

Issue 8 • Spring 2017

The **Methodist** Church



the connexion

Transition

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



David Perry
Editor

Transition

Easter represents the most potent transition ever recorded in the history of humanity.

If the arrest, trial and crucifixion of Jesus is the world's defiant "No" to all that he was and stood for, his resurrection proclaims God's emphatic "Yes". The strong echo of that "Yes" is heard resounding through the pages of this issue that explores the transition our Church is making towards a revitalised future. Our cover image makes the basis of this transition clear.

It shows a figure, head bowed, depicted with outstretched arms and open hands in a gesture that suggests the act of giving, of handing over and of letting go. This intentional offering is done with humility, dignity and purpose and is performed with great grace and poise.

The focus of this act is the cross.

Cruel symbol of the negation of hope and promise, and chilling talisman of barbarity and suffering, the cross should be construed as an end-point, a final full stop in the punctuation of life's injustice, unfairness and downright brutality. Epitome of divisiveness and contempt, it is a monstrous "No" to all that would bind us together.

And yet the cradle-like gesture of the figure is made in plain sight of this fact and is directed towards it.

Jesus enables us to open ourselves fully to God's "Yes" when all worldly expectation seems to point in the opposite direction. His selfless embracing of the way to the cross is the ultimate expression of giving, handing over and of letting go. It is the cradle-shaped precursor which liberates the gift of resurrection.

Easter sets us free to live out of the continuing power of this beautiful gesture in the life of the Church. It is where all transition begins. Where we intentionally let go and open ourselves to receive God's "Yes" – not least through newcomers and new ways – we see such courage and faith being blessed by God. Such a cross-inclined Church leans with humility into God and is intent on handing over and opening itself to God's future, because it is confident that it will receive more than it could ever imagine through the Spirit-gifting presence of the risen Christ.

*Love and peace,
David*

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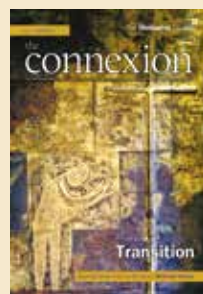
the connexion

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East Africa Famine Appeal

All We Can and the World Church Relationships Team of the Methodist Church in Britain are calling for support to an urgent appeal for East Africa. Civil conflicts, economic crises and droughts have led to food insecurity across the region. Donate to the appeal on the All We Can website www.allwecan.org.uk/famine

A gift of Easter

Inserted with this issue of *the connexion* is **A gift of Easter**, a pocket-sized booklet inviting readers to journey through Lent and Easter using Scripture, prayer, hymns and pictures. Ideal to give to visitors at services, on pastoral visits or with those who don't come to church. They are available from Methodist Publishing 0845 017 8220 www.mph.org.uk. If the booklet is missing, please email theconnexioneditor@methodistchurch.org.uk

A place to call home?

Four leading UK denominations, including the Methodist Church, with the support of Housing Justice and Scottish Churches Housing Action, are calling on their congregations to hold conversations around housing and homelessness. A new resource of Bible studies titled *A Place to Call Home* is now available on the Joint Public Issues Team website at www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/aplacetocallhome



This June the Methodist Church is encouraging churches and circuits across the Connexion to run a 'Bible Month', 30 days with the letter of James. By focusing on a single biblical book, Bible Month aims to help all in church engage more deeply with Scripture. For more information or sign up to run a Bible month at: www.methodist.org.uk/biblemonth. Share your stories on our social media platforms using **#BibleMonth**



As a pioneer minister, marathon runner, failed improv comedy student and Mission Advisor of the Birmingham District, the Revd Trey Hall reflects on transition

The glorious

MESS

of transition

God recycles everything

Before I admitted I was an alcoholic and got into recovery, I found it difficult to journal.

It wasn't for lack of trying: every time I attempted to get sober, I'd buy a fresh new notebook to log my enthusiastic will to change. I wanted a crisp, positive record of my transition: "Today, I start over! This time it's for real!"

Genuine transition isn't that tidy, though. It's theologically, spiritually, psychologically, and practically messy. Ask Mary Magdalene or Saul-Paul, or Simon-Peter or any of

the stewards from the Central Halls in Jerusalem or Antioch, and they'll tell you.

But my ego couldn't accept that dissonant truth. As soon as I fell off the wagon or encountered some conflict I couldn't handle, I'd stop journaling. Or I'd write down a fragment of the pain, only to scribble over it or tear out the offending entry and start again, searching in vain for that 'clean slate' experience of change.

I was paralysed between two false ideas: (1) that the current me was really bad, and (2) that the future me would be really

good. My sincere desire for transition was caught in a double-bind: the perfectionistic, unrealistic and therefore unreachable, goals I'd compulsively set prevented me from seeing God's grace and my own belovedness, and prevented me from growing.

Radical shifts

We live in a time of tectonic cultural shifts that challenge the Church to transition our orientation to mission and ministry. In my opinion, the changes required are systemic.

For example, in the twenty first century, every minister is called to be a pioneer minister, every church is called to be a pioneering church, and every member is called to be an evangelist. We must equip current disciples to steward these changes and take audacious evangelistic risks to reach people who are not disciples.

To kick-start this transition in my own Birmingham District, we have committed to launch eight new congregations by 2020. This will mean a radical shift of perspective and practice, not merely fine-tuning.

Gracious transfiguration

To embrace this transition, however, we must stay humble, centred in assurance, and relaxed in God. God's offer of change is fuelled by a generous power; a stabilising freedom that holds our bold plans for transition together with a recognition of what's beautiful in our current condition.

It welcomes failure as part of ministry, and also a capacity to testify, with sobriety and laughter, to the experience of change. If we see this process through what theologian James Alison calls "the joy of being wrong", we won't have to keep starting over with a new journal or ripping out pages in miserable fits of judgment.

Through this gracious transfiguration, we'll come to a felt sense of God's ability to recycle *everything* – our own journal entries of bravery *and* anxiety, along with Paul's rhetorical brilliance *and* his 'skubala'* , Mary's 'beautiful things' *and* her demons, the early church's inspired mission in Acts 2 *and* its fighting about inclusion in Acts 15 – into God's trajectory towards the restoration of all things.

Now, as we are increasingly freed in heart, mind, body (and even connexional policy!) to try new things, many things won't work. A key marker of transitional health



is the willingness to risk and fail, which unlocks potential. Failure is not a wrong answer to be binned, but paradoxically part of the eventual right answer that works.

Another related marker of health is the capacity to 'transcend and include'. Instead of severing from 'old, antiquated, ineffective' ways and attaching to 'new, contemporary, effective' ways, mature leaders move into the future by incorporating the particular gifts of previous generations and approaches.

