

Issue 24 · Autumn 2021

The **Methodist** Church 

the connexion



God for all

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



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What is the Connexion?

Methodists belong to local churches and also value being part of a larger community. In calling the Methodist Church in Britain 'the Connexion', Methodism reflects its historical and spiritual roots.

In the 18th century a 'connexion' simply meant those connected to a person or a group – for instance, a politician's network of supporters. So when people spoke of "Mr Wesley's Connexion" they meant followers of the movement led by John Wesley.

Wesley believed that belonging and mutual responsibility were fundamental Christian qualities.

The language of connexion allowed him to express this interdependence, developing its spiritual and practical significance in the organisation and ethos of his movement. Both language and practice are important for Methodists today.

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

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

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"The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call." Acts 2:39 (NIV)

God is for all. What a radical statement this is. Peter's absolute faith in the truth of it shines brightly through his sparkling speech on the Day of Pentecost. The Spirit-led missional waves it sets in motion advance further and further away from the epicentre in Jerusalem to impact the peripheral margins of the empire, faith and life itself, shaking the very foundations of religion and politics in the process.

God's inclusive kingdom of love is indeed for all, without exception. The Church is raised up by God to make this real for all. We are called to challenge every injustice, to call out those who perpetuate exclusion and to embody God's better way.

Peter acknowledges the psychologically parochial nature of this process. It begins in our own sense of self; with our yearning to be loved and accepted, transformed and set free. The circumference of care widens to embrace those closest to us, before reaching out to the margins to include those 'who are far off', a designator as much emotional as geographical.

However, if God is for all, paradoxically all are most definitely not for God. In our time we are challenged by God to engage with those who are 'far off' from faith and the ongoing life of the Church. We are challenged to engage with those who are 'far off' from being included and valued in our society. We are challenged to make the 'far off' goal of climate justice for all a reality before it is too late. Indeed, as this edition of *the connexion* shows, in so many ways God is shaking us out of our cosy parochialism and is actively challenging all of us to journey with intention to 'all who are far off'.

Love and peace,
David

The calling of the Methodist Church is to respond to the gospel of God's love in Christ and to live out its discipleship in worship and mission

the connexion

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Youth President,
Daud Irfan

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Same-sex weddings

In June the Conference voted to allow Methodist premises to be registered for same-sex weddings. As well as legal advice on what church councils need to consider, there are resources to aid discussions that churches may have ahead of deciding whether or not to register their building for same-sex weddings. They include a suggestion session plan, information on how to communicate well when living with contradictory convictions, background reading and a brief history of the discussions. Churches in Scotland were able to register for same-sex weddings from 13 September and churches in England from 20 September. You can find the resources in the Marriage and Relationship part of the Methodist Church website: www.methodist.org.uk/same-sex-marriage-resources

Methodists at UN climate change conference

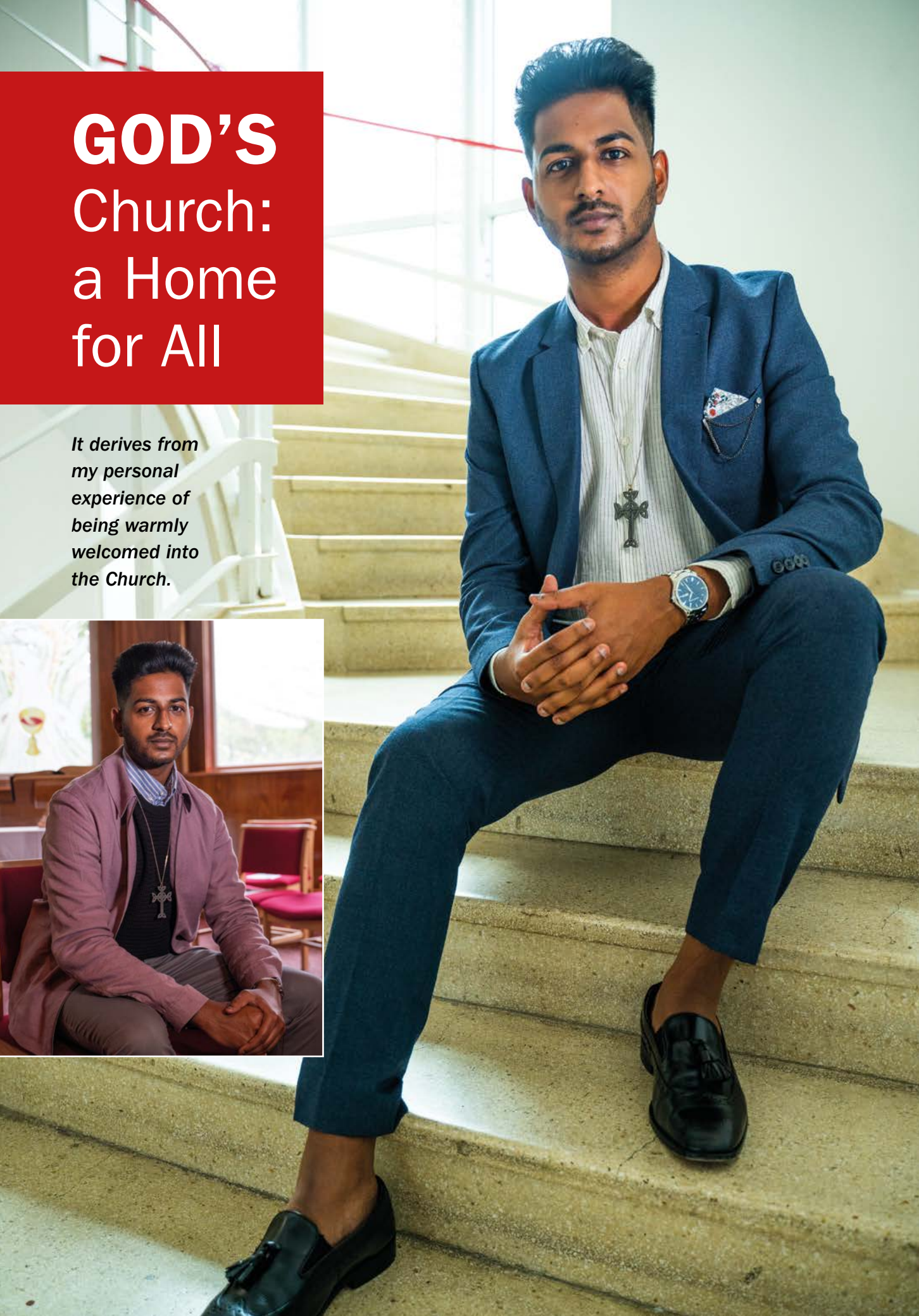
Methodists from across the globe will join 30,000 others at the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) in Glasgow in November. Local churches including Woodlands Church in the centre of Glasgow have come together to offer a range of 'fringe' events and a welcoming space for attendees to rest and pray while they are in the city. Lectures, art exhibitions and music will complement the Conference agenda including presentations from the workers behind the Methodist campaign 'Climate Justice For All', many of whom will be attending the Conference in person.

