

# Newsletter



SITTINGBOURNE METHODIST CHURCH

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[www.sittingbournemethodist.org.uk](http://www.sittingbournemethodist.org.uk)



## From the Minister

### Spring hopes

**Spring is a proper start to the year. It cries out for hope and new life. Things really open up, and after a long period of wearing extra layers we go out in t-shirts, feel the desire to plant, to walk and to spend more time outdoors. Compared to dull January and February, spring certainly gives us all reasons to enjoy the days.**

Spring is also the season of various festivals celebrating life. From my home country of Slovakia we still preserve the spring festival called "sibacka", where all females are gently whipped with weeping willow whips and all men get chocolate or even a small amount of money. So unfair, but in exchange it's believed that all this will bring about more beauty and more prosperity. Many of these traditions have their origin in pagan beliefs that nature is regenerated and all will be well again. Easter eggs and the Easter Bunny are very modern remnants and symbols

of this hope. In churches we kind of accept these because they are made of chocolate and even a firm belief in Jesus doesn't give you the immunity against the chocolate temptation!

But the reality of this broken world has its reminders regardless of the season we live in. The horrors of war in Ukraine, the rising cost of living in UK, continuing to live in the shadow of Covid and suspiciously we have not heard much about global warming lately, but I do not think it is all sorted. As much as we can improve our world we have not invented a machine or pills to change the human heart. If we could, and do it at the rate and speed of our technological advances, we might be better off.

Our hearts can be changed but that remains the work of God. Only he can touch our lives and bring that essential change which can overcome everything else. This is the work of God and Easter has its main say in it.

*"There are some people,  
who say we cannot tell*

*Whether we are saved or whether  
all is well.*

*They say we only can hope and  
trust that it is so,*

*But I was there when it happened and  
I guess I ought to know" (Johnny Cash)*

When Jesus carried his cross he sensed not only pain but also loneliness and rejection, even from his Father, so it seemed. He died of a broken heart. It was not the pain and physical damage to his body, but his heart broke from the horror that all that he had said and done had been misunderstood, rejected and even mocked by people. How terrible to die and enter the grave with such a mind-set. Yet he knew it was the only way. What Jesus went through, for us, was the final sacrifice. There is no better way. No new-fangled idea can better what Jesus did on the cross. Worship band City Alight in the song "Yet not I, but Christ in me" sings:... *what gift of grace is Jesus my Redeemer, there is no more for heaven now to give".*

With all our advances in science we cannot find anything to replace the Easter cross and what it means. As we look to spring for fresh hope, watch the daffodils and tulips as they show us new life from the dark earth, let us also look to Jesus. He never changes, neither does the Easter message. It is a simple and perfect reply from Heaven to our loneliness and brokenness.

Easter blessings to you all!

Robert



# Dear church family and friends...

**As a church family we are about to decide whether or not our church building should be registered for conducting weddings for same sex couples and blessings for couples in a same sex relationship.**

This is a follow up from last year's Methodist Conference vote, where the conference finally decided on this matter after a long discussion. The decision was that the Methodist Church now recognises two definitions of marriage, one traditional which we are familiar with, and a new definition stating that marriage is between any two persons as legally permitted.

We all understand that this may create tension between three groups (pro, against, undecided), which always emerges when this topic is discussed and decisions are made. Please consider the concept of "*contradictory convictions*", as this is the suggested way forward for our journey together.

Here are some steps to help us make this decision together:

- Pray - Read the Newsletter - Participate at Annual Church Meeting

**At the Annual Church Meeting on Thursday 12 May 2022, 2pm,** all members will have the opportunity to participate in an Indicative vote. This will not be our final decision but helps to guide the Church Council in its final resolution. This vote will be by secret ballot, following the procedure as recommended by Connection.

#### **What is our task at this meeting?**

To decide if at this time, we do or do not want to register/make available our premises, Sittingbourne High Street Methodist Church, for same sex weddings.

#### **What is not our task at this meeting?**

To decide whether any Minister, or lay member, will or will not marry same-sex couples. That is a decision for each person to make for themselves, whatever the outcome of our vote as a church council for our premises.

#### **Consider the following before you cast your vote:**

1. What the Bible tells us.
2. What the Church tells us.
3. What my/others' stories tell us.
4. What our reasoning tells us.

