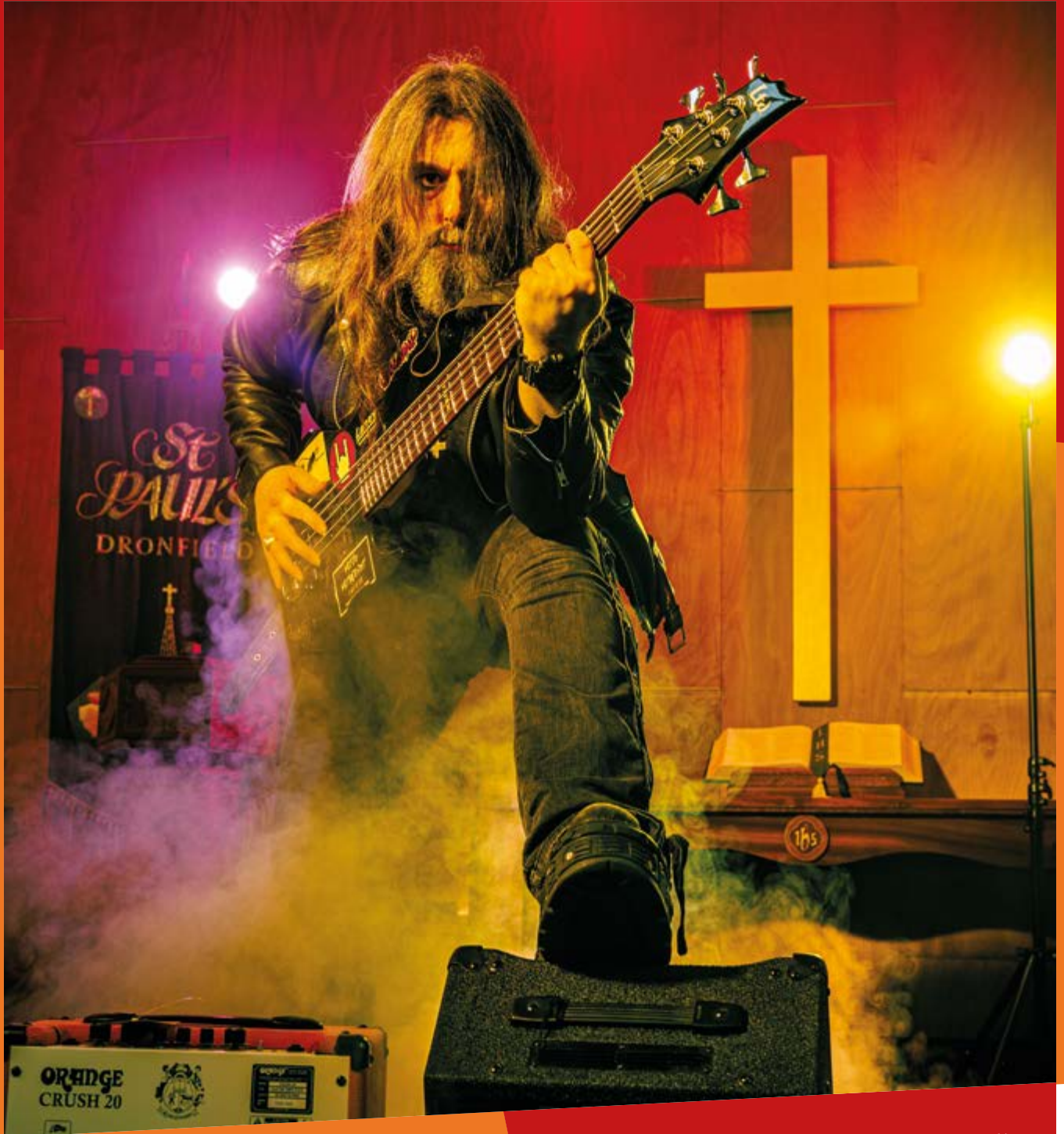


THE connexion

Inspiring stories from the Methodist Church



SHOWING OUR METTLE

The Methodist Church





Rachel Dalby, Editor

What is the Connexion?

Methodists belong to local churches and also value being part of a larger community. In calling the Methodist Church in Britain 'the Connexion', Methodism reflects its historical and spiritual roots.

In the 18th century a 'connexion' simply meant those connected to a person or a group – for instance, a politician's network of supporters. So when people spoke of "Mr Wesley's Connexion" they meant followers of the movement led by John Wesley, one of the founders of the Methodist Church.

Wesley believed that belonging and mutual responsibility were fundamental Christian qualities.

The language of connexion allowed him to express this interdependence, developing its spiritual and practical significance in the organisation and ethos of his movement.

Both language and practice are important for Methodists today.

Go to methodist.org.uk/theconnexion to change your order for *the connexion*, or to download the pdf.

Tell us what you think about this issue: theconnexioneditor@methodistchurch.org.uk

The main purpose of *the connexion* is to share inspiring and informative stories about the impact of the work of the Methodist Church in Britain. If your Methodist church or project has a great story to tell, that can be told through the voices of your community members, we'd love to hear from you. As magazine space is limited, story ideas submitted may be developed for other Methodist Church publications. Please email: theconnexioneditor@methodistchurch.org.uk

Welcome! Whether you're new to church, an occasional or regular churchgoer, or someone who visits (or is thinking of visiting) a Methodist building for another reason, *the connexion* is for you.

This magazine brings you stories from and about real people whose lives are being impacted by the work of the Methodist Church in Britain.

With millions of people continuing to face tough social and economic conditions, in this issue we highlight several churches that have been trying new things in order to support their communities.

In Hull, the fourth most deprived area in England, a small urban church is coordinating several initiatives designed by and for community members facing multiple deprivation. In Northamptonshire, a community hub has been established by church members spurred into action by the stabbing of a local teenager, while in St Ives, Cornwall, a parent and toddler group is providing opportunities for vital mutual support for families.

Volunteers at a Tea and Toast drop-in project at a Huddersfield church are, themselves, finding a sense of purpose through journeying with locals struggling to make ends meet, and, in Hampshire, a congregation's drive towards net zero carbon emissions is facilitating more community outreach.

Also in this issue, we bring you a report on the new President of the Methodist Church, the Revd Helen Cameron's pre-induction visit to Kenya and Uganda, and news from the annual Methodist Conference held in Leeds last month.

It's our hope that, wherever you are in your own life and on your own faith journey, you will be inspired by reading about the people and projects featured in these pages.

Rachel Dalby
Editor

THE Connexion

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The Revd James Morley, who runs Metal Methodist, a faith space for heavy metal music fans (see pages 4-5)

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The Methodist Church

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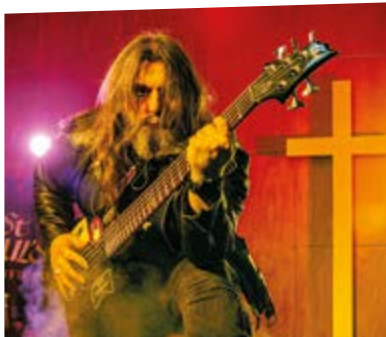
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Highlights



4 Showing the Church's mettle



6 Supporting a community through crisis



10 Overseas visit develops relationships



14 Turning tragedy into hope



18 Evolving outreach boosts attendance



24 Wesley's artefacts inspire artists

New leaders take up their roles

The new President and Vice-President of the Methodist Conference have taken up their roles. The President, the Revd Helen Cameron, and Vice-President, Mrs Carolyn Godfrey, were inducted at the end of June during the Methodist Conference in Leeds.

Prior to her appointment, Helen was the Chair of the Northampton District. She is Moderator of the Free Churches Group (FCG) and President of Churches Together in England. She represented the FCG at Her Majesty the Queen's funeral, reading prayers during the service, and was present at the Coronation of King Charles.

Originally from Yorkshire, Helen, who is married with three adult children, has worked extensively with sexual abuse survivors.

