

MINISTER'S LETTER

I was asked by another church to write an article about worship. My article is to be the second of a series, the first having been written by Revd Mark Bonney, Dean of Ely Cathedral whom I quote below. Given all the changes we have made to our worship space, I offer the article to you in a slightly amended form in the hope that it might provide you with some further insights into what I understand worship to be about and therefore how I approach it.



'...worship is first of all about God. I say that is blindingly obvious, but in practice it is not so. I have been as guilty as the next person in going to an act of worship thinking first and foremost about myself, and then coming away saying, "That didn't do anything for me", "I didn't get anything out of that", "I wasn't moved by that service", "I didn't find that sermon uplifting". We all say and think these things, it's part of the somewhat self-absorbed world we live in, and actually part of worship does of course need to address the needs and concerns that we and others come to them with – but that is not what worship is principally about; if it were it would be some kind of therapy session. Worship is not a therapy session, worship is about turning our attention to God above all things – and that is not easy; it's hard and challenging and we get it wrong very often, but I do believe it is what is most important.'

Revd Mark Bonney, Dean of Ely Cathedral

Worship is indeed about God and about us turning our attention to God, as Mark says. To use my own words, I would say that it is about our response to God¹. What our response to God is or should be - what constitutes an appropriate response to God - will of course be understood in different ways by different people. This is nothing new. In the Hebrew Scriptures people are seen to respond to God in different ways: some build altars, others bow down; some fall to the ground and prostrate themselves, still others offer a sacrifice. In each case, people are offering something of themselves. Sometimes the act is an instinctive one, at other times what is offered forms part of a well-rehearsed corporate act.

Whenever we gather to worship God in church, we do so as a church community. It is then a corporate act that takes us beyond the realm of personal devotion into that of the whole people of God. Indeed, it sees us participate in the work of the whole people of God as together we form

and offer our response, our worship, to God.

A key word here, for me, is ‘participate’. In my youth I was raised on a form of worship that I can now best describe as being something akin to a monologue. The person leading the worship introduced all the hymns, led the prayers, read the Gospel, preached the sermon and later sent us on our way with some words of dismissal. With the exception of perhaps one person who had been asked to read another lesson, congregational participation amounted to listening to the one leading the worship, singing hymns and joining in with the Lord’s Prayer. If it was a service of Holy Communion (one Sunday per month) it would be as described but, commencing on page B12 of *The Methodist Service Book* (1975), we would additionally join in with a few lines of the Great Prayer of Thanksgiving and, of course, move to the rail to receive the bread and wine.

When people later talked about the service over coffee, comments would be made along the lines of those suggested by Mark Bonney (see above) or else there would be more positive reactions, for example, “That was a fantastic service”, or “The sermon really spoke to me today”, etc., etc. In essence though, an act of worship was evaluated and deemed to be good or not depending on whether those in the congregation had liked/been impressed by the performance of the one leading. Here the word ‘performance’ is important because it infers that the one leading worship is a ‘performer’ and, if this is so, the congregation has, unwittingly perhaps, assumed the role of ‘audience’. And, since everyone has her/his own view as to what constitutes a “good” act of worship, such an audience is usually full to bursting with would-be theatre critics.

As Stephen Burns² highlights, ‘Among the first words of the *Methodist Worship Book* we find the claim that ‘worship is the work of the whole people of God: a congregation is not an audience or a group of spectators.’ Stephen then continues with some words that have helped me enormously:

‘The Methodist Worship Book’s stress that the congregation is not an audience resonates with a comparison made by the eighteenth-century Danish Lutheran philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, who in his writings compared worship to the theatre. The staging of a play, he suggested, involves three groups of people: the actors, who perform; prompters, who enable the actors to perform well; and

the audience, who listen and observe. Kierkegaard made the point that many of his Christian contemporaries might make the analogy between worship and theatre like this: the clergy or leaders are the actors, God is the clergy's prompter, and the congregation is the audience, watching – and judging – the clergy's performance. Kierkegaard argued that such an understanding is profoundly mistaken and, rather, the whole congregation are the 'actors' in worship, the clergy role is analogous to the actors' prompters, helping them to perform as best [sic] as possible, and the audience is God! God is the one before whom the whole congregation enacts worship.'

