



In-touch

No 103

September - November 2024



The magazine for the Ealing Trinity Circuit

In this issue

- | | |
|--|----|
| • From the Superintendent | 1 |
| • From the Circuit Meeting | 3 |
| • Hanwell Barn Dance | 4 |
| • A Short Guide to Sue's Sabbatical | 5 |
| • All Saints - is Halloween a "thin place"? | 8 |
| • Ealing Green Quiz Night | 10 |
| • A Visit to "The Largest Church in Christendom" | 11 |
| • Harvest Festival Around the World | 13 |
| • Greenford International Evening | 16 |
| • A Prayer following the recent unrest | 17 |
| • A prayer for wisdom | 17 |
| • Forthcoming Events around the Circuit | 18 |

From the Superintendent

Dear friends,

It is a pleasure to be writing to you as your new Superintendent. I look forward to worshipping and working alongside you. Jane and I are grateful for the support we have received as we have moved into our new manse.

In the previous edition of *In Touch* there was a short article which gave some background information, but I would like to tell you a little more about myself here.

I grew up in Yeovil, Somerset and studied Biological & Biochemical Sciences at the University of Salford before doing a PhD about the movement of wingless aphids on winter barley at Wye College in Kent (University of London).

As a child I attended a United Reformed Church in Yeovil. However, it was not until I was 23 that I made a commitment to following Christ when I became a member of Wye Methodist Church. Shortly afterwards, with the encouragement of a Local Preacher within that church, I sought a note to preach and was accredited as a Local Preacher in 1996.

A growing sense of call to become a minister grew after I completed my PhD. However, I spent several years discerning this sense of call. I did a Time for God year with the then Ashford (Kent) Circuit and worked closely with the Superintendent. I also worked as a lecturer in Biology at Canterbury College and as a part-time youth worker with Kent County Council.

I eventually decided to put my sense of call to the test by candidating and was accepted as an ordinand. After three years of ministerial formation at Wesley House, Cambridge, I began circuit ministry in the Leeds (South) Circuit in 2001.

It was during my appointment in Leeds that I met a neighbouring Baptist minister at a mission conference; this was an unexpected gift! Jane and I were married in 2008.

A year later, Jane and I moved to Huddersfield, where I became the Superintendent of the Huddersfield (Pennine) Circuit and Jane began her role as the Regional Minister for Mission in the Yorkshire Baptist Association.

During our time in Huddersfield we offered to serve overseas, which we had explored separately before marriage but now explored together. We were accepted as Mission Partners and were sent to Germiston in South Africa. Germiston is a city just east of Johannesburg founded with the discovery of gold in 1886. I was the minister of Germiston Central Methodist Church, a multicultural congregation in which we held three services each Sunday and worshipped in four languages. Jane worked with the wider Methodist Church of Southern Africa in empowering women in ministry.

Jane and I returned to the UK in 2014 after five demanding and enriching years in Germiston. I became Superintendent of the Croydon Circuit and Jane began two part-time roles: Centenary Development Enabler for the Baptist Union of Great Britain (a post created to mark the centenary of the first woman Baptist minister) and a lecturer in Community Theology at Regent's Park College, Oxford. Jane is also studying for a professional doctorate related to research conducted about Baptist women ministers.

The other member of our family is Ginger, a Cockapoo. Like Jane and I, Ginger is settling into her new surroundings and is enjoying the proximity of our manse to Lammas Park.

It is also helpful for you to know that my usual rest day is Friday.

I am delighted to be joining you in the Ealing Trinity Circuit and look forward to all God will do amongst us in the coming years.

God bless,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Steve". The signature is written in dark ink and is underlined with a single horizontal stroke.

Rev Steve's Welcome Service will be on Sunday 8th September at Ealing Green Church. Refreshments will be served from 4pm, with the service starting at 5pm. All are welcome, there is no need to RSVP.

From the Circuit Meeting

An extraordinary Circuit Meeting was held on 10th July 2024 on Zoom, to deal with various property matters.