In our world Methodist family, for example, we're undergoing substantive spiritual change as we recover *and* discover the truth that the biblically evangelical church is always the increasingly inclusive church, and the biblically inclusive church is always the increasingly evangelical church.

God in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit is calling us to change. Let's open our journals and write the vision down. Its clarity will be messier than expected. But the glorious mess is finally good news so immeasurable that, to paraphrase the last scribble of John's Gospel, there aren't enough pages to contain its gorgeousness.

The biblically evangelical church is always the increasingly inclusive church

* A rare term found only once in the new Testament in Philippians 3:8, often translated as rubbish or dung.



A new pattern of leadership

Lay Pastor Amy Wyatt describes how Oasis Community Church is now immersing people across rural Staffordshire in the refreshing love of God

After working at Swan Bank Methodist Church in Stoke-on-Trent for 13 years, my husband and I both felt it was time for a change.

I'd worked as a youth worker, and an associate pastor with a focus on 18- to 30-year-olds, then young families, and anything else that job required. My boss and minister, the Revd Ashley Cooper, was encouraging me to explore leadership further. My husband and I were simply praying, "What next?" We were expecting the change to be in my husband's job. So I was surprised by Ashley's suggestion when asked into his office for a conversation in the summer of 2013.

Three years earlier, a new church had joined our circuit – Oasis Community Church (formerly known as Biddulph Park Methodist), situated in rural Staffordshire with a congregation of about 34 people. The congregation was open to change and

hungry to see growth. Oasis is situated between a village and small town, on the side of a hill, on a very bad bend – quite literally in the middle of nowhere!

Moving and committing

Ashley asked me to consider moving to work part-time with Oasis as the lay leader, under his supervision. It was an opportunity for me to explore leadership further and for the Church to see if concentrated, committed leadership to a specific place would encourage growth. After praying it through with my husband, we felt this was where God was calling us. So in September 2013, our family moved from worshipping in a large urban church to a small rural one.

What an amazing adventure it has been! Three years on, I am now the full-time lay leader of Oasis with continued support from Ashley. We have a congregation of 70-90 people, and are in touch with many more



through a schools' ministry, holiday clubs and community engagement. Employing a part-time youth worker releases me to focus on pastoring a growing church and linking into the community. God even thought to bless Steve and I with a second child. What an amazing God we worship!

Changes and confidence

Initially we looked at developing a mission statement and church strapline: "We, Oasis Community Church, exist to immerse ourselves and others in the refreshing love of God, expressed through Jesus Christ."

We got busy immersing ourselves in God. We introduced a new way of working on Sundays, the praise band developed new ways of sung worship, visiting preachers were asked to preach on specific themes and church members became hosts. When visitors came to the church, the faces they saw were mainly faces from the worshipping congregation, providing familiarity. This meant the main church body and visitors felt safe. In turn, this helped the church become more confident in inviting friends to worship.

As people arrive for worship they are offered a cup of tea or coffee. It's self-serve so visitors also have something to do. The coffee station is a great meeting place, and the necessary questions such as "Where are the spoons?" are an easy conversation opener for people.

Sometimes we ask visiting preachers to preach for ten minutes and come with five questions for us to discuss. This creates further opportunity for conversation and people can listen to personal stories of faith and get to know others. Members who were once visitors say this helped them feel connected very quickly. As a church we have also become more open to talking about our faith.

We also got busy immersing others in the refreshing love of God through a variety of ways, such as charity events, practical support and gifts to those who are in need. We offer our help to the community and say "yes!" to local invitations.

The rest, as they say, is history. With limited space at the chapel, we often move worship into the village hall, and in the summer worship moves outdoors. We keep pressing on, never standing still, always trying new things. Not everything works but we learn something each time and can see God's footprints.



*Open to change,
hungry to see
growth*



What are the key factors of life at Oasis through which God continues to bless us?

- Consistent and committed leadership that drives our vision forward.
- Intentional preaching and worship.
- Movement out into the community.
- A warm welcome.
- Practical, prayerful love.

Praise God for his faithfulness to us as a church as we've stepped out of our boat!





Transformed by God for new adventures

Following a change of focus, the Revd Naomi Cooke urges us to remember Romans 12: “Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould, but let God remould your minds from within...”

Sometimes, waves come along which provide the energy and momentum needed for change.

The people at Bethesda Methodist Church, Cheltenham, responded to God’s call to explore redeveloping the church’s ancillary buildings. And, through this process, God began to remould our minds and hearts from within.

In the mid-1990s the sanctuary at Bethesda was completely restructured to

create a light, flexible worship space that continues to serve the congregation well. However, its additional rooms at the back of the building had fallen into disrepair. So in 2012 the congregation decided to work towards redeveloping that area.

All too familiar fundraising

Over the next three years, the church took the familiar route of fundraising, using many and varied events to raise about £43,000. But going forward with this approach to stewardship, the burden of debt and the need to fundraise would be with us for many years to come.

We noticed how many of our worship services began with an announcement about money: money needed, money raised. Was this the focus we wanted? We also began to recognise a creeping sense of fatigue and the danger of focusing inwards, physically, emotionally, even spiritually. We asked ourselves: “What is this doing to us?” and “What might it be saying about us to the wider community?”

Miroslav Volf writes “We live in a culture in which extraordinary generosity does happen, but at the same time, a culture that is largely stripped of grace at its grass roots.” Born of a fear of scarcity and lack of enough, our lives are dominated by the economics of supply and demand. We tend to start from this assumption of lack, rather

God delights in the transformation of people’s minds and hearts





than an understanding that God has already given us what we need.

God's economy

In contrast to buying and selling, the economy of God is entirely based on grace and gift. God's gift and giving is without conditions. We are not expected to, nor can we, do anything to earn it. We cannot buy or bargain for it. God gives, modelling this throughout all of creation (see 2 Corinthians 9:15; Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:8).

In acknowledging our financial focus, we asked, "Are we engaged in the economics of the world or the economics of God?" As we embraced this question, we began to own the privilege and the challenge that we are created in God's image *to be in some significant sense like God!*

As Ephesians 5 says: "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."

Volf goes on to say: "When we freely give, life becomes extraordinary, because God's own gift-giving begins to flow through us." We find ourselves liberated to discern and engage with the work God *actually* intends us to do.

At Bethesda we believed God was asking us to leave the cost and fatigue of fundraising behind and to trust God entirely

for our need: simply to give the money, each person giving in faith – after careful prayer and thought, pledging whatever we could to enable the project to go ahead. The eventual cost of the redevelopment was £558,000 and over half that money came from Bethesda; the rest through generous donations from the Gloucestershire Circuit and a Connexional Grant. The building work, which began in March 2016, is now complete.