Stephen Burns, *Liturgy* (SCM Study Guide; 2006) p.7f

The word 'liturgy' has, in certain circles, become synonymous with something 'written down' and therefore something 'more Anglican than Methodist'. Given Methodism's Anglican/Wesleyan roots I would argue that such a claim is at least debatable, but, either way, such an understanding of liturgy is far too narrow.

There is some debate as to whether the original meaning of the Greek word 'leitourgia'³ - which we translate as 'liturgy' - is indeed best understood as meaning 'the work of the people', as is commonly supposed. Whatever its original meaning, it has come to mean 'the participation of the People of God in "the work of God"'⁴. And, in part at least, this includes what we do together when we gather for worship on a Sunday.

As you are more than aware, during my sabbatical in 2011, I was fortunate enough to visit *House For All Sinners and Saints (HFASS)* in Denver, Colorado and spend some time with its charismatic Lutheran pastor, Nadia Bolz-Weber⁵.

Interestingly, when HFASS gathers on a Sunday for what we would call 'a service' or 'an act of worship', it calls it "Liturgy" or, when appropriate, "Eucharist Liturgy". Describing itself as a community that is 'anti-excellence and pro-participation', the liturgy at HFASS is duly led by those present. Nadia, as pastor, offers the Eucharistic prayer and the sermon but all the other parts of the liturgy are led by people from where they are sitting and they sit "in the round". There are no rotas - people simply choose whether to pick up a marked copy of the service booklet, or a "bulletin" as they call it, which indicates a part of the liturgy that the holder is asked to lead e.g. 'Bidding Prayers' or a clean

copy that carries no such requirement. The music too is made by the community as a whole for the liturgy is a capella and therefore comes entirely from the bodies of those gathered.

Yes, aspects of the liturgy are here 'written down' and draw on some of the ancient liturgies of the Church but 1) preparations will have been made by a number of people in advance e.g. 30 people - which at the time represented 50% of the community - had come together to shape the liturgies for Lent, Holy Week and Easter that I shared in and 2) alongside the written words there is space for - and much evidence of - creativity and innovation.

What I experienced during my time at HFASS was a community which truly owns the worship that it offers to God and it does so, I think, because it encourages genuine participation. Combine this with its yearning to be a 'liturgical, Christo-centric, social justice-oriented, queer-inclusive, incarnational, contemplative, irreverent, ancient/future church with a progressive but deeply rooted theological imagination' and, thus far, this is the nearest thing I have found (beyond *Greenbelt* that is) to the sort of church community that I long for my children to grow up, find a home and worship God in.

With every blessing

Paul

¹ If 'worship' is about our response to God it stands to reason that this is a term that embraces the whole of our daily lives and work and not just the time we spend together in church on a Sunday. The word 'Liturgy' carries with it a similar connotation.

² Now Associate Professor of Liturgical Theology and the Study of Anglicanism at Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

³ The word is derived from two root words - laos (the people) and ergas (a work).

⁴ See 1069/1070 http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p2.htm and note, '1071. As the work of Christ liturgy is also an action of his Church. It makes the Church present and manifests her as the visible sign of the communion in Christ between God and men [sic]. It engages the faithful in the new life of the community and involves the "conscious, active, and fruitful participation" of everyone.'

⁵ <http://houseforall.org>

Extreme Thoughts

Taken from: Extreme devotion, the voice of the martyrs from the co-authors of Jesus freaks. Serious followers of Jesus pay a price, and extreme followers often pay the ultimate price. Each story is true.

"Move it, Prince!" laughed the guard, grabbing the man's arm. "Let's see how you like your new accommodations." The guards shoved Prince Vladimir from the Rumanian royal house of Ghica into the harsh prison cell. In one corner, he could see prisoners taking clothes and blankets from a thin, dead prisoner. In the back he could hear the screams of a prisoner being tortured.

This place was a long way from the life of luxury he had known at home. Yet Prince Vladimir survived the dehumanizing conditions in prison by holding on to his faith in Christ who comforted him and guided him. A cell mate of Vladimir once said, "Nowhere have I heard purer prayers and more thoughts of eternal value than in Communist prisons."

Vladimir's eternal thoughts from this time were published in a powerful book. He wrote. "Blessed are those who spread joy that arises out of their own suffering. He who denies himself for others clothes himself with Christ. Seek one who pushes you away. May my joys never come through the suffering of others. May my suffering bring joy to others."