Carolyn, who grew up in Lincolnshire and is married with two adult children, is the District Safeguarding Officer covering the Darlington and Newcastle Districts and is a local preacher. She has a background in pastoral care and child protection within the education system, supporting children with additional needs and families facing complex issues.

Long-service tribute for organist

Joycelyn Hocking is among several organists across the Methodist Connexion marking over 80 years of playing in their local churches this year.

Joycelyn (93) began playing 86 years ago after being taught by her grandmother so that she could take over from her on the church rota. Joycelyn was seven years old when she first played during a service in August 1938. St Neot Methodist Church, Cornwall, has always been her home church.

She has since played, often accompanying choral performances, in more than 50 churches and other venues, and has taught many people to play the piano.

At a church gathering held to celebrate Joycelyn's achievement, former piano pupil Colin Arthur, now the Deputy Director of Loveny Male Voice Choir, paid tribute to her patience, faith, loyalty and sense of duty.

The Revd James Morley is the minister of several churches in the Sheffield Methodist Circuit and also coordinates Metal Methodist, metalmethodist.co.uk

Showing the Church's mettle

As the Church's New Places for New People initiative continues to gather momentum, the Revd James Morley explains the origins of a faith space for heavy metal music fans, and looks ahead to returning to 3Generate, the Church's national youth assembly.

I didn't fit in at school. I was one of those kids who was singled out by other pupils and made to feel like an outsider.

At the same time, I was starting to question whether or not God was real. As a Methodist minister's son, I'd been brought up to believe in God. But, as I journeyed closer to adult independence, I knew I needed to make up my own mind.

Wanting to rebel against my Christian upbringing, I found myself rejecting faith and religion for a while. Feeling outcast and alone, I started listening to heavy metal music. This led me to discover a geographically dispersed community of music-lovers who placed an emphasis on being different, so I felt at home with them.

Commitment

Eventually, I made a faith commitment and decided to dedicate my life to God – hence I've been a Methodist minister since 2013. But that didn't mean I stopped enjoying listening to heavy metal.

When it comes to culture and faith, I believe the Methodist Church is well placed to say "yes" to both rather than "either or".

People who aren't very familiar with metal music probably think all the songs are about darkness and evil, but there are good and bad elements in every sub-culture. As with everything, we must exercise discernment. While there are some bands that claim to be satanic, a lot of metal music draws upon biblical imagery and is about battling evil and searching for goodness. There's even a handful of UK Christian metal bands.

While on a sabbatical in 2021, I was reading about aspects of Western culture, including metal music. I thought to myself "God has given us the gift of music and we should celebrate it and use it for good, recognising that God can speak through any genre."

Online prayer

Soon afterwards, I was leading some online prayer meetings and began thinking about how I could use the internet to connect metal music fans with the gospel.

In 2022, the then Youth President of the Methodist Church, James Carver, encouraged me to develop my ideas. So, towards the end of that year, I formally launched Metal Methodist – an online faith space aimed at metal enthusiasts.



A few people joined the first livestreamed event, so I was encouraged to continue. Some of those original participants were from my local Methodist circuit, while others lived further afield. One of them later told me they'd grown up as part of a church but had decided, earlier on the day of the livestream, to call it quits with religion. They had then seen a Facebook post about the event and decided to give it one last go. They have since remained part of our congregation, been baptised and become a member of the Methodist Church!

The growing number of people engaging with Metal Methodist, which now includes livestreamed face-to-face gatherings, are a mix of atheists who visit for the interviews with musicians, people open to learning about Christianity, people seeking a relationship with God, and Christians who feel they don't fit into a traditional church environment.

Welcoming

I think people connect with a welcome that's for everyone and recognises that God can speak to people in all kinds of ways, including through heavy metal. It's vital that metal fans know that they don't need to change their music or aesthetic to be a Christian.

I'm thrilled that, for the second year running, I'll be taking the essence of Metal Methodist to 3Generate, the Church's national event for young people, at Birmingham NEC from 4 to 6 October.

There may be young people out there who are struggling to find a sense of belonging. Some may be carrying heavy burdens, so it's my aim to provide a space at 3Generate where they can talk to God about their troubles, consider how they could ask people they trust for help, and hear that they're not alone.



A lot of metal music draws upon biblical imagery and is about battling evil

If you feel inspired to explore if God may be nudging the church you are part of to begin a New Place for New People – a Christian community for those not yet part of an existing church – you can find out more at methodist.org.uk/NPNP. Tickets for 3Generate, for young people aged 8 to 18, along with 4 to 7-year-olds accompanied by a guardian (in a specially allocated space), can be booked at 3Generate.org.uk



Life has got tougher and tougher for people here.

Supporting a community through crisis



Sue Trotter is Joint Project Leader at Selby Street Mission and is a senior steward at Anlaby Park Methodist Church. Since she became a Sunday School teacher aged 17, Sue has served the Church in various ways, including helping with Hull West Methodist Youth Choir.

The cost of living crisis has been especially hard on people in areas that were already deprived. Sue Trotter explains how she felt called by God to journey with a community in Kingston upon Hull – England’s fourth most deprived area.

Hull City Council reminded locals in its Deprivation and Poverty report (recently updated to account for the effects of the cost of living crisis) that increased deprivation and poverty means poorer community health. This can affect people’s educational attainment, employment and housing prospects. It’s a downward spiral that’s hard to escape from.

In the past decade, people living in Hull’s Boulevard – originally planned by the Victorians as one of the city’s finest thoroughfares, but now has some of England’s lowest house prices – have seen a dramatic decline in local services that once provided a safety net. Even the local homeless hostel closed its doors last year.

During that time, members of Anlaby Park Methodist Church and its sister church, Selby Street Mission, part of the Hull (Centre and West) Methodist Circuit, have been continuing to work extremely hard to journey with people in the Boulevard area.

Strong feeling

As a member of Anlaby Methodist Church, about 10 years ago a friend and I were asked by our minister to attend nearby Selby Street on a Sunday to help boost the singing. During that first service, I had a strong feeling that I should return and help the church to serve the Boulevard community. I believe this was a call for me to work for God.

After prayerful consideration, I moved more of my time over to Selby Street while keeping a strong connection at Anlaby Park. Looking back, God's timing was perfect as things started to get tougher for the Boulevard community around the time I arrived.

I have since been working alongside Brenda Emms, who was already at Selby Street, to coordinate several initiatives designed by and for the community, with supervision and support from Anlaby Park.

Complex problems

Having previously worked at a school on a deprived council estate for 40 years, I understand the complex problems faced by many in the community. On top of (and often integral to) drug, alcohol and gambling addictions, people have relationship problems, lack of self-worth and low levels of education.

Over the past decade, as life has got tougher and tougher for people here, we've been able to walk alongside those who had nowhere else to turn. These include homeless people and people having problems with housing processes.

As well as offering housing advice, we provide showers, a haircutting service, weekly tea and toast and light lunches, and we partner with a local counselling service to offer free sessions. Our food bank has been a lifeline for many, and around 70 people come through Selby Street's church doors on our busiest days.

Glimpse of God

We believe that everyone should have a glimpse of God that carries them through their problems and challenges. This is vital if we want to further Jesus's work on earth.

We are often taken up on our offer of personal prayer by people dropping-in to use our services, and it's not unusual to see people who have become accustomed to prayer going on to pray with each other – a real triumph for the Church and for God.

For people who want to nurture a Christian faith, we hold Thursday Bible studies and Friday morning Kairos sessions that offer a relaxed and creative form of worship. Of course, everyone is also welcome at Anlaby Park Church, and some of our Selby Street members attend services there on Sunday evenings.



Selby Street catering volunteers (left to right) Marge, Diane and Ian



We've been able to walk alongside those who had nowhere else to turn.