Some have questioned if this could happen in a less affluent region. I firmly believe that God is not interested in wealth or 'grand totals'. God delights in the transformation of people's minds and hearts. And *through that transformation*, God works the miracle.

This project has been the canvas for discovery. As we take each step forward we are forever going deeper into discerning God's call to us; the cost, challenge and joy of discipleship, and the utter trust involved throughout the journey.

The process of transformation is shaping us for new adventures, which will likely demand ever more generosity on our part, as we respond with gratitude to all that God has given and continues to give.

We do not yet know fully what the adventure will entail. But we do know that it will involve an ever deepening call to relationship, community, love and grace.

Seeing differently

What hidden potentials would we discover if we looked at the things around us from a different perspective? The Revd Dr Joanne Cox-Darling, Learning and Development Officer for the London District, offers some thoughts



In January 1994, a powerful earthquake struck the San Fernando Valley near Los Angeles, California. The quake itself caused an estimated \$20 billion of damage, and at least 60 people died. Earthquakes are not unfamiliar occurrences there, but this one affected local infrastructure in unprecedented ways. Many of the electrical and telecommunications services were disabled.

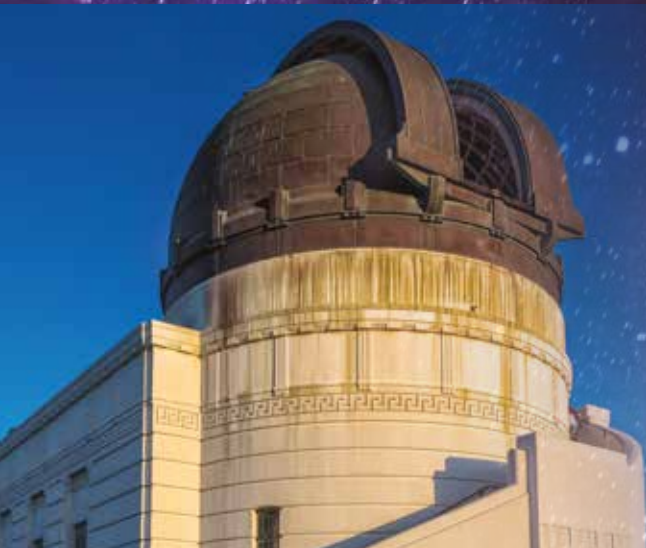
That night, the Griffith Observatory in LA received numerous panicked phone calls from people describing a “strange sky” and making increasingly terrified suggestions that the grey blanket cloud above the city was in some way to blame for this particular earthquake.

As people’s fear increased, the director of the observatory realised that for many residents of San Fernando Valley, this was the first time that they had looked into a clear sky – with an unpolluted view of the Milky Way.

The earthquake had revealed what was there all along, if only people had been able to look, watch, wait and see.

Transitions – in life, faith journeys and church – often follow this metaphor. A crisis, trauma or experience causes us to look, watch, wait and see things from a new perspective. This does not always happen easily, or quickly. It can be painful. We can suffer loss.

But sometimes, we catch a glimpse of the kingdom of heaven (as the Gospel writer



The Griffith Observatory in Los Angeles



Matthew would say), and we are offered that grace-gift of seeing, knowing, and being invited into a new Christ-adventure.

It can be popular to tell the painful story. To speak of dwindling finances, reduced leadership capacity, personal burnout and fewer people in our buildings. What if we chose not to tell the painful story, but instead chose to tell the vulnerable story? The version in which the work of the Spirit offers us hope for a revitalised future?

What if we were courageous – and told our own personal stories of transformation and growth? What if we shared from that time when we realised something new about God? And what if, in doing so, we challenge a culture of loneliness and help more people to find companionship or fellowship together?

What if we were bold enough to celebrate the most creative ideas offered to us – and rediscovered something of our calling as Jesus followers to bring good news? Perhaps we offer people prayer in the market place, as happens in cities across the world through Healing on the Streets. Perhaps we adopt a roundabout, transforming something derelict into something grace-filled and beautiful. What if we changed our focus of worship to being a 24-7 multisensory activity, rather than a few dedicated hours over the weekend?

What if we took seriously our connectedness to each other, to a global Methodist family – and listened to questions, rather than rushing to find

solutions? What if we prayed to learn more about our neighbour; used creative tools to host art exhibitions that speak without words of the kingdom of heaven for our global and globalised world? What if this changed the way we pray? What if this changed the way we understand God and our relationship to the Creator, Provider and Healer?

What if this helped us to notice God incarnate our midst once again? As we risk being vulnerable, the topsy-turvy world of the kingdom can break through and transform us afresh – through our personal and corporate courage, creativity and connectedness.

I believe that we have a lifetime to go on our journey as people called Methodists; and the Spirit of God continues to lead us into a revitalised future of transformed and transforming Jesus followers. We are called to be people committed to Scripture, inquiry, our history, our present reality, and to a renewed future. This is an invitation of vulnerability, of being fully present: looking, watching, waiting and seeing, and ultimately of living in the knowledge, experience and presence of the kingdom of God in our midst.

And it is happening – in hearts, chapels and circuits across the UK and around the world.

As the resurrected Jesus said to Mary in the garden: “What are you looking for?” Perhaps, like the Milky Way over the San Fernando Valley, it has been here all along.

An unpolluted view reveals what was there all along



Growing Methodism in the North East

The Church's Director of Scholarship, Research and Innovation, the Revd Dr Stephen Skuce, highlights five common factors for growth



Our churches often looked different to those who were not already members

Are we, as a Methodist people, at risk of accepting denominational decline as inevitable? Whilst overall trends indicate numerical decline, some churches are growing.

To investigate this, I initiated a small research project to explore how growth occurs in the North East, with Dr Andrew Orton (a Methodist and Senior Lecturer in Social Sciences at Durham University) as the lead researcher.

Measures of growth vary. Depending on the criteria used, up to 40% of churches in this area might be said to experience some form of numerical growth over three to five years. The research looked particularly at factors enabling and preventing growth in six churches. These have memberships from 8 to 124 people, and are considered to be growing across different contexts.

Every church is made up of many interdependent parts and is consequently distinct. It is fully recognised that as Christians we depend on God who is responsible for any blessing and growth. Within that, five factors emerged as supporting growth where they were present, and limiting growth when not present:

- 1 being welcoming, hospitable, and caring as a church community;
- 2 being responsive and actively inclusive

- 3 offering accessible, intentional spiritual development opportunities;
- 4 involving participatory and collaborative leadership;
- 5 providing support to enable change and overcome barriers.

These characteristics were interlinked. They created virtuous cycles, where being welcoming and responsive encouraged inclusion and participation, which then grew connected church communities. These characteristics are not unique to Methodism, but fit comfortably across its breadth.

