**A Very Brief History of HWMC:**

Harold Wood Methodist Church began its life around 1908, when the newly-formed United Methodist Church was asked if it would take over the work of the small, free-church mission established in Athelstan Road around 1890. The mission officially passed into the hands of the Forest Gate Circuit and Methodism arrived in Harold Wood.

For several years the little chapel was just an outpost served by visiting preachers and ministers, but the membership trebled in just 10 years and by 1918, the existing premises, which are now the British Legion Hall, needed enlarging to accommodate the needs of this fast-growing membership. However, although the old chapel was improved, plans were soon in place to find a new and larger site where a completely new church could be built. The United Methodist Conference was approached to explore the possibility of obtaining the services of a full-time minister and in 1926, Rev Edward Cato was appointed as the first resident minister in Harold Wood. Three years later a new church was built and opened in The Drive, near the corner of Gubbins Lane, thanks largely to generous grants and the personal generosity of Sir William Mallinson, an important figure at the time in the United Methodist Church. It had a seating capacity of 250 and a Schoolroom to accommodate children’s work. This is the old building on our upper level.

After a succession of supernumerary or 'retired’ ministers, the church gained the services of a young minister. In 1936 Rev R Clifford C Pattison, affectionately known as ‘Pat’, began an important period of ministry that would see the church through the dark days of war when the church became an important focal point in the community, serving as a rest centre for the homeless who had been bombed out. People slept in the pews and dogs and cats roamed the aisles. At one point a canary in a cage adorned the communion table!

‘Pat’ was able to develop the church’s work with children and young people and soon, temporary huts to house the expanding activities, which some of us still remember, were erected to the rear of the top building. The Sunday School grew, the youth clubs became increasingly popular and new organisations were begun. Activities ranged from pageants to film shows, drama and carpentry, to sports and Christian education. It was ‘Pat’s vision’ to develop a community church that could minister to the needs of people through all the stages of life. This would require a development of the premises but although the mission of the church expanded during his ministry, it was another ten years before the decision to go-ahead with the construction of a new church building was reached. In just one year £2, 000 was raised from members and friends and other funds came from grants and the sale of some land. Funding also came via the Connexion, from compensation for war damage following the destruction from enemy action of another church in the District.

The new church was opened on September 8th, 1962 and immediately became a focus for worship. It also freed-up more space for mission and the old church was converted into a much-needed hall. The ‘temporary’ huts on the grass at the back were beginning to show their age and in 1977 a new suite of rooms was built to link the old and new buildings. Sadly, almost as soon as the new fellowship rooms were opened, fire took hold one evening, in the old church building. It was a devastating blow as, by the time it was extinguished, serious damage had been done. But the church’s faithful saw a way of turning tragedy into opportunity. Using the insurance money, the halls were modernised, equipped with a new stage and lowered ceilings and rededicated in 1979. Since then two toilets for the disabled, one at each level, have been installed, but the greatest change came 2 years ago when funding was offered by a church member to convert the vestibule into a larger and more-useable Welcome Area, with the huge glass wall dividing it from the worship part of the church opening and lighting-up the whole area.

Our premises are in use 7 days a week and we continue to reach out into the community. The church runs a playgroup 5 mornings a week for pre-school children and we open our doors for Tots and their carers; the Tuesday Lunch Club gives older people the chance to enjoy a good meal and some company and the Guildonian Players continue to entertain hundreds of people every year with their plays. Our church also provides a base for many organisations including Rainbows, Brownies and Guides, the Wesley Guild, the Women’s Own and the Table Tennis Club. But most of all, 108 years from its beginning and 12 ministers on, Harold Wood Methodist Church continues to be a place where people continue to find and develop their faith in Christ.