How could you participate in God's work? Could you build on work that has gone before, or start something new? Could you draw upon skills and experiences that you have already been developing? Maybe there are prompts in your prayer life that you need to pay attention to? Perhaps people you know have been encouraging you to explore some form of ministry or role in your church or community? Take time to reflect, pray, and to listen to others and to God as you seek to discern God's call and join in with God's work.



Jovan, Hayley and Lily display the church's eco award plaques

Going beyond gold for God's creation

With the Methodist Church's 2030 target for net zero carbon emissions drawing closer, reporter Anais Pedron visited a Hampshire church to see what's been happening since it gained its gold Eco Church award four years ago.



We had to see going for gold as a process rather than a race.

Getting the gold award was a bit harder than first envisaged by members and leaders at Romsey Methodist Church, Hampshire. A Rocha, which runs the scheme aimed at encouraging and recognising churches' green credentials, sets high standards, reflects church treasurer Don Simons.

But, with solar panels installed on the roof, and a relentless engagement in community eco-outreach activities, the church was proud, in 2020, to become only the second Methodist church to gain gold.

"In the end, small things (along with a few bigger things) added up," said Don. "We had to see going for gold as a process

rather than a race, and this has continued beyond us hanging the gold plaque on our wall."

Strategy

The church's eco journey began in 2012 when its governance team decided action was needed to attract more families.

Realising that the church premises were outdated and generally unfit for purpose, a development strategy was drawn up.

"As energy became more expensive and our heating system had to be changed, we decided to refurbish much of the building to improve its efficiency and cater more to our needs," said Don.



Micah shows-off the church's bug hotel



Families Pastor Maggie helps Lily to make grass seed models

Having secured grants from the Methodist Church's Connexional fund and the Winchester, Eastleigh and Romsey Circuit, along with money from fundraising, it was decided to close the church after Easter 2015 so the work could be carried out. The pews were removed to create a more versatile space, and a new boiler with a smart meter and timer was installed along with low energy lighting, insulation and secondary glazing.

Timing

The building re-opened on 1 September, just as the church's new minister, the Revd Gareth Hill, took up his post.

Don said: "The timing couldn't have been better, and we came out of that project with enough money to refurbish the halls and rooms at the back of the church a few months later."

The new layout allowed for more community outreach including a pop-up café and toddler groups which, along with the arrival of a new family pastor, have been credited with growing the number of families connected with the church.

Increased footfall enabled church leaders to further spread their message about caring for God's creation, and more people got involved with Eco Church projects. Within a few months the church received its bronze Eco Church award, followed by silver in 2017.

Bird boxes

By the time it applied for gold, the church was using Fair Trade products, had installed LED lights, outdoor bird boxes, bug hotels and planters, and had slashed its carbon footprint by installing solar panels on the roof.

Gaining gold wasn't the end of the church's eco journey. Church steward Peter Manning explained: "Since then we've held

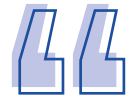
eco fairs, an eco-fashion event selling used clothes and offering clothing repairs, and a Christmas jumper swap. We try to keep our congregation engaged so in March we took part in The Big Plastic Count, tracking our plastic waste for a week. Everyone was surprised by how much plastic they used at home."

Soon the church's energy efficiency will be further improved through the installation of double glazing in the church hall and kitchen, and the plan is to then extend the eco initiatives into people's own homes.

"When we gained gold, we were encouraged to involve our community even more in joining in with what we're doing, so our next step will be partnering with Creation Care," explained Peter.

Creation Care is a Christian organisation that provides ideas and resources to help households to care for God's creation by putting a focus on their own lifestyles including their patterns of consumption.

"It seems logical for us to encourage the people our church connects with, along with the wider community, to strive for greener households while we continue to make our church more sustainable," added Peter.



As energy became more expensive and our heating system had to be changed.



Gaining gold wasn't the end of the church's eco journey.

Hamish Leese, Implementation Officer for the Church's Action for Hope project, funded by the Benefact Trust, says: "The Church is on a journey towards net zero carbon emissions by 2030. This is a really challenging target, which will require action across the Connexion, but is key to our role in God's mission. Climate change is a global problem and we can sometimes feel that we can't make much difference as individuals. But, by joining together with others in our communities, we can have a bigger impact."

To find out how you and your church can journey towards net zero, visit methodist.org.uk/ActionForHope



The Revd Dr Andrew Ashdown is the Methodist Church in Britain's Partnership Coordinator for Africa.

Overseas visit develops relationships

The new President of the Methodist Church in Britain, the Revd Helen Cameron, recently travelled to Africa to meet members and leaders of the Methodist Churches in Kenya and Uganda. The Revd Andrew Ashdown, who travelled with her, reports on the visit.



We met one young widow who was struggling to provide for her seven children.

"A place where everybody is somebody." These words, on a sign in the Kawangware Church and School complex in the slums of Nairobi, in many ways summed up the inspiring and humbling visit of the Revd Helen Cameron, the then President-designate of the Methodist Church in Britain, to the Methodist Churches in Kenya and Uganda in May.

In 1996, the women of the small Methodist congregation in Kawangware slum started a feeding programme in the church on a Sunday for some of the poorest children in the community. This developed quickly into a kindergarten, and, a few years later, after fundraising for a couple of classrooms, the mothers managed to register a primary school.

The school now serves 108 children, 60 of whom can only afford to pay for a lunch levy.

Despite the financial challenges, the church is determined to continue to provide education and lunch for the most vulnerable children.

Young widow

After visiting the school, we were taken through the slum's narrow alleys to visit a few families supported by the church. We met one young widow who was struggling to provide for her seven children by selling vegetables. Her greatest desire was that her children might get an education and so have the hope of a better life.

A few days later, we stood and prayed with members of the local church beside the graves of the Revd John and Mrs Annie Houghton in the village of Golbanti in the Tana River Valley, close to Malindi in the coastal region of Kenya. John and Annie, who were among



Helen with children at Nambula Church, Uganda



Helen with members of Nambula Women's Fellowship, Uganda

the first Methodist missionaries in East Africa, were killed in Golbanti in 1886. Like all the missionaries who helped establish Methodism in Africa, they are remembered with great respect by the local people. And today, the Methodist churches that serve the residents of the valley – one of the most isolated and poorest regions of Kenya – are growing.

Great joy

As we met and prayed with local church members, they danced and sang with great joy, thanking us for being the first British visitors to their circuit, and telling us that our visit would be remembered for many years.

A few weeks before our visit to the valley, heavy rain had caused extensive flooding, displacing more than 40,000 people. Their tented camps lined the main road to Malindi for many miles.

In Western Kenya, we visited the country's largest Methodist Synod. Set in a vast rural area inhabited by 23 per cent of Kenya's population, the synod comprises 30,000

members spread across 68 churches/ societies in 12 circuits. In one of those circuits, we visited the area's only health centre, where conditions were basic, along with a high school at Ugunja. Approaching the school, we were met by all 580 pupils, who lined the roadsides and sang songs to greet us. They were eager to develop educational links with schools in Britain.

From Kenya, we crossed the border into Uganda. The Methodist Church in Uganda, founded in 1985 by a Muslim convert, is a young Church (70 per cent of Uganda's population is aged under 30). Most Church members are farmers in the rural region of Eastern Uganda.

Neighbours

The mission of the Church is to be a strong, growing Church, rooted in the Methodist tradition, where members love God with all their hearts and strength, and love and serve their neighbours. This desire to serve God's people and share God's love flows naturally from the Methodist members. We joined in joyful worship and travelled into the villages to see how members are building churches and growing schools, despite having few resources. They persevere with a vision, faith and commitment that is humbling and inspiring.

Throughout our trip, we saw how the principle of loving and serving God and neighbour is lived out in the face of huge challenges. We also learned that the ministry of presence is most transformative for people. By being present, we develop understanding and friendship. And from this mutuality, we gleaned that we have so much to learn from one another.



Our visit would be remembered for many years.



We have so much to learn from one another.

