

THE connexion

Inspiring stories from the Methodist Church



OUT OF THE ORDINARY

The **Methodist** Church



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

This issue is packed with encouraging and inspiring stories from and about real people who've been impacted by the work of the Methodist Church.

There are accounts from people with disabilities who are being empowered as a result of Methodists journeying with them, stories from refugees who – with Church support – are rebuilding their lives, and wise words from young people who are working together towards a greener future.

You can find out about a church's new brunch meeting, featuring a 10-minute Bible talk, for people who wouldn't normally go to church, and read about a long-established church that's doing something new by moving to a local pub.

With the time around Advent, Christmas and the new year being a period when we may be more curious about, and open to, spiritual things, now is a great time to drop in on a church service. If you're already a churchgoer, how about inviting a friend or neighbour to a service or other church-run activity? We hear the inspiring stories of people who had such an invitation, and how going to church changed their lives.

The Methodist Church's 2023 Christmas film, *Out of the Ordinary*, illustrates that God's extraordinary love can shine through our ordinary acts in our ordinary lives. You can read about Catherine who used to feel too ordinary to be loved by God, but is now helping others on their Christian faith journeys.

Wherever you are in your own life and on your own faith journey, it's my hope that you will gain a sense of God's extraordinary work as you read about the people and projects featured in these pages.

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

THE connexion

Issue 32 • Winter 2023/2024

Published by the Methodist Church in Britain
Registered charity no. 1132208 © Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes (TMCP) 2023.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher, except for articles and photographs downloaded for local church use that are fully acknowledged. All rights reserved.



Farm workers look after some of the donkeys at Amelia Trust Farm (see pages 28-29)

Photo credits

Front cover © Amelia Farm Trust; Page 3 © Robin Prime; Page 4-5 © The Methodist Church and Getty Images; Page 6-7 © Mark Kensett; Page 8-9 © Robin Prime and Getty Images; Page 10-11 © Mark Kensett and the Methodist Church; Page 12-13 © Julian Burr; Page 14-15 © The Methodist Church and Getty Images; Page 16-17 © Tracey Hume and Catherine; Page 18-19 © The Methodist Church, Sheila Sharman, Heather Jones, Robert Amos and Getty Images; Page 20-21 © The Methodist Church, Getty Images and Penny Gardner; Page 22-23 © Tewkesbury Borough Council, Ian Yates and Getty Images; Page 24-25 © Bramhall Methodist Church; Page 26-27 © Methodist Ministers Housing Society and Getty Images; Page 28-29 © Amelia Trust Farm; Page 30-31 © Getty Images, Jenny, Graham, Michael, Jenny, Pam, Jackie.


Unless otherwise stated, Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible: Anglicised Edition, copyright © 1989, 1995 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.



The **Methodist Church**


Tel: 020 7486 5502

Email: enquiries@methodistchurch.org.uk

Web: methodist.org.uk

 Find us on Facebook

 Follow us on Twitter

 Watch us on YouTube or Vimeo

 See our pictures on Instagram

Information contained in this magazine was correct at the time of going to press. Views expressed in the articles may not be the official position of the Methodist Church in Britain.

For more copies of *the connexion*, order directly from Methodist Publishing at methodistpublishing.org.uk while stocks last, or download the pdf at methodist.org.uk/theconnexion

Highlights



4 When diamonds aren't a girl's best friend



8 Seeking hidden treasure



16 When the ordinary becomes extraordinary



20 Safety from persecution



24 Sharing the gospel, one bite at a time



28 Nurturing community and nature

Warm welcome for Youth President

The new Methodist Youth President, Thomas Hart, has been warmly welcomed into his role.

Tom (18), who lives near Grimsby in Lincolnshire and attends Keelby Methodist Church, was brought up as a Methodist and became a church member at the age of 14. He later served as a church youth steward and as a congregational representative.

The President of the Methodist Conference, the Revd Gill Newton, along with the Chair of Lincolnshire Methodist District, the Revd Angy Long, and ex-Youth President James Carver undertook Tom's induction at the Side Door Youth and Community Church, Grimsby. The National Methodist Youth Brass Band, of which Tom is a member, played during the service.

Tom loves playing and listening to music, and is planning to eventually study for a degree in popular music. He also enjoys travelling and learning about different cultures.

As Youth President for 2023/2024, Tom will meet and represent young Methodist people to ensure that their voices are heard and will help them to be involved in every aspect of Church life.



Extraordinary gifts

All We Can, the international development and emergency relief organisation that's part of the Methodist family, is encouraging Christmas shoppers to buy gifts that can transform people's lives.

The charity's Extraordinary Gifts Christmas catalogue enables shoppers to fund a variety of long-term projects in vulnerable communities in lieu of buying physical presents. Personalised cards are then sent to the gift 'recipients' explaining that a donation has been made in their name.

There are 17 gifts to choose from, including supporting the building of toilets in Zimbabwe, helping families in Malawi to set up a small honey business, and providing African communities with solar panels.

Central to the Extraordinary Gifts initiative is the recognition that sustainable development can only flourish when it originates from within the communities themselves.

The online Christmas catalogue is available at: allwecan.org.uk/gifts



When **diamonds** aren't a girl's best friend

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

While jewellery is likely to be among gifts under the Christmas tree for many of Britain's wealthier people, Lesotho church worker Retha explains to the Revd Dr Andrew Ashdown why sparkly gemstones will never be her bestie.

A million miles away from the glitz and glamour of Marilyn Monroe's movie performance of the now-classic 1940s song about diamonds, Retha fixes her eyes on part of Lesotho's mountainous landscape.

"Over there," she gestures, "is the largest diamond mine in the country – the second largest in Southern Africa – yet everyone in this area is living in poverty."

Those who work in the Mokhotlong area's diamond mines live in extremely basic and squalid conditions, she elaborates. Villagers residing in the hills surrounding the mines are subsistence farmers, with very little infrastructure to support them, so most young adults flee to South Africa in search of jobs.

The harsh conditions faced by the older villagers left behind are not the result of recent global economic troubles. The jewellery

industry reports that, while price-sensitive consumers have reduced their luxury goods spending, wealthier shoppers have sustained global diamond demand. In Britain alone, it's estimated that more than 300,000 people continue to spend at least £500 annually on jewellery incorporating diamonds (data from Statista.com), with sales spiking in the run-up to Christmas.

High quality gems

High in Lesotho's Maluti Mountains, just a few miles from our meeting place, lies an open-pit diamond mine known for its large, high-quality gems. Retha tells me that the site is a huge open wound surrounded by barbed wire fences.

"Why are we, the local people, not benefitting from the rich resources of our country?" asks Retha. She already knows

the answer, but wants to make a point. The country's government, which has stakes in some of Lesotho's diamond mines, pledges to provide more support to residents but, for now at least, the locals continue to struggle.

That's why Retha's work as part of Lesotho's small national Methodist Church, part of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, is vital. Originally from Zimbabwe, Retha moved to Lesotho 14 years ago and so she is well-versed in the landlocked resource-rich country's social problems.

Managing the Methodist children's centre in the mountain village of Semonkong, Retha faces daily challenges. Like many church-run initiatives, especially in poorer communities, there's a constant struggle to resource the work that's so desperately needed. Yet, unlike most church workers elsewhere, Retha is almost within touching distance of some of the world's most valuable gemstones.

Undeterred by the obstacles in her way, Retha oversees a team that takes care of some of the area's most vulnerable young people. Many have been orphaned by the loss of their parents to HIV or AIDS. Some of the children were born with the HIV virus.

Safety and well-being

Located in a former Methodist hospital complex, the children's centre cares for around 60 under-18s who have been referred by community leaders and organisations. The centre's staff are dedicated to the children's safety and well-being.

"We, as part of the wider Lesotho Methodist Church, want to be a beacon of light and hope in this small country, and to nurture the gifts that people have," says Retha, enthusiastically. Her faith in God shines through as she speaks.

"We won't lose hope," she adds. "We have many physical resources within the national Church that are currently under-utilised, and we have many good people with strong faith.

"We just need to change our mindset, build our morale and consider how we can make the best use of what we have. Of course, we also wish that more of the wealth from Lesotho's diamond industry could be used to improve people's lives. We want our country to become more developed and self-sufficient."

While for many people in her situation that would seem like an all-too-distant dream, Retha's trust in God keeps her hopeful that life will, one day, improve for Lesotho's people.



Retha supports vulnerable young people



At the foot of the Maluti Mountains



A village close to a diamond mine



Why are we, the local people, not benefitting from the rich resources of our country?

A prayer for justice for struggling communities

Jesus said: "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." Thank you, God, for all the people across the world who are fulfilling this call to be light and life in challenging situations. We pray that you will help us to play our part in ensuring that justice prevails wherever your work is being done. Amen.