Who would dream that such "pure prayers and thoughts of eternal value" would come from a dethroned prince who survived the dungeons of communist cruelty?

Negative thoughts can affect us profoundly. If we focus our minds on our sufferings, we can grow bitter and resentful as a result. If we choose to think positively in the midst of a crisis, however, then we can lift ourselves above our circumstances. Not only can we save ourselves from discouragement and despair, but we can also help others. Vladimir experienced joy in his sufferings. Are you prone to negativity when you are going through trials? Remember, you cannot control what happens in life. But you can control your attitude. Refuse to be negative. Ask God to give you a positive perspective on your trials, and open your eyes to help others.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:7)



AN EVENING
OF MUSIC

SATURDAY 16th
NOVEMBER

Featuring
SOIREE

Acoustic music, ballads,
fine harmonies, rock'n'roll,
contemporary songs, jazz

at RUXLEY CHURCH
Ruxley Lane West Ewell
KT19 OJG

7.30pm for 7.45pm

TICKETS £5

Children under 12 **free**
accompanied by an adult

For tickets phone
0208 394 1081
or Call at Ruxley Church
or contact
Ken Dunn on 0208 330 0641

Poppies for Remembrance Sunday

As ever, this year red poppies will be available at the church courtesy of the Royal British Legion. The red poppy has become a familiar emblem of remembrance and it is a powerful symbol. Not only did red poppies bloom across some of the battlefields of WW1, their brilliant red colour reminds us of the blood spilled in war. Proceeds from the sale of red poppies is vital to The Royal British Legion's work in serving ex-service personnel and their families and this work needs to be supported.



There are though problems with the red poppy. Over the years it has become synonymous with us remembering those whose lives have been lost in the service of this country and, of course, war claims many more victims than that. Another symbol is therefore needed if we are to make a statement that we wish to remember all victims of war.

For those who don't know, the idea of an alternative white poppy dates back to 1926, just a few years after the red poppy came to be used in Britain. A member of the No More War Movement had suggested that the British Legion be asked to imprint 'No More War' in the centre of the red poppies. When this didn't happen, in 1933 the Co-operative Women's Guild produced the first white poppies to be worn on Armistice Day. The Guild stressed that the white poppy wasn't intended as an insult to those who died in the First World War – after all, this was a war in which many of the women had lost husbands, brothers, sons and lovers - but rather an attempt to put the focus on working for peace.

Remembrance Sunday is a challenging time for everyone and it raises difficult questions for us as people of faith.

Whatever we believe about the place or necessity of war, we can't escape the fact that Jesus calls us to love our enemies and to pray for those who'd attack us. And neither can we forget that, in the face of utter hatred and absolute violence, Jesus not only refused to respond to

violence with violence himself but also interjected when others did. And when dying on the cross, he prayed for those who'd put him there.

Jonathan Bartley of the Christian think-tank Ekklesia draws the comparison between the cross and the poppy. Both are linked to sacrifice, he says. Both take a location of bloodshed and violence and make a statement about it. And both attempt to give us hope in the face of death. They imply that those who died didn't do so in vain. But he goes on to highlight a crucial difference. Whilst the red poppy implies that redemption can come through war, he argues, the Christian story implies that redemption comes through non-violent sacrifice. Jonathan Bartley comes to the conclusion that the white poppy reflects such an understanding rather better than its red counterpart. I tend to agree but other Christians can and will come to different conclusions.

This year white poppies will be available in the church to sit alongside - and perhaps be worn alongside - the red ones.

Revd Paul Timmis

Remember

That military personnel are not the only victims of war



Remember

The innocent civilians, the stretcher bearers, the victims of genocide, the merchant navy, the rescue workers, the ambulance drivers, the broken families ...

Theatre in the round comes to Martin Way Riding Lights - 'A Different Drum'

There was an air of suppressed excitement as we queued up for the Riding Lights Theatre Company's production of 'a different drum'. No need to worry about getting the front few seats because this was to be theatre in the round in our completely re-furbished church....but how would it look?

It was brilliant! Seating for over 100 with excellent viewing for everyone. The lighting focussed on what proved to be a most versatile stage and we were immediately involved with the actors waiting to welcome us.