Many Methodist congregations may already see themselves as embracing the five factors listed above, but are not experiencing growth. Perhaps we need to review *how* we demonstrate these characteristics, rather than assume we are, simply because they seem so Methodist.

The research found that our churches often looked very different to those who were not already members. Due to be published as a free report later this year, this research doesn't provide a magic answer for growing Methodism.

However, it does illustrate *how* some churches are growing, and it challenges us to review our lives as Methodists if we wish to experience growth in our congregations.



Circuit in transition

Christians everywhere long for vibrant congregations and communities of faith, with relationships built upon trust and our common faith in Jesus Christ.

Since February 2016, we in Bridgend Circuit have been in transition as we discover what the future will be for our churches in a rapidly evolving culture. Our members are discerning the Spirit of Christ sparking conversations and prayer, where God is calling us as a community of faith. We believe that it is in our places of brokenness (such as our declining membership, our age-profile heavily weighted to the older age group and our diminishing finances) that the work of God has always been most miraculous.

While some of our members express passion for change, others may resist it. But all of us agree that change is important, and some would say essential, in our lives, work, family, and relationships. Jesus was aware

of this yet championed for so much change through his ministry that people found him a threat. Even his disciples did not understand his remit to introduce change to society. To reconcile this, we have opted for balance between the 'old' and the 'new'.

As we move through these changing times we know that God is with us, in our meetings and work, worship and play, struggles and celebrations. So we discover where God is calling us to be. While we cannot predict the future, talking about it at least allows us to position our churches for impact in a changing world.

We are hearing many great ideas, and some consistent themes are starting to emerge that will shape our strategic mission priorities for the future. This includes creating space where people can faithfully discuss what it means to be church today and in the future; safe spaces for worship, mission and evangelism.

The Revd Teddy Kalongo tells how Bridgend Circuit – sparked by the Spirit – is excited about launching its five-year plan



God is calling us as a community of faith

Making something new



As Director of Mission for the Northampton District, the Revd Jill Marsh reflects on how change – however small – can be the prompt that causes bigger transformations to happen

“Well, I’ve managed to instigate one change at least...” a minister said to me as we began to talk in a small village chapel. “We now have bourbons as well as custard creams!”

I love helping the churches I work with to become aware of their own culture, which can be comfortable for those who belong, yet off-putting to others who might want to belong. It’s heartening when churches welcome transition to a new culture; it’s endlessly fascinating that God takes all sorts of combinations of people and creates new cultures, which work for a new time.

Sadly, much in the world right now is adding to greater tension between ‘us’ and ‘them’. The vision for churches to be truly inclusive (rather than just ‘welcoming’) is as vital now as it always was.

It is so easy for us to imagine that “our way of doing things” is the right or only way and to expect others to join in with our expectations and standards. My heart sinks when new people try churches out and then fade away (possibly to other churches, possibly not), realising that there is no way their presence will make any difference. My



heart sings when congregations celebrate difference, are changed by new friends and, together, become renewed into something different.

So how can we be open to the kind of change that God might want to bring within our Church's culture? The prompts for this transitioning are all there for us in our Christian heritage.

We know God created in the beginning and we know that he has made us creative. In our case, creativity doesn't mean making something from nothing. Rather, it means being ready to take all the things people bring with them, and creating something newly beautiful by putting these elements together – much like a collage, a mosaic or a patchwork.

Language to trust

One church decided to include in their worship some 'moments' of language from each person's culture, regardless of who understood it. This reminded everybody that God doesn't (or doesn't only) speak English! It helped people see that language is not the only way to communicate with God and each other. It encouraged people to recognise how much was expected of people for whom English is a second or third language.

It opened the congregation up to the mystery of trusting in the words of Christian brothers and sisters, whether they made sense to them or not. We know that God has made us to belong together and to help each other through life, learning new ways as we go.

We learn to be more adaptable when we adapt in even the smallest ways (remember the bourbons?), and we discover that there are new possibilities that will rest, renew and refresh us when we let others have a go, and a say, and a turn in their own way – which can often become 'our' way.

Asking others

One church was very fed up with, and tired out by, the annual routine of decorating all the window ledges for Harvest on the Friday evening. They decided to ask the African members (from Ghana, Sierra Leone and Zimbabwe) to organise Harvest as they would have done in their home countries.

The nerve-wracking outcome was that nothing had happened by the beginning of the Sunday morning service. However,



by the end of it, the church was full of beautiful, wonderful colours, scents and food.

Learning to relax

Another church welcomed a group from the local hostel for people with mental health problems. Some who came could not sit still, were agitated during the service, and needed to wander a bit. They often arrived late and got up or sat down at what seemed to be the 'wrong' times. But the congregation wanted them there and learned to relax with these differences. This helped the members to open up to others, including local parents with small children – who had never been churchgoers. Soon the church was changed beyond recognition, and into a fuller life.

We know that God has made us all in his own image. So we are confident of meeting with God when we meet with others. We can let go of the distorted idea that God is only like us and learn something new about him through each person we meet.

*My heart sings
as we celebrate
difference*



Transition in our worship music

Local Preacher and Youth Coordinator for the Newham Circuit, Sanya Strachan is inspired as cultural diversity in her congregation allows music to transform worship

Born and bred in the Methodist Church, I grew up on worship songs like *I Will Celebrate* and *Sing to the Lord (with all of your heart)* by Maranatha! Music and Amy Grant's *El Shaddai*. Worship at Manor Park Methodist Church in the early 1990s was modern contemporary with regular youth participation, while also being 'waist high' in Methodist traditions and *Hymns & Psalms!*

Easter was, and is, my favourite time of year making our church alive with colour, joy and song. My wonderful Sunday school teachers Anne Martin and Deacon Tony Martin encouraged me to pray with heart and dance in the Spirit of the Lord. So, from childhood I brought my cultural experience and love of music into worship.

Reflecting the person involved

Worship across our circuit has transitioned from modern contemporary to include African singing – often at special occasions like Accreditation and Thanksgiving, reflecting the person involved and their culture. I thank my brothers and sisters for bringing this style of worship to our church family; you can only be captivated by the melody, rhythm and joy that such singing brings. It has heart and is so emotional.

In addition, we continue to learn new hymns; modern, classics and Taizé chants as well as the odd rap worship song. The use of silence in worship is increasing too, with time to reflect and pray apart from the busy world around us.

*It has heart
and is so
emotional*



Our church is alive with diversity and transition. There is club worship, silent worship, worship with drums, Messy Church, art, dance, gospel urban praise, band-led worship, traditional worship with hymns and more. At our next youth hang-out we plan to experiment with dance music in worship using songs like Chris Tomlin's *God's Great Dance Floor* and titles from Hillsong's *Young and Free* album, such as *Alive* and *Brighter*. We'll also learn new gospel songs and works from people like Travis Greene, Israel Houghton and CeCe Winans.

