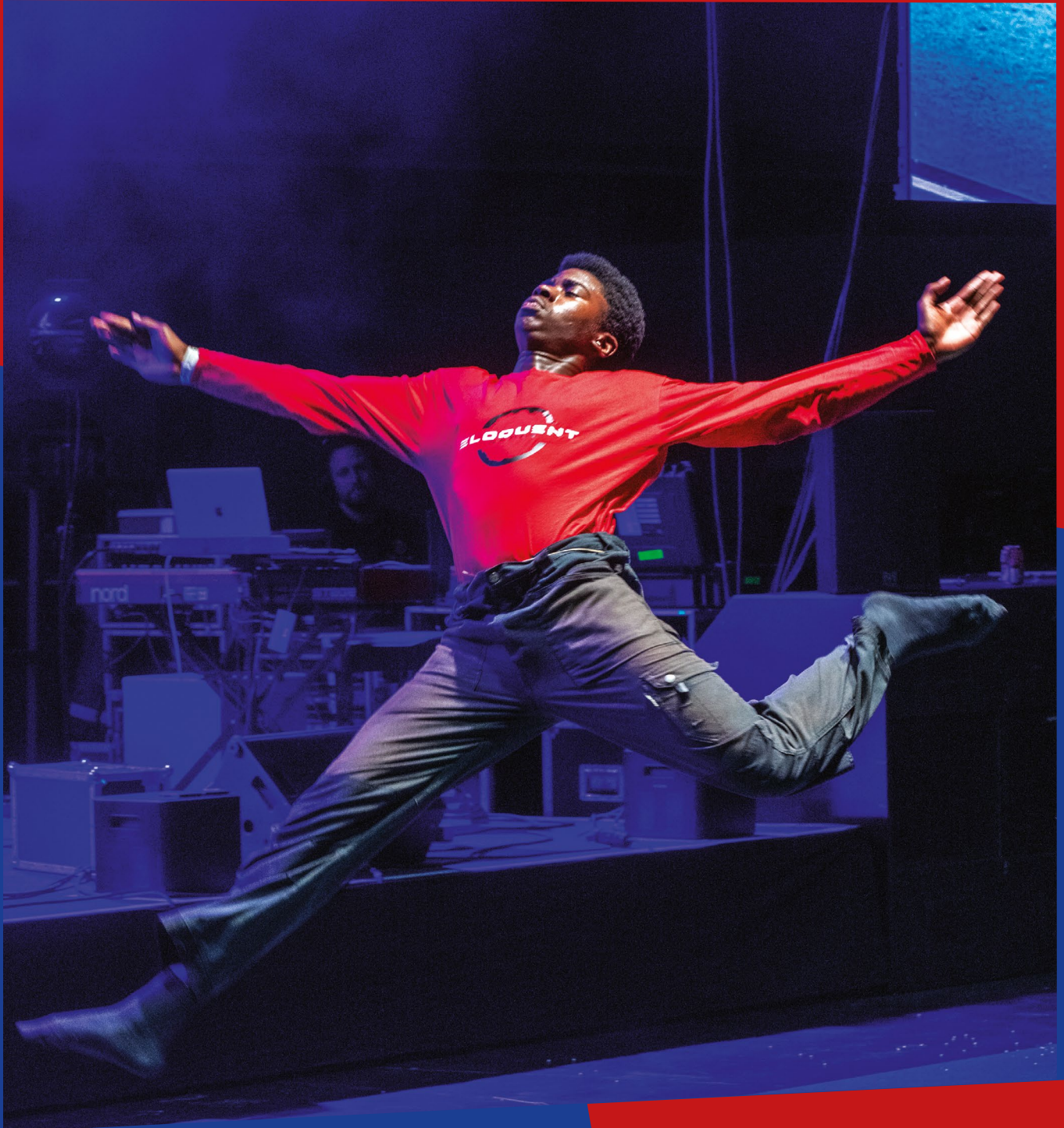


# THE connexion

ISSUE 38 WINTER 2025

Inspiring stories from the Methodist Church



## JOURNEY OF A LIFETIME

The **Methodist** Church 



# THE connexion

Issue 38

Winter 2025

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As we say goodbye to *The Connexion*, we take this final opportunity to see how Methodists meet and work together, with this issue offering a range of examples of Methodists exercising their ministry in places that we might not expect to find them, or where they might not have expected to find themselves.

In some cases, these are places Methodists have inhabited for generations. Conrad Hicks reminds us that we have been present on the Rock of Gibraltar for more than 250 years; chaplaincy to the armed forces is one of the oldest expressions of Methodist ministry; the President records a chapel designed around Mr Wesley's preferences finding a new use.

Other articles tell us of opportunities that Methodists have seized which were unimaginable before the mid-21st century. You can read how a Minecraft Church pioneer in Kidlington has taken the world-building game to a new level, inviting people of all ages to respond creatively to the Bible and the creative way in which the Modern Art Committee has exhibited its work both in Bradford and in Ditchling is unlikely to have happened in earlier generations.

There is much in between as the mission opportunities that emerged in the mid-20th century – in radio, at Greenbelt and other festivals, in school or retail chaplaincy – are dependent on the faithful (and sometimes nocturnal) ministry of people representing the Methodist Church in those places.

For so many – be it on the airwaves, in a workplace, amidst leisure activities – Methodists are able to say 'here we are'. And 'here' is the key word in Becky Cherriman's poem. Like her, I ask,

isn't this what it is all about....

how we change this earth and one another

with what we bring, by being here?

Because everything is connected.

So, it's goodbye to *The Connexion*, but it's hello to ever evolving ways of Methodists being connected by being 'here', wherever 'here' is.

The Revd Dr Jonathan R Hustler  
Secretary of the Conference

## Highlights



Minecraft in Church



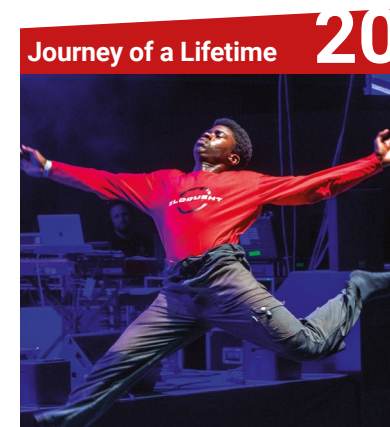
Love Triumphant



School Worship



I fought the law



Journey of a Lifetime



Pause for Thought

## Yorkshire Net Zero

The Yorkshire North and East District has celebrated the successful completion of 'Building Sustainable Hope', a £1.1 million decarbonisation project that the district has been running alongside the wider Methodist Church's commitment to climate justice and net-zero by 2030.

'Building Sustainable Hope' has enabled 20 churches to significantly reduce their carbon footprint through the installation of sustainable technologies. To mark the occasion, a special service was held on the 26 September at Northallerton Methodist Church.

The Revd Leslie Newton, Chair of the Yorkshire North and East Methodist District, commented, "Through our 'Building Sustainable Hope' project, the District has been taking important steps on our journey to Net Zero, affirming that caring for creation and caring for communities go hand in hand. By working together, churches have been able to reduce their carbon footprint and created greener, more welcoming spaces that serve both congregations and their neighbours. Every step forward makes a real difference and shows what is possible when faith and action come together."



# Blocks and Bricks

Screen time is a valuable commodity to children, as many parents can testify! While often seen as something to be restricted, screen time can be engaging and fun, and even sociable. Kidlington Methodist Church in the Northampton District have been experimenting with the computer game Minecraft as a way of being church. Minecraft is a creative game of world-building, particularly popular with 7–15-year-olds, but accessible to all. For several years, Kidlington Methodist Church have run a monthly all-age afternoon, Minecraft Church, in which a Bible story is shared and people are invited to respond to it creatively, either by building in Minecraft or with real-life craft materials.

“The children love these meetings and the comments we hear are so encouraging! They wish we could run it every week, they don’t want to leave after a session. The children pester their parents to arrange their diaries to be sure they can come. It is a joy to be part of such enthusiasm,” shares Emma Huber, Minecraft Church pioneer.

**“What was great was that the children were actively and equally involved and contributing to the service.”**

“Minecraft is also a very inclusive way of being church. A number of neurodiverse children and families who feel confident around the computer game are regulars and are able to make a valuable contribution to the proceedings. One parent commented that although their child had always been taken to church, this was the first time they really felt they belonged.