Andrew spoke with Retha during his visit to Lesotho for a Church CAN consultation – a joint initiative by the Methodist Church in Britain's Global Relationships Team and the Methodist international development and relief charity All We Can. The consultation was funded by the Church's World Mission Fund (WMF), which relies on donations to support projects and people around the world. More information about the WMF can be found at: methodist.org.uk/WorldMissionFund



The Eco Saints group with the President of the Methodist Conference, the Revd Gill Newton (far right)



The Eco Saints at work, with the Revd Gill Newton

Young people sow seeds of justice

A group of young people are leading their church and community towards a more sustainable future, where social and environmental justice are entwined. They invited the President of the Methodist Conference, the Revd Gill Newton, to see their first project.

“Even small changes we make can have a big impact on people and the environment,” Jasmine (15) tells the Revd Gill Newton. Jasmine’s sister, Eliza (13), adds: “Planting greenery and encouraging wildlife are simple things to do and are vital in protecting God’s creation.”

The sisters are part of the Eco Saints group at Trinity Methodist Church in Bramley, Leeds. The group formed last year after other young people in the church read about the national Eco Church scheme and suggested getting involved.

After gaining the backing of church leaders and members, the Eco Saints came up with ideas for their first project – transforming an area of disused land behind the church into an eco-friendly community peace garden.

“We all got together and made a model of the garden in a seed tray to gather our ideas,”

explains Sam (10). “We talked about what we’d need, such as a firm level path for our older church members, and bushes to give refuge to wildlife.”

The group took their ideas to the church council, which was delighted to give its go-ahead. The young people, led by Junior Church leader Tina, then immediately got to work with sourcing second-hand materials and appealing for donations of plants and shrubs.

Working flat-out

Fundraising events, including a sponsored swim by Sam, were held so that other items could be bought. Meanwhile, the young people were working flat-out at the site in their spare time to ensure the soil was dug and weeded before the path was laid.

“One day, we moved two tonnes of



Planting greenery and encouraging wildlife are simple things to do and are vital in protecting God’s creation.

materials by hand to make the path! It was hard work, but we had great fun," Liam (13) elaborates.

A huge part of the work was researching and selecting the right plants for the garden in order to attract insects, and planning a layout including hiding places for birds and small mammals.

"We wanted plants that are native to our country and locality," adds Liam.

Tina explains: "The garden is a large area, so we're lucky to have a lot of support from local people. Many of the plants have been donated by people who have split plants in their own gardens or have given us cuttings."

Faith in God

The group is acutely aware that their local project connects with what goes on in the wider world and with their faith in God.

"If we raise awareness of the importance of looking after people and the environment in our community, the hope is it will spread. Eventually, our little efforts will add up to make a difference globally," says Liam. "In the Bible, the book of Genesis tells us that God wants us all to care for the planet."

Sam adds: "Our garden will be a peaceful place for people who need somewhere to rest or pray when the church is closed."

The Eco Saints are also encouraging their families and other community members to make small eco-friendly changes to their lifestyles.

With an Eco Church category award for 'worship' already in the bag, the church and its Eco Saints are determined to eventually gain full Eco Church status.



Sam weeds the new flower bed



The site in the early stages of clearance



Planting work begins

More information about the Eco Church scheme, run by environmental charity A Rocha UK which supports churches wanting to demonstrate that the gospel is good news for God's earth, can be found at: ecochurch.arocha.org.uk



If we raise awareness of the importance of looking after people and the environment in our community, the hope is it will spread.

"The young people walked me round their garden, and I was really impressed to see the results of their work so far. They talked me through their plans for the next phases, including installing a large wooden cross, from recycled materials, at the garden's centre. Then they invited me to join in with some weeding, so I popped on my gardening gloves and got to work!

I was struck by how the project has brought different age groups together, and by how passionate the Eco Saints are about their garden and about striving for the Eco Church award.

With many corporations and world leaders still struggling to commit to making a meaningful difference on environmental issues, the Bramley young people are doing what we've all got to be doing – pursuing the green agenda for ourselves in our local communities."

The Revd Gill Newton, President of the Methodist Conference

The Methodist Conference has set a target of becoming a net zero carbon emissions Church by 2030. The Church's Action for Hope strategy has been developed to help us to stay focused on our journey towards this. You can find out more at: methodist.org.uk/ActionForHope

Reflection

Seeking hidden treasure



The Revd
Gill Newton and
Deacon Kerry Scarlett
are the President and
Vice-President of the
Methodist Conference.



*Our calling
is to live in
ways that
allow us time
and space
to notice
what God is
doing, often
in unexpected
people and
places.*

The President and Vice-President of the Methodist Conference, the Revd Gill Newton and Deacon Kerry Scarlett, reflect on the meaning – and hope – behind their chosen theme for their year in office.

We're very aware of the challenges being faced by many of us due to high inflation, food and fuel poverty, unemployment and lack of suitable housing. We're conscious, too, of the hurdles faced within the Church as buildings become burdens, finances are stretched, and we struggle to know how to change.

We know that, globally, there are immense difficulties such as the climate crisis, people-trafficking and corrupt leadership. There's rough terrain to be navigated everywhere we look!

With this in mind, and as the result of prayerful contemplation, we chose to put this Bible verse at the heart of our theme for the year:

"I will give you the treasures of darkness and riches hidden in secret places, so that you may know that it is I, the LORD, the God of Israel, who call you by your name."
(Isaiah 45:3, NRSVA)

The context of these words from Isaiah is one of disruption and conflict, and the message is one of hope and challenge. Freedom is coming, says Isaiah. But it won't happen as the exiled people in Babylon might expect.

These words aren't written to a leader in their community, but to Cyrus, King of Persia. How might it have felt to hear of God calling an outsider by name? Not only that, but to hear that the treasures, stolen and hidden from the people who created them and to whom they rightfully belong, are to be part of the cost of freedom.

Loss and conflict

How do we sit with the tension of this story of promised freedom alongside the reality of loss and conflict faced by those in exile at that time?

Perhaps we do so by resisting the temptation to make Cyrus, the now powerful king, the focus of our understanding. We can't

gloss over the violent acts in which he will engage, and the treasures of others which he will claim. Cyrus is no superhero.

Perhaps, instead, we might follow the challenge of theologian Gina Hens-Piazza (author of *Nameless, Blameless and Without Shame*) and focus on the impact Isaiah's words have on a community in exile, on the people who will directly bear the consequences of this violent struggle for power, wealth and status. Because, as we commit to the practice of naming and seeking to understand the difficult things in Scripture, so we learn to do likewise with our own stories.

Flawed human nature

The truth is that we have too often, as Christian communities, struggled to demonstrate a sustained commitment to restoration and transformation. Our flawed human nature results in misuse of power, fractured relationships, and discrimination.

The language of 'secrets' and 'hiddenness' within Isaiah 45 brings to mind the challenges faced by those seeking to lead in troubled times, including our own, present, difficult times.

Yet we still believe that our God has treasures hidden for us to discover, even amid all that is so painful and tough. For the exiles in Babylon, the treasure to be found in Isaiah's prophetic words lay in the reminder that God hadn't forgotten them, and that their gifts, skills and creativity could be rediscovered.

Likewise, our calling is to live in ways that allow us to notice what God is doing, often in unexpected people and places, and to uncover that treasure for ourselves. This is easier said than done, especially when we find ourselves in such uncertain and fragile times.

God's treasure

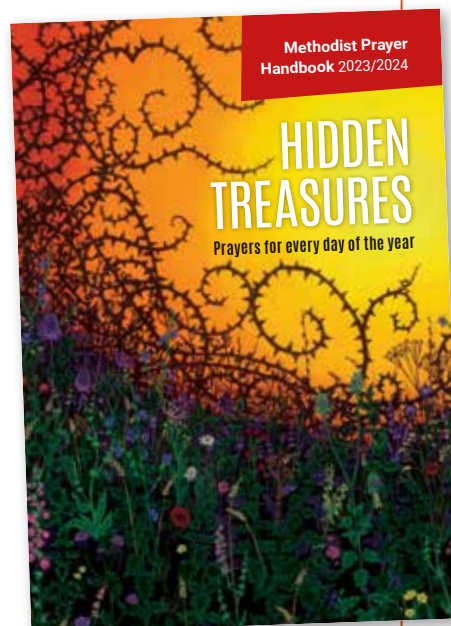
Yet, in the early weeks of our year in office, people have already shared with us their experience of discovering hidden treasure in their lives as they've reflected on these words. We've also heard stories of people rediscovering that they are God's treasure, and that God is *their* treasure, of light being discovered in the midst of darkness, and of people sensing God calling them by name!

Our God is a God of hope who longs for us to discover renewed hope as we notice where they are at work, even in the darkest corners of our lives and world.

The Methodist Prayer Handbook: Hidden Treasures follows the President and Vice-President's theme for their year in office. It offers daily prayers, poetry and prose to enable Methodists to stand with each other in prayer.

Copies, priced £4.50 each, or £4.15 per copy for ten or more, are available from methodistpublishing.org.uk, or by phoning 0845 017 8220.

