

Issue 27 • Summer 2022

The **Methodist** Church 

the
connexion



Open to God's Spirit

Inspiring stories from the life
of your **Methodist Church**



David Perry
Editor
blog visualtheology.uk



In Cornwall I came across this great advert for an outdoor adventure company, even though my self-knowledge meant that only two of the five energetic activities on offer could possibly relate to me.

It might surprise you, but this edition of *the connexion* magazine demonstrates that within the life of the Church there are activities that are equally as exciting, challenging, demanding, thrilling, enjoyable and beneficial.

Why do I believe this? Because the Spirit of the living God is continually and irrepressibly birthing adventure; let loose, wild and free in our midst, God's wonderful Spirit is inspiring us to acts of astonishing creativity and transformation.

It just doesn't feel like that. In a time of multiple crises at every level of our common life, from the global to the very local, we are confronted by challenges that can so often seem to be insuperable. Struggle abounds; everywhere there is a sense of lives overshadowed by real and present dangers to wellbeing and stability. As we know all too well the Church is not cocooned from this, but is facing its own particular threats and anxieties regarding the future.

So where better to look for the Spirit of God to be at work than right there, at the heart of all of this collective anguish and longing? Our theme 'Open to God's Spirit' reminds us of this timely truth and turns our attention to the One whose vision and creativity are ceaseless.

Our cover image shows a Dove of Peace fashioned out of knives that have wounded and killed on the streets of London. In the midst of fear, grief and violence this representation of the Holy Spirit is a phoenix-like icon of resurrection, a statement of purpose and an invitation to hope. At its best so too is the Church. Come, Holy Spirit, come.

Love and peace, David

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.

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 www.methodist.org.uk/theconnexion to change your order for *the connexion*, to download the pdf to reuse articles in your own church magazine. Images are available at www.flickr.com/methodistmedia

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

As each issue of *the connexion* is commissioned to a specific theme it is not possible to include unsolicited articles. Stories about local churches may feature in Methodist News and Podcasts developed by Communications: mediaoffice@methodistchurch.org.uk

the connexion

Issue 27 • Summer 2022

Published by the Methodist Church in Britain
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*Dove of Peace sculpture,
Southwark Peace Garden*

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Evangelism at summer festivals

Hope and Anchor is the Methodist Church's inclusive, evangelistic public presence at festivals and events in the year ahead. Showing up as a café at Cliff Festival and 3Generate, and as an alcohol-free bar at Greenbelt Festival, Hope and Anchor is a space for the kinds of conversations you've always wanted to have; with contributors, friends and strangers. A place where justice meets evangelism, where you can talk or listen, and bring your questions. Come to

relax and grab a drink, but be prepared: real conversations change things!



Working towards net zero

To support local churches as we all work towards the target of the Methodist Church becoming net zero by 2030, digital resources for making changes to buildings are available on the Methodist Church website. These recommendations aim to help churches reduce energy use and associated carbon emissions:

www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/property/net-zero-carbon



New Places for New People Hubs

Projects focused on forming new Christian communities for people not yet part of an existing church are developing across the country, with each district and circuit including them in their mission plans. From the Kairos Movement in the Yorkshire North and East District to a street ecclesial community in Birmingham, creative new shoots are appearing. Churches looking to set out on this path are encouraged to join a hub to learn from people already on the journey. Find details here: www.methodist.org.uk/npnphub

THINK
PIECE



The greatest commandment



The President of the Conference 2022/2023, the Revd Graham Thompson, says our relationship with a loving God sustains and opens us to God's abiding Spirit.



The presidential theme for 2022/2023 is 'The Greatest Commandment' (Matthew 22:37-39).

I first became truly aware of the activity of the Holy Spirit when in my early 20s I attended a teaching weekend at Cliff College. Until then my understanding of the 'abiding presence of God' had been purely theoretical. That weekend, I discovered how the Holy Spirit can bless and inspire as I allowed God to be at work in a way that I had not allowed before. The experience has not been a 'one off' as, throughout my ministry, I have been fortunate to witness others experience the same openness and the same blessing.

I like to think that John Wesley's experience at Aldersgate Street was the same as mine at Cliff College! And, while there are some resonances, there are many differences. Wesley was an ordained Anglican with a theology and understanding that, at this stage, had not been granted to me. Even so, the journey from the theoretical to the

personal – from the head to the heart – was similar. And I am convinced that each disciple of Jesus needs to understand as much as they can about God's activity (head) and to experience as much as they can (heart). We need both to be truly the people that God created us to be.

Love your God with all your heart

The presidential theme for 2022/2023 is 'The Greatest Commandment' (Matthew 22:37-39). Vice-President Anthony Boateng and I are concentrating on different aspects of the theme as we believe the Church should be filled with those who love God, others and themselves. We also need a fresh wind of the Holy Spirit to restore, revive and reignite us. In fact, we believe that each is necessary for the other. We should love God and our neighbours as much as we love ourselves and, it is as we love like this, that we become ready for the



We need to go back to first principles and consider the love we have – or don't have – for God.

new or fresh things that God wants to do in us and for us.

To go a little deeper, our relationship with God should be continually evolving, maturing and deepening as we learn to live and minister together day by day. This happens when we love and trust each other. I am continually amazed that God is willing to trust me to be a servant of God and a presbyter in the Methodist Church. And I can only be the minister that I am called to be because my relationship with God sustains and enables me each day. A caveat, however, most relationships go through rocky patches and that has been my experience too!

Grounded in love

A relationship with God, made possible through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and made real by the abiding Spirit is on offer to us all. Such a relationship transforms lives and enables God's purposes to be fulfilled. The basis of such a relationship is love and when we struggle to get things right with God we need to go back to first principles and consider the love we have – or don't have – for God.

We love God, says the writer of 1 John (4:19) because God first loved us. God reaches out to us in Jesus and blesses us with the Holy Spirit as we invite God to share all our living with us. Such love is the kind that, to quote from the old marriage service, "grows and deepens with the years" (*Methodist Service Book* p.186). It isn't a crush or a phase but results in the gift of oneself to the other; utterly and totally. We become open



to God's Spirit when we are grounded in such a relationship.

Throughout this year both Anthony and I want to encourage others to find hope and security in their relationship with God. In an ever-changing world (culturally, economically and post-pandemic) it is our relationships that sustain us. We may not always get things right; we will make mistakes but, together with God and one another, we can be the best versions of ourselves.

At the same time, we should be ready for the fresh wind of God to blow through our Church. As we make ourselves open to God, we can expect new and exciting things to happen as we love God and one another and invite God to be at work in and through us.

*Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.
Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.
Break me, melt me, mould me, fill me.
Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.*

(Words Daniel Iverson, StF 395, copyright Capitol Licensing and used with permission.)



Restore, revive and reignite: what needs to change to make these goals a reality?



We should be ready for the fresh wind of God to blow through our Church.

The Revd Graham Thompson is President of the Conference 2022/2023.



**THINK
PIECE**

Hearing God's voice



Vice-President of the Conference 2022/2023 Anthony Boateng says it's time to be 'sorely open to God's Spirit' and rekindle Wesleyan fire.



God is urging us to be attentive to things of the Spirit.

Particularly recently and when I was training to become a local preacher, I would often pray in my heart, yearning for revival. I was yearning to comprehend the depth and breadth of God's power, and to be filled with the fullness of God because I knew deep down the survival of our beloved Church (and the growth of my ministry) depend on it. You see, to experience revival it is incumbent on us to be open to God's Spirit. That means as a Church we have to be completely dependent on the sovereignty of God. Only then can churches get lifted out of spiritual indifference and worldliness into earnest desire for Jesus Christ and a renewed commitment to our Methodist calling.

New birth in the Spirit

In John 3:1-21 we get an insight into what it means to be open to God's Spirit and how one can be born again. Nicodemus had a strong academic knowledge of God but prior to his meeting with Jesus he did not have a personal relationship with God. However he was open to God's Spirit. He was hungry for God, and this hunger enabled him to persevere until the revelation of Jesus Christ was complete in him.

The 'new birth' that Jesus alludes to in John 3:1-21 is the work of God's Holy Spirit and it requires us to be open to it. Like the weather, the Holy Spirit is unpredictable and challenges us to keep moving forward, irrespective of what we're faced with. Only

one thing is certain: our inner being is slowly and constantly being refined and God is always with us during this time.

Standing up for justice

As we face the cost of living crisis, war in Ukraine, the long-term impact of Covid-19, the new asylum law and the virus known as institutional racism, let us as a Church be open to God's Spirit. This is the time for the Church to stand up and show the world why social justice is in the DNA of Methodism. This is the time to stride further with some of the good work we have already made through our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Toolkit.