#### **Indicative vote**

*(This is not the final decision. We are assessing where we are as a group)*

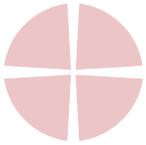
All members will be asked to choose one of five options to the question:

"Should we register/make available our premises for same sex weddings or not"

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Do not know
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree

*continued on page 4*





# Pilgrimage of Faith

1990 – 2021 : A brief history of a Methodist Pilgrimage of Faith regarding human sexuality

**1990**

Report of the Conference Commission on Human Sexuality

**1992**

The Conference Statement on a Christian understanding of Family Life, the Single Person and Marriage

**1993**

## Resolutions on Human Sexuality

**1.** The Conference, affirming the joy of human sexuality as God's gift and the place of every human being within the grace of God, recognises the responsibility that flows from this for us all. It therefore welcomes the serious, prayerful and sometimes costly consideration given to this issue by The Methodist Church.

**2.** All practices of sexuality, which are promiscuous, exploitative or demeaning in any way are unacceptable forms of behaviour and contradict God's purpose for us all.

**3.** A person shall not be debarred from church on the grounds of sexual orientation in itself.

**4.** The Conference reaffirms the traditional teaching of the Church on human sexuality; namely chastity for all outside marriage and fidelity within it. The Conference directs that this affirmation is made clear to all candidates for ministry, office and membership, and having established this, affirm that the existing procedures of our church are adequate to deal with all such cases.

**5.** The Conference resolves that its decision in this debate shall not be used to form the basis of a disciplinary charge against any person in relation to conduct alleged to have taken place before such decisions were made.

**6.** Conference recognises, affirms and celebrates the participation and ministry of lesbians and gay men in the church. Conference calls on the Methodist people to begin a pilgrimage of faith to combat repression and discrimination, to work for justice and human rights and to give dignity and worth to people whatever their sexuality.

**1998**

**Preparing for Marriage**, including a further discussion of the 1993 resolutions

**2005**

**Pilgrimage of Faith** – more work to do/start; reaffirmation of 1993 Resolutions

**2006**

## Living with Contradictory Convictions paper

**Pilgrimage of Faith** – members and ministers may enter civil partnerships; no services of blessing on our premises

**2007**

## Review of the 1993 resolutions on Human Sexuality

**2014**

**Marriage & Civil Partnerships** – members and ministers may marry those of same sex; no opt-in to Marriage Equality legislation but prayers allowed on our premises

**2015**

**Homophobia Definition and Guidance** - A resource produced by the Equality Diversity and Inclusion Committee

**2019**

**God in Love Unites Us** Marriage and Relationships Report (2019)

Provisional Legislation

- Mixed economy approach
- Marriage defined as *one man one woman or two people*
- Celebration of civil partnerships
- Conscience clause for ministers
- Conscience clause for managing trustees to register for same-sex marriages or not

**2021**

## God in Love Unites Us

COHABITATION

*"The Conference affirms the following summary understanding of cohabitation: The Church recognises that the love of God is present within the love of two human beings who are drawn to each other, and who enter freely into some form of life-enhancing committed relationship with each other, whether that be through informal cohabitation or a more formal commitment entered into publicly."*

*"As a Church we wish to celebrate that the love of God is present in these circumstances, even if that grace is not responded to or even discerned by the people concerned. The Church has an important calling, therefore, to point to the presence of God's love within such relationships, and to encourage people to respond to it in the renewing and deepening [by whatever means] of their commitment."*

SAME-SEX MARRIAGE

*"The conference consents in principle to the marriage of same-sex couples on Methodist premises throughout the Connexion and by Methodist ministers, probationers or members in so far as the law of the relevant jurisdiction permits or requires and subject to compliance with such further requirements, if any, as that law imposes."*

**2021**

The Conference voted to ban Conversion Therapy

## What now?

Methodist ministers, probationers and any member the law allows to conduct weddings, can choose if they do or not want to officiate at same-sex weddings as a Methodist representative.

All Methodist Trustees (Church Councils) are now able to vote to decide if they do, or do not, want to register / make available their premises for same-sex weddings.

All Methodists are asked to work through what it means to live with contradictory convictions.

# Living with Contradictory Convictions

## A Model Statement prepared for the Methodist Conference 2016 by the Marriage and Relationships Task Group

We continue to believe that God has been revealed in Jesus Christ, accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour, and live in communion with God and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

We cherish our place within Christ's Church, recognising that it is Christ alone who chooses, calls and confirms us as members of his church, the body of Christ.

While we may not all agree about everything, we recognise the importance of the truths which bind us together, as well as the issues which currently divide us.