Trying out... gospel urban praise

At a planning meeting for the Methodist youth event Breakout 2010, we were discussing worship and I had just been introduced to Guvna B's, *Kingdom Shank* by our young people (Google it). I asked if we could try gospel urban praise, but others at the meeting had never heard of this style of worship.

Yet instead of dismissing the idea, they asked me to trial it in my own church. So we held our own gospel urban praise youth-led service. Then we booked Christian artists Guvna B, Tunday and Leke for Breakout and they led a roaring time of worship along with our youth group leading the gospel songs. Gospel music now often features at 3Generate.

Our church is alive with diversity and transition

This is not to say that the Methodist Church has never embraced gospel music. What I am trying to say is how this is an example of transition. It is gradual. And we bring our culture, our life experiences, our influences, even our dislikes, to church life. The beautiful thing about the Methodist Church is that it is always moving forward whilst treasuring our Methodist heritage.

By allowing our life experiences and culture to inspire our worship life and worship music we see God's world through new eyes. This can only help revitalise our Church and build continued relationships in our communities.

As a Methodist, I love that our church family embraces different forms of worship and being church. With Jesus at the centre of it all, we reach people where they are, not just physically but emotionally and spiritually too. Together, as brothers and sisters, we bring ourselves, our talents and cultures. As a local preacher, I deeply value these contributions.



*I will celebrate, sing unto the Lord,
Sing to the Lord a new song.
I will celebrate, sing unto the Lord,
Sing to the Lord a new song.
With my heart rejoicing within,
With my mind focused on Him,
With my hands raised to the heavens,
All I am worshipping Him.
Amen.*

Sanya also works for the Connexional Team as its Marketing Executive.

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New life

Pastor of The Gathering, a multi-site Methodist church in St Louis, Missouri, the Revd Matt Miofsky creates Christian communities that are compelling for new generations

Here is the problem: the world changed; the Church didn't.

Several years ago, after starting a new church in St Louis that was attracting younger people, I was asked to speak at a neighbouring congregation. This very traditional and well-established church asked me to speak with their board about how they could reach younger people. I agreed, and asked for details of the meeting.

Predictably, they sent me the date, time, and room in their church building, telling me to meet them in the 'parlour'. The night of the meeting, I found my way to the church parlour, which, as one might imagine, looked like great-grandma's house. It had pale pink carpeting, a case displaying church china and an aged sofa.

As I sat with their board, I knew exactly where to start. They wanted to reach new generations of people, and so I asked, "Tell me about the room we're sitting in." They replied excitedly, "This is our parlour, our most formal room. This is where we have meetings, coffee, and welcome new people."

I asked if they had ever considered redecorating the room, or even better,

renovating it to fit their hope of being more welcoming to young people. I received blank stares. "We could never change this room," someone finally replied. I had expected this answer, and it became my opening.

I recounted the history of church parlours. Many churches in St Louis were built in the late 1800s, at the height of the Victorian era. Many houses were built in this style and typically had a parlour. What did a parlour do? It was the most formal room in the house, a place to welcome and receive guests. A family put their nicest furniture and most valuable art here. Churches built in this era did something smart – they paid attention to their context. When building churches, congregations decided to create parlours, a place for their churches to welcome and receive visitors. It was a move towards being more welcoming in a changing world.

Here is the problem: the world changed; the Church didn't. Today, we don't build houses with parlours. If you have friends over, you often hang out in the kitchen or family room. Outside home, people meet in pubs and coffee shops. Not in a parlour. So I asked, "What if we did the same the builders of this church did? What if we paid attention to our context and reflected that in this room? What could it look like?" Suddenly they were brainstorming new ideas.

Here is the point: we in church often want to attract new (and younger) people. But, we usually don't want to change to meet them where they are. We want them to come and like what we like. We want them to see value in our traditions, beauty in our worship and meaning behind our established practices.



ABOVE: The Gathering's McCausland site 'before' and 'after' renovation for a new context

Reaching new people and being Church that is ready to receive them requires more. We cannot tweak a few things and expect people to come. We have to be willing to start over and rebuild everything we do with this question in mind, "How will a new person experience this?" From the paint colour in the lobby, to the style of worship, to the typeface in the church bulletin, we have to begin shaping everything with new people in mind. This is the only way it works. And this is precisely why it is so difficult for established churches to reverse their slow decline and begin reaching new people. The cost is simply too high, and the change too great.

But, it is not impossible. It took several years, but that church decided to do a massive renovation of the parlour and the entire ground floor, including the sanctuary. They took a beautiful old space and tastefully recreated it to be welcoming for

new people. It was thorough, complete, radical – and brave. It is too early to tell, but the church is showing signs of new life.

Our churches are not beyond the point of new growth and new life. But to be welcoming to new people, we have work to do. We have to lose the sense that Church is about what we like. We have to be willing to question long-established traditions. We must be willing to change. We will have to work hard to see things through the eyes of new people – who aren't here yet. In the end, we will have to have the boldness, leadership and courage to let go of what we know and love to recreate our churches for the sake of new people. It is hard, scary, and not without controversy. But if we can do it, then we may just see the new life and energy that many of us have long been praying for.

Connect with Matt www.gatheringnow.org and www.mattmiofsky.com



A bright future for a brave chapel



Growing a new vision from its toddlers, Waddington Methodist Chapel in the Clithero Circuit rediscovers old gifts: their minister the Revd Sally Ratcliffe describes how

On a Friday morning, you will find me at Waddington Methodist Chapel playing with a group of children under four, drinking tea and singing “I’m a dingle dangle scarecrow”. It is the highlight of my week!

This busy toddler group, Waddington Waddlers, has existed for many years and has always been a welcoming, supportive place. The church sees this group as a way of reaching out to the community, but in the last twelve months, a new-found desire to engage with the Waddlers in a different way has emerged.

The chapel is at the centre of the village both in terms of geography and community involvement. Its building is used, but attendance at Sunday worship is declining. Many of the congregation are over the age of 70 and were feeling weary and concerned about their future. Last February, they met together to reflect and plan a way forward. Back then, it was unclear as to the direction that might take, and I admit it was with some trepidation that I approached the

meeting. However, my fears were unfounded.

We prayed together and began to talk and consider what it was that God was calling us to do and be. Three hours later, the church members had a new vision and had rediscovered their enthusiasm for mission and evangelism! It was clear that God wasn’t quite finished with Waddington Methodist Chapel.

