



*Peter Castle, Local Lay Pastor in the Winchester, Eastleigh and Romsey Circuit in the Southampton District, shares how new shoots of opportunity are emerging from the old and familiar which had been laid to rest.*

On the last Sunday in May 2022, the small Chapel at Canada Common, part of the Winchester, Eastleigh and Romsey Circuit (WER) held its last service as a Methodist church.

The decision by the remaining members to cease being an active Methodist meeting place was a painful one and not everyone agreed. There was the genuine feeling that we had let our Father God down and also the saints who had set about building the chapel.

I had become the Local Lay Pastor for the WER Circuit in October 2021 and it quickly became apparent that, owing to the chapel's position on the border of the New Forest National Park and also with a graveyard which is still in use, that it would be difficult to sell the site.

I contacted my interdenominational colleagues in the area (Anglican, Gospel Hall and Elim Pentecostal) and asked if they would consider forming a Joint Churches Together in Wellow (JCTW) and to use the Canada Common Chapel as an outreach venue for the area.

They agreed and JCTW was born with WOFF (nothing to do with dogs!) but Worship, Outreach, Fellowship and Finance as our linked strategy.

It was decided to hold a monthly reflection service on the last Thursday of the month at 1.00pm. When we closed the chapel the attendance of the congregation had dropped to five. On Thursday June 27th 2024 we had a congregation of fourteen.

JCTW are holding joint services in the chapel for special events. Rev David Hull brought the Revive Me UK Tour to the chapel in May and we had an open-air service on the last Sunday in July.

We have found working together as JCTW with the support of the circuit has been a real blessing to us all. We also hold a Christmas Community Carol Service in the Wellow village hall.

During July and August, JCTW ran a 'Coffee on the Common' every Thursday morning, free to the community with any donations going to supporting the Men in Sheds community project which are building a new shed in Wellow.

Going forward, we want to grow in wisdom, stature and knowledge of our Lord who has blessed us through the Holy Spirit in every venture we have undertaken in his Name.

Please note, this is not my doing, but our Lord's and the wonderful teams of people willing to work for the kingdom in the New Forest area.

*Peter Castle is Local Lay Pastor in the Winchester, Eastleigh and Romsey Circuit, and Acting Chair of Joint Churches Together in Wellow.*