks to all who donated yoghurt pots, and to everyone who gave their time to help plant and set aside time for the Messy Vintage sessions. Your kindness and practical support made this journey possible.

I would also like to warmly encourage anyone who feels even a small nudge of interest to consider joining us as a volunteer. You do not need special skills, simply a willingness to be present, to listen, and to share time with residents can make a real difference. Even occasional involvement is deeply valued and greatly appreciated.

Messy Vintage and Coffee Gatherings – Growing Roots

We are now a regular presence in four care homes, where we continue to run both Messy Vintage sessions and Coffee Gatherings.

Messy Vintage continues to be a space of creativity, storytelling, and gentle reflection. Thank you once again to all who have volunteered their time to attend and support these sessions. Your presence brings warmth, patience, and joy to residents who value these shared moments more than words can easily express.

Alongside this, our Coffee Gatherings have become an equally important part of our ministry. Initially, I was uncertain about the format and direction these times might take. However, they have grown into something deeply valuable.

Sitting together over a cup of tea or coffee has created space for real conversation, often honest, sometimes difficult, but always meaningful. These conversations have opened the door to discussions about family struggles, health concerns, loneliness, and peace of mind.

In several moments, these naturally led into prayer requests, as residents shared what weighed on their hearts. This simple ministry of listening has proven to be profoundly fruitful.

Moments of Deep Privilege

In recent weeks, we have also had the privilege of praying with two individuals who are nearing the end of their life. These moments were quiet, tender, and deeply significant. They have reinforced something that sits at the heart of this ministry: the importance of presence.

To sit with someone, to listen without hurry, and to pray with them in their final stages of life is both a sacred responsibility and a profound privilege. These encounters speak powerfully to the ongoing need for this work within our care homes.

Prayer Requests

As this ministry continues to grow, I invite you to hold the following in prayer:

- Residents, families, and staff across all four care homes
- That Messy Vintage and Coffee Gatherings will remain spaces of warmth, dignity, and gentle joy
- For those who share deeply personal and sometimes painful conversations during Coffee Gatherings
- For individuals who are approaching the end of life, and for their families walking alongside them
- For continued wisdom, sensitivity, and strength for all volunteers
- For the ongoing development of relationships with care home staff and management teams
- For the wider ecumenical movement, that churches across our local area will be encouraged, strengthened, and drawn into this shared ministry of presence and pastoral care

Contact details

If anyone would like to know more, get involved, or volunteer in any way, please do feel free to contact me:

Phone: 07836 394364

Email: colchestermethodist.ac@gmail.com

Thank you for taking the time to read and support this work.

Your prayers, encouragement, and practical involvement are deeply appreciated and make a real difference in the lives of those we serve.

Anna Chaplaincy
for older people
Colchester and District

CIRCUIT TOGETHER DAY

The theme of the Circuit Together Day on March 7th was "Shaped by God". Rev Chris and Rev Hannah led our thinking, based on the well-loved Psalm 139 and Jeremiah's visit to the Potters House.

We were then asked to reflect on God's presence in our own lives by using clay to illustrate this in a practical form. There were varied and inventive expressions of this, and like Jeremiah's Potter, we were conscious of the flaws in our productions. However, God uses us just as we are, to become useful in His service.

It was good to meet with members of different churches and thanks to West Mersea for their warm hospitality. It was an enriching experience and it is a shame so many people from across the Circuit missed this opportunity to be part of something special.

It was a very calming day shared with lovely people. Great to do something creative and spiritual, without thinking that I should be busy doing normal day-to-day stuff.

Looking forward to sharing another day in due course.

I recall a quiet together day with the chance to think, write, or make something in an atmosphere created by a bunch of like-minded people.

Maybe next time we could be led in creating some music or poetry.

Sometimes our lives are so busy that it can be hard to find the time to think more deeply and to reflect on our faith and how our lives are shaped by God. This was a wonderful day that enabled me to step outside the usual pressures and to spend time with God.

It was good to meet up with friends from around the Circuit and share in fellowship. I am no potter, but with the help of Rev Hannah I had a great deal of fun making a plate. This year was so different to last year, but the learning was just as helpful.

Circuit Together Day (continued)

Many of those who attended the Circuit Together Day were moved almost to tears by the following prayer which was written in Braille by Roger Wilson-Hinds, a member at West Mersea, and read out to us by his wife Margaret:

GOD MADE ME

Dear God.

