

THE PURLEY CIRCUIT



Phil Revnell describes work undertaken by Sanderstead Church in their concern for families. The story of hard work and perseverance is characteristic of the tough challenges faced by so many of us today. The study questions to help us reflect on the challenges of the 'Making Waves' story are followed by some reflections on the special 'Making Waves' Prayer.

'Sanderstead Methodist Church's "Making Waves" project, seeking ways to make worship more relevant and attractive to young families, was launched in September 2005. Children's attendance had declined progressively over the previous 4 years, it was time for a new initiative.

Early last year I put the proposal to the Church Council that we should initiate a new form of Sunday Service designed specifically, but not exclusively, for families with young children. I had read of similar initiatives in 'The Buzz' and felt that, unless Sanderstead tried something similar, membership and attendances would continue to decline and we would be failing in our calling to bring the Good News to many in our neighbourhood. A new Circuit Youth and Children's worker was in post and he was planning to forge links with two local primary schools.

With the backing of Church Council, the Annual Church Meeting and the wholehearted support of our minister we prayed, planned, leafleted and advertised the service, naming it 'Making Waves' and held our first half hour service in September. We timed it for 9.30, having moved our main service to 10.30, and the church members who came to support us thoroughly enjoyed the service. Sadly there were no young families. Disappointed but not discouraged, we continued to lobby the children's groups who meet at the church during the week, and our neighbouring church at Warlingham came up with the splendid idea of 'lending' Sanderstead some of their young families so that newcomers did not feel awkward. So in October we did have families, but no 'outsiders'.

It was our 50th Anniversary in October, so we mounted a 'Making Waves' stall, and in November were delighted to welcome new families. We have attracted 3 or 4 each month ever since, and will shortly be having our review to plan ahead. The monthly half-hour Service is planned to be as "Bright and Breezy and Free and Easy" as possible, always remembering that we have gathered to worship a loving Lord.

The Worship includes music, stories, activities, prayer and friendship, and has made regular use of the new Church Projection system for images and DVDs. Refreshments are served at the close of the Service, to allow “Making Waves” worshippers to meet and talk with the regular congregation. Currently the response has been slow, but the Church is committed to reach out to young families and “Making Waves” remains a priority.’

Reflecting on the experience of ‘Making Waves’ a year after its start, Phil offered the following comments and advice on the basis of lessons learnt.

- *We have got an attractive format, and some good contacts with children, but we are still struggling to attract families on a regular basis. We are looking for growth but not getting it. The reality is that over two generations the simple routine of families coming to church has been lost.*
- *Contact with families has been a problem. Leafleting drew a complete blank, that sort of publicity was wasted time. The most response has been through direct contact and dogged persistence in inviting them along.*
- *It is important to have one individual to be a key person to make a project of this sort a priority in their Christian life and to keep things going. However, a team is needed to do the bits and pieces and we have had huge help from musicians and IT people. The problem is that so many willing workers are tied up with other responsibilities in the church.*

QUESTIONS:

- What would you say are the key lessons to be learnt from the ‘Making Waves’ experience?
- Phil talks of two generations that have lost the habit of regular church going – how much responsibility do you think the church has for this and what do you think might have been done differently? What can be done to remedy the situation now?
- What does the example of Warlingham in ‘lending’ families suggest about the ways Circuits can enable their churches to develop?
- What is likely to undermine those who are struggling to keep going in an experiment like this when there are few signs of success? What can the church most effectively do to support them? From your own experience what most helps us persevere?

Making Waves Prayer - Jan Grimshaw, Local Preacher, Oxford Circuit, from Methodist Church Handbook 2004/5

You call us to work together in your
name Lord;
To share our resources and gifts,
Our insights, hopes and fears.
Who – us Lord?

With our insecurities and
uncertainties;
Conscious of our differences, wary of
change,

Yet challenged to work as one in
Your name?
Yes – us Lord.
Strengthened by Your grace, upheld
by Your love;
Guided towards Your purpose;
Committed to move on together in
faith.

Not living in the past, nor entrenched
in the present;
But bringing past and present
together into the future,
Facing the opportunities you lay
before us;
Yes – us Lord,
...with You beside us

QUESTIONS:

- What does this lovely prayer suggest about who should respond to the challenges of church life today?
- What is your experience of facing new opportunities ‘together in faith’?
- How would you say we can most fully experience a sense of the Lord ‘beside us’?
- What are the opportunities the Lord is laying before you and your church?