

Trinity@25

1996-2021

Ministers who have served the LEP

Preface

The content of the next few pages would not have been possible without significant contributions from the five Ministers who have served the LEP in Park Lane from the start in 1996. Sincere thanks are due to them primarily because one result of the Covid-19 pandemic is that both the Methodist Circuit and URC Synod offices are closed, so formal records of the late 20th Century cannot be accessed.

If any errors are noticed, particularly in the paragraph immediately below this, then please accept the fact that this part of the History of Trinity as an LEP is based on personal recollections and little else!

The immediate pre-history

The Welwyn Methodist Circuit, had been served by Rev Bob Forrest as superintendent minister since 1985 and, together with Rev David Viles, who was appointed to the United Reformed Church at Park Lane in 1990, these two ministers led the development of the Local Ecumenical Partnership.

Bob Forrest

March 1996 to September 1998

I came to Welwyn in 1985 and Knebworth was part of the Methodist Circuit for which I was responsible. I took the occasional service there every quarter but there were also 7 others that I had to keep an eye on.

(Editor's note - other recollections indicate that Rev Forrest was also frequently planned in for the evening service at Trinity, this being a feature of the Methodist presence in Knebworth for many years prior to 1996)

David Viles was a very valued colleague. I was only able to do a service there once a quarter on average but David was on the spot and he was the "main man" in keeping the Church going. When, after many discussions, it was decided that Trinity should become "independent" David oversaw the process and my subsequent visits were to an "independent Church". In later years Trinity was transferred from the Welwyn to the Stevenage Circuit.

Rev Bob Forrest, March 2021

David Viles

March 1996 to August 1999



David, pictured with his wife, Josie

Being 87 my memory isn't what it was but nevertheless I have fond recollections of my time in Knebworth. Did the two churches only join together twenty five years ago? – it seems longer!

I became minister of the URC church in the village in 1990 and certainly came with no expectation of embarking on what for me was a second church merger! Indeed, when the suggestion was first made, I had a little heart-sink moment as I was not sure whether it would be possible for two denominations with such differing governing structures to join together easily. Personally, I was not far off retiring and didn't relish the idea of joining the Methodist Circuit! However, I believe very strongly that the Holy Spirit works through the Church, and in this instance the Church Meeting, so I kept my personal thoughts to myself and waited to see what would happen!

In fact, I needn't have worried as things seemed to go very smoothly – looking back maybe the Methodist Minister Bob Forrest helped more than I realised!

I remember various meetings to discuss the idea and many shared worship services before anything formal happened. So, the two congregations knew each other quite well before we joined together. I remember how vigorously the Methodists sang and what a great feeling it was to have worship invigorated with their enthusiasm. Bringing the two sets of very capable Elders together was another bonus and of course joining together two small Sunday Schools created a happy Junior Church experience for the children and young people. The Methodist church had several lay preachers attached which we all benefitted from. I remember that the Elders at that time were energetic and willing to give things a go.

I also remember that the Methodist building was quite modern and it was painful to lose it - but it was much smaller than the URC building and the money used from its sale enabled us to modernise the larger building.

In thinking about this I am aware that all the churches I have been associated with have survived and I think it's because they were willing to change with the times and indeed approached challenges with some enthusiasm. That was true of the Knebworth church when I was there.

I retired only a few years after the two churches had joined together. When I look back to the lovely goodbye party that the church organised for me, I have no recollection of who was Methodist and who was URC. My personal reservations had been dispelled and I no longer needed to think of the church as an LEP – it was simply Trinity Church Knebworth where a cohesive group of people met regularly to worship.

Sue Keegan von Allmen

September 1999 to August 2008



Sue, pictured here with husband Daniel, started her first ever stationing at Trinity and in 2003 she added the role of Superintendent for the Methodist Circuit. Sue left Trinity in 2008 to be stationed at Hinde Street in Marylebone, W1 – a complete change of scenery and a new set of challenges presented by an inner city flock.

I was stationed as minister at Trinity Church in the St Albans and Welwyn Methodist Circuit from September 1999. I was a probationer minister, still studying a day a week in Cambridge, and felt very new. I began ministry as Daniel ended his. He was known to some, because he'd been minister at Trinity URC in St Albans, but was always very clear that I was now the minister and he was retired!

When I arrived, I discovered a Church that wanted to change, and was looking forward to something new. I was glad that the difficult decisions about which building was to be used had already been taken and that what was to be decided were the details of the scheme. So, my first months only involved the final planning, and after moving out of the church building in February 2000 we worshipped in the school until November 2000. The reopening was a great weekend, but it was touch and go as to whether or not we'd manage it, and it was an amazingly resourceful group of church members who made that possible!

The church building was wonderful, and was a space I loved leading worship, funerals, baptisms, weddings and other events in, but buildings don't make churches and it's not the building that's uppermost in my memory of Trinity Church. It's people. The people and families of those whose baptisms, weddings, wedding anniversaries and funerals I led. The Elders, the pastoral care team, musicians, the building project team, the Local Preachers, the Pre-School, those who met daily for prayers during the Afghanistan war, the weekly prayer group and many, many more.