You made all of me. From the hour that my dad made love to my mum, you were on it! Planning and managing my life in all its detail. Sometime during the second month in the womb, you caused or allowed something to go wrong with the development of my eyes and possibly my ears. You already knew the implications of all this and you already knew what was to come over the next, at least, 86 years. You knew that it was wartime, bombing, stress and anxiety. You knew my parents had already lost twins and that I too would be born early, a blind baby. You knew there would be lots of medical stuff! And hospital visits. Despite that fragile start, you set me up to see, hear and think a little usefully. You allowed me to stop bothering with you for nearly fifty years but you brought me back to you via Margaret, stayed with me while I almost died of cancer and claimed me as your child as you always intended. I thank you God for your faithfulness to me and I am sorry I have fallen short in being faithful to you so far. I plan to use my remaining time here well and I look forward to being in your presence one day permanently. Thank you for your love.

A new face to look out for

We are delighted to have been approached by Queen's Foundation, where all Methodist ministers are trained, to ask if we would host a placement for a student presbyter.

John Annim is training part time for ordained ministry and will be joining this circuit between mid-April and mid-July. John will be available on various Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays within the circuit (except when he has to attend training weekends in Birmingham) and for some evening Zoom gatherings during the week. During this time, John will be gaining experience of circuit and ministerial life.

John will be working with both Rev Chris and Rev Hannah during his placement. If any church has a particular activity that is happening during the placement period, then please contact Chris in the first instance to see if this can be incorporated into the programme. We look forward to welcoming John to the Circuit and to working with him.

John has kindly written us a short introduction:

Thank you for welcoming me to the circuit. My name is John Annim, and I live in Leigh-on-Sea. I'm married to Angela Paradza, and we have two grown-up children, Taniel and Nataniel. By profession, I'm a quantity surveyor, and I am also a Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors assessor.

As part of my ministerial training, I will be doing a placement here under the supervision of Rev Chris and Rev Hannah. I will be present in the circuit on some Fridays and will join you for fellowship on Saturdays and Sundays. I'm very much looking forward to meeting you all.

GDPR annual returns

Many thanks to all in our churches who submitted annual GDPR returns to our Circuit administrator Helen so they could be passed on to District ahead of the deadline. Colchester Circuit was the first to submit all its returns on time and has received high praise for this from the District.

Completing these returns is an extremely important task, because unless they are done on time, Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes (TMCP) which acts as custodian trustee of all Methodist Church property, will refuse to act as data controller. This would create an administrative headache for those churches!

Circuit Mission Plan

A planning morning looking at the Circuit Mission Plan for 2026-28 took place at The Ark in April, led by Rev Chris, but disappointingly attended in total by just 12 people.

This essential piece of work on a living document looked ahead at some possible priority areas and action plans under the headings of Worship, Learning and Caring, Service and Evangelism – familiar themes to all churches who have their own Mission Plans.

Those who attended had a most enjoyable morning together, thinking ahead about the life of the Circuit to which we all belong and looking at how the Circuit can improve, develop and grow. A healthy and vibrant Circuit is essential for the life and growth of all the churches within it.

Without a mission plan there is a risk of a lack of focus and a lack of funds to enable development and growth. A circuit mission plan is a primary requirement to access Connexional and District grant funds. A church mission plan is required to access Connexional, District and Circuit grant funds. Appointment of new Ministers is now dependent on the number of members. If membership declines the circuit is at risk of not being eligible in the future to appoint two presbyters, so development and growth to enable worship and spiritual leadership in our churches is a vital part of the life of the circuit and all churches within it.

Many thanks to our superintendent minister Chris for her enthusiasm and dedication which enabled the Circuit mission planning meeting to produce some exciting thoughts and questions and possible action plans for future discussion, hopefully with many more members around the circuit.

Judith Winward

So what is membership?

We often talk about membership in Methodist Churches but what does it mean? Where does it come from? Why do we use the term membership? When we receive people into membership we rightly rejoice but sometimes the word ‘member’ may not be the most helpful, yet membership is an integral part of the Methodist Church.

