

Memories of Christ Church (Congregational, later United Reformed), Leatherhead

Christ Church has played an important part in the lives of the Lidgey family. My parents Gweneth Henwood and Harry Lidgey married at North Parade Methodist Church in Camborne in June 1936. Always having lived in Cornwall, Harry moved to Leatherhead for work a short time before his marriage. Gweneth was brought to the new house in Ashted following the marriage. She found the move out of her beloved Cornwall difficult for many years. She had left family and the coast of Cornwall which she loved.



Harry attended the Leatherhead Parish Church periodically and Gweneth attended the Methodist Church for a while. However, after my birth in January 1938, she was invited to attend Christ Church. She was made very welcome and very soon attended regularly. Having felt homesick for Cornwall, Christ Church helped her settle in to life in Surrey. The Church was a great support and comfort when my sister Elizabeth died aged only 7 hours, in May 1944.

I was baptised in the Leatherhead Parish Church but soon afterwards, Christ Church became our family Church. I attended Children's Church and remember Edith Box, wearing her choir gown and hat, standing on the steps to the choir, her greeting the children as we walked in pairs down the central aisle after the first hymn, to go to the children's service. Later it was her daughter Doreen Box who as Children's Church Superintendent who greeted the children.

I taught in the Children's Church when my brother John, nine years younger than me, was in the primary class. In 1953 I became a Church member. The YPF (Young Peoples/ Fellowship) with the badge Kyro, provided a full and varied social life. YPF was for the 15 to 30 age group. As people reached 30 and did not want to leave, the group was renamed 19/40, and another 10 years of fellowship was enjoyed by many. We had a large congregation and extra chairs were put down the central aisle and there was talk of extending the Church.

All my social life revolved around the Church. Tennis on the courts by the Manse, social meetings with outings both to local areas and annually to the south coast. The Sunday afternoon discussion groups followed by tea and the evening service became a special time. Meetings at the Manse for study during Robert Paul's time became important to me. Singing in the choir when Dr Bathurst was the organist and later Anthony Cairns. Carol singing around the streets at Christmas. Another wonderful time was the annual Young Peoples' Fellowship County meetings. I attended one in Purley and another in Kingston. We had study periods and a social time and all attended the service on Sunday.

Moving to London at the start of my nursing training, meant I wasn't available to attend Christ Church regularly. However whenever I was able to get home I still attended the Church and the 19/40 group.

There were two periods when I was able to attend Church activities regularly. In 1962 to 1964, I was a District Nurse/ Midwife at Shamley Green. Having weekends off, I returned home every fortnight and resumed my relationship with Christ Church. Then for a year in 1965, I attended University, to complete Health Visitors training. I lived at home again and it was wonderful being involved once more in the life of the Church. I was able to sing with my mother in the Church choir and attend Church meetings where mother was a Deacon.

Although I moved to Cornwall to take up a position as District nurse/midwife/Health Visitor in 1966, my contact with friends at Christ Church remained. I was married there in March 1968. My sister Alison was also married at Christ Church.

The most significant Minister during my teenage years was Robert Paul. His teaching leading up to my becoming a Church member was invaluable. Others were the Geddes family, Jim Todd who was the celebrant at my marriage service and Brian Treharne, I got to know Brian and Sheena on my trips back to the UK from NZ. I am so thankful for Brian Treharne's regular visits to my parents, after my father's strokes.

Moving to New Zealand 51 years ago next January has not meant I have lost contact with members at Christ Church. The annual Christmas card, visits from Liz Todd , Heather Treharne, and Mary Keene, Anne and Anthony's two visits, and receiving the Church newsletter for many years have kept me in contact. My many trips back to the UK have often included attending a service. I was also able to attend the Celebration of both my parents lives.

Christ Church has been a huge part in the faith journey of many of my generation in the Leatherhead area. That relationship has continued for me. I am sad the Church is closing its doors on the 22nd November 2020. The building might be closed but what it has given me during my lifetime will not close. I have so much to give thanks for.

Christ Church (Congregational) became Christ Church (United Reformed) just a few years after the Congregational Church in NZ amalgamated with the NZ Presbyterian church. I will be leading the service here at the St Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Takaka, Golden Bay, on 22nd November. We are a small congregation and we will be praying for the Christ Church (UR) congregation, your future and that of the building. May God walk beside you all as you move forward. God bless.

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