Therefore, we resolve:

- To engage with each other openly, honestly, prayerfully and graciously
- To treat each other with respect and dignity, recognising the sincerity of the faith of those who may see things differently
- To seek to learn from one another as we travel together as fellow pilgrims
- To renounce all language and behaviours that attempt to coerce others to change their views or beliefs
- To seek, as far as conscience allows, to preserve the fellowship of Christ's Church
- To unite under the authority of scripture as we seek to live as authentic Christian disciples in our own generation

# The Conference Vote

The Methodist Conference UK of 2021 voted in support of a change to the definition of marriage.

The Standing Orders of the Methodist Church UK now acknowledge two definitions of marriage:

"The Methodist Church believes that marriage is given by God to be a particular channel of God's grace, and that it is in accord with God's purposes when a marriage is a life-long union in body, mind and spirit of two people who freely enter it. Within the Methodist Church this is understood in two ways: that marriage can only be between a man and a woman; that marriage can be between any two people. The Methodist Church affirms both understandings and makes provision in its Standing Orders for them."

Thus both the traditional one man and one woman definition continues to be official Methodist teaching, alongside a second view which endorses marriage between any two people of either gender.



## Workshop on God in Love Unites Us

Presentations by the Revd Mark Rowland and the Revd Dr David Hull on the report God in Love Unites Us held at Sherborne Methodist Church.

**Please note this video was originally broadcast before the decision of Conference last year, but may answer a few questions.**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nYFRMbC5g0&t=110s>

# Half-yearly Financial Report

## Our financial situation continues to be challenging.

At this half-yearly stage we are showing a deficit of -£9,484.34, slightly better than the same period last year which was -£10,542. We still have two quarters assessments to pay totaling £20,330. The average monthly giving so far this Connexional year has been £2,100 a month (last year £2,323). We now brace ourselves once again for the escalating costs of energy as the fuel price cap comes off next month. What that will mean is completely unknown, but it certainly won't contain good news.

We are hoping that Gift Aid will make a contribution of around £4,500 to the budget and with your continued generosity Gift Day may yield something around £2,900.

Next to giving by our loyal members, our other main stream of income comes from room hire lettings. All lettings have been seriously affected throughout Covid-19 so our income has been drastically reduced. A long standing user of our premises has been the Mackinnon Dance School who recently had a setback as Mrs. Tina Keely suffered a serious freak accident, so the school was unable to continue teaching budding ballet dancers.

Although not fully recovered Tina has returned today (14-3-22) to continue her work in a reduced capacity for the time being.

Optivo continues to be a faithful user of our premises; one of their latest courses which starts this coming Saturday is on self-defence. New to us is Alcoholics Anonymous who have started weekly recovery classes entitled 'Road to Recovery' in our lounge every Friday evening. The Sittingbourne Society use our lounge quarterly for their interesting local issue meetings.

The 'Lion of Judah' Messianic Church also continues to use our lounge for monthly fellowship meetings as they have done over the last five years or so.

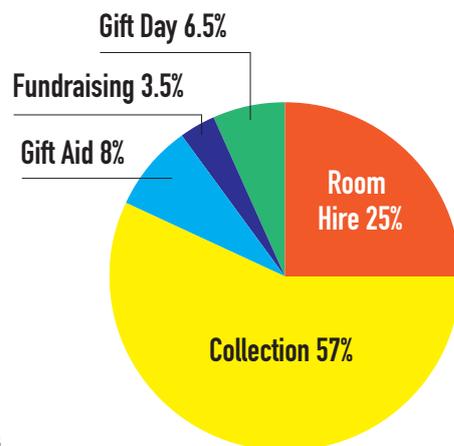
There are no immediate calls on any major property issues.

There will be an additional financial report at our Annual Church Meeting on 12 May.

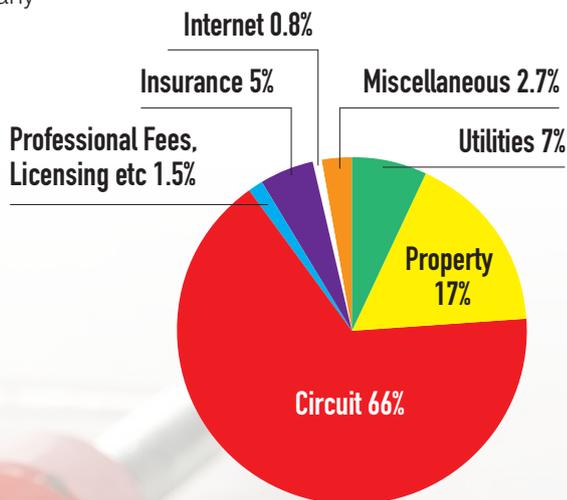
**Tony Brown**  
Treasurer

## BUDGET 2021/22

### Income



### Expenditure



# Pastoral Report

## Called to become...

On page 1 of a booklet entitled 'Pastoral Visitors Notes' published by the Methodist Church, there is a meditation called 'Become', that is just what pastoral visiting is: a 'calling'.