Let’s begin by thinking about baptism. When anyone is baptised, we are celebrating the goodness, grace and love of God. In line with other denominations we are welcoming people into God’s family as they make the first steps to responding to God’s care and goodness. In being baptised a statement is being made, either through parents on behalf of their children, or people for themselves, that they recognise Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. In the Methodist service, the baptismal promises

are made after the baptism has been conducted. This is a beautiful expression of God's grace which goes before us, in that the baptism is not conditional on the promises being made but which are a response to God's love.

Over time, we grow and explore faith and come to make our own decisions about God, our faith in Jesus and how we live this out in our daily lives. This can lead to people asking about confirmation. Confirmation is the confirming of the baptismal promises which are made. In the Methodist Church this comes hand in hand with being received into membership. It is making a public statement of faith in God, and saying that, in this season of life, our faith is being lived out in the Methodist Church and in the local church of which we are a part.

If someone has been confirmed elsewhere then this is honoured, and the person is received into membership. Where someone may not already have been baptised then baptism, confirmation and reception into membership can all be done in the same service.

When we think of membership, we often think of joining a gym, a club or the like and where we might have to pay an annual subscription in order to belong. This is not what Methodist membership is at all! The term 'membership' comes from the history of the church. The Methodist Church started as a movement for renewal from within the Church of England. John and Charles Wesley, the founders of Methodism, were both Anglican priests who did not want the Methodist Church to become a separate entity but always to remain within the Church of England. In the 18th century, the Methodists were a religious society within the Church of England of which people were members. This terminology has stuck over the years and is integral to the way in which the church works.

Everyone who attends a Methodist Church belongs. There is nothing that needs to be done to be part of the congregation. Membership is making a commitment to say that this is the church and the community within which they wish to develop their faith and discipleship. In other words, membership is a way of expressing our belonging. It is to say that 'I love God and here is the place in which I am seeking to grow in my faith.'

When we become a member, we are making a commitment to worship regularly, to seek to grow in our faith, and to serve God in and through our daily lives.

Membership begins with God and our faith in Christ. Through the Holy Spirit we will grow with God and with one another. Membership is the term we use for this expression of discipleship within the Methodist Church.

If you feel you would like to explore becoming a member, then please have a chat with someone in your church and then talk to your minister. If you are already a member, why not chat to others about the importance of God in your life and encourage others to seek to become members too.

Chris Preece

NEWS: **from The Churches**

Castle:

What a wonderful time of fellowship we shared in at our now annual Shrove Tuesday Pancake party. With a choice of both savoury and sweet fillings there was a good choice for everyone. As in previous years, we were able to support the work of St Helena Hospice.

You may begin to think that all we do at Castle is eat!! On the morning of the 8th March, the day of the Colchester half marathon, we invited our congregation to breakfast. This was to avoid some of the delays we have experienced in the past in driving to Castle. A good number of people attended and were treated to a choice of cereal, cooked breakfast, toast with either marmalade or jam and plenty of tea and coffee. This was greatly appreciated and enjoyed and is something we hope to repeat in the future. This year we decided that this event would support the annual Easter Offering.

During Lent we used the Liturgy published by The Methodist Church at the beginning of our Worship each Sunday. We found this very thought provoking as we journeyed through Lent. We were joined for Worship by our friends from St. Botolph's on the first Sunday. We welcomed our friends from across the circuit to the evening service led by Cantus Firmus on Palm Sunday and our friends from The Ark on Good Friday, some of whom took part in our Service of readings and meditation, not forgetting the fellowship over coffee and Hot Cross buns. On Easter Sunday morning we celebrated by decorating our empty Cross with flowers. This year many of the flowers went into flower vials which allowed them to last throughout the following week.

Our young people continue to meet with Rev's Chris and Robin once a month and a games afternoon after a recent morning service was enjoyed by all present, both the young and young at heart. Two of our young ladies are currently undertaking their A level Exams and we wish them well for the future.

At the beginning of May we had the joy of sharing in the Baptism of three young girls. Their families have started to worship regularly with us this year. The girls are cousins and were very excited at the prospect. If they had been given responses to make, we would certainly have heard them. Such joy!!

I would like to thank all those members of the church family whose enthusiasm, commitment and support has enabled these events to happen.

As we continue our journey through the year, we will keep our Circuit friends updated of our events. May God Bless you all!!

The Ark:

It is often said that good things can come from bad. Sadly, The Ark was recently the target of someone taking potshots, probably with an air rifle, at the front of our building, leaving the panes of the windows across the front marked with pellet holes. The police were informed and have recorded the incident as a hate crime.