The meeting began with attendees being asked to bring something their church is celebrating, and then sharing the prayer needs of their churches and communities. Notable celebrations included new members at Hanwell, several baptisms around the circuit, and the return of Rev Sue Male from sabbatical.

The meeting approved plans for extensive renovations to what was Rev Rachel's manse, at Elers Road, ready for the arrival of Rev Steve Day. Much work was needed to bring the house up to standard, and the meeting approved the following:

- Replacement of all windows (except those with stained glass) and the back door
- Complete interior redecoration
- Re-carpeting of the bedrooms, landing and stairs, and replacement of the kitchen flooring

The meeting noted its thanks to Jane Horwich for all her work in improving one of the Circuit's main residential properties, Havelock House.

The meeting agreed to defer a decision on whether to sell the former manse at Costons Avenue until the next Circuit Meeting, as some remedial work to fix a leak and some lifted laminate flooring is needed before it could be sold.

HANWELL METHODIST CHURCH
Saturday 14th September 2024

7:00 - 10:30pm

Including a 2-course meal



In the Church Hall, Church Road, W7 1DJ

Tickets including 2-course meal

Adults: £12

Children under 15: £6

Tickets available from:

Gill: (020) 8567 4018

Mary: (020) 8579 0373

Ticket numbers are limited

*In aid of
Church
fund-raising*

A Short Guide to Sue's Sabbatical

By Rev Sue Male

Andy asked me for an article for *In-touch* about my sabbatical. Many people have asked me since I came back, "What did you do"? Well, the best way to answer that is in a list. The list is chronological in so far as I can remember:

- Carried on working much more than full time for the first two weeks
- Got tired
- Spent a week on a silent retreat at St Beunos Jesuit Spirituality Centre with one aim – "to move from work mode to sabbatical mode"
- God was good
- I came home, accepted loose ends and handed everything over
- I really did switch off from the Circuit and Ministry issues
- I went to Glastonbury
- I visited my Parents in Minehead for three lots of five days
- Phil and I attended "Christ the Saviour" Anglican Church in Ealing Broadway each Sunday at 8 AM!
- We went on a church weekend away with that church, making new friends and having deep conversations, putting the world to rights.
- We visited Canterbury – twice – once including a whole day UNESCO tour learning about early Christianity in that place
- We visited the Taize community in France for a week, joining in with worship, study, work and community life.
- I attended Northolt Methodist Church when Phil was preaching at Pentecost and heard a great sermon!
- We also attended Bless Community Church in Ealing, St Albans Cathedral, Canterbury Cathedral, and Minehead Methodist Church
- I studied
 - Philosophy in the Nineteenth Century
 - Philosophy in the twentieth Century
 - The theology of Hans Urs Von Balthazar
 - "Women in the Old Testament"
 - A course on Cicero
- I also read (or at least listened to) the whole five-part series of Ken Follet's "Pillars of the Earth" series which looks at the development of Catholicism, Anglicanism and Methodism over 6 centuries.

So I DID a lot. I feel really privileged to have been given the opportunity to do all of these things. Studying is so much more accessible to me now than it was at the time I had to do it. I have always thirsted for learning., When I was a child – and could see – I would often be found sitting in my room at my desk with my Dad’s “Self – Educator” book in front of me learning something new. You have also heard my story of attending Rev’d Jonathan Hustler’s Bible Study on Logos when both he and I were in our twenties. I did not understand. I had only been back in church for a matter of months. Far from being put off by that it was the point that cemented me. I realised there was a whole mass of things I did not understand about Christianity, God, the Bible, even Jesus and Logos, and I was hooked. I wanted to learn more and more and through it draw closer and closer to god, and study DOES do that for me, and that desire has never gone away. So one thing that sabbatical is is an opportunity to draw closer and closer to God in whatever way suits the person taking the sabbatical.

