

Issue 11 • Spring 2018

The **Methodist Church** 

the connexion

Sharing testimonies



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



David Perry
Editor

“Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony.”

John 4:39, NRSV

The Bible encourages us to see that each of us has a story to tell of the difference that Jesus makes to our lives. The woman at the well in John 4 could have kept quiet about her encounter with Jesus, but because she didn’t, a whole community was transformed and blessed from within. She had great and wonderful news to share and so she spoke about it in ways that enabled others to accept it and own it as their truth too.

Testimony has the power to be persuasive, convincing and unsettling.

When someone speaks honestly and openly from the heart about their experiences, we are asked to take such deeply personal stories on trust. This is someone’s truth and they have taken the risk to voice it and share it with no guarantee of how it will be received. That takes courage.

It also takes a conviction that others will benefit from and be encouraged by what is said. Across the world the hashtags #MeToo and #Timesup have demonstrated the raw power of testimony to persuade, convince and unsettle on a scale and with a speed that is truly breathtaking. The amazing and irreversible cultural paradigm shift that we are living through as a result owes its genesis to the brave testimony of women and men who chose to speak out.

From the first days of Jesus’ ministry to Easter and Pentecost and beyond, we see the same power of honest and open testimony gathering pace and breaking out against the odds. So changed and transformed are they by their experiences of Jesus that the men and women who followed him have a passion to tell others. The wildfire of Holy Spirit-fuelled testimony that results lights up the known world. Ordinary people choosing to speak up and speak out were the essential sparks that lit the fires of conversion which birthed Christianity as a global movement.

Testimony is just as much an essential aspect of our evangelism and mission today as it was in the time of the first Easter and Pentecost. So how might you and your church need to be persuaded, convinced and unsettled?

Above all, might you be encouraged to share your testimony to the good news of Jesus in your life?

Love and peace, David

Go to www.methodist.org.uk/theconnexion to order more copies of *the connexion*, or to download articles for use in your own church magazine. Images are available at www.flickr.com/methodistmedia

What do you think about this issue?

Email theconnexioneditor@methodistchurch.org.uk

Write *the connexion*, Methodist Church House, 25 Marylebone Road, London NW1 5JR

Call 020 7486 5502

Contact us via Facebook or Twitter

the connexion

Issue 11 • Spring 2018

Published by the Methodist Church in Britain © Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes (TMCP) 2018. Registered charity no. 1132208.

Designed and produced by the Publishing and Communications Team of the Methodist Church. Design: Stephen Lambert. Editorial: Anne Montefiore and Helen Angove. Digital: David Webster. Director of Publishing and Communications: Andy Jackson.

Editorial board: David Perry, Anne Montefiore, Andy Jackson, Doug Swanney (Connexional Secretary), Martin Ashford (Head of Mission and Advocacy Cluster).

The article about Ablewell Advice in issue 10, pages 12-13, was written by Deborah Wills.



Photo credits

Cover © David Perry; Pages 4-5 © Mark Kensett; Pages 6-7 © TMCP and John Rylands Library; Pages 8-9 © Zoe Crewdson; Pages 10-12 © David Perry, Cliff College and Getty Images; Page 13 © Alex Baker/TMCP and TimE Photography; Pages 14-15 © Matt Gonzalez-Noda and Getty Images; Pages 16-17 © Mark Kensett; Pages 18-19 © Mark Kensett; Pages 20-21 © Andy Fishburne, Bunmi Olayisade and Getty images; Pages 22-23 © Rachel Ryan Photography; Pages 24-25 © Jenny Dyer and Mark Kensett; Pages 26-27 © David Perry; Pages 28-29 © Queens Foundation; Page 32 © Matt Gonzalez-Noda and Getty Images

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher.

The Methodist Church

Methodist Church House,
25 Marylebone Road,
London NW1 5JR

Tel: 020 7486 5502

Email: enquiries@methodistchurch.org.uk

Web: www.methodist.org.uk/theconnexion

Find us on Facebook

Follow us on Twitter

Watch us on YouTube or Vimeo

See our pictures on Instagram and

Flickr

Find us on Google+

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

Highlights



4 We all love a good story



10 Honest responses



13 Called to share



16 God in the pain



20 An island blessed by the Spirit



26 Investing in the kingdom

Thy Kingdom Come

Methodist presbyters have contributed to Thy Kingdom Come, the global prayer initiative prompting people to pray between Ascension and Pentecost 10-20 May 2018 that more people might know Jesus.

The Revd Catherine Dixon has written *Resources for Prayer and Worship*. These include prayer pointers, prayers from past Methodist Prayer Handbooks, an outline for prayer and an Order of Service.

In this copy of *the connexion* is *Waiting in Wonder* by the Revd Michaela Youngson, President-Designate and Chair of the London District. These nine days of prayer include reflections on Scripture and paintings from the Methodist Modern Art Collection. Both items are available from www.thykingdomcome.global #Pledge2Pray #thykingdomcome

A Brave New World? Living a faithful life in a time of change

Nearly 300 people representing Methodist, Baptist, Church of Scotland and the URC denominations, gathered at Methodist Central Hall, Manchester, on Saturday 17 March for the annual Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT) conference.

The conference informed, equipped and inspired Christians to tackle social injustice locally, nationally and internationally. Attendees began with worship and prayer before the keynote session featuring Stella Creasy, Labour MP for Walthamstow, and Peter Osborne, political journalist for the Daily Mail, who took part in a passionate discussion on the state of modern political discourse, climate change and their hopes for the future.

Methodist podcasts

Podcasts allow listeners to download audio content on to their smart phone or device to listen to wherever and whenever they like. On the Methodist Church website you can find a wide range of podcasts including *The Legacy of Charles Wesley* where the Revd Dr Jonathan Hustler, Assistant Secretary of the Methodist Conference, offers reflections on Charles Wesley, 230 years since his death. You will also find two Parliamentary Interns from the Joint Public Issues Team talk to leading politicians in their podcast Faith In Politics. www.methodist.org.uk/podcasts

We all love a **GOOD STORY**

Having experienced the impact of sharing testimony as minister of New Silksworth and St John's Methodist Churches in Sunderland, Kathryn Stephens reflects on the importance of telling our stories



Who doesn't love a good story? There's a reason why the soaps on television are so popular. We love a gripping story – getting to know characters and seeing the interaction and intersection of their lives. In spare moments I like to find a coffee shop, 'set up camp' and read a book because, well, who doesn't love a good story? And if cake's involved too, that's even better!

Much of our Bible comes from storytelling: the oral tradition of passing the stories from one to another down the generations. Recently one of the churches I serve welcomed groups of children from the local school to come and hear some of the stories of Jesus' life. We had a truly wonderful time.

Sharing our stories

Within the Methodist tradition telling our stories, or sharing testimony, has played a necessary role in the life of the Church.

The early Methodists were taught to give testimony and would speak of their own discipleship journeys and how they were encountering God in their daily lives. This came as encouragement and challenge to those listening, but also built up those who were doing the sharing as they looked

for and acknowledged God at work in their lives.

My own story of faith comes from a place of testimony. I committed myself to following Jesus after having heard a group of Cliff College students talk about their experiences of God with such honest, integrity-filled passion that it left me wanting to know this God they not only spoke of, but knew. In that moment I realised I knew of God, while they knew God – and through their testimony I was challenged to journey with Christ and experience the Holy Spirit in my own life. Sharing testimony does make new disciples.

Telling our stories is hugely important and when done carefully, sensitively, honestly and boldly it has a great impact. As we share what's going on in our lives, we can speak of how we sometimes wrestle with our faith, how we experience Jesus, how we journey over the mountain tops and dark valleys of life and how we join in the work of the Holy Spirit in our own lives and contexts.

