

Circuit Stewards Report for the Methodist Year 2024/2025

The year has been marked by a series of welcomes and farewells amongst our ministerial team. In November 2024, Revd. Georgina and family were welcomed into her manse at St Amand Drive, Abingdon. During the summer months of 2025 we bid farewell to Deacon Selina Nisbett as she moved to her new post, and to Revd. Keith Underhill our Circuit Superintendent, as he retired (or 'sat down', as Methodists say). In August 2025 we welcomed Revd. Georgina as our new Circuit Superintendent. From the Circuit Steward team, we said farewell to Carolyn Roche as our Senior Circuit Steward. For those to whom we have said farewell, we offer a deep sense of gratitude.

Our Circuit Leadership Team (CLT) now consists of Revd. Georgina Bondzi-Simpson, Revd. Bruce Thompson, Libby Hawkness-Smith (Community Chaplain), and the Circuit Steward team of Mary Hancock (Circuit Property), Anne Matthews (Senior Circuit Steward) Neil Oastler, and Gordon Skidmore (Circuit Treasurer).

Our previous year was marked by a focus on circuit sustainability, something that will continue this year. The outcomes of the Circuit Plus consultations and the reduction in our staffing marked a transition towards ensuring support for our circuit staff, and that we turned our attention towards strengthening the lay contribution to church life within our circuit. The need for a Circuit Administrator was widely supported, and during the summer of 2025, Neil Oastler took forward the process, and we are delighted to say that Jane Hawes was appointed and took up her post on September 1st. Many thanks to Neil for his valuable work to achieve this excellent outcome, which will help to relieve the administrative burdens which fall on Revd. Georgina and Revd. Bruce. For the sustainability of our worship life, the Revd. Bruce has been running workshops for our lay community offering training in Local Arrangement leadership. This has been widely supported and welcomed, and the process is ongoing into 2025 – next date is 27th September. Please consider whether you might get involved in leading worship when there is a Local Arrangement service in your church.

Regarding wider sustainability issues, CLT efforts to build links with the Oxford Circuit have been ongoing during the year. Revd. Keith was very aware of the pressures experienced by the Oxford Circuit staff during 2025 which have slowed things moving along. We hope to make progress with this in the connexional year 2025/2026, and to look for links with other neighbouring circuits.

We have been pleased to welcome the Circuit Futures initiative, led by Revd. Georgina during the early part of 2025. This has involved consulting with every circuit Church Council and Church Meeting (Trinity) about mission, asking these bodies to respond to a series of questions. The responses were gathered by circuit stewards in attendance, and a summary was produced and circulated. Going forward, it is hoped to organise a Mission Day in May 2026 (date to be confirmed) to enable our seven churches to think in practical terms about their core focus.

Circuit Stewards continue to be very busy regarding our manses. Having made a huge effort to provide a considerably updated and adapted manse at St Amand Drive, we are now involved in the process of selling the Wantage manse at Heywoods Close and the Abingdon manse at Kingston Close. We hope to conclude the sale of Heywoods Close in the very near future, and are progressing with Kingston Close. Following the closure of Childrey Methodist Church in October of 2024, the CLT spent time consulting with community groups and representatives at Childrey, with a view to discovering if there could be community use. Despite there being ideas, there appeared to be no management capability for the running of the church as a community facility. The view of the CLT therefore was to move towards a sale of the church (decision at September Circuit Meeting 2025).

In May 2025 we held an accreditation service for Belinda Kaur as a Local Preacher in our circuit and offer her our congratulations! We give thanks for the commitment of all our local preachers who serve us so well Sunday by Sunday. If anyone feels called to become a Local Arrangement Leader, a Local Preacher, or a Circuit Steward, or would like to find out more about any of these roles, please talk to a member of the Circuit Staff or your local Church Steward, and they would be delighted to help.

We wish Revd. Georgina and her team every success in the coming connexional year 2025/2026. She will have the support of all of us as we move forward in faith.