Mentioning any individual or group of names is fraught with danger, but history isn't history if it isn't personal, so I'm going to risk it. Gill Hughes was Church Secretary throughout my time at Trinity – in the last few years with Andrew Barclay as well. If the ministry I exercised was fruitful it was because I had the privilege of working with Gill and Andrew throughout those years. Another couple who really important, were Alan and Kaye Stafford, who supported me and share their experience with me until their deaths. One of the highlights of my time in Knebworth was being accompanied at my ordination in June 2001 Bury St Edmund's Cathedral by 25 or so members.



Sue photographed following her ordination in
Bury St Edmunds, June 2001

There are too many memories from nine years to share them all. But I wanted to recall three areas that remain important and have continued to shape the ministry I have exercised since.

Firstly, the way the church responded to the gift of a large legacy in June 2001, which is an expression of the grace and generosity of the church. Instead of keeping it for ourselves, we decided to use it to support different projects - Duaripara, in Bangladesh, is the one that I particularly remember. Also, a village-wide non-faith enshrined initiative - a project to reach out to children and young people of Knebworth. It also attracted financial support from the Village Trust and KFC as well as much welcome voluntary pairs of hands.

The second, was the ecumenical spirit of the church, a spirit that I've missed in both appointments since. As well as a commitment to engaging with both parent denominations, we also sought to ensure that our worship respected Reformed and Methodist traditions and practices, while also ensuring we didn't get trapped in them. We created a pastoral care team and a mission and outreach group that suited the church. And planned for the time when Trinity would move to a new circuit that reflected the geographical area of the URC Group we were part of. Within the village, the Good-Egg Club - the holiday club for children - run by the three churches, had already started when I arrived. It went from strength to strength with the huge commitment of many church members. We ran ecumenical Weeks of Accompanied Prayer over several years and set up prayer stations for people to explore in the churches. And one of the highlights of my time was the service in which we signed a Covenant between the churches. The fruit of over 40 years of commitment from many members – including Alan Richardson.

(cont.)

Sue and Daniel obviously enjoying the Swiss scenery and mountain air.



The third, was the way the church made big decisions, where there were sharply differing and powerfully-held views. The first I remember was the décor of the new building. We went about that simply. Everyone had a vote! The second, was the issue of whether or not we would have alcohol at church events and if so, what would be the basis of the decision. The third was human sexuality. It was a conversation we had twice with 7 years in between. The process was led by groups that researched the issue and ensured everyone was informed through Trinity Times and in meetings. Anyone who wanted to share in the conversation was consulted. And the decisions were taken in time-honoured way in Church Meetings. I recall one member telling me early on that it was a waste of time, that we should vote and get it over and done with, but later they recognised that by taking time and ensuring many people's voices were heard, the church was able to remain united over contentious issues that can so early divide.

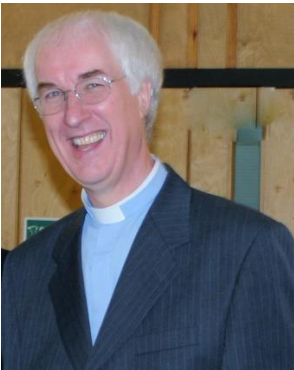
I am glad to have been minister at Trinity Church for the first nine years of my time as a minister. I am grateful for your support throughout my time, beginning as a probationer, and including when I became Superintendent of the St Albans and Welwyn Circuit in September 2003. The Church and its members and friends played a significant role in shaping who I have become as a minister. So, thank you!

Sue Keegan von Allmen, March 2021

Editor's note:- life as a Methodist minister means that a current stationing is never permanent and after 10 years in central London, Sue and Daniel find themselves in Hampshire. Sue is the superintendent minister for the Winchester, Eastleigh and Romsey Circuit and minister at Chandler's Ford and St Francis LEP churches.

John Steele

September 2009 to January 2014



Looking back over my shoulder

I am honoured to be invited to share some thoughts and recollections from my time as Trinity's minister. Ministry was shared on a 50:50 basis with Stevenage URC and the contrasting challenges meant I had to be on my toes! Now, some 7 years into retirement, it would be easy to get dewy-eyed at all sorts of memories.

Dreams and visions

Trinity has never been content to rest on its laurels! The church's "Vision 2009" process (in response to the URC's own "Vision 2020") was very much on people's minds when I arrived. Questions like "Where will we be in 10 years' time" and "What will be our priorities be in key areas of our life?" were to provide much for us to work towards over the next few years. In this 25-year celebration these continue to be important questions.

Pastoral Care

Identified as one of Trinity's "strengths" the Pastoral Care Network (30 or so individuals at that time) was indeed a vital asset to ministry and to be involved with. This important expression of God's love continues to nurture and care for both our church family and local community.

Café worship

"Doing church differently" was very much a flavour of the time and "Social Sunday" were a learning curve for us all! Youth focused, they enabled families to worship together and young people to share faith with their friends. We learnt that informal table fellowship and all-age learning are a unique combination!



