

Issue 5 · Spring 2016

The **Methodist** Church 

# the **connexion**

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## **Spirit-led enthusiasm**

Fresh vision for growth

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A farm  
that challenges  
and cares

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Developing disciples

Inspiring stories from the life of your Methodist Church



David Perry  
Editor

# Spirit-led enthusiasm

**O**ur cover photo shows a young Methodist dancer leaping enthusiastically through the air. Of course, context is everything; the building behind her is the Epworth Old Rectory, the birthplace of world Methodism. What was apparent then still holds now: we are intrinsically energetic, visionary and purposeful.

Enthusiasm is at the heart of who we are and what we are about. It is an expression of our life literally being *en theos*, 'in God'.

"Catch on fire with enthusiasm and people will come from miles around to watch you burn," is a saying attributed to John Wesley, but without the literary evidence to prove it.

It has the quality of something overheard and passed on by eager Methodists, and is no doubt repeated because it expresses an enduring truth that we recognise.

Both the saying and the cover image evoke this colloquial essence of enthusiasm as our birthright as a movement raised up by the Holy Spirit to spread scriptural holiness throughout the land. Such Spirit-led enthusiasm marked out the early Methodists and fuelled their impact.

As this edition of **the connexion** makes clear, the same is true today. We are people for whom Easter and Pentecost are the energising realities of our everyday faith. We look for, and expect, the Holy Spirit to be igniting enthusiasm and transforming lives here and now.

The evidence in these pages is compelling. Enthusiasm that sparkles with hope, catches our attention and leads to the verve, dynamism and vivacity that was so evident at Pentecost and which epitomised the first Methodists is not a time-bound quality.

We see it and experience it for ourselves.

*Love and peace,*  
David

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## the connexion

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**Cover picture**  
An enthusiastic young Methodist leaping outside Epworth Old Rectory, Lincolnshire

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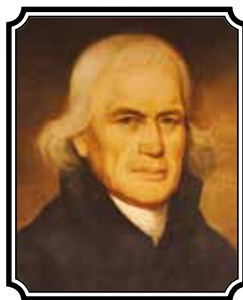
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## Discover the Methodist who shaped America

**F**rancis Asbury was an 18th Century Midland's Methodist who helped define modern America. A day of unique events, exhibits and talks is to be held in the evocative setting of the Black Country Living Museum in Dudley on Saturday 9 April to mark the bicentenary of his death and to explore his influence.



For further information about what's on at the **Family Fun Day** on 9 April and how you can get involved, visit the Methodist Heritage website: [www.methodistheritage.org.uk](http://www.methodistheritage.org.uk)

## Conscientious objecting

**A** special service on Sunday 20 March marked a century of legal conscientious objection. Held at Englesea Brook Methodist Chapel and Museum near Crewe, among those present were living objectors who had served time in prison for refusing to undertake National Service in the 1950s and relatives of those who had refused to fight during the First World War.

Dr Jill Barber, Vice-President of the Methodist Conference, preached at the service and commented: "It was wonderful to meet both objectors and relatives. For some, being able to talk about a family member who was an objector had been something they had found difficult until now." Resources: [www.methodist.org.uk/co100](http://www.methodist.org.uk/co100)

## European referendum

**T**he Joint Public Issues Team will be publishing a free online resource to encourage reflection and debate on the forthcoming EU referendum by the end of April, along with information on running hustings. If you would like to be notified when these are published, please email: [toppingb@methodistchurch.org.uk](mailto:toppingb@methodistchurch.org.uk)

# A Spirit-inspired quest for justice

## The power of the Holy Spirit ignites Anthony Reddie's passion for social justice.

**O**ne of my favourite passages in the whole Bible is to be found in the Acts of the Apostles chapter 2. We have seen the power of the Holy Spirit that energises the first disciples, and how manifestation of the Holy Spirit gave rise to the gift of speaking in tongues, or glossolalia. What has always inspired me is the radical challenge that results from the transformative life in the Spirit. That is, the common life of cooperation, mutuality and sacrificial living demonstrating such Spirit-filled living.

### Commitment to all

My lifelong commitment to social justice, and freedom from oppression for all people, grew out of the inspiration gained from this text. I continue to believe that the narrative of the first Pentecost has much to teach us as we struggle with the challenge of embracing and affirming difference in our contemporary life in 21st century Britain.

As a black liberation theologian, much of my work has been critiquing and challenging

white norms and assumptions of superiority. I love the way Pentecost demolishes any notion of cultural superiority, or government-inspired attacks on multiculturalism that favour sameness and integration.

Pentecost has a special resonance for our increasingly plural and complex world. Any materialist reading of this text (focusing on social, cultural, political and economic factors of Biblical times) affirms notions of difference and particularity (the quality of being individual). If physical differences are themselves part of the problem for our postmodern, differentiated world, then what are we to make of a text where difference is visibly celebrated?

In the Pentecost narrative, we read of the disciples speaking in other people's mother tongues. There is no presumption of pre-eminence in terms of language, culture or expression. The ability to have visions and dream dreams is the preserve of all human kind, irrespective of class, ethnicity or culture. As James Cone reminds us in *Risks of Faith*, the God of all, in Christ, has called all humanity into an unconditional relationship with the Divine, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

For Methodists, the inclusivity of





Professor Anthony G. Reddie is a Learning and Development Officer in the North West and Mann Team of the Discipleship and Ministries Learning Network of the Methodist Church. He is also an Extraordinary Professor in Theological Ethics with the University of South Africa and is the editor of *Black Theology: An International Journal*.

Pentecost is a reminder that our founder, John Wesley, was committed to a gospel that spoke to and was available for all people, irrespective of rank or social status. The ‘Four Alls’ of Methodism (see below) is a radical restatement of the availability of grace for all peoples, and that this calls us into relationship with God and most crucially, with one another.

### **Inspiration for social justice**

My inspiration for social justice emerges from the God who challenges us to seek the good of our neighbour: we are encouraged to find human fulfilment in radical hospitality, in community with others and communion with God, as revealed in Jesus.