In the course of having the panes replaced under insurance, we paid extra to have the glass in the floor to ceiling window of the vestry, part of which had blown, replaced as well. It occurred to the leadership team that this window was a missed opportunity to advertise that our well-used building is, after all, a church! The vestry is the one room which is used by the church alone and its window can be viewed from the street outside.

We were truly inspired by images of Castle's wooden cross which was beautifully decorated with fresh flowers placed by the congregation on Easter Sunday, and we thought that we too could benefit from a large cross which can be kept permanently on display inside – and visible to the passing world. The vestry is still a work in progress, but within a matter of a few minutes the desk which has been placed for decades in front of the window was moved to a different spot, to fully expose the whole window.

And we have been blessed with the craftsmanship of a friend to the church, Peter, who has made us a beautiful large cross, modelled on Castle's, which now stands in the window in full view of passersby. We have plans to use the cross and window for displays of the changing seasons and Christian festivals and the life of our church.

Thank you Castle for seed of the idea, thank you Peter for making it happen, and thankyou God for the divine inspiration!

It was with great sorrow that we learned that another cherished member, Sue Wood, had died in hospital. She had been struggling with ill health for a number of months and had recently returned to hospital. Sue was the driving force behind The Ark's bid to become an eco-church and to continue to strive to reduce our carbon footprint. It was entirely because of Sue that eco-church was on the agenda for every meeting of the leadership team and church council. It was entirely because of her passion to make the world a better place that she gathered a small team around her to ensure that we achieved a bronze eco-church award, and she made it clear to all that bronze was only the start and there was still much more to do. She pushed for us to change our lights and water taps and desperately wanted our loos to flush less water. We are currently in the process of starting the second and final stage of having all our lights changed to LED, with the help of a circuit grant. She urged us to use the land around the church to plant flowers to increase biodiversity and with the solid support of husband John introduced and maintained planters at the front of the church. Beyond The Ark she was a passionate supporter of refugees and had been actively involved in the Bridgeway project, as well as giving regular support to her local parish church, St Andrew's in Marks Tey.

Sue's philanthropy is her legacy, and she is already sorely missed. Our prayers and love are with John and his two daughters and grandson.

The Well:

We held an Easter Free Family Fun Afternoon for the local community during the Easter holidays. It proved to be very successful and we had to turn people down because we were fully booked. There were various activities and refreshments for families to enjoy (please see the photos on The Well website).

Plans have been submitted to Colchester City Council for full planning permission for our Building Project. We have now been informed that we have to submit an Ecology Survey before the plans can go online and this is in hand.

We are delighted that Stephen is free from leukaemia and he rang the bell at Addenbrookes hospital a little time ago. He is home and has just started back at school for a couple of hours each day.

Six members of our congregation are to be received into membership of the Methodist Church on Sunday 21st June and we are looking forward to sharing that special time with them and welcoming them into membership.

As in previous years, we are holding 'Tea at The Well' in early August, for everyone on our Pastoral list, particularly for those who find it difficult to get to worship on a Sunday.

All are welcome to join us at our next two monthly Charity Coffee Mornings:

- Saturday 20th June – Methodist Homes
- Saturday 18th July – Action for Children

Lexden:

On Maundy Thursday we were all delighted to be invited to Sheila's house where we shared in the Love Feast. This is a short service followed by communion but rather than bread and wine we shared croissants and juice and then shared in a light meal. Music was supplied by Sheila's daughter in law. We also had children join us. Everyone really enjoyed the treat and grateful thanks was given to Sheila.

Jacqui from our congregation was keen to get involved in helping with residents in care homes and has recently joined Jastine at one of his events which she hopes will lead to more activities.

Mersea:

"*See what a morning gloriously bright, with the dawning of hope in Jerusalem.*
Folded the grave clothes, tomb filled with light, as the angels announce Christ is risen.
See God's salvation plan wrought in love, borne in pain, paid in sacrifice.
Fulfilled in Christ the Man, for He lives, Christ is risen from the dead."

These words echoed around the beach in the dawn of the sunrise on Easter morning. It was a wonderful experience as some of our congregation joined with those of other churches on the island, reminding us that we are all Easter People.

