

ST. FAITHS, HITCHIN
Methodist/Church of England

www.stfaithshitchin.org.uk

St. Faiths is a Local Ecumenical Project, formed by the joining of St. Faiths Anglican church and Walsworth Methodist church in 1976, On the Anglican side St. Faiths has Parish Status, belonging to the Diocese of St. Albans, and a member of the Hitchin Team ministry along with the other three Anglican churches of Hitchin. On the Methodist side it belongs to the North Hertfordshire Methodist Circuit. Legally the congregation have to register as either Methodist or as Anglican members (about the only time we think in those terms), with the split being 93 Anglican and 9 Methodist at the last AGM.

The St. Faiths vision of itself

St. Faiths has always seen itself as serving the community of Walsworth with our church literally at the crossroads. St. Faiths founded and is heavily involved in the annual Walsworth Festiva and unlike some of our overtly Green colleagues the majority of our congregation walk to church. But St. Faiths is also part of Hitchin and we are more than happy to involve Churches Together in Hitchin in our initiatives. So our church outings (to Swanage, Paris, Bruges and Amsterdam) will always include “friends of St. Faiths” in our number. I have to mention our Pantomime, the highlight of 2009, performed to three packed houses so watch out for February 2010. See our web site for pictures and details.

During 2009 our effort has been in preparing our building for mission. This has involved a complete repainting of the church (by the members for peanuts costs), new oak doors, and community patio. We have almost raised our target of £10,000 for the new kitchen (almost complete) and windows which will enable us to rent out the building to more local groups in the community. Next year (2010) the emphasis will be on mission itself, using the tools and facilities that God has given us (not that that has been ignored to date).

There is an unwritten rule at St. Faiths., that everyone has a part to play in the worship and service of the church. Contributions are welcome from animals (eg the Pet Service), from the very young and old, and we have a wide range of services and rotas to reflect this. Part of this involvement is music. The choir sing at all services and the music group plays for the All Age Services.

To many visiting Methodists, St. Faiths would appear very “Anglican” in its format. But all LEPs have to find their own compromise and character. The original Anglican St. Faiths had a very high church tradition (being a daughter church of Holy Saviour) and although the current church could be called “low”, certain “high” traditions remain, such as a statue to Mary, Holy Communion as part of each main Sunday service, and of course the choir.

Practicalities – the main 9.30 am Service, therefore with Holy Communion

There are set service booklets, which vary throughout the year but follow the same basic format. The minister and preacher will meet with the choir in the side rooms for a prayer and then the choir and minister will process down the corridor to the back of the church. At this point the notices and banns of marriage will be given, usually by one of the church wardens in the case of visiting ministers. After this the first hymn will be sung with the choir processing down to the middle of the church at the commencement of verse two. The minister, preacher and servers follow after the choir. Thereafter the service follows the booklet. (Note that we sing the *Gloria* at full throttle, except in Lent when it is not sung).

The Prayers and the Old and New Testament readings are done by members of the congregation as according to one of our many rotas. There is also someone appointed to check that everyone on the rota is aware that it is their turn. The preacher is usually invited to read the gospel passage. After that comes the sermon. Note that Anglicans are only used to ten minute sermons! Our current Anglican minister usually invites the choir members to join the congregation for the duration of the sermon rather than stay in the choir pews.

I should have mentioned that we have an active Sunday school. They start with the church in the service, but leave after the first hymn. The minister/preacher will say a prayer for them and their teachers whilst one of the Sunday School members lights the Sunday School candle to show that we are still part of the church. The Sunday School, especially the choir members, aim to return in time for the Lord's Prayer during Holy Communion.

The collection is taken during the hymn after the peace and also the bread and wine are brought forward at this point. As St. Faiths likes singing, some of the responses are sung, especially the *Agnus Dei*. The minister distributes the bread, with two members following with chalices and one member with cups for non-alcoholic wine. During the current Swine-Flu pandemic the system has changed so that the minister (who has used the anti-bacterial hand wash) dips the waiver in either the alcoholic or the non-alcoholic wine chalice and then gives it to the communicant. The choir receive communion first so as to get ready for the anthem.

During the last hymn (there are five in all) the choir process out (starting at verse two) with the servers, minister and preacher following. There is a short prayer said with the choir in the corridor to finish.

Note: if it is anyone's birthday, this will be celebrated just before the final hymn after a suitable chord from the organ.

Note: Tea, coffee and biscuits follow after the service at the back of the church.

St. Faiths has a PA and a loop system. There is permanent microphone at the lectern, and also a lapel microphone for the minister when reading the service at the altar. If necessary we also have a hand held microphone if requiring contributions from the congregation. There is also a CD and tape deck linked to the PA system. This is usually used for funerals but can be used for the main service with some warning.

Practicalities – the 11.30 am service (communion once a month)

This service was originally held in the St. Michael's community centre. It was aimed at younger families for whom 9.30 am was deemed too early. In fact it proved to be attended mainly by the elderly for whom 9.30 am was too early. As a consequence it has a very relaxed style of service with everyone sitting down even for the hymns (three). We set out the chairs in a semi cycle at the front of the church and invite the preacher to give us a talk rather than an address. One of the members usually reads the one lesson, often the set gospel passage, but more readings can be given if desired. Although the PA system is unnecessary for amplification we ask that the preachers use the lapel microphone in order for the loop system to be activated. Preachers usually give the sermon from the comfortable chair we provide rather than from the lectern.

Pastoral notices are usually given at the end of the service, after which tea, coffee and chocolate biscuits. The 11.30 am service is well known for providing superior refreshments.

A couple of years ago we regretfully had to move the service from the Community Centre down to the church, mainly due to the difficulty in finding enough volunteers to provide lifts. One advantage however is that sometimes the 11.30 am slot can be used for other activities, such as baptisms and even the pet service. We also find that a number of newcomers to the church first come to St. Faiths at the 11.30 am service and then migrate to the main 9.30 am service as they join in the full life of the church.

There is a very simple form of service in a service booklet.

Hymns and Hymnbooks

St. Faiths uses Hymns Old and New. Preachers should also be aware that it is an Anglican tradition for hymns to be chosen, not by the preacher but by the hymnbook committee who then give the numbers to be printed in the weekly bulletin and they are practiced by the choir at their rehearsal on Monday evenings. So if preachers would wish to request specific hymns, then this has to be done somewhat in advance.

Life is more flexible at the 11.30 am service, then main consideration being giving enough time for the organist to be familiar with the hymns chosen.

Contact Details

Always try our web-site as one of our church wardens keeps this very up-to-date and there are always some new photographs for viewing.

Organist: Tim Mitchell
 Mary Brenchley (for 11.30 service)
Sacristan: Dorreen Peacock

See the circuit plan for contact details.