Liberation theology often speaks of “Base Communities” – groups of people meeting in radical solidarity with one another to share faith and discuss the Bible and its relevance to their lives. The term is often associated with Marxism or communism. But one can argue that the roots of this form of simple, faithful living following Jesus’ message are found in the earlier Acts chapter 2.

I love the way this text counters all our bourgeois notions of Christian faith as an expression of self-centred, middle class, consumer-styled individualism. The

transformation brought about by the Holy Spirit does not lead to self-centred notions of individual blessing, nor notions of “cheap grace” as we have been admonished by the great Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Rather, living in the Spirit leads to a renewed commitment to live for and to serve others in the name of Christ.

### **Passion for social change**

As a black liberation theologian, my passion for social justice finds much of its inspiration from the early disciples’ desire to see the collective and social outworking of faith as key to serving God in Christ.

John Wesley himself understood this when he argued that all holiness was indeed social in its dimensions. We are called not just to change the hearts of people, but to change the structures and systems in which those hearts beat daily. Our mission is to go not only to those who need us, but to those who need us most!



### **The ‘Four Alls’ of Methodism**

- All people need to be saved.
- All people can be saved.
- All people can know they are saved.
- All people can be saved to the uttermost.

# “Go and discover what God is doing in the city and join in...”



*Jill meeting people where they are at*

## Deacon Jill Taylor enthusiastically follows Jesus' call to serve the poor in Hull.

**W**hat an amazing, but terrifying commission! Released by the Methodist Church to work among the poor, politicians and party-goers. A blank canvas – but where do you start? Where do you make the first mark? For me, it was with prayer; daily, asking God to lead me to the streets he wanted me to walk and to meet the people or person he wanted me to encounter.

I met 'M' begging while I was on patrol with Street Angels. She was homeless and an alcoholic – drinking 16 cans of high percentage lager a day – and claiming to be an atheist. After spending time gaining her trust and building our relationship, I was able to help find her accommodation, supporting her to work through a number of issues. She is now alcohol free, in a stable relationship, volunteering at church and saying grace at her meal table.

Jesus met people where they were at. I try to spend time building relationships

where broken people are – street corners and doorways, hostels and soup kitchens. I am privileged to meet many damaged people, cast out by families, loved ones and society into dark places. I try to see people as Jesus would see them, my brothers and sisters in Christ, reminding them they are loved, they are precious.

God dwells amongst the poor (financial, spiritual and emotional). As I spend time with the poor, I see God at work, touching and transforming people's lives, releasing people from addiction, restoring relationships.

What excites me? Witnessing Jesus at work in people's lives. Seeing blank, despondent, hopeless people grow in stature and self-worth, vacant eyes becoming shiny. Jesus said "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." (John 10:10, NRSV)

We all have our part to play, in enabling others to experience life to the full. I thank God for the small part I have been called to play.

*“Witnessing Jesus at work excites me.”*

*Jill on duty as a Hull Street Angel*



*Deacon Jill Taylor*



# From Lincoln to Afghanistan

**H**ow are you at getting out of bed each morning? I always consider my willingness to leave the comfort of my bed to be a useful gauge in 'ministry-satisfaction'. I felt God's call to ministry early, at 16. By 17, I had a note to preach and bags of enthusiasm. My formal route to ordination came later, following a brief teaching career.

On completion of pre-ordination training, I was stationed in the Lincoln North Circuit where I soon discovered that the more love we gave, the more we were blessed. Looking back, I see a thread running through my ministry; I've always had a heart for those who live beyond the margins of Church.

In Lincoln, that desire led me to establish Church2You, a bus-ministry taking God's people to communities where the Church was not well represented. I also ministered alongside fellow Christians at Mind, Body & Spirit events on the Lincolnshire Showground, where many 'spiritually open' people experienced God's touch.

Out of a desire to reach Lincoln's thriving evening economy, I established Street Pastors in the city centre. Representatives from 14 churches joined together to provide a caring presence on the streets each

weekend. The Church had left the building... and it was right up my street!

As a Street Pastor I found that personnel from the local RAF stations wanted to talk, often sharing very sensitive issues. I contacted the chaplains to establish how we might refer people on – and so began another journey in ministry.

I'm currently in my seventh year as a Chaplain in the Royal Air Force and I love it! Every day I have the privilege of being alongside young men and women who would never dream of going to church, but who invite me into their lives because I'm their Padre.