Being in a congregation and not leading is also important to me. I try to do this occasionally when I am working but it often gets pushed out due to a busy schedule. When I am leading my head and mind are usually active. They need to be really if I am to make any sense! (although I guess it is possible that my congregations will disagree with that assertion) Somebody once said to me though that every Christian needs to spend at least some time every day in silence in order to simply know that we are loved by God. I manage that on some work days – the walk between appointments helps me with that when I have time, or turning up early for a service in a church where there is quiet before the service (not exactly Methodist) or to be honest sometimes just switching off and joining God in prayer when my family are watching TV .. but these times are not frequent when working. On sabbatical lots of silence before worship, a whole week in silence at St Beunos, “silence” for hours at Taize WHILST singing the Taize chants, silence for moments staring at the architecture of Churches, Cathedrals .. and well yes, OK, sometimes bridges too!

So sabbatical is about doing whatever assures you of God’s love for you
Many special things remain with me. You will hear them over time I am sure. I will mention only two here.

At the end of my sabbatical, I did not want to go away again. I had been much away and wanted to make sure I did not return to work as exhausted as I left. I did a retreat with London Jesuit Centre this time which involved zoom calls with a Spiritual Director each day. The aim this time – to get me from sabbatical mode back to work mode.

One of the items I was given to pray with was a recording of a song – Matt Redman’s “Benediction”. I was transfixed by it. It contains the words of the Priest’s blessing – “The Lord Bless you and Keep you, the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you, the Lord look on you with kindness and give you peace”. My prayer about this? A desire to be in church, and to say this blessing ... not for the purpose of dismissing people in God’s love but because I wanted to join them all in coffee afterwards and catch up with them. Well, at least I am honest ... and here definitely, God was re-orienting me towards work and all the people I would see there.

The final thing I did in my sabbatical was visit my parents for the third time. Life is tough for them and I try to visit when I have leave. Usually I visit on week days because I am preaching at weekends but I visited this time on the final weekend before coming home. Apart from the clandestine Northolt visit with Phil I had not been in a Methodist Church for three months.

Phil and I decided we would go to Minehead Methodist Church. I had been to many churches in my sabbatical .. all lovely ... this one felt like home as soon as I entered! Methodists are so friendly! On top of that it was a Holy Communion Service. As soon as the Minister started to lead the liturgy tears began to roll down my face. Tears of joy, love desire. THIS was my job. THIS was my purpose. I wanted to come back and I wanted to do it myself!

Sabbaticals are about finding those things which ensure you that you are where God wants you to be (or help you to find that place of course if you are not). So ... that’s enough words, there will be much more to share – in due course – I hope that some of what I have learned – intellectually and spiritually will be passed to you and open you up to God’s leading onwards of you in your own – personal – and purposeful lives for Him.

Thank you to all of you for facilitating for me this special time with God.

Sue

All Saints - is Halloween a "thin place"?

Is there a case for reclaiming Halloween as an intrinsic element of the Christian celebration of All Saints? Laurence Wareing believes there may be.

The Scottish Church leader and founder of the Iona Community, George MacLeod, used to describe the island of Iona as a "thin place" – where barely a sheet of tissue paper “as thin as gossamer” separated the material from the spiritual. It was an image borrowed from the broader Celtic idea that there are places where God is experienced more nearly than others.

In another Celtic tradition, it was once believed that at the festival of Samhain (pronounced “sow-in”), the boundary between the worlds of the living and dead became blurred. Celebrated on the last day of October, the festival marked the end of summer and the harvest season and the beginning of the dark, cold winter during which death was a common occurrence.

In choosing this day to recognise the presence of otherworldly spirits, whatever their malevolent intentions might be, were the Celts also acknowledging that there is no hard and fast division between our day-to-day material world and the spiritual world? The world beyond death lies closer to us than we often permit ourselves to remember. Was not the festival of Samhain a celebration of the “thin place” in which we live; an acceptance of the tissue-thin division between the living and the dead?



A Mexican woman celebrates with festive face paint. Photograph by Zepherwind, Dreamstime

Via the Romans, who combined Samhain with their existing celebrations of Feralia (commemorating the passing of the dead) and the honouring of Pomona, the goddess of fruit and trees, Samhain was eventually morphed into All Souls' Day (2 November) – a Christian attempt to replace the Celtic festival of the dead with a related, but Church-sanctioned holiday. But Samhain has lived on its own right as All-hallows Eve – the night before All-hallowmas, known more usually as All Saints.