Praying with hymns

Praying with Hymns, produced in conjunction with *Singing the Faith*, is a new guide for those who want to use hymns as prayers. It's packed with easy-to-find suggestions grouped under familiar themes for Sunday worship. In this anniversary year of *Singing the Faith*, it includes suggestions of hymns written in the ten years since the hymnbook was first published. You can download it from October on the Singing the Faith Plus website www.methodist.org.uk/stfplus. You can also purchase it as a printed A5 booklet (£3.50), which is ideal to have available in your church vestry or on hand for pastoral visits or small group gatherings.

GOD'S Church: a Home for All

*It derives from
my personal
experience of
being warmly
welcomed into
the Church.*



The welcome on coming from Pakistan inspired Youth President Daud Irfan to make his theme 'God's Church: A Home for All'.

Spending my early years in Pakistan, a country where the lifestyle, culture, customs and environment are poles apart from the United Kingdom, will continue to shape my life and that of my family. It is often said that there are five key stages of development for children, which shape their identity and influence the norms and values that they will uphold as they grow up. I moved to this country just as I was entering the final stage, which is the school-age stage, and so I was shaped by life in both Pakistan and Cardiff, my new home town.

Hearing my story, many people imagine all the hardships that my family has been through in moving across the world, or they wonder about the significance of such a deep cultural shift. However, from the very first moment we arrived in the United Kingdom, we had a sense of belonging, community and acceptance. The love that was showered upon us made it seem as if we were destined to be here.

In all the years since – in school and at university studying International Marketing and Business – as I have built my life here and made deep-rooted and everlasting relationships, one verse has stayed with me: “For many are the plans in a man’s heart, but it is the Lord’s purpose that prevails” (Proverbs 19:21).

I have now started my year as the Youth President of the Methodist Church in Britain, and I strongly believe that, having gone through many ups and downs in life, this is the plan of the Lord and he had a purpose for my life when I moved here. Just as God told Joshua, “The Lord your God is with you wherever you go” (Joshua 1:9), I have seen God work in my life in amazing and supernatural ways and favour me with countless blessings.

A Christian community

The theme for my Youth Presidential year is 'God's Church: A Home for All'. It derives from my personal experience of being warmly welcomed into the Church and wider

community. I feel that 'the Church' is more than our physical place of worship – it is the people who worship and stay in fellowship together as the Body of Christ. We need to be an openly welcoming and inclusive Church to all those who are around us in our local communities. As we steer away from the devastation of Covid-19, I firmly believe that churches throughout the country need to be a welcoming hub in our local communities for everyone impacted by the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns.

In my personal encounters with those affected by Covid-19, I have witnessed feelings of misery, vulnerability, deprivation and loneliness. As we learn from the Early Church in the book of Acts (2:42), it is the responsibility of church members to devote themselves to “teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer”. Our churches today need to uphold these strong foundations and carry on the work and mission of the Early Church, which we read about in the Bible. Furthermore, as the story of creation teaches us, we are all made in the image of God. Therefore, as followers of Christ we should not treat anyone differently to others. God's love is the same for all humanity, no matter our backgrounds.

The year ahead

As I embark on this new chapter in my life and career, I urge all members of the Methodist Church and our Global Partners to pray for me to lead the children and young people of the Methodist Church in Britain with wisdom and a sound sense of purpose to spread the gospel of love and peace.

Most of all, I am extremely excited to be a part of 3Generate 2021 this October. Along with the year-round 365 initiative, it aims to support children and young people as they live out their faith and grow in discipleship so they flourish and become embedded in their Christian communities, where people of all ages can pray, listen and discuss together.

God's love is the same for all humanity, no matter our backgrounds.

**GOD
FOR ALL**

What positive action can you take to engender real belonging, community and acceptance where you live?

To find out more about 3Generate or to book tickets, visit www.methodist.org.uk/3generate

To find out more about 365, visit www.methodist.org.uk/365



THINK
PIECE

God for All: a big journey of small steps

In June 2020, during the first wave of the pandemic, the Methodist Conference enthusiastically embraced 'God for All: The Connexional Strategy for Evangelism and Growth'. With its adoption, the Methodist Church took some big steps in its commitment to be a growing, inclusive, evangelistic and justice-seeking Church.

Amidst our great diversity as Methodists, 'God for All' affirms a common path. As we walk together, new people become disciples of Jesus Christ, faith deepens for everybody, and churches and communities experience transformation. It emphasises our common calling. Human beings are diverse (there are people of faith, spiritual but not religious folks, agnostics and atheists, too), but all long for true friendship, authenticity, healing, transformation and a just world. We are called to help them connect with

the gifts that our Methodist tradition offers: justice-seeking small groups; commitments to leadership everywhere and 'a church without walls'; a dynamic understanding and experience of God's grace in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit; and an expansive theology that conveys the Scripture way of salvation with intelligence, passion and universal openness.

The journey honours our differences but holds us together as we move in faith towards transformation. As we journey together, we ask for God's help: to centre us in prayer, to be a Church that helps people at the margins, to start loads of 'new places for new people', and to practise evangelism and social justice together.

Thousands of small steps towards growth
Over the first year of the strategy, God has been so faithful. We've seen how these big

*We can do
this one thing.
We're taking
this small step.
Here we are,
Lord, send us.*



connexional steps into evangelism and growth are created from thousands of small commitments made by people like you and me. All over the country people have said: “We’re not trying to do everything, but we can do this one thing. We’re taking this small step. Here we are, Lord, send us.”

Here are some ‘small steps’ that have had a huge impact:

- One district developed *A Methodist Way of Life*, and now over 300,000 copies of this discipleship booklet – in a dozen languages – have been shared across the Connexion.
- Another district challenged the Methodist Church to pray together. As a result, in 2020/2021 thousands of people engaged in a weekly online ‘Year of Prayer’, praying the Breakthrough Prayer (above), and, asking the Holy Spirit to break through. At the end of each meeting, they said ‘Amen’ together.
- Some early pioneers (modern lay missionaries) within the Church took steps to meet people right where they are and now all 30 districts are planning to start new Christian communities as part of their mission plans.
- One sceptical person took a step and said “Maybe God is asking me to share my faith.” That person went

on to work in evangelism and now in 2021 alone more than 300 people are being equipped for evangelism in the Methodist Church’s new evangelism pathways.

The power of working together

There are innumerable stories like these. People take a step and God does something with it: thanks be to God! They remind us that ‘God for All’ is not about quick fixes or magic initiatives. It’s about real people and real churches working towards transforming their communities, taking the Gospels as their inspiration. It is a process that will last not for the next five years but throughout our life and mission together.