**“...many of the comments afterwards highlighted how inclusive the format was...”**

After running a separate session for several years, last year we were confident enough to incorporate Minecraft into our normal Sunday worship. This required real courage and open-mindedness on the part of our regular congregation. It was hard to explain exactly what to expect in advance, and it was a real step into the unknown for many. This courage was rewarded however, as the service was very well received. There were activities and discussion questions available, ensuring there was something for everyone, and projector screens

allowed the activities of the people playing Minecraft to be seen by all. What was great was that the children were actively and equally involved and contributing to the service, participating in the discussions around them.”

The service was so successful that Emma and her team were soon invited to run another one at a different church in the circuit. Combining Minecraft with other crafts, discussion questions and a reading corner, they ensured there was something for everyone. “It was a very diverse congregation and many of the comments afterwards highlighted how inclusive the format was. We had a lot of giggles, particularly when a sheep started wandering around our virtual Minecraft church, baa-ing at not-entirely-appropriate moments!”

Another invitation followed, this time part of a circuit celebration service. A large number of children joined in with a creative activity based on the Bible story. They witnessed as, unprompted, older children took on responsibility for helping and encouraging the less experienced (of all ages!). The children discussed what they had built and why, which led to new insights and perspectives.

“We’ve since given advice to several churches interested in using Minecraft and know of one very rural church with no Wi-Fi and little to no technical expertise that is now regularly incorporating Minecraft in their activities. While Minecraft isn’t for everyone, we have shown that it can be integrated with a traditional service to create inclusive and truly all-age worship, and we are quite excited to see where it goes from here!”



## Blocks and Bricks – church for Minecrafters and Builders

Minecraft is a widely available computer game that costs around £7 to install on a mobile device. In a world composed of blocks of different types, a little like Lego, players craft and build anything imaginable, resulting in impressive builds in a short space of time.

Interested in trying out Minecraft Church? A good starting point is the monthly lectionary-based ‘Blocks and Bricks’ resource, which includes full instructions and session plans.



[kidlingtonmethodists.org.uk](http://kidlingtonmethodists.org.uk)

No great technical expertise is required. You don’t even need to have access to the internet! ‘Blocks and Bricks’ has instructions for leaders and Minecrafters and even provides a Plan B activity to complete with Lego or junk modelling.

Alternatively, visit [minecraftchurch.uk](http://minecraftchurch.uk) for information and example session plans created by the Revd Kevin Colyer, an Anglican Minecraft Church pioneer. Watch this video about his work and see Minecraft Church in action at [youtube.com/watch?v=Xmui7LTsFX4](https://youtube.com/watch?v=Xmui7LTsFX4)





# OUR STORY OUR SONG



THE REVd RICHARD ANDREW

**Everyone has a story to tell. Everyone has a song to sing. That's the basic idea behind the presidential theme, Our Story, Our Song. President of the Conference, the Revd Richard Andrew, explains how, at its heart, the theme is about testimony and witness.**

What stories do we want to tell about ourselves? What songs do we want to sing and live? Are they life-giving or soul-destroying? Are they narrow or broad enough to make space for the stories of others, especially those who are marginalised? Are they Spirit-breathed and Christ led? Do they open up the possibility of a new chapter or chorus? These are the questions we have been asking as we have begun our journey around the Connexion.

## FIRST ENGAGEMENTS

One of our very first engagements saw me and Matthew Forsyth (Vice-President of the Methodist Conference) visit the Dorset South and West Circuit for the Tolpuddle Festival weekend, sharing the

**"There were some remarkable synergies in the stories of the places that I visited ..."**

rich history the Methodist Church has of seeking justice for people from all parts of society, and our determination to continue to walk alongside those seeking justice just at the Martyrs did with 'God as their guide'.

After that, I visited the Scotland District hoping to discover something of the song that Methodist churches in the district were learning to sing. There were some remarkable synergies in the stories of the places that I visited with an emphasis on hospitality, practical responses to human need, deep listening and valuing people simply as they are.

At St John's, Arbroath, an original octagonal chapel where Wesley preached has been converted into a café – the Totum Kirkie (the name of an eight-sided spinning toy) – and exhibition space. The church has employed a lay pastor, Sue Marshall-Jennings, and has made 14 new members over the past year as it has got to know its community better.

A visit to Stirling provided an opportunity to hear from Deacon Natalie Clark

about the church's plans to develop a community pantry in response to its mission listening in the community. A short trip to Inverness provided an opportunity to learn about the local church's involvement in the Bike Shed, a community hub in a deprived area of the town. We were there for the Open Mic night where a variety of local people brought poems, songs and puppets, all equally valued and received.

The visit provided a really encouraging insight into the ways in which churches in the district had engaged communities and spread a table of grace in the midst, making use of refurbished church spaces, community hubs and city thoroughfares.

## FESTIVALS AND EXHIBITIONS

In August, I attended my first Greenbelt Festival but it certainly won't be the last! The festival has an underpinning Christian ethos but provides a safe, inclusive space in which to be whether you are a person of faith or not. The uniting element is a shared concern for social justice.

Highlights for me were the wonderful team from the Methodist Church at the Hope and Anchor venue, a thought provoking alcohol-free space; being glitter balled by the Youth President; a shared reflection group of inter-faith leaders facilitated by Micky Youngson; the Christian Aid giant kintsugi pot on which we were invited to write messages of hope; inspirational music, talks and worship; and, of course, coffee and conversation with friends old and new.

If you've never been to Greenbelt, do think about coming, whether as a guest or a volunteer. There is a strong Methodist presence at the Festival and people return year by year, which tells me something.

In early September I visited the Yorkshire West Methodist District to celebrate the opening of the *Everything is Connected* exhibition which displayed several paintings from the Methodist

Modern Art Collection across a number of venues (read more about this on pages 8 and 9).

The paintings create opportunities for conversations about the relationship between faith, culture and justice and the Yorkshire West District has a lot to teach us about building partnerships and developing creative opportunities for mission.

After Yorkshire, Matt and I travelled to Manchester to celebrate Methodist Central Hall becoming a church of sanctuary. We took part in a service where civic, ecumenical and faith leaders all came together to celebrate this incredible accolade.

As we have begun our travels, we have discovered stories of imagination and hope, of risk taking and deep commitment to the marginalised and, of course, fear and anxiety. But amidst all of this, there is a deep sense that God is at work amongst us. As we move around the Connexion, we hope and pray that we will continue to find a Church and a people that is being breathed back into life.

MATTHEW FORSYTH





# Love Triumphant

## at Ben Rhydding Methodist Church

Here, where doors open with unfurling leaves,  
where a cradle rolls out children born  
in the affectionate regard of all hearts.  
Here, where an organ mourns those who went to war,  
and angels wait with wings on their throats  
behind glass fogged like doubt,  
where marks on stone, which seem to tally every prayer,  
remind that for each smoothed to silk,  
there are many more battered and marked,  
and all hold up the whole.

Here, where some evenings  
the sun through glass is so bright  
we await a house for it to go behind,  
where nails recall those ancient nails,  
rusted with Christ's blessed blood,  
where ghosts of Bible moths in canonical black  
crowd round the Pentecostal flame,  
where sewers together sow  
hues like wheat or grapes  
into a spectrum of hope and love triumphant,

here, I meet a man who tells me he's curious to feel  
how the space will be changed by what we bring here,  
and I gaze up at all these touching arches,  
think isn't that what it is all about,  
how we work to shoulder the perils,  
these structures we build,  
hold together our understanding of the heavens,  
how we change this earth and one another  
with what we bring, by being here?  
Because everything is connected.

Becky Cherriman,  
Creative Writer in Residence

As five exhibitions of the Methodist Modern Art Collection were held in Bradford as part of the City of Culture 2025 celebrations, Verity Smith, Faith & Arts Development Lead in the Yorkshire West Methodist District reflects on the experience of *Everything is Connected*.

The artist Maggi Hambling is quoted as having once said, "Whatever you're feeling, have a conversation with your work. Sometimes I have arguments with it."

I have certainly had conversations with myself during the planning and development of the exhibition of *Everything is Connected* in recent months, and these continued in the days following the opening weekend, which included three launch events, two services, one faith trail and the presence of the President of the Methodist Conference!