Prayers from *Hidden Treasures* can also be found on social media and at methodist.org.uk/Prayer



The Revd Gill Newton (right) and Deacon Kerry Scarlett pictured at the 2023 Methodist Conference

We have much to continue to learn from survivors about the gifts of truth telling, accountability, reconciliation, resilience and hope. That's not to say that we should place the burden of doing that difficult work on survivors. Rather, in putting aside our own perspective and privileges, and in committing to walking alongside people who have experienced loss, exile, and marginalisation, what is revealed to us is what it means to be known by and called by God. In the stories and experiences we share, there may be treasure, or there may be challenge.



Our God is a God of hope.

Right: The Revd Ben Scrivens, who supported church members as they moved their services to the local pub



We had to admit to ourselves that we were getting on in years and struggling to do all the jobs that needed doing.



Church calls time on old building

What happens to a congregation when running and maintaining an old church building becomes unfeasible? For Pogmoor Methodist Church the answer was to move to their local pub. The Revd Lyn Gregg learns more about the move.



The Revd Lyn Gregg is the new minister at Pogmoor Methodist Church. Lyn, who has served in ministry for 20 years, took up her role in the Barnsley Methodist Circuit in the autumn after moving from the Bradford South Circuit.

When the members of Pogmoor Methodist Church, Barnsley, struggled to get things back off the ground after the Covid-19 pandemic, they were faced with discussing their options for the future.

An aging congregation – some with health problems affecting their mobility – coupled with a downturn in attendance made it seem impossible to keep their church building open.

Their then minister, the Revd Ben Scrivens, who's since moved to the Redhill and East Grinstead Circuit, West Sussex, journeyed with church members as they contemplated various options.

Member Gwentyth Harrison, who attended the church's Sunday school as a child in the early 1940s, recalls: "We only had a few members and we had to admit to ourselves that we were

getting on in years and struggling to do all the jobs that needed doing.

"While I, personally, didn't love the idea of moving out of our building, I knew that we had to be realistic. We no longer had a caretaker so even something as simple as opening a window became a huge (and dangerous) challenge as it meant one of us perching on a chair to reach up. There were other things that we felt unable to do, too, so we couldn't carry on with the way things were.

Huge change

"When we thought more about it, we remembered that Pogmoor chapel, as it was known locally, originally met in someone's house. Later, a piece of land was bought and built on, and the church had its own meeting place. The church members back then went



Some of the church members during their Tuesday service



The church's former building



Dora (left) and Wendy socialise after a service



Preparing for Holy Communion

through huge change, so why shouldn't we?"

Helen Neal adds: "We very much wanted to continue to have a presence in Pogmoor, and we realised that we could have more time for fellowship if we didn't have to run our own building."

After much debate, including mulling the difficulties of reaching other churches by public transport, the members decided that, overall, it would be better to meet somewhere nearby where someone else was responsible for opening up, cleaning up and locking up. A temporary place was initially sought, and a pub known locally for its warm welcome – the Tom Treddlehoyle – seemed like the ideal place.

Fellowship

Debbie Evans says: "The pub managers were very happy to welcome us in, and we've now been meeting here on the first Tuesday of every month for over a year! We hold our services in an area that's separate from the bar, and we can stay for a time of fellowship afterwards if we wish. We'd like to keep meeting here for as long as the pub allows us to."

"Last Christmas, with the pub managers' permission, we opened the glass doors that normally separate us from the bar so that everyone could join in with our carol service. We were accompanied by a keyboard player and we gave out chocolates and cakes. It was brilliant!"

The pub doesn't charge the church for using its premises, so the members make a

regular donation to a local hospice charity and buy after-service soft drinks from the bar.

Looking back, Gwenyth, who was the church's senior steward and treasurer at the time of the move, feels sad that they had to let go of their building, but adds: "On the other hand, so what? At the end of the day, we're a group of people, not a building, and this move has enabled us to survive. In fact, we now talk with each other far more than we used to do, meaning we can better serve one another."

More visible

"Also, we're far more visible here in the pub on a Tuesday afternoon than we ever were behind closed doors on a Sunday morning."

As Pogmoor Church's new minister, having arrived in the autumn, I can see that the move out of the church building and into the pub has released the members from worrying about their old building.

We're an old church meeting in a new place, so we can get on with being the people that God calls us to be – disciples developing our faith, supporting one another and serving people in our local and global communities through our various projects and initiatives.



We can get on with being the people that God calls us to be.

A video about Pogmoor Methodist Church, Barnsley, is available to watch online at: youtu.be/sAJ5BLzLHik



We built it, and now they're coming



Pauline Emmett is the secretary of the Finance and Property Committee at St Andrew's Methodist Church. She is married to a supernumerary (retired) Methodist Minister.

When a church member's illness led to him becoming a permanent wheelchair user, the church leaders decided that was the cue to make their building fully accessible. Pauline Emmett looks back on the project and explains how it has brought more people into church.

A couple who worshipped here at St Andrew's Methodist Church in Filton, Bristol, were hit by serious illness. This resulted in the gentleman becoming a permanent wheelchair user.

The couple continued to come to church, but every visit was a struggle as the lady had to push her husband round our building in his wheelchair. Although we had put in a ramp and automatic doors at the entrance, disability access was difficult once inside.


The original interior of our 60-year-old church had fixed pews, with no wheelchair space, differing floor heights with steps, and no toilet suitable for wheelchair users. There

was an accessible toilet in the church hall next door but having to leave the building was far from ideal.

Coffee was served after each service in a room up some stairs, making it impossible for the couple to socialise. It was very sad for us as a church to watch the couple, who had given many years of service to the church, struggle to fully participate in church life. Something had to change.

Flexible worship space

We began to form a plan. We wanted to include a flexible worship space with ancillary rooms including a basic kitchen (with some



The church interior gives easy access to wheelchairs and mobility scooters

Having completed the work, including installing new audio-visual equipment, we feel that the building has been given a new lease of life. Indeed, we've discovered that some of our worshippers feel that the building has given them a new lease of life!

Sue (76), who lives nearby and has been coming to this church all her life, has been a wheelchair user for the past five years due to severe osteoporosis. Thanks to the changes we've made, and help from another church member, she's still able to come to church.

Fully accessible

She told me: "I live alone, so the people here are my family. Being able to continue to come to services and other events is very important to me."

Ken and his wife, Heather, both 82, have been churchgoers since attending a Methodist youth club in their teens. They've been coming to St Andrew's for a couple of years since their previous church closed. Ken, who has several health problems, is a wheelchair user so transferring to a church that was fully accessible was important.

Life's easier now

Louis (39), who has been blind since birth, is another regular at church. He said: "I remember when the building was split-level, and there were steps up to the coffee room. Life's easier now everything's on one level."

The flexible layout of our church has benefited all of our building's users – not just those with disabilities – and we're still discovering its full potential. Our Messy Church meets monthly and attracts good numbers, and we have several new groups hiring our premises. The modern layout makes a statement to the community concerning the life of the church, and the building is being used more than ever.

Sadly, the gentleman we originally had in mind when we started the transformation has died, but his memory lives on in our new interior. We think of him when we see all the other people with disabilities who now enjoy using our building.



Wheelchair user Sue and her friend, Carol



Improved access into the church



The building has been given a new lease of life.

The Methodist Church in Britain is committed to being inclusive, and making sure that people with disabilities can use our buildings is a fundamental part of this. If your church would like to review, and help to improve, access to your building, guidance and templates for conducting a building access audit are available at: methodist.org.uk/Property/AccessibleBuildings



Climate change brings struggles to daily life



Mariam makes and sells charcoal, using the profits to buy essentials for her and her child

Challenging social stigma and intolerance

With Tanzania's population reeling from the effects of climate change, life is harder than ever for the country's disabled people. Rachel Dalby, the editor of *the connexion*, hears how they are being empowered by the Methodist Church.

The effects of climate change are all too real for the people of Tanzania. Several failing rainy seasons since late 2020 caused the worst droughts in living memory, destroying crops, decimating livestock, and pushing large swathes of the population to the brink of starvation.

In some villages, the water supply was, for long periods, no more than a puddle. In others, women often found themselves returning home with empty buckets as wells failed to yield the water their families desperately need.

Then, in March and April this year, came the rain. In fact, so much rain fell that flash floods, as the result of high water runoff due to the hard-baked land, swept away

many homes, livelihoods, roads, bridges and, tragically, lives.

As if these treacherous conditions aren't making life tough enough for the already relatively poor Tanzanians (many live below the World Bank poverty line), social stigma and intolerance are extra burdens that people with disabilities carry.

Discrimination

While in recent years Tanzania's government has moved towards improving legislation to support people with disabilities, public intolerance and discrimination remains deep-seated and widespread – as it does in many other countries.

One of the organisations journeying with the country's disabled community is the Methodist



The attitude of the community towards her has completely changed.

Church in Tanzania, which is a growing synod under the Methodist Church of Kenya.

With support from the World Mission Fund, a joint fund of the Methodist Church in Britain and the Methodist Church in Ireland, the Tanzanian Church is providing small grants along with physical and spiritual support to some of the most marginalised disabled people in rural communities.