As ‘God for All’ reminds us, this big journey of small steps will require patient soul-searching, courageous decision-making, and important cultural change. If we could only rely on our own powers, it would be exhausting and impossible. But dependent on the power of God, there will be life and joy for the Church and the world.

So remember: we don’t have to do everything. But let’s get out there with a group of like-minded other people and try to do something – and see what God will do with it.



Trey Hall is Director of Evangelism and Growth.

Real people and real churches working towards transforming their communities.



The Evangelism and Growth team can help your circuit

As churches and circuits discern their calling, a free new guidebook *Take Your Next Steps in Evangelism and Growth* is available at

www.methodist.org.uk/nextsteps

Other helpful resources are at www.methodist.org.uk/evangelism

Members of Evangelism and Growth would love to join one of your circuit leadership team meetings via Zoom. In a 30-60 minute slot, we can offer a presentation on ‘God for All’ and listen to the key questions you’re wrestling with, and explore next steps. To book us, email evangelism@methodistchurch.org.uk

New Places for New People

Matt Finch and Eunice Attwood describe how 'New Places for New People' projects are part of the vibrant mixed ecology of God's Church.



The wonderful mixed ecology of the wood reminds us of the diversity of God's world.

Sat by the log fire in Black Barn Wood, we are surrounded by alder, ash, oak, beech and hazel trees and take in the smell of damp moss and the gentle sound of the wind rustling. It is easy to recognise and celebrate the variety of God's creation. The wonderful mixed ecology of the wood reminds us of the diversity of God's world. We celebrate the birth of new Christian communities, which are not in competition with other forms of church, but are part of the glorious diversity of the Methodist Church.

As part of its 'God for All' strategy, the Methodist Church gives financial support to districts and circuits to start 'New Places for New People' (NPNP) projects, within their five-year mission plan. They

are new Christian communities for those not yet part of an existing church. It has been our privilege to accompany districts as they prayerfully discern the vision for a district NPNP project, and how to plant new Christian communities. Ten districts have participated in the first year (2020/2021). Nine identified a vision for a new Christian community supported by their district team. The other, for very good reasons, decided it was not the right time. We believe it is important not to rush: listening and waiting for God's direction is a vital part of the process.

The Chair of the Southampton District, the Revd Andrew de Ville reflecting on the district process, said, "We give thanks for the 'God for All' initiative. It has enabled

us, through prayerful reflection to develop a vision in the city of Portsmouth building on the foundations of worship and mission of previous generations.”

Churches take root

The alder trees in Black Barn Wood are a pioneer species that spring up first, fixing nutrients in the soil that help trees which are slower to establish, such as oak and ash, to take root. In a similar way, the heart of the vision for New Places for New People is to see pioneering environments where many new forms of church take root and flourish.

District teams formed of ordained and lay colleagues, are centred in the belief that God remains at work among us, inviting everyone to dream dreams, and look for signs of resurrection. Helle Sewell, an evangelism and community worker in the Darlington District commented: *“I’m grateful for the opportunities that NPNP offers to districts. It has fed that excited child in me who wants to love, live, and explore for Christ. In the Darlington District, there is a NPNP project emerging in Hartlepool. It is called six8nine and is the base from which we can participate in God’s mission and be witnesses to God’s love through loving, caring and service in our broken world.”*

In the woods, the cycle of growth is happening all around, often imperceptibly so. Likewise In the districts we have witnessed ideas grow and develop. It has been inspiring to pray alongside the district teams as they discern a deep commitment to their local contexts. Dr Val Turner is a member of the Shetland District team and reflects on their emerging vision for a new Christian community. *“Shetland has a big drugs problem, and our vision was to create a Christian rehab facility called Fresh Start, which people could access without leaving Shetland. This would include Fresh Start fellowship groups based on recovery church meetings. I was invited into the core team for my project development and delivery skills – now I am passionate about the vision for the project.”*

After a district has identified and launched a NPNP project, finances are available for the district NPNP teams to distribute.

Next steps

There is an open invitation for every district, circuit and local church to pray and seek God. Ask yourself, in God’s wonderful and



Pioneering environments where many new forms of church take root and flourish.

diverse ecology, where do you see God at work? Who are the new people, and where are the new places God is inviting you to connect with to form gospel-centred communities? As you pray, talk and discern with others, you can include New Places for New People as part of your district, circuit and local church mission action plans.

To learn more about NPNP visit www.methodist.org.uk/startingnpnp

Matt Finch is Pioneering and Church Planting Officer and **Eunice Attwood** is Church at the Margins Officer in the Evangelism and Growth Team.

GOD FOR ALL

Who are the new people and where are the new places God is inviting you to connect with?



New ways to encounter God



GOD FOR ALL

Who is God prompting your church to listen to and connect with?

We just need to ensure God feels accessible to all.

From ecoprojects to drop-in centres, there many ways to bring God's love to people, as Laura Wood explains.

The Family Project is an ecumenical venture between the Methodist and Anglican Churches in and around Kirkby Lonsdale. It creates opportunities for families to explore and experience faith in new or different ways to traditional church. Over the last four years we have listened to our local communities to hear their needs and connect with local schools as well as with other key stakeholders. Continually listening to those around us, particularly those on the edge of church or those who don't see church as relevant, has been key to understand what it is about traditional forms of church that hasn't worked for them and their families. God is for everyone; we just need to ensure God feels accessible to all too.

God in nature

Our earliest project was a gardening club, Green Warriors, at a local primary school.

It enables young people to learn how to be stewards of God's earth through a mixture of Bible stories, discussion, games and gardening projects. Each week we begin with a Bible story exploring our relationship and God's relationship with the earth. Often the young people find nuggets of wisdom in the story that as leaders we miss. Next, while doing some gardening we continue our conversation. These diverse chats are free-flowing and insightful. The gardening itself has been fruitful; over the last four years we have provided the school and some families with fresh vegetables, and occasionally flowers are sent home to families.

The climate emergency is never far from young people's minds: sometimes they share things they have read or seen that week on the news. Our aim is always to find moments of hope throughout these discussions, though sometimes that is tricky.

We are keen to promote awareness among these young people that God is ready to listen. After gardening, we pray together, then finish with games and biscuits. They have a 'take home challenge' such as a litter pick, designing a bug hotel, or watching and recording birds. Green Warriors seems to work as it connects with young people's passion for the environment and shows how God has that passion too!

Listening, tea and unconditional love

A consultation with the local community led to an awareness of how many people felt unheard and lonely. Consequently, we have established several projects as listening spaces. One of these was 'Drop-In', a space for parents and guardians to drop by for a cup of tea and a catchup before school pick up. People share their joys, worries, sorrows and hopes in this confidential space. By simply being and listening, our Drop-In team is living out their faith and showcasing unconditional love. Occasionally, if it feels right, when someone shares a worry or concern, a member of the Drop-In team may ask "Would you be happy for me to pray about this later with the team?" We have created an environment where the answer to this being 'yes' or 'no' is equally welcome. The care remains.