John Wesley was committed to a global ministry. Today, the Methodist Church is a global family and our partners around the world deeply value the historical links with the 'parent' church, the Methodist Church in Britain. As we honour that relationship, our Church life in Britain can only be enriched by sustaining and strengthening our relationships with our partner Churches. In the next issue of *the connexion*, we hear from the new Vice-President of the Methodist Conference, Carolyn Godfrey.



Fun, food and friendship for people with dementia



Katy Morris is Local Lay-Pastor based at Well Street United Church. She runs Lyrics and Lunch at nearby Thornborough Methodist Chapel, part of the Buckingham, Bicester and Brackley Methodist Circuit.

Almost a million people in the UK have dementia, with the number set to rise to 1.4 million by 2040 according to Alzheimer's Society estimates. Pastoral care worker Katy Morris explains how churches in her community are supporting people living with the condition.

The very first person I visited in their home, after starting in my role in 2008, had dementia. Since then, I have seen the effects of dementia on people's lives in all three of the rural churches I serve, as well as personally in my husband's family.

I meet wives and husbands caring for their spouses, adult children looking after parents, and friends doing whatever they can to make a difference to loved ones with dementia.

For the person with dementia, their social circle shrinks and then starts to disappear as they are increasingly unable to leave their home. Taking a loved one with dementia out

to public places is hard work for relatives who are afraid that society won't make allowances for their loved one's needs, and, eventually, even going to church seems impossible.

Hope

It was with this in mind that I began to hope for ways in which the Buckingham area churches I serve could do more to journey with people with dementia and their carers. Then, a few years ago, while taking part in an online conference organised by Churches Together in Cumbria, I heard about Lyrics and Lunch. The way Lyrics and Lunch works is that

churches provide a relaxed and comfortable setting along with volunteers to coordinate fun, friendship, singing and a simple lunch for people with dementia. Each person who attends must be accompanied by a carer, and there are none of the traditional expectations of how people should behave in a church setting.

Having prayed a lot about the logistics of getting a Lyrics and Lunch group off the ground in my area, I approached a few people to see if they would be interested in helping.

Training

Jeanette Main, the founder of the national Lyrics and Lunch network, kindly led a training day for us. This included Dementia Friends training and experiencing first-hand a Lyrics and Lunch session.

Soon afterwards, a group of us planned our first meeting and we advertised it to the local community, including through our GP surgery. We also told our area's care providers.

Our superintendent minister, the Revd Sara Cliff, was instrumental in obtaining a start-up grant from Northampton Methodist District, and our first monthly Lyrics and Lunch gathering was held in Thornborough Methodist Chapel, part of the Buckingham, Bicester and Brackley Circuit, in June 2022.

Needs

Lyrics and Lunch is based around the core needs of people with dementia and their carers. These are the need for mental stimulation, hence the singing and use of simple percussion instruments, the need for food and nutrition as carers can often struggle to get their loved one to eat, the

need for support for the carers, and the need for spiritual care for everyone.

The sessions offer a fun and stimulating activity, a warm and welcoming atmosphere and tasty and nutritious food. This is all served up with a huge helping of God's love via our volunteers and through a Bible reading, thought for the day and hymn. This can often connect people to their memories of singing hymns in school assemblies or at special occasions, such as weddings.

With 16 regular guests, we try to create an atmosphere where carers don't need to worry about anything or feel awkward about how their loved one may react or behave.

Volunteers

Our 15 volunteers are a mixture of Thornborough Chapel members and people from my home church, Well Street United Church, along with a few from the local Anglican church and wider community. Some have first-hand experience of dementia, having previously cared for a relative.

We have worked hard to establish ourselves as a part of the community, and local Women's Institute members make our cakes. One of our volunteers held a musical fundraiser for us on the village green last summer, and we keep local people updated about our activities via village newsletters.

As people's dementia progresses, we do, ultimately, see guests move into care homes or pass away, but we rejoice in the fact that our group has been able to make a difference to their lives and share God's love with them and their families.

More information about running a Lyrics and Lunch group is available at lyricsandlunch.org



Volunteers (left to right) Veda, Pat, Maureen and Nora



For the person with dementia, their social circle shrinks and then starts to disappear.



We rejoice in the fact that our group has been able to make a difference to their lives.



Visitors and volunteers sing along at Lyrics and Lunch



Caroline Barratt is Community Chaplain at Cornerstone Methodist Church in Corby, Northamptonshire, which is part of the East Mercia Methodist Circuit. As part of her work, she coordinates the church's Here4U Hub.



Turning tragedy into hope

When a teenager was fatally stabbed in the street, a nearby Methodist church decided it was time to step-up its neighbourhood outreach work. Community Chaplain Caroline Barratt explains how the tragedy has inspired hope.

The whole community was in shock when we heard that a 16-year-old boy had died during a knife fight with another teenager near his home in Corby, Northamptonshire in May 2021.

Our church, just a few streets away, decided that we should open our doors for a morning so that locals could come in and spend time contemplating, praying, lighting candles and consoling one another – and talking with us if they wished

We didn't know how it was going to go because it was the first time that a lot of visitors would come through our doors, and we felt it would probably be daunting for those who had never before been in a church.

It ended up being an incredible time. More than 40 people visited, and we felt that our time together had been really powerful. It was then that we realised our church needed to do more for our community. We felt we needed to open our building and our hearts to share God's life-transforming love.

Connect

While we had already been checking-in on families during the pandemic, and running a food bank, we felt we could do more. Our church, Cornerstone Methodist Church, is on the Kingswood housing estate which has many social problems, so we decided to use hospitality to connect with our community.



We listened to what people wanted and needed.

I'd already been working on the estate as a children's and youth worker and, while I still do a lot of work with young people, I realised it was important to form relationships with the whole of the family, not just children. This meant a change in my role to Community Chaplain and, with the sterling work of a team of volunteers, and support from North Northamptonshire Council, the launch of our Here4U Hub.

Social isolation

Starting as a Wednesday morning drop-in with tea, coffee, books and newspapers, the Hub quickly grew into a place where local support agencies, including social workers, could meet with their clients. Many of the people who came had long-term health conditions and/or were experiencing social isolation.

We listened to what people wanted and needed, so, during the first winter we opened for the whole day on Wednesdays and included hot lunches in order to provide a warm place for people struggling to afford to heat their homes. We also had a drop-in session for rough sleepers.

At Christmas we held a community carol service which was attended by nine people from the Hub who hadn't been to a Sunday service before. They contributed to the readings, which was really special.

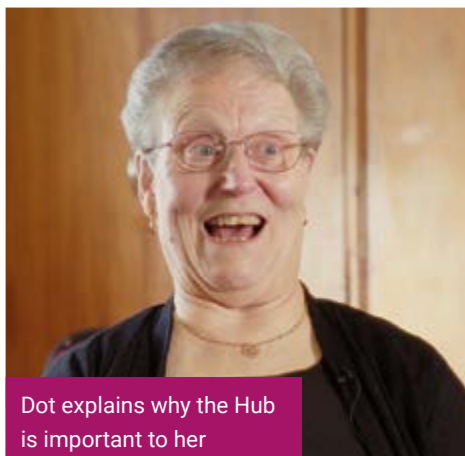
As the winter progressed, we saw more people coming through our doors, including from further afield, and many social connections were formed. We knew we needed to keep up the momentum over the summer, so we secured funding, including from the Methodist Church, to keep the Hub open on Wednesday mornings and continue serving free lunches.

Partners

At the moment, the Hub, which has a lot of support from Wendy Ryan, Community Development Worker at North Northamptonshire Council, includes craft sessions and armchair yoga. We partner with organisations including Christians Against Poverty, local councils and the police to provide advice, support and signposting for anyone who wants it. Through the Hub, people can also hear



Community members make the most of the Hub's warmth



Dot explains why the Hub is important to her

about other community and church activities that they can join in with.

One of the many people who is benefiting from the initiative is Dot, who was experiencing isolation and loneliness after being widowed. She has formed some good friendships that continue beyond the Hub's walls.