Through unity, guided by the Holy Spirit, let us support people who feel marginalised and voiceless. Let's challenge the status quo and be an agent of change. Let us remind ourselves of the benchmark Christ has set for all society because God is Lord of every society and nation. No one is inferior and there should be equality in opportunities. There must be no room for tokenism or fear of being silenced. Our values and most importantly our actions must stand up to the judgment of God.

Revival – open to God's Spirit

I realise that some of us may feel tired or held back by the structure of our Church, with little time to focus on our personal relationship with God. But, friends, through Christ all

things are possible. Let us strive to reignite and revive the Wesleyan fire in our everyday life. This means regular fellowship and prayer groups during the week. We need to revive things that were the bedrock of Methodism such as band and class meetings. We also need strong modern worship and to apply a Methodist Way of Life in a non-prescriptive way. We need to inspire more young people to get into ministry and leadership. We must be sorely dependent on the Holy Spirit. Let us keep in mind it requires us as a Church to be entirely submissive to God's will.

In Mark 4:26-34 we learn from the parable of the mustard seed that size does not matter, and growth is mysterious and gradual: "first the blade, then the head, then the full grain...". Therefore friends, even though we may be reduced in numbers, ageing and increasingly under attack from the secular world, I believe God is not done with us yet. Rather, God is urging us to be attentive to things of the Spirit. God has placed in our hearts the greatest commandment ("You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart" Matthew 22:34-40). Accept it so it may bear fruit. By uniting as a Church we will make more followers of Jesus Christ.

Over the coming year, it is my hope that we as a Church work faithfully alongside one another in love, and are prepared to put our head above the parapet as we thirst to experience the fullness of the Holy Spirit.



Social justice is in the DNA of Methodism.



Let us strive to reignite and revive the Wesleyan fire.



What pathway to revival is the Spirit calling you to support?

Anthony Boateng is a local preacher and Vice-President of the Conference 2022/2023.



Home is where the Spirit leads

Staying open to God's Spirit, the Methodist Church is handing over the keys to 25 Marylebone Road and moving to a new London home, explains Doug Swanney.



gathering space for the Church and could offer rental space for other organisations, providing a future income stream.

Moving from 25 Marylebone Road

In 2020 the world changed. We all endured lockdown and a major change in working patterns, and consequently a reduced demand for London office space. Despite the excitement at the prospect of a new-build project, it became clearer and clearer to many that the proposals were now out of date: they spoke of a way of working that seemed to have gone. This led to a period of prayerful reflection on what had been reached and what we were being inspired to do.

So the decision was taken to find a new gathering place – a new Methodist Church House – and 25 Marylebone Road was put up for sale. Given its prime location, there was no shortage of offers and agreement was reached for its sale before we were able to find a new home. This is not unusual: many people sell their home first so that they can move quickly when that perfect new home comes on the market. But despite months of searching, nothing ticked all our boxes. We began looking for rented space that would enable some form of Church House to continue after the sale of Marylebone Road. For some this felt exciting – a time of preparing to live differently as we waited to see how the world would emerge from the global pandemic. As we started to look at possible 'campsites for our tent' we came across the perfect place. Our Covenant partners were looking to lease space in Church House Westminster. It felt like the right fit: it was the right place at the right time. In addition to our space in Church House, we can also use space in Methodist Central Hall in Westminster and The Wesley Hotel in Euston for connexional meetings.



This led to a period of prayerful reflection on what had been reached.

Since 1996, 25 Marylebone Road has been a gathering place for the wider Connexion and the home of the Connexional Team, but it has a longer history of service to the mission of the Church. It was built in 1939 for the Methodist Missionary Society, which sent and received Mission Partners from around the world. Initial construction was delayed due to the outbreak of war and for a period the BBC used parts of the building for their broadcasts. It has seen many changes: there used to be a canteen on the seventh floor and a flat where the Commissionaire and his wife lived (now the home of Methodist Schools) and many hundreds of people have worked in its offices and come through its doors.

The years have taken their toll. The latest estimate was that around £8 million would be needed to upgrade the building to modern office standards and there were questions (even prior to the outbreak of Covid-19) about the Church's future need and use of space. So we took the bold decision to develop a new building on the site, which would be a



25 Marylebone Road was put up for sale.



Our new permanent home

At the same time, we continued the search for a new, more permanent home and we found 25 Tavistock Place. It is close to Euston and St Pancras mainline stations, connecting London to all points north. It can be developed to meet our desires in terms of inclusivity and energy use; it has room for partners (both old and new); and it can be purchased and developed under the available budget (returning money to other funds). Perhaps most importantly it feels like 'us': not the us we were, or are now, but the us we seek to become. It's a place where we can put the Justice, Dignity and Solidarity strategy

into action as we ensure all are considered as we plan. It's a place where we can ensure excellent facilities for online meetings as we continue to keep travel to a minimum. It can be a shop window for a Methodist Way of Life in the heart of the city and it's close to our partners.

Methodist Church House at Tavistock Place will be the best destination for the journey we have been on. There will be a time of temporary wandering as we 'set up our tent' elsewhere, but Tavistock Place will be our home, where the Connexion can gather and continue to respond to *Our Calling*.



Tavistock Place will be our home, where the Connexion can gather.

Images taken at the Thanksgiving Service for Methodist Church House on 25 May 2022



Doug Swanney is the Connexional Secretary of the Methodist Church in Britain.



God's people have always been prepared to let go and move on: what does this mean where you are?



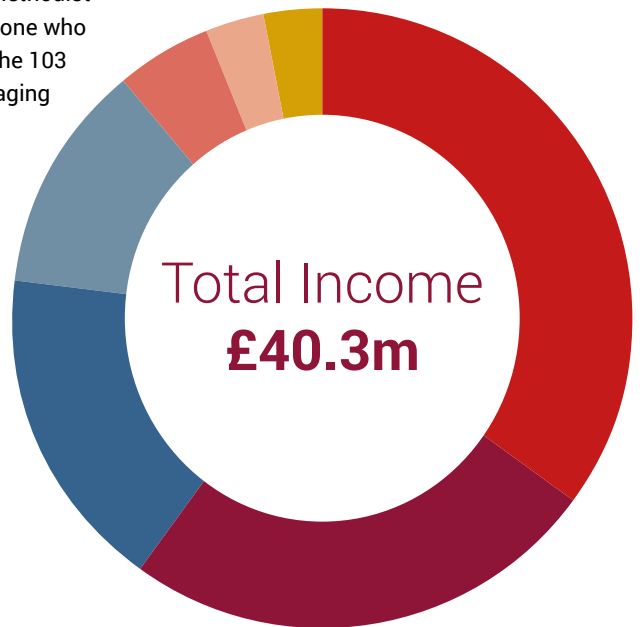
We were very successful in reducing our expenditure by £5m.

Report on connexional finances

Matt Tattersall, Director of Finance and Resources, Methodist Church in Britain, summarises the Church's annual financial report and the ministers' pension scheme.

The Annual Trustees' Report and Accounts 2020/2021 is a significant document in the life of the Methodist Church in Great Britain. However, anyone who has taken the time to wade through the 103 pages will know it isn't the most engaging read. The thousands of numbers can be bewildering, even to those with experience of reading accounts. *The connexion* magazine is always full of stories of Methodists living out their discipleship and these sets of figures are just another way of sharing that story.

So, as the Unified Statement of Connexional Finances for 2020/2021 is laid before the 2022 Conference, it is appropriate to provide a brief summary of the financial position, and to look ahead to next year's budget.



Income

During 2020/2021, income fell by £4m to £40m. This was mainly due to a reduction in legacies and also the impact of the pandemic. Donations and investment income were down, as was trading income at The Wesley Hotel and Cliff College. These reductions were partly offset by increases in property levies that are charged when churches and manses are sold. The breakdown of where all the income comes from can be seen in the chart on this page.

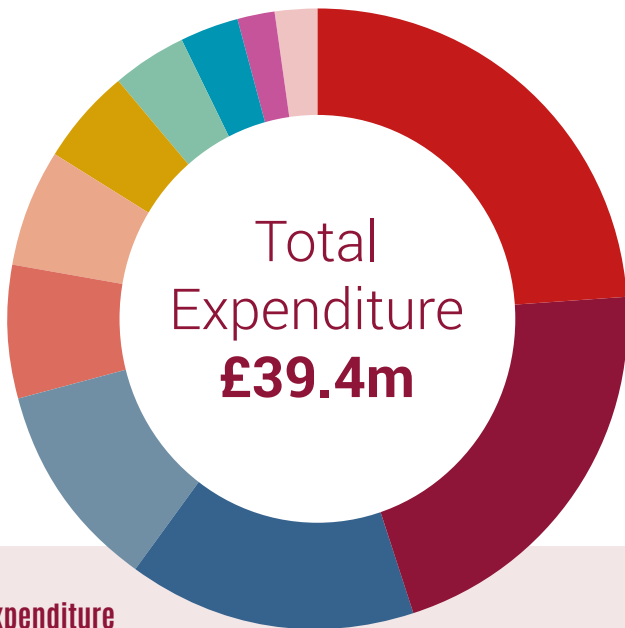


Inflation is causing fuel bills to rise; pay and stipends are increasing.