During the pandemic we moved online. Our numbers were smaller, but we still had important conversations. Before the pandemic one mum said that 'Drop-In' had been a lifeline for her. That feedback alone sustained the team throughout this last year.

This summer we have created a trail for families to explore around St Mary's Churchyard as we are increasingly mindful of the need for opportunities for families to play together without financial cost. Alongside other projects such as Muddy Church and Messy Church, we have found seasonal events and seasonal trails are means of connecting with families.

The key point in all projects is to prioritise listening and connecting before any action. Trust is established slowly and results won't happen overnight. But what we are doing is big: we are trying to communicate about Christ and tell stories of faith in a world where faith has slipped off the radar for many. Therefore the Church has to adapt and look and feel right for the community we are in today.



The Church has to adapt and feel right for the community we are with today.



For more information about further work by the Family Project please find us on Facebook and Instagram: @familiesinlunesdale

Laura Wood is the Church in Lunesdale Family Project Leader.

CLIMATE justice for all

As COP26 meets in Glasgow, Molly Pugmire explains the ambitious Methodist global campaign for climate justice.

Lives are impacted by the climate crisis at an increasing and alarming rate.

We are weeks away from the beginning of the United Nations' annual Climate Change Conference (COP26), which takes place in Glasgow in November. Many hope that not only will ambitious targets be set, but that action will be taken to see these targets reached. The conference marks six years since the all-important Paris Agreement was signed, in which each nation set targets for limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees above pre-industrial

levels. In the run up to this crucial moment for climate action, the Methodist Church in Britain worked with its Partner Churches to hire six young people from five countries to develop a campaign to mobilise the global Methodist family ahead of COP26. So I get the pleasure of working with James Appleby also based in Britain, Irene Abra in Italy, Jessica Bwali in Zambia, Maima Vaai in Fiji and Camila Ferreiro in Uruguay.

Global campaign

Over the past year, we have developed the campaign 'Climate Justice for All' (CJ4A). We believe there is real strength in the global Methodist family working together to model the kind of global cooperation that we should be seeing from our leaders.

CJ4A is based on the idea that, as Christians, we should believe in climate justice for all, not just a small number of individuals. We are led by the theology of John Wesley, who was outspoken in his belief that God's love is for all, not the few. We believe that Wesley's principle of God's love should influence our work to seek climate justice for all because the climate crisis is impacting all life.

Being a global campaign helpfully reminds us of our responsibility to our global neighbours, whose lives are impacted by the climate crisis at an increasing and alarming rate. Throughout the campaign, we have listened to one another's stories, and those of volunteers around the world and heard how climate change has impacted their lives.

Listen, call, commit

CJ4A has three campaign asks for Methodist communities all over the world: listen, call and commit.





We're inviting Methodist communities to call their ambassadors to COP26.

GOD FOR ALL
 How will your church and circuit be a truly radical force for climate justice for all?

Listen: Listening to one another's stories is important for learning about and responding to the effects of the climate crisis. To enable churches to do this, we have released short films and worship resources each month, to tell the stories of different communities and their experience of climate action and climate change. We have put at the centre of this campaign the voices of those with experience to share. In particular, we have focused on those who live in the global south, who are most likely to have to deal with the worsening climate crisis.

Call: After hearing stories of those impacted by the climate crisis, it is important that this is shared beyond the church walls. We want communities to speak to people in positions of responsibility and power, and to share what they have heard. So we're inviting Methodist communities to call their ambassadors to COP26. We want to ask them to make climate justice for all a reality. In Britain, we have held consultation sessions with Methodists from across the Connexion to find out what they'd like to say to Alok Sharma MP, President of COP26.

Commit: Finally, we're inviting church communities to make personal commitments to enact change for the climate within their own contexts. This is vital to ensure the work of the campaign is sustained beyond COP26 and that change is truly embedded within our communities. In Britain, we're encouraging congregations to sign up for Eco-Church and Eco-Congregation to make positive change for the planet within a supportive community. We are also really keen for communities to check out the Young Christian Climate Network's (YCCN) Relay to COP26, where Christians from across the UK are walking from Cornwall to Glasgow to mark the journey to the COP.

As young people leading this campaign, we stand on the shoulders of other young people who have brought the climate crisis into the spotlight. We recognise their work, and we hope to build upon this momentum. We want to invite all the global Methodist family, regardless of age or place, to join us as we lift our voices to declare, "We believe in climate justice for all!"



Molly Pugmire is a Methodist COP campaign worker in the Joint Public Issues Team.
 To find out more about CJ4A and Eco-Church visit www.worldmethodistcouncil.org/cj4a/
 For information on the Young Christian Climate Network, visit www.yccn.uk

*At the heart of
this ministry
we are offering
Christ's
compassion.*



GOD FOR ALL

As a result of this story, in what new ways will your circuit now engage with people on the economic margins who are experiencing poverty?

*There is a
deep welcome,
a sense of
belonging and
love for one
another.*

Church at the margins

**Deacon Eunice Attwood
interviews Deacon Lemia
Nkwelah about her ministry
supporting two community
cafés in Norfolk.**

God is biased to the poor and the gospel of Jesus Christ challenges our materialist culture. Christ sees the extraordinary worth of those who experience poverty. The Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated the pre-existing inequalities across the UK and flagged up the extent of poverty, which has such a devastating effect on individuals, families and whole communities. Part of the 'God for All' strategy, approved by the Methodist Conference in 2019, includes a vision for 'Church at the Margins'. It aims to build and nurture new Christian communities that involve and are led by people experiencing economic marginalisation. They are communities in which people truly encounter one another and everyone's gifts are recognised, valued and received.

As the Church at the Margins officer, it is great to hear the passion and vision of people involved in these new communities. Deacon Lemia Nkwelah in the North Norfolk Circuit of the East Anglia District recently shared her commitment to see new Christian communities emerge among people at the economic margins.

Eunice: Lemia, it's great to talk to someone who is so passionate about church for people at the margins of society. What does your new diaconal appointment involve?

Lemia: I moved appointments during lockdown, so life has been very strange. In August last year I moved to the North Norfolk Circuit and, of course, everything was closed due to the pandemic. The area appears to be quite wealthy, but like many communities, poverty is present and hidden.

This new poster of Our Calling, the Methodist Church's overarching purpose, is for you to use around your church.

Why Our Calling?

The Our Calling statement helps us to focus on God. It is God who calls us as Methodists to fulfil our calling as a people actively involved in seeing God's transformational power change lives.