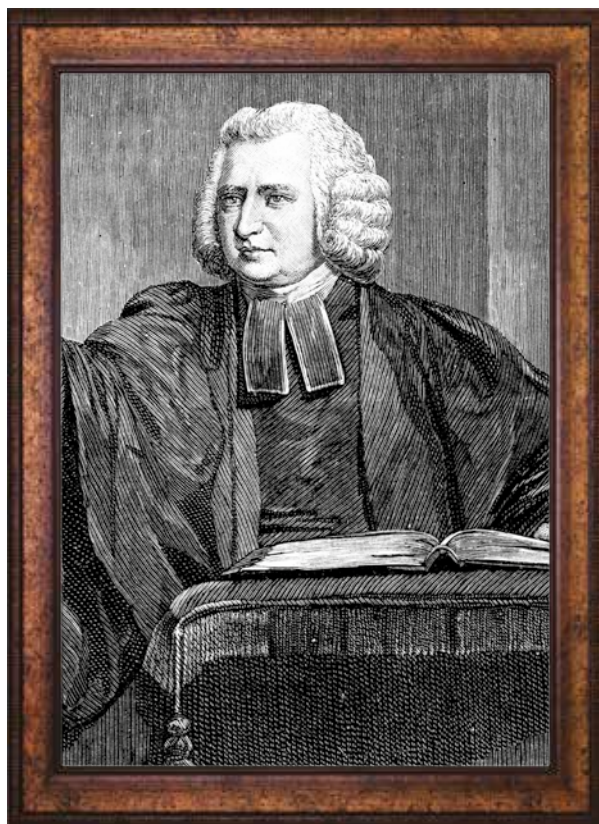
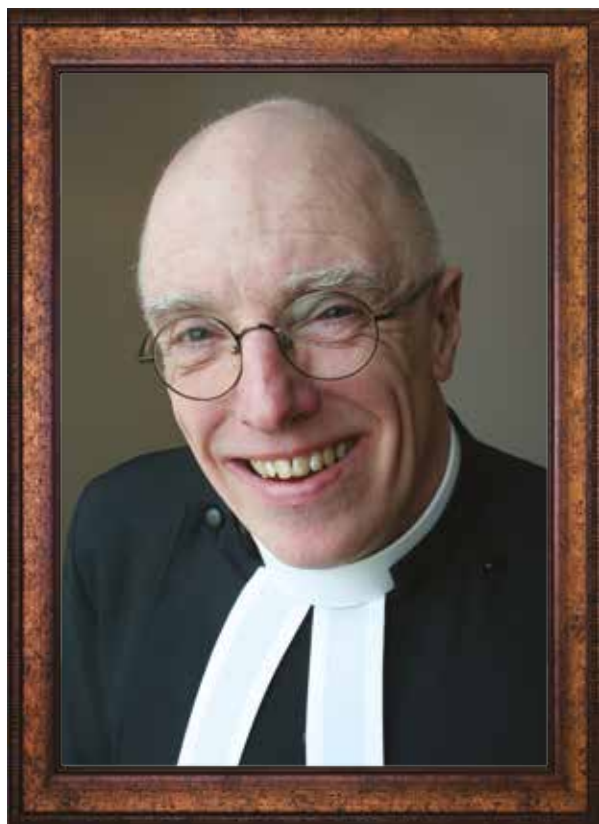
This ministry has taken me all over the world, from the UAE to the Falkland Islands, to Afghanistan. Each new posting offers fresh opportunities to speak something of God to those who face the daily challenges of military life. It doesn't come without personal sacrifice, but what I can say is that I certainly don't have a problem getting out of bed each morning!

**A heart for those beyond Church led the Revd Ian Brown to serve as an RAF Chaplain.**



To find more information about RAF Chaplaincy, please visit [www.raf.mod.uk/chaplains](http://www.raf.mod.uk/chaplains)

# Spontaneous enthusiasm



*“I feel that it is the love of Jesus that fires me up.”*

Steve Wild

*“And let me live to preach thy word and let me to thy glory live.”*

Charles Wesley

**President of the Methodist Conference, the Revd Steve Wild, explains what fires him up.**

**O**ne of the Rochdale stories I grew up with was how a lad was converted in his bedroom reading John’s Gospel. He felt such a wave of enthusiasm that he ran out of the house and up the road to tell his friend – in his socks, without putting his shoes on!

The fishermen in the boat spot Jesus on the shore – Peter is so excited he jumps out of the boat and swims to encounter Jesus on the beach.

What radical spontaneous enthusiasm.

I am an enthusiast for Jesus Christ, and have a great passion for the gospel message and what it can achieve. I feel that it is the love of Jesus that fires me up.

As a youngster, I visited the Taizé community in France. The experience astonished me: here was Christianity on a large canvas and like nothing I had ever encountered. It excited me. In those days I was a bit

puzzled by the chants and worship. It was Holy Week: on Good Friday a procession with the cross meant deep sadness, but on Easter Day the love of God broke into my heart and this has been the touchstone of my life ever since.

### **Passion and love**

I felt the Spirit giving me an energy and passion that has never left me. I did truly feel a love for every single human being on the planet; a true sense of the Father’s heart – both a joyful and painful thing, I’ve discovered. This has been confirmed to me as Charles Wesley writes, “And let me live to preach thy word, and let me to thy glory live ... Thy love let it my heart o’er power, and all my simple soul devour”.

I am as convinced now as I was then, that it is Christ’s love that energises us and I ask for more of that love all the time.



# Infectious enthusiasm

**Jo Simpson offers a refreshingly different view of church life where infectious enthusiasm for challenging questions and difficult conversations bring God's changes.**



*“I like people who are messy and chaotic, and people who seem to have life sewn up.”*

**I** come alive when I help people enthuse about life and direct them to what is good, beautiful, delightful and possible. Enthusiasm creates motion and momentum towards the possibility of life in all its fullness.

That's why I like people. I like difficult, risky, edgy, damaged, quiet, loud, angry, lonely, brash people. I like people who are messy and chaotic, and people who seem to have life sewn up. I like it when they disagree.

I enjoy tense conversation, and prefer to be in situations which are painful and difficult rather than safe and sterile. I get my best ideas when listening to stories of struggle. I like facilitating conversations to help those involved realise that it isn't some grand plan of mine which will change people, but conversations with each other and with God.

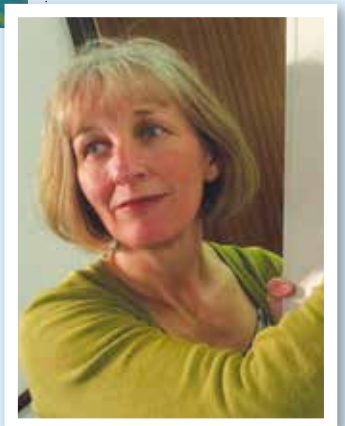
But, in my experience, such spaces where God forces us to engage with diversity and think differently are rare in our churches. So I create those spaces. I become the grit in the oyster; the one who says the difficult thing, who provokes passionate outbursts, who holds the silence while people struggle – and God works.

That is not what people are expecting when they invite me to help them think about reaching more families, or how to be better at mission. There is an expectation that I will bring ready-made answers and programmes. But there are no shortcuts to church growth, only gut-wrenchingly honest conversation in which those involved realise that they had the answers all along!

The process of change is painful. It helps, I think, that I am by nature forthcoming about my own struggles and constantly challenged and fascinated by the person of Jesus. It helps that I believe that faith is a gift which is about questions, and not answers.

When we put people at the heart of everything we do, when we say “if you are here, then you belong, you are valuable, your story is important,” then people feel safe enough to become passionate. Then change becomes possible. People start to feel brave enough to question the status quo, to think the unthinkable and direct their time, resources and talents towards what is important.