Today, many Christians feel ambivalent at best about marking a festival that allows free rein to evil spirits before they are sent packing by the holy forces of the saints. We are happy enough to sing about the continuing presence of angels (“Still through the cloven skies they come, / with peaceful wings unfurled” StF 205) but the less understandable, less controllable manifestations of death and evil are increasingly taboo.

Is it because we have forgotten that the two festivals are conjoined – that Halloween makes more sense when reunited with its equal opposite, All Saints? Does the rejection of Halloween by many Christians (unlike other, apparently more acceptable, Christianised “pagan festivals”) say something about our desire to shut out our contemplation of death? If so, then it's an attitude challenged by the lectionary Gospel reading for All Saints Day, which records Jesus' raising of Lazarus out of death. (John 11:32-44).

The raising of Lazarus is an event that signifies the dramatic presence of God even – and perhaps especially – when other powers appear to be at the fore. It's a story that enacts the words of the prophet Isaiah: “On this mountain, he has destroyed / the veil which used to veil all people, / the pall enveloping all nations; / he has destroyed death for ever.” (Isaiah 25:7-8a)

Taken together, the festivals of All-hallows Eve and All Saints remind us that we are connected to our past, and that those who have gone before us still live with us and may help support us into our future. Using vivid and unsettling imagery, the twin festivals insist on the wholeness of creation – God is God of the dead as well as of the living. If we remain alert to the non-material aspects of our lives, we may remember that the division between our lives and theirs is tissue thin.

*Article originally published on the Methodist Church Website:
<https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/resources/posts/all-saints-is-halloween-a-thin-place/>*

Ealing Green Church



12th October 7pm - 10pm
Includes a fish and chip supper
£10 per person

Contact revsuemale@gmail.com
by 3rd October to register teams of 6 to 8 or
to sign-up as an individual

A Visit to “The Largest Church in Christendom”

By Andy Brierley, editor of In-touch

In August I spent a week near Lyon in southern France, and had the chance to visit the remains of a mediaeval icon. Visiting Cluny Abbey was not just a step back in time, but an encounter with a monumental chapter of Christian history. The grandeur of the ruins, set in the peaceful Burgundy countryside, is awe-inspiring even today, and it is easy to imagine the lives of the monks who once lived here, and the vast influence the abbey once held over medieval Europe.

Walking through the remains of what was once the largest church in Christendom before the construction of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, it was impossible not to feel a profound sense of reverence. The soaring arches, even in ruin, convey the scale and importance Cluny once had. Established in 910 by William I, Duke of Aquitaine (great-great-grandfather of Eleanor), Cluny Abbey was more than a religious site; it became the heart of a monastic reform movement that would reshape European Christianity.

One of the things that struck me most was the sheer size of the abbey grounds. Only fragments of the original buildings remain today, but in its prime, Cluny was a vast, sprawling complex with a towering church, cloisters, and Abbot's Palace serving the spiritual and material needs of the monks. The abbey even had an enormous oven capable of baking thousands of loaves of bread at once, such was its popularity with visiting pilgrims. Cluny's influence stretched across Europe, with the Cluniac order overseeing hundreds of monasteries and priories, extending its model of strict Benedictine observance far and wide.

Historically, Cluny Abbey was a beacon of reform at a time when monastic life was drifting into worldliness. The monks of Cluny were known for their dedication to the Divine Office, with an emphasis on prayer and worship rather than manual labour, which set them apart from other monastic orders. This focus on prayer, chant, and the liturgy also influenced the arts and architecture of the abbey. The abbey church was designed to reflect the glory of God, filled with light and height, leading the worshippers' gaze heavenward.