These are real stories of real people and a real God. They don't need to be dressed up, overdramatised and embellished; indeed it would be quite wrong if they were. Sharing the grittiness of our stories can be autobiography at its best. Rooted,

*In that moment
I realised
I knew of God
while they knew God*



Spirit-led sharing can show a strength-filled vulnerability which draws anyone listening into the ‘story’ and offers an invitation to think about the experiences of life and living and the work of God in our midst.

Using testimony

Recently in the Sunderland Methodist Circuit, we spent some time thinking about the place of testimony. We recognised that the use of testimony had somewhat diminished over the years and the Church was poorer for it. Consequently we pledged to try and raise the profile of testimony and especially encourage our preachers to consider inviting people to give testimony in church services. There were some deeply encouraging stories that came back from this intentional move to regain our confidence in the use of testimony. For me, this certainly came into focus as several new members took up the invitation to tell their own stories at their membership service. The church was buzzing afterwards about how uplifting and challenging it had been to hear these words.

We all have a story

It may be a cliché, but we all have a story to tell. Your story, like mine, will probably

include tales of walking paths of joy and celebration and of travelling painful roads of deep sadness and loss. This may seem simplistic and obvious – for which I make no apology – but we journey these roads with God as our companion. Bearing testimony to this can be profoundly life-giving to each other.

Be encouraged by the testimonies you read in this issue of *the connexion*; be challenged and remember that your story matters – yours might just be the testimony someone needs to hear. So be bold... tell it!



TESTIMONY

How might you use testimony in your circuit and church?

Writing to Wesley: testimonies of the first Methodists



As Methodist Heritage Officer, Owen Roberts discovers letters of testimonies sent to Charles Wesley from some of the first people called Methodists

The words of the Wesleys are famous: sermons, hymns, journals and letters. They have been gathered and published many times, they have been cherished, disputed and studied. But what about the words of their followers, the unknown masses who flocked to hear John and Charles?

Letters by ordinary people

Among the thousands of documents held in the archives of the Methodist Conference at the John Rylands Library, University of Manchester, is a collection of 153 letters. Unlike other letters in the archives, these were written by ordinary people who joined the Methodist movement in its earliest years.

They date mainly from the 1730s to the 1760s and were largely written by women; these are rarely heard voices, captured in their own handwriting.

They were sent to Charles Wesley who requested testimonies that could be shared to exhort others to faith. The letters deliver. Full of rapture, conviction and visions of heavenly delight, they brim with the joy of salvation. They also reveal great anguish. Although steeped in the language of the period and of the Bible, they show real people, with recognisable doubts and problems. They give us a glimpse of the first people called Methodists.

Evocative phrases and fascinating details

The letters resound with evocative phrases.

Writers sign off as “daughters”, “worms” and “babes of Christ”. Satan’s wives are frequently cited. We read of “papists turned saints”, “backsliders”, “Pharisees” and “malefactors”. Mariah Price speaks of the wonder of her “new eyes”, having been “a partaker of the bread and wine for some months but not of the body and blood of my loving Saviour”. John Edmonds “abhors” predestination. The contention around this particular belief is a common theme; other writers touch on the doctrine of Christian perfection.

In addition to theological debate, there are countless fascinating details. One writer relates the eye-watering stoicism of a fellow-believer, Mrs Davis, during her mastectomy without anaesthetic: “some thread being called for, she immediately Said (sic) there is some in my work basket.” Martha Clagett recalls the misery of multiple unwanted pregnancies. Death looms large; many of the letters are accounts of “good ends”, others speak of the loss of spouses and children; one “almost exult[s]” that a child may become “a harper in heaven”, singing “that song which only the 144,000 can learn”.

Bringing the letters to a wider audience

Although academics have been aware of the letters for many years, most people in the Methodist Church will not know that they exist. They are now digitised and available online and I have been working with the university library to prepare the collection

These are rarely heard voices, captured in their own handwriting



for a wider audience by recruiting volunteers to transcribe them.

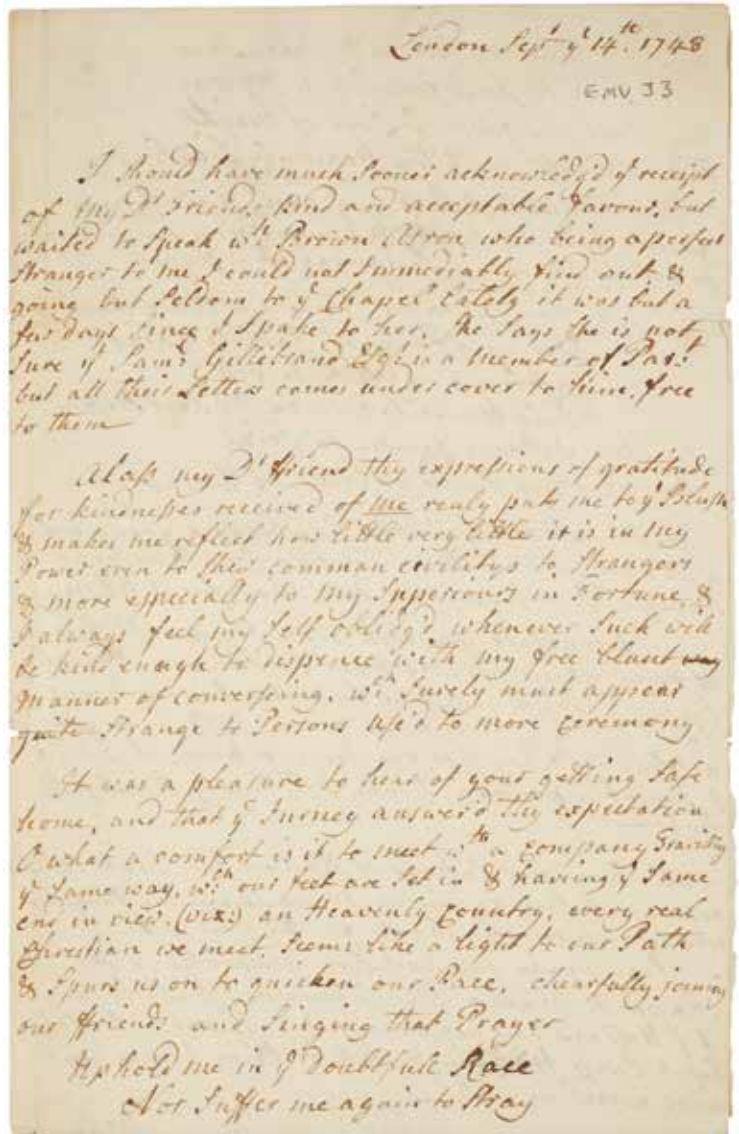
Transcribing testimonies

Being handwritten, the testimonies can be difficult to read. Spelling and punctuation vary greatly, and abbreviations, often cryptic, are frequently used. More than sixty people have been tackling the collection. Transcribers work from home, downloading the digitised letters and submitting a transcript by email.

A minimum of three transcripts are required for each letter, and the transcripts are then 'triangulated' by staff at the library to produce a definitive version. This is then uploaded to the university's *Rapture and Reason* website, where about half the testimonies are now available to view. Go to www.library.manchester.ac.uk and search the site for *Rapture and Reason*.

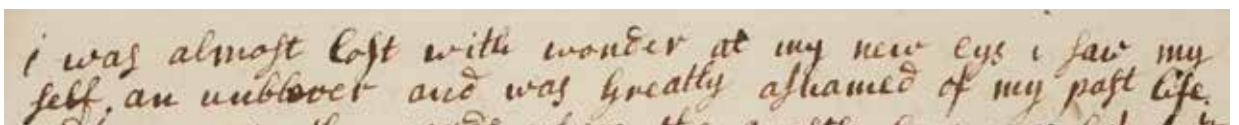
Many, but not all, of our transcriber volunteers are active Methodists, and some are local preachers and ministers.