I'm learning that enthusiasm is infectious.



**Jo Simpson** fills two roles as District Evangelism Enabler for Plymouth and Exeter District; and as Families Worker, The Avenue Methodist Church, Newton Abbot.

# A caring farm



**The Wales Synod is proud of its long-term relationship with Amelia Trust Farm. Director Karen Turnbull shares how young people find healing there.**

**V**olunteers who have been at Amelia Trust Farm for many years tell of how proud they are to watch a young person change from the closed, isolated teenager who arrives at the farm in their first week to a confident, open young person as they get to know the staff and volunteers, and begin to realise that somebody does care about them.

Love. Safety. Care. Welfare. Security. These are things that many of us take for granted. But for the young person who attends Amelia Trust Farm, these feelings of safety and security are often sorely lacking.

The farm provides an alternative education for vulnerable and disadvantaged young people, working with skilled staff and volunteers who are committed, passionate, and enthusiastic about providing an environment where a young person can grow.

In being challenged about their own behaviour and attitudes, youngsters come to realise that there are certain values and

respect due to everyone, regardless of faith or background. They begin to realise that they, too, are valued and respected.

That isn't to say that every story is a success story. We deal with all the warts of human life, and sometimes a person's circumstances and history can influence their future too heavily. So we have stories of success, of people finding meaning in their life, going on to find jobs and start families. And we have stories of sadness, of people succumbing to drugs, prison, homelessness and isolation.

For 25 years, Amelia Trust Farm has worked with these young people, and our enthusiasm for seeing change in a broken young person's life, and supporting them through all life may throw at them, remains at the heart of the farm. It is also open throughout the year to visitors who want to experience and enjoy the tranquillity of beautiful countryside.

[www.ameliatrust.org.uk](http://www.ameliatrust.org.uk)

*Karen receiving a defibrillator from the local Rotary Club*



# Fresh vision for growth

**Superintendent of Burslem Mission, Ashley Cooper is committed to seeing God move through the Methodist Church.**

**I** have made a resolution – not a new year's one but a ministry shaping one. I have decided that I am no longer going to engage in the conversation of decline, believing it is inevitable; I am no longer going to talk of the faithfulness of churches, and that we now need to let them end well. I will not engage in any of these without first talking about growth, dreaming of new possibilities and exploring fresh vision.

My highlight of 2015 was hosting the first Navigating Change conference at SwanBank Church, Stoke-on-Trent. It was a busy few days and extremely hard work, but it was an immense privilege.

More than 150 Methodist leaders from across the UK gathered to look forward with hope, and to explore together what is necessary to see growth.

It was amazing to connect, and to hear what God is doing across our churches. I am convinced that God has a great future for us if – together – we learn how to navigate our way through this time of transition.

We live in a period of unparalleled change. When I trained for ministry 20 years ago, I was trained to lead in a world that no longer exists. Many of us now lead churches and conduct ministry in a world that is almost gone – but not quite. The Church is often the place where the remnants of the old world are clung to, and the Church begins to look alien to the community around it.

The hard truth is that while the Church becomes a safe place for some from the change around, we fail to fulfil the call upon us to communicate and fulfil the great commission for the current generation. It is time to rise from the dead and become the Church God asks us to be – which for many will mean navigating a different course, taking difficult decisions, and not always being able to carry everyone with us. Our challenge is to be obedient to God.

Let's navigate change.

[www.navigatingchange.org.uk](http://www.navigatingchange.org.uk)



Above: The Revd Ashley Cooper

Ashley at last year's Navigating Change conference

***"It is time to rise from the dead and become the Church God asks us to be."***





# The heart of a pioneer

From teenager to youth worker, Jemma Wraight tells how she helps transform lives on the Stoops Estate, Burnley.

**A**bout ten years ago I made a decision that changed my life forever. I put my trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and knew my life was going to be different. Over the years, I developed a love for God's word and the deeper my relationship with Jesus grew, the more I started to see people the way God sees them.

This excited me and I could not shut up about Jesus. I love sharing the gospel message that Jesus loves us the way we are but not enough to allow us to stay that way – I know if Jesus can change me, he can change anyone!

As a teenager, I attended an evangelical church and every week the doors were open for young people. The team was so committed and passionate about Jesus – and so patient with me. I was a difficult youngster and probably the most unlikely to respond, but I know if it were not for the people there I would not be doing what I am today.

For three years I worked with Scripture Union Scotland and then studied at Capernwray Bible College. This was an amazing experience to sit at Jesus' feet. During Capernwray, I completed a church placement with the Burnley Methodist Circuit.

I will never forget the night we arrived in Burnley. The church was right in the centre of a housing estate. As we drove up, there was a closed pub with a lopsided sign reading "The Shepherds' Arms"; I remember thinking that the community really needed a shepherd!

At the church, a group of lads was knocking a football off the wall. I got out of the car and started kicking the football about (showing off my skills!). At that moment, I felt God tugging at my heartstrings for these kids and I knew,



there and then, that I was going to work in Burnley. Please bear in mind I hadn't been offered a job and they were not yet advertising!

Over my ten days in Burnley I made a commitment that I would show the love of Jesus to the people on the Stoops Estate, and we had a great time together. At the end, the Superintendent asked me if I would be interested in working with the Burnley Methodist Circuit full-time.

This was no surprise, as my sense of 'calling' felt very strong and I had prayed

*"If Jesus can change me, he can change anyone!"*



that if this was the right move for me, God would make it happen – and He did! I have now been in Burnley four and a half years and I have no regrets!

### **Relevant Church**

These years have been exciting and challenging. The church building on Stoops closed and reopened to 'do' Church differently; relevant for the community.

Stoops has high unemployment, anti-social behaviour and a notorious drug problem. A lot of problems are generational

and people lack self-esteem. Stoops Church had to reach people where they were to present the gospel in a 'non-religious', loving way. With volunteers from across Burnley and even the Republic of Ireland, we delivered weekly activities meeting people's needs. It took time to build relationships and gain people's trust but now the church has a great reputation in the community and also with local authorities and schools.