She told me: "I absolutely love coming here because everybody speaks to me. I really enjoy the crafts and the lunch. It's made a big difference because I'm not sitting in the house feeling so lonely. I always look forward to Wednesdays."

The people who visit the Hub see it as providing a family, and it gives them hope for the future.

A video about the Corby Here4U Hub is available to watch at: methodist.org.uk/CornerstoneCorby



It's made a big difference because I'm not sitting in the house feeling so lonely.



The people who visit the Hub see it as providing a family.

Experience shows that when churches open a Warm Space, to offer community members warmth and company during the winter months, people visit. And the visitors become family who, in turn, are a blessing for the Church. The Bible tells us that "if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday." (Isaiah 58:10, NRSVA)
More information about Warm Spaces, and where to find them this winter is available at methodist.org.uk/action/poverty/warm-welcome-spaces



Helping children on an emotional journey

A book aimed at helping children to navigate the emotional journey associated with an elderly relative moving to a care home has been launched by MHA, the Methodist care provider, in partnership with the Methodist Church.

Launched at a gathering of residents and local schoolchildren at a Croydon care home, *Finding Nana* follows the story of fictional characters Ellie and Jack as they discover what happens when their nana moves into a care home.

Author Jenni Bacon said plans for the book had originally been based on a younger audience but that, when she was writing, the story had formed naturally into a longer tale most suitable for junior and young senior school children.

“Everything was carefully researched and, as much as possible, based on real life,” said Jenni, who has experience of working with schoolchildren.

Characters

Once the story was written, Jenni and illustrator Sophie Parmenter collaborated to ensure the characters, some of whom were inspired by people known by the pair, came to life on the pages.

The idea for the project came from the late Revd Crispian Acher, who was MHA’s Head of Chaplaincy. Crispian, who died suddenly while the book was being published, had realised during conversations with colleagues that there was nothing available to help children if an older relative went to live in a care home.

The Revd Gill Newton, ex-President of the Methodist Conference, said at the launch that the Church was very proud that the whole concept had begun in the mind of Crispian, an ordained Methodist minister and chaplain.

She said: “It’s been a joy for the Church to partner with MHA and see this project come to fruition.

It’s a unique book that not only tells the story of children and their grandmother but also spotlights the important role a chaplain plays in supporting residents and their families.”

Chaplains

The Revd Jennifer Potter and the Revd Malar Lawrence, who are chaplains at MHA’s Hall Grange care home where the book was launched, said they already knew of several children who would benefit from reading *Finding Nana*.

“Many people who live here have grandchildren, so we can see that the book will be an incredibly valuable resource,” said Jennifer.

Between them, Jennifer and Malar provide pastoral and spiritual support to the home’s



Launching the new book are (left to right) Kate Le Sueur, MHA Head of Chaplaincy North, the Revd Gill Newton, ex-President of the Methodist Conference, Sophie Parmenter, illustrator, Jenni Bacon, author, and Sam Monaghan, CEO of MHA

residents and families, greeting newcomers and then journeying with them until the end.

“Some residents have had not-so-good experiences of church in the past, or may not have had church on their radar in the months or years before their arrival, while others have been life-long Methodists. Regardless, as *Finding Nana* illustrates, chaplains are here for everyone,” said Malar. “We lead daily prayers, have coffee and do puzzles with residents, and provide a listening ear to anyone who wants it. When residents and their families are going through tough times, we make sure that they feel loved and supported.”

Happier

Jeremy (12), who attends Oasis Academy Shirley Park, was among the local schoolchildren who attended the book launch. He said: “I sometimes visit my Grandad in the care home where he lives. I remember when he lived on his own and was struggling, and I can see that he’s much happier now he’s in a care home. I’ll definitely be reading the book.”

MHA Chief Executive Sam Monaghan said: “Visiting a care home can be a daunting experience for anyone, but it’s particularly unsettling for children when they see someone they love moving in.

“*Finding Nana* aims to help families have honest and positive conversations about this experience. It also shines a light on the fantastic and unique work that our chaplaincy team does in supporting our residents and their families.”

Finding Nana is available to buy from methodistpublishing.org.uk. For every copy sold, a proportion of the proceeds go to MHA’s services.



Visiting a care home can be a daunting experience for anyone, but it’s particularly unsettling for children.



Jeremy (12) looks forward to reading the book



Finding Nana aims to help families have honest and positive conversations.



The Revd Sue Pegg has served as a minister in the Huddersfield Methodist Circuit, which includes Gledholt Methodist Church, since 2018. Having undertaken postgraduate studies in evangelism, Sue is passionate about church growth and loves to support others in this.



They don't have to face life's struggles on their own.



It's taken a few years of prayer-led evolution to get here.



Tea and Toast volunteer Eric

Evolving outreach boosts attendance

An initiative aimed at helping a struggling community has led to the growth of a Huddersfield church. The Revd Sue Pegg explains how.

"Some of our visitors are in need of more than breakfast, so we do our best to show them that they don't have to face life's struggles on their own," says Eric (83), one of our Tea and Toast volunteers.

Eric, a life-long Methodist, became a regular helper at the Wednesday breakfast drop-in sessions at our church, Gledholt

Methodist, after being widowed in spring 2023 when his wife, Betty, died after a long illness.

Gledholt's Tea and Toast is open to anyone in our community, regardless of their faith, who would like morning refreshments and a chance to socialise – though visitors can just sit quietly if they want to.

Volunteers benefit

Eric and our other volunteers do a marvellous job of providing a warm welcome, making and serving the breakfast and being available to chat. The great thing is that the volunteers benefit from being involved, too.

“It gives me a focus for my week and means that I can feel useful, contributing to the community,” says Eric.

Anyone arriving into the busyness of Tea and Toast for the first time would probably think it’s been like that for ever, but it’s taken a few years of prayer-led evolution to get here.

Five years ago, a few months into my appointment as a minister in the Huddersfield Circuit, I was asked to look after Gledholt church alongside the two village churches I was caring for. Gledholt is an urban church, so this was a first for me, having spent 20 years in rural locations.

Crisis

Sadly, Covid-19 set in before I’d had chance to get to know the Gledholt congregation, and the pandemic lockdowns then led to some church members leaving and the resident playgroup closing.

When we returned to worshipping in our building, the congregation had shrunk from around 35 regulars to 23, with just 3 children. Then the cost of living crisis hit our community.

Several of us began praying about how we could best help our community. Hearing that many people were struggling to afford to eat, we joined the national FareShare network which redirects surplus food from businesses to hungry people via charities including churches.

Also, we decided that, when community members visited our church to collect food, we would offer them a free simple breakfast as part of the national Tea and Toast network.

Breakfast

As time went on, we found that food coming to us via the FareShare scheme was a bit hit and miss, but about 15 people still came regularly for breakfast.

Hoping to give our community outreach a boost, I applied for a few grants and was thrilled when the church was awarded £3,000 to buy food for distribution, along with a further grant to become a registered Warm Welcome space. We were also given boxes of essential items by the local council to distribute to our service users over the winter.



The Revd Sue Pegg chats with visitors

Wednesday morning Tea and Toast with food giveaways, alongside Warm Welcome, became increasingly popular and, as visitor numbers went up, so did attendance at our Sunday services!

Children’s activities

In addition, about a year ago, families newly arrived in the UK from several African countries began to attend our services. Many speak English as a second language and most are Christians, and it’s been a great joy to have since baptised two of their babies. As a church, we’re journeying with the newcomers, supporting them in various practical ways.

The increased numbers of families at services (we now have a congregation of around 50 worshippers!) has led to us restarting some children’s activities including monthly Lego Church sessions. We’re also offering teenagers mini smart screens for them to watch Christian programmes.

Sadly, with many supermarkets now selling food that they previously would have donated, it has become challenging to provide groceries to our community. However, Tea and Toast continues to thrive, and other events including a school uniform giveaway, community police talks and free basic health checks by NHS nurses occasionally run alongside.