On a recent visit to northern Tanzania, the Revd Dr Andrew Ashdown, the Methodist Church in Britain's Partnership Coordinator for Africa, spoke with people who are being empowered by the Church to transform their lives.

On his return to Britain, Andrew told me: "With a small grant, Mariam, who has speech difficulties and, as a result, had been severely marginalised by her community, has been able to start a small business. She makes charcoal and sells it to local people, using the small profit she makes to buy the essentials she needs for her and her child.

"Since being able to financially support herself, the attitude of the community towards her has completely changed. Mariam, who also has a mental health condition, is a faithful Christian and walks 10km on a Sunday to attend church.

Changing attitudes

"Like Mariam, Laurencia, who has significant movement restrictions in her hands and shoulders, has also started a charcoal making and selling enterprise with Church support."

Andrew explained that the Methodist Church in Tanzania's ministry to people with disabilities has four core aims. These are: changing attitudes within society towards disability; supplying disabled people with urgently needed essential provisions; providing skills training, and resourcing disabled people to establish their own micro-businesses.

He said: "For some disabled people, including Sophia, the Church's skills training has meant that they are now equipped to get the best from their small plot of land. Sophia, who had been finding it almost impossible to get enough food to eat, now has a small vegetable garden and a micro-business selling fish from a nearby lake.

"Thanks to Church support, Pascal, who has difficulty walking, is also making the most of the land. He's farming chickens to feed himself and to generate a small income."

Andrew also met Antonia, whose daughter, Leokadia, has a mental health condition and



Antonia (left) buys and sells maize to support her and her daughter



Pascal farms chickens to feed himself and to generate income



Laurencia has started a small business

is deaf. With Church help, Antonia started a small business buying and selling maize – a staple in Tanzania. "This enterprise is really transforming their lives, and they told me that they're both deeply grateful for the help they've received," he said.

Transformation

With around 20 ministers, 45 preachers and very limited funds, the Methodist Church in Tanzania is permanently stretched as serves its almost 4,000 members – many of whom live in rural areas. Despite this, it remains focused on holistic community transformation.

Besides its work with disabled people, the Church runs initiatives that address some of the social issues around gender violence, poverty, HIV and AIDS.

"It is inspiring to see such missional initiatives being undertaken with minimal resources in communities that struggle to sustain themselves. Please remember the Methodist Church of Tanzania in your prayers," said Andrew.



Social stigma and intolerance are extra burdens that people with disabilities carry.

Out of the Ordinary

When the **ordinary** becomes **extraordinary**



Deacon Tracey Hume is the District Community Engagement Enabler for the Newcastle Upon Tyne Methodist District. She launched an online Recovery Church community during the Covid-19 pandemic, and now also co-runs an ecumenical Recovery Church in Newcastle Cathedral.

The Church's 2023 Christmas film shows that, out of our ordinary acts, in our ordinary lives, the world-transforming, extraordinary love of God can shine through. Recovering alcohol and gambling addict Catherine explains to Deacon Tracey Hume how God is helping her to help others.

"Did I ever think I'd be speaking at church gatherings? No! I didn't think I was good enough for that," says Catherine.

"When my mam and dad died, both before I turned nine, I thought God was punishing me for something I'd done wrong. Things carried on downhill from there."

Catherine tried to escape her grief by immersing herself in books and films, and then, as a teenager, started binge drinking. Sadly, her parents' deaths weren't the only things she wanted to run away from. "I was abused as a child, and I drank to try to escape those memories," she reflects.

"Then, as a younger adult, I kept getting into bad relationships. All of the partners I've had have been addicts, so that made my problems worse."

On top of her alcohol addiction, Catherine started gambling when her children were young.

"My eldest son, Alan, had ADHD and I struggled to cope with him when he was little, so I started playing the slot machines as a way of escaping. Gambling became an addiction when I had a taste of a small win."

Refuge

At that time, Catherine was in an abusive relationship so had to move with her children into a refuge.

"It was then that my addictions came to a head because I could no longer hide them. I'd left my children to go gambling, the police were called and social services got involved. Things had reached crisis point, so I had to get help."

Although Catherine started to attend Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) meetings, it would be some time before she could fully commit to being drink-free, and this was made harder by Alan's tragic death.

"Alan was 26 and homeless when he died of a heroin overdose. He was with a group of other addicts who panicked they'd be arrested if they called for help. When Alan didn't regain consciousness, they dragged him outside and anonymously called an ambulance, but it was too late."

Sober

Although knocked off course for a while, Catherine continued to attend AA meetings and in February she celebrated 10 years of being sober. She's still working hard to stay away from gambling.

During one of Catherine's AA meetings she was invited by a friend to another recovery group. It was there that she heard about Newcastle's ecumenical Recovery Church at Newcastle Cathedral.

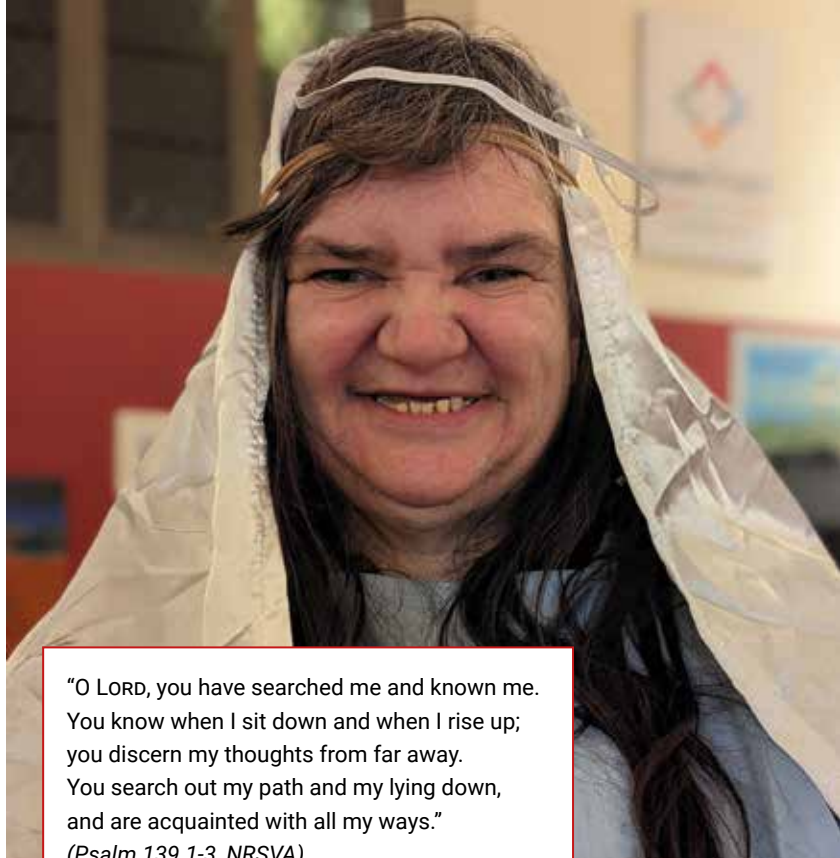
"Thinking through the AA's '12 Steps' (staging posts on a recovery journey) I'd started to feel that God was with me, so I accepted the invitation to the church and I've been attending for over a year.

Unconditional

"One really important thing I've learnt is that God's love is unconditional. There's nothing I have to do to earn it. I know that God loves me and has already forgiven me for the things in my past."

Catherine takes part in the weekly in-person and on-line Recovery Church meetings, along with monthly Bible studies. She also attends her local church.

"Psalm 139 is important to me, and I like to share it as I think it's helpful to others. Although I had a period of attending church a few years ago, it's only recently that I've realised God knows and understands me. God's been with me the whole time. The



"O LORD, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away. You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways."
(Psalm 139 1-3, NRSVA)

psalm's first three verses sum this up.

Catherine was thrilled last Christmas when she played the part of Mary, the mother of Jesus, in the Recovery Church nativity.

"I was never picked at school, so being asked to play Mary at Recovery Church was brilliant!"

As the Deacon who co-founded Newcastle Recovery Church, I've been startled by Catherine's wise and profound contributions to our church groups. She's a real encourager and her honesty about her difficulties, and about how God is working in her life, is really helpful to others.

Recently, Catherine's helped to lead one of our Bible studies and she's amazing! It shows how someone who once thought of themselves as 'too ordinary' – or perhaps, sadly, not even ordinary enough – can be used by God in such an important and extraordinary way.



Being asked to play Mary at Recovery Church was brilliant.



The Methodist Church in Britain's 2023 Christmas video, *Out of the Ordinary*, aimed at people who don't usually go to church, is available to watch via the QR code or by visiting methodist.org.uk/OutOfTheOrdinary

The Methodist Church's Lent 2024 resources will explore how God's divine love can free us from whatever shackles us, hurts us or separates us from one another. To sign up to receive daily Lent reflections, please visit: methodist.org.uk/UnboundedLove





**YOU'RE
INVITED!**

Life-changing invitations

It goes without saying that the Advent-Christmas season is a busy one for churches. But it's also a wonderful opportunity to connect with people who don't normally attend church. Three people explain how their Methodist Church journeys began with invitations from friends.