We have more than 70 young people come through the doors each week, and we go into local schools regularly to support staff and to encourage youngsters. We also provide a weekly Care and Share group and family events where families have fun together, parents learn new skills, such as cooking, and they hear about the Lord Jesus.

I believe we have to be at the heart of a community to share the good news. We invited volunteers to join us on the estate, and live the 'kingdom in action'. By simply letting people into our lives, by showing radical hospitality and making real friendships the Holy Spirit moves and the Christian life becomes appealing and exciting and people want to join in!

We see no distinction between volunteers and the local community; we are all the same – people who desperately need the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

In 2015 the mission on Stoops linked with The Hub, part of central Burnley Methodist Church, to become the independent charity Burnley Pioneer Project.

As a Christian charity we aim to enhance people's lives and share the message of Jesus Christ. We seek to equip and train people in mission, to encourage serving in the local church and to be passionate followers of Jesus who want to see change in the world. God uses ordinary people to do extraordinary things!

*"I got out of the car and started kicking the football about (showing off my skills!). At that moment, I felt God tugging at my heartstrings for these kids."*



# From suffering to serving



**Originally from Gambia, the Revd Olufemi Cole-Njie is Superintendent of the Forest Circuit in London. With a positive passion to share the gospel, Femi is described as a “most enthusiastic person”. The Leytonstone Church she serves includes a youth choir and a project tackling knife crime among young people.**

*The Revd Olufemi Cole-Njie demonstrating on behalf of refugees*

**I**t all began in a simple, loving, Christian home with staunch Methodist parents. My maternal grandmother also taught me the power of prayer. In my early teens, through Scripture Union, I developed a desire for a personal relationship with Christ Jesus, having discovered that being a ‘goody goody’ was not enough to earn my way into God’s kingdom.

At a mission held jointly with World

*From Banjul, Gambia to Leytonstone, UK*

Evangelisation for Christ in the Wesley Methodist Church in Banjul, Gambia’s capital, I gave my heart to Christ. This was the start of an exciting spiritual journey.

Meeting Christ in this way literally fired me up to live a Spirit-filled life and to share God’s love and good news with others. At 18, I offered to become a local preacher.

Suffering has played a part in strengthening my faith – taunts, rejection and emotional bullying being part of my lot. I was labelled “the woman who would give her husband Bible for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Watch out!”

Kenneth and I got married in God’s time and, together with our children, shares in my enthusiasm for holistic ministry. Daring to pioneer women’s ordination in the Methodist Church in the Gambia was also costly. Theological education, instead of destroying my faith as some predicted, has informed how I live out of my faith and God-given ministry.

Zeal for God’s word and work consumes me, and so I am passionate about worship that is Bible-based, relevant to contemporary life and celebratory; nurturing young and old and encouraging them to live out their faith in community. Social justice issues are another of my passions – race, gender and poverty – serving the needs of the marginalised.

Finally, I am passionate about sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with all – but particularly with children, youth and people of other faiths; Muslim cab drivers in East London are becoming a new mission field.

For all of this and more, I give the glory to God who in Jesus sought and found me!



# Redeveloping Hong Kong-style



**F**izzing with energy, Hong Kong is a vibrant, vertical, colourful, Asian city brimming with an enthusiastic, hard-working, youthful population. Optimism and hope characterise Hong Kong Methodists. Not a wistful hope, but an earthed hope in God, the empowerer and provider.

Methodism here has known nothing but growth since the English Methodist Church opened on Pentecost 1893. Unusually leased for 999 years, this site is being developed to its maximum – going up 24 floors, all the way to a Sky Chapel!

## Worshipping congregations

Now named Methodist International Church Hong Kong (MIC), our church reflects the many nations present in our worship. We have eight distinct congregations worshipping in Tagalog, Ilocano, Putonghua (Mandarin) and English. I get to preach to them all in Yorkshire!

MIC is a sanctuary for Filipino domestic workers, offering hospitality and a 'home' to worship, learn, share, laugh,

cry and pray. We have a Putonghua Fellowship reaching out to mainland Chinese, most of whom have no other contact with the Christian Church. It becomes a place of enlightenment for them.

For all our congregations, it is a nurturing training ground, equipping them in discipleship for ministry here and other parts of the world.

The redeveloped MIC will have four worship halls and space for children's and youth work, music and choirs, small groups, Methodist Social Service and offices for MIC and the Methodist Church Hong Kong, with four floors of accommodation. Our vision is for a place of grace, a sacred space, efficient and hospitable.

It has been a privilege to share with a young congregation in this ministry for five years. Out of 1,200 members only eight are older than me! This is to be a beacon church, with a ministry to, and far beyond, Hong Kong. The British Methodists invested well and we are now seeing the significant fruit of their commitment and faith. Praise be to God!



**Since 2010 the Revd Dr Howard Mellor has helped a young international congregation bear fruit.**



# A circuit developing disciples



Celebration launch  
for Holy Habits

When the Birmingham Circuit rediscovered ten holy habits from Acts 2, they recaptured early church enthusiasm and developed it into an exciting initiative for a district-wide programme. Andrew Roberts takes up the story.



**The Revd Andrew Roberts** is Learning and Development Officer, Bristol and West Midlands in the Discipleship and Ministries Learning Network.

**T**he early Church was on fire with Spirit-filled enthusiasm. This fuelled a community famous for the joy, depth, generosity and quality of its missionary-discipleship life. According to Luke, this nascent Christian community enjoyed “the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47 NRSV).

At Pentecost 2015 around 1,000 Methodist Christians and ecumenical partners gathered in Birmingham for a Spirit-filled, colourful, multi-lingual celebration launching the circuit’s two-year programme to explore and live out ten ‘Holy Habits’ of discipleship as seen in Acts 2. The circuit conceived the programme in response to a review which identified discipleship development as a weakness within the life of the Birmingham Circuit and many of its constituent churches.

Neil Johnson (one of the three Circuit Superintendents) says: “Across the Birmingham area, *Holy Habits* is helping us revisit and be renewed by the foundations of Christian life and witness.”