Members desired to be more intentional about building deeper relationships with others who used the building, finding ways not just to offer hospitality but share the gospel. Waddlers seemed a good place to start. Six months later, after some listening to and talking with the ‘Waddler families’, gaining the support of the circuit for finances and helpers from across the circuit, the church made a significant and brave decision to worship ‘differently’ once a month. This ‘different’ worship does not run alongside the usual Sunday service but replaces it. We pray for a bright future for this brave chapel as it seeks to serve the community and share the gospel.



Changing focus

Across the Norfolk Broads Circuit, people's kindness and sacrifice in caring for one another bring a tear to the Revd Steve Cullis' eye: for him, such changes in people's lives are the starting point for gospel transition and rejuvenation



Over the last year I feel as if God has refocused my vision. As I look at those I serve, I see people with lives transformed and rejuvenated. That surely is at the heart of the gospel.

But ever since becoming a Methodist Minister at the age of 25, there have been few topics that have fixated our minds and hearts as much as *Transition* and *Revitalisation*.

Conference Reports tackle the issues these words raise (anyone remember Charter 95?), and countless churches, circuits and districts have 'away days' to focus upon them.

That is surely right: the Christian gospel is all about transition and rejuvenation. Yet, how many times in the last decade have we asked "What could we do differently as a church?"

Our staff team, in wrestling to find a vision for our circuit, came up with "God does not want us to be stuck, but to lift us up to a vision of his glory." That alters the focus. Now it is not a question of how do we transition and revitalise our churches, but a question of how do we allow God to transition and revitalise our lives? It seems far more valuable for us as a staff to ask God to lift us where we are stuck, than to ask him where our churches are stuck.

I wonder if I'm the only one stressing about the inability of our institution to change and transition into all the things we feel Methodism 'needs to be' in 2017? In contrast, God is quietly getting on with the business of lifting people out of the mire and setting their eyes on a vision of his glory, his will, his purpose for their life.

What if the transition we need to make is to relax, and know we are held in the love of God – no matter what? How truly lives rejuvenated by that solid centre change the world around them!

The Christian gospel is all about transition and rejuvenation





Risk taking and creative

The Revd Helen Johnson describes churches across Rochdale and Littleborough Circuit catching God's vision for church life outside normal boundaries

In Rochdale and Littleborough, there is a sense of anticipation coupled with the uncertainty of knowing that as church we are travelling to unknown destinations.

Clearly, transition that is risk taking and creative is at the heart of what God has called me to. I am privileged to lead churches that are mission focused and forward thinking. Marcel Proust says: "the real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes." For my churches this means seeking out what God is doing.

Brave decisions

Thrum Hall Methodist Church's vision for change explores radical hospitality and different expressions of doing and being church. Thrum Kitchen provided Christmas Day lunch for 170 vulnerable adults and is at the heart of daily soup runs to the homeless. The latter came out of a challenging sermon that God is calling us to act. Relationships flourish through Luncheon Club, Art, Community Choir, Keep Fit, Wonder on Wednesdays, Toddlers, local

school connections and much more. This approach has its challenges as we work out "what is church?" and "what is worship?"

At a recent Valentine's Café worship evening I was asked by a non-church goer, "Where is the church?" Our visitor was asking a genuine question in expecting church regulars to be there. Some were, but many were not! Our Fair Trade Harvest Café with prayer, reflection and a message caused much debate as to whether it was worship or not. An even bigger matter is how we can challenge the Soup Community of 40 volunteers and up to 60 clients to discipleship.

In hearing the call to make disciples but faced with decline, Syke Methodist Church took brave decisions to explore a new partnership with the Community Base (a collection of local groups with about 350 people), called 'Syke Connexion' where it is hoped people will find faith, a spiritual home and wholeness. A refurbishment project for creative spaces is underway. Groups meet as 'base communities' with liberation theology at their core. The vision is that God will speak through the groups

God's vision is being caught

already meeting and emerging new ones. The sense of community centred around church is strong and growing. We need the freedom and the encouragement for these experiments to grow, knowing that some will fail and some will become part of our future church.

Doing church differently

Whitworth's Lighthouse was a high-street shop and does church differently – offering space to find God through healing services, community prayer breakfasts and drop in sessions. My chaplaincy in a local factory, Anglo Recycling, offers church outside its building through a workplace Alpha, boardroom Bible study and an exciting new Christian youth group funded by the factory – as the council youth club had ceased to meet.

The church community is very small and the congregation supports many vulnerable adults. But God provides opportunities that are not to be missed. There is a sense that God's vision is being caught outside the normal boundaries of church. Now, the church's dream is to support groups and provide a community area for sanctuary in imaginative prayer spaces.

With Smithy Bridge's Imagine Project came a shift to mission-focused, whole-life discipleship through changes in emphasis, practice, language, expectations, and behaviour. Church culture is changing from maintenance to mission and involves everyone. There was stagnation and some frustration over the inward focus, so Imagine offers a new perspective and



way of being church. Membership and attendance have grown by over 25%. The Bridge Building Project is complete, encompassing a charity shop and café that are now a thriving part of the community where God's purpose is worked out and expressed in service. The church identifies ongoing challenges, such as how to keep discipleship fresh, focused and alive, alongside being open to change, to each other and the Holy Spirit while not lapsing back into comfort zones. Members now focus on 'knowing, growing and going' as the Bridge centre looks to play its part more fully in what God is doing.

As long as transition involves respect and care, there is so much to look forward to.



Transition that is risk taking and creative is at the heart



Transitioning local church to transform the world



High Street Methodist Church, led by the Revd Mark Hammond, is turning more fully outwards to engage the Harpenden population beyond its doors

Leadings Harpenden's High Street Methodist Church is a phenomenal privilege. Being part of this large church is an exhilarating experience, with highs and lows common to all who seek to follow Jesus more closely. It involves helping a diverse community express and hear each other's inspired hopes and all-too-human fears. It requires levels of grace, patience and resilience that constantly drive you back to God in prayer.

High Street has long enjoyed some of the Connexion's largest congregations. Thanks to our prime location alongside Boots and WHSmith, hundreds pass our door every day. Many step inside to be greeted by our amazing army of volunteers who welcome at the door, serve in Wesley's coffee shop and run activities such as toddler groups, meals for the over-60s and after-school drop-ins for teenagers. This is a vibrant, lively and well-resourced all-age church comprising remarkable people with a strong track record of facing up to the need for change.

Most notably, in 2006 it introduced an innovative pattern of parallel worship. At the same time each Sunday morning, we have a traditional service in the church with organ and robed choir, an informal service in the hall with worship leaders and a band, and

Children's Church in various smaller rooms.