We were not a church-going family, but we felt supported by the Church.

“About a week before Christmas in 1952, our local Methodist church carol singers were doing the rounds in our neighbourhood, collecting money for a cancer charity,” says Sheila Sharman.

“One of them knocked on our door. My mother told them she was happy to make a donation because her husband (my father) had just died from cancer.

“Aged 41, my father had succumbed to his brain tumour, leaving my 39-year-old mother to look after me (then six years old) and my teenaged brother.”

The day after the carol singing, a Methodist minister visited Sheila's family home. Then, on Christmas Eve, he called again, this time with a box of food and some Christmas presents.

“After Christmas, he continued to visit us to check we were okay. We were not a

church-going family, but we felt supported by the Church.”

A few years later, aged 11, Sheila was invited by friends to go with them to the Sunday school at Parchmore Methodist Church, Croydon – the church that had helped her family. She went along and loved it.

Grateful

“I returned the following week, and that was the start of me going to church regularly and finding out more about God.

“Sometime later I became a committed Christian and then, in 1963, a member of the Methodist Church. Two house moves later, my husband and I are now members of Bromsgrove Methodist Church, Worcestershire, where I am the treasurer.

“I'm so grateful for the care of the Methodist

Church after my father's death, and for my friends' invitation to Sunday school."

Heather Jones was invited to her local Methodist church – St Paul's – 37 years ago by a new friend she had met shortly after she and her husband moved to Aberystwyth, Wales.

"New to the area, I was eager to meet people so I was grateful for her invitation to attend a get-together of the church's women's friendship group," says Heather.

"I left the meeting feeling that I'd made new connections and, 36 years later, many of them are still my friends!

"I became a member of St Paul's Methodist Church in 1989, a day before I found out I was expecting our son.

Pastoral visitor

"I'm now a church pastoral visitor – a role I've held for 25 years – and I'm a member of the church's prayer chain. I've held various other church roles over the years, including Sunday school teacher.

"I feel it's important for us to invite people to church in whatever capacity they feel comfortable – whether that's attending a service or another type of activity. I'm very grateful to the woman who originally invited me to the friendship group."

Robert Amos grew up on a council estate in Barnsley, South Yorkshire, with his parents, two sisters and twin brother.

"As a young child, I attended a Sunday school at an Anglican church opposite our house, but, as I grew older, I much preferred playing football with my pals," he admits.

Youth club

"At the age of 14, in the late 1960s, I was sitting next to a friend at school who, out of the blue, said: 'Do you want to come to our youth club? We've got snooker and darts'. Well, I was there like a shot!

"The club was run by a Methodist church, and one of the leaders invited me to their Sunday morning discussion group. I became a regular and even persuaded my twin brother to go along.



Robert Amos was invited at the age of 14 to a Methodist youth club

Full-time ministry

"One day we were invited to a church youth rally in a neighbouring village. Lots of people from our church went, and we all shared a bus. It was on that bus that I met a girl called Kathryn, and we've since been together, first as friends and then as husband and wife."

After marrying 53 years ago, the couple helped to run a youth club at their local Methodist Church. It was through this that Robert was invited to help a local preacher, and that was the start of his journey towards full-time ministry.

"I retired as Superintendent Minister for Driffild-Hornsea Methodist Circuit in 2020, and now serve part-time in the Bridlington Circuit."



Sheila Sharman was invited by friends to a Sunday school when she was 11



Heather Jones was invited to her local Methodist church 37 years ago by a friend



Could you invite a friend or neighbour to a church service or activity?

The Methodist Church has produced a series of resources to support you and your church in inviting, and warmly welcoming, visitors during Advent and Christmas. The resources, which include posters, scratch-off invitation postcards along with graphics to use on churches' social media channels, are available at: methodist.org.uk/ChristmasResources



I'm very grateful to the woman who originally invited me.



Safety from persecution

When Taliban fighters marched into Afghanistan's capital, Parwana knew her family would have to flee. Reporter Anais Pedron takes up the story and explains how the family, and many other refugees, are now being supported by a Dorset church.

Parwana's husband and mother were working for the British Embassy in Kabul when the terrifying news came in August 2021. Having advanced rapidly across Afghanistan, seizing province after province, the Taliban were re-taking the capital.

Two decades after being removed from power by a US-led military coalition, and a subsequent agreement that Western forces would leave the country, the Taliban were back.

The world watched on TV, stunned by the speed of the Islamic fundamentalists' advance, as the Afghan military collapsed and government leaders fled. Tens of thousands of people fearing Taliban rule scrambled for places on flights out of the country.

Parwana, a law graduate, said: "Things happened very quickly. We were told by the embassy to get our identity papers in order and prepare to leave the country."

Clutching their toddler-son and 16-day-old baby, she and her husband, along with other family members, made the treacherous journey to Kabul airport.

"When we arrived there was chaos everywhere. My husband said we should go back home and wait. But we couldn't go home because we knew the Taliban were hunting everyone who'd worked with Western agencies and would find us."

The family hid in different houses, keeping on the move, in between returning to the airport five times.

Flight

Terrified, and making no progress, the family decided to sell their car to pay for visas for Pakistan. Once in Pakistan, they boarded a flight to the UK and were then told they would be bussed to Manchester.

"My husband asked the officials if we could go to Cardiff, where his parents had gone. Just before the coach left for Manchester, we were moved into a taxi. We didn't know where we were going, so were relieved when we eventually saw a 'Welcome to Wales' road sign.

"We were so happy to meet up with my parents-in-law. We were devastated that we'd



The family hid in different houses, keeping on the move.



had to leave our homes, but getting away from the Taliban was like being released from prison.

“Six months later we moved to Dorset. We had just a couple of bags and some children’s clothes. Thankfully, there were caseworkers who arranged accommodation for us and helped us to access the services we needed.

Language lessons

“I was introduced to a charity worker, Celia, who connected us with Cheap Street Church in Sherborne. Soon after we arrived, people from the church drove us to meet other Afghan refugees, and gave us help with language lessons. They also invited me to a parent and toddler group.”

Parwana quickly discovered that the church, a joint Methodist and United Reformed congregation in the heart of historic Sherborne, was helping more than 100 refugees.

Among them are Manal and her husband, Abdul, who, with their two children, fled Syria’s civil war in 2012. They spent years struggling to survive in Egypt before arriving in the UK in 2015 as part of a UN refugee resettlement scheme. They moved to Sherborne two years later.

Manal said: “We were nervous at first, but people at the church helped us and welcomed us. We found a family here.”

The couple now run a catering company specialising in Syrian delicacies, and help to prepare food for the church’s refugee fellowship gatherings.

Manal and her family were among some of the first refugees to be welcomed by the church after Penny and Geoff Gardner, along with other church members, decided to take action to help people fleeing war and persecution.

Penny explained: “It began with us hearing about the terrible conditions in Calais’ ‘jungle’ refugee camp in France and then deciding to go there, with our minister’s blessing, as helpers. We ended up volunteering there on three occasions.”

Back home, the group were pressing their MP and local council to allow refugees to settle in Dorset.

Knock backs

“At that time, there was no scheme to house refugees in Dorset, and we had plenty of knock backs. The problem was a lack of available housing, so we, ourselves, had to find homes for the first refugees,” said Penny.

The group worked hard to raise awareness of the refugees’ plight, and eventually council policy changed. By 2017, the church, working with other community groups, had welcomed five Syrian families. Afghan refugees followed, and then Ukrainians.

From the beginning, the church has provided refugees with practical help, such as with housing, job-hunting, English language skills and form-filling. Some church families have hosted refugees in their homes.

“Our community members are very generous towards refugees, and it’s fantastic that now some of the more established refugees are helping us to care for newcomers,” said Penny.



Penny Gardner (left) volunteering in Calais



Syrian refugee Manal, safe in Dorset



We were nervous at first, but people at the church helped us and welcomed us. We found a family here.

Methodists in Britain are actively seeking a more just world, supporting people experiencing hardship, being alongside those seeking sanctuary, campaigning for change, building stronger communities and supporting global justice. The Methodist Conference report, *A Justice-seeking Church*, sets out a framework to help Methodists and churches with their approach to justice over the next five years. More information is available at:

methodist.org.uk/SocialJustice



Robbing-up for **social justice**

Consumed by a ‘burning anger’ about the current level of social injustice in Britain, the Revd Ian Yates decided to stand up and be counted. He explains how, within a few months, he went from being a retired Methodist minister to the Mayor of Tewkesbury Borough.

It was a day like no other. After months of planning, sometimes feeling full of hope and sometimes feeling quite despondent, we had arrived at the local election count.

With 38 councillors to be elected, my wife, Christine, and I joined around 100 other people in the local sports hall to await the Returning Officer’s announcement of the results.