We’re journeying with the newcomers.

Reflection



Justice through trading



The Revd Walter Attwood is a supernumerary (retired) minister in the Forth Valley Methodist Circuit in Scotland. After working in the Civil Service and then as a community worker, he became an ordained minister and served in five circuits in England and Scotland before retiring.

Fairtrade Fortnight provides a great opportunity for us to reflect on how we can play our part in being a justice-seeking Church, writes the Revd Walter Attwood.

Jesus rampaging through the temple, attacking those who were ripping off the pilgrims, tells us a lot about how he viewed fair trading.

Money can be acquired by dubious means and used for selfish purposes. It can also be gained by means of fair pay for our labour, and we can use it to benefit others. Money is not the problem. Far too often we are the problem, in our attitudes towards and use of money.

Fair trade is about treating people with respect. That's good. However, before we begin our celebrations of fair trade, we perhaps ought to reflect on how we use, and benefit from, exploitative trading practices – even if unwittingly.

Many small communities along the west coast of Africa were once self-sufficient. They also provided food to inland communities. On a daily basis, the local fishermen caught sufficient food for their own families and the extra fish was traded in local markets. This provided money to buy other foods and essentials. They had a simple but secure lifestyle based upon fair trading.

Exported

But this security was destroyed when larger, more technologically advanced foreign fishing boats entered their waters. Their catch wasn't used to feed local people. Instead, it was exported, with much of it being processed into animal feed and sold in Europe.

Having overfished the waters, the foreign boats moved on, leaving the previously self-sufficient local communities to struggle. With little fishing work available for locals, young people moved away from home in search of jobs, hollowing out towns and villages.

Agribusiness

Tragically, it's not just fishing communities that are being exploited by international profit-led commerce. Global agribusinesses have been shown to be exploitative, acquiring land in poorer countries, driving out locals, exporting crops to wealthier countries and handing the profits to company shareholders.

For Christians, the Bible is clear about what God expects from us when we interact with one another, including how we do business.

"When you make a sale to your neighbour or buy from your neighbour, you shall not cheat one another." (Leviticus 25:14, NRSVA)

"He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8, NRSVA)

Thankfully, the Fairtrade scheme offers a socially-just method of doing business. It empowers local communities to work together as cooperatives so they can be more efficient and productive, giving them more financial clout when trading their crops.

Living wage

Workers involved in the cooperatives that are part of the Fairtrade Foundation's scheme get a living wage and better working conditions, and, in turn, a better life for their families. The cooperatives often produce a trading surplus and profits can be invested within their local communities.

So how does this connect with our own daily lives? Well, for starters, when we can afford to, we have the choice to buy Fairtrade products such as tea, coffee, bananas and chocolate. This is a direct way for us to support small-scale producers in poorer countries.

Also, we can add our voice to campaigns for fairer deals for small traders, and promote the benefits of buying Fairtrade products to our friends.



West African fishermen sell their catch to local people

Fair Trade Stirling

In Stirling, a fair trade group that brings together partners from organisations across our city including Stirling Council, was launched at an event in our church in 2004. This has gone from strength to strength and, in 2013, the whole Stirling council area became a fair trade zone.

Fair Trade Stirling's mission is to promote Fairtrade and fairly-traded goods, uplifting local and global communities through conscious consumerism. We're very pleased, as a church, to have been involved from the beginning.

The group has a link with a rice-producing cooperative in Malawi, which, as the result of us buying their produce and sending them the profits from our Fairtrade stalls, has been able to buy agricultural equipment. This has, in turn, enabled them to increase production.

Some of the Malawi rice has been donated to our local food bank, ensuring that we're also supporting people at home.

Fairtrade Fortnight, from 9 to 22 September, offers a really good opportunity to think more about what we can all do to support small-scale farmers overseas.



For Christians, the Bible is clear about what God expects from us.



Fairtrade Fortnight offers a really good opportunity to think more.

The Methodist Church is committed to tackling inequality and injustice. Practical steps we, as individuals and as congregations, can take to make the world a fairer place include supporting and journeying with people experiencing poverty through initiatives such as Fairtrade, and campaigning against injustice. To learn more about the Church's practices for justice, as part of its strategy, A Justice-seeking Church, visit: methodist.org.uk/SocialJustice



Where **Methodism** is all in a day's work

More than 24,000 pupils attend over 80 schools with 'Methodist' in their name. Reporter Mike Ivatt visited a Merseyside primary school to find out what makes them special.

Crosses, extracts from the Bible and framed quotes from John Wesley hang on the walls. You can't ignore the conscious Christian expressions at Nutgrove Methodist Primary School, St Helens, near Liverpool. At Nutgrove, theirs is a living, inspirational faith and its influence is felt throughout the school.

Nutgrove has just over 200 pupils, and Headteacher Rachel Bottell believes its faith-based ethos makes the school popular. "We make our Christianity and our Methodism overt and we are fully subscribed. Families choose us because we create a happy, secure and purposeful culture, based on our Christian values, that is conducive to learning and high standards."



We make our Christianity and our Methodism overt.

Jane Dawes is the school's Religious Education Coordinator and, being a Methodist School, RE is an important part of the curriculum with the children receiving two hours of the subject every week.

Following God

Jane explains: "To understand Christianity, pupils have one creative RE session – maybe music, drama or art – and another that is literacy based. We have lessons where we learn about Methodism's history and values. For example, we get pupils to write their own Methodist Covenant Prayer, which expresses Christians' commitment to follow God's will in their lives.

"When learning about Methodism, the

children look at the words on the membership card that's given to Church members, and then design their own. We also use resources based on the Church's Modern Art Collection.

"Every year, our eldest pupils put on a school assembly about the life of Methodism's founder, John Wesley, and parents come to watch.

Curriculum

"Faith runs through the whole curriculum including the foundation subjects of history, geography and science, and, of course, the children learn about other world religions and cultures, too."

Kathryn Barlow is a pastoral assistant. Her role is to ensure the children receive suitable emotional, social and spiritual support. She has a long connection with the school and Methodism. "My parents attended Nutgrove, and I followed years later with my brother. My father was a local Methodist preacher. Faith is important to me.

"When the children are singing, I tell them that Methodism was born in song, and then they practically raise the roof!"

Support

The children recognise how special their school is. Luke (10) has been at Nutgrove since reception class and appreciates the care the school shows towards him and his friends. "The school gives us lots of support. There are things like worry boxes, where we can post notes with our worries written on, and the teachers listen to what we say.

"We also do our best to share Christian values such as love, respect, faith, self-control, forgiveness, hope and thankfulness. As we get older, we go deeper into what it means to be a Christian and learn about God and what God means in our lives. I go to church so it's good to be able to talk about faith with friends at school."

Kindness

Seb (11) likes how friendly the school is and, although he doesn't go to church, he told me that he believes in Jesus. "We do RE a lot. We learn that kindness is important. We have assemblies and learn about God, and sometimes we talk about Jesus and our school values in lessons."

Headteacher Rachel emphasised that the school sees faith as a lifetime investment for its children. "Our Christian ethos means



Kathryn Barlow with pupil Luke



Headteacher Rachel Bottell

we encourage the children to have a close relationship with God, be that now or when they grow up.

"Our motto, All My Best Everywhere, is based on John Wesley's words. It's a call that covers so many aspects of life, whether pupils follow the Christian faith or not. It's not just about personal ambitions but faith encourages us to play an active role in building cohesive communities where all are respected.

"The school is part of the Epworth Education Trust, a family of schools that are deeply committed to working together for the benefit of all the children they serve. This offers us additional support as a faith school. The trust's motto, Do All You Can, is an integral part of our school and we all believe that anything is possible with the right attitude.

"Being Headteacher here brings so many strengths. It is a privilege to serve as Head at Nutgrove, where the children are at the heart of everything we do."



The children recognise how special their school is.