Commenting on her experience of transcription, volunteer Cynthia Park describes it as "a privilege to hear the voice of a real woman from the past through words written by her own hand." Peter Brophy, another volunteer, echoes this, and adds that the letters demonstrate how "faith and assurance so often challenged hardship and poverty in a world of frequently



untreatable illness and early death." Paul Ellingworth, who has transcribed over 80 of the letters, also refers to the delight of reading "the kind of English written and spoken by ordinary men and women a couple of generations before Jane Austen." Christine Jones, another prolific transcriber, has undertaken extensive local research to cross reference the letters against other sources, finding many new connections and shedding light on the tantalising hints and gaps the testimonies leave.

More transcribers are still needed to complete the project. If you would like to know more, or become a volunteer, please go to www.methodistheritage.org.uk/earlymethodistvolume.htm



All new

MAIN PICTURE:
Engineering Student
Alice Watson-Taylor
LEFT BELOW:
Librarian Lynda Jeffery
BELOW RIGHT:
the Revd Dave Martin,
Superintendent Minister
Plymouth Mission Circuit
with Alice and Lynda



What is it that brings someone to the point where they turn to God, put their trust in Christ and set out on the journey of faith? Acknowledging it is first and foremost a work of the Holy Spirit, in listening to those who have recently taken this huge step Superintendent Dave Martin of Plymouth Mission Circuit also sees important issues for congregations to consider

Having been baptised as a child, for most of her life Alice had done little more than attend church at Christmas with her Nan. She is now in her fifth year at Plymouth University, studying for a Master's Degree in Civil and Coastal Engineering.

“My journey with God really started when I arrived in Plymouth,” Alice explains. “My mental health had been a struggle and at university it became worse. After a suicide attempt and multiple emotional and mental breakdowns, I hit a point where I felt completely alone and useless. Something drew me back to the Church. Every day I would walk past the university chaplaincy and would often look in, willing myself to step over the threshold, but never finding the courage.

“One day, though, something just pulled me in and there I met one of the chaplains who spoke with me about my feelings and my beliefs and helped me to find the right church. Methodist Central Hall was suggested, so I went that Sunday, having snuck out of my student house telling the others I had to work in the library. For the first time I went to a service alone, with the hope I would learn something about why I was here.

“Everyone was so welcoming and friendly, and I started going every week. At first, it was a very personal thing. I didn't want anyone to know that I was there, nor why I was there. However, *being* there every week helped me to open up.

“I was finally walking the path God wanted me to take and coming to that realisation has been the best thing ever. I am here for a reason. I have made so many friends and I am now seeing the positives in life again. My faith is now a part of me. It is who I am, and I am proud to say I am a Christian.

“Thanks to God and the friends I have made, I am a stronger person walking the path with Jesus.”

Lynda walked into Plymouth Central Hall one Sunday in July 2016.

“It was during yet another period of my life when things were not going well at all,” she explains. “I had run out of ideas and my inner strength was rapidly disappearing. I needed some sort of help and support, so I suppose because I already believed in God, the Church seemed like a good start. I was miserable, at odds with the world, uncomfortable in my own skin. Yet, any anxiety I had as I walked towards the building soon disappeared with the welcome I received. It really struck me how happy people were here, and how at ease they seemed to be around each other. I kept going for several months. I was learning a lot, mixing with good, kind people and maintaining daily readings from the Bible. Then I started a new job that I really enjoyed, and I felt much more at peace within myself. Even though things had improved, there was still something missing, but I didn't know what.

“Then, on New Year's Day 2017, something amazing happened. Towards the end of the service we were encouraged to go to the front for prayer, to pray for Jesus Christ to come into our hearts. This was it; this was my chance to start over. But I started to worry. What would people think? Wasn't it a bit of a cliché to become 'new' on New Year's Day? Wasn't just coming every Sunday enough?

“And then I did it. I went to the front of the church. The very person who had been the first to welcome me five months previously came over and I told her that I believed in God, but I had a strange feeling that I was missing something. When she asked if I had prayed for Jesus to enter my heart, I admitted I hadn't. All those times I had sung the words “O Come to the Father through Jesus the Son”, but the meaning had not sunk in. So we prayed. The nagging feeling disappeared. I was new, a new Christian with a new life. No longer afraid and with a sense of belonging and purpose. I am truly blessed.”



TESTIMONY

Remember that God is at work prompting people to make contact with the Church as the Holy Spirit meets them in their need.

- **Be a welcoming church for them.**
- **Remember the power of an offer to decide for Jesus.**

Honest responses

Editor of *the connexion*, the Revd Dr David Perry travelled to Cliff College to interview a group of students: their following testimonies give wonderfully honest and inspiring answers to some simple questions



Ellis Solway, BA Mission and Ministry (Children)

What difference does being loved by God make to your life?

God's love means that I can go anywhere and meet anyone without worrying or fearing rejection – because if I can receive the greatest love of all without doing anything then what am I scared of?

Life's a struggle, yet being loved by God keeps me going.

Absolutely everything. Knowing that I am loved by Father God allows me to live life in abundance – and even face deep suffering.

Everything. I am who I am because of God's love. It transforms the way that I think.

It brings an element of peace. It gives me a sense of trust that no matter what happens God will always be there for me, helping and guiding me.

I don't know that I would be alive today if God hadn't shown me unconditional love, despite all my mess ups. I tried to commit suicide and God met me in that place.



Will Hepworth
BA Theology



Andy Beard
BA Theology

What excites you about following Jesus?

That I am part of God's big picture of changing people's lives. I get to partner with Christ's ministry to the world.

Jesus spoke words of truth and brought good news to those who did not know his name. If I am to follow Jesus I should also be sharing the gospel with those who don't know it. This gives me fresh excitement to telling and teaching Generation Z God's love for them.

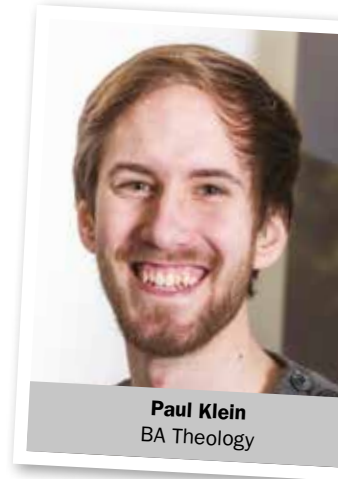
You see a development over your lifetime where you change in your personality to live out the gospel in spirit and truth. It's exciting, too, seeing the change in other people also journeying with Jesus.

Jesus never promised life would be easy, but that he would never leave us or forsake us and would be with us every step. The future is uncertain, but it is the thrill of going where he tells us, safe in the knowledge that we're in his hands.

What blew my mind was understanding that we are co-heirs with Christ – he has grafted us into his whole life, his family. I don't follow out of duty, I follow because of mutual love and respect because Christ has chosen me.



Kim Leach, BA Mission and Ministry (Family)



Paul Klein
BA Theology



Jack Key
BA Theology

Where do you see the Holy Spirit at work transforming the life of the Church?

We are getting in touch with the rawness of the Bible again.

I believe that the Holy Spirit is transforming the welcome of young people within the Church.

Drawing us into fellowship as one people, because we are connected by the Spirit and drawn into God's enfolding fellowship as Trinity. For the first time I have found a safe space in which to be open and transformed.

I think the challenge for the Church in the West is to become more gospel centred. If we want the Holy Spirit to transform our lives and the lives of people around us this is the key.

Fifty years ago many people went to church for social and cultural reasons. Now people, especially young people, are involved in church for genuine reasons: that they know and love God.