%

- 35** Charitable activities
- 25** Capital levies
- 17** Donations and legacies
- 12** Investments
- 5** Other trading activities
- 3** Grants
- 3** Miscellaneous income

Should you wish to take a look at the full report you will find it at methodist.org.uk/trusteesreport



Total Expenditure
£39.4m

- 24** Ministries
- 21** Global relations
- 15** Evangelism and growth
- 11** Methodist Council and governance
- 7** Learning network
- 6** Income generating centres
- 5** Building communities
- 4** Raising funds
- 3** Children and youth
- 2** Property
- 2** Other

Expenditure

While a fall in income is unwelcome, we were very successful in reducing our expenditure by £5m. A large part of this was the reduced operating costs at The Wesley and Cliff College during the pandemic restrictions. We also made major changes to how we operated as a Church, moving away from costly in-person events and meetings and conducting business online. How we spent our money can be seen in the chart above.

So, with expenditure remaining slightly below income, the connexional finances ended the year in a similar position to the start of the year. Of course, this was not by accident, and a great deal of hard work was undertaken during the year to ensure the budget was well managed as we moved through such uncertain times.

Connexionalism and reducing costs

One of the most significant elements of the budget is the funding received through the District Assessment, which accounted for £13.8m of our income. We are aware that some churches were not able to make their full Assessment payment during the year. However, it was great to hear of the work done by circuit and district treasurers to ensure monies were reallocated, resulting in some more prosperous churches and circuits helping those who were struggling. This commitment to connexionalism ensured that the full amount of the Assessment was paid to support our ongoing activity across the Connexion.

As we look ahead to 2022/2023, the pressures on the budget will continue to increase. Inflation is causing fuel bills to rise; pay and stipends are increasing; the cost of ministerial pensions is going up, and National Insurance contributions have risen. At the same time, we are uncertain about whether our income can be sustained at the same level

in the coming years. Right across the Church people face the same pressures, and we continue to look at what can be done to help manage these issues. We have to live within our means, and our means are much reduced from what they once were. The Conference will be considering a number of proposals about how we as a Church are governed and administered. These changes will not be easy but do have the benefit of reducing costs so that our resources can be better directed to fulfilling our mission as followers of Christ. The Conference has already committed to a series of reductions in the level of the District Assessment as it seeks to ease the pressures on local churches and circuits. However, this does mean there will be less money for the Connexional Team to undertake its work and the Church needs to consider which activities are key priorities, and which need to cease.

On a positive note, we can look forward to the opening of The Wesley Hotel in the converted Camden Town Methodist Church in London. This will give a new source of income for connexional funds while also making good use of a Methodist property. Another positive is that there are significant reserves held by local churches and circuits. While these funds are not evenly distributed, it does mean there is some money available to invest in new projects, not least our commitment to evangelism and growth.



More prosperous churches and circuits are helping those struggling.

Ministers' pensions

The ordained ministry is a vital part of the Methodist Church. The covenant between the Church and those called to ordination includes the provision of a pension in retirement.

Under the existing scheme, for each year of full-time ministry they have served, a retired minister will receive an annual pension of £323 (which is uplifted by inflation each year). This means that after 30 years' service, a full-time minister will have earned a pension of £9,690. The cost of this pension is funded jointly by circuits and ministers with annual contributions of £6,947 and £2,402 respectively.

Pension contributions are paid into the ministers' pension scheme. The pension trustees are responsible for ensuring that contributions are invested carefully so there is enough money to pay the pensions when they become due. When there is more money being paid into the pension scheme than is being paid out in pensions, trustees can take a long-term approach to investing. However, we are reaching the point where the decline in the number of active ministers will result in the contributions falling below the amount of pensions being paid out. Currently, there are 1,212 ministers paying into the scheme, but

2,639 pensions being paid out. Consequently, trustees have to be even more diligent in making sure there is sufficient cash to pay the pensions when they are due.

Pension trustees are legally required to undertake a valuation of the pension scheme every three years. They consider whether there is sufficient money in the scheme to pay the pensions that have been earned, taking into account all sorts of factors such as inflation, interest rates, return on investments, life expectancy, etc. While the scheme had more than enough money in 2017, by 2020 it was showing a small deficit. As a result, the Church had to make up the shortfall. As the valuation was made in the middle of the pandemic, and economic conditions have improved since then, the amount actually needed may be reassessed each year and could be reduced.



1,212 ministers paying into the scheme, but 2,639 pensions being paid out.



Remedying deficits

Deficits in pension schemes are not unexpected and do not mean that the scheme is being badly run. They are simply a calculation taken on a set date using certain assumptions. Fortunately, the Church already had plans in place in case such a deficit arose. It set up a fund over ten years ago that benefits from a levy every time a manse or church is sold. This Pension Reserve Fund has enough money in it to cover the current deficit. However, this fund is also used to reassure the pension trustees that the Church has enough money should deficits happen in future.

In order to increase the amount in the Pension Reserve Fund, and thus reassure the trustees, the 2021 Conference asked all churches, circuits and districts to look at their financial reserves to see if they could afford to make a contribution. The Church is very grateful for all those churches, circuits and districts that gave this issue proper consideration. At the time of writing, it resulted in donations totalling £6.4m. In addition, the Methodist Council has looked at the reserves in Connexional Funds and made a contribution of £500,000. However, because of the ongoing pressures, the appeal is to be kept open for a further year.

Another measure the Methodist Council has taken to protect the pension scheme

is to give a guarantee to the trustees that funds will always be available to meet the Church's responsibilities. This means, in the highly unlikely event that the Conference ever failed to pay what was owed to the scheme, the trustees could sell some connexional properties, that have been offered as security, to cover the shortfall.

Despite all this, pension legislation over many years has been pushing trustees towards reducing their investment risk. This could lead to circuit contribution rates increasing even further in the coming years. While none of this will affect pensions that have already been earned, a review is underway to consider how pensions can best be provided in future.



A review is underway to consider how pensions can best be provided in future.

"Having added my voice to the need for contributions to the Pension Reserve Fund, I have been amazed by the generosity of the Methodist people at a time when resources can be constrained. I would like to say a big 'thank you' to all those churches, circuits and districts that have responded, thus far. To receive £6.9m (and counting) is a great result, particularly in such challenging times."

The Revd Sonia Hicks

President of the Methodist Conference 2021/2022





The Methodist Church was called into existence to focus on one thing.

There's a lot going on!

The Church's many initiatives stem from one thing: being open to God's Spirit, says the Revd Dr Jonathan Hustler.



The unmerited good news of God's love in Christ that we have received.



A colleague said, "There's a lot going on!" as we began our meeting, and she was right. There is a lot going on in the Connexional Team because there is a lot going on in the Church. Some say that there is too much going on, and *cris du coeur* on social media asking for 'no more initiatives for a time' receive a large number of 'likes' from fellow Methodists. There is a lot going on and Methodist people who have worked tirelessly to maintain the life of their churches and circuits during the pandemic will sometimes ask "Why, O why, is there so much going on? Can we not focus on one thing?"

The latter part of the question is the vital issue. The Methodist Church was called into existence to focus on one thing. In the 18th century we expressed it as "spreading Scriptural holiness throughout the land"; and

at the beginning of the 21st century in *Our Calling* we encapsulated it as "to respond to the gospel of God's love in Christ and to live out our discipleship in worship and mission." It is from that 'one thing' that all else should flow and if it doesn't, then it is not the Methodist Church's to do.

Gospel at the centre

In trying to make sense of this, I've visualised concentric rings made by the ripples from a pebble thrown into water. The pebble is the gospel – not something we do, but the unmerited good news of God's love in Christ that we have received. In *The Character of a Methodist*, John Wesley wrote "a Methodist is one who has the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost given unto him [sic]." This new life of holiness is at the heart of the Methodist Church and as the

Our Calling statement makes clear all else is response to that.

