

**Christ Church Barnstaple
Methodist/United Reformed
Special Away Day Review and News Update September 2025**



**Embracing the Future
Christ Church Barnstaple & Team Away Day
14 June 2025**

**Whether or not you attended either or both these
events, please take and read this
“post Away Day” special edition magazine
with reference to the
Ilfracombe & District Circuit Church Review
meeting held on 23 July.**

Compiled by Paula Littlewood

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A resume of what happened on the Away Day

On Saturday 14 June around 24 people gathered in the hall of Westward Ho! Baptist Church to “Embrace our Future”. It was all very informal with quiet and creative rooms available off the hall.



We began with a short time of worship linking our thoughts for the day with Pentecost and sang the hymn “Come to us, Creative Spirit”.

Come to us, creative Spirit,
in our father’s house,
every natural talent foster,
hidden skills arouse,
that within your earthly temple,
wise and simple
may rejoice.

Poet, painter, music-maker,
all your treasures bring;
artist, actor, graceful dancer,
make your offering;
join your hands in celebration!
Let creation
shout and sing!

Word from God eternal springing,
fill our minds, we pray;
and in all artistic vision
give integrity.
May the flame, within us burning,
kindle yearning
day by day.

In all places and for ever
glory be expressed
to the Son, with God the Father
and the Spirit blest.
In our worship and our living,
keep us striving
towards the best.

David Mowbray
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726 in Singing the Faith

Our opening act of worship included these readings:

Acts 2 v 1-4: “When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.”

Reflection: What can this mean for us? What happened on that first day of Pentecost affirms not that we human beings have to invest in some divine plan, but rather that God has invested in us. God promises to empower each one of us here today and to empower our Churches in North Devon along with the whole Church worldwide. All are included. The Holy Spirit doesn't speak solely through church leaders. The story of Pentecost reminds us that God speaks and acts powerfully through the likes of you and me, in any place, at any moment, and even when we're least expecting it.

Then we heard words of Paul to the Galatians, a church community which was struggling a bit at the time and then words of Jesus to Nicodemus who was struggling with his own personal faith.

Galatians 2 v 22-25: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit”.

John 3 v 5-8: “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. ⁶ Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”

In our afternoon act of worship, we sang the hymns:

O Lord, My God when I in awesome wonder by Stuart K. Hine

We are marching in the light of God (South African Traditional),

The Lord's my shepherd by Stuart Townsend

Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father by Thomas O. Chisholm.

The day was led by Deacon Ruth Richey, Mission Area Lead (North) for the South West Peninsula District of the Methodist Church. Deacon Joan Cole joined Ruth to help tell us about the history of Deaconesses in the Methodist Church and the role of Deacons in the church today. I found the explanations very helpful in understanding about these Ministers who are dedicated to a life of Prayer, Witness and Service. The Methodist Diaconal Order is “a Christ-centred, prayerful, pioneering Religious Order committed to modelling God’s love in action”.



Deacon Ruth called
on us all to
‘Embrace the Future’

We need
to remember
that God
is always with us.

We spent the day café style in small groups around tables with paper tablecloths. We were asked to write down what our Church does currently – and then think WHY we do these activities. Then we were challenged to think about their purpose going forward. Ruth said it was a bit like gardening: you look at your garden and think how it could be improved – take some plants out or move them around, or plant new ones to make the garden grow better. It was thought-provoking and challenging but also a time of love and teamwork. Everyone took part and we learned more about each other.

Rev Marilyn typed up what we wrote on our tablecloths. She and I have also tried to put what we wrote into some sort of order to make it a bit easier to think about. Let’s start with what we do in both Christ Church but also thinking of the other Circuit events:

WORSHIP

Sunday worship
Sunday Club
Café Church
Communion
Oasis
Local Preachers and Worship Leaders
Causeway

Special services e.g. Christingle
Funerals, Baptisms, Weddings
Hymnal (but we need more volunteers)
Thursday Zoom Service (Circuit)
Wednesday Services (Braunton, Norah
Bellot Court)

PASTORAL CARE

Church Friends
Share family celebrations
Welcoming
Caring for one another
Friendship
Talking, listening, supporting