The ten habits are: biblical teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, prayer, giving, service, eating together, gladness and generosity, worship and making more disciples. A new habit is introduced every other month and explored imaginatively and creatively through Sunday services, small groups, Bible studies, community projects, world issues, children and youth activities, reading, films and day-to-day life. A wealth of creative new material has been developed by the people of the Birmingham Circuit.

Those who have seen the resources are enthusiastic about their potential. Martyn Atkins (Team Leader and Superintendent Minister, Methodist Central Hall, Westminster) said about *Holy Habits*: “Just the job! An accessible and authentic account of Christian discipleship, full of encouragement and insight. *Holy Habits* becomes a resource for Christian fruitfulness for each and every small group and local congregation I can think of.”





# Worshipping the Lord

## Dr Bunmi Olayisade, Africa Partnership Coordinator, finds phenomenal enthusiasm in South Africa.

**W**as I in heaven? I pinched myself ... I was home again! Listening to a soulful choral harmony in different languages, I heard soft drums and it brought a smile to my face. I could not resist, I had to stand and join in the swaying and singing in the presence of our Lord. Even though I could not understand the lyrics of the various songs, my soul rejoiced in God's presence. We are in church! The Methodist Church Germiston in Johannesburg.

In December 2015 I visited two of our lovely mission partners, Steven and Jane Day. Steven is a Methodist minister married to Jane, a Baptist minister – both with the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. The service was phenomenal.

It started with singing a cappella from Zhosa South Africans, followed by Shona-speaking Zimbabweans and culminated with Charles Wesley hymns! The drums, tambourines and hand pads alongside the keyboard provided music for worship before King Jesus!

Black, white, yellow or red; we were in the presence of Jesus together – thanking him for his goodness and faithfulness in spite of challenges and hardships.

Wow, the wind was blowing again. Twenty seven baptismal candidates came forward to commit themselves as followers of Christ. A few previously disgruntled members came forward to re-dedicate themselves to serve the Lord anew. Supernumerary ministers served Holy Communion alongside younger church

stewards. Leaders prayed with parishioners. The aged carried toddlers. We were one family indeed. There was unity in diversity, there was elation.

That is often my experience in Africa. The wind of the Spirit is blowing, the Church is alive! Scripture remains the focus of services. People openly share their testimonies of God's goodness. My heart yearns for him as we celebrate his Lordship.

Who says God is dead? God is not dead, he is alive and his Holy Spirit burns in our hearts and souls. With the cross of Christ as our focus, his love is cheering us on with his grace empowering us in service to Him and humanity.

*The wind of the Spirit is blowing, the Church is alive! "Oh come, let us worship and bow down; Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker!"*

*Psalm 95:6 (NRSV)*



*Jane and Stephen Day, Methodist mission partners in South Africa*

Currently a minister in the Liverpool District, the Revd Jackie Bellfield of New Song Network Church serves four churches with a ministry of presence and loving engagement.



## Encouraged, enabled and enthused

**“Oh you’re a woman-God-thingy.”** Many people had heard the stories, but those gathered this particular Christmas Eve at Fox Covert Cemetery experienced it for the first time. “It really does happen” affirmed Rachel, one of New Song’s volunteers. I had just been listening to a lady for about 20 minutes at our Hot Drinks Ministry event at a local cemetery when, following a cold gust of wind, she noticed my scarf and then the clerical collar. She smiled and laughed as she shared her story of life and why coming to the cemetery was made so much better by the team who, for the past six years, had been offering a hot drink, biscuit, smile and listening ear to those laying floral tributes at various critical times of year.

### **Passion for the gospel**

My calling to ministry began at a young age, when at 14, I was encouraged to join a mission band. I was so surprised at the first meeting when I saw no trombones or guitars, misunderstanding the concept completely (not the only time in my ministry). Yet through the patience and care of the group, a passion for communicating the gospel was birthed and a calling identified that I could not deny.

After school, then Bible college, I worked

*“Fully present and aware of others is what truly lifts me.”*





as a civil servant for 18 years. Having surprising parallels to ministry, the civil service taught me a great deal and helped in my transition to full-time ministry. My time there was latterly focused around communications within education.

This fed into another aspect of my current ministry of being linked to schools, which I find creative and liberating and great for being involved at the heart of our local communities – either as a school governor or through worship.

**Being real**

It is this essence of engaging with others in different and varying contexts that fires and stirs me. Drawing alongside people, whether in a pew or coffee shop, retirement home, school or hospice, to be there as a listening ear, fully present and aware of others, is what truly lifts me.

This present moment – or ministry of presence – can at times be uncomfortable. I find myself standing with people in their joys and celebrations and also in the midst of their anxiety and fear. Being real in both is important – just as Jesus is – and not pretending things are better or worse than they are points to Christ, who makes all things new.

The Hot Drinks Ministry and Community Action Team (another example of loving service) show this ministry of presence and loving engagement, which is a tangible reminder of the love of God. From these encounters may come an opportunity for prayer, stillness, tears or sacrament.

What will always come is the realisation that you can leave another person changed from when you met them – and that is the Christ moment. That is what he did and that is his story of grace. Sometimes people don't remember what is said – but that can on occasion be unimportant.

New Song Network Church has at its heart a passion for God through worship, discipleship and loving service within the local community. It isn't just about singing songs (another misconception). Our range of activities, including New Song Kids, has facilitated an excellent lay leadership team and group of worship leaders who are also passionate about God and people. This is shown by their enthusiasm to communicate the gospel to those they meet.

This enthusiasm has changed lives for the better. Enthusiasm energises everyone. No one can make you enthusiastic because enthusiasm doesn't come from without, it comes from within. Properly understood, realistic and healthy enthusiasm comes from God. We read of that in the account of Pentecost as the disciples gathered in one place, then told others of God's love.

The mixed economy of our worshipping communities through the partnership with Bold Street and Latchford Methodist Churches and the joy of New Song Network Church has created within me a deep desire for recapturing the passion of what I was called to be and to do. To love God and to love people, to enable others to grow in discipleship and develop their faith and love for God as they are overwhelmed by his very presence.