Since being launched in 2000, Our Calling has become a central part of the Church's life, with its importance and value reaffirmed by the Conference. In 2021, the Conference resolved to adopt Our Calling as the primary strategic driver for the work of the Church.

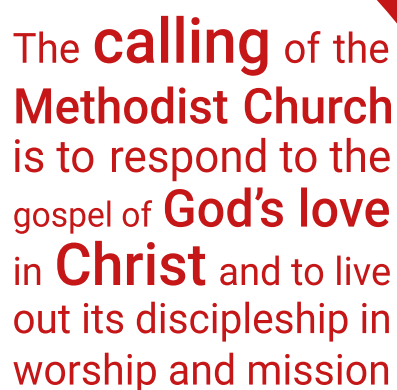
This poster celebrates our renewed focus on Our Calling. It supports us in continuing to organise church life and our mission activities to reflect Our Calling.

Please place this poster where as many people as possible will see it to help them understand how we, as the Church, respond to the gospel.

Order more copies

You can order different sizes and quantities of this poster to suit your local church needs. Prices dependent on size and finish.

Purchase Our Calling posters for your church from www.cpo.org.uk/courses-and-campaigns-methodist



The **calling** of the
Methodist Church
is to respond to the
gospel of **God's love**
in **Christ** and to live
out its discipleship in
worship and mission

Our Calling

The Methodist Church 



**The calling of the
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in **Christ** and to live
out its discipleship in
worship and mission

Our Calling



The **Methodist** Church

The **calling** of the
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out its discipleship in
worship and mission

Our Calling

Part of my diaconal role in the circuit is to support two community cafés, alongside some wonderful people. Thankfully, the cafés have re-opened as they are both really valued and needed.

Eunice: They sound fascinating Lemia. What happens at these cafés?

Lemia: The 'Do Drop-In' café is based at St Andrew's Methodist Church, Sheringham. It's staffed by a team of volunteers, offering free hot food once a week. The other café is in Cromer and it's called 'Community Matters'. They offer a hot meal on Mondays and a cooked breakfast on Thursdays, everything is free and all are welcome.

Eunice: What are you aiming to do?

Lemia: Our aim is to become a community together, a space where everyone is genuinely welcomed where gifts are shared and received. It's about journeying alongside people and being available to support one another. Living out the gospel is our daily task. Our ultimate aim is for people to know and be transformed by the love of God, become disciples of Christ together, learning from one another. There is a deep welcome, a sense of belonging and love for one another in these communities. Both cafés are spaces where friendships are being made; there is wonderful mutual giving and receiving of one another's gifts.

Eunice: Why is this ministry important to you, Lemia?

Lemia: All kinds of people attend the café many of whom are struggling in different ways. In the café in Cromer, several people who attend are homeless. This ministry reflects my belief that God is biased to the poor. God seeks justice for all people, and especially those at the margins of society. The gospel challenges the systems that oppress and damage people. I believe this is why we are here – to demonstrate God's love, to seek justice and be a community of friends together.

Eunice: A community of friends, that's an interesting phrase, Lemia.

Lemia: It's a really important part of our ministry, Eunice. We're not here to show how good we are or to be the 'givers'



or to tick boxes to say we have done this or that. We are here to 'become a community of friends' together. At the heart of this ministry, we are offering Christ's compassion. Christ demonstrated his compassion to everyone; we are now Christ's hands and feet, but we must resist thinking we are the 'saviour'. We must remember our task is to signpost people to the love of God revealed to us in Christ.

Eunice: How would you like the community to develop?

Lemia: Our next step is to create spaces where people can be quiet and pray, where we can nurture spirituality and experience transformation. We would like to see new Christian communities emerging, led by local people at the economic margins, where the gifts and skills of everyone and especially people experiencing poverty are received and valued. I am so thankful for this work, which has already been a blessing to me in which I can see people receiving from others and being transformed.

We are here to become a community of friends together.

For further information visit www.methodist.org.uk/churchatthemargins

Deacon Lemia Nkwelah is a Church at the Margins practitioner in the North Norfolk Methodist Circuit and **Deacon Eunice Attwood** is Church at the Margins Officer in the Evangelism and Growth Team.

Justice, dignity and solidarity

Bala Gnanaprasadam
explains the new
strategy to make
'God for all' a reality.

*This report is
about the
biblical call
to justice.*



The 2021 Methodist Conference adopted the report 'Strategy for Justice, Dignity and Solidarity (JDS): working towards a fully inclusive Methodist Church'. At the Cardiff Gathering, my friend Sam McBratney called us to go beyond equality, diversity and inclusion to embrace justice, dignity and solidarity in the Methodist Church. The report is about delivering justice, treating people with dignity, and standing in solidarity with the marginalised and oppressed. For too long, we have knowingly or unwittingly colluded with misuse of power in the Church, we have not called out coercive control, discriminatory and bullying behaviour, taking cover behind procedures and process.

Challenging injustice

Professor Anthony Reddie in his book *Nobodies to Somebodies* (2003) suggests redefining the norm is necessary if the Church is to move beyond apologies to challenge injustices of race, gender, sexuality or disability. If the Church is to be a safe space where everyone is treated equally, things have to change. We are embarking on this journey of transformation because it is a gospel imperative and discrimination and denial of rights are a sin. We are all made in the image of God and this report is about the biblical call to justice.

In my Vice-Presidential year I heard too many voices (black, brown, women, LGBTQ+) telling me how the Church – that is you and me – caused them damage, pain and suffering. People told me of the hostility experienced by black and LGBTQ+ ministers at the end of the stationing process from receiving circuits. I heard how the complaints system has failed to be effective for minority communities in our Church. These voices convinced me that there is a deficit of trust and confidence, and that fundamental changes are needed to address the under-representation of women, black, brown and LGBTQ+ members in positions in our Church. We need to listen and work with people who have experienced discrimination, learning from them and using their experiences to effect change.

Ending discrimination

The JDS report sets out a path for the Church to put an end to this hurt and damage. We must seize this opportunity:

making our Church fully inclusive is the responsibility of all of us. That includes reflecting on our **own** prejudices (regarding gender, race, disability, sexuality), and where we have used power and privilege to exclude others. Transformation starts with each of us, guided by the Holy Spirit. I believe the key to achieving sustainable transformation, in addition to winning hearts and minds, is in attitudinal, cultural and systemic change. That means reviewing and revising our systems, procedures and processes across the board. We need to identify barriers that prevent black and brown people, LGBTQ+ and disabled people, and women, from playing their full part in our Church and using their God-given gifts. If we don't change the way we work (including our stationing, complaints and appointment procedures) we will continue to be trapped in a Church designed by and for professional, mainly white men. We will have failed to design out discrimination.