DISCIPLESHIP

Word 4 Today
Bible Study (in Church / at home?)
Tuesday Prayer group
Tuesday communion (move from 1st Tues)
Circuit Lent Course
Circuit Advent Course
Zoom Bible Study (Monday)
Zoom Prayer Meetings (Muddiford)
Resources Centre

COMMUNITY LIFE (Church based)

Afternoon Tea
Maundy Thursday frugal Lunch
Hobnob (Circuit)
Sound It Out
Games Afternoon
Friendship Group
Sing for Your Supper
Christian Aid Big Brekkie
Parents and Toddlers

Twins / Multiples group
Brownies and Rainbows
Community Groups use of rooms
Concerts
Winter Fayre
Spring Fayre
Fundraising Quiz
Action for Children

Jubilee Singers, Choral Society, Community Choir and Orchestra
Yeo Valley School: Carol Service, 'Eggy Drop', Experience Easter

AS PART OF THE COMMUNITY

Links with Norah Bellot Court (volunteers)
Support Foodbank
Links with schools
Volunteering in community: eg Community clubs, Memory Cafes, Fern Centre
Support Charities
Social Justice events
Contact with schools (Yeo Valley)
A Presence in the Community in Bear Street

ECUMENICAL LINKS

Churches Together

ORGANISATION / ADMIN

Elders Meeting
Church Secretary
Church Meeting
Finance Committee
Property Committee
Worship Group

Activities in the Other Churches in our Circuit Group

HIGH BICKINGTON

Café Church
Parish church links

FREMINGTON

Community groups
Knit and Natter
Blood Bikers coffee Morning
Light up a Life

STICKLEPATH

Open the Book
Lunch Club (Monthly)
Games Afternoon
Christingle
Hospital Chaplaincy
Zoom Bible Study

NEWPORT

Dance groups

OTHER THINGS WE COULD DO

White Board on display for volunteering opportunities
Band on Sunday
Worship at Home (needed post-Covid but now stopped – restart?)
Birthday Cake on Pentecost Sunday
Mention of birthdays for the month
Bereavement group
Transport – offers of assistance if people have difficulty getting to Church
Bible Study for mums – would need volunteers to look after children
Prayer Partners
Alpha Course
More “Church Friendly” Services
Consult other churches with large congregations to see what they do
Use Facebook more to invite to special events
Update Bible Class using more accessible resource
Book Group (non-biblical) but perhaps themed e.g. on morality and decisions
Restart links with schools (Open the Book)
Exchange of books
Men’s breakfast – start again
Curry night

In the afternoon, after a delicious lunch, we gathered around a large tree that Ruth had drawn. This was the focal point of our afternoon worship. We filled in the trunk and branches with words describing what had helped make us the people who we are today, and what had been important in our growth as a Church community. We added fruit - the positive thoughts and then fallen leaves - things we identified as negative. Finally, we were invited to add a personal word or phrase to summarise how we felt because of the day.

So here is a summary of the: Away Day Tree - see what you can spot that you might identify with (though some of the “leaves” did not remain legible after the day so apologies if your thought or word is missed off):

In the trunk and running through the branches: *What from the past has shaped us as individual members of the congregation e.g. People ... Traditions ... Symbols*

“Jesus	Family
Holy Spirit	Parents
God’s word (Bible)	Christian Upbringing
Bible studies	Family holidays
Psalms	Friends
Sunday School	People of faith
Holy Communion	Salvation Army and Church Army
House groups	Bible Christians
John and Charles Wesley	Brownies and Girl Guides
Graham Kendrick	Girls Brigade
Geoffrey Beaumont	Pilots, URC
Rev. Glad	BURC SOC, METHSOC, URC SOC
Sister Janet Marley	and CONGSOC at University
College and Mission	Candles
Music	Whitsuntide Walks
Organ music	Choir
Liturgy	Ginger group
The Alpha Course	Kindness in Grief
The Environment	The NHS”

Fruit (Apples): *What has the congregation celebrated and what has brought joy?*

“Love	Being welcomed
Fellowship	Each Other
Picnics	Understanding
Birthday	Community
Family	Easter
Worship	Preaching/Sermons
Oasis	Ukele
Baptism	Smiling faces
Flower arrangements	Children
Singing to the Digibox	Support”
Sound it Out	