A trail of art, sculpture and community creations, *Everything is Connected* was an ambitiously planned series of five connected exhibitions at venues across Bradford and beyond. It was a privilege to showcase a selection of original works from the Methodist Modern Art Collection (MMAC) alongside powerful responses by artists and children in the local community. Hope, despair, joy, sadness, love, death, loss, grief, conflict, pain, light, creation and renewal – the exhibitions represented all these things.

The group of paintings and responses from artists and children in Ben Rhydding Methodist Church's local community was an incredibly powerful body of work on the theme of peril.

Displayed alongside these community creations was *Gaza in Ruins: From Rubble Reborn* (top right), a stoneware ceramic sculpture created in response to Jyoti Sahi's painting, *Dalit Madonna* (top centre), by artist Mo Schofield. Schofield's sculpture invites reflection on birth, hope and humanity across borders.



**"Hope, despair, joy, sadness, love, death, loss, grief, conflict, pain, light, creation and renewal. The exhibitions represented all these things."**

It was not produced against anyone but for someone. In this case, the 'someone' is representative of all those born in times of destruction, but here represented by an unnamed, unknown baby in Gaza. Displaying this work presented an opportunity to engage people with the realities on the ground in Gaza and the Methodist Church's shared work happening in the region.

In stark contrast to the other paintings and works at the venue, John Reilly's *Love Triumphant* acted as a compelling reminder that there is always hope. Creative Writer in Residence, Becky Cherriman, wrote a beautiful poem in response that not only captures the essence of the specific building at Ben Rhydding (left), but the project as a whole across a diverse district; a journey through art and faith against the backdrop of a world currently more perilous than it has been for some decades.

What I keep returning to is the stories of the people behind the art. The Revd Kerry Tankard (Chair of Yorkshire West District) shared in his homily on the first Sunday of the new connexional year, "Creativity is the gift; it is the use that is the human's decision." These are the things that help people of all faiths and none make connections to each other and find their place in the world.

**"These are the things that help people of all faiths and none make connections to each other and find their place in the world."**

On a very personal note, it was my late mother, the Revd Dr Liz Smith – former Chair of the Leeds District (as was) – who was a passionate advocate of the Methodist Modern Art Collection and without whose influence, in life and in spirit, I wouldn't have taken on this project. Her enthusiasm, love and compassion for people, poetry and paintings has significantly rubbed off on me – a gift that I will be eternally thankful for.

**Keen to know more about the Methodist Modern Art Collection?**

Visit [methodist.org.uk/ArtCollection](https://methodist.org.uk/ArtCollection) to find out more and to see where the Collection is next on display.

*Gaza in Ruins: From Rubble Reborn* is on display at Bradford Cathedral until 28 November. Visit [bradfordcathedral.org](https://bradfordcathedral.org) to plan your visit.







# Guiding young soldiers

Currently chaplain for the 6 Regiment Royal Logistic Corps in Thirsk, the Revd Robert J Birnie ObISB CF shares his life as an Army chaplain and ministering to the young men and women who join up.

"I've always thought deep down, every chaplain should in their heart be a pacifist, but who's going to minister to those who don't have that choice?"

"As a military chaplain I don't have to be in favour of armed conflict to minister to soldiers: if you have seen the physical and emotional impact of conflict you quickly realise that conflict is not part of God's plan for creation. In fact, I don't know any soldier who has experienced conflict who would not tell you war must only ever be a last resort.

"As a chaplain it's not my job to stand in judgement, but rather to see our soldiers as precious in the sight of God. And it's not for me to stand in judgement of a job that we as a nation ask them to do. We all love it when the military go in after an earthquake and bring humanitarian relief. That's all great. But when we send these young men and women to fight and sometimes die to secure the peace, then we can't make moral judgments on them."

**"You'll be with a soldier, up to your knees in water and mud...and you'll have those conversations about life."**

Uniformed service has always played a part in Robert's life. He served for a short period in the Army before leaving to serve with the police in Northern Ireland during the difficult years of the Troubles. Then, following theological training, he spent 14 years working in inner-city ministry. When a



friend became a military chaplain, it sparked an interest. "I thought, well, I'd worked with the Army for years and often accompanied them on many patrols."

"I enjoy guiding young people to adapt to the high values and standards of the Army. They are often bombarded in their young lives with so much negativity, whether through social media or poor role models. As a chaplain it's a privilege to be part of an organisation that will provide them with a moral framework, a good education, teach life skills, trades, and take these young people on amazing adventures. They will make lifetime friendships. Being a chaplain, I have a wonderful role in helping to steer them in their life choices.

"A chaplain sees the impact that a lack of life experience and good role modelling means when the first life crisis comes along: you struggle. My grandfather raised me when I was a child and he gave me the wisdom and tools to work through life's difficulties. Army life can help these young people to be more physically and mentally fit for what life throws at them.

## FINDING WAYS TO RELATE

"I love being a chaplain and I can relate to many of these youngsters' backgrounds. I grew up in a sectarian, strife-torn city, and from the age of five I never knew a world without senseless violence. I can understand their desperate need to escape social deprivation and non-existent education. Joining the army at 17 was my way of escaping this same world. I understand their background and this is why as a chaplain I love the opportunity of having an incarnational ministry. No more so than when I join a tour or exercise: I've had the amazing privilege of being alongside soldiers in Afghanistan and Iraq. On exercise



**"Being a chaplain, I have a wonderful role in helping to steer them in their life choices."**

I have slept under the stars in the Falklands when it was absolutely freezing; I've lived in the mountains for weeks in horrendous weather and sweltered in Kenya. You'll be with a soldier, up to your knees in water and mud, or baking in heat in a shelter at 3am during an attack, and you'll have those conversations about life – and then the question they often ask: 'What made you do this, Padre?' Then slowly questions about God will come.

"Often someone you've chatted to on and off for ages will suddenly say, 'Can I see you for a minute?' And then they'll open up about a life of hurt or how they've got themselves into a complete mess and don't know what to do. Things like prayer may be a new experience for them. When I suggest 'Do you mind if we pray?' often the first bravado response you get is, 'I don't believe in God' and I'll reply 'that's ok, God believes in you'. That brings a smile to their faces.

"It may be that the only time they will come into any Christian spirituality is through the chaplain. But the words and theological concepts we use in church settings will make absolutely no sense, so you have to find a way of sharing the message of Christ and the hope of good news that these soldiers can understand. It's nice to sit in your armchair and to be a moral theologian about war, but who's going to reach these young people who we ask to bring us the same freedom that allows us to worship?"



# Helping children find God

Deacon Helen Coleman didn't expect to set foot in school again, but finds ministering in a primary school is a privilege, as she explains.

Some say their schooldays were the best time of their life. Not me. I had undiagnosed dyslexia and I always found school incredibly difficult. On my last day, my form teacher said I was good for nothing and would never achieve anything in life. Yet today I am a Methodist minister with two degrees working part-time as a chaplain at Nutgrove Methodist Primary School in Merseyside. God has a sense of humour!

I admit that if I'm asked to see the headteacher, I still panic. My first thought is "Oh no, what am I in trouble for?" But I'm not the person I used to be, and all is calm and very positive.

The Revd Andy Moffoot, the Superintendent Minister of the Sankey Valley Circuit, also supports Nutgrove School: "At junior school I found myself in the headteacher's office a lot as I was 'school bell monitor' and I needed the headteacher's permission to ring the bell. In a very different way, I now find myself continuing to support a headteacher, as well as their staff and the children in school. I really enjoy the privilege of contributing to the life of the school, leading assemblies and representing the Church on certain occasions."

**"Working within Nutgrove School is a blessing and a privilege."**

## SCHOOL WORSHIP

As chaplain, working within Nutgrove School is a blessing and a privilege as I seek ways to engage effectively with staff and children. I teach and love engaging with the children as they seek answers to their many and varied questions. I love nothing better than for them to quiz me on my faith, as it makes me think through what I believe. Sometimes I tell them I must go away and research an answer, which is great as it shows them we all continue to learn and grow.

I lead regular times of school worship (assembly), when we look at, for example, what the Lord's Prayer means and try to answer questions such as 'Who is this Jesus?' The children love taking part, whether acting out stories, saying prayers or operating the technology.