So why the need for further transition? Well, notwithstanding the evident vibrancy, for decades our worshippers have been declining numerically while increasing in age. In 1983, Sunday attendance was 430 adults and 200 children. By the time I arrived in 2013, this had shrunk to 233 adults and 44 children. Furthermore, a congregational census showed that worshippers were now two-thirds female and two-thirds over 60. Outside our doors, 39% of the population were aged between 10 and 39, inside only 14%.

God-shaped vision

At our first annual Vision Day in March 2014, we prayerfully faced the facts and considered our corporate calling. We wanted to grow and also to reflect better the age profile and gender balance of the town's population. More than that, we wanted to turn more fully outwards. Our vision was to witness lives, relationships and communities in this world transformed by the love of God in Jesus Christ. Our strategy for sharing in this work of God was to focus on encountering God, equipping God's people, and extending God's kingdom.

We have since shaped everything





according to this new vision and strategy. Our members have developed many new initiatives, including a prayer ministry team, a quarterly 24-hour prayer session, parenting courses, a theology school, ecumenical children's events, meals for men, and partnering with others to address self-harm among young people. We established a leadership team who now coordinate the ongoing development of our various ministries. We also agreed those Christ-like values that shape the way we seek to do all we do.

Church in transition

At the same time, we have had to grasp some 'thorny nettles'! The thorniest involved a thorough review of our much-loved parallel pattern of worship, which had proved so successful that by 2013 our informal congregation was often full. In addition, our Children's Church leaders needed extra space to work more creatively.

After many heart-searching months, we settled on a new sequential pattern, with informal worship in the church at 9.15am followed by traditional at 11.00am. This released the hall for our re-energised Children's Church, which now operates during both services. More than a year on, a huge volunteer force sustains this pattern, and we rejoice that our Children's Church has practically doubled in size.

High Street has not 'arrived'. It is merely mid-transition to a revitalised future. There remains much to do. This year, we will once more seek to listen to one another's hopes and fears as we pour over architect's plans suggesting how we might better fit

our buildings for this current age. And as we keep returning to God in prayer, we fully expect to see lives, relationships and communities in this world being transformed by the love of God in Jesus Christ. And that is the key. Any difficulties faced in transitioning the church will surely be eclipsed by the joy of more fully joining God in transforming the world.

To reflect better the age profile and gender balance of the town



Hoist the sails and go

The Archbishop of Canterbury invites us to join a global wave of prayer blowing a wind of change through the Church, as Rachel Farmer, Communications Manager for *Thy Kingdom Come*, explains

*Incredible
move of the
Spirit*



Have you ever been stuck on a boat waiting for the wind to pick up? The sails hang listless and there is barely a flutter. All around the water looks flat as glass. Then suddenly a few ripples appear on the water and there is the sound of rustling above. There's a sense of excitement because the wind is coming and it's time to push out the sails and get moving...

The Archbishop of Canterbury has painted this picture of the Church. He believes a wind of change is blowing and prayer is at the heart of this spiritual transition.

Thy Kingdom Come 2017 is a global wave of prayer movement between Ascension and Pentecost (25 May-4 June) that calls Christian communities to pray for more people to come to know Jesus Christ.

Archbishop Justin Welby said he was astonished by the way *Thy Kingdom Come* had taken off and described it as a "bizarre and incredible" move of the Spirit. "I've never been involved in anything that seems so much to be the work of the Holy Spirit," he told a gathering of church representatives at Lambeth Palace. "When the wind of the Holy Spirit is blowing, you don't control it, you hoist the sails and go with the wind."

Last year more than 100,000 people joined with the Archbishops of Canterbury and York to pray during the ten days in May. People took part in more than 3,000 events

and services, praying for others to know Jesus Christ. There were also large scale 'Beacon Events' over Pentecost weekend at cathedrals in different parts of the country, where people came together to worship and pray. At Winchester, demand was so great overspill areas with big screens had to be organised and Canterbury had a live stream for people to join in via the internet. By July it had received 300,000 views.

There were many stories of people responding and having their lives turned around. In Winchester a young woman in a wheelchair who had stopped going to church attended the Cathedral Beacon event. During the evening she found herself completely overwhelmed by a desire to belong to a church community again.



with the wind

This year the wave of prayer is building again and even more churches around the UK and across the world are expected to join in.

According to the Archbishop, prayer happens when we have a challenge we can't meet by our own resources. He said: "None of us have the resource to bring someone to living faith in Jesus Christ. Our cupboards are bare so we have to go to the one who has everything we need and ask for it. *Thy Kingdom Come* is essentially that in practice. It's the task set before us, not by me but by Jesus: he says to the Apostles you are my witnesses.

"This is why prayer is so important: It's not about us, it's about Jesus. Good news can only be proclaimed in the power of the Spirit. Good news can only be received through the work of the Spirit."

In a new video, which features the Archbishop on his early morning jog and follows him through the day, he talks about his faith, why he's a Christian and why he is asking Christians around the world to join him in praying for more people to know Jesus Christ. At the end of the video he urges Christians to #Pledge2Pray via the website www.thykingdomcome.global,

uniting with thousands of others in praying for people to come to faith. Churches are being encouraged to share and download the video, which had almost 500,000 views on Facebook within the first week of going live. It's hoped this will inspire more people to take part and pledge2pray as part of *Thy Kingdom Come*. The hashtags #pledge2pray and #thykingdomcome will be used to promote the wave of prayer on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram in the next few weeks.

Thy Kingdom Come aims to be a catalyst for change supporting churches in holding events like 24-7 prayer, prayer stations and prayer walks. The website offers a range of downloadable resources; a 'Kingdom Kit' for family prayer activities and games; resources for a range of church traditions including novena¹ prayer booklets of daily prayers.

Prayer has the potential to change situations and transform lives, according to the Archbishop, "When we pray... there is no imagining the new ways in which God can use us to his glory."

www.thykingdomcome.global and use #Pledge2Pray #thykingdomcome on social media



¹ Novena worship consists of special prayers or services on nine successive days or weeks.