(cont.)



.....and finally

Our time at Trinity was the fulfilment of a long-held wish of mine to conclude pastoral ministry (much as it began in 1980) by being involved and energised in a vibrant and committed Local Ecumenical Partnership. These 25th Anniversary celebrations owe much to the encouragement of our respective denominations and our Knebworth Family of Churches. Thanks be to God for the friendship and collegueship of our shared journey.

John Steele, March 2021

Editor's note:- the following needs to be added – a view over John's other shoulder. John was our minister when Trinity celebrated its 15th Anniversary in 2011. The main focus was over the weekend of 9 & 10th July with an All-Age Service on the Sunday morning at which Rev John Hardaker preached – he was the URC Moderator at the time – John Steele "co-led" the service with Rev Andrew Maguire who was the Superintendent Minister for the North Herts Methodist Circuit. This was preceded on the Saturday afternoon with a talent show featuring "Home Groan" (John's title) skills and abilities from members, families and friends. The photograph below shows John introducing the next act.



Steven Cooper

September 2014 to August 2019



Following the established pattern of alternating between URC and Methodist ministers, I was stationed—being a Methodist—to serve at Trinity following the retirement of the Revd John Steele (URC), my predecessor.

Initially appointed also to serve as minister of St Paul's Methodist Church in Stevenage, my stationing to the North Hertfordshire Methodist Circuit represented my first appointment in presbyteral ministry; indeed, I came as a probationer presbyter when I started at Trinity in 2014, being ordained two years later in the summer of 2016.

Ministry in Trinity Church made for an excellent experience for someone starting out as a presbyter. Something that was clear about the Trinity Church community from the beginning was the strength of its hospitality—which was a significant feature, not least, of my own experience and of my wife Ruth—and in due course our daughter Seraphina, born in 2017. Trinity's genuine spirit of welcome was something we experienced first-hand.

In my experience, the beating heart of Trinity Church's life was the outstanding quality of its lay leadership, and a sense of teamwork that characterised the whole congregation: a community seeking actively to be a positive presence within the Knebworth Community and to serve the needs of others. And so, honestly, my job always felt easy when working with Trinity: a large part of what, as a minister, I would seek to encourage in a church, Trinity would be doing without me really having to try!

That being so, I was able really to focus on what 'added value' I could bring as Trinity's minister, and to me this seemed, on the whole, to be twofold: firstly, to point the church always to Jesus Christ, as the true source of its life, its energy, its hospitality, its friendship to the wider community; and secondly, to help Trinity make the most of its rootedness in, and connectedness with, the wider Church—which helps only to amplify Trinity's impact in the wider world.

As I look back, these two focuses lay behind much of how I spent my time and directed my energy within Trinity, forming the experiences that mean the most to me from my time with you, and which I shall forever cherish.

(cont.)

To name a few:

- establishing a pattern of conversation around the things of God, in worship—in the form of bimonthly ‘Café’ services, always planned by a team, and always a joy;
- being a part of starting the ‘One Truth Youth’ youth fellowship, and introducing some of our young people to the ecumenical community at Taizé;
- leading the year-long ‘Disciple’ Bible study course with participants from Trinity and across the North Hertfordshire Circuit;
- representing Trinity within the Knebworth Family of Churches, and among Churches Together in Stevenage, in which Trinity was often a beacon of hospitality to others.

I cherish too experiences such as ‘Singing Our Faith’ in which we were able to celebrate the gifts of our rich denominational roots: Methodist (in that instance), and Reformed. These are indeed to be owned and celebrated!

The list is long, and the more I look back, the more I recall the experiences for which I rejoice and which are beyond what I can list here.

Just one example though underlined, for me, the excellence of Trinity’s hospitality and its embodiment, at its best, of the spirit of Jesus Christ: this was the way in which Rick Andrews (also known as Ricky), a local man, sometime homeless and quite suspicious of institutions, would often drop in at Trinity to say hello, finding Trinity to be a place of friendship in the truest sense, where he was very much received as a friend himself. One of my greatest privileges was being invited to lead Ricky’s funeral after he tragically died at the age of 35, in 2018.

I pray that Trinity Church will continue to go from strength to strength, as a beacon of God’s love within Knebworth, living out its discipleship to Christ in each generation, and drawing on its rich roots and fellowship in both the Methodist and United Reformed Churches.

Steven Cooper, March 2021

Editor’s Note: Steven left Trinity with many fond memories and with Ruth, his wife, not only brought their warmth and humanity but, during their time with us, a daughter, Seraphina, was born bringing much happiness and joy to all.

This was not just for Trinity but for the whole community. This was perfectly demonstrated when St Thomas More Church in Knebworth was the venue for Seraphina's christening in January 2018. (see photo)



The, now, larger family, left Knebworth for pastures new when, in September 2019, Steven was stationed to Wesley's Chapel and Leysian Mission in Shoreditch, EC1