With many cheers and tears, success and jubilation were mixed with bitter disappointment for many. We could hardly believe how the results were turning out. And then, my Liberal Democrat colleagues and I discovered that we had won just enough seats to lead the council!

As we congratulated ourselves (and commiserated with others) it dawned on all of us that this was a turning point for our borough. We now had some tough decisions ahead of us, along with the challenges of

governing a widespread semi-rural area.

Within our first few days in office, we had to tell the council’s senior officers who would lead the council, who would chair the various committees, and who would be mayor. After all, the mayor-making ceremony was scheduled for 16 May – just 12 days after polling!

Amazement

To my amazement, my Liberal Democrat colleagues immediately turned to me and said: “You’re a minister. You’ve chaired meetings, can speak in public, and have experience of working with charities. You’d make a great mayor!”

Although initially shocked, I was, of course, delighted to accept their invitation, and Christine was pleased to become my Mayoress.

How did I end up here? Well, I am what I have always been for more than 60 years – a Methodist preacher. This is my core, my very

The Revd Ian Yates is a Liberal Democrat councillor and is the Mayor of Tewkesbury Borough. As well as preaching on the Gloucestershire Methodist Circuit, he is a member of the Connexional Faith and Order Committee, and a member of the Society for Old Testament Study. He and his wife have two adult daughters and five grandchildren.

existence. My direct involvement with politics is much more recent.

At a time in my life when I should have been taking things easy, having retired from circuit ministry, I suddenly found myself consumed with a burning anger at the direction in which our country was travelling, and the way in which so many people were being excluded or left behind.

As Christians, we are called to act justly and to work for God's kingdom. The Methodist Church has a long history of living out our calling to justice and peace by speaking up in public. So, feeling a strong desire to work for the people in my local area, I stood for election for the seat of Churchdown Brookfield with Hucclecote. This is a ward of around 5,000 voters living between Gloucester and Cheltenham.

Local people's needs

I had joined the Liberal Democrat Party in 2017 but had remained largely inactive until the 2019 local elections when I stood unsuccessfully as a candidate. Thereafter I worked hard for the local Party, serving as secretary for three years and being closely involved with our 2023 local election planning.

As a Churchdown resident, I am very aware of the needs of the local people, and of those across our borough.

Since being elected, and invested as the mayor, I have been hard at work with my

colleagues to do the best we possibly can for our constituents. While a borough council has considerable powers and handles a lot of money, its activities are limited by law. A lot of what the council does is not political, but it does require us to be diligent and careful.

Thank goodness for the staff who advise us, and who carry out the policy decisions. In our election campaign, we promised to listen to our residents, to be open and transparent, and to move as quickly as possible towards a greener, fairer, more inclusive society. We have already set policies in motion to lead in this direction by strengthening our green commitments, and to allow easier access to council meetings (by live-streaming them online).

There is, however, a long way to go. I am still finding my way around and discovering what is possible and what is not. Inclusiveness, caring for each other – especially those in need – and environmental sustainability are all part of the Methodist Church's mission, so, in a sense, being a councillor is an extension of my work as a Methodist minister.

Having retired from 40 years of ministry, ending as superintendent of the Leamington Circuit, I now preach in my home area, where I know of people experiencing great hardship. I have pledged that all funds donated to the mayor's charity appeal will be used to support local foodbanks.



I suddenly found myself consumed with a burning anger at the direction in which our country was travelling.



The Revd Ian Yates in his mayoral robes

The Revd Ian Yates leads a service in the Gloucestershire Methodist Circuit



Andrew Pennells (far right) and the church volunteers get up for the first brunch

Sharing the gospel, one bite at a time



Andrew Pennells is a member of Bramhall Methodist Church and is the main organiser of Bitesize Church on the Colshaw Farm housing estate in Wilmslow, Cheshire. Andrew often speaks at churches within the Manchester and Stockport District.

As congregations seek to attract more newcomers, Andrew Pennells explains the thinking behind a different type of church that he's helped to launch.

Research shows that, in general, people are increasingly flitting between competing tasks, spending shorter periods of time on one thing before moving to the next. This is why we recently launched Bitesize Church – an informal all-age Sunday get-together featuring a simple 10-minute talk.

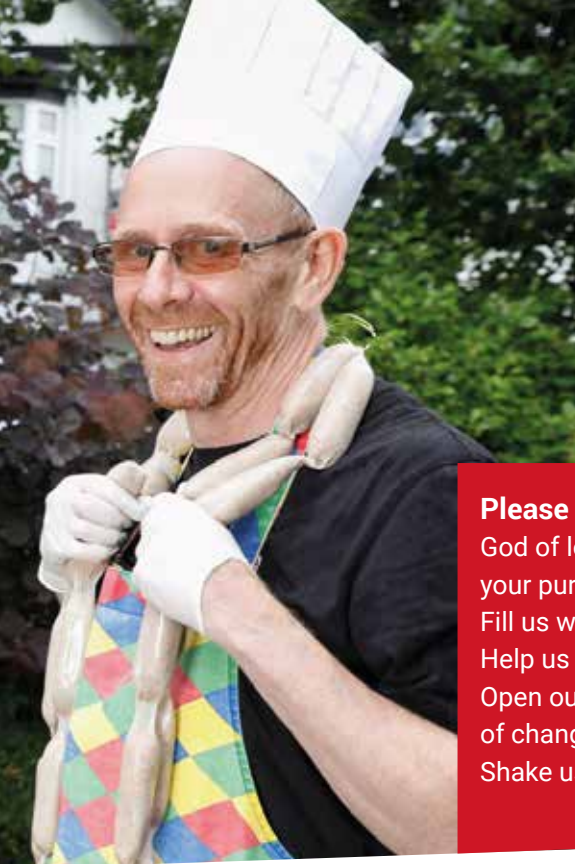
Its main aim is to share the good news of Jesus, primarily with those who have little opportunity to hear it, in a relaxed and caring environment that we hope will appeal to believers and non-believers.

To encourage as many people as possible to attend, we're serving-up a free brunch of hot and cold food alongside a very warm welcome, worship music, friendly conversation and children's activities.

This venture is being run by Bramhall Methodist Church (in the Manchester and Stockport District) in partnership with St Chad's Anglican Church in Handforth and Hope Central – a Handforth-based Christian charity.

Housing estate

Held at the Open Arms community centre in the heart of the Colshaw Farm housing estate, Wilmslow, this initiative is on the doorstep of people living in what was originally a Manchester City Council overspill estate. Opened in the 1970s to house people displaced by the council's inner city slum clearance, the estate used to have a reputation for high levels of crime and antisocial behaviour.



A resident spots the Bitesize Church adverts



Visitors tuck into brunch

Please pray for God to break through in the life of our churches

God of love, God for all,
your purposes are more beautiful than we can possibly imagine.
Fill us with your Holy Spirit.
Help us let go of all that holds us back.
Open our lives and our churches to new seasons of humility and faith,
of change and growth.
Shake us up with the good news of Jesus and show us the way. Amen.

Things have gradually improved in recent years following a multi-million-pound regeneration scheme led by the housing association that now manages the properties, and Bitesize Church aims to add a new dimension to the ongoing community works.

Our partnership with Hope Central, which offers a range of services to help relieve poverty, means we can signpost Bitesize Church visitors to the charity for any help they may need.

Ecstatic

Following our marketing campaign, which included placing professionally-designed adverts in prominent places on the estate, we were ecstatic to see over 30 people attending our first Bitesize Church in the autumn.

Among them was Morris, who lives alone and had seen our posters when walking to and from his local shops. He told us: "It's great to see the community come together like this."

Also joining in was Tanaya, who brought along her three younger sisters while their mum worked. She said: "Thank you so much for hosting this event. The children have had a great time and we've enjoyed the wonderful food."

Of course, Bitesize Church would not have been possible without the amazing team of volunteers and the foundation of prayer from so many people.

At a time when churches are often seen as irrelevant and in decline, Bitesize Church is committed to delivering a vision that is contemporary, vibrant and appealing.

We know full well that we live in an age where social media-driven 'snackification' is king, so we feel that serving-up snappy on-message content and inspirational worship music, as well as tasty brunches, is a great way to live out our Christian calling to serve our community.



Bitesize Church has received £20,000 of Methodist Church New Places for New People funding which has been matched by the Bramhall and Wythenshawe Methodist Circuit. The Methodist Church in Britain sees starting New Places for New People (NPNPs) in every circuit as a vital part of responding to the gospel of God's love. NPNPs are new Christian communities in new places for people who are not yet part of an existing church. Creating a movement of NPNPs will require listening deeply and responding to God with, and alongside, our communities. More information is available at: methodist.org.uk/NPNP

Clive Price is the MMHS's Communications Manager. He created the charity's news publication, Roof 'n' Roots, which shares stories of MMHS residents.



Providing shelter after service

Hundreds of retired Methodist clergy have a place to call home, thanks to a charity that launched 75 years ago. Clive Price chats with some of those who have been helped by the Methodist Ministers' Housing Society.

