

THE GREEN SOCK

NEWS FROM THE SHROPSHIRE AND MARCHES METHODIST CIRCUIT

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Lockdown Leads Ministers to Develop New Skills

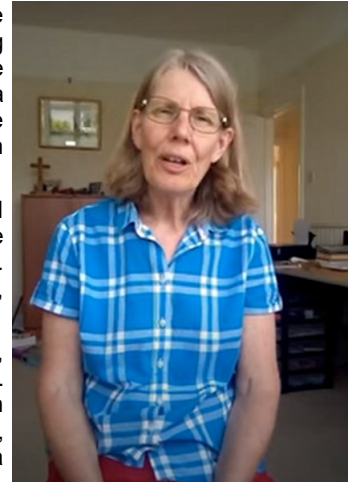
Rev Frances Biseker

My lockdown testimony is that I never knew I had an inner techy! Although the internet and all that stuff has only ever really been a means to an end, I'm finding that I'm able to navigate my way around Zoom, make a little video on my phone and record music with John Bacon, a great guitarist who with his wife Martina has joined us at Luston and Leominster chapels over the last 18 months. I might even concede that I enjoy doing these things; providing the tech works! People are extremely gracious when something goes wrong on Zoom or it crashes, so I'm not quite as nervous as I was.

With online services and Youtube, people are able to dip their toes into the water while still remaining anonymous. And with my video on Prayer* a complete stranger left a positive comment, and a friend's son who I haven't seen for several years watched and enjoyed it too. Leominster's Facebook page, which Margaret Wright posts on each day, has also had many, many likes.

At our end of the Circuit we have a virtual Coffee Morning each Monday for Leominster Church, and then a midweek Zoom service where we consistently have twenty-eight people joining in. There's nearly always someone new coming along and it's great that people across our patch who've never met before, get to "meet". How it will all shake down in the future we do not know, but using technology in the way we are currently doing is here to stay, and that can only be a good thing as it really seems to be reaching more people.

*As part of *Thy Kingdom Come* I promised folk at church that I'd have a go at making a video about prayer. It can be seen at: <https://youtu.be/oyxcsBkiefw>



Rev Frances Biseker

A TIME CHANGE BRINGS NEW WORSHIP TO LUDLOW

The discovery that people could still worship together without a building or the internet, brought great excitement to many members and friends from in and around Ludlow. We began straight away with Conference Call worship - everyone on the phone, no discrimination. It worked up to a point - and the thrill of hearing the cacophony as people shared the Lord's Prayer and the Grace at different times and paces was memorable. The numbers participating too was a great surprise. However, the poor sound quality and noises -of heavy breathing and "why doesn't s/he be quiet?"- became tiresome, so we decided to give Zoom a try. Alas the first experience was not good - Zoom wasn't used to so many people phoning in at 10.30! - in some ways a good problem to have. To avoid the morning rush, we've now shifted to 6pm (who would have dreamed of that!) and all is sweet - many can see one another (or not if they find that a distraction!), at least half still join by phone. Folk can join the Circuit Service or other online or televised services if they wish, in the morning. It has been a real blessing that people have been able to join regularly who wouldn't normally have been in our morning congregation. Our evening number of calls is in the mid-fifties - only slightly less than we had for the morning service. And a recording of the service is available by telephoning during the week. There are many who are very keen to get back to being together in the building, but this time has certainly opened up new opportunities which we shall take forward. The service can be joined Sundays at 6pm by going to: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83675471538?status=success> or dialling 0203 481 5237 and, when prompted, entering the ID 836 7547 1538. Alternatively, the service can be heard at any time by dialling 01584 701984.



Ludlow Church's Zoom Service

Rev Kim Stilwell

Lay Pastor Jacob Molyneux

I began working as a Lay Pastor in Shropshire and Marches Methodist Circuit in the summer of 2017. I came only with my music, my previous life experience as a Salvation Army Officer, a big collection of instruments which has grown since then; experience as a Local Preacher, plus a desire to make outreach into the community via familiar tunes to warm the heart and to strike a chord in the memory. The main thing I had to offer was music, although not many people know I play only by ear. My mission? To bring the focus back on *music* in Methodism and to link it with mission in the local area. I already had a band, "The Vintage Band" which began in my Barber's Shop before joining the Circuit. We played, by invite, in many Chapels, and at many community events celebrating Anniversaries, Harvests and Christmases. In the Llanymynech area, I initiated a live "Folk Night" in Maesbrook Village Hall, once a month and open to all players. The Folk Night was always a happy thing and it brought chapels together to enjoy the night's entertainment. It also reached out to the community as local people brought friends with them. A wide range of musical contributions were offered with stories and poetry. The emphasis was on equality for all and inclusion of all people. For about three years, in all weathers, a few singers and musicians like me have been regularly doing Open Air Mission in Oswestry on market days, under the umbrella "Methodist Mission Through Music" *Lockdown* has put a stop to this work in the town.