The school sees faith as a lifetime investment for its children.



Wesley's artefacts inspire artists

The Museum of Methodism has been hosting an exhibition of work by a group of neurodiverse artists. Rachel Dalby, editor of *the connexion*, met them during one of their visits to gain ideas for their future work.



I'm interested in religious art so this museum is a great place to visit.

“Whoa,” said Violet, looking up at the stained glass windows of Wesley’s Chapel in London. “I absolutely love them. I love the light and the beautiful colours. They definitely give me ideas for my own artwork.”

Having taken in the rest of the Chapel – London’s first purpose built Methodist church – Violet and the rest of the group from Artbox, a London charity that runs activities for adults with learning disabilities and autism, continued to the site’s Museum of Methodism.

The group had come to view a temporary exhibition of their members’ own artwork, and to take part in a sketching workshop.

Excitement

There was great excitement from the artists as they walked round, spotting their own work displayed on easels in front of the museum’s collection of paintings from the 18th and 19th centuries.

Violet paused to look at her own colourful canvases that were influenced by her love



Joel sketches some of the museum's exhibits

of cats and the eyes of animals and people. "My style is abstract, sort of like Picasso's, though I'd never actually knowingly seen any of his work before I developed this style," she explained.

Painting such colourful and playful images had been impossible for Violet when she joined Artbox in 2019. Her mum, whom she was very close to, had just died, and Violet's sister suggested she went along to some art workshops to take some time out for herself.

Colours

"The Artbox sessions gave me space to grieve," she said. "For a long time, I only painted using blue and black, because that's exactly how I was feeling. But now my brain is thinking in more colours and my artwork definitely reflects that. It's amazing to now be able to see

my work on show in the Methodist museum."

Another artist viewing their own work was Herald, who enjoyed art during his school and college days but never imagined he would once have some of his work on display in a museum visited by people from around the world.

Herald's work is heavily influenced by important figures in Black history, including former renowned American basketball player Julius Erving (nicknamed Dr J). Herald's painting of Dr J was on display alongside another of his works at the exhibition.

Pausing close to a pair of John Wesley's shoes, on display in a glass case, Herald said: "I'm really enjoying looking at the museum's artefacts and learning some things about the Methodist Church."

Religious art

Paul, who has been a member of Artbox for about five years, said: "I'm not really sure how I feel about religion, but I'm interested in religious art so this museum is a great place to visit."

Having recently received a medical diagnosis that made him think more deeply about his life, Paul has found solace in immersing himself in painting exuberant scenes of imagined tropical paradise-like places. "I like to use bright, warm colours that cheer people up," he said.

Later, during their workshop in the museum's education space, the Artbox group sketched pictures inspired by some of the artefacts they'd seen on display, including a large collection of John Wesley busts.

Museum curator Christian Dettlaff said: "This exciting collaboration with Artbox means so much for us here at the chapel and museum. It's great to welcome this fabulous group of neurodiverse artists, and, through exhibiting their work, encourage new people into the museum where they can learn about Wesley, Methodism and the Christian faith."



Violet with her colourful abstract canvases



Artist Herald, who never previously imagined he'd have his work on public display



It's great to welcome this fabulous group of neurodiverse artists.

The Museum of Methodism, which shares a site with John Wesley's house and the first purpose built Methodist church in London, Wesley's Chapel, tells the history of Methodism from John Wesley to the present day and its contribution to shaping Britain's political and social history. More information is available at: wesleysheritage.org.uk Artbox London is a registered charity and social enterprise that runs art workshops, trips, and exhibition and sales opportunities for around 80 people with learning disabilities and autism. More information is available at: artboxlondon.org

TOTS group members gather for story time



This group has been my sanctuary.



The Revd Nicholas Witham

has been a presbyter (ordained minister) for 17 years. Originally from South London, he is a huge fan of playing and watching sport and is chaplain to his local cricket club. He is keen to use sport as a means of talking about faith and will be writing a sports evangelism course during his upcoming sabbatical.

Acting in faith to build community cohesion

Deciding to break with tradition and adapt to new situations has enabled our Cambridgeshire church to significantly increase its numbers, writes the Revd Nicholas Witham.

“This group has been my sanctuary where I can share my experiences as a first-time mum”, says Kate. “There’s such a great sense of community here.”

Kate is among a group of local parents who, between them, bring around 60 children to our weekly Christian TOTS session at St Ives Methodist Church in Cambridgeshire.

With a strong emphasis on pastoral care, TOTS has a list of people waiting to join. Our ethos is centered on care and prayer, creating an environment where parents look out for each other, share their concerns with staff, and build a community based on compassion for anyone who’s struggling.

This ethos has led to the group being recognised by local health and social care professionals who have started referring some families to us, which is big news. But perhaps even more significant is the fact that we are

seeing a drift of some of our group members into Sunday morning worship meetings, where our TOTS staff are on hand to greet them.

This kind of community outreach by our church hasn’t been accidental – far from it. Realising that the personal isolation of the Covid-19 pandemic had left its mark on our community, we decided to reset our church outreach activities to do everything we could to promote social contact and cohesion.

New image

We gave our church projects a new image, including a new logo, and we introduced new missional aims centered on radical hospitality with a very intentional aim of sharing the love of Christ.

Thankfully, some years earlier, our church building had been completely refurbished so we have a great flexible space and up-to-date facilities to cater for different types of activities.



New members

Over the past three years, since TOTS was relaunched and we have adapted our worship, the church has welcomed 38 new members and has seen the number of children at Sunday worship grow to 25.

Alongside TOTS, another stand-out project is our Thursday morning Coffee On The Waits session, which is an informal coffee and cake drop-in that regularly attracts more than 50 people. From this, a mens' group has developed, mainly for people who live alone due to being widowed.

One of the mens' group members, Dave, told me: "I look forward to coming each week and wouldn't miss it for anything. We talk about all sorts of things and I really enjoy it".

It really is a thrill to be seeing so many people in our community making connections, having conversations and caring for one another. We're praising God for this at every opportunity because all of this hasn't happened without a few struggles along the way.

Changes

Changing our patterns and style of worship to accommodate new and younger people, many of whom are either seeking faith or are taking early steps in their Christian journey, has been challenging.

Thankfully, the vast majority of people have welcomed our new, more flexible approach

that has reached all ages, and some of our older members have rejoiced at seeing younger people and children in church.

While we've been highly focused on growing our local church and community work, we've also been keen to broaden our global perspective, so, as part of the East Anglia District Methodist Partnership, our church has connected with Mount Sinai United Methodist Church in western Harare, Zimbabwe.

Sharing

Via video, we have shared in worship with Mount Sinai, and we have a commitment to pray for and encourage each other. In April, a small team of us from St Ives was part of a Methodist district delegation, including our district chair, the Revd Julain Pursehouse, that visited churches in the Harare West District to which Mount Sinai belongs.

This visit provided us with a rich time of sharing and learning that will impact our future practice at home and has already encouraged us to be more confident in our identity and in the power of the gospel to change lives.

We hope to continue this learning by stressing the importance placed on acting in faith rather than acting from a place of fear. We feel that it would be too easy to allow finance or other challenges to block church growth and mission projects, so we are now endeavouring to put all of our faith into Christ.



I look forward to coming each week.



We're praising God for this at every opportunity.



Representatives vote on policy changes during the 2024 Methodist Conference

Be bolder in seeking justice, Conference President urges



*“Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed.”
Isaiah 1:17a (NIV)*

Addressing poverty, keeping people in church safe and improving the way in which the Methodist Church handles complaints were among the topics discussed at the Church’s annual Conference meeting in July.

Hundreds of representatives met in Leeds to seek, through conferring with one another, God’s will for the Church and to agree policy. The event was also a time of thanksgiving, worship and ordination, with five Yorkshire churches hosting ordination services for deacons and presbyters.