You might not have seen his name in lights, but Trevor Haigh played his part at the forefront of cultural change. Like John Lennon, Mick Jagger and Roger Daltrey, Trevor was part of a skiffle group in the 1950s.

Called The Sapphires, they scooped a regular Saturday night spot at a local venue – and won a skiffle championship in Yorkshire.

“We didn’t make the charts, but we were number one in our street!” laughs Trevor, who went on to become a Methodist minister.

Having married his sweetheart, Jenny, on Boxing Day in 1963, the couple are celebrating their Diamond Wedding this year – at the same time that the Methodist Ministers’ Housing Society (MMHS) is marking its 75th anniversary.

To congratulate the couple, who live in an

MMHS property in Yorkshire, the charity has been featuring Trevor and Jenny’s story in its anniversary displays, including at its Daffodil Rally attended by 600 people at Methodist Central Hall, Westminster.

Trevor and Jenny haven’t looked back since moving into their home with a sea view in 2008. “We had no problems with the move because MMHS helped with everything,” says Jenny.

Train set

Trevor now divides much of his free time between listening to music and playing with the model train set he’s installed in the garage.

Also featured in the MMHS anniversary-year displays is Iris Chapple who has, this year, been celebrating 40 years of being a Guide Dogs volunteer.

Iris, who has cared for nearly 30 puppies



Our charity's history is one of mission-hearted giving on a scale that's truly humbling.



Iris Chapple with Guide Dogs puppy Tigger



Di and Les Wallace

that have gone on to help people with sight loss, moved to an MMHS property with her retired minister husband, Rik, in 2004.

Iris was heartbroken when Rik died in 2017 after having two major strokes, so she felt glad to be settled in her property in Somerset. "It's a very cosy terraced house, and I'm so lucky that I have lovely neighbours," she says.

Other MMHS residents include retired minister Les Wallace and his wife, Di. The couple were keen to live out their retirement in East Anglia and, at around the time they approached MMHS, one of the charity's supporters had bequeathed a house in Norfolk.

"The property was exactly what we needed!" says Les. "We moved in in 2019 and we've been very happy."

The couple, who have been celebrating their Golden Wedding this year, met during the heady days of the Methodist Association of Youth Clubs in the Sixties and Seventies. Tens of thousands of worshippers would gather for huge rallies with live music.

Folk music duo

Les and Di became a popular folk music duo at such events, with one of their highlights being a performance at the Methodist Central Hall, Westminster, where they shared the bill with folk-rockers Parchment.

Back then, folk music was a powerful wave, and Les and Di were riding it – all the way to their wedding ceremony in 1973.

"Everyone said we were too young to marry and that it wouldn't last," laughs Di.

Les grew up in the same Surrey town as Christian musician and composer Paul Field, who wrote the hymn *Christ Is The Cornerstone* to celebrate MMHS's anniversary. The song has been played at the charity's events this year, and many CDs featuring the track have been given to supporters.



Jenny and Trevor Haigh

Around 700 presbyters, deacons and their spouses are currently being housed by MMHS across the UK.

The Chair of MMHS, the Revd Alan Taylor, says that the charity's modern-day housing network stems from a donation made by a woman called Mary Hoult just after the Second World War.

Chief Executive Mairi Johnstone adds: "Others joined Mary, and so our charity's history is one of mission-hearted giving on a scale that's truly humbling."



The property was exactly what we needed!

Christ Is The Cornerstone, written by Christian musician and composer Paul Field to celebrate MMHS's 75th anniversary, is a contemporary hymn in a classic Wesleyan style. Based on the second chapter of Ephesians, it evokes lots of imagery around the theme of buildings.

With meaningful words about the foundations of faith, set against present-day concerns such as immigration and sectarianism, the song confers hope for reconciliation. Paul, whose friends include retired Anglican priests, says: "The emotional effect of retiring can be very difficult for people who have devoted their lives to Christian service."

Paul's song, along with downloadable words and music, is available on the MMHS website at: mmhs.org.uk



The farm is a thriving community hub that's locally renowned for supporting people.

Nurturing community and nature

A farm project originally set up to help disadvantaged and vulnerable young people has grown to be so much more. Sophie Howe explains.

This year has been very special for us here at the Amelia Trust Farm in the Vale of Glamorgan, near Cardiff. We've been marking the 30th anniversary of the opening of our field study centre, bunkhouse and animal centre, and celebrating the thousands of people who have since benefitted from our work.

Back in 1993, just two years after the formation of our charity in partnership with the Methodist Church in Wales, and a year after the first local schoolchildren visited our pond, our trustees began to realise their radical vision for our 160-acre site. They wanted the farm – bequeathed to Bob and Ethel Huggard by Bob's late mother, Amelia – to become a 'rural lung' for a variety of people, especially young people marginalised by society.

Now, 30 years later, the farm is a thriving community hub that's locally renowned for supporting people by promoting self-help, building confidence and enhancing people's employment prospects. While retaining a focus on young people, we also extend our caring and nurturing environment to adults with learning disabilities.

Sustainability

The farm, with its woodland walks, animals and play areas, is open for members of the public to enjoy throughout the year, ensuring that we play our part in encouraging as many people as possible to learn about the countryside and environmental sustainability.

At the heart of the Amelia Trust Farm is the GROW programme, which helps young people who have fallen between the cracks in the education system. Our objective is to improve

Sophie Howe is the Development Manager for the Amelia Farm Trust in the Vale of Glamorgan, Wales.

their confidence and teach them skills that will help them in their everyday lives.

Vicki McCoan, our Visitor Officer, says: "Some of these young people have ADHD or autism which can lead to types of behaviour that schools struggle to accommodate. Some pupils find the traditional classroom setting overwhelming, and that's where we can help.

"We can teach and encourage them to help on our farm, for example with caring for the animals, in their spare time."

Successful

Morgan, who has been through the farm's GROW programme and is now one of our Animal Care Workers, says: "I think GROW is so successful because it changes people's attitudes about themselves. When I joined the programme, I was quite boisterous and didn't really want to succeed, but I now have a completely different view on life.

"Working with the charity is brilliant. My job involves taking care of the animals – feeding them and making sure they're alright. We do a lot of work with the animals to make sure they're happy and can thrive."

Most of the animals, including donkeys, alpacas, sheep, guinea pigs and reptiles, have been rescued or donated, and the young people love spending time with them.

Opportunities

Also on offer are opportunities to learn how to work in our woodlands, along with training courses in nutrition, woodwork and budgeting. We have an onsite gym, basketball court, music studio and bunkhouse for residential stays. Woody's Lodge, a meeting space run by a charity that supports veterans of the armed forces and uniformed services, is also based on our site.

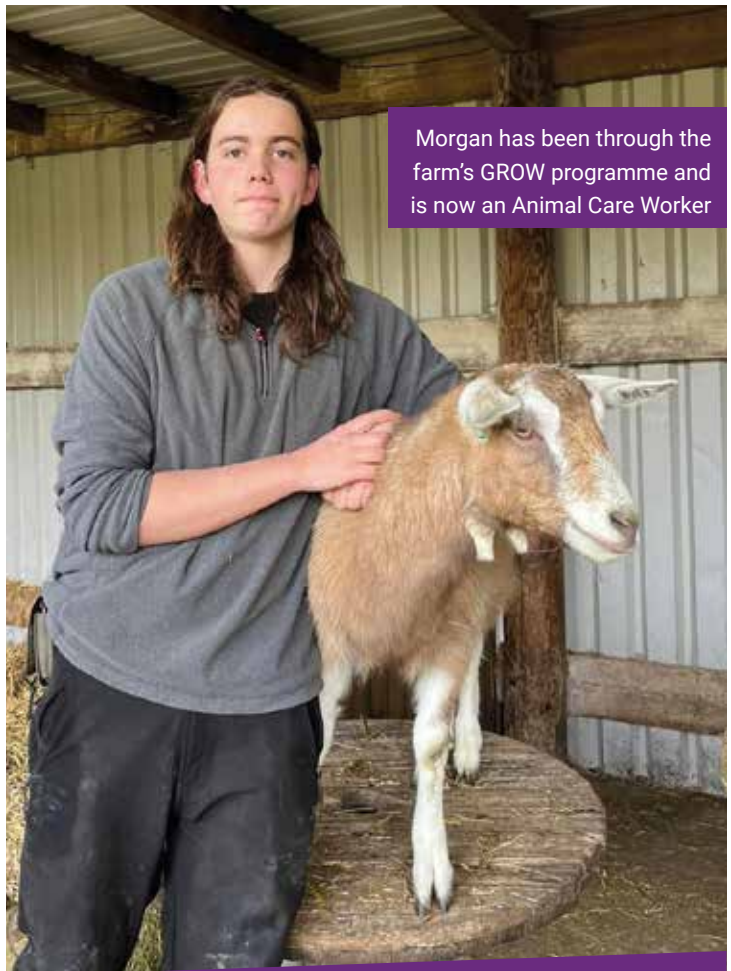
Work to improve the farm and its facilities never stops. Our café is being refurbished and is due to re-open for the spring. It will have much better facilities for disabled people, a new servery and built-in technologies aimed at reducing its carbon footprint. It will be a great space for small community groups, including parents and toddlers, to meet, and will provide café training for volunteers, empowering them to test out possible new careers.