The Holy Spirit is bringing people into Christian unity – breaking down denominational boundaries and showing us that we are working towards the same goal.

How is the Holy Spirit using your time at Cliff College?

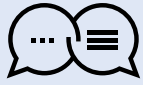
I'm learning that God's heart is for families and how the Holy Spirit wants communities transformed. 'Bums on seats' is not what the focus of my ministry should be.

I came to Cliff expecting to be developed in a good theological foundation to become a local preacher. Instead, God has set my heart on social justice and enabled me to be open to wherever God may be calling me.

I find that the Holy Spirit breathes spiritual growth into every activity here at Cliff, be that teaching, friendships or retreats.

The Holy Spirit has taught me to speak with respect to people whose views differ from mine, the importance of patience and the need for Christian discipline. Not to waste my life but to make every moment count for God's glory.

When I first came to Cliff I was in a dark place. To be honest, Cliff College was a life raft for my faith. The first year was emotionally and spiritually very painful but the Holy Spirit used that pain to turn my faith back around to Christ.



TESTIMONY

Why not use questions like these as prompts for short 'Talking Heads' video sequences that you can show in worship, meetings, groups and on church or circuit websites and social media?

Complete the sentence: Easter really matters to me because...

...without it there is no hope, no love; without it there is nothing left. God breaks in and everything changes, nothing looks the same.

...the Cross gives you hope, even in pain because Christ suffers when we suffer.

...if Jesus can overcome death then he can overcome anything, which gives me significant hope when I pray.

...it tells me that my Saviour lives and the atonement he made for my sins is sure.

...it is the bedrock of my Christian life. Without the Cross I cannot come into a relationship with Father God.

...the Church becomes a lot more on fire for Jesus. It is also a wonderful opportunity for mission so that we can show what Jesus did, and make it real for people.

Complete the sentence: Pentecost is amazing because...

...it proves that our church mission is multilingual, multicultural and multiracial.

...it reminds people that God's Holy Spirit is still, and always will be, within us to work in amazing ways.

...it is God's kairos moment; everything changes in a paradigm shift and nothing is the same afterwards.

...it is the fulfilment of Jesus' promise to send a helper and that he will never leave me or forsake me.

...the Church was birthed and it changed the world.

Complete the sentence: I believe that God wants me to...

...deepen my relationship with God and all God's children.

...delight in God by living a holy and pleasing life.

...be a humble servant open to be led and directed by God: not my will.

...respond through godly love to the things in my community that break God's heart.

...always do whatever I do for God.



Called to share



Gwennap Pit: a huge, stepped, open-air amphitheatre created by mining subsidence in the mid-eighteenth century where John Wesley preached on 18 occasions from 1762 to 1789. After Wesley's death, local people turfed the steps and made the pit a regular oval shape. It is still used for theatre and other purposes today.

To share our testimonies is to reclaim our Methodist heritage, believes the Revd Canon Gareth J Powell, Secretary of the Conference

In 1760, after a rain-soaked sermon at Gwennap, a village in Cornwall, John Wesley ended the day at a love-feast, where James Roberts, a tinner from St Ives, shared his testimony. It was a familiar story: a story of coming to faith, of being drawn back into old and destructive habits, of a chance encounter that pierced his soul, of despair, followed by an unexpected sense of assurance of God's mercy and forgiveness. "All his load was gone," wrote Wesley in his *Journal*, "and he has now for many years walked worthy of the gospel."

The sharing of testimonies is a key strand in our Methodist heritage. Since the founding of the first societies, Methodists have gathered to share a simple meal and to tell one another about how God is at

work in their lives, in the ordinary and the extraordinary.

Today, our faith stories, as individuals and communities, are still one of the most powerful tools we have at our disposal as we seek to follow Jesus' invitation to go and make disciples (Matthew 28:19).

As we continue to discern how best to speak of God, to converse about the holiness that is at the heart of our creation, we need to reimagine the language we use to talk of God. We need to speak clearly of our experience of God, with confidence, but always with care. This year, the Methodist Church is a partner in *Thy Kingdom Come*, a global call to prayer from May 10 to 20 May. One of the hopes of this movement is that people will be empowered through prayer by the Holy Spirit, finding new confidence to be witnesses to Jesus Christ.

We are called to share our faith story. As Methodists, we have the resources within our tradition to equip us to do so with confidence and imagination. So, it is for us to attend to the task of singing the Lord's song.



TESTIMONY

In Psalm 137:4, the people of Israel question, "How could we sing the LORD's song in a foreign land?"

Are we singing the Lord's song wherever we are?



Testimonies over time

The Methodist Church is full of mature, unsung heroes whose voices we don't always hear, attuned as we are to contemporary change and challenge within our Connexion. Yet these unsung heroes are faithful disciples of Jesus Christ and three tell their stories to Superintendent Gwyneth Owen of Christchurch and Wimborne Circuit

Joyce, 80, knows Jesus walks with her

Joyce Hedley grew up in North Seaton Colliery Church in Northumberland. "I am so grateful for the example of my staunch Methodist parents and grandparents," she says. "My grandma's life was tragic in many ways, but even as a child, I knew her strong faith helped her to cope."

Joyce's life has not been easy either. Two of her three sons died, one aged 11 and the other 42. Her husband died from motor neurone disease. Joyce says: "I know these things weren't God's fault, but it all made me think about who God is and who Jesus is in more honest ways. I can feel the pain of God in losing a son. For me, it is painful not being able to do anything for your child. You have to put them in the hands of God and know he understands and loves. I think God is still hurting with all the pain in the world."

Joyce coordinates the coffee lounge ministry at Wimborne Methodist Church and is there most days, welcoming, making

coffee or cooking lunches. Joyce confirms that: "I want to give back to others what I have received over the years. My prayer is often the words of the hymn, 'In heavenly love abiding' – I just know that Jesus walks with me, so I am not frightened."

Philip, 83, has a reason for living

Brought up at Lymington Methodist Church, Philip Wiseman made a commitment to Christ whilst on national service and at a Billy Graham rally in Scotland aged 19. Following university and three years of teaching, he says: "I responded to a need for teachers in Sierra Leone and saw it as my Christian responsibility to offer my skills." On returning to the UK, Philip continued to worship in Lymington, breaking his time there to spend two years in Nigeria helping set up a sixth form college and supporting young Christians. Back in Lymington, Philip was disappointed when the local Methodist/URC partnership didn't happen. So he threw



Joyce, 85, came alive for Christ

“My early life was in Parkstone Methodist Church, Dorset,” says Joyce Peacock. “A group of young men on national service pointed me to Christ because when I heard them speak of their faith, I knew something was missing – I knew Jesus in my head but not my heart.” Aged 21 Joyce experienced that transforming change and “came alive for Christ”.

As Joyce grew in the faith, she admits there were: “set backs, stumbling blocks and cliff-edge experiences.” However, her passion for people to follow Christ has continued undiminished. When she was 41, Joyce married Wesley, a widowed Methodist minister, and accepted the challenge to move from Poole for the first time, leaving for circuit in Preston.

The spiritual life is crucial for Joyce. She got involved in leading Bible studies and prayer meetings, which she still does at her local church in Bransgore, along with being pastoral secretary. Her husband once said to her: “Because it’s hard doesn’t mean it’s not right,” and this has led Joyce to reflect: “These are not easy times for our Church, but my testimony is, ‘To God be the glory’, for God is still doing great things in people’s lives.”

himself behind a partnership with the local Anglican church and was upset when that partnership collapsed three years ago leaving Lymington with no Methodist congregation.

But sadness and frustration gave way to a renewed commitment to serve Christ at Milford Methodist Church, where he is a steward and his URC wife plays the piano. Philip broadcasts on Lymington hospital radio – so his witness continues. He reflects: “When you’re exhausted you do sometimes wonder why you do all this. But I feel it is my reason for living. I have committed my life to Christ and must continue in worship and service even when it is rough.”