None of this is easy. Change is not achieved simply by words. There will be issues with funding, capacity, misleading information and reluctance to effect change. These are challenges we will face and overcome through good leadership. If we are to become a truly inclusive Church, we need a paradigm shift.

The JDS report has ten recommendations, which range from awareness training for leaders, to a more targeted and transparent recruitment process and avoiding language that may cause offence or exclude people. They are all important and I urge you to read the full report, or the user guide, which contains a summary of the strategy, the theological basis for it, prayers and Bible study materials. It also gives pointers and challenges to action for local churches and individuals.

Mr Wesley constantly reminded the early Methodists that real change required accountability. Therefore the Conference is appointing a scrutiny group to assure the Church that transformation is taking place. It will measure and report progress to the Conference.

Finally, good work is underway at local church, circuit, district and national levels. But the JDS report is about so much more than equality, diversity and inclusion. It is about transformative witness to our loving and just God, so that we may speak, live and love with integrity.

Transformation starts with each of us.

GOD FOR ALL

How will you be part of the paradigm shift that is needed if we are to become a truly inclusive Church?

Bala Gnanapragasam was Vice-President of the Conference 2018/2019. The full Methodist Strategy for Justice, Dignity and Solidarity is available at www.methodist.org.uk/inclusive-mc-strategy

HOPE

for racial justice



“Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer” (Romans 12:12). The Revd Charity Nzegwu asks what hope does Paul speak of?

I am a black African woman presbyter, born in Rhodesia and raised in Zimbabwe. I am a product of colony. I am married to a man of Nigerian heritage, also a product of colony. I developed my sense of justice against this background. I rejoice in ‘The Methodist Strategy for Justice, Dignity and Solidarity’ (JDS) because it encourages us, as Methodists, to live out our theological conviction that God’s love is for all, as attested by ‘Our Calling’.

I have witnessed first hand the amplification of white citizens’ rights at the expense of the native blacks for access to education, employment and healthcare. I grew up in a Church where the majority of members were women, but most of those in senior leadership were and still are men. I grew up at a time when a woman’s

place was perceived to be in the kitchen and the labour ward. Women could only be teachers, nurses or secretaries. Many black mothers lived away from their children. They looked after their white master’s children, accompanying them to and from school, while their own children ran to school on their own, shoeless at times, and got home to look after themselves in their village, while their fathers worked in the city.

Hear our voices

Every human being is central to any sustainable transformative work, not in a token way but as someone who is “fearfully and wonderfully made” in the image of God (Psalm 139:14) and equal before God. This conviction enables me to imagine a Church in which people like me can be visible, can speak, can be heard and our voices can be amplified by the Church to the glory of God. This is where our hope lies, but our corporate inactions or omissions have left some feeling ignored or ‘othered’ and their contribution to the Church diminished.

The death of George Floyd did not need to be a pivotal point for the Church, because issues of social justice have been our

A woman’s place was perceived to be in the kitchen.

A Church in which people like me can be visible.



representation in senior leadership roles. It appears black bodies are only acceptable as far as they are useful. Individual contributions are not celebrated but are often acknowledged only in a subordinate sense. There seems to be a disparity and inconsistency in the way former Presidents or Vice-Presidents are appointed to roles post-tenure depending on their ethnicity.

Black role models

It gives me hope to see the Revd Sonia Hicks, a black Afro-Caribbean woman, appointed as the President of Conference. I am also encouraged when articles by my friend and colleague, the Revd Farai Mapamula, a black African woman minister, are published by the Methodist Church. I can identify with these two black women and see myself represented within the Church's senior leadership structures. This is cause for celebration although a lot of work still needs to be done.

In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul reminds the Church of the communality of the faith we share. In Luke's Gospel, Jesus sends out 70 or 72 of his disciples in pairs on mission. On their return, they shared their stories, adventures, failures, joy and hopes. Both citations suggest a way we can become more united as a Church, so we can all feel able to share stories, sorrows, failures, joys and hopes. I see JDS not as 'just' a strategy, but as the transformative gospel itself, calling the people of God to embody kingdom principles. I invite us all to join the Apostle Paul in "rejoicing in hope, being patient in suffering and persevering in prayer!". As the prophet Micah said: "O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you?" (Micah 6:8)

bread and butter ever since the inception of Methodism. Our theology and work have all been about being made in the image of God.

So what is wrong? Unfortunately, justice-speaking in the Church can be selective. Anecdotal evidence suggests that more black people are brought before the disciplinary committees of the Church than their white counterparts and anyone with a foreign-sounding name gets stationed last. There also seems to be a lack of black

GOD FOR ALL

What fresh transformation rooted in kingdom principles is God urging in you as you read Charity's testimony?

The Revd Charity Nzegwu is a presbyter in the Royston and Cambridge Circuit. You can read more about the the Inclusive Methodist Church at www.methodist.org.uk/inclusive-church



Methodist Women
in Britain 2011-2021

for women, for justice, for Christ

Methodist Women in Britain: who's it for?



God is for all, and so too is Methodist Women in Britain – its work is more far-reaching than you think, says Jude Simms.

Celebrating a big birthday or anniversary is a great excuse for introspection, and for asking ourselves some potentially awkward questions: What have I done with my life? Was it all worth it? Where do I go from here? What does the future hold?

This year Methodist Women in Britain (MWiB) has been celebrating its tenth anniversary as the new women's movement in the Methodist Church. When it transitioned from being the Women's Network to becoming the MWiB, perhaps one of the most debated issues was its name. Finally 'Methodist Women in Britain', was chosen. It encapsulates precisely who we are, recognising our heritage and the legacy of countless women who have gone before – but perhaps it doesn't

encapsulate precisely who (or what) we are *for*.

Yes, we are by tradition and practice Methodist – but we are *for* people of all denominations and traditions, and people of all faiths or no faith, because *God is for all*. We are run by and primarily for women; but we are *for* people of all genders and sexualities, because *God is for all*. We are based in Britain, but work in partnership with and *for* people of all ethnicities and nationalities, in Britain and around the world, because *God is for all*.

In the months approaching our anniversary year we asked ourselves some awkward questions: What have we achieved in the last ten years? What do we do best, and what should we let go? And perhaps most importantly, what should we focus

We work in partnership with and for people of all ethnicities and nationalities.



on as we move forward into our second decade? Out of these deliberations came our new strapline, which sums up our purpose and focus: ‘for women, for justice, for Christ’.

MWiB is for women

As the movement’s communications officer, I often represent MWiB at events, and I’ve found that standing beside a display of MWiB information is a great way to engage people in conversation. I often get asked (by women and men), “Why do we need a women’s group in the Methodist Church?” People usually reason that in the Methodist Church women have a high profile and roles and responsibilities equal to those of men – they preach, they are ordained, they chair districts, they hold leadership and figurehead roles, and so on. True enough. But, I gently remind them that ‘our’ Church is not the whole Church, and for every woman’s voice heard where we are, there are countless women elsewhere who cannot make themselves heard, indeed they cannot even speak.