Confidence and integrity

The first ripple around the pebble is the confidence with which we make our response and the integrity with which we express it. Central to 'God for All' is 'A Methodist Way of Life' (MWOL), challenging each of us to make *Our Calling* an integral part of every day. It is 'A Way' not 'The Way'; other Methodists, individually or in their classes, will be developing their discipline with different tools, but MWOL expresses our desire to build our confidence in the gospel. The 'Walking with Micah' project similarly seeks to build our confidence in understanding how the gospel speaks to the society in which we live. The 'Justice, Dignity and Solidarity' strategy reminds us that a Church which believes that God's love is for all must express that in the way that we treat each other and all whom we encounter. 'Everyone an Evangelist' is designed to help each of us express what we know of God's love. Baldly, this first ring of 'confidence and integrity' is our intention to be a better, more articulate Church.

Mission

The next ripple out (of mission) follows from the ring of confidence and integrity. Having received the gospel and sought to know it more deeply, we long for others to know it and endeavour to live in a way that others will want to share. Again, the Church has tools

to help. 'God for All' and 'Changing Patterns of Ministry' offer resources and models to churches and circuits that can make us effective in our mission while 'Oversight and Trusteeship' help us develop models of governance that mean we use our resources effectively, appropriately, and with the diligence required in any public body.

The world transformed

The final ring is the consequence of being effective in mission. Our siblings in the United Methodist Church express it as 'the transformation of the world'. If 'a lot going on' does not express itself in locally and connexionally serving those in need and working with others for a better world, it's the wrong lot. However, what I hear, and what I read quarterly in *the connexion* magazine is that Methodists in many places, often in partnership with others, are making a difference: creating opportunities for worship and fellowship for those new to the Church, reducing carbon emissions, welcoming refugees, feeding hungry people, and challenging those in power.

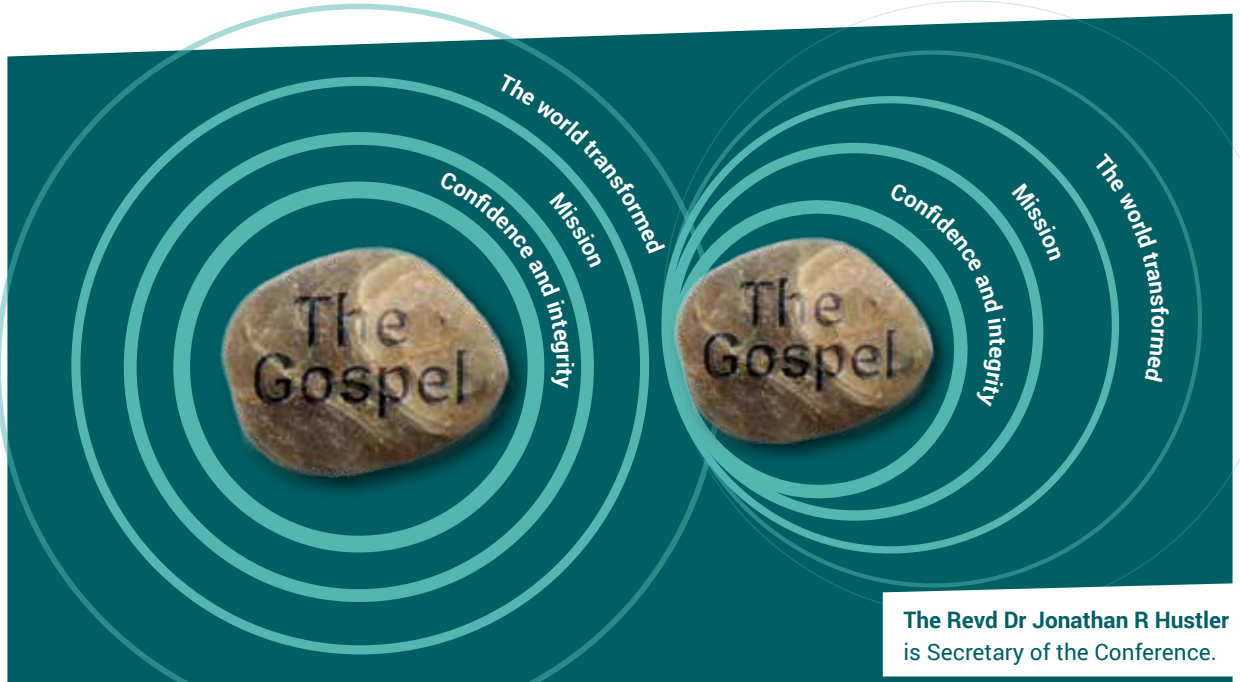
No visual representation of the work of the Church is perfect and this is flawed if we fail to recognise one simple but astonishing truth. Whenever we inhabit the outer ring we meet again the Spirit who poured God's love into our hearts. And so as a fresh pebble is dropped into our life as a Church, the ripples spread again, and we say with joy "There's a lot going on!"



What does this article inspire you to ask for and commit to?



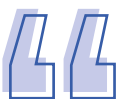
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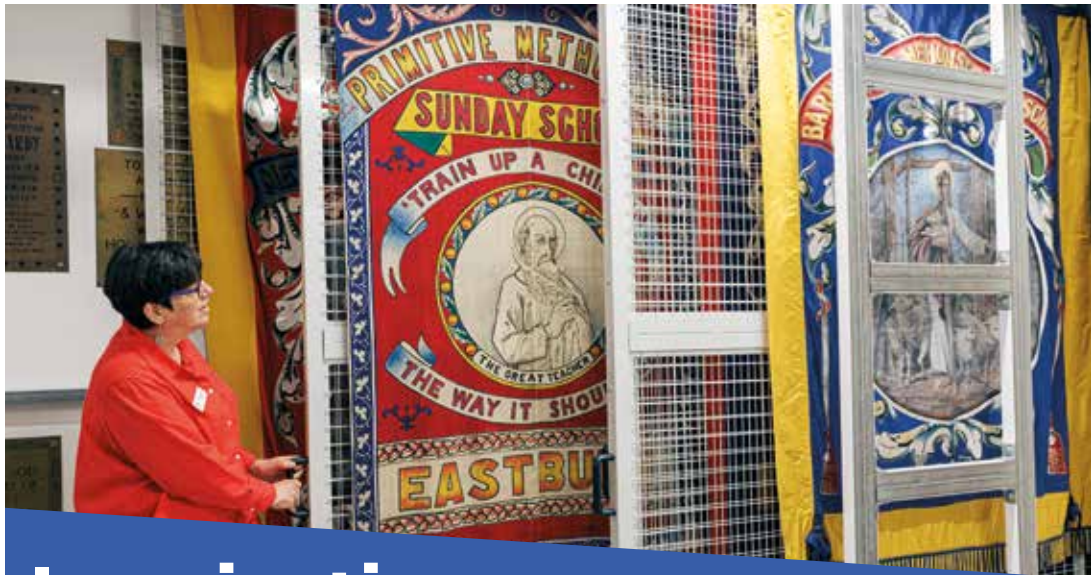
The Revd Dr Jonathan R Hustler is Secretary of the Conference.



Hugh Bourne showed an inspiring openness to God's Spirit.



As many churches face decline and closure, let's draw on our heritage.



Inspiration from the past

As we're challenged to be open to God's Spirit, Ruth Hilton takes heart from the example of Hugh Bourne.

Arriving early in 2018 for my first interview at Englesea Brook Museum of Primitive Methodism, I discovered the grave of Hugh Bourne, a co-founder of Primitive Methodism, and that we share a birthday. And so the seeds were sown to celebrate his 250th birthday in style! His is not a household name like John and Charles Wesley, but Hugh Bourne showed an inspiring openness to God's Spirit. As many churches face decline and closure, let's draw on our heritage, letting the past speak to the present. Here are some examples from his life to encourage us.

A small spark

Hugh Bourne was born in North Staffordshire on 3 April 1772. By the time he died in 1852, Primitive Methodism had (as inscribed on his grave): 9,916 itinerant and local preachers, 109,964 members in society, and 148,896 Sabbath schoolteachers and scholars. Yet Bourne by his own admission was "so timid and bashful as is seldom equalled" and shared his testimony with his cousin Daniel Shubotham only by walking side by side so he didn't have to look him in the eye. Daniel

was his first convert and this small spark from the Holy Spirit led Bourne to advocate 'conversation preaching' as a way to share one's faith. I suggest we all might think how we can use our timidity and limitations to better effect.

A sense of place

The commemorative plate for the 1907 centenary has the caption: "The little cloud's increasing still which first arose upon Mow Hill". Methodism is inseparably associated with this area on the Staffordshire/Cheshire border. One writer from Stoke-on-Trent claimed "... its two main products are pots and prayer, and no historical survey of the life of the area could ever be complete if it did not take Methodism into account."