TESTIMONY

These are tiny parts of the testimonies of three faithful Methodists who consider themselves ordinary, and were surprised to be asked to contribute to the connexion.

There will be stories such as these to be told in your church too. What can you do to help them be heard?

FROM LEFT: Joyce Hedley, Philip Wiseman, Gwyneth Owen, Joyce Peacock



GOD in the pain

We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.

Romans 8:28 (NRSV)

Two student presbyters at The Queen's Foundation give testimony to God working for good even through their difficulties

Rachel Leather came closer to God

For many people when they encounter difficulties, rather than questioning both the benevolence and existence of God, crises can bring them into closer relationship with God.

This was certainly my experience when my 11-year-old son, Jared, suffered a traumatic head injury. Up until that point I had kept God at a nice safe distance. Then, in recognising my own vulnerability and pain waiting in the children's hospital, I reached out and discovered God had been there all along. I knew immediately that this reaching out would be life-changing; it had been a risk to allow God to get through my impenetrable layers. But I started to acknowledge God speaking through word, song and especially other people. I knew God was asking me to give voice to my potential.

Eighteen months later I started training to

become a local preacher, and last year all of my family's lives changed when I became a student presbyter at Queens. I made no bargains with God to heal Jared; this was not *quid pro quo*. I believe there are some things God cannot do: God could not intervene to stop the accident that caused Jared to fracture his skull. But I do believe that in all things God works to the greatest good, and out of the most horrific circumstances, God steps in and pours out love.

There have been no promises that life will now be easy, but throughout Jared's recovery and beginning my training I have found myself noticing God's presence in a way I previously failed to observe. Because I don't live in a constant mountain-top state of spiritual ecstasy (who does?), I have learnt to notice God's presence even when I don't feel it. To rephrase a very cheesy song, love really is all around.





TESTIMONY

You could use these questions for personal reflection and conversation.

- What are you grateful to God for this week?
- Where do you see God doing things in your life, or in other people's lives?
- When and where have you encountered God?
- How did you come to faith?
- What makes you feel close to God?

Moses John felt God's personal call

My father is a church leader in India and so from a very young age devotion to Scripture, prayer and church life were normal for me. I have great respect for my father and seeing his Christian faith lived out amidst the opposition of an overwhelmingly Hindu culture inspired me greatly. You could say I inherited my faith from him.

However, it wasn't until I was involved in a serious motorbike accident when I was twenty, that I was forced to stop and really consider my faith. What would have happened if I had died? Was I following the purpose that God had called me to? During the days of my recovery in hospital I made the decision to follow Jesus, not just for my father, but because I had felt a personal call from God.

Two years later I followed that call to study theology in England. I planned to gain

some good training and return to my father's churches in India. Very often, though, God challenges our pre-conceived ideas and brings us to (uncomfortable) places where our faith is stretched. In the following years, I met and married my wife Kim and our first child, Joshua, was diagnosed with a congenital heart defect. Through these and other difficult circumstances we learned that "all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

We also felt the Lord's call to remain and minister in the UK, including the Spirit's more recent guiding into ministerial training. I now have four young children of my own and I teach them in the same way as my father taught me. For now their faith is inherited from me, but one day, God willing, it will become a strong and personal calling of their own.



Belonging together

The Revd Novette Headley is Superintendent Minister of the Leicester West Circuit, but it is as secretary of the Belonging Together Ministers' Group that she challenges us to see and value everyone within the life of our diverse Church

Traditionally, the friends of Job get a bad rap. Each one comes to commiserate with their friend who, it appears, has fallen from grace in a spectacular manner. They, naturally, want to 'fix' Job – he is broken – and each, in their own way, wants to mend him and restore him to God.

We of course know the backstory told in Job chapters 1 and 2: it's all a set-up. What is obviously devastation for Job – the loss of his family, his future, his wealth, health and reputation – is in fact a test where God allows Satan, the accuser, to try Job. Following catastrophe after catastrophe, Job's friends turn up to be shocked by what they see. They sit with Job for seven days in utter silence, acknowledging the devastation of Job's position.

This 'sitting in silence' with Job redeems Job's friends in my eyes. For that reason, I can never totally reject the friends of Job; their silence is their solidarity with him.

Standing in solidarity

The calling of the Belonging Together Ministers' Group (BTMG) is to stand in solidarity alongside Methodist ministers of world-heritage identities as they serve British Methodism. The group also creates accountability: all Methodists are charged "to watch over one another in love".

The Belonging Together Ministers' Group, previously known as the Black Methodist Ministers' Group, was formed in 1985. Some of our presbyters and deacons are from overseas Conferences and denominations, and some are British-



born Methodists. The group's aim is to "encourage, challenge, inspire and develop" both the Church and those of its members who are of worldwide heritage to develop an increasingly diverse leadership.

The presence of this group in the life of the Church is a testament to the vibrancy and richness of the Methodist Church in Britain – and a testament to the fact that we belong to a worldwide Church.

What we seek to do

Members of BTMG practise solidarity through four key areas:

ENCOURAGEMENT This comes when we meet together and share news about missional or worship initiatives. People are encouraged through fellowship and prayer as they stand together with those in the wider society who deal with oppression and alienation.

CHALLENGE We seek to challenge one another and the Church to use creatively all the resources available to us, including the gifts of all people within our churches. One of the challenges facing the Church is to be relevant. The gospel is eternally relevant, but our mode of delivering that message needs to be continually under review, and appropriate to the local context. Do we actually see the people who are around us?

INSPIRE Some individuals are a breath of fresh air amongst us and we are inspired by

The calling of the Belonging Together Ministers' Group (BTMG) is to stand in solidarity alongside Methodist ministers of world-heritage identities as they serve British Methodism



TESTIMONY

Do we actually see the people who are around us?

How might you intentionally endeavour to see and hear and value those in your context who are unappreciated and overlooked?



their input. They bring new perspectives on Scripture generated from lived experiences of both rejection and liberation.

DEVELOP Fruitfulness is one of the gospel imperatives – we are called to grow and nourish one another and the world. The BTMG tries to do this by encouraging local district groups to also meet together with the same aims of encouraging, challenging, inspiring and developing spiritual growth in our churches.

Seeing each other

Like other institutions in society, the Methodist Church struggles with difference of various kinds. The BTMG would like the Church to see that each member of the

Body of Christ is a gift, and we should receive those gifts with joy.

A phrase from the film *Avatar* struck me the first time I saw it, as I am sure it struck many people. The greeting of the tribe is “I see you”. In other words, I acknowledge you, I recognise you, I draw you to me, you are part of me.

In some of our churches many people who are ‘different’ are invisible. The Belonging Together Ministers Group would like the Church to begin seeing everyone in our churches – and, even more importantly, seeing those who are outside our Church too, and valuing them all.

An island blessed by the Spirit

There is a real sense that the Holy Spirit is at work in a significant way on the Isle of Man: the Revd Richard Hall, District Chair, tells the island's testimony



One of our rural chapels has become a centre for prayer on the island.

Following a study of the book *The Grace Outpouring*, by R. Godwin and D. Roberts, Ballagarey Chapel made a commitment to daily prayer to ask for blessings on the local community.

This commitment has been maintained for four years.

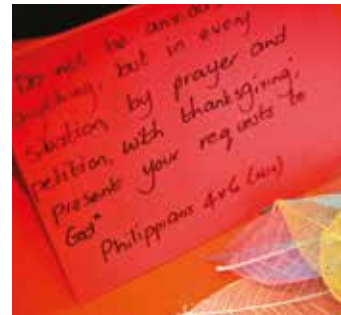
During that period the chapel has been blessed with a gift of land and the complete funding of a significant extension, which has enabled the chapel to play a more flexible role within the local community. We have also seen bumper harvests of both crops and livestock and the healing of folk for whom we have been praying.