All our pastoral visitors have had a challenging two years, being unable to visit people in their homes (although a garden visit was achievable, especially in the lovely summer of 2020).

On the last page of this booklet there's a prayer for standing on the doorstep, as though the writer must have known something back in 1998 that we didn't.

Pastoral care has continued well during the pandemic, and even though we were not able to visit the wonder of technology came into its own. We remembered those who hadn't got computers or smart TVs by sending a card, which is always acceptable at any time. We remember birthdays, anniversaries, bereavements....

Our pastoral visitors send a birthday card to those on their list. Please uplift

pastoral visitors in prayer as most of their work, like many other jobs in the church, goes on unseen. It is a valuable job, strengthened by friendship over the years, as we become aware of people's spiritual needs.

We have to respect confidentiality at all times so we must be sensitive to this and be prepared to listen deeply to troubled hearts, speak love gently. We welcome Sarah who is to become a pastoral visitor, which will be endorsed at the church Annual General Meeting on 12 May.

We now have a team of nine pastoral visitors. We thank our Minister Robert and his wife Rachel who visit not just in Sittingbourne Church, but Newington, Bearsted and Hope Street. The demand is great for Robert. We remember them both and all the family in our prayers, and all our pastoral team as they continue this valuable work.

**Linda Brown**  
Pastoral Coordinator

## Bible study: the power of the Gospel

The Bible study group continues to meet online via ZOOM. Sessions are well advertised on the church web page, thanks to a poster designed by PS.

We meet on Tuesdays at 2pm except during half terms. In January and February we had four sessions focusing on the theme: The power of the Gospel. Eight or nine people take part.

Lent season was shared with the circuit Zoom Study on Tuesdays at 7pm. The theme is: "Becoming Church" and these are led by different ministers. There is also an afternoon course on Mondays at 2:30pm led by the Revd Bonni-Belle called "Staying awake".

I'm not sure who will join any of these options at the moment, but we all see and continue to see the convenience of using ZOOM in this area of church life.

Robert Z

## Worship planning:

### living through lockdowns and emerging for Easter

The Worship consultation group meets to discuss and plan Sunday services.

Our last meeting was on 24 November when we planned services for Christmas. Unfortunately these did not take place as the resurgence of Covid forced a decision to close the church during Christmas season.

On 23 January we held a special service to (re)commission our pastoral visitors, an opportunity for the church to pray and support the people who offer this ministry. Following the service two people expressed an interest in joining the team. One of them is not at present a member of our church, which is a requirement for the role of pastoral visitor. However, we are delighted that Sarah P continues in her preparation and will join the team soon.

We also had a discussion about how to combine our live music band and screen projection of music in our worship. This resolved in the agreement that each service will be carefully prepared and both options will be considered.

The following is Just a brief outline for Lent, Easter and further ahead regarding Sundays and special services:

We continue to include a Lent liturgy at the start of each Sunday Service (resourced by LB)

There will be a Maundy Thursday Holy Communion jointly with Bearsted MCH and Newington. This will be held at Bearsted MCH at 7pm on 14 April 2022

There will also be joint services with the churches for which the Revd Robert is responsible:

29 May in Sittingbourne,  
31 July in Newington and  
30 October at Bearsted.

# Theology of Safeguarding

**As your safeguarding officer I recently attended a Webinar on the Theology of Safeguarding. This does sound rather daunting and in some ways it was, but it was also very interesting and thought provoking. Shown below is part of the introduction to the Theology of Safeguarding, and also some screen shots of the session.**