Presiding at the gathering were the 2024/2025 President and Vice-President of the Methodist Conference, the Revd Helen Cameron and Carolyn Godfrey. Their theme for their year in office is ‘learn to do right, seek justice and defend the oppressed’.

Vision

In her Conference address, Helen said: “Carolyn and I seek to share with you this

year, a vision of the Church and the world transformed, not by might or power but by love and justice, mercy and compassion, truth and grace. We do so in support of the Justice-seeking Church work begun by members of the Connexional Team.

“We wish to encourage the Methodist Church to continue to be a Justice-seeking Church, and where we may have been hesitant or uncertain, to urge one another to be bolder. We believe, inspired by the great Cornel West, that justice is what love looks like in public.”

Golden threads

Carolyn’s Conference address reminded those present that much of the Church’s recent work and its plans for the future reflected the

three key rules that John Wesley spoke of in the early days of the Methodist movement: Do no harm, do all the good you can, and attend to the ordinances of God. "These three golden threads," said Carolyn, "should weave through our lives and all we do as individuals and as an organisation."

During the seven-day meeting, the Church's work to take God's love to everyone as part of its God For All strategy, was celebrated and its objectives were renewed to 2032. The strategy sees the Church embracing God's call to change and grow in the 21st century so that new people become disciples of Jesus Christ, faith deepens for everyone, and diverse communities and churches experience transformation.

Later in the week, the President and Vice-President of the Methodist Conference for 2025/2026 were elected. They are the Revd Richard Andrew and Matthew Forsyth, who will begin their year of office at the Methodist Conference meeting in Telford in June 2025.



The President and Vice President of the Methodist Conference, the Revd Helen Cameron (right) and Carolyn Godfrey

Read Helen and Carolyn's Conference addresses in full at:
methodist.org.uk/PresidentsAddress2024
methodist.org.uk/VicePresidentsAddress2024

Five facts about the Methodist Conference



The first Wesleyan Conference, held in London

1 What is the Methodist Conference?

It's the Methodist Church in Britain's governing body. It has responsibility for the government, discipline, management and administration of the life of the Church.

2 When and why does it meet?

It meets every summer to seek, through conferring, God's will for the Church and to agree policy. This is also a time for worship, thanksgiving, ordination and celebration.

3 Who belongs to the Conference?

Representatives of each Methodist district, along with some who have been elected by the Conference, and representatives of the Youth Assembly. The representatives are a mixture of lay people, presbyters and deacons.

4 When did the first Conference meet?

In 1744, when Methodist Church founder John Wesley gathered together his assistants (ordained ministers and itinerant lay preachers) to confer about "what to teach, how to teach, and what to do, ie how to regulate our doctrine, discipline and practice".

5 When was the most recent Conference meeting?

The 2024 Conference meeting was held from 27 June to 3 July at the Royal Armouries, Leeds.



This two-way conversation is exactly what the annual Conference meeting is all about.



Gathering **connects** local churches

The Revd Paul Critchley, responsible for four churches in the West Norfolk Circuit, East Anglia District, was among those taking part in the 2024 Conference meeting. Paul outlines his experience of the event and its significance for local churches.

Taking part in conversations on key policies that will shape the Church's life felt good because we knew that, through the changes agreed at Conference, we'd be helping people in the future. For example, as the result of a really thoughtful discussion about the Church's complaints and reconciliation procedure, the process will now be streamlined and made fairer and quicker for the people involved.

District representatives

The way that Methodism works is that it connects local churches to their circuit, circuits to their district, and districts to the Connexion – the wider community of the Methodist Church in Britain – and then back, via districts and circuits to local churches. This two-way conversation is exactly what

the annual Conference meeting is all about.

Prior to Conference, all of the East Anglia District representatives met to highlight parts of the agenda that we found particularly interesting and had comments or questions about. This made sure that we were properly prepared, ready to speak and vote on behalf of the churches and people in our district.

Outside of the main Conference business, the coffee and lunch breaks were important for networking, enabling us to share ideas and experiences and to support one another. It was a good time to catch up with colleagues we hadn't seen for a while, and to make some new connections.

The breaks also provided time to chat with exhibitors from other Methodist organisations, and to pick up useful resources and knowledge to take back to our churches.

God is for everyone!

Crucial plans to help churches reach more people and deepen their congregations' faith were celebrated and renewed at the 2024 Methodist Conference meeting. Director of Evangelism and Growth Trey Hall explains why the plans are so important and what they mean for local communities.

The Methodist Church is in a season of prioritising building relationships with the world outside of its traditional 'four walls'. We want to journey alongside people in local communities and so we are recommitting, over the next decade, to engage more fully in the public square.

Recognising that some people may not be attracted to traditional forms of church, it will be important for us, in our local churches, to offer people new ways of exploring spirituality. This is where the Church's God For All strategy comes in.

Diverse backgrounds

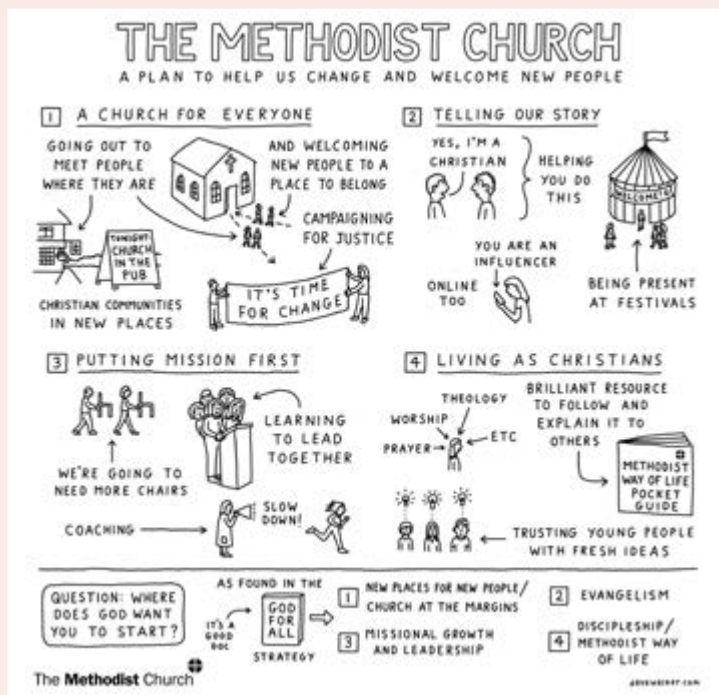
Launched four years ago, God For All is a strategy aimed at inspiring and equipping churches to build on and launch new ways of connecting with their local communities. The hope is that people from diverse backgrounds and generations, including those who don't feel at home in traditional religious settings, will feel welcomed and included by the Methodist Church.

We want new people to become disciples of Jesus Christ, for faith to deepen for everyone, and, as a result, for diverse communities and churches to experience transformation.

Since God For All's launch, we've seen New Places for New People (NPNPs) – new Christian communities for people who aren't part of an existing church – open in 18 districts, with current plans in eight more districts. There are also many existing churches that are meeting new people in different ways. These include forest church outings, craft groups, coffee drop-ins, Lego church for families with children, and gatherings with English language lessons and meals for refugees.

Festivals

Another key element of God For All is about expanding the Church's presence at festivals and other events where there are opportunities for us to engage with people



who are not part of (or affiliated with) religious communities. Church volunteers at these festivals are receiving training that they can take back home and put into practice at their local events.

There is also, among other things, direct support for churches and circuit teams with planning community projects and initiatives, and with building relationships in their local schools and with uniformed organisations.

God For All is a profound stimulus for Methodist renewal. It's not a compulsive tick-list that every individual, church and circuit must work through and complete immediately, but a set of invitations to help individuals to make reflective decisions about their calling and resources.

God For All is enabling renewal for the times we live in, not in a 'one size fits all' manner, but in a way that is deeply embedded in and faithful to the communities to which we belong and serve.



Trey Hall speaks to the Methodist Conference

Find out more about God For All at: methodist.org.uk/action/god-for-all

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