Ballagarey Chapel's daily pattern of prayer is now extended to include monthly prayer gatherings and regular quiet days, both of which draw people from across the island.

Encouraged by the story shared by Ballagarey, the circuit committed itself to a year in which it would make prayer its priority. We have had two 24-hour prayer events since September, which have drawn in people from across the community and involved our ecumenical partners. We are planning 48 hours of prayer in July around Tynwald Day, the national day of the Isle of Man, and a week of prayer to start the new connexional year.

Various chapels have committed to weekly prayer meetings and seen an increase in attendance at their Sunday services without any outreach initiatives taking place; these chapels have also seen three baptisms, a





wedding and two new members. Yes, the couple had already planned their wedding, but they cancelled the registrar and requested the church instead!

In February we had the news that all 32 state primary schools on the island are now welcoming ecumenical 'Open the Book' teams (an initiative of the Bible Society) to tell Bible stories to the children on a regular basis. This represents a whole generation of children who are hearing the stories in the Bible.

Add to this Messy Church groups operating across the island and we begin to see a pattern of the gospel message spreading beyond our traditional community. After one of our Messy Church sessions recently, a parent spoke of how she had been challenged to take a pattern of prayer we had introduced and use it at home with her family.

Building relationships with our community

The Manor Ark project is an example of community work in one of the more disadvantaged areas of our island. Through the vision of one of our ministers, David Shirliff four years ago, we secured a lease on a redundant

police house on the Pulrose Estate in Douglas. God also provided us with a community and youth worker, Panda Dooley who, having been a volunteer, felt it was time to give up her career in the finance industry and apply for the post.

The work has blossomed under her care and she has built fruitful relationships with the local school. Manor Ark hosts a drop-in and homework club and is seen by many young people on the estate as "our space". It is also a hub for the community and for prayer for the area. The value of the work was recently recognised by the Government Education Department, who are now partly funding the project. This project also received a connexional grant.

Living on a bigger map

We hugely value our twinning relationship with the Methodist Church in Sierra Leone. Over the past six years we have been funding, in partnership with the Manx government, the building of a centre for people living with HIV/Aids.

One of our members, Karen Norton was, as she would put it, inspired by the Holy Spirit with the vision to set up the 'Café Lingo' project in our Promenade Church. This is now in its second year and we see 50 folks from up to 17 nations coming weekly to work on English as a second language.

With the visit of the Methodist Modern Art Collection in May and June this year under the title 'Awakening', and our planning of a series of island-wide Alpha courses as a follow-up in the autumn, we are excited about what God might yet do here.





*Each follower
of Jesus has to
live their faith
wherever God
has placed
them*

Kingdom music

Caroline Ainger, of Liverpool (South) Circuit and one of the Methodist Church's youngest superintendents, tells how God is bringing music out of the notes of her life

“Music is so much more than the notes written on the page.” These words from the film *Mr Holland's Opus* struck me recently. Richard Dreyfuss plays Glenn Holland, a man who believes he will eventually write a truly transcendent piece of music. In the

meantime, he has taken a teaching job at a high school. At first the job frustrates him, and his unconventional methods are not welcomed by the principal. However, Mr Holland grows to love his students. The 'temporary' position stretches into a long career. In the end, his students

reveal just how much they love him too.

Every musician has to bring the notes on the page to life in their own unique way. Similarly, each follower of Jesus has to learn their faith and live it wherever God has placed them. This can be daunting and thrilling. It has been so for me, in my current appointment as Superintendent of Liverpool (South) Circuit. The truth is, I'm doing what I never anticipated or planned!

Coming to faith

I first came to faith as a teenager. With my parents and brothers, I had attended a local Methodist church since I was a toddler. When another church held a tent mission near our school, I went along with some friends. The worship was Spirit-led in a way I hadn't experienced before, and the message was inspiring and relevant. I felt God was speaking to me through the preacher's words, and when the call to commitment came my feet took me forward without either fear or hesitation. Several of my friends responded too.

I'm so grateful that when I went to my usual church the following Sunday, we were all listened to and rejoiced over. Quickly, the church leaders established for us a discipleship group. I felt, and still feel, that their grace and the sacrifices they made to serve and to support us, put my hand in the hand of Christ. I've only ever wanted to walk with him since.

Jesus building his Church

And I can see, looking back, that our remit is to make disciples and Jesus will build his Church – not the other way around! My teenage church blessed us, and in the years following many young adults entered full-time Christian ministry with others ordained.

Now I am a mother I sometimes glimpse the world through my children's eyes. This is both a privilege and a challenge. I don't know whether I was more surprised when my eldest drew the Holy Spirit for his year three teacher, or when my youngest told a bishop at a confirmation service that since he wasn't moving diagonally he was breaking the rules of chess! They experience the numinous, they are learning about Jesus and I hope they will tell their peers about him.



According to recent research, 95% of children and young people in England and Wales don't go to a church. How are we going to them? This question has been shaping what I do where I am now. In one church, we have two thriving toddler groups.

One has an emphasis on pastoral care and the other teaches Bible stories and prayer through craft and play. Adults and children are learning together. The same church has been developing a link with a local family centre.

This facility hosts families who are asylum seekers, homeless or victims of abuse. We befriend, provide practical support and act as advocates. We have also connected with the Roma community who all too often experience poverty and discrimination. Food and clothing distributions are appreciated, but the biggest smiles are for the refurbished double-decker bus which we use as a base for a weekly homework unit.

In such ways, I am seeing the music of God's kingdom come off the page beautifully!



TESTIMONY

What fresh call to commitment is God asking of you and your church?



Home is where the heart is

Prayer-led changes to being Church in a city centre echo Susanna Wesley's ministry, testifies the Revd Jenny Dyer, Superintendent of Derby Circuit



Gathering round the kitchen table, sharing food and God's Word together

Back in the days of the Revd John Tudor, who died in 2009, Queen's Hall Methodist Mission in central Derby was a force to be reckoned with. The gallery was packed every Sunday night with young people. But these days the larger Methodist churches are in suburbia. In 2012, when Queen's Hall applied to cease worship, the congregation was elderly and the building beyond their means to maintain. In 2013 the building was sold to a businessman and has become a banqueting suite and wedding venue.

A person, not a building

A process of prayer and prayer-walking took place to work out what to do with the proceeds of sale. It was decided to get a person, not a building, and Deacon Jane Rice was appointed. She was asked to spend time in the city centre, meet people, network, and discern what the Spirit was saying the Methodist Church should do there. After a number of months, what she felt the Spirit saying was that we should buy a manse right in the city centre.

An area of run-down commercial properties between the station and the shops had been cleared and a development of houses and flats called Castleward was under construction. Jane suggested that we buy one of these houses, and during a Circuit Leadership Team Meeting the proposal grew to two houses. One would be a manse and one next door a 'community property' and 'fresh expression of Church'.

The Circuit Meeting took a unanimous decision to sell two manses that had previously been let out in order to do this, and the meeting finished with a spontaneous outburst of "To God Be the Glory".

A town centre resource

A pair of houses was bought, facing on to a green and a children's playpark, just off the walk-through from the station to the town centre, and just a stone's throw from the old Queen's Hall. Deacon Jane and her husband moved into the manse in March 2016, and the 'community property' was named Susanna Wesley House. During



TESTIMONY

How is the power of prayer reshaping mission where you are?

Jane's tenure, the work focused around prayers and lunch every Thursday, exploring spirituality through the creative arts, and 'Footwashing Church', in which women using the Derby Churches' Nightshelter were welcome to come for showers, pedicures and general pampering on a Sunday evening. A reflective garden of herbs, fruits and flowers was created out the back.