We have developed a travelling exhibition for 2022 about the impact of Primitive Methodism, and several districts across the UK are hosting it to engage with this strand of their heritage. East Anglia, for example, has the story of George Edwards, who worked as a crow-scarer from the age of five because his father had been sentenced to hard labour for stealing a few turnips. Edwards went on to

become a local preacher, trade unionist and MP, driven by his faith to improve social and economic conditions. There is no single way to witness to Jesus Christ – evangelism and social justice offer different approaches to mission – but openness to the prompting of the Spirit is key.

How much do you know about the history of Methodism in your area and can that inspire new ways of engaging with communities today?

Radical inclusion

Hugh Bourne and the early Primitive Methodist movement made some bold decisions. A lay person himself, he involved lay people at every level of the organisation, which was unique to Primitive Methodism. At every meeting, including the Conference, there were two lay people to one minister. As Barbara Easton, the current Vice-President reminded us, the President of the Primitive Methodist Conference being a lay person became a key issue at Methodist Union in 1932. The Wesleyans could not accept a lay President, so agreed instead to a lay Vice-President. Likewise, the Representative session of the Conference was created for Union to succeed, as the Wesleyan Conference was only for presbyters.

Women preachers were also included in the early Primitive Methodist movement. Elizabeth Evans, on whom the character of Dinah Morris in *Adam Bede* was based, profoundly shaped Bourne's attitude to women preaching. Having heard her preach in June 1809, he wrote in his journal: "She appears to be very clear in Scriptural doctrine and very ready in Scripture, and speaks full in the Spirit."

Bourne, like John Wesley before him, turned to Scripture to test women's call to preach and concluded the words of Jesus should decide the matter: "By their fruits ye shall know them." (Matthew 7:16) I feel I should add a caveat: he didn't get everything right. When women became travelling preachers, they were paid £2 a quarter while men were paid £4!

What are the bold promptings of God's Spirit in your church and community?

Thriving museum

Our museum about Primitive Methodism is in Englesea Brook near Crewe. We are seeking to be fully accessible, so visitors with



He involved lay people at every level of the organisation, which was unique to Primitive Methodism.

additional needs may visit. We are starting new initiatives to engage with our community such as the monthly Crafty Ranters group, which explores a contemporary version of 'conversational preaching'. We also offer opportunities to learn about Primitive Methodism through heritage talks on Zoom which are available through our website and we held the Connexional Heritage online conference in May.



Where in your community do you expect 'small sparks of the Holy Spirit' to be prompting new life?

Ruth Hilton is the Project Director of Englesea Brook Chapel and Museum. engleseabrook.org.uk For details of the travelling exhibition, email director@engleseabrook.org.uk



Planting new churches

Mission enablers the Revd Rod Hill and Helle Sewell discuss the new church communities that arise when people are open to God's Spirit.



Just a few weeks later, the vision came to plant a new church in a nearby town.



There is now a hub developing of new people who feel comfortable in the church.

Rod: I've tried for the past 30 years in my ministry to be led by the Spirit with some positive results. Even though the background picture has been one of decline, in my experience God is doing new things. In every appointment I've had, I have been fortunate to minister in situations that had problems of growth, not problems of decline.

Helle: When we talk about being Spirit-led, what would you say we mean?

Rod: About five years ago I had a conversation with the minister of one of the larger churches in our district. I said that churches such as this should be planting new communities and they might like to think about where God could be calling them to plant such a church. Unbeknown to me, our District Chair had a similar conversation with him. Just a few weeks later, the vision came to plant a new church in a nearby town where the Methodist community had recently ceased worship.

We began to meet together, to pray and think what this new church might look like. Out of it came a vision for a new church in a nearby town, but in a different circuit and district. So we began to consult with the relevant people and put together funding to employ someone to start up the new church.

Over the next few years, including during the lockdowns and pandemic, the new church came to life and has begun to reach out to the people of the town in amazing ways. We now have a thriving new church community. It's led by a small group of committed people who meet often for prayer and discipleship formation. It's not anything like the Methodist congregation that used to worship in the town, but it is clearly of God. And it's still growing.

Helle: You say that the project is growing. What are the pillars sustaining it?

Rod: The first pillar is one person with a vision, who is driving this forward. They are aided by a dedicated band of people and underpinned by prayer. An administrator was employed too. The second pillar is a committed small group of people enthused by the vision from God.

Helle: How big a role did prayer play in this?

Rod: It was absolutely crucial. There was a prayer meeting at least once, if not twice a week. You get awareness of what the Spirit is doing when you dedicate time to hearing and seeing it. And I think it is also important for people such as you and I, the 'permission givers' to say, "Give it a go, this might well be the Spirit leading you."

Now can I ask, Helle, where have you seen the Spirit at work in your ministry?

Helle: When I started my role in January 2020, I sought to be Spirit-led. Starting from the point of being led by the Spirit can seem alien. When I speak of a discernment process, I find there seems to be no experience of how to go about it or use it as a tool for hearing from God. I deliberately ask people how often do you gather for prayer to listen to the Spirit? Listening to the Spirit will lead us to trusting the Spirit. We need to trust God. It's God's mission after all. There is no other way. If we open up intentionally and are present, we can see and hear God. It's an activity that needs to be intentional.

Rod: I agree. When we listen to the Spirit, then growth, in all senses of the term, becomes possible. The key is listening to what the Spirit is saying.

Helle: I am involved in a project that has grown into a big community hub where people of all ages and backgrounds gather. It began because the ageing church folk prayed,



“What next for this enormous building that we have no strength to carry?” God answered them in the form of a user group that was already using the space. They had a vision for the building to be a community hub. The existing congregation gave the premises to the Circuit, which meant that together with the user group there is now a hub developing of new people who feel comfortable in the church. It’s their home and we have now employed a pioneer to work there. Prayer has been essential to make this all possible.

The Revd Rod Hill is Mission Enabler in the Manchester and Stockport District and Helle Sewell is Evangelism and Community Engagement Enabler in the Darlington District.



OPEN TO GOD'S SPIRIT

If gathering for prayer to listen to the Spirit is crucial, how important is this in the life of your church and circuit?



Give it a go, this might well be the Spirit leading you.

The Revd Rachel Parkinson and Jo Yair both work in the Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury District. Rachel is the District Chair and Jo is Ministry and Mission Coordinator.



We can strengthen the habit of daily dependency on God and keep an outward focus.



Following the Spirit in a time of scarcity

Jo Yair and the Revd Rachel Parkinson advocate being open to the Spirit when resources are running low.



I learned that the group's premises were being closed and felt God's prompt to act.

Rachel: These days I find myself turning to the story of the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:8-16). There's a drought and famine in the land. The widow is down to her last handful of flour and drop of oil. We meet her gathering sticks for a fire so she can make a final meal for herself and her son before they both lie down to die. In our district it can feel as though we are in that widow's situation: down to our very last resources.

JO: It's an exhausting place to be. I'm reminded of the people of Israel on their Exodus journey. God rescued them from Pharaoh but they grumbled they'd rather be back in slavery if it meant they knew they'd be fed. The story shows us that hungry people are not at their best. I think we can recognise this in ourselves. When resources – whether volunteers, energy or finance – are scarce, we are more inclined to desperation and panic.

That can lead us to lose sight of God's plan and, more importantly, of who God is! It feels we're in a season where we need the Spirit's help in quelling fear and anxiety. The way God provided manna and quails to the wilderness wanderers on a 'just enough' basis was a lesson to them in trusting God day by day. A favourite quote of mine is from the Christian writer and Holocaust survivor, Corrie ten Boom: "Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God."

Rachel: Once you start looking, the Bible is full of stories of how to live faithfully and abundantly in hungry times. Think of all those famished people on a hillside. In Mark's account (Mark 6:30-44), the disciples focus on what they *haven't* got: food and money. Jesus asks them what they have got: five loaves and two fish. Using a divine mode of distribution, there's more than enough for everyone.

In common with many circuits across the District, the Stafford Circuit is finding it nigh on impossible to 'make the Plan' (have someone to take the service each week). However for some time now, Stafford has looked at what they already have and then are open to the Spirit to lead them into new ways to maximise their resources. They've applied this approach to the Plan. Churches no longer expect to have a 'person in each pulpit' every Sunday but instead alternate twice-monthly circuit services on Zoom with worship in their buildings, some of which is also streamed online or is hybrid (both in-person and online). The tiny rural chapel in Bishop's Offley has adopted hybrid worship and now includes regular congregation members who live in Scotland and Wales. Superintendent Minister Pauline Salter says, "Not everyone finds the online services helpful, but we feel we need to use all means available to reach as many as we can in order to fulfill our calling."