Fallen leaves: *What has the congregation struggled with in the past and in the present; What do you feel are your losses?*

“Loss of older friends
Money
Decisions
Irrelevant hymns
Lack of peace

Loss of direction
Financial concerns
Doubt
Not being heard
Misunderstandings”

Green Leaves: *What word or words do you think God has placed on your heart from today’s gathering?*

“Prayer
Vision
Hope
Community – “it is ok”
Hope for the future
Hope through Faith
New shoots of Hope

Solidarity
Re-dedication
Think and Pray
Mind the Gap
Giving the Peace
Persevere
Patience”

“Love and support each other
Work to end conflict in the world
Pray for peace and understanding
Comfort and joy in the church family
To love and to be loved when offered
Thank you for one lovely day”



This is what Dot said of her experience at the Away Day:

“Our first session was entitled: What do you think goes on at our Church. As we made our lists, we realised just how many activities we partake in, ranging from different Church services, e.g. Causeway, Oasis, Cafe Church to Concerts, Coffee Mornings, Choir Practices, the list went on and on. We were asked to evaluate whether all these activities were of help to the Church, or were they a drain on resources, but the discussion was useful in that it made it clear how much we do achieve.

The second session was entitled: What else should we be offering. There followed a very good discussion, with suggestions of what we could aspire to, some impractical, and some worthy of further consideration.

At the end of a long morning session, we partook of an excellent lunch, and then several of us went for a walk along the seafront, enjoying the sunshine and a chat. We then had time to look at examples of different craftworks which had been brought in by many attendees. The skills of so many were outstanding and just shows what hidden talent we have in our Church.

After lunch Deacon Ruth displayed the outline of a large tree and asked everyone to contribute words to describe what had brought them to faith, what had contributed to our growth as a Church, and the positives and negatives in our Church at the moment. The words were written in the appropriate places.

It was so good to meet as a group and have ideas and suggestions flowing backwards and forwards between us. I felt inspired and uplifted by the whole day and feel huge gratitude to everyone who helped to plan and organise such a wonderful day.”

What happened next?

As you may be aware (or even attended) there was a meeting at this Church open to all who had an interest in the church. This was part of the Ilfracombe & Barnstaple Circuit Church Reviews The meeting, led by Reverend Tracey Darling and Deacon Rith Richey, was held on the morning of 23 July and was attended by a cross section of church members and friends.

In her introduction, Ruth referred back to the Away Day and said that the purpose of the meeting was to continue the conversation that we had started of our own volition but that the Review is part of something bigger. The aim was to:

- gain a comprehensive understanding of the current state and activities of the church;
- to provide time for reflection on the local context, mission, and God’s work within the church;
- evaluate the practical aspects of being a church; and
- discern the ongoing work and understand what God is currently asking of the church in its mission within the local community.

The same format and questions have been applied to each church in the circuit and extensive notes were made and compiled. A draft summary was sent out a few weeks ago for us to present to Church Meeting and approve with or without amendment.

I attended the meeting and have seen the notes and summary so, hopefully, I can give an accurate summary here. I didn't count but I reckon there were around 20 people in attendance and that's not bad when you think our current membership stands at 55.

The opening worship centred around Hebrews Chapters 10 and 11 where we are told that faith is the assurance of things hopeful and not seen. You may remember that a series of questions were circulated, and we went through them in turn.

There were similarities with the approach taken for the Away Day in that we considered: what brings us joy in Christ Church; what is challenging and what things are draining us rather than being life-giving; what missional activities are we engaged in; how do we sustain and nurture our discipleship and faith; what growth has there been in the last 5 years and what are our hopes for the future? Many of the comments made mirrored what had been written on the Away Day Tree.

There was also a bit of pragmatic stuff like how big is our membership (55), do we have a balanced budget (no but we can pay our assessment for the next 2 years), what sort of state is our property in (fair); are there issues over roles and responsibilities (comments made were that we need a health and safety officer, a church administrator and another treasurer so that Kathy can step down. We were also asked to consider what help we wanted from District and the URC Synod – remember that we are a joint Methodist/URC and there is money available in both.