[www.newsongwarrington.com](http://www.newsongwarrington.com)



*“Ministry of presence can at times be uncomfortable.”*



# 'When I think about Easter and Pentecost ...'

Enthusiastic probationers leaping for joy

## I am inspired to:

Encourage others to look for the Spirit moving in the seemingly mundane moments of our everyday lives. And to wait expectantly for signs of resurrection, transformation and hope breaking through.

**Relate the vulnerable baby Jesus of Christmas to the courageous vulnerability demonstrated on the cross, to the resurrected Jesus, Christ the King, who lives with us – Emmanuel!**

Experience new hope that is born out of despair; new life that is born out of death through Jesus, who is the resurrection and the life.

**Praise God for all he is doing in the world and look for new opportunities to share his love in my town.**

Shout out loud for the gift that keeps on blessing us.

**Recognise that Easter is the celebration day of the risen Christ enabling Christians to live a wildly thankful, celebratory, sacrificial life-in-abundance the other 364 days of the year.**

See a future for the Church beyond the tombs of today.

**Rejoice and sing out loudly 'he is alive!' and 'his Spirit is with us'.**

## I am enthusiastic about:

Reaching out and sharing the song with others.

**The hope of these seasons: that Christ comes to us to renew, challenge and equip.**

The Holy Spirit living within me so that I am compelled by God's outrageously generous and unconditional love to share that overflowing cup with those who haven't met God yet.

**Sharing Jesus in everything I do.**

The fact that there are no gifts greater than those which God wants to give us!

**The Holy Spirit who is described as fire and tongue resting on the disciples, who empowers and casts out their fear so that they are able to speak the word of God.**

Retelling the familiar stories in creative and exciting ways for all generations, churching, un-churching and de-churching, holding before us the gospel message of love, grace and redemption.

**Sharing how God's story connects to my own, and speaking God's story into others' situations so they can find that relationship for themselves.**

# Our enthusiasm!

**T**here were many words used to describe the followers of John Wesley. Some have stuck – like Methodist – but some only appear in the history books.

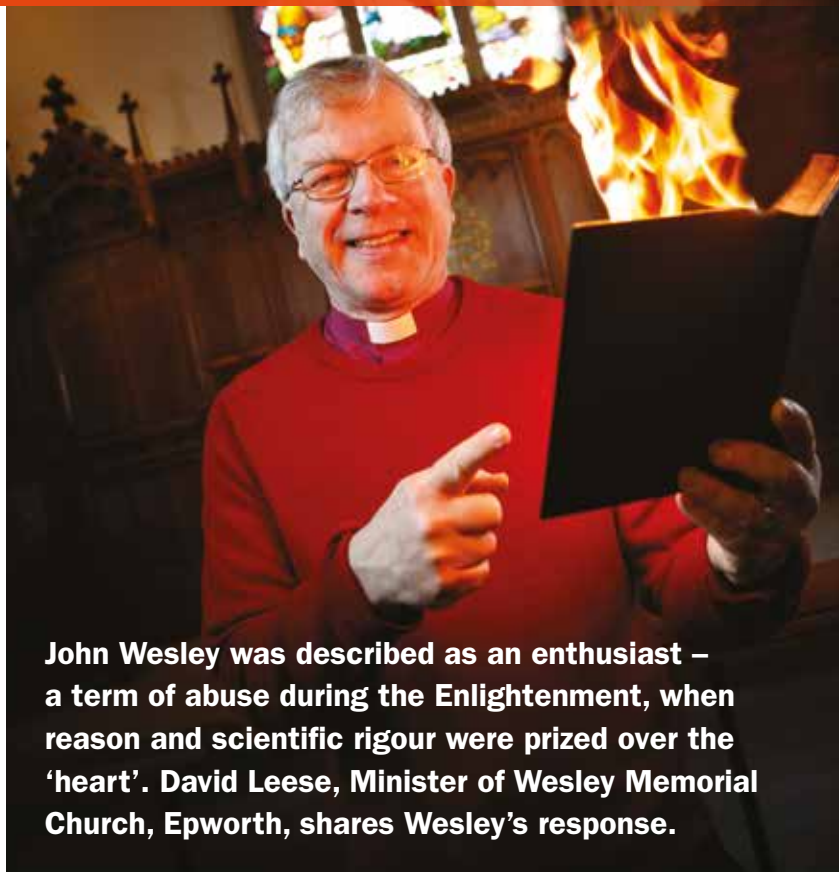
‘Enthusiasm’ is such a word. There may be no historical evidence to support the widely held view that John Wesley said “catch on fire with enthusiasm and people will come from miles around to watch you burn,” yet the spiritual truth it describes is undeniably part of the Methodist DNA.

It was the sceptic Dr Johnson who defined enthusiasm as “a vain belief of private revelation ... of divine favour.” To the eighteenth century Bishop Butler, such enthusiasm was “a very horrid thing.” This term of abuse referred to claims of divine power and associated excitement; John Wesley’s journal providing numerous examples of enthusiasm.

## **Witness of salvation**

When responding to the enthusiasm charge, Wesley did not consider it out of the ordinary, but an aspect of faith evident in Scripture and normal for all ages. In our Methodist Deed of Union we claim those doctrines “based upon divine revelation recorded in the Holy Scriptures”, and the continued witness to the Christian experience of salvation. This gives us the rhetoric. But the question for us is do we have the reality? Do we have it both personally and corporately?

This is our enthusiasm as we witness today to those gifts of God’s Spirit. And the life of God’s Spirit urges us continually to further, fuller, deeper and more glorious truths.



**John Wesley was described as an enthusiast – a term of abuse during the Enlightenment, when reason and scientific rigour were prized over the ‘heart’. David Leese, Minister of Wesley Memorial Church, Epworth, shares Wesley’s response.**

Gifts are given to the Church that we might be equipped and enabled as followers of Jesus. Far from a revelation for scriptural times alone, we witness God’s power today – and pray it would be more.