*Taken from the 2021 Conference Agenda document*

## Introduction

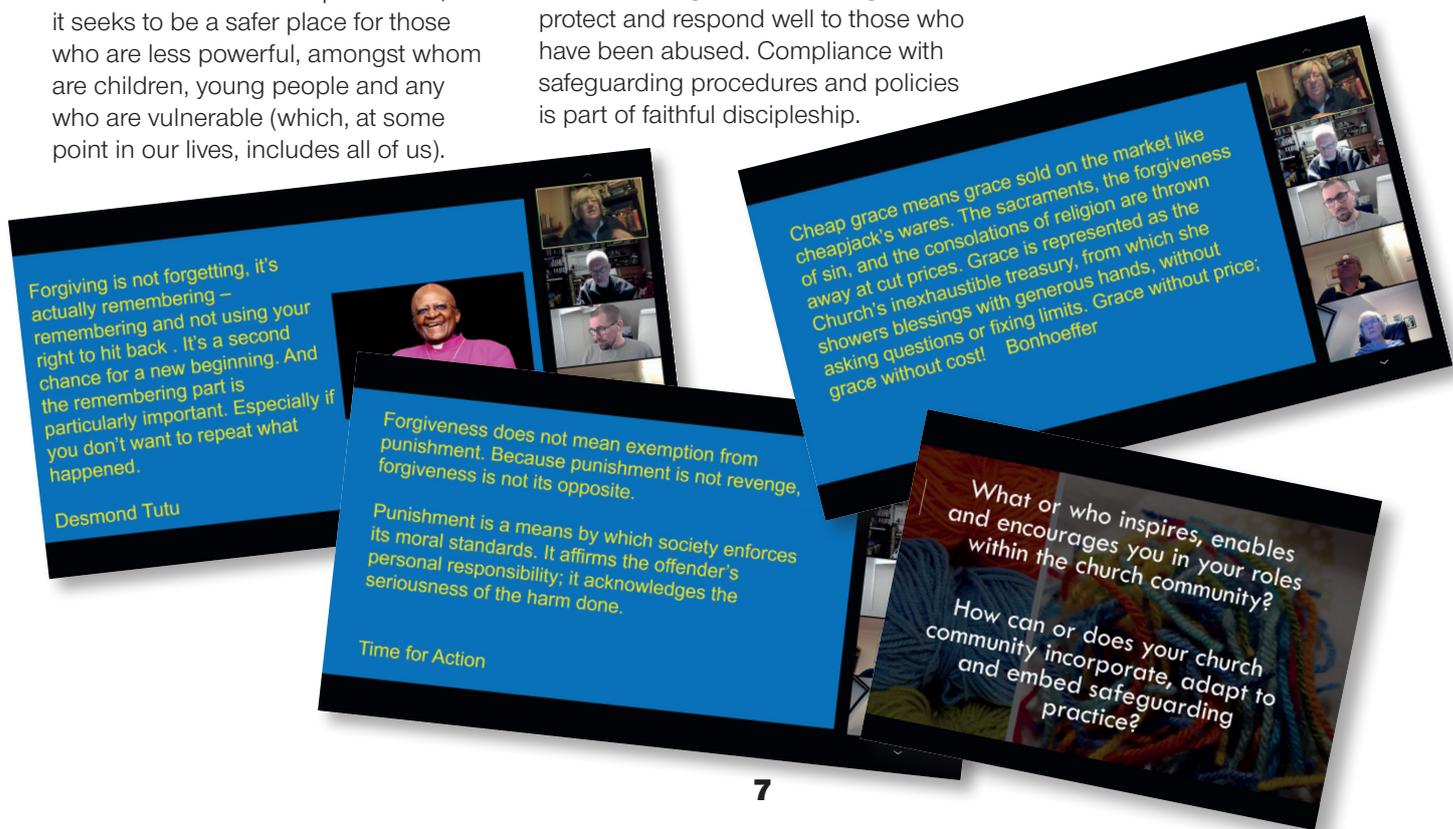
**1.** The calling of the Methodist Church is to respond to the gospel of God's love in Christ and to live out its discipleship in worship and mission. Its witness is in the sort of community that it is, including the welcome that it offers to others. It is the Methodist Church's intention to value every human being as part of God's creation and to be a place where the transformational love of God is embodied. As part of this, it seeks to be a safer place for those who are less powerful, amongst whom are children, young people and any who are vulnerable (which, at some point in our lives, includes all of us).

The Methodist Church is therefore committed to safeguarding as an integral part of its life and ministry.

**2.** Safeguarding is about the action the Church takes to promote a safer culture. In common with many other churches and organisations, the Methodist Church has undertaken to embody best practice in safeguarding. Since the early 1990s it has been developing and increasing its safeguarding policies and structures, seeking especially to learn from the experiences of those who have been hurt and abused in Christian communities. The Methodist Church affirms that this is a shared responsibility. Safeguarding policies and procedures concern how Methodists order their life together as the Body of Christ. Everyone associated with the Methodist Church has a role to play in promoting the welfare of children, young people and adults, in working to prevent abuse from occurring, and in seeking to protect and respond well to those who have been abused. Compliance with safeguarding procedures and policies is part of faithful discipleship.