Several coffin style, slatted wood boxes with a few 'A' frames were central, which unknown to us, apart from converting to many different settings, also contained the props to be used during the performance. The swift and skilful transference of these was absolutely amazing. Each actor knew exactly what was required and we were transported to homes, churches, trenches, hilltops and missions by car or jeep, with utter conviction.

The five actors were inspirational, adapting instinctively to each character and situation as different experiences evolved. The clarity of their voices, so essential to theatre in the round, was impeccable and even when they were compelled to turn their back to part of the audience, the body language insured that nothing essential was lost. The harmony and emotion of their singing was also professional and the atmosphere remained compelling throughout the evening.

It was a most uplifting experience and interesting to watch the effect on the faces of this four-sided audience. The final response and the inter-active conversation which followed were an acclamation of Riding Lights as well as reassurance to church members that the regeneration of their premises was a highly successful achievement.





Even without the assistance of a programme, the essence of ‘a different drum’ remains and it is to be hoped that this small and talented company will return soon with a further production.

Irene Goldsmith

excellent performance gripping captivating joy
dramatic stirring eloquent outstanding heavy
shocking sacrifice depressing sadness extraordinary

Some of the above words were used by us during the interval and following the end of the performance to describe how we were feeling and what we were understanding or not at that precise time.

We hadn't been totally aware at the beginning that we were part of the Eyam community in Derbyshire where the plague had arrived and that the performers were already in role! As the play moved on describing the situation in Eyam other stories were told of people and situations where people sacrificed their lives for the good of others in different centuries in places such as Uganda, France, Algeria, Hull and El Salvador. It was absolutely gripping due not only to the content of the play but how it was performed; smooth and effective change between scenes the actors seeing to the props themselves; the props were few and simple but so versatile. The talent of the performers outstanding only 5 of them taking on several roles and to top it the musical ability of each one and to hear the harmonies was exquisite. The whole performance was challenging, memorable and educational.

Lastly, the refurbished church was a perfect setting, where we sat we not only could see and hear but feel the emotion of the performers.
-Well done!

*Moira Bailey
(and friends)*





Perhaps it was the comfortable chairs, but there was barely a movement from the audience. We were held spellbound, apart from when the crane fly put in an *unscheduled* appearance. Had he auditioned for the role?

It was not a cheerful little piece, although there were touches of humour. It was poignant, it was bleak, it was harrowing, but it was powerful in its message. It demanded concentration. Not having read the programme I was somewhat confused when the young Derbyshire lass started talking in an American accent, but the five actors held their different roles superbly. The set was simple but extremely versatile and how they managed to remember which piece to move when and where whilst still speaking their lines, well it was quite remarkable. Beautiful singing and the choice of music totally appropriate for the particular scene all added to the experience. Was it a bit too long? But which story would you leave out? Altogether a production worthy of any West End stage. Thank you Riding Lights.

Lesley Mortley

I really enjoyed the Riding Lights' production of 'A Different Drum'. It was well written and acted, so much so that I felt part of the action. The way the modern stories were woven into the play was very clever, and emphasised their relevance to the overall theme.

Rosemary Leach

Very well staged and performed, the production engaged the emotions of the audience, while communicating the unifying theme. My only comment would be to wonder whether the script might have handled the transitions in and out of the five modern 'cameos' from the main narrative in a more seamless way.

Tony Leach

It is hard to pin down how a story with such devastating consequences could be so up-lifting. The almost audible gasp of horror as the red silk was flung from the chest in innocent abandon, delighting each villager who became wrapped in it, is a moment I will never forget. A thing so vibrant and yet so deadly, carrying death to the people of Eyam. And we witnessed many deaths throughout the evening. Deaths so convincing in the portrayal that audience heads were bowed in respect.

Perhaps then it was the overriding theme of humanity at its best, laid bare in adversity, giving substance to our eternal hope that goodness will prevail. The idea that when something terrible happens, we should always watch for what good is taking place. The terror and the benevolence on view in all corners of the world.

World War 1 and Woodbine Willie cradles a dying man on the battlefield, talking of better times with kindness and gentle humour reminiscent of lullaby.

El Salvador and Oscar Romero journeys peacefully and tirelessly in the darkness of a corrupt government, unchanging with the threat of the inevitable bullet ever at his back.