As I stood in what was once the nave of the great church, I couldn't help but imagine what it must have been like during its heyday—a thriving centre of worship, education, and culture. The abbey's rich history is not only spiritual but also political. Over time, the abbots of Cluny held considerable power, often rivalling that of kings and popes – indeed, Pope Urban II was the Grand Prior of Cluny before his papal accession. Given Pope Urban's role in instigating the Crusades, and the influence his time at Cluny is said to have had on his papacy,

we can assume history may have looked rather different if the abbey had not enjoyed such a unique position of power. For much of its history Cluny enjoyed special privileges, including exemption from local bishopric control, answering directly to the Pope. This unique position gave Cluny an enormous role in shaping the religious and political landscape of medieval Europe.



However, like many grand institutions, Cluny's power and influence waned. The abbey's decline began in the late Middle Ages as new monastic movements, such as the Cistercians, arose. The French Revolution dealt the final blow. Much of the abbey was dismantled, and its stones were used for other buildings, leaving behind the majestic ruins that stand today. The abbey's many relics, which had attracted pilgrims from all over Europe for centuries and included a (supposed) fragment of the True Cross, disappeared, looted or lost.

Despite its decline, Cluny's legacy endures. Its vision of monastic life and its contributions to medieval art, culture, and Christian thought continue to resonate today. For me, visiting Cluny Abbey was more than a trip through history; it was a reminder of the enduring power of faith and the profound ways in which communities like Cluny have shaped the Church and the world. Even in ruin, it stands as a testament to the spiritual and cultural heights that faith can inspire.

Harvest Festival Around the World

The harvest season will soon be upon us in the UK, but naturally it falls at different times of the year depending upon region, climate and crop, so for some people it's still six months away! In some countries harvest is a first-fruits festival that recognises the start of the season, while in others it's a celebration of thanks for the blessing of a bountiful harvest and to mark or ensure the recurrence of the process. In some parts of the world, harvest festivals have become largely secularised into a more general holiday. For example, the autumn festival of Thanksgiving, which is observed in Canada (second Monday in October) and in the United States (fourth Thursday in November), is largely a national day of rest. Other festivals, such as the first-fruits festival Lammas and celebrated by Neo-Pagans and Wiccans, are no longer major popular celebrations but are observed by smaller groups. Still others remain major cultural events or religious holidays. Here are some of the more interesting examples from around the world.

Cornwall: Guldize (September)

Cornish traditions of Guldize (sometimes referred to as Dicklydize or Nickly Thize) go back as far as 1602 and take place after the last sheaf of corn in a local area has been cut. The sheaf is presented to the north, south, east and west in a process known as '*crying the neck*', so-called because the corn sometimes bends in the middle like the neck of a hen.

The corn is turned into a '*corn dolly*', a kind of symbolic figure of the harvest that would then be paraded at the head of a procession as instruments and traditional songs were played.

One of the more antiquated traditions associated with Guldize involves one of the men attempting to sneak into the house of the main feast to steal the corn dolly. If caught, water is poured down his neck. But if he is successful, he earns a kiss from the female '*guard*' tasked with looking after the dolly.

Indonesia: Rice Harvest Festival (May-June)

The Rice Harvest Festival that is held in Bali, Indonesia, is a feature of the island's Hindu culture. The harvest time follows the New Year—when ceremonies are held to purge evil spirits from the land—by about one month. The harvest festival is dedicated to the rice goddess and is a time of joyous celebration. Effigies of the goddess are placed in the fields in thanks, towns are decorated with coloured flags, and special bull races are held.

China: Mid-Autumn Festival (September–October)

The celebration of the harvest is one of the most-important traditional holidays in China, Taiwan, and Vietnam. It is also known as the Moon Festival because it coincides with the full moon on the 15th day of the eighth lunar month; special delicacies called mooncakes are prepared during this time. Ceremonies are held both to give thanks for the harvest and to encourage the harvest-giving light to return again in the coming year. It is a time of family gatherings, matchmaking, and public celebrations.