**3.** Safeguarding is integral to the mission of the Methodist Church and a part of its response and witness to the love of God in Jesus Christ. This report seeks to explore the theology and practices that undergird and support the safeguarding work of the Methodist Church, and that help the Methodist people to create safer spaces for human flourishing. It is also written in the context of the results and recommendations of the Methodist Church's Past Cases Review and the British Government's Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse. It is hoped that this report will be a helpful resource for the Methodist people and further resources to help support reflection on the contents of this report can be found on the Methodist website.

For a copy of the Theology of Safeguarding (54 pages) please contact Paul: paul@skipp.org.uk



# Some Reports from Church Council

## **JC Club: growing up without us seeing it**

JC Club continues to meet once a month. We have seen a drastic fall in numbers compared to pre Covid. This is probably partly due to a lot of the children having grown up into teenagers who feel that they no longer fit in. This does pose a problem, because the main church service isn't always adapted for teenagers and since they come so sporadically it is hard to plan anything specifically for them. It is also due to communication. Some families need a lot more encouragement to return after the long break. Habits have changed, lives have moved on and JC Club needs to reflect this, but I'm not sure how right now.

We have regular helpers in Lawrence and Rachel. Eileen is getting back into it slowly, with understandable caution and has asked Richard to help her when she does take a turn. Paul and Kathy are always happy to help but we recognise their growing commitments within the rest of the church.

Eileen and Richard will take JC Club in April and then we hope to bring something together for a family orientated Easter Sunday activity as part of the Service rather than a separate JC Club as in previous years.

Please continue to pray for our young people. They have grown up without us seeing it. Some will be choosing GCSE subjects this year while others continue learning to read and write. We want to be relevant, Godly, fun loving, sharing our faith and knowledge of Jesus. Pray for the leaders too as we set such high goals!

## **Luncheon Club: (almost) normal service resumed**

Luncheon Club has met three times since Church Council approved its return in November.

We asked initially for a ceiling of 40 covers, and following the monitoring by CO2 monitors, we proposed an increase to 50 total – 45 diners and five serving staff. There will be two or three working in the kitchen. Serving and kitchen staff will eat following the meal.

The price increase has not affected demand but as we now only have two cooks, we envisage meeting twice per month, the next dates being 10 and 24 March. If all goes to plan, we should be able to contribute at least £1000 to church funds during the current financial year.

**Pat Goodger**

## **Wiggles Toddler Group**

Wiggles is a very positive group at the moment. It continues to run on a Tuesday morning with Rachel and Kathy as helpers. Briefly, before Christmas, Annette re-joined us but has been very busy lately with family. We have changed the price from £1 – £2. People seem happy to pay this and since we are now making money more quickly we have donated £100 to church funds to help pay for the heating we use in the colder months.

We have steadily built up a new group of people who seem to get on well together, grandparents and parents alike. Everyone who comes says how important toddler groups are so we feel we are doing a good thing. There are now many groups open again but our little group seems to be the favourite of the families who attend. We don't hide the fact that we are Christians nor we do push it on people through songs or activities and this seems to be

appreciated too according to some of the comments we have received.

We hope to continue. One mum has also offered to help out on weeks when we wouldn't be able to open due to lack of volunteers. Kathy and I both know this person and would be happy to have her help out should the need arise. Volunteers from the church family are always welcome, those with a degree in wooden train tracks and Lego preferred!

**Rachel Zacharova**

## **Youth club: a space for fun, friendship and faith**

Youth clubs came about as an idea to support the younger generation in our church family. We were hoping to gather what we have and create a space for fun, friendship and spirituality. This really started before lockdown with several Friday games evenings and we had a great time and good hopes. We had a team of five leaders at the time. As the lock down came we continued meetings on ZOOM but gradually lost the enthusiasm.

During the summer of 2021 we also met in King George's park for outdoor games on a Friday evening and had up to four families with parents staying to play as well.

Recently Rachel and Robert have been trying to restart clubs in person. The rear hall is booked for every third Friday of the month. We borrowed table tennis and table football from Newington. The church purchased a badminton net. These are all nicely stored in the back of the church. Unfortunately we only managed a few sessions, mostly attended by the minister's children and once we had an extra family join us. This continues to be on our hearts and we hope to attract and bless more young people. Please pray for us.