A special time in the school year is Prayer Space week. I set up interactive prayer stations and, each day, in slots of 20-30 minutes, groups of six to eight children come to the room to explore the space. Over the week every child in the school comes to the room, regardless of whether they have a faith background or not. It's an opportunity to ask questions of God; to be still; to think about the community and the world; and to write their own prayers.

The questions the children pose for God give food for thought. Below are some examples:



## SUPPORTIVE PRESENCE

I try to be a regular presence within the school, usually present in the dinner hall once a week, giving every child an opportunity to speak to me. It's often a significant time to have a quick catch up with the staff too.

Throughout the school year I attend significant events led by the children, especially when they present a worship or a play to their families. At the end of the school year, I help present Bibles to the Year Six leavers and give each of them a leaver's bag, which includes a holding cross and other encouraging items.

I also try to support staff as a listening ear and encourager. Some share with me when things are difficult, knowing that I will hold them in prayer. To give the staff a psychological lift during Covid-19, I made wellbeing boxes for every member of staff, including the cleaner, lunch staff and caretaker.

So, who would have thought I'd find myself working in a school? It's not what I would have expected, but God knows best, it's a joy and I love it!

At a wider level, there are many advantages when the Methodist Church is involved in schools. As the Revd Andy Moffoot says: "The Sankey Valley Circuit cherishes having a Methodist school here. Sometimes the Circuit offers practical support, such as funding some new playground markings. The relationship with the school is mutually supportive and the school helps the Church. For example, one of our local societies relinquished its unsuitable church building and is now hosted within the school."



**Deacon Helen Coleman** is the Chaplain of Nutgrove Methodist Primary School

## FIND OUT MORE

For information about God's call to work with schools so that children, communities and churches can flourish, go to [methodist.org.uk/FlourishSchools](https://methodist.org.uk/FlourishSchools)



# Voices for Haiti: A call to Prayer and Solidarity

**The church's doors remain open as it seeks to offer hope to its communities.**

**In the heart of the Caribbean, Haiti stands as a symbol of resistance, resilience and faith. Yet at present its people are suffering. The Voices for Haiti prayer campaign invites British Methodists to lift our voices in prayerful solidarity with our Haitian siblings.**

## A HISTORY OF RESISTANCE AND FAITH

Haiti's story is one of extraordinary courage. In 1804, it became the first Black republic and was the first nation to abolish slavery following a successful revolution against French colonial rule. The legacy of resistance has shaped Haitian identity and continues to inspire movements for justice.

Methodism in Haiti began in 1817 at the request of the Haitian President Alexandre Pétion who invited missionaries from the Methodist Missionary Society to support in the establishment of a school system. After foreign missionaries were expelled by Pétion's successor, three young Haitians developed the early Methodist presence in Haiti.

**"Let us stand with Haiti – not only in crisis but in hope."**

Over the past two centuries, the Methodist Church in Haiti – now a District of the Methodist Church in the Caribbean and the Americas (MCCA) – has grown into a significant spiritual and social force. It currently has over 150 congregations, operates 122 schools and 7 medical clinics.

## HAITI TODAY: POLITICAL INSTABILITY AND VIOLENCE

Today, Haiti faces significant challenges. The 2010 earthquake compounded the longstanding challenges facing the nation, causing the deaths of over 200,000 people and displacing hundreds of thousands.

More recently, since the assassination of Haiti President Moïse Jovenel in July 2021 various armed gangs have grown in the political vacuum. Gang violence has escalated to unprecedented levels. The humanitarian toll is staggering: over 4,000 people have been killed; over one million people are displaced and half of the population faces acute food insecurity.

Yet, amid this chaos, the Haitian people continue to resist. Their resilience is rooted in care for community and faith – and the Church remains a beacon of hope.

## THE ROLE OF THE HAITI DISTRICT

Amid unimaginable hardship, the Haiti District continues to walk faithfully alongside its communities. The church shared in the daily struggles of its people – facing the same dangers, shortages and uncertainties.

The Haiti District of the MCCA has been at the forefront of responding to both disasters and social upheaval, living alongside its affected communities and experiencing the same challenges and sufferings. The church's doors remain open as it seeks to offer hope to its communities. Each week, congregations gather in search of comfort, strength and the presence of God. Teachers continue to teach and children still want to learn. Though resources are scarce, the church offers what it can distributing food and essential goods when funds allow. The Methodist Churches in Britain and Ireland have supported the Haiti District in this work through solidarity grants of the World Mission Fund.

But the burden is heavy. Our friends in Haiti tell us that hope is wearing thin. Ministers and staff, stretched beyond their limits, are beginning to despair. Their cry echoes across our global family of churches: "Lord, how long must this suffering ensure?" In this moment, our prayers are not only needed – they are vital.

## VOICES FOR HAITI

A commitment to prayer is a critical part of our global relationships. It provides a faithful demonstration of our care for our global neighbour. The Voices for Haiti campaign, launching in January 2026, offers resources for personal and communal prayer, including testimonies from Haitians, weekly reflections and prayer prompts. Between 12 January and 16 February we are inviting you to record your prayers so that we can share them with the Haiti District. Whether you light a candle, lead a prayer in worship or share the campaign on social media, your voice matters.

Let us stand with Haiti – not only in crisis but in hope. Lifting our voices together in prayer for Haiti.



Sign up to receive emails from the **Voices for Haiti** campaign at [methodist.org.uk/VoicesForHaiti](https://methodist.org.uk/VoicesForHaiti)

**"Haiti is in a state of chaos. The world is too busy with other crises to spare a thought for this, the first Black republic in the world. Consider:**

- **It saw off the armies of France, Spain and England in its struggle for independence.**
- **France imposed a crippling indemnity on the new nation destroying forever any chance of building a sound economy.**
- **A British diplomat wrote a widely-publicised book accusing Haiti of devil worship.**
- **American marines occupied Haiti for 30 years and USA corporates raped the country, extracting all its mineral and agricultural wealth.**
- **Dictators ruled.**
- **The 2010 earthquake claimed 303,000 lives.**
- **A head of state was assassinated.**
- **Gangs rule.**
- **So many would-be helpers have found it all too difficult and have pulled out.**
- **British Methodists, while recognising the difficulties, must not be among them. We must pray, give, hope, organise and stand in solidarity with this wonderful people in their hour of need."**

**The Revd Lord Leslie Griffiths of Burry Port, Co-Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Haiti, Supernumerary Methodist Minister and Minister in Haiti between 1970 and 1980.**



# I fought the law

In one of the most-watched dramas of the year, *I fought the law* captivated audiences with its portrayal of real-life campaigner and bereaved mother Ann Ming – played by Sheridan Smith – and her challenge of the legal system. With each episode of the four-part drama drawing around 5.5 million viewers and a staggering 15 million streams, *I fought the law* depicts Ann successfully lobbying at the highest level of Government to change the Double Jeopardy Law and ensure that her daughter Julie's murderer was convicted.

Mark Braithwaite, who features in the drama, was a Detective Sergeant at the time of the 1989 murder and is a member of the Methodist Church.

He played a key role in supporting the Mings throughout their ordeal and subsequent campaign, rising to the ranks of Detective Chief Superintendent by the time of his retirement.

His ongoing commitment to the family, investigating the crime and personally and professionally supporting the campaign he says is rooted in his faith and the Christian principles of justice, truth and compassion.

Julie Hogg went missing in November 1989; Ann Ming contacted the police convinced something had happened to her daughter who had failed to return home having not turned up to a solicitor's appointment to commence separation proceedings from her estranged husband.



Forensic investigators searched Julie's house for days, then it was sealed and left empty over the winter. When it was re-occupied by Julie's estranged husband and their son, a terrible smell emerged and Ann, who had medical experience, recognised the smell and discovered Julie's decomposing body hidden behind the bathtub.

This was February 1990 and Mark was brought on to the case both as part of the investigation team and then as the family liaison officer.

**"The values emphasised in Methodism... align closely with the principles I upheld throughout my career as a police officer."**

A local man from Billingham, William Dunlop, was charged with Julie's murder. Two trials were held, but both juries couldn't reach a verdict and the judge acquitted the accused after the second trial.

While serving time for another offence, he admitted to killing Julie and later confirmed it in a formal interview. He was then charged with two counts of perjury for giving false evidence during both trials and was sentenced to six years imprisonment on both counts. Mark explained that, for Ann, this was an unbearable injustice.