In India, our Partner Church, the Church of North India (CNI) is more than 80% comprised of Dalit people. They are discriminated against because of their caste and economic situation, and Dalit women

are especially disadvantaged on account of their gender. Since 2013, MWiB has been working with CNI and the Dalit Solidarity Network UK to empower Dalit women and girls in their churches and communities. Since 2018, MWiB has worked with Cliff College, World Day of Prayer (WDP), and others, to offer bursaries to enable more than 30 women to attend conferences such as the WDP’s younger women’s prayer conference, and training courses, including conflict resolution training and ‘Cliff Year’ – Cliff College’s gap year programme.

‘Women’s Work’ in the Methodist Church began in 1858, with the aim “to train, equip and finance the sending of women missionaries overseas”, and MWiB still holds dear this World Church focus. We continue to support our mission partners, particularly the women, keeping in touch with them, sharing their news and concerns, offering gifts and grants to enable their ministry among women, and holding them in prayer.

MWiB will always support women because God is for women.

MWiB is for justice

Some of the most interesting conversations I have with people begin, “Oh, MWiB, I’m

We raise awareness of global social justice issues.





Creative spirituality that lies at the heart of MWiB's activities.

not interested in that.” But it often turns out that the MWiB they’re not interested in is actually nothing like the real MWiB!

One aspect of MWiB’s work that people sometimes don’t know much about is our focus on global social justice, which is based largely on the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals. Working with All We Can, JPIT and others, we raise awareness of global social justice issues including campaigning for the rights of child domestic workers; working with migrants, asylum seekers and refugees; and to stop human trafficking. We take practical action where we can, providing financial, practical and prayer support for people and projects around the world, and some wear black on Thursdays to support the World Council of Churches’ campaign against gender-based violence. We also produce resources for MWiB and the wider Church such as ‘Growing Dementia-Friendly Churches’; a ‘Dalit Solidarity’ resource pack, and issues-based worship material.

At MWiB’s residential weekend in 2018, our keynote speaker Rachel Lampard from JPIT spoke about the universal credit system and food poverty in the UK. In a ‘craftism’ project, she encouraged the 250 participants to decorate cloth napkins with images and slogans, to present to their MPs. This in turn led to a grant from MWiB to enable a group of women from Tower Hamlets to present a play and to share their personal experiences of the universal credit system in Parliament.

MWiB will always stand for justice because God is for justice.

MWiB is for Christ

The motto of the World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women, the global movement to which MWiB belongs, is: ‘To Know Christ, and To Make Him Known’. We are held together as Methodist women around the world by a determination that God in Christ is made known in all we do.

Like many others, I value the creative spirituality that lies at the heart of MWiB’s activities: the threads of prayer and worship running through every meeting and event; God encountered in Bible study, conversation and pilgrimage; and opportunities to produce worship material on justice issues, climate change and the global pandemic, and to offer them to the wider Church. Perhaps the best example of this is the Easter Offering, an annual offering and worship service, produced by MWiB and celebrated around the Connexion. It has raised more than £3 million for the World Church Fund, and allowed the whole Church to see God at work through MWiB’s triple focus on the World Church, global social justice and creative spirituality.

MWiB is for Christ because God, in Christ, is for all.

As I move from my role with MWiB this autumn, I do so with pride and gratitude for all that we have achieved in the last ten years. My continuing prayer is that as we go forward from this special anniversary year to share the enabling, equipping and empowering love of God to all – because God is for all.

GOD FOR ALL

How might Methodist Women in Britain be a fresh source of blessing for your church?

Jude Simms is the Communications Coordinator for Methodist Women in Britain.

For more information about MWiB, visit: www.mwib.org.uk, www.wfmcuw.org

To be added to our mailing list for news and information, email: admin@mwib.org.uk

Proof in print that GOD is for all



Ever since Wesley's day, magazines have been saying God is for all, writes the Revd Dr Jonathan R Hustler.

We have a long history of magazines in Methodism. In 1778, John Wesley launched *The Arminian Magazine* in which he proposed “to publish some of the most remarkable tracts on the Universal Love of God.”¹ The context in which Wesley launched his new journal was the continuing controversy with those who believed in the salvation only of those who were predestined. It was a dispute that exercised the Wesleys and others greatly in the 18th century and while the policy of *The Arminian Magazine* was to argue that God's will is for all people to be saved “by speaking the truth in love” and “in as inoffensive a manner as the nature of the thing will permit”, Wesley could be



polemical about the shortcomings of his opponents' position.

Profiles, poetry and letters

The Arminian Magazine, though, did not only contain theological treatises. There were narratives about the lives of those who shared Wesley's Arminian position, often recounting their charitable deeds as well as their theology and evangelistic ministry as belief in God's love for all is a doctrinal position to be lived out in demonstrating that love for those in need. There was also a poetry section as belief that God's love is for all invites us to engage our imagination as well as our logical minds. And there were letters, because Wesley believed that it was beneficial to debate the doctrinal position and its implications.

This issue of *the connexion* (and perhaps every issue) is, in a sense, *The Arminian Magazine* of its day. Our 'God for All' strategy aims to articulate our central theological position that no-one is excluded from God's love, to live that out in practical ways, and to dream dreams about what our lives and society might be like when that faith is put into action. As the articles in this magazine show, we 21st-century Methodists might be less trenchant than John Wesley in the way we express our views, but we are no less passionate about the 'Universal Love of God'.

¹ *The Arminian Magazine* volume 1 (1778), p.v

We have a long history of magazines in Methodism.

GOD FOR ALL

If no-one is to be excluded because God's love is for all, what is your dream for how this can become real where you are?

Belief in God's love for all is a doctrinal position to be lived out in demonstrating that love for those in need.



**GOD
FOR ALL**

“A project that is not just about us.” Given the plight of refugees worldwide, what action is the Holy Spirit inspiring your circuit to take?

God for REFUGEES

The Revd Dr Barry Sloan recounts how a German pastor and a local printer brought warmth to freezing people in refugee camps.

The Revd Elisabeth Kodweiss serves the United Methodist Church in Villingen-Schwenningen, in the picturesque Black Forest region of south Germany, not far from Lake Constance. The Methodist congregation is small, but active, as members faithfully live out their Christian calling at church and in the wider community. And – as so often is the case when God is involved – they sometimes find themselves on an adventure they could never have imagined.

It was a typical January day for Elisabeth, with phone calls, emails, visits... and a scheduled meeting with Marius, a member of the congregation who was beginning his training to become a local preacher. Elisabeth guided Marius through some of the learning material. They talked about the books he would need for his studies, and dealt with some of the practical issues.