Jo: To return to Zarephath, the widow is asked to give her last meal to Elijah. Only then does she find her store cupboard renewed. Working with Fresh Expressions projects across the District I'm most impressed by circuits who, even in a time of scarcity, continue to look beyond their own membership. For example, in the Dudley and Netherton Circuit, lay worker Liz Dean has spent time building relations with the Woodside Day Centre, a local authority day service for adults living with challenging



mental health issues. Liz says "Through three separate conversations over a 24-hour period I learned that the group's premises were being closed. I felt God's prompt to act." Following much prayer, the group was invited to relocate to Woodside Methodist Church. Liz offers pastoral support and prayer alongside the craft session the day centre staff provide. It's early days, but the appetite for faith conversations is growing. Liz firmly believes "each week God is revealing the next step" as she journeys alongside the group.

In addition, in the heart of the Shropshire Hills, Stiperstones Methodist Church, which was only in occasional use for worship, is being temporarily converted by the Shropshire and Marches Circuit into accommodation for a family of six Ukrainian refugees.

Rachel: I really hope that we can strengthen the habit of daily dependency on God and keep an outward focus. This is a season where not everything can be maintained. There will inevitably be death and dying. But I'm reminded of the poem 'Death of Flowers' by Edith Joy Scovell, which contrasts the way irises and tulips age and die. Irises draw in on themselves in a 'clenched sadness' while tulips throw themselves outwards in reckless flamboyance. I hope we can be tulips!



*Each week
God is
revealing the
next step.*



What most
inspires you about
this dialogue and
what will you do
about it?



*Stiperstones
Methodist Church
is becoming
accommodation
for a family of
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refugees.*



The Revd David Hardman is the Deputy JPIT Team Leader. You can read more about JPIT's work on peacemaking at jointpublicissues.org.uk/peacemaking

Can knives symbolise **peace?**

As a sculpted dove is created from former weapons, the Revd David Hardman says being open to God's Spirit means challenging injustice.

I held the police officer's phone and looked at one of the most disturbing pictures I had ever seen. The police were donating decommissioned knives to the Southwark Peace Garden Project at Walworth Methodist Church in London as raw material for a sculpture that would become the garden's focal point. Even though they lay dormant in a crate, safe in the hands of the police, they radiated a sense of violence, hatred and aggression. I recoiled.

Many of us will have recoiled at the images of the war in Ukraine, and reflected on big questions around warfare, peace and justice. It is easy to feel overwhelmed. How can we beat swords into ploughshares if they are already being wielded in anger?

Weapons become peace symbol

A sculpted dove, created from those knives, now flies high above the Southwark Peace Garden. On the wings you can clearly see the serrated edges of knives once with the potential to kill, transformed into the majestic wingspan of a universally recognised symbol of peace. For Christians though, the dove is a symbol of so much more than peace. The Gospels recount Jesus' baptism when the Spirit descends on him like a dove, illustrating that from the beginning Jesus' ministry is spirit-filled. Yet, how can we hold together the symbol of God's Spirit and the symbol of peace in an unjust and violent world?

The dove is only one of many images used to represent the Holy Spirit. The ancient Celtic people preferred to think of the wild goose representing God's Spirit, because of its ability to disturb and surprise. It seems strange to talk in the same breath of peace and disturbance when thinking about God's Spirit. They appear to be opposites. Yet systems and situations that are aggressive, harbour racism, resist climate change, marginalise people and do not offer a welcome to the stranger need to be challenged and disturbed before true peace can flourish. Christians open to God's 'wild goose spirit' can shake up these systems to allow peace to be built. Or as Pope Paul VI said, "If you want peace, work for justice!"

Conflict resolution and peace

The Just Peace theory says peace is not simply the absence of conflict. Just Peace enables a creative process by which we become skillful at working through our conflict without resorting to violence and

without demeaning one another's dignity.

The phrase 'without demeaning one another's dignity' lies at the heart of justice. Our role as peace-builders is to agitate and disturb by asking the hard questions about injustice so that mutual dignity can be the foundation for peace.

In 2006 the Methodist and United Reformed Churches produced the report 'Peacemaking: a Christian Vocation'. It says building peace is part of the Christian way of life, not just something we do once conflict has flared up. It concludes "The Christian vocation of peacemaking is a task for the whole Church... a crucial part of faithfully following Christ and a vital contribution the Church makes to the earthly peace that is a basic human necessity for all people and nations." The report recognises that this task is lived out through just and peaceful relationships, active conflict solving, supporting strategies for preventing violent conflict and engaging with political leaders about when violent force maybe be threatened or used.

Being open to God's Spirit leads us to a vocation of challenging injustice and building peace. We are encouraged to reflect on how we deal with conflict not only in the world, but also in our personal relationships and church communities. The Methodist Church is piloting a Reconciliation and Mediation Team with the charity Place for Hope, enabling church communities to live well together (not demeaning one another's dignity) and to work through conflict without resorting to division. This commitment to living as peace-builders not only has the potential to transform our churches and communities, but it gives us the integrity to call on those with influence and power to use this approach also.

It is important to deeply and prayerfully reflect on the big questions that the conflict in Ukraine raise for us: the use of nuclear weapons, what is a just war, the welcome of refugees, and the use of sanctions for example. Yet, this conflict also offers a wider reminder of our calling to a way of life that, led by God's 'wild goose spirit', agitates against injustice, and led by God's 'dove spirit', builds peace in and through our relationships, communities and nations.



If you want peace, work for justice!



'Without demeaning one another's dignity' lies at the heart of justice.



In your area what are the urgent priorities for our collective agitating against injustice and building peace?

Place for Hope is a charity equipping people and faith communities to reach their potential to be peacemakers who navigate conflict well. Find out more at placeforhope.org.uk

Keeping faith with later life



Overnight all our 90 care homes and 70 retirement living schemes closed to non-essential visits.



Methodists are always open to the Spirit's call to care for older people says the Revd Chris Swift.

The central character in founding Methodist Homes (MHA), the Revd Walter Hall, always strikes me as a wily politician and a visionary Christian. Lots of clergy visit members of their congregations, listen empathetically to their troubles, and go on their way. Walter also listened, but was seized by a less common determination to act. He agitated for the creation of a charity to provide care for older people, and in 1943 the Methodist Conference voted in favour of the proposal. While much has grown and changed over the decades, our commitment to meeting the needs of older people is constant.

Challenge of Covid-19

In all our years of providing care, MHA had never experienced what began to unfold in March 2020. All the spirit of Walter Hall's determination and vision was needed to enable MHA to manage the many impacts of

the Covid-19 pandemic. Overnight all 90 care homes and 70 retirement living schemes were closed to non-essential visits. Our 'Live at Homes Schemes' (now 'MHA Communities') stopped meeting in person and began to work via Zoom and on the phone. We also made doorstep deliveries of food and medicine. We went to great lengths to ensure no one was missed, and that the real risks of loneliness were mitigated as much as possible. At Epworth House, MHA's head office in Derby, a skeleton staff ran 'Gold Command' to coordinate the resources of the charity from Edinburgh to Falmouth, Norwich to Aberystwyth. When personal protective equipment (PPE) ran low in one place, we shifted supplies across the country. The groundbreaking dashboard developed by our Change Team, collecting and organising information from all our services, was shown to the Government's SAGE committee. On different occasions, the Gold



What imaginative response to the Spirit's call to care for older people does MHA's story stir in you?

Command meetings on Zoom were joined by the President of the Conference and the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Deaths and memorial services

There were many difficult moments in the first two years of the pandemic. Sadly some residents died from Covid-19. All our staff in homes and retirement living schemes were affected when this happened, and we tried more than ever to offer counselling and support. Thankfully, in the majority of our services, our chaplains were able to continue working and spend time with people. On Easter Day 2020 our care home in Lytham St Annes broadcast its service on YouTube because it was one of the very few places in society where Christians could gather in worship. They didn't want other people to be left out of what they were able to experience and share.

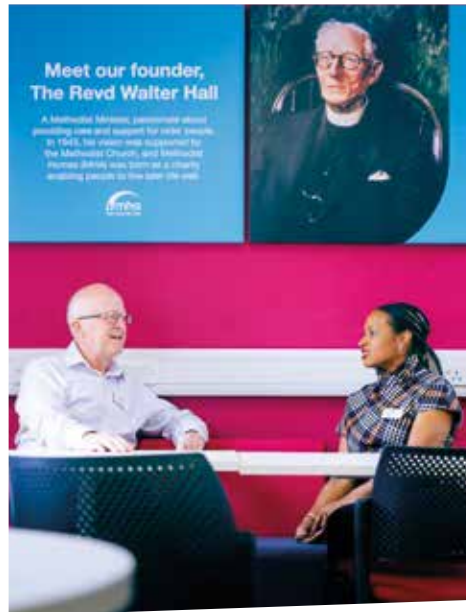
In the past MHA hasn't held a memorial service across the organisation but, due to the universal impact of the pandemic, we decided to do this for the first time in September 2020. Local services continued to hold their memorials whenever possible, but we offered video content centred around a two minutes' silence for everyone who wanted to be together in remembrance. Similarly, our first ever MHA Sunday service online was held in June 2020, which included contributions from our music therapists. To date, this has had over 5,000 views.

