**The Opening of the Romford Circuit Mission Outreach Project Centre**

**at Collier Row on January 14th 2018**

Balloons, bunting and a welcoming [non-alcoholic] drink were in place to help greet guests arriving to celebrate the opening of the Circuit Mission Outreach Project in the Romford Circuit on Sunday January 14th. The project evolved following the courageous decision of the members at Collier Row MC to cease to meet because of falling numbers of worshippers, after which a farewell service had been held exactly 8 months before, on May 14th. However, rather than taking the decision to close the building and offer the premises for sale, the circuit, under the leadership of Superintendent Minister, Rev David Jebb, took another courageous decision, to use the premises as a mission outreach centre instead. A management group was formed, ideas were gathered and many prayers were said. From the speed with which things moved the group was in no doubt that the Holy Spirit was at the heart of it all, leading to the appointment of a Mission Outreach Worker, Miss Chloe Purchase, who was commissioned at the service.

Representatives from many of the circuit churches attended, together with invited guests who included the Deputy Mayor of the London Borough of Havering, Cllr Dilip Patel; the MP for Romford, Andrew Rosindell; local councillors Carol Smith and Jason Frost; the principal of a local academy, Jenni Elliot; Monica Abdala from the Havering Street Pastors and Rail Pastors Coordinator; Rev Hilary Cheng representing the Forest Circuit, from which Chloe Purchase comes and the Area Dean of Havering, Rev Canon David Hague. Rev David Jebb opened proceedings by explaining the vision behind the Mission, quoting John Wesley: ‘Go always, not only to those who want you, but to those that want you most.’ Rev Nigel Cowgill, Co-Chair of the London District was then invited to cut a symbolic ribbon, after which Chloe Purchase was commissioned by Rev Jebb. Greetings and words of welcome were extended to her by many of the invited guests and representatives, for which Chloe’s offered her thanks. MP Andrew Rosindell assured Chloe that Romford was a great place in which to live, work, bring up children, reach nearby countryside, parks and central London. He had always received a warm welcome form the fellowship at Collier Row and while it was sad that the premises’ life as a church had ended, they were after all, only buildings and he was confident that this was still a place where God was found. Others gave their encouragement to Chloe, saying how much they were looking forward to working with her. Monica Abdala referred to the decorated windows, which Chloe had thoughtfully designed to represent what she hoped people who came would find in the new Centre: new beginnings, a welcome, comfort and caring, hospitality, listening and creativity. Rev Canon David Hague, who was passionate about the church being a blessing for everyone reminded everyone that the Anglicans and Methodists had a covenant to work together. Christian Unity was a very important thing and serving the needs of others was the best way of working together. He assured her that the help of the local Anglican community was fully behind the project.

Rev Nigel Cowgill’s message spoke of the story of vision and the journey of prayer that were behind the project. The church existed by mission: no mission meant no church, which he felt was a fact the church had done its best to ignore down the ages. It was also a fact that churches failing to respond to this would fail and die. Thriving was not about ‘bums on seats’ but about the Spirit of God and by looking outwards, not inwards. Mission could not exist without missioners, therefore Chloe would need our help. Nigel reminded us that the Bible was a drama of God’s unfolding mission. At his Transfiguration Jesus was clothed in the light of God’s being and our mission was to be sent by God to shed the light. Nigel illustrated his point by referring to the dynamo hooked up to the wheels of a bike: pedalling made the wheels turn and eventually the light would come on, but as soon as the pedalling stopped the light would go out. We were here to make God’s light shine. Our job today was to make this place become a place of transfiguration in the community and we needed to be effective at transforming the local community, with all its ‘aches and pains’ by offering the love and companionship of God’s people throughout history across all boundaries. He reminded us that the Spirit of God didn’t stay with Paul 2, 000 years ago – it was available to us now!

Following Methodist tradition, hot and cold drinks and cakes were served at the end of this very joyful occasion.  **Pamela Coles**