*Amateur magician David Leese conjures tongues of fire from the Bible*

## **Enthusiasm around Epworth**

The life of rural churches around Epworth, home of world Methodism, is no stranger to claims of enthusiasm and revival familiar in Wesley’s time. The hunger and thirst is still seen today. Hunger not for rhetoric but reality, not for style, but for the substance of life in Christ.

In our experience of enthusiasm, it is these gifts of a divine presence that encourage, excite and convince; gifts that may have been vain to Dr Johnson, but not to people of faith. We thank God for those who have the gifts of healing, of inspired utterance, of discernment and of deliverance. This is the reality of our faith. To Methodists in every time and in every place, including Epworth, enthusiasm continues to be wonderful.

**“Enthusiasm continues to be wonderful.”**

*Epworth Old Rectory, John Wesley’s childhood home*



# Reflection



**T**he Revd Langley Mackrell-Hey is Superintendent Minister at Peterborough. He is on the organising group for Re-Imagine, within the Fresh Ways Working Group.

Photos by Shine Photographic and Media, set up by Langley in 2006 as a means of providing faith-based images to churches and other charities: [www.shine-photographics.org.uk](http://www.shine-photographics.org.uk)

Jesus came proclaiming a kingdom,  
Yet what we got was a church.  
But I am not convinced that's what he was aiming for.  
Rather than a community of believers living a life of  
prayer and service where our practices and discipline  
fan the coals of mission from red hot to white hot,  
I sometimes see a church that has been poisoned by  
the serpent's venom of "this is the way we do things  
round here ... properly".  
We all have a tendency to stay comfortable, and to  
resist change.  
Yet not all change is bad.

As I see it, Jesus did not come to form a club or an  
institution.  
He came to form a family, a body of believers who strive  
to experience life in all its fullness.  
Where success is best measured in quality of  
relationship.  
And where our love for God, for each other and for the  
world compels us to care for others.  
We can welcome people at the door all we like.  
We can 'do our bit'.  
But it is not until we start giving our lives to people  
and changing to meet their needs rather than our own  
that we will see growth.

There are, however, times when despite our  
disappointments,  
my heart skips a beat with joy.  
There are times where our own children,  
and others under our care,  
receive the gospel and live it better than we do.  
They realise that the world is theirs for the taking.  
That life should be lived in all its fullness.  
We need to follow their example,  
lay our anxieties to one side,  
outstretch our arms, and live in the moment.  
Our fears will melt away to be replaced with delight  
and the chains that we once believed were there to  
constrain us,  
become the chains that keep us safe as we feel the  
wind brush against our face.



And there are times when our children's innocence  
exposes us.  
They are not as naïve as we think.  
They see the truth. They see our incongruence.  
But, thank God, they are not so inhibited by our own  
social inhibitions.  
And ask awkward questions with perplexed eyes and a  
smile.  
"Come on then, are you really up for it?" they say.  
Or, when receiving bread and wine they ask, "Is that it  
then?"  
Little do they know how they are the prophet in our midst.  
We have sanitised our bread and our sharing.  
Our communities are often divided like cubed bread.  
and relationships can in reality be wafer thin.  
Someone once said to me that you cannot buy or fake  
enthusiasm.  
And that is what makes it so potent.

The Holy Spirit is moving at our generation.  
But amidst a plethora of innovation and all things fresh,  
some are questioning what is it to be 'Church'?  
As if unless it meets on a Sunday and ticks all the right  
boxes  
it cannot be the real deal.  
I put it to you that just because something lacks  
maturity,  
does not mean that it is any the less valuable.  
Just because a child is not an adult, does not diminish  
their humanity  
or devalue what they have to say.  
And who is to say that our understanding of what is  
proper  
is right in the first place?

I know a man who was accused of enthusiasm.  
His name was John Wesley.  
Some said he was a Bible moth, taking scripture too  
seriously.  
Others said he did far more than was reasonable, and  
was attention seeking.  
A number suggested that he was a radical, at risk of  
stirring unrest as people began to fight for their self-  
worth.  
But I am proud to be an enthusiast.  
Today the term would be fundamentalist.  
I have no problem with that.  
It is just what you are fundamental about that is the  
issue.  
Being lukewarm is what God can't stand.

With the power of enthusiasm  
the Church can become for us, once more,  
a means of doing the work of the kingdom  
rather than a social club for almost Christians.



# Encouragement in crisis

In our last issue, we read of Cornerstone Methodist Church's commitment to Sandylands community in Kendal. Minister Wendy Thornton now tells how floods forged new friendships and family.

It was all going so well, and then Storm Desmond hit Cumbria on 5 December 2015. Our church, along with many houses and businesses in our community, were flooded.

As water levels rose the church became a rescue centre – until the emergency services had to rescue those gathered here when our own building was overwhelmed.

Following a social media call for volunteers to help, people went out in teams to offer practical support to flood victims. The flooded building quickly became a hub, sharing God's love in very practical ways, including distributing cleaning materials, coordinating volunteers, signposting, form filling, and offering emotional support. Local businesses provided food to volunteers who

then supplied meals to the housebound using a borrowed catering truck.

It was essential to maintain a physical presence in our community while our building was restored. We had a Portacabin placed at the front of the church which has become the **Encouragement Cabin**.

It provides an operations centre with a warm and welcoming hospitality area for the community. Many people have had to move out of their properties and at night, especially, there is a sense of desolation. Our string of lights in the shape of the cross represents the light and hope of Christ in the darkness and people have said they find it comforting.

The fact that our own building was flooded has given us 'permission' to inhabit the experience of others in a profound and authentic way. In turn, we have partnered with and received the hospitality of other churches, individuals and community groups, even from across the country.

As we responded out of Christ's love for people we have formed new relationships. Close neighbours who had previously never been into our church now regularly call into the cabin for a catch up. Neighbours who never spoke have become friends. A member of the community now describes himself as having "found a new family" and has begun his own journey of faith.

In this time of crisis we have known the **Encouragement** of the Holy Spirit and of so many wonderful people who we are blessed to know and serve.

