

## **The Minister's General Church Meeting report 2021**

Our General Church meeting this year takes place during a year that will stay in our memories for a very long time. Living during a global historical event has taken its toll on all of us, in a variety of ways. At the beginning many people used the phrase, "we are all in this together", and to some extent it was true. But as time has gone on it has been clear that although we are all in the same storm, we are not in the same boat. If nothing else, the pandemic has thrown into sharp relief the differences in our circumstances, and the inequalities that some have to cope with.

Within all of this, we as Christians have, along with many other people, played our part in serving our communities; providing support for our friends and families and neighbours. For some this support was offering a listening ear, for some it was through volunteering with the various national and local schemes. For many of us it was keeping on doing the things that we do, week-in week-out whether there is a global pandemic or not. For some of us, this last year has been the year that has tested us beyond all measure. For those folks, the pandemic will have a lasting effect which only time will show. And, of course, we remember and stand with those who have lost family or friends during this time. Grief is hard, but it is made all the more difficult when a cherished life becomes a statistic.

For our church life, this year has changed us beyond recognition. Who would have thought that we would have even considered Zoom Church as an option? I'm not entirely sure before the pandemic many of us would have ever heard of Zoom, let alone used it. It is with huge gratitude that I want to thank those of you who have been able to use Zoom for services. Without having this option, it would have been very difficult for this incoming minister to meet many of you. However, I recognise with a certain clarity, that there are a large number of you for whom Zoom is not an option, either through lack of access, or choice, and as a consequence I have not been able to get to know nearly so well. I regret the fact that we have not been able to meet as the community we should have been. I look forward to the next 12 months when I hope at some point, we can begin again to be that place.

Aside from the pandemic, there has been some changes. Revd Irena Byron moved on to a well-deserved retirement at the end of July 2020. We thank her for her ministry amongst us and wish her well for her future.

I, Barbara Evans-Routley, arrived during August ready to begin in September 20. Unfortunately just 6 weeks into my appointment I needed some time off in order to have very long awaited surgery and therefore I finally started to get to know folks once I returned in December. However, it was a Christmas like no other. We were not able to celebrate with our normal traditions, no in-person carol services, Christingles, or nativities. Christmas carols and the story of Christ's birth were present though through home-based services. Christ still came amongst us showing that a global pandemic cannot prevent the presence of God.

The membership of Chyngton is currently 21. During the last 6 months, sadly one of our members, Eddie Clark has died. We give thanks for his life and for his faithfulness to the tasks which God had called him to.

In Methodist Church's, we embrace a pastoral system whereby members (and non-members) are under the care of a designated visitor. This system has been in place since the early days of Methodism. In its early days it was to ensure the growth of each person's faith and prevent "back-sliding" (the losing of faith). In more recent years, such pastoral system has also been used to ensure that each member of the church is cared for and this care is undertaken by a dedicated team of visitors, who help and encourage us. This year, when we have not been able to gather very often physically, has brought the pastoral system to the fore. Please keep these people who do important but not very visible work in your prayers.

In other years, we would comment on how well we may serve our community by giving space to community groups to meet. Such groups have been severely restricted over the last 16 months. However, our commitment to such groups has not diminished. The pandemic has shown up how important it is for us to meet socially with others. While we may be able to physically survive in isolation, the difficulties we face we do so have been clearly visible for us to see. We very much look forward to being able to welcome people once again without the need to socially distance from each other.

Although the building has often been closed to groups and for worship, it has not been locked up and forgotten. A small team of dedicated volunteers have been visiting the building to ensure its upkeep, including activities such as flushing water pipes through to prevent Legionella and maintaining the gardens. All these activities help ensure that there is a church to come back to.

I wish to offer a huge thank you to the team of volunteers who have helped with all of this work. Please support these volunteers through your prayers and consider if this is something that you can add to your repertoire of serving God and the community.

Central Sussex United Area continues to play an important part in the life of our church, with its input from other preachers. CSUA gives us a way of connecting with other Methodist and URC Christians in the area, but also provides support and challenge to our lay and ordained members through meetings, training, worship and mission opportunities.

In July we will be saying goodbye to Revd Darryl Sinclair who is minister at Hassocks URC, as she will be getting married and moving to join her new husband Peter in Nottingham. We will also be saying goodbye to Revd Amanda Roper who will be moving with her husband Mark to Plymouth, to a new appointment there. The Revd Andy Melvin, currently minister at The Haven and Area Mission Enabler will be adjusting his duties to take on the pastoral care of United Church Uckfield, Cornerstone Crowborough and Buxted Methodist, alongside his current appointment. John Gray, who has been Area Officer in CSUA for the last 11 years will be standing down from the role and Carole Short from Hailsham has volunteered to take up the role.

Finally, a huge thank you to all of you who offer your time, skills, money, talents and effort to the work of this church. Without the team effort required we would not be able to do any of this, and so I thank you; you know who you are. I ask God's blessing upon each and every one in the weeks and months ahead.

Barbara Evans-Routley, June 2021