## Ann ran an unbelievable campaign to change the law.

Her view was that the killer had murdered her daughter, yet the ancient law of Double Jeopardy shielded him from being tried again. This sense of injustice compounded with grief drove her campaign for change.

She met with top Government officials including Home Secretaries Jack Straw and David Blunkett. She even addressed a House of Lords commission.

Mark describes her as a plain-speaking person, who didn't back down, ultimately Parliament changed the 800-year-old Double Jeopardy law.

In 2006, Dunlop pleaded guilty to murdering Julie and was sentenced to life imprisonment.

"Ann ran an unbelievable campaign to change the law. She spoke to anybody and everybody who would listen, anyone who was in a position to influence it. I don't think many people realise the huge significance of what she achieved, which has helped other families including Stephen Lawrence's. For my part, it's an investigation I carried for the best part of 18 years of my 32-year police career. It has been a huge privilege to journey with the family," says Mark.

*I fought the law* is available to stream now on ITV X

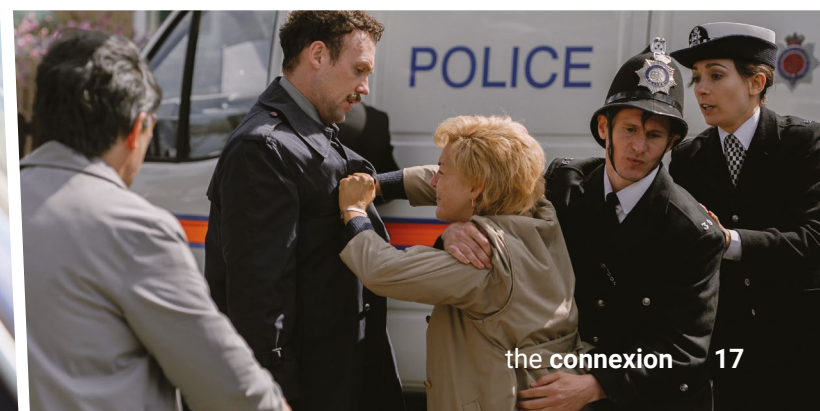
The Methodist Church is a justice-seeking Church. Find out more at [methodist.org.uk/Justice](https://methodist.org.uk/Justice)

While he is very clear that his job as a police officer was to investigate the crime and present the evidence through prosecuting counsel, this has gone hand in hand with his deep commitment through his Christian faith to truth, fairness and compassion.

Mark was first introduced to the Christian faith through his parents. He and his wife were married in a Methodist church, 41 years ago, in Middlesbrough where he was baptised and has been a committed member ever since.

Today, he volunteers as chair of the regional safeguarding group for the Newcastle and Darlington Methodist Districts and also serves as the circuit safeguarding advisor, a role that draws on his policing background and related experience.

"My church life means a great deal to me. I find that many of the values emphasised in Methodism – and in Church life more broadly, such as forgiveness, truth, fairness, care for others and the pursuit of justice – have always resonated deeply with me. They align closely with the principles I upheld throughout my career as a police officer."





# Community re-born in Gibraltar



Some of our new members  
had intentionally sought us  
out as they were looking  
for an inclusive church that  
would be a safe place for all.



**Conrad Hicks explains how, amongst the challenges, with renewed ecumenical partnerships the Methodist Church is once again becoming a hub of faith, service and connection in Gibraltar.**

Less than a week before the Methodist Conference began in 2023, I was asked if I would go to Gibraltar. The process of exploring a possible re-invitation in my current role had just begun, but there was a sudden need for a Superintendent in the Gibraltar Circuit. Taking on this appointment would mean living away from my wife, who is also a Methodist presbyter, but, after a period of prayerful deliberation, I agreed to go to Gibraltar for a period of two years.

## MOVING TO GIBRALTAR

The original Methodist church building in Gibraltar includes a worship area, a manse, an apartment and studio flat, a bookshop and a café. Unfortunately, one of those disputes that occasionally arise in the life of the Church has meant that I have been unable to use that building and we are currently embroiled in legal proceedings to recover it. Being stationed to a circuit without being able to be present in its property has brought its challenges.

However, having found two members who wanted to remain loyal to the Methodist Church, the District appointed new Trustees under special Standing Orders to support the work of revitalising the

“... our  
tiny congregation  
began to grow...”

Methodist Church in Gibraltar. The local Anglican Cathedral offered for us to use one of their side chapels for worship each Sunday. It meant meeting at 9.00am, which wasn't ideal for the Gibraltarian culture and context, but this generous offer meant that we could continue the Methodist worship and witness that had first begun in Gibraltar in 1769.

Over the following weeks, one or two people noticed us as they came to the Cathedral for private prayer or simply to ask about the things of God; and our tiny congregation began to grow. I remember there being just one person

in the congregation on Remembrance Sunday 2023; by the grace of God there were thirteen of us on Remembrance Sunday 2024. One of our two members suggested everyone be invited back to theirs for refreshments after worship each Sunday. The fellowship began to deepen.

## A GROWING FELLOWSHIP

New attendees were asking questions about the Bible, so we started a Bible study which soon attracted around half a dozen people each week. Bible study then became Confirmation class for a season, and, within two years, the membership had grown to eleven. Some of our new members had intentionally sought us out as they were looking for an inclusive church that would be a safe place for all. Others, who were passing through personal or economic challenges, were seeking to be among Christians who would treat them with respect. Others were Methodists new to Gibraltar.

Given Methodism's long-established presence in Gibraltar and its much-respected work among the military, spanning over 250 years, the Methodist Superintendent is afforded many opportunities because of their role. I found myself being invited by the Gibraltar Broadcasting Company on average once a month, either to record a week's reflections for the breakfast radio show; or to record a Thought for the Weekend for broadcast on television. I was invited to countless civic and military events, from the Governor's garden party

to the remembrance service for the Battle of Trafalgar. My face became quickly recognisable in the community, and I found that walking down Main Street and around the city in my clerical collar led to many conversations.

## SAYING GOODBYE

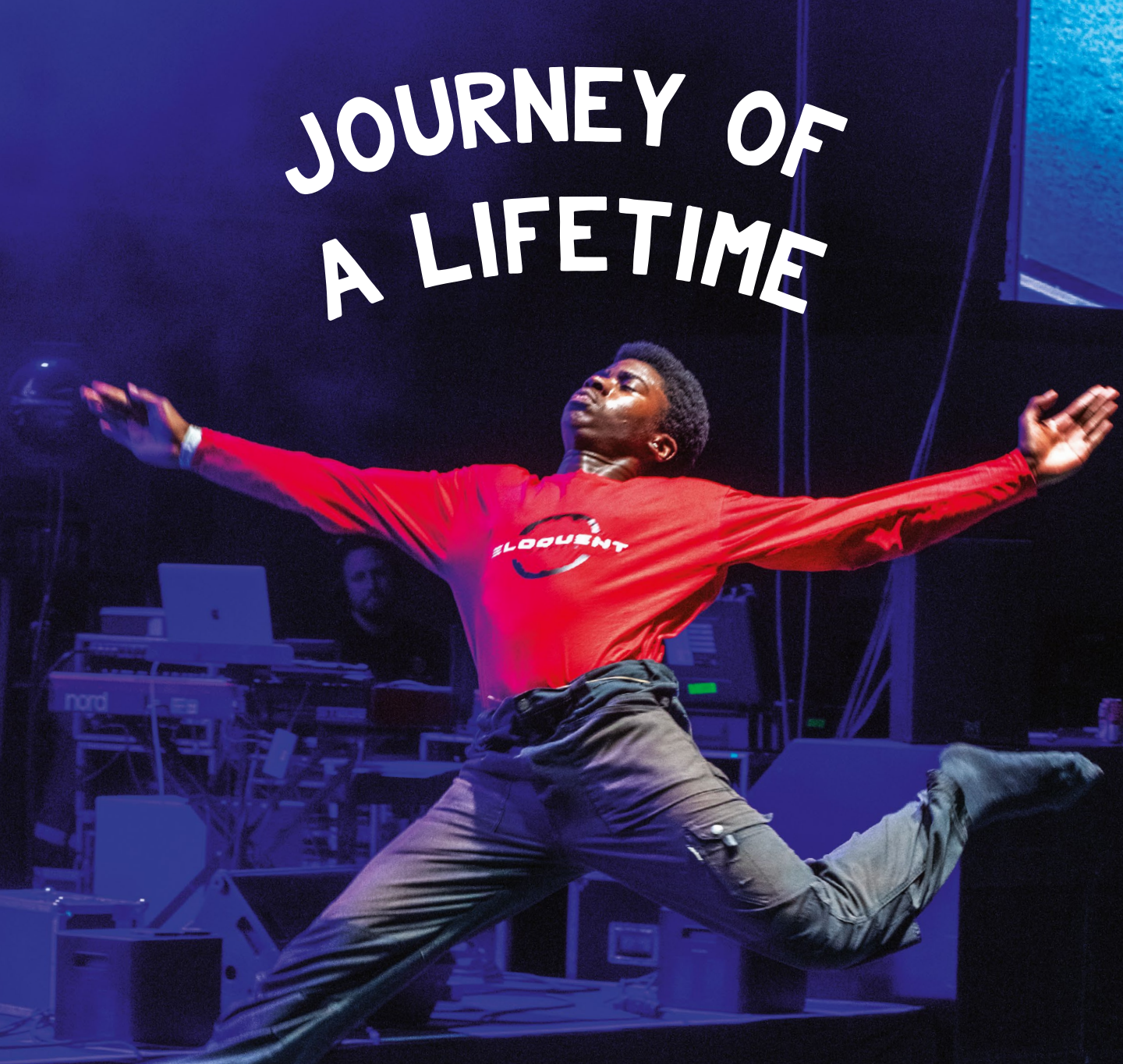
It was with very mixed emotions that I left Gibraltar this August to take up a new role in mainland Britain. I had fallen in love with the community and forged many precious relationships. I was also leaving before our legal claim on the building journeyed through the courts. After moving house seven times in my first five months in Gibraltar, it became obvious that our legal claim would take longer than we had hoped and an apartment was rented into which my successor will now move. Blessedly, this work has been identified as the District's New Places for New People initiative and monies are waiting for the day when we regain access to our building, so that we can use its cafe and other facilities for outreach and mission.