Algeria and in the face of terrorist action, Brother Chretien plants seeds with his Muslim friends, challenging the notion of difference and finding common ground amongst humankind.

With slick and effortless dexterity, the five actors produced “a cast of thousands” and magicked the set of simple pallet boxes into different props



from piano to camel to see saw to, inevitably, coffin; the stands from lectern to trench to allotment to roadblock, all laced with beautiful music and heart stirring singing.

Theatre at its finest, this is one ‘box-set’ I could watch over and over again.

Rebecca Timmis

Churches Together in Merton Park

Throughout the year, the committee members of the Churches Together in Merton Park have increased in number with most of the churches having at least 2 representatives. The five churches (St James, Martin Way; St Mary the Virgin, Merton Park; St John Fisher RC, Martin Way Methodist; Merton Park Baptist) continue to meet 4-5 times a year.

The committee recently paid tribute to Dennis Clark who died suddenly on the 1st of May. He was a committed member of CTiMP since 2008 and will be sorely missed.

The main events of the past year have been:

Autumn Event - Mission Service

On Sunday the 4th November 2012, the CTiMP arranged a Mission Service at Merton Park Baptist church. The keynote speaker was Rev. David Shosanya, Regional Minister of London Baptist Association. During the service there was a moving testimony from Bruce Dyer an ex-professional football player and founder of Love Life UK Prison Outreach. He showed a DVD highlighting his work in the prison ministry. The evening's offering was for Love Life UK.

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (18-25th January)

This service was cancelled in January due to the adverse weather but did take place on the 28th April at Martin Way Methodist church. During the service, which was well attended, the Christian CARE office was dedicated.

Forum: "On the streets, off the streets"

The forum took place on the 13th April at St John Fisher church hall with a presentation of 3 church-based charities who work with people on our streets who need help and support. Mr Tom Kavanagh was in the chair and welcomed

- John Goddard, who is the Co-ordinator of the Merton Street Pastors and recently received the Merton Community Excellence award for his

dedication to the community. He leads 31 Street Pastors volunteers from local churches who go out on the streets of Wimbledon and Mitcham to help, listen and care for those in need on Friday nights.

- Counsellor Linda Kirby, Chair of the management committee of Faith in Action, a Drop-in Centre for the homeless providing breakfast, a hot meal and shower facilities. An average of 50+ vulnerable people attend each session.

- John Bush, pioneered the Winter Night Shelter scheme to accommodate rough sleepers with a bed, food and clothes for 12-13 weeks during December - February. Twelve churches in Merton were involved in the scheme last winter.

Easter Sunrise Service

This year the weather was favourable and the Easter was celebrated at 6.30am on Cannon Hill common. Rev Keith Mitchell shared communion and an Easter message followed by breakfast at Martin Way Methodist church.

Christmas Leaflets

As in previous years the CTiMP have produced leaflets with a Christmas message and including a list of Christmas services held in each church. These will be distributed to about 8,000 homes in Merton Park. The committee are extremely grateful to the many volunteers from each church who have given of their time to distribute these in the past.

Christian CARE

It was decided that this year's Autumn event would focus on the Christian CARE Annual General Meeting to be held on the 6th November (see future events below). The theme of the evening will be "*Food for Families in Need - Three Responses to Hunger in the London Borough of Merton*". Our Minister Rev Paul Timmis will be in the Chair. The Panel Members will be:

Pastor Marcus Bennett - Wimbledon Foodbank,

Pastor Ioannis Dekas - *Doxa Deo Christmas Lunch on Jesus*

Miss Gillian Thick - *Christian CARE Family Support*

Future plans and dates for your diaries:

Christian CARE A.G.M. At Morden Baptist church on Wednesday 6th November 2013 at 8pm

Taize Autumn meetings 11th November and 9th December at 22 Aylward Road

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity service will be held at Merton Park Baptist Church on 19th January 2014

Easter Sunrise service 20th April 2014 at Cannon Hill Common

An Appeal for representatives

Since the passing of Dennis, Gwen Wildman is currently the sole representative for Martin Way Methodist church on the CTiMP committee. It would be great to have another committee member join her. Please prayerfully consider if this worthwhile role is for you.