Sadly, Jane's health deteriorated and she was obliged to retire earlier than she had hoped. The circuit sought to keep the work going during Jane's time off sick, and the vacancy that followed, but much of it was relationship-based and foundered without Jane. The circuit advertised for a new 'Pioneer Missioner, lay or ordained'.

Enter Ali!

Ali Stacey-Chapman's commissioning service took place on 12 February 2018 in a borrowed Baptist church, and after the service the congregation walked to Susanna Wesley House for a pancake party. Ali is a lay person, who has spent the last four year working for the Richmond and Hounslow Circuit, first as a pastoral worker and then as an 'Urban Missioner'.

It is however clear as soon as she speaks to you that she comes originally not from London but from somewhere further north: Middlesbrough, in fact.

It is early days yet, but already Ali has put her own stamp on the house and the work. The Thursday prayers and lunch have grown and developed, and during March include Lenten reflections. Ali has been out and about, meeting the neighbours, the locals at Derby City Mission, the Derby Domestic Violence service, 'Welcome Churches', workplace chaplains, and many others.

Tonight, as I write, she is out with the Street Pastors. Ideas abound: to bring the community together with 'meet the neighbours' gatherings, to arrange for local people and asylum seekers to share meals together, to join the local Anglicans in mentoring ex-offenders. As one pioneer minister said to us: "Try lots of things. Some will work and some won't. You'll never know which will work until you try them."

Much of what has happened and will happen at the house springs from gatherings round the substantial kitchen table, sharing food and God's Word together. Susanna Wesley gathered people in her kitchen for fellowship and to hear God's Word. We feel she would approve.



Investing in the kingdom: working on the margins



I offer to wash his feet, which is met with some surprise

After 29 years of street and youth ministry in Hull and Louth, mostly at night-time, Gerald Barley – retired Team Leader of Hull Princes Avenue Street Angels – gives testimony to the reality of working in this tough yet rewarding environment



It's a cold, wet New Year's Eve and there are lots of places I could be. However, as Team Leader of the Hull Princes Avenue Street Angels, I believe I have been positioned and commissioned to serve in this community of restaurants, bars and takeaways. In a few minutes we are expecting the bells to chime, the fireworks to light up the sky and the revellers to be dancing and singing and hugging everyone in sight.

A good start to a new year

The Street Angels volunteers are having a well-earned hot drink before continuing their patrols on the streets when there is a knock on the church door. We greet a young man who has spent the last few days living and sleeping in a local cemetery. He is visibly shaking from the cold, and very hungry – not a good end to the old year. We welcome him in, offering food and a hot drink. I offer to wash his feet, which is met with some surprise.

Helped by a colleague I take off his disintegrating boots and socks and bathe his feet in a soothing, sweet-smelling bowl of hot water. This prompts the question “Why do you do it?” We answer, “The God who loves us also loves you, Brother. We are following his example.” The young man smiles and says it is the best start to a new year he has ever had. A few minutes later we also wash the feet of a man he sheltered with in the cemetery. We work with many agencies to try and improve the lives of the frightened and vulnerable folk who live on our streets.

A few weeks later we meet another of our regular friends sitting outside the local supermarket, wrapped in a duvet and trying to keep warm. Our response is to ask: “Is there anything we can do for you?” “I'm not hungry,” he says, but: “will you pray with me?” I remark to my team member that he has said “will you pray *with* me” and not “for” me. “You start,” I say, and we pray together as the night-time customers shuffle by. It is so clear to me that this, the dirtiest, scruffiest guy on the street, believes in a God who loves him.

Serving the community

As Street Angels we serve our night-time



community in many ways – with food, clothing, first aid and by networking with vital agencies. We are out all weekends in all weathers.

As I retire from my role as Team Leader of the Hull Princes Avenue Street Angels, after many years, it has been my absolute privilege to love, befriend and witness to the happy and the hurting, the funny and the frightened, the silly and the sad, the hugger and the hated, the alcoholic and the administrator, the brothel worker and the business tycoon, the pusher and the president, the door staff and the dispossessed.

Outside the walls of our churches there is an amazing mission field with whole armies of folk needing to be loved and to be told about our wonderful, loving God.

We need to share this intimacy, so I decide we should offer Holy Communion on the street. With the support of my ministerial colleagues I take the communion table to where the people are, outside the church building. We share bread and wine, we pray and we talk, a continuous act of worship throughout the evening. It is truly a table for all.

Many, who the world judges harshly, repeat well-known prayers and passages of Scripture that have been written on their hearts, and their hearts begin to come alive again. We have experienced many humbling conversations. We have seen lives turned around and we have seen miracles happen.

A question for all of us

As I head into retirement, I ask you to ask yourself a question: “What has this got to do with me?”

Well, I would say, “everything”. If we believe we have been called into relationship with God, then we have a job to do. Tell others! With God's help we can do it.



TESTIMONY

Five-point guide to successful street ministry

1. Know God.
2. Know yourself.
3. Know you are called.
4. Know your story.
5. Know your streets.

Five-point guide to testimony on the street

1. We have a calling to tell others.
2. Be a good listener.
3. Know yourself.
4. Be confident and sure of your story.
5. Read the Bible and pray regularly.

Reflection

Deacon Eunice
Atwood gives
testimony
to the power
of daily prayer

For twenty-two years
I have been part
of the Methodist
Diaconal Order.
Saying the Order's
daily prayer repeated
over days, weeks,
months and now
many years, has
become an anchor
which holds me fast.
Its words centre,
nourish and challenge
me, in equal measure.
I read the words of
this prayer profoundly
aware of the words
also reading me.

**Eternal God,
you are the source of all life,
the fount of all wisdom,
the wellspring of all grace.**

These opening phrases immediately transport me to the beautiful poetry of Genesis 1, the God of all beginnings, the very source of all life, including mine. All of creation is declared good: light and dark, day and night.

The rhythm and balance of creation is held in the creative action of God. Through the language of founts and wellsprings, I picture majestic rivers, glistening streams, crystal clear fountains of water, never-ending supplies. This is the language of abundance not scarcity.

**Your days are without end,
your loving mercies without number.**

As I say this prayer (typically on a working day at 7am) I am conscious of the many activities of the day ahead and recognise my own rather dysfunctional relationship with time. These words declare God is beyond time, beyond the limitations of our human experience.

God's love and mercy are neither numbered, measured nor limited. There is nothing I can do to earn God's love, there is nothing in my day that can change this profound reality. God, unconditionally, loves me and loves you. In his book, *Being Christian*, Rowan Williams reminds us, "God does not love us because we are good, God loves us because God is good." My challenge is to learn every day to live dependent on the loving faithfulness of God.

I depend on you and remember your goodness to me, and to those who have gone before.

Dependency is not easy. Like most of us, I would rather be in control. To be dependent on God's goodness is to accept each day as an invitation to live beyond the limits of our own resources; to recognise and receive, with gratitude, the gifts of God which are all around us.

As I search for truth in a world of 'fake news' I am led to God, the dependable source of all goodness and truth, the fount of all wisdom. One of the many reasons I am a Methodist is because I wholeheartedly believe in the connexional principle, defined as belonging, interdependency and mutuality in *Called to Love and Praise: The Nature of the Christian Church in Methodist Experience and Practice* (1999 Methodist Conference Statement). This is expressed in a particular way in the Order, as we meet in Convocation, in area groups and commit to pray for one another daily. At the Queen's

Foundation, where I work as the Diaconal Oversight Tutor, I am aware of the interdependency and mutuality of a wonderful team of colleagues, whose shared ministries constantly enrich my life and work.