The next Superintendent will be a real blessing to Gibraltar and its Methodist community. He is not able to begin until February, so I ask for your prayers as a team of ministers go out to Gibraltar throughout the autumn to support the leaders and members of this beautiful, fragile, re-born Methodist community; and I ask your prayers for the Revd David Barrett as he moves to Gibraltar and takes up the role of Superintendent from February 2026.





# JOURNEY OF A LIFETIME



**More than 1,700 children and young people aged between 4 to 18 years old went on 'The Journey of a Lifetime' at 3Generate, the Methodist Children and Youth Assembly held at the NEC, Birmingham from Friday 3 to Sunday 5 October. Genesis Padgett, the Methodist Youth President, offers this report on the event.**

It was a tremendous thrill to see all the young people come into the hall on the Friday evening. They had travelled from all corners of the Connexion. Some, including those from the southwest and Scotland, had been on the road for many hours but all were super excited. For those who were new to the event, the size of the venue can be mind-blowing. Not including all the accommodation, the 3Generate event fills six hangar-sized halls at the NEC.

As the number of people increases so does the noise as the young people start to explore. We have to keep our young people entertained for the weekend and a lot of thought goes into ensuring that we have a good mix of things that are fun, thoughtful and faith-based.

To keep 3Generate as inclusive as we can, where possible, the events and activities are designed to be enjoyed by everyone. There are special spaces for those who may find the weekend overwhelming and need a little time out, and the programme is designed to ensure that people from all backgrounds can find something that speaks to them. This means a dodgeball competition in the sports centre, surfing simulators and animal encounters sit alongside music workshops, arts, talks on social justice,

the environment and almost every type of worship you can imagine. 3Generate is not a passive event, everyone is part of the journey.

For me, the most wonderful part of 3Generate were the worship sessions. God was at the centre and I've never seen so many young people in one place just wanting to worship and praise God together.

## BIGGER AND BETTER

Chris Parker was one of the organisers of the event. I asked him how it had gone: "This year was bigger than ever but it all went really well. There were lots of children, lots of young people, and they've all had a great time. They are all so keen to take part, they are all willing to explore, and they're all willing to look for ways of moving their faith on.

**"It's a testament to the Methodist Church that we can put together such a massive event full of children and young people, and shows that the Church is alive and well."**

The youth leaders and volunteers have been brilliant as well. They are looking after all these children and young people. They are making sure they are happy and they are connected, and they have done a fantastic job. It's a testament to the Methodist Church that we can put together such a massive event full of children and young people, and shows that the Church is alive and well."



This year we had a first with Richmond Methodist Primary School attending. The school's Headteacher, Mrs Stevenson, told me, "I believe 3Generate provides children with an opportunity to connect together, to develop deeper friendships and try new things. The independence that they've shown here has been phenomenal."

## FELLOWSHIP

Fellowship is a really important aspect of 3Generate. For many young people, their experience of being part of a Methodist Church may not involve being part of a large group of their peers.

Nick Cambridge is a leader from Heston and Castle Street Methodist Church, Cambridge: "It has been fantastic, full of joy and fun. There have been so many activities for everyone. It is important for young people to realise that their Church is something much bigger than they usually get on a typical Sunday morning. There's such a diverse range of people here and it is really something to behold with activities to encourage everyone on their journey."

Abby Godfrey is a youth leader from the Birmingham circuit who brought 37 young people. "There's been such a God presence this year, with really coherent experiences for the kids, particularly our 12-year-old boys, they had a really good time with the worship which was accessible and inspirational. We've just seen really good engagement from our kids. It's been great."

When I spoke to Jemima, aged 9, and Rachel, 11, they had loved the shared gaming activities, especially the rope ladders. Jemima says: "I like that. You can go up and down, backwards and forwards on it. It is competitive and fun to play." "3Generate is amazing!" added Rachel.



# Surviving Annunciation

**Trigger Warning:** This content mentions child sexual abuse and survivors of abuse, which may be distressing or triggering for some readers. Please proceed with care.

**Annunciation is a small watercolour – only 9 cm by 12 cm – yet there is a lot of controversy surrounding its artist and ownership. Ann Sumner, outgoing Chair of the Methodist Modern Art Committee Management Committee, explains how the Church asked survivors of abuse to speak into its exhibition.**

*Annunciation* was created by the famous English sculptor, typographer and printmaker, Eric Gill and was acquired for the Methodist Modern Art Collection (MMAC) to fill a gap in the biblical narrative of subjects that our paintings portray.

However, since posthumous revelations of Gill's family life became widely known – specifically the sexual abuse of his daughters and sister, revealed in Fiona McCarthy's biography published in 1989 – how to curate Gill's work has been a question for museums, galleries, churches and cathedrals alike.

Back in 2017, a decision was made to take *Annunciation* out of the touring collection of the MMAC, off the website and into the reserve collection.

Looking back now, it's clear that it may have felt as if the MMAC were trying to shut down open discussion. That's certainly how the Methodist Survivors Advisory Group (MSAG) members saw things when, in 2022, I approached the group about the future of the work, which had come to the fore again following protests damaging the *Ariel and Prospero* sculpture on the iconic BBC building.

By continuing to keep *Annunciation* out of view, we were effectively not acknowledging ownership of it, 'sweeping it under the carpet', as they put it, much as child sexual abuse had been for so long.

Consulting the MSAG, being guided by their thoughts and opinions, resulted in a new, clear pathway – fully acknowledging our ownership of it, returning it to the website with interpretation reflecting survivor voices and then seeking to lend it again.

As one survivor, Sarah, put it, "discussing sensitive topics such as abuse can be challenging. Traditionally, people have tended to avoid the subject, conceal it, or overlook the perpetrator's actions by focusing on their positive accomplishments. As survivors, we saw the Gill painting as an opportunity to change this narrative. Instead of hiding it we wanted to use the artwork to start conversations, acknowledge the victims, confront historical abuse and discuss its intersections with faith."

## A JOINT PROJECT

Thus work began on a project of co-curation that focused on looking anew at how survivors saw and interpreted the work in the light of what they knew about Gill's behaviour towards his daughters; their observations were hugely insightful.