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Christmas Shoebox Appeal

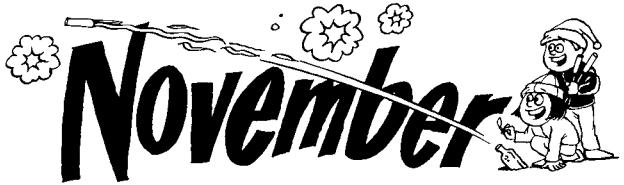


Platform 10¾ are organising the shoebox appeal for the Samaritans Purse this year. This is an organisation that sends shoe boxes full of toys to children all over the world who will not receive a present for Christmas.

There will be a box in the store cupboard to place your items into. Please see October's Newsletter for a list of suitable items or speak to a member of Platform 10¾. If you are unsure of what to get, but would like to make a monetary donation towards the shoebox appeal please do as we are required to send £2.50 per box made.

There will be a collection plate in which to put your donation after the morning service on 4th November. Platform 10¾ will put the shoeboxes together on Sunday 17th November.

CHURCH DIARY



Fri	1	12.30 pm	Luncheon Club
Sat	2	10.30am-1.00pm	Big Brunch
Sun	3	10.30am	All Age Worship led by Brenda Cannon
Tue	5	10.30am-noon	Coffee and Chat
		8.00 pm	Time for Prayer
Sun	10	10.00 am	Remembrance Sunday Service led by Rev Paul Timmis
		6.30 pm	Communion Service led by Rev Paul Timmis
Tue	12	10.30am-noon	Coffee and Chat
		8.00 pm	Time for Prayer
Fri	15	12.30 pm	Luncheon Club
Sun	17	10.30am	Holy Communion Service led by Rev Paul Timmis
Tue	19	10.30am-noon	Coffee and Chat
		8.00 pm	Time for Prayer
		7.30 pm	Men's Supper Club - <i>Desert Island Discs</i> - Mike Mortley
Sun	24	10.30am	Morning Service led by Valerie Ashcroft
Tue	26	10.30am-noon	Coffee and Chat
		8.00 pm	Time for Prayer
Fri	29	12.30 pm	Luncheon Club
Sat	30	10.30am-1.00pm	Big Brunch

*Please refer to the Website (www.martinway.org.uk)
or Weekly Notice Sheet for any additional information*

We wish all of those who celebrate a birthday this month a very

Happy Birthday

and especially to:



Megan Sweby on **7th November**
Jack Pallister on **9th November**
Jacob Passfield on **27th November**

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Big Brunch is back!



Yes, Big Brunch is back offering a full English breakfast for only £4.00, the profits from which go to help some of our youngsters go to Spring Harvest in 2014.

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CHRISTMAS SIGMA

After the meeting in October it was agreed that Sigma will now be helping Tony & Brenda with the Carol service this Christmas rather than putting on a full production.

We hope to do a bigger Easter production next year on Palm Sunday.

Anne Conquest

Advanced Christmas Notices

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MORDEN CAROL SINGING

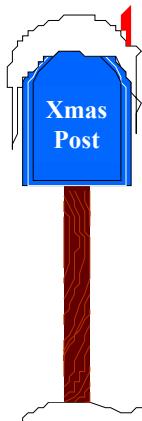


It's that time of the year that we serenade the commuters of Morden. Once again we will be raising money for the National Children's Home and would welcome as many people to come along and join in the singing of carols at Morden Underground Station. We will be meeting at the

Station on Wednesday 18th and Friday 20th December and plan to start singing at 5.00pm and finish about 7.00pm both of these days.

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CHRISTMAS POST BOX AND CARDS



The church Christmas post box will be outside the vestry from Sunday 1st December until Friday 20th December for those sending Christmas cards to members of the church community. Cards will be ready for collection on Sunday 22nd December.

As in previous years, you are invited to make a donation which will go to Methodist Homes for the Aged. (In doing so you may wish to remember that you are saving 50p for each card posted in the church post box!)

Please address all cards clearly using surnames and initials or forenames to avoid confusion. (We have several Smiths and several Andrews!)

If you prefer, you are welcome to post a single card addressed to the whole church family. Such cards will be placed on display panels in the vestibule on Sunday 22nd December.

Items for the **December Newsletter** should be with Andrew Fox, (email: roife@hotmail.co.uk) by **Sunday 17th November** at the latest