Finally, we were asked “what do you sense God is saying to Christ Church Barnstaple?” These were the responses recorded by Ruth:

- Listen to me, listen to Jesus – we need to pray.
- Discern where God is leading.
- Trust me and each other. Take risks, I will be there for you.
- Invite people to special services (e.g. Brownies)
- Accept change and move forward.
- Move on holding his hand.
- You're not alone and you're part of something bigger.
- Be encouraged, change and celebrate.

In our “wash-up” meeting from the Away Day we agreed we should send round some sort of summary for everyone to read. It was also opportune that we had this Review in July as well.

We hope this “special edition” will provide food for thought for all associated with Christ Church Barnstaple and will give Sheralee an idea of how we think at present. I am sure you, like me, are excited about her imminent arrival and look forward to all that she brings.

Prayer plays a big part in our Church life, so I am closing with:

A Prayer said at the Away Day

(shared by Jenny Newman)

“As people tend their gardens may we plant seeds of hope everywhere, with faith-filled prayer, words of encouragement, and joy. As we prepare for all that is to come our way, using the tools of faith, hope and love, love for our God and love for one another. Your words of hope and life will keep us planting, reaping and sowing. In time, You will help what You have called us to plant to sprout. We shall recall the Past, celebrate the Present and embrace the Future.

Lord, please accept all these prayers in and through the Name of Your dear Son, Jesus. AMEN”

This seems a good moment to remind you of a **few dates coming up at the Church.**

There is a **Tuesday prayer group** which currently receives a thought for the day and prayers every Tuesday by email. If you do not receive this and would like to do so, please speak to Shirley Baxter or any Elder. The prayer meetings will also take place in person in the Church on Tuesday 21st October and 18th of November, at 10am. Hopefully we will also have tea and coffee on offer. Please come along to support this prayerful event which will continue into the New Year if there is enough support.

Don't forget our Annual **Harvest Festival service on Sunday 28th September at 10.30 am**

The service will be led by Rev Terry Spencer and followed by a bring-and-share lunch. All are welcome to either or both. Details about gifts will be announced in Church but we will be distributing all foodstuffs and donations of money.

There will be a Quiz and Pasty evening with Dave Stevens on Saturday 18th October at 7pm. All are welcome to join in this popular event. Get your thinking caps on! Bring a team or come or join one on the night.

Our **Winter Fair** is an important fundraising event for the Church so please come and support it on **Saturday 8th November, 10am - 2 pm.** We will be serving light lunches and refreshments. Our stalls will be Books and Puzzles, Cakes, Gifts, Raffle. We will start collecting from Sunday 5th October.

September Diary Dates

Reminder: Welcome Service for Deacon Sheralee Devitt on Monday

1 September at 7.00pm here at Christ Church Barnstaple. ALL are welcome at this special service. Refreshments will be served afterwards.

Please come to welcome Sheralee, her husband, Brendan and daughter, Leah, as they join us here in North Devon. Sheralee will be a Minister in the Circuit, working with Rev. Tracey Darling; as a Deacon she has a ministry of 'Prayer, Witness and Service'. She will be working with Christ Church Barnstaple, and also with the congregations and communities at Newport, Sticklepath, Fremington and High Bickington.

Other dates:

Sun	7 th	10.30am 3.00pm	Morning worship with Holy Communion: Rev. Tracey Darling Causeway
Mon	8 th	10.00am	Sound It Out
Sun	14 th	10.30am 4.30pm	Morning Worship: Pastor Jason Thorpe Café Church
Sun	21 st	10.30am	Morning Worship: Deacon Sheralee Devitt
Mon	22 nd	10.00am	Sound It Out
Sat	27 th	2.30 pm	Games Afternoon 2.30 – 4.00pm
Sun	28 th	10.30am	HARVEST FESTIVAL: Rev. Terry Spencer (followed by lunch)

Regular meetings restarting in September:

Tuesdays: Rainbows and Brownies 5.30pm (start 9 Sept)

Wednesdays: Parents and Toddlers 9.30am (start 10 Sept)

Thursdays: Twins (Multiples) 10.00 – 12.00am (to be confirmed)

Friendship Group meetings for September tbc. Winter programme will be circulated in October. Please ask an Elder if you are not yet a member of the group but would like to join. All welcome.

Information for the October News Update: please by Monday 15 September to Paula Littlewood (paula_littlewood@btinternet.com) so copies can be printed for Sunday 28 September