Following this, we approached Ditchling Museum of Art + Craft to explore loaning *Annunciation* to them and developing a co-curation project working with the survivors, in the context of a wider exhibition entitled *It Takes a Village*. This exhibition would explore the lives of Gill's daughters, with the survivors selecting works and developing interpretation that focused on their stories and later lives – including their own drawings from childhood and some of Gill's portraits of them.

As part of research for that exhibition I went with one survivor, Vivien, and Kate Little, Safeguarding Survivor Lead Officer, to look anew at the microfiches of Gill's original diaries (now held in California) at the Tate Archive, London. Our work was intense, looking through a mountain of material that shed light on all aspects of Gill's family life. During a break, I asked Vivien, about the impact of reading these entries, knowing myself how shocking I had found some. She responded:

"I was shocked by how casually [Gill] treated the abuse he carried out. For instance, a typical entry in his diary would read. 'Met with ... to discuss painting. Worked on ... painting. Had

sex with [daughter's name].' This totally disgusted me, especially when I hear people say, 'Oh but he was a brilliant artist and you have to separate his life from his art'. No – perpetrators have to be exposed for what they are and Gill's casual attitude to his appalling crime increases it tenfold."

## HONOURING SURVIVORS

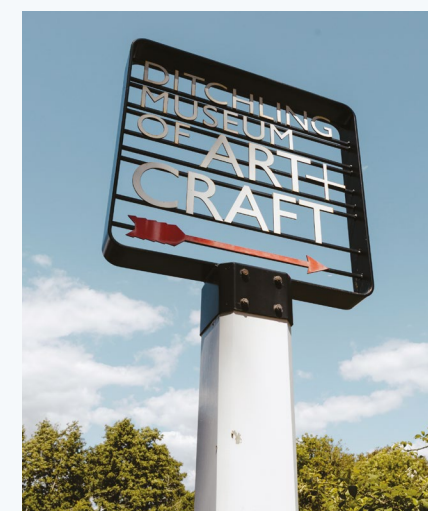
Due to Vivien's own personal experience, we agreed not to show one famous wood engraving image of Gill's daughter Petra, *Girl in Bath*, (1923) given the age Petra was when portrayed. Vivien explained:

"This picture was produced without the consent of the subject, in a very abusive position. One complaint received from a reporter was ... 'we had not had the courage to display his famous nude pictures', whereas what we felt we had done was have the courage to celebrate the survivor rather than the abuser."

Working with the Ditchling team and the survivors we have all learnt much. Listening to the voices of people who have experienced such abuse was illuminating and moving. The project has resulted in new understanding and new ways of looking at Gill's work. Co-curation will hopefully be a key part of the work of the MMAC going forward, listening to the voices of people who have relevant lived experience.



*It Takes a Village* runs until 1 February 2026 at the Ditchling Museum of Art + Craft, Ditchling, West Sussex.





# Gifted

This Advent and Christmas season, the Methodist Church invites you to join 'Gifted'.

**Gifted is a message of good news to a weary world...You are a gift. Made with love.**

Gifted is the Methodist Church's open invitation, speaking the good news to people that they matter. That they are beloved. Created with infinite care. A gift to the world, just as they are.

Together, all districts, circuits, local churches and fellowships of the Methodist Church are invited to remind people of their inherent worth and beauty – not because of what they've done, or what they can give – but because of who they are.

Gifted is for everyone: believers rejoicing at God's gift of Jesus, and those who might find the season more wearying than wonderful; people longing for transformation but feeling stuck. For those searching for something more, something real – but unsure where to look.

## HOW CAN YOUR CHURCH GET INVOLVED?

This Christmas, we're encouraging churches to share the good news of Gifted – and embody it!

What do your neighbours most need this season and how might you offer it, with generosity and grace?

Think about how your own church community already is, and can be, a gift to the people around you. That might mean lots of things you already do:

- Creating warm, welcoming spaces where people can simply be – with no expectations.
- Offering food, music, storytelling, or silence – gifts of presence and beauty.
- Making space in your services for vulnerability, for doubt, for grief as well as joy.

Perhaps you might want to reach out to people in your community, thanking them for what they do and declaring "you are a gift because..."

We've created cards just for this purpose, visit [methodistpublishing.org.uk](http://methodistpublishing.org.uk) to order.

## SINGING THE GOOD NEWS OF GIFTED

We are so excited to announce the upcoming release of our collaborative Christmas carol, a new version of 'Joy to the World'. Let us take you behind the scenes of the Methodist Church's Christmas single, *Joy!* – recorded at GloWormRecording in Glasgow.

*Joy!* celebrates the joy of collaboration and the creativity of our connexional Church. Local churches were invited to participate by gathering groups to sing along and join in together. A huge thank you to all who took part.



Methodist voices came together in Glasgow to record *Joy!*, a contemporary arrangement of the much-loved carol Joy to the World (from left to right: Izzy Wellings, Rubie Lemasurier and the Revd Heather Simmons). The single captures the excitement and celebration of the season, while also reflecting the joy we find in our shared life of faith. This is the third year the Methodist Church has released a Christmas single, continuing a growing tradition that brings people together through music.

As a Connexional Church, collaboration is central to who we are. The recording of *Joy!* reflects this spirit, with singers, musicians and staff gathering at Sprowston Methodist in Norwich to work side by side to create something that could be shared across the whole Methodist family. In music, as in ministry, our strength lies in Our Calling. Each voice contributing to something greater, each gift shared for the benefit of all.



In the heart of GloWormRecording studio, Ben Lawrence worked alongside the production team to blend contemporary sounds with the timeless words of Joy to the World, the team created a piece that celebrates both creativity and collaboration. The recording highlights the Church's commitment to using music as a joyful expression of faith.



This year's Christmas campaign is called Gifted, with the strapline: *You are a gift. Made with love.* The single forms part of a wider set of resources designed to help churches share this message of God's love in their local communities. Worship materials, digital assets and video content are all available to support services and outreach, helping congregations connect the joy of Christmas with the reality of God's gift to the world.

Access the resources at [methodist.org.uk/ChristmasResources](http://methodist.org.uk/ChristmasResources)



The single will be released in November, ahead of the busy Christmas season. The Gifted message is designed to stretch beyond church walls – resourcing church services while also reaching people unconnected to Christianity through digital adverts and creative outreach. Gifted offers a 'three-step journey' so each person can join in where they are: finding their worth, experiencing church as a gift, and discovering Jesus as the ultimate gift. Discover how it can support your church at [methodist.org.uk/GiftedThreeSteps](http://methodist.org.uk/GiftedThreeSteps)





# Pause for thought

**BBC's Pause for Thought** is a reflective radio segment found in three BBC Radio 2 programmes, offering spiritual insights from people from all faiths. It aims to inspire warmth, honesty and hope, connecting timeless truths with modern life.

Reaching millions across the UK, it engages listeners of all beliefs through thoughtful themes that connect with everyday life, often touching on current events. If you've listened to a Pause for Thought you will almost certainly have heard a Methodist contributor.

Currently the list of Methodist contributors includes Jonathan Mead, Tony Miles, David Waters, Michaela Youngson, Inderjit Bhogal, Jo Cox-Darling, Matt Finch, Thelma Commey, Trey Hall, Sue Peat and Delyth Liddell. Here, just a few of those listed, explain how they came to be contributors and give an insight into what goes on behind the scenes.

## DELYTH LIDDELL, METHODIST MINISTER

"Hello and welcome to 'All Things Considered'. I'm Delyth Liddell and today my guests are..." is a phrase that I'm well used to using, since I am one of four presenters on BBC Radio Wales' religious magazine programme. My radio work started when I was asked to reflect on my university chaplaincy work for a Radio 4 celebration service. The producer of that programme then asked me if I'd be interested in taking on some of Radio Wales' Pause for Thoughts (called 'Weekend Word') and, feeling completely out of my depth but willing to take on a challenge, I accepted.

Now, I present 'All Things Considered' and 'Sunday Celebrations' on BBC Radio Wales, and do regular

Pause for Thoughts on BBC Radio 4's Daily Service and on OJ Borg's show on BBC Radio 2 at 2.30 in the morning! Thankfully I don't have to record them at that time. The BBC call me at 11.00pm on the previous night, when OJ arrives at the BBC to prep for his show, and I record from my bed – both because I'm always in bed by then and because the sound is best when I'm surrounded by soft furnishings like a duvet! I've got to know OJ quite well with these late-night chats, both before we record and during when he always asks me what's going on in my life – we've discussed how my daughter broke her arm on national radio! They are always a pleasure to record but listen carefully – you may be able to hear my dogs snoring in the background!