As 2020 progressed, our CEO Sam Monaghan was increasingly in the media spotlight. He contributed to a BBC *Newsnight* programme and other news and current affairs programmes, supported by stories from a number of MHA locations. It seemed that Walter Hall's political skill and Christian passion for service and protecting the vulnerable, was still very much in evidence across the whole of MHA.

Covid aftermath

Some things have changed permanently. Our skill in using online technology to engage with a wider audience is here to stay. In 2021 we appointed our first 'digital chaplain' to ensure that alongside our chaplains in homes and schemes, we have the capacity to bring the commitments inspired by our Methodist roots to even more people.

None of this has been easy. Our chaplains know that it will take some people a long time



Lives have been changed, disrupted and ended.



to be at peace with the toll of Covid-19. Lives have been changed, disrupted and ended. Some members of our MHA Communities remain hesitant about re-engaging with groups. All this is understandable and MHA's commitment to pastoral and spiritual care is central to our response to the consequences of the pandemic.

It has been clear to me that across the months in which we have endured restrictions and difficulties, the prayer and love of many Methodist and ecumenical friends have made a big difference. I thank everyone in the Church who has supported us in these unprecedented days.



The prayer and love of many Methodist and ecumenical friends made a big difference.

The Revd Chris Swift is Director of Chaplaincy and Spirituality at Methodist Homes (MHA) www.mha.org.uk/faith



How do we continue to worship during lockdown?



A Spirit-led journey: changes and challenges in worship

Buildings closed but worship continued: Rosemary Nixon describes how ROOTS adapted worship resources for lockdown.

ROOTS for Churches is an organisation publishing worship and learning resources online and in print. In my nearly 17 years with the organisation, I've seen a huge amount of creativity as leaders try out different ways to engage people in worship. The three-year cycle of lectionary readings has remained at the centre of ROOTS' ministry, but each time we approach a new cycle, we aim to support leaders 'in the midst of a changing world'.

Church moves online

In March 2020, church doors closed and we all experienced major and quite unexpected changes. Church leaders and their communities suddenly faced new challenges. Firstly, a very practical one: how do we continue to worship during lockdown? Some people were already quite comfortable

using digital technology, but most had a steep learning curve in deciding what to use and how to use it. Was it going to be live or recorded? Could people phone in? What were our responsibilities in respecting copyright when broadcasting to the wider community?

The results of many hours of experimentation, frustration, but increasing competence, led to a truly Spirit-inspired outpouring of worship offerings, drawing people in to connect with churches from way beyond our established communities. At the same time, worship materials were being distributed to thousands of households – by hand, through collection points, and via email and social media.

Later on, there were the practical challenges of deciding when it felt appropriate to open the church doors again. How could we make worship spaces safe for everyone?



God's presence, through the Holy Spirit, brought resilience and inspiration.

Keeping people together

The other major challenge to worship and learning during the pandemic was less tangible but critical: how to continue to be a Christian community while behind the doors of our homes. We wanted to offer worship that felt authentic and meaningful. Pre-pandemic, churches offered a varied pattern of worship to cater for everyone: sermons, prayers and hymns; active sessions for children and young people; toddler groups; interactive all-age services; and so on. This simply wasn't going to be possible online.

One approach was to make worship more inclusive and not divide people into separate groups. This has been so well received, that some people say they're going to continue to gather in this way and discontinue running a separate children's ministry.

Another approach was to focus on one group of people in terms of worship provision, and adults were generally prioritised over children. Using Zoom and other digital technology, it was relatively straightforward to replicate traditional led-from-the-front worship. However, children are accustomed to imaginative and participatory worship and learning, with discussion, games, crafts and active prayer. It was a huge challenge to continue to support children's faith development remotely, particularly as volunteers dropped out, and many employed leaders were furloughed. Some churches distributed activity packs. With a bit of lateral thinking, many activities could be done in online sessions. At ROOTS, the editors went back through the resources we'd already published, adding notes about how to use them in different ways.

Where children's sessions did take place, parents were, for safeguarding reasons, required to be in the same room, but they were mainly out of range of the camera. Over time, however, the Spirit was at work, slowly drawing parents closer to the session. They listened and gradually joined in, until they were fully involved alongside their children.

Unexpected benefits

The pandemic gave us shared experiences and challenges, and we've all had our own journey, as individuals and as church communities. How churches reacted was influenced by leaders' attitudes to risk and their style of leadership, as well as by the





**OPEN TO
GOD'S
SPIRIT**

What creativity and innovation in online worship is the Spirit inspiring in your context?

people available to volunteer. Now we're now all evaluating where we've ended up. We face more challenges ahead – recruiting new lay leaders and reconnecting with people and families we've lost touch with, for example.

Yet despite the challenges, there are signs of new life and growth. God's presence, through the Holy Spirit, brought resilience and inspiration. Regular online worship offers inclusion for people who have for many years been unable to attend in person; older and younger people are genuinely learning from each other and creating community in intergenerational services; families are growing in faith together. As we decide what changes we want to retain and develop, we're acutely aware of the need for worship to be relevant and life-giving for people facing more new challenges to their lives. We pray, as ever, to be led on our journey by the working of the Holy Spirit.

Rosemary Nixon led the team at ROOTS for Churches from 2005 to May 2022.
www.rootsontheweb.com



Regular online worship offers inclusion for people unable to attend in person.



The person's face lit up as years of blurred vision gave way to defined shapes and letters.

Open to God's Spirit worldwide

Mission Partners Melissa Newell and Sylvester and Rachel Deigh tell of the transformational power of God's Holy Spirit in the global Methodist community.

A mission partner is called by God to serve in another part of the World Church. They are willing to serve wherever God directs usually for between one and six years. They gain a new insight into God, new perspectives on their Christian faith and experience first hand the joy of belonging to a Church that extends throughout the world.

Melissa Newell in Ecuador

Have you witnessed someone see again? Nor have I, but working with an American team who visited in March, it almost seemed like it. They arrived in Ecuador with over 2,000 prescription glasses plus the equipment to work out people's prescriptions and find them glasses. Often it would take time to find people a match,

to the frustration of the long queue in the searing heat outside. But then there were the moments when the glasses matched perfectly and the person's face lit up as years of blurred vision gave way to defined shapes and letters; those were 'Hallelujah' moments for both giver and receiver. I was touched by older ladies producing worn tattered Bibles with very small print they could no longer read due to deteriorating eyesight. They wanted glasses so they could continue to read the word of God. Even after many years, they were still open to the Spirit of God working in their lives.

I think of a small neighbourhood on the outskirts of town. It is a poor community, but one where everyone comes together. Since the United Evangelical Methodist Church of Ecuador started working there, there has been an amazing change in the individuals who come and who are now leaders. Although young in their faith, they are open to the power of God's Spirit for the transformation of their lives and their community.

Sometimes change is immediate, like the ladies and their glasses, but more often, it happens slowly. Being a mission partner is about being open to God's Spirit in every part of your life and work. Transformation takes time, but it takes place all around us and in us. It is not us who does the transforming, but the Spirit of God, the evidence of which I see daily as God gives me strength and grace to navigate the country where, for now, I am 'pitching my tent'.

Sylvester and Rachel Deigh in Sierra Leone

Coming to work with the Methodist Church Sierra Leone is something God seems long to have been preparing us for. For Rachel





Being a mission partner is about being open to God's Spirit.

it began as an eight year old, when a book about the missionary Hudson Taylor she received as a Sunday School prize captured her imagination. But during 20 years of circuit ministry her testimony became "You don't have to go to the other side of the world to tell people about Jesus."

We first offered as mission partners in 2008 following a sabbatical visit to Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone. But while it felt the right time for us, it was not God's time. Then after what seemed like a random conversation in 2018, someone encouraged us to offer again. Covid delayed us, meaning two terms of training became four, but then suddenly we found ourselves in Freetown. So here we are: in God's good time.

As frustrating as the delays have been, it does feel the right time. Sylvester's responsibilities were primarily to help the Church with its training needs, but three days before we left the UK one of the ministers in the Conference Office very sadly died. Someone was needed to pick up that minister's critical work on the Church's Strategic Plan, and Sylvester was the right person. Rachel is working at the theological college at a significant time of change following the recent departure of its principal and vice-principal.