**Your story has been told in every generation:
the Lord Jesus Christ lived among us,
full of grace and truth,
revealing your tender mercy,
he healed the sick,
comforted the broken and lost.
In humility he washed the feet of his disciples,
calling us to follow his example as one who serves.**

All deacons share in the calling of all God's people to model *diakonia*, the servant ministry of God revealed to us in Christ. This section of the prayer prompts many questions. How will my life reveal the story of God? What is God's invitation to me in this day? Will I allow the Christ in me to recognise the Christ in others? How will my life remain open to the story of God discovered in the life of God's world?

**You are my God,
ahead of me, leading me,
guiding me and calling me;
you are the Lord God,
the all-wise, the all-compassionate.
And I lift my heart in worship
today and forever.
Amen.**

The prayer closes with a declaration of who God is. As a young child I often sang the hymn beginning "O love that will not let me go". Throughout the many joys and challenges of my life, I have experienced the reality of these words. The love of God which, despite my struggling, has never let go of me.

For me, the Methodist Diaconal Order daily prayer is a beautiful shared gift, offering a deep anchor in the unconditional love and generosity of God.



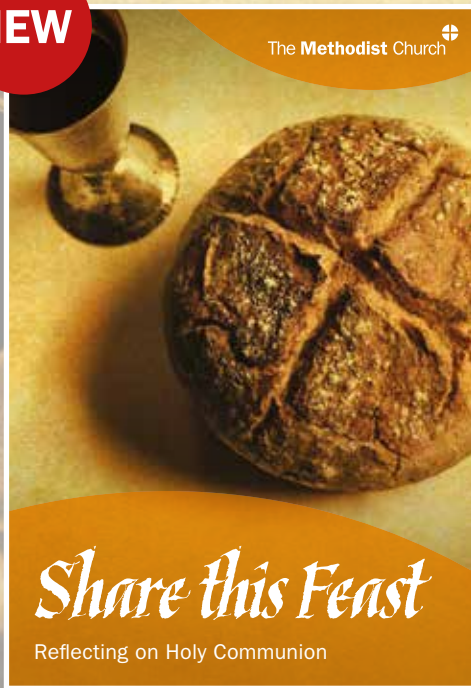
FOR REFLECTION

- **What are the centring and anchoring points of your life?**
- **What nourishes and resources your life in God?**

Deacon Eunice Attwood currently serves as the Pastoral Studies and Diaconal Oversight Tutor at The Queen's Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education, Birmingham

NEW from **Methodist** Publishing

NEW



Share this Feast

Reflecting on Holy Communion,
the third book in the series about
the faith in the Methodist Church

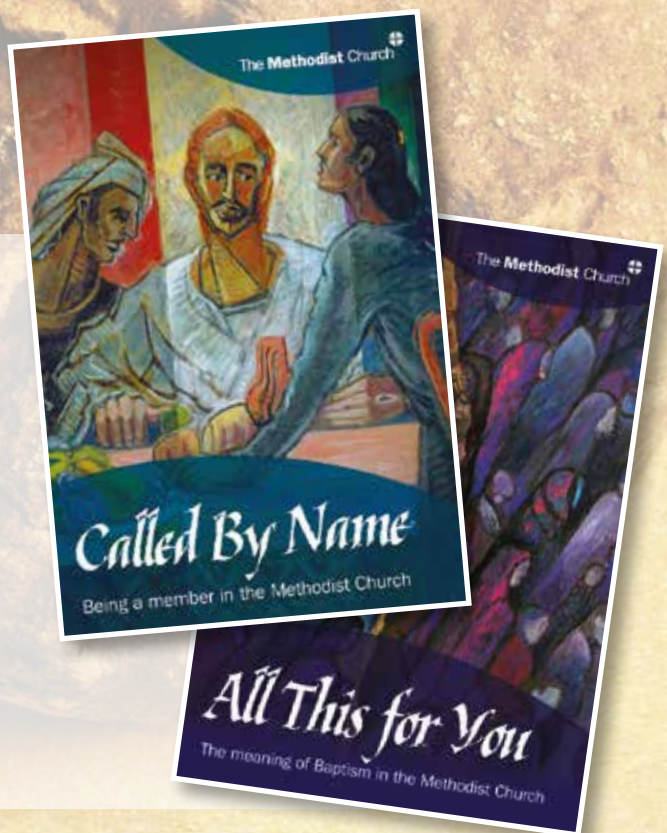
ALSO AVAILABLE

Called By Name

Being a member of the
Methodist Church

All This for You

The meaning of Baptism in the
Methodist Church



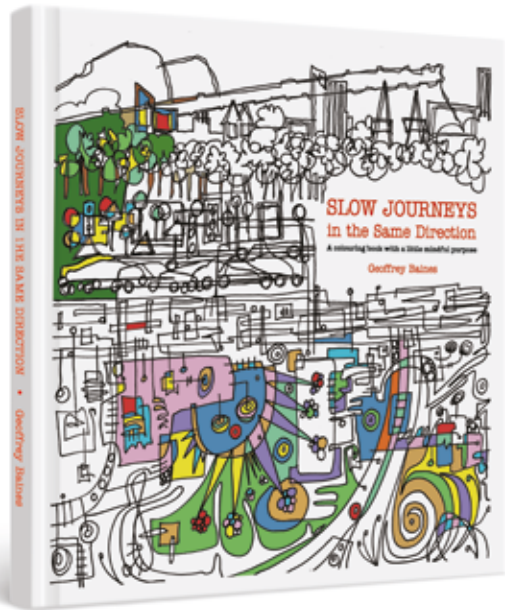
Available from **www.mph.org.uk**

NEW

SLOW JOURNEYS in the Same Direction



*A colouring book
with a little
mindful purpose,
using the artwork
of the Revd
Geoffrey Baines*



Available from www.mph.org.uk

ECO CHURCH

Your Church Caring For God's Earth

Plastics. Species Loss. Climate Change

How do we find joy and hope in God's creation and play our part in the renewal of God's earth?

Find out by joining over 800 churches taking part in **Eco Church!**

Eco Church is an A Rocha UK project, supported by the Methodist Church, for churches in England and Wales who want to demonstrate their care for God's earth. Over 100 Methodist churches have already registered – will your church be next?



Register for Eco Church today at

ecochurch.arocha.org.uk



Registered charity
no: 1089276



tearfund

The Methodist Church



Dyslexia inspires a deacon's ministry

Working with many rural churches in South Kent Circuit, Deacon Carys Woodley offers a ministry of encouragement

Dyslexia means that I have struggled and felt isolated. However, this inspires my ministry as I come alongside the struggling and vulnerable. Dyslexia is an important part of who I am and what I do. Because I know the difference encouragement has made to me, I want to encourage others. So my role today is to encourage the rural churches and their communities. My hope is that people sense how I care and that I am being Christ's presence to them.

Rural marginalised

Some people might imagine ministry is going out and telling people about Jesus. I come alongside the rural marginalised. I focus on supporting the very small churches by going to their services and sitting among them. I help them to value who they are and their ministry; to recognise that what they are doing is important even if it seems small.

I help rural church fellowships to ask the question: "What are the needs of our local community?" We then explore together what is possible.

I go to local activities, coffee shops, yoga or book groups. I need to take time to build up Christian

presence – so I spend hours listening to people's stories.

Christian spirituality

I go to some surprising activities where Christians are not normally found, yet have been very moved by the welcome I received.

Recently I went to a 'sound bath'. Imagine lying on a mat in a village hall wrapped in a blanket letting the sound of gongs flow over. The leaders were very touched that a minister had come!

I am excited by spirituality and want to connect people with Christian spirituality, being willing to embrace and welcome others' spirituality.

This, in turn, opens doors to sharing Christian traditions of meditation and the spirituality of Jesus.

