

sabbatical *noun* a period of leave.

From Hebrew *shabbath* rest.

So what do Methodist ministers do on their Sabbaticals? Revd Pat Olivent-Hayes will enjoy hers during June, July and August. She indicates her plans as follows:

- * exploring healing and wholeness in retreat at Iona and Ffald-y-Brenin and in conference entitled “The power of prayer”.
- * listening to God in retreat at Poole and in conference entitled “O for a closer walk with God”.
- * spending more time with her family

Moving home twice !

Having recently moved manse in Buckingham Revd Tim Edworthy finds himself in a new space for Sunday worship.

Having some years ago moved the three different worship offerings from the Well Street premises to the Hall of the Royal Latin School the decision was reached this year to relocate to the new Lace Hill Academy (on a new estate not too far from Tesco's and even nearer to the new manse).

The new premises hold out the prospects of being a place of welcome to a new and growing community on Sundays. An adjacent community centre could be a place from which the church can share the love of God through weekday activities. Meanwhile, the new manse is already a base for prayer and other meetings as Well Street plans how to make the most of the opportunities that God has given!

CIRCUIT DIARY

more at www.bbbcircuit.org.uk

Apr	13	Wed	7.30pm	Circuit Meeting at Silverstone
May	15	Sun	6.00pm	Circuit Pentecost Praise at Brackley
Jun	9	Thu	7.30pm	Circuit LP and WL meet at Silverstone
Jun	18	Sat		Circuit Section Prayer events
	24-29	Fri-Sun		Circuit Children's Weekend at The Quarries

b

Doing it by Sections

u

- like Goldilocks?

Prayer is the Christian's vital breath reads a hymn. Most would agree that prayer is equally vital for a Circuit, too. For several years a Saturday in June has been reserved as a special day for the Circuit to pray. This year that day is 18 June and the intention is to meet as Sections: Bicester, Brackley (and Silverstone and Towcester) and Buckingham (Gawcott and Steeple Claydon and Thornborough). It is hoped that the section will feel like Goldilocks felt: not too big and not too small but just right!

l

l

Meeting people from one or two other churches, learning about what their issues are and how they are hoping deal with them and praying together would be a good thing: so do join in your section's day. Each section will let you have details during by the beginning of May.

e

Thinking big (names)!

t

There's more than a subtle difference between a *few* people wanting to enjoy a Circuit event and *lots* of people wanting not to miss one! We are hoping to move from one to the other.

i

How might we we do that? Our idea is to arrange just one event each year with a famous-name guest. Graham Kendrick, Gervaise Phinn, Steve Wild, Adrian Plass have been mentioned. No promises yet but the proverbial feelers are being put out.

n

Have you any suggestions: tell your minister or a Circuit Steward.

To CUBA and back

Revd Steve Mann writes:

Many of you will already be aware that in January I had the privilege of spending two weeks with the Methodist Church in Cuba. This was a trip organised by an organisation called 'Christians Aware' and my eight travelling companions were an ecumenical mixture of Methodists, Anglicans and an URC!

Why Cuba? A few years ago I heard a visiting group of Cuban Methodist pastors relating the tremendous changes God was bringing to their church. They spoke so inspiringly that when the opportunity came I felt I had to go.

Like all of Cuba, the Methodist Church was hit dramatically by the 1958/9 revolution. At that time many of the pastors and missionaries were American and almost all of these left either immediately or over the next few years. Churches in use and not vacated were allowed to continue albeit with restrictions but a ban was placed on any building of new

churches and that ban still officially remains. After the revolution the church was left with just a handful of pastors and about 2,000 members.

The next few decades were understandably tough but, from the late 1980s, the church has seen great revival. Outside factors may have helped – the Soviets pulled out in 1990 leading to a period of great hardship and a fuel crisis meant the government allowed worship to take place in private houses – but speak to Cuban Methodists and they will point to prayer; fasting and the work of God's Holy Spirit.

The statistics are dramatic. In 1990 the membership was 5,000. By 2000 this had risen to 16,000 and today is well over 42,000. The great majority of these are under 30! In 2009 there were 273 churches, just over 100 of these



dating from before the revolution and the rest were houses converted into churches more recently. By 2014 this number had exceeded 400 and is still rising. In addition there are approximately 800 missions - church plants from a mother church which are intended with time to grow into churches in their own right. The vision is for every community in Cuba to have access to a Methodist church.

On our travels we visited a number of churches ranging from large congregations numbered in the hundreds to small missions in very poor communities. Everywhere we found exuberant worship and great levels of expectation. Services included not just a call to commit lives to Jesus but also invitations to come forward for prayer ministry. That expectation also looks forward and great store is placed upon training up the next generation of leaders. We visited the Methodist Evangelical Seminary in Havana where pastors are trained as well as one of their extensions centres, one of 35 around the country providing training for lay leadership. The extension centre we visited reaches over 400 people on an evening class basis.

People ask me what I have brought home with me. These are wonderful, welcoming people and a scenic island but I guess above all I bring back an uncomfortable truth. If prayer, fasting and an expectation of the Spirit's moving are key then we are a long way from being revived. There is a great poverty in the prayer life of most UK churches and, if I'm honest, in my prayer life too. We must do more than give lip service to the vital priority of prayer.

As we approach our circuit wide day of prayer on Saturday 18th June, let me challenge you as I am challenging myself. How serious are we about God reviving our British church as he has done the Cuban church? And are we prepared to really commit ourselves to prayer in order to achieve it?

PRAISE at PENTECOST

Join the Circuit in celebration

6.00pm
Sunday 15 May
at Brackley