We are now beginning to see how waiting has better equipped us for the work God has brought us here to do. Being open to God's Spirit means working to God's timescale, not our own, and trusting that all will become clear in God's good time. As we adjust to our new surroundings, please pray we continue to be open to God's Spirit.

Supporting mission

Global mission partnership (with our mission partners) is only possible because of your kind donations to the World Mission Fund (WMF). There are two main connexional funds: the World Mission Fund and the Mission in Britain Fund and they support projects and individuals around the world and in Britain. For information about the funds and to make a donation, please visit methodist.org.uk/funds

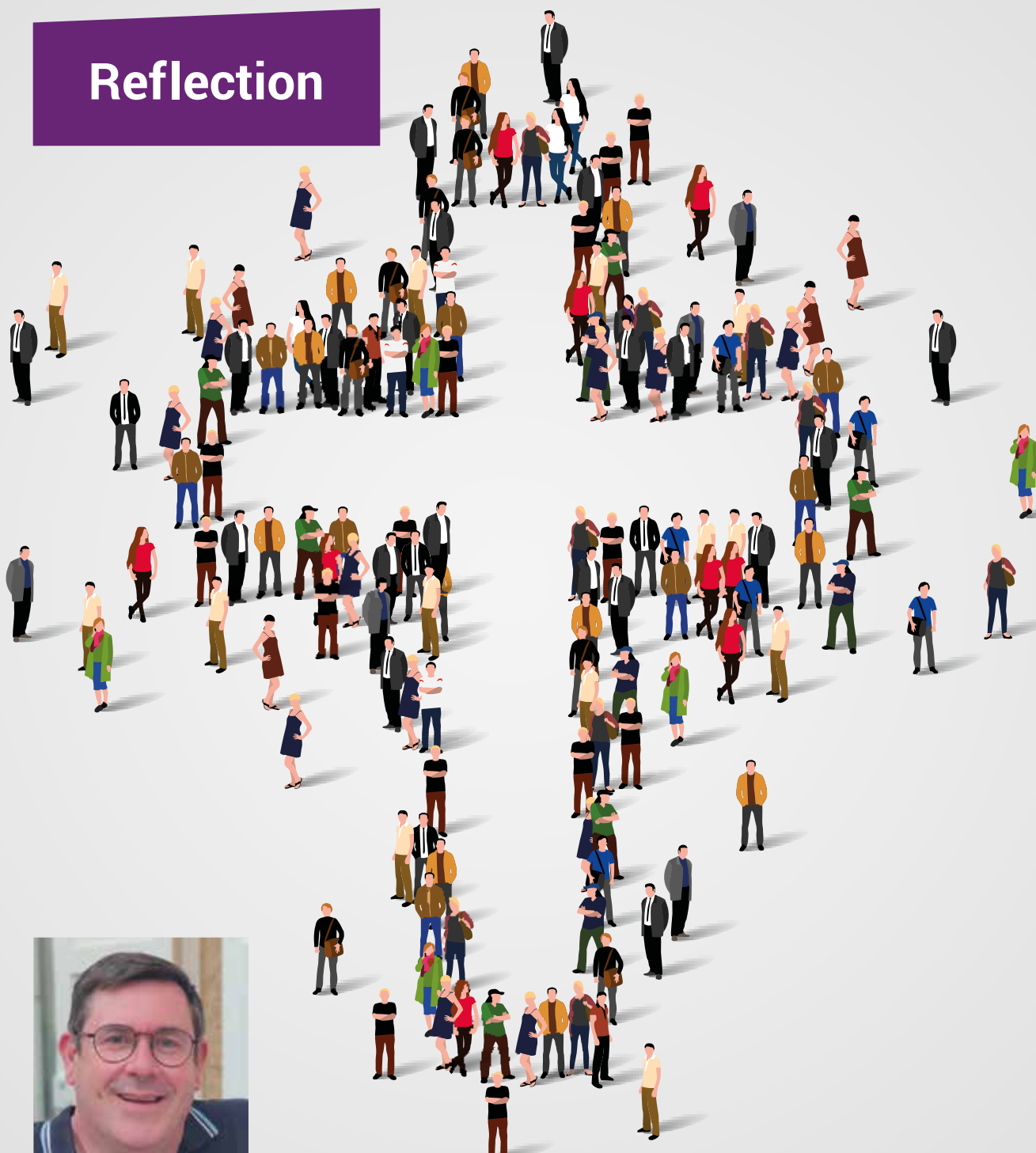
Without your generous support this work simply cannot happen, so thank you!

Melissa Newell
The Deighs



In what new ways can your church support our mission partners?

Reflection



Good news of Pentecost

Like the disciples at Pentecost, when we open to the Spirit we are transformed, says the Revd Ashley Cooper.

As the current Principal of Cliff College, let me begin with the words of a former Principal, the Revd Samuel Chadwick*: “The Church is looking for better methods; God is looking for better people. He has staked his kingdom on people. He has trusted his gospel to us. He has given his Spirit to us.... The Holy Spirit does not come upon methods, but upon women and men. He does not anoint machinery, but women and men. He does not work through organisations, but through women and men. He does not dwell in buildings, but in women and men. He indwells the body of Christ, directs its activities, distributes its forces, empowers its members.”

New purpose at Pentecost

As we find ourselves post-Pentecost living a life open to God’s Spirit and hoping for a fresh sense of God’s indwelling, we look to the lives of the disciples who suddenly found a new purpose and passion on the day of Pentecost. They were inwardly transformed beyond recognition for all to see and hear. The pages of the New Testament flow from this point and a new era of mission is born.

Following the outpouring of God’s Spirit in Acts chapter two, Peter is a different man. He preaches his first sermon and about 3,000 are added to their number that day. The Spirit transformed him, filled him, and equipped him for the task. The Spirit changed 3,000 hearts: how I long for a few more days like that in our Church. Peter’s sermon stirred up an instant response in those who listened. Baptism, the breaking of bread, prayer, the sharing of money and possessions, a true community of believers – all came from Peter’s Spirit-filled words.

The American evangelist DL Moody once said, “You might as well try to hear without ears, or breathe without lungs, as to try to live the Christian life without the power of God.” On the day of Pentecost, the faithful gathered together, trusting God to do something amazing and bigger than they could do themselves. They waited on God and God showed up, just as promised.

Open to transformation?

As I explore the theme of ‘Open to the Spirit’ I find myself reflecting on how open to transformation we really are. Is the Church desperate and longing for a fresh outpouring of God? Are you? Do we want an outpouring of God’s Spirit that drives us into our communities and our world? Do we truly

want to usher in a new era of mission that transforms our nation?

Many of us have become consumed with programmes and committees, and seen our Church decline. Some attend church to be entertained, and if they don’t like it or it’s not their style they moan or leave. Instead of openly allowing God’s word to change and challenge us, we want a motivational pep talk or to leave feeling good about ourselves rather than encountering the challenging Spirit of God.

It’s the word and power of God’s Spirit working in our lives that can change the world, change circumstances, and change us. Experiencing Pentecost doesn’t have to wait until 50 days after Easter. It is waiting on God, just like the faithful did, and expecting to receive from God the power to change our lives and our world. It is the ushering in of a new era of mission and evangelism.

God’s Spirit for all

Here is God’s promise: “I will pour out my Spirit on all people.” That includes you and me – it’s the good news of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit continues the ministry of Jesus. It took a group of lost, confused but expectant disciples and shaped the early Church with them. It became a Church that changed the fate of millions of people. It’s a Church that despite its failings is still a world-changing force for good. It’s a ministry of salvation, a ministry of hope, a ministry of renewal and refreshment. Jesus’ ministry continues through young men and women who dream dreams and see visions. It continues through organists and music groups, through Sunday school teachers, local preachers, Messy Church leaders, coffee mornings and pastoral encounters. Jesus’ ministry continues through all of God’s people who are open to God’s Spirit pushing them out and leading them into communities, workplaces, schools and the whole world.

The Holy Spirit was a gift given freely to the Church. It gives you power to show people Christ through your words and through your lives. There is no greater challenge.

The Revd Ashley Cooper is the Principal at Cliff College.

**Edited for a 21st-century audience in ‘Ablaze: Chadwick’s the Way to Pentecost’ published by Cliff College.*



Jesus’ ministry continues through all of God’s people.



The word and power of God’s Spirit working in our lives can change the world.



Methodist Children & Youth Assembly

HOW DID A YOUTH EVENT TRANSFORM YOUR FAITH?

THE ANNUAL METHODIST CHILDREN AND YOUTH EVENT

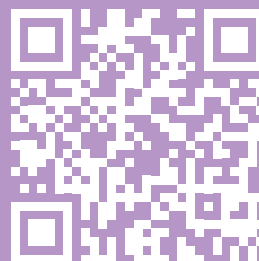
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