Reflection

by the Revd Frances Biseker, a minister
in the Shropshire and Marches Circuit



Peeling Off the Shackles of Legalism by Helena Magnusson Ogburn, acrylic on canvas, 2012, 24 cm x 48 cm
www.etsy.com/listing/180906908/peeling-off-the-shackles-of-legalism

*Transition is such a calm word.
It is orderly, well mannered and even-tempered.
A transition is a thing to be managed smoothly, with all elements
coaxed into new alignments with nothing left over.
There are no rough edges or unruly margins, nothing left
sorrowing in the empty place;
no looking back, no disturbing pillar of salt;
it is of itself complete, its movement imperceptible.*

*And yet within this calm contained word
Is a leap –
a pushing from the ground
that thrusts us into the air for a
moment of unbecoming,
of disrobing –
our grave clothes are undone.
We are unmade but also in the making;
we are held in the bright flash of resurrection and seared by the
Spirit's surging impulse.
New ground rushes up and with urgent gaze we search out our
first foothold.*

*Resurrection:
It takes time to map this new territory and wonder
how our lives may be shaped to fit these contours;
how we might be at one with this place.
Yet land shifts, and it cannot be our home forever,
For God's restless Spirit will always draw us on
and other landscapes call.*

Transition

is about moving from one place to another. We often talk of making the transition from childhood to adolescence, or middle age to old age. We may move from one set of domestic circumstances to another, and for some it is the courageous transition from one gender to another.

Looking back at our transitions we like to tell ourselves a particular story of how it was, the experiences that stood out, the phases we moved through and we weave these things together into one coherent piece; "This is my story, this is my song" as the famous hymn *Blessed Assurance* (StF 498) puts it. Similarly in the Church we look at how things used to be, how they are now, and the journey that brought us to this place – for good or ill. Our inclination is to smooth our stories into a flowing narrative that make sense of the journey thus far.

Cost of transition

Yet transitions are costly and far from smooth; we do not move through them unaffected. Indeed, transition is not simply moving from one place to another in some kind of uninterrupted continuum. It is a moment of changing circumstance in which we too are changed, and for as long as we are held in that circumstance we question our identity and purpose. Many of us will remember what it was like to live through those days of emerging adolescence, searching for a sense of what we were

growing towards as young adults; what would life be like, what would I become? We were shedding a childhood self and discovering this new almost-adult self, and like many people I still have the photos (but alas not the flares), that bear witness to my own emergence into adulthood during the 1970s.

Church in transition

The Church in almost every denomination is living through a time of transition. Whilst it never changes that we are followers of Jesus Christ trying to live authentic gospel lives, there is a sense that as Church we are often wanting to be something other than we currently are (perhaps a diminishing or aging congregation), and to be somewhere else other than the place we are in (metaphorically if not literally). There is a deep sense that we have to let go of the familiar territory that defines our expression of faith and calling, and be available to something new and uncertain, which we have yet to discern.

This is a hard place to inhabit, but a life-giving one. In transition we offer ourselves wholeheartedly to God and to the moment; and we seek out what it is we will become, both as individuals and church communities. A new story is emerging; yes of a smaller church (whatever that phrase might mean), but the Church that is being renewed in its passion to tell the story of Jesus afresh and stand alongside the dispossessed and marginalised of our society and wider world.

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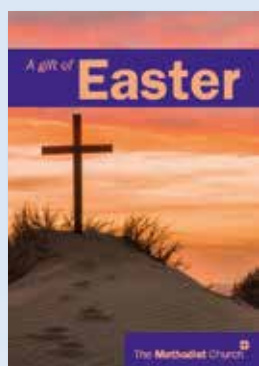
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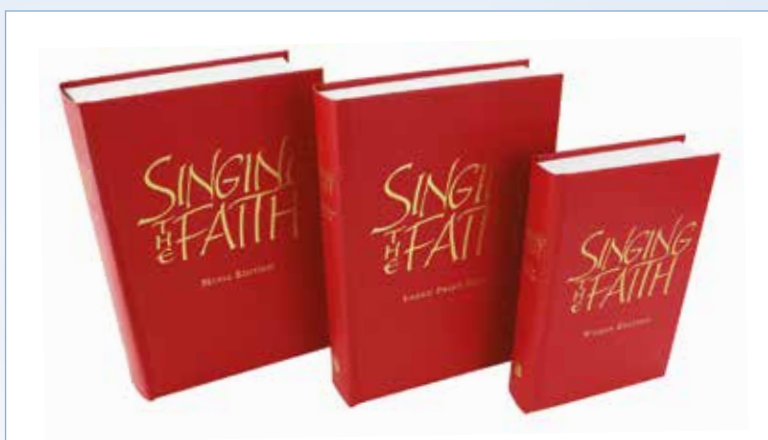
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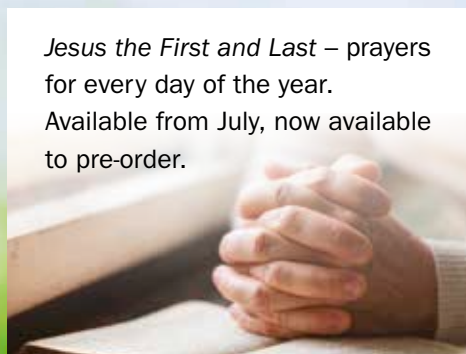
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Available from June, now available to pre-order. Available in red, blue and purple in the Standard and Extended editions (with extra pages for notes throughout) and in a Personal Organiser edition. NEW for 2018 even more content – the diaries start from September 2017 – maps of the UK and more Notes pages.



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Transitioning into the role



Sculpture of north Scotland's bottlenose dolphin, Moray Firth



Authorised by Conference 2016 to serve in North of Scotland Mission, the Revd Chris Jackson reflects on changes of home and heart

As a probationer, transition has been a constant companion on my life journey for several years. Discerning God's call through candidating whilst living on the Shetland Islands, acceptance to train as a minister, studying at Queen's College and now ministering along the beautiful Moray Coast in Scotland.

The day my wife, Joanne, and I arrived here, we took an evening walk by the sea to be greeted by the glorious sight of several dolphins swimming beyond Buckie Harbour. What a welcome to our new home! The Moray Coast hosts a resident pod of about 130 dolphins living in a close-knit community, much like the people themselves.

Each transition has been a progression in my development as both a disciple of Jesus and as a minister of God's word. What I have found fascinating is how, rather than being swamped by the demands of ministry, I have made time to reflect on this role to which God has called me.

Transition is not only experienced by the minister, but also by the congregations. So this new presbyter arrives in church, and it takes time to adjust. The first few months up in the North of Scotland involved a great deal of observation and relationship building. For any

probationer that can be hard, as much of the transition of the past few years has been leading to the point of initial stationing. So one arrives fresh faced and raring to go, a bit like the Duracell bunny.

As for me, I contained that feeling, and I'm pleased I did. My passion in ministry is to encourage and enable people to develop and grow in discipleship, and that begins with understanding where people are on their own journeys. Many of those are way ahead of mine. As a minister I walk alongside, and with, people. And I share and learn from everyone as we journey together.

We live in an increasingly uncertain world, experiencing major political and social transition. This is creating confusion, anxiety and fear among many. What is my role as a Methodist minister, and what is the role of the churches where I minister in this world? In answer, I often return to Jesus' words:

"...for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me."

Matthew 25:35-36, NRSV