Pre-*Lockdown*, I recorded two CDs, "Singing the Faith" and "Faithful Friends." I contributed many songs and recorded singers from the Folk Nights and singers from many little chapels and surrounding communities. The recording for the CDs was done on a 4-track recorder which was small and very hard for me to understand at the time. The height of my recording career had been

years ago in the 1970's, when recording music was done on cassette tapes. Technology has moved on rapidly since then. When I did all these initiatives, little did I know THEN how useful they would be NOW. With churches and chapels closed, how would we now have Sunday Services? How would we be able to visit people or hold meetings?



Lay Pastor Jacob Molyneux

As soon as the *Lockdown* took effect, the team of Rev Julia Skitt, Deacon Carys Woodley and myself set up a Facebook page for the Circuit's northern area as an effective means of communicating with interested people. Before Lockdown I had never been interested in Facebook or any other social media. We had to learn fast how to make videos in many settings and how to post them online. This needed a basic knowledge of technology and the right equipment to do it with. Rev Julia did mainly Bible Study presentations, Deacon Carys focussed on many ways of praying, and I made videos of songs and hymns and told stories about the background to the hymn writing. I enjoyed telling the stories about why the hymns were written. The comments and numbers of views for all our posts on the Facebook page show how popular and enjoyable these videos from the three of us have been with the people who regularly visit our page.

Soon bigger changes to my ministry were to take place, demanding even more technical expertise and upgrading of recording equipment, all because of *Lockdown*. First of all, I sent Circuit Superintendent Rev Richard Hall some of the MP3 recordings I'd made long ago with The Vintage Band and with members of my congregations. This was because he was preparing to put together the first online Circuit Sunday Service via Zoom. I sent Richard familiar and reassuring hymn tunes like "Great Is Thy Faithfulness." It was also becoming evident that I needed to make a space for myself to work in when recording the music files, for whoever was presenting the Zoom Sunday Circuit Services each week. I had by now outgrown my 4-track recording machine, as recordings in my mind had become more ambitious, involving a wider range of instruments and voice harmonies. In anticipation, I ordered an 8-track recording machine, a better microphone for recording videos on the Ipad, and another music stand. I had two birthday presents of harmonicas in different keys which I have used in the videos and in music files. Carol my wife bought herself a new Ipad Pro with a much larger memory in order to cope with the storing and transferring of large video files. We both had to learn the technology involved quite quickly. The next thing I did was to create a space of about half of my garage over to become a recording studio for making the Sunday Circuit Service recordings. I worked two solid days to declutter and rearrange everything in there. We call the space I made "The Primitive Studios," mainly because it is primitive, but with overtones of our Primitive Methodist heritage.

For me, it has been a joy to record and share this music. In quiet moments on walks I have found spiritual direction; receiving prompting advice about which tunes to record on the many videos I have made for Facebook. My hope is that the hymns have been a comfort and reassurance to all listeners, during this long and strange time we are going through. I can say I'm grateful to have had the time to learn a lot. I have certainly stretched myself with the demands of the 8-track recording machine. I hope that making the MP3 sound files for whoever hosts the Circuit Sunday Service on Zoom has been a good contribution, enabling listeners to have a hearty sing-a-long. Another project I have already started, is to record a collection of Wesley Hymns arranged for a brass quintet and a collection of Welsh Hymns for the people of Llanymynech who are such enthusiastic Welsh tune singers. My brother-in-law David Andrew has helped by arranging the music for these tunes for me. These would lend themselves to be two CDs to sell for chapel funds.

It has been my privilege and joy to serve in this musical way. If I was to be asked what has been my favourite tune during *Lockdown*, it is an MP3 file I made of "Amazing Grace" played on my banjo and harmonica, because it reminds me of Appalachian style folk music. I feel the hand of God has guided and protected me to this point in time, His plan has been for me to serve him as a musician and to use my gifts to serve God's people during a difficult time. This mission we've been given is forever ongoing and since we Methodists are *BORN IN SONG*, do stand tall and sing with me joyfully, our heritage of Methodist hymns throughout Lockdown and beyond.

Lay Pastor Jacob Molyneux

Chapel Buildings Critical To Food Bank Efforts

In response to the Covid 19 crisis, many church and chapel buildings are assisting local communities as food hubs. Tenbury's Chapel and hall has become essentially a food distribution service. According to ecumenical team vicar Rev Mark Inglis, the buildings are "right now a critical component", contributing alongside other local churches to a "superb community response". The food bank at Tenbury has gone from helping ten to fifteen people per week to currently ten times that with the numbers needing help rising on a weekly basis.



Bishop's Castle Food Bank volunteers (l-r) Mandy Bryce, Angela Willcock, Peter Willcock, Andy Stelman and Maureen Gray

Bishop's Castle Chapel has also undergone transformation, facilitating a food bank that serves around 65 people each time it opens twice a week. Andy Stelman who heads the volunteers said, the food bank is promoted as a community food bank that offers a delivery service to minimise embarrassment or any shame people might feel at having to ask for food, toiletries, pet food and other necessities. "We have lots of choice, we want it to have a welcoming atmosphere and make it like a shopping experience, people choose what they want. Some of our customers come from outside but the bulk are from Bishop's Castle." The well-stocked food bank has garnered much support from individuals, local businesses and supermarkets particularly Morrisons. Set up because of Covid 19, the uptake has identified a need that Andy predicts will remain for some time after the Covid crisis is under control.



Food Bank at Tenbury Chapel