But Marius’ focus seemed to be elsewhere. A few days beforehand, he had heard the news about the refugee camp Moria burning down on the Greek island of Lesbos. The refugees were sent to a new camp on the island, Moria II. Marius had seen the TV pictures of Moria II and the inhumane conditions in which the refugees were living. He saw helpless refugees –

both adults and children – freezing in the winter cold. And it broke his heart this was happening in Europe today.

The Moria camp had also been on the mind of the Revd Elisabeth Kodweiss. Some weeks prior to her meeting with Marius, she had read a letter written by some of the refugees in the camp and learned of the impossible living conditions there. Outraged and upset, she decided to write a number of letters to German politicians, asking them to intervene. She also signed petitions for better conditions for refugees on the borders of Europe.

And she prayed. In fact, she had been praying right up to her meeting with Marius.

God brings much-needed warmth

Then God did ‘a God thing’. A meeting that was supposed to be about local preaching became one about reaching out to those destitute and stranded at Europe’s borders. This ‘preaching’ also took on another form, becoming something more than just words when, at the end of that Spirit-filled meeting, Elisabeth’s prayers were answered and ‘Blankets for Moria II’ was breathed into life.

The idea was simple. People are freezing: they need blankets to keep them warm. It’s not rocket science – it rarely is, when it comes to finding ways to help suffering

People are freezing – they need blankets to keep them warm.



The Revd Dr Barry Sloan is the Europe Partnership Coordinator of the Global Relationships team. He lives in Germany, where he also serves as a mission partner with the MCB's Partner Church, the United Methodist Church.

Through its Global Relationships team, the Methodist Church in

Britain works with over 100 Partner Churches and organisations worldwide. For information about its work, visit www.methodist.org.uk/global-relationships or email: gr.admin@methodistchurch.org.uk

people. Marius had his own printing business and had recently purchased some industrial sewing machines in order to help some former refugee women who were seamstresses and needed work. Elisabeth was able to get the congregation on board, and everyone got to work – sewing blankets, raising funds for materials, organising transport, and finding a local partner to work with in Greece.

The aim was to sew 1,500 high quality blankets in record time in order to help the refugees through the cold winter months. Thanks to many people in the church and the local community generously giving time and money, the team achieved its goals and

is currently working on sending an additional 1500 blankets to Moria II this autumn.

This God-inspired initiative is such an adventure with so many benefits. Shivering bodies in Moria II are warmed and comforted. Former refugees now living in Germany get to be included in German society, finding paid work, purpose and acceptance. A pastor's prayers are answered. A businessman blesses the community. A local preacher gets one of the best sermon illustrations ever. A town unites for good. A Methodist congregation decides that this time here is a project that is not 'just about us'.

And God can't stop smiling.

The aim was to sew 1,500 high quality blankets in record time.



The Revd Verity Phillips asks does everyone belong in God's 'All'?

*When one
suffers, we all
suffer.*

All along God has been 'for all'. Noah knew it so long ago we've lost count; Jesus lived it 2,000 years ago; John Wesley wrote his four 'All's in the 1700s. For one year this gospel truth is highlighted by the Church – and after that? For some, connexional initiatives are irrelevant, as denominations are often irrelevant to non-church-attending Christians.

I have not always considered myself disabled. After my accident, I insisted I was 'in recovery' to stop people treating me as an invalid. I am not 'ill'; not likely to 'get better soon'. I had an accident and now my neurology malfunctions. My brain has done what your mobile phone might do if it was dropped on the floor, but somewhere inside, I am still me.

After the accident, I laughed for months at the bizarre changes. I also cried and felt confused, bewildered and worried. Through physio, I can mostly manage my condition, though some 'little' jobs are like mountains to climb; but I can't control the triggers in my environment. Self-respect is hard, because certain behaviours can't be prevented. When I saw a book on disability theology called *Unworthy* (with the 'Un' in recessive type), I thought: that's it! The Church calls me 'worthy', but can't explain

what they mean, and occasionally because I'm disabled some people react as if I may not be worthy. I understand the theory of 'God for All', but somehow it doesn't fit with my experience. Why not?

Accepting people as they are

Integrating disabled people fully into society is fairly recent; it's unfamiliar for some, even though they are fair-minded. Perhaps you accept whoever, whatever comes your way. Maybe you can accept people once you understand them. A few can never relate to people who are different... which is their own disability. Not all brains work the same, and we are influenced by our experience and education.

I can't do all I want to do – all that my colleagues do. I feel excluded and inadequate not least when the time to be assessed as a minister comes around: how can I belong when I don't pull my weight? And if I push myself, I'll relapse. Either way, it's not fair on others. There are embarrassing trigger moments when my brain functions like a toddler or a teen, and there are times when my 'performance' reveals knowledge and experience. I have no choice but to let God be in charge of each day. I must accept forgiveness, and forgive myself, daily.

We are one Body

Reading disability theology has helped me to realise that disability, like race and gender, is not anybody's fault. Our society and theology produce low self-worth through perceptions of what it means to be human. We have become individually accountable for gifts, abilities, spiritual discipline. Yet jointly we are the Body of Christ, and when one suffers we all suffer. When one person is missing or 'excluded', we are all the poorer, not because abilities are missed, but because everyone is part of the Body; it's like taking your teeth out, or wearing a sling.



Jointly we
are the Body
of Christ.

An aside

A ten year old told me to “go home to my own country”; while dressed in black with a headscarf. I was already at home in the county of generations of my family. I hesitated to answer, as I had a strong foreign accent at the time – a brain malfunction. I didn’t have time for long explanations – I was on my way to lead Christian worship. What causes this tribalism? We’re all ‘citizens of heaven’, the family of Jesus, following him as best we can.

I’ve learned that my disability is not my problem, any more than the twin colours of my face. I didn’t ask to be as I am. God has seen fit to let me go through what has happened, and see what I make of it. If it’s a problem, it’s a problem of, not for, the whole Church, the whole Body of Christ, which we can productively wrestle with together. If it’s a gift, then it’s *our* gift, not just mine. Can we live with people who are different, even with people who don’t behave as expected; does everyone belong in God’s ‘All’, or are there unconscious limits?

Let’s not leave those who are ‘different’ feeling bad when they ask for a recovery room, or for adjustments to settings, or when they explain they can’t join in, or they take too much precious time... it’s not their need they’re addressing, but *our* need. Your needs, reader, are *ours*, too – can you dare to let everyone share them? When we glimpse how individualism is incompatible with wholeness we may start to understand what it means to be the Body of Christ. Then we might recognise how ‘God is for All’ enough to begin to follow God’s example in Jesus – with a little help from the Holy Spirit.



Original artwork by Verity Phillips – Covid exclusion (above), Thwarted effort (below).



The Revd Verity Phillips is a minister in the Teignbridge Methodist Circuit.



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