Meanwhile, Woody's Lodge is being relocated and made bigger, and our bunkhouse is being extended and will have new accessible bedrooms on the ground floor.

Open all year (except Christmas Day), our farm relies heavily on our many volunteers who help with site maintenance, animal care and managing our woodland. I think a project that exists on the basis of giving to the local community while being supported by the local community, and works hard to look after the environment, is a good example of a sustainable venture.



Some of the farm workers who care for the donkeys



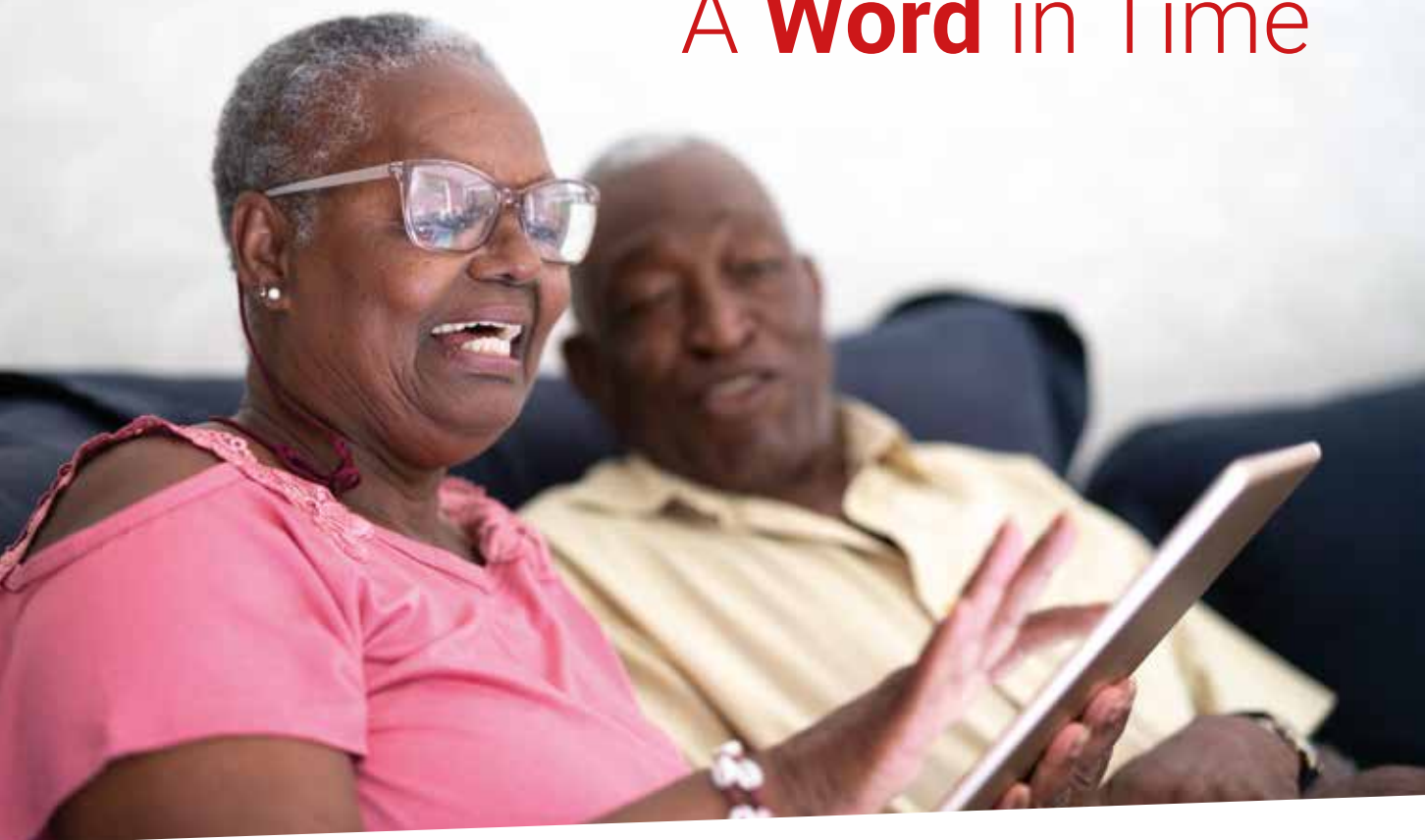
Morgan has been through the farm's GROW programme and is now an Animal Care Worker

More information about Amelia Trust Farm is available at: ameliastrust.org.uk



Most of the animals, including donkeys, alpacas, sheep, guinea pigs and reptiles, have been rescued or donated.

A Word in Time



The notes are relevant, enlightening and challenging.

A free online daily Bible resource from the Methodist Church is getting 1,000 hits per day. A Word in Time (WiT) offers Bible study, prayers and questions to ponder seven days a week. Some of its readers explain why it's an essential part of their life.

Mark

"I don't go to church, but I enjoy quiet Bible study," says conservationist and educator Mark, who's in his 50s and lives in the south-west of England.

"There's a lot of Christian content on social media but I don't know where it comes from or what its values are. I trust WiT as a source and for its theology. I like the mix of Bible studies and thoughts from different lay or ordained people. It's like being in a Bible study with different preachers each week. I read it with my morning coffee before the rush of the day."



Graham

"As someone who's recently rediscovered my faith in God, I've found WiT very useful," says history and sports

enthusiast Graham, who's in his 30s and lives in Leicestershire.

"Without it, I'm not sure where to begin with Bible study, nor do I always fully understand what I'm reading. I read the prescribed passage and accompanying notes before bedtime."

Could you write for WiT?

We're looking for more writers (both ministers and lay people) for WiT. If making the Bible relevant for thousands of people is a challenge you'd enjoy, please email the WiT editor at: wit@methodistchurch.org.uk



Jenny

"For many years I'd slipped out of the habit of daily Bible reading and reflection, and it was when I came across WiT on the Church website during the pandemic that I regained the habit. It's free and easily accessed on my phone," says Jenny of Portishead, Somerset.

"The notes are relevant, enlightening and challenging, and the knowledge that unknowable numbers of my Methodist family are looking at the same passage that day gives me a sense of fellowship."

Susan

Susan's prayer group of around 10 people from Rugby Methodist Church uses WiT in its weekday morning Zoom meetings.

"Some of the 'to ponder' questions have challenged us, resulting in interesting discussions. One of the questions – whether Jesus thought he was God – was a particularly interesting topic."

Tolu

In his 50s, Tolu, who works for a digital communications agency in Lagos, Nigeria, says: "WiT is part of my daily routine. I don't always agree with what the author writes, but even then it is useful as a challenge to my own thoughts. I find the background analysis helpful in pointing out things that I might otherwise miss when reading the Bible."



Michael

"We have no Bible or prayer meetings at our church, so WiT's daily readings are essential to me," says Michael (79), who has an engineering and education background and lives in Yorkshire.

"I have been encouraged by these readings so many times. They have uplifted me and given direction to my life."



Pam

"As a disabled person unable to get out to worship meetings, I find WiT is a good way to connect with the Methodist Church," says Pam of Derbyshire, who has retired from paid ministry due to ill health.

"Knowing that other Methodists are joining in gives me a focus each day. The points we're encouraged to think about are really helpful, and the prayer at the end brings everything together."



Jenny

Oxfordshire Christian nature group leader Jenny, says: "I sing WiT's praises to anyone who'll listen! I've been using it for ages."

"It's like being in a home group every morning because I know that many other people are reading it. I particularly like the prayer at the end, which gives me a focus for that day."



Jackie

Mental health nurse and professor Jackie is in her 50s and lives in Leicestershire. She says: "I use WiT every morning to ensure

I start each day spending time in God's presence. It has hugely helped in my discernment process regarding becoming a local preacher and possibly candidating for ministry."



I have been encouraged by these readings so many times.



I particularly like the prayer at the end.

Join the WiT community

Inspired to try WiT for yourself? It's completely free and you'll find engaging, bite-sized reflections on Bible passages, with questions such as: "If Saul could change, anyone can. Do you agree?" and "Have we intellectualised faith and made it less accessible?"

The WiT Bible readings follow the daily lectionary (schedule of readings) of the Methodist Prayer Handbook. Each day's main reading matches one of the commitments for living A Methodist Way of Life. Visit: methodist.org.uk/a-word-in-time



Action for
Children



Over 4.2 million children in the UK live in poverty.

That's 29% of all children.

We're there when families can't afford the basics. We top up the gas meter. Put food on the table. We're a vital lifeline for desperate families with nowhere to turn.

We're proud to have been part of the Methodist family since we began over 150 years ago. And we're grateful for the amazing support of this community.

Get involved today:

actionforchildren.org.uk