Ghana: Yam Festival (August or September)



Men and boys carrying yams at a harvest festival in the Trobriand Islands, Papua New Guinea. Caroline Penn/Alamy

The Ewe people of Ghana celebrate the end of the rainy season and the first appearance of yams, a staple crop. The duration and exact days of the celebration vary according to place, but, regardless of the manifestation, the festival is held in hopes of averting famine in the coming year. Huge feasts and activities such as dances and parades are held. Similar festivals are held in Papua New Guinea and Nigeria.

Israel: Sukkoth (September–October)

Sukkoth, the “Feast of Booths,” is held on the 15th day of Tishri in the Jewish lunisolar calendar. Following shortly after the High Holy Days of the New Year celebration, the eight-day festival gives thanks to God for the harvest. Special booths, or huts, are constructed to recall the period of the Exodus, recounted in the Hebrew Scriptures, when the Israelites lived in huts in the desert before entering the Promised Land.

South-east Asia: Pongal (January)

The four-day festival of Pongal is a celebration of the rice harvest period. Held after the winter solstice, it celebrates the return of longer days of life-giving sunlight. It is similar to other festivals held in South and Southeast Asia, but Pongal (also called Thai Pongal, Thai being the name for January in the Tamil calendar) is celebrated mainly by Tamil-speaking people. Its name comes from a Tamil word meaning “to boil” and is also the name given to a rice dish that is prepared during this time.

Article originally published by Britannica: <https://www.britannica.com/list/5-harvest-festivals-around-the-world>

Harvest Festival will be celebrated in the circuit on the following dates:

22nd September: Ealing Green

29th September: Circuit Service at Greenford

6th October: Northolt

13th October: Hanwell

Greenford Methodist Church

Ruislip Rd, Greenford, UB6 9QN

International Evening



Raising funds to support the Church finances.

Saturday 19th October 2024

5:00 - 9:00 pm

...lively entertainment and food from around the world.

Tickets: Adults - £10, Concession - £5, Children - Free

We look forward for your support.

A Prayer following the recent unrest

God of love,
We pray for your Spirit of peace to move in our communities,
that those who are targets of hate might be safe
and that people of good will might work together in love and respect.

We pray for your Spirit of healing,
that those who grieve, might be comforted
and those who are injured might be made well.

We pray for your Spirit of hope,
that those who despair might see a way ahead
and those who live in fear might find sanctuary and freedom.

Soften the hearts of those motivated by hate
and help us all to love our neighbours as those made in your image.
In Christ's name.

Amen

A prayer for wisdom

Gracious God, we look to you for wisdom, often we look in the wrong places, missing the opportunity to learn of you from others. Your word, as expressed in the Bible, can be difficult to interpret in this divisive world. Show us your way through those we encounter who exude your wisdom in their love for their neighbours, and who emanate your justice from the very depths of their souls. Teach us to engage with the needs of refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants, as all are our neighbours and all are precious people to you. In Jesus' name we pray and for his sake, Amen.

David Latter, Chair of Trustees, LWPT

Forthcoming Events around the Circuit

September

14th Sat 7pm **Barn Dance**
With two course meal.
Hanwell Methodist Church
Adults £12, Children £6 (cash only)
(See page 4)

October

6th Sun 4pm **Iris Axon Concert Series at Acton Hill**
Albert Lau, Piano
Adults £6, Concessions £5, Children £2

12th Sat 7pm **Quiz**
With fish and chip supper.
Ealing Green Church
Tickets £10 (cash only)
(See page 10)

19th Sat 5pm **International Evening**
Lively entertainment and food from around the world.
Greenford Methodist Church
Adults £10, Concessions £5, Children free
(See page 16)

November

3rd Sun 4pm **Iris Axon Concert Series at Acton Hill**
Harris Leung, Piano
Adults £6, Concessions £5, Children £2

23rd Sat TBC **Winter Craft Market**
Hanwell Methodist Church
Check church website for updates

Articles for 'In-touch' Issue No 104 (December 2024 – February 2025) should be sent by email headed 'In-touch' to the Editor.

office@ealingtrinity.org.uk

Deadline for next issue: 1st November 2024