## JO COX-DARLING, SUPERINTENDENT OF THE MANCHESTER CIRCUIT

The alarm clock rings at 4.30am. A few minutes later, I'm sat with headphones in (and tea to hand), listening in to the Owain Wyn-Evans early breakfast show. At 5.25am, at least one more cup of tea on the go and all the doors shut, I'll log in to the studio; literally praying that the internet connection stays stable. At 5.45am, the background music for the show is turned down, and I lean into the microphone – reciting 360 words on the reflective theme of the week. Three minutes and a short farewell later, and it's over for another week.

I do a breathing exercise, praying that some of my pre-prepared words might

connect with some of those listening – and return to the breakfast preparation and school uniform chaos with my family.

The deadline for next week is now looming, so at some point in the day, I'll remind myself of the forthcoming theme, writing it in large letters at the top of my notebook. I try as much as possible to tell stories that are personal, offering into the airwaves a heart-to-heart connection with listeners. So over the next few days, I'll search for a quote or two to focus my attention and lean into the experiences of the week to inspire an interesting story which will offer listeners something hopeful in the midst of daily life.

## DEACON SUE PEAT

When I applied to be on the Birthday Game – a daily phone in on BBC Radio 2, in December 2023, I had no idea what it would lead to – it was meant to be a bit of birthday fun!

I enjoyed the chat with Scott before I played the game and he was really interested in the work I do as a Retail Chaplain. Off air, he asked me if I would consider doing more work on his radio show! "Yes", I replied, "I would love to!" Just a week later, I was asked to do a few more things on his afternoon show – including reading a poem for shop workers at Christmas and saying a blessing for Scott and his partner Sam when they got married. It was all done over the phone, sat in my study.

When Scott moved over to hosting the Breakfast Show, he asked for me to join the Pause for Thought team. I was told that it would require me to be in the studio – at which point I very nearly said 'no'. The thought of having to travel across London on the tube was just as nerve wracking for me as being live on air! As the fear of it all filled my mind, I sensed God simply saying "Trust me..."

I have now done eight Pause for Thoughts on the Breakfast Show with Scott Mills, as well as two on Good Morning Sunday with the Revd Kate Bottley. I am so glad I trusted that God would be with me and equip me for this work. It is a reminder that we do not know where God will lead us when we say 'yes' to an opportunity. ▶



**"I had no idea what it would lead to – it was meant to be a bit of birthday fun!"**



## TREY HALL, DIRECTOR OF EVANGELISM AND GROWTH

On the Mondays I offer a Pause for Thought, my alarm goes at 5.00am and I'm out the door before 6.00am to cycle into BBC Broadcasting House. There's something invigorating about cycling across London Bridge at sunrise, knowing I'll soon be a small part of the Breakfast Show team, greeting 7 million listeners preparing for the day ahead.

Back in theological college, our professor asked us to carry a notebook with us at all times so we could note anything interesting, beautiful or challenging that stuck out to us as we went about our days. This practice has stuck with me over the past 30 years, and these notebooks are usually where my Pause for Thoughts begin: with a story, or a fragment of a story, that actually happened to me, or next to me, or to someone I know. Each week I try to craft something that holds story, depth, laughter and joy together



with sincere inclusion and an invitation to be open to a God who is, I believe, with and for all people.

It's a great privilege to be able to speak to 10% of the nation about God, and it's also wonderful to develop relationships with the BBC Presenters. I started working with Vanessa Feltz, and then moved to working with Zoe Ball, who is as lovely in person as she seems on camera or on air. Now I work with Scott Mills, with whom I share a deep love of House music!

## INDERJIT BHOGAL, PAST PRESIDENT OF THE CONFERENCE

I enjoy contributing to Pause for Thought. The theme is chosen by the producer, Michael Wakelin, and team, and my first reaction is often, "this is very good". Then later I often think, "what on earth am I going to say about this?"

Sometimes I talk with friends about the theme and ask for their thoughts. I read around the theme a little. I spend some time in silent meditation and prayer. Then I need a clear two to three hours to sit and write. I have no more than 360 words for the presentation, so there is no room for any waffle or wasted words.

I get into the theme with a story from personal experience, then I offer a couple of sentences of insight from my faith, usually a Bible verse or story.

**"He said he felt a friend  
was talking with him at a  
lonely time."**

In my view this is a great opportunity to speak to a wide range of people around the world. I hope I add to the thought processes of those who may be listening, perhaps with a different way of looking at important issues. I have received feedback from a remarkable range of people. It meant a lot to me when someone I know, who sleeps on a bench in a street in my city, called out to me when he saw me and said, "was that your voice I heard in the early hours of the morning?" He said he felt a friend was talking with him at a lonely time. ■

# saying goodbye

to the connexion magazine



In winter 2015, when the first issue of *The Connexion* was published, I was serving in my first appointment as the Ministerial Coordinator for Oversight of Ordained Ministries. One of the tasks that my colleagues and I had to do each year was to set the topic for a creative presentation that candidates for ordained ministry had to present to their District Candidates' Committee. I cannot now remember the exact wording, but we settled on a title drawn from the report *Issues of Connexionism in the 21st Century* that was going to the 2015 Conference with a resolution to commend it for study and reflection.

The report (from the Faith & Order Committee) began "Whether or not Methodism was 'born in song' is open to some debate, but it was certainly born as a Connexion." The report reminded us that connexion is our way of being as Methodists, not an optional extra in the life of our churches and circuits. More, it argued that the

sense of 'being connected' is important in the 21st century, in which societies are paradoxically both more connected through electronic media and more atomised as some forms of association have fallen into abeyance. The aspects of the life of the Methodist Church in Britain that this magazine has showcased over the last decade have shown us new and old ways of 'being together'.

The last decade has been a time of (arguably) unparalleled challenges; the global pandemic of 2020 and the restrictions that were imposed to limit the spread of the virus caused us to think afresh about what it means to be connected to each other. I do not know, for example, if we would have developed our Lent programme of online resources had Covid not accelerated our move online, but the engagement with the practical activities each year has been amazing.

The challenge set to candidates in 2015 produced some remarkably inventive presentations as candidates thought imaginatively about what it means to be a connexion. I only got to see or to hear a few of those that were presented to the District Committees (it was a different process then) but my recollection is that two ideas predominated. One was about connectedness – in different ways candidates expressed their understanding that Methodists belong together and what happens in one corner of the Connexion in some sense is an act of all of us. The other was about variety – within the network are very different expressions of what it means to be Methodist. ▶



Those who look back over the archive of *The Connexion* magazine will see those same two themes reflected. We have had a great variety of material with stories ranging from the celebration of our heritage to previously unthought-of ways of being the church in a community, with lay and ordained ministers sharing the gospel within and far beyond the walls of the Church. We have also seen elements that unite all those stories. The orb and cross has appeared in many pictures, but in many different contexts. Throughout its ten years, *The Connexion* has continued to successfully demonstrate the width and breadth of the Methodist Church and

supported Methodist communities in their mission to share the good news with people who are not involved with the Church. As we bring this final edition to a close, we find ourselves filled with gratitude – for all the ways *The Connexion* has helped us to share and shape our story and the countless conversations we’ve shared across these pages.

**Though this chapter ends, the story doesn’t have to. Let us reach out and share in new forms – through good news stories, social media, and quiet reflections. Let’s stay connected. ■**



Check out all the past issues of *The Connexion* at [methodist.org.uk/theconnexion](http://methodist.org.uk/theconnexion)

# Stay Connected with us!

Even though this is the final edition of *The Connexion* magazine, our story continues and we’d love you to keep in touch. Discover all the ways you can keep up to date and share your story with us.

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Don’t forget to add the Methodist Church website to your favourites so you can easily return for the latest updates.

*The Connexion* magazine may be ending, but our community is alive and growing. Thank you for being part of our story: let’s keep building the future together.



# SUCH A BIG MESS FOR SUCH LITTLE ANGELS.



The Methodist Church

***You are a gift. Made with love.***

Find Advent and Christmas resources at  
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