We are overjoyed to have Margaret as our recognised Worship Leader and to have her lead our Good Friday Service. This was a dramatised reading from 24 hours that changed the world.

As we continue to work through our Mission statement, we have focussed on making a visible presence in our community. We have already distributed our church leaflet to the new estate and we are planning to distribute leaflets on the second estate which is filling up with new residents.

We held an event for the Air Ambulance on the island and raised £140 as well as a special collection for East Anglian Childrens' Hospice.

We held a Quiz Evening and meal in celebration of two special birthdays and at time of writing, in May, we will be holding an event for Christian Aid.

Our Community Coffee continues on Wednesdays and our Toddler group on Thursdays, both are well supported.

Beach Club will be held from 20th to 24th July alongside all the other churches on Mersea. Our theme this year will be Friendship, using stories from the friends that Jesus met; the disciples, Bartimaeus, the children, Zacchaeus, the two on the Emmaus Road. We are praying for good weather, but will use the two churches on Mill Road, the Free Church and ourselves if not.

Our Anniversary Weekend is 11th/12th July when we will be holding an event on the Saturday evening. Further details later.

Wimpole Road:

WE were blessed with a wonderful Easter at Wimpole Road, with services from Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and then the celebration of Easter Sunday. A huge thank you to Hannah for her preparation and leading these services.

AT time of writing we were looking forward to our annual open-air Pentecost Service on the Recreation Ground, joining with St Stephen's and delighted that Jonathan Sparkes, and Rev. Anna from St. Stephen's and St. Margaret's would be jointly leading this service.

ON Sunday 26th July we will be having our first Pet Service which Jonathan will be leading. Pets and other animals play a huge part in the lives of so many people, to say nothing for the likes of hearing and guide dogs who are an absolute lifeline to those with hearing and or sight impairment - so this will be a great opportunity to celebrate them in all their wondrous shapes, sizes and varieties!

OUR recent upgrades in the vestry and vestibule, as well as the new kitchenette facilities in the church, have been well received by visitors and preachers alike, but we now have another big project in the offing. This one is major, complex and costly and will involve new heating, insulation, electrical work and pipework for our hall and parlour. At present there is no permanent heating at all, as the boiler has failed but it's not straight forward as we also need to upgrade the halls to make this expensive undertaking beneficial and as eco-friendly as possible. So, extensive discussions are under way, and once a decision is made, we will be seeking grants and additional funding. Whilst this is urgent and will involve a lot of upheaval in the future, our ongoing commitments continue and we are indebted to those who enable the work of God to be carried out in this lovely old church building.

Wivenhoe:

Wivenhoe continues to enjoy some friendly gatherings to reach out to others.

We have our monthly Coffee Mornings on the 2nd Saturday each month. These raise a significant amount for our Beacon of Hope Charity in the DRC for youngsters in need, led by the Congolese Members of our Church. These coffee mornings are very well attended, some visitors having supported us for many years.

We have our monthly Knit and Natter Group and Fellowship Group held on the 2nd and 4th Thursday afternoons respectively. Again, these are well attended and raise various amounts of cash for a variety of charities. We have had interesting Speakers, Singers and Preachers and cream teas!

A recently started Bible Study group led by Hannah meets on the 3rd Thursday afternoon of each month, and attendees are enjoying studying the Minor Prophets together.

DATES FROM THE CIRCUIT DIARY:

13th June	Circuit Monthly Prayer Meeting at The Well from 9am
22nd June	Circuit Meeting at The Well from 7:30pm
11th July	Circuit Monthly Prayer Meeting from 9am – venue to be confirmed
8th August	Circuit Monthly Prayer Meeting from 9am – venue to be confirmed
13th August	Safeguarding training at The Ark from 2pm

In addition:

Circuit Evening 'Zoom' services take place on 1st, 2nd and 4th Sundays of each month from 6:30pm

Circuit Bible Study takes place on many Tuesday evenings throughout the year (via Zoom)

All are very welcome and further information on any of the above is available;

from our Circuit Administrator at colchestermethodist.office@gmail.com or by viewing the Circuit diary at https://colchestermethodists.org.uk

DEADLINES

Please submit your plan requests for Sep/Oct/Nov by 15th July via our Circuit Administrator at colchestermethodist.office@gmail.com

The next newsletter will be distributed at the beginning of September so please let Judith have your church news by 20th August via judith.winward@talk21.com