

Issue 7 • Winter/Spring 2017

The **Methodist Church** 

the
connexion

**Thinking
big**

Inspiring stories from the life of your Methodist Church



David Perry
Editor

Thinking big

The Shard is the tallest building in the UK and exemplifies the architectural ‘thinking big’ mentality which is such a feature of the London skyline. The ‘View from the Shard’ experience offers a unique perspective upon the capital, with sight lines extending up to 40 miles. Our cover photo, taken in the precinct of Southwark Cathedral, challenges such competitive hubris by overshadowing the opulent Shard with the time- and weather-worn simplicity of a wooden cross. This ancient symbol conveys a towering truth that is altogether more majestic, impressive and awe-inspiring.

Here is a viewpoint from which we can appreciate and assimilate the whole breathtaking panorama of divine presence and purpose as we follow the sight lines of resurrection – leading our perception way beyond our expectations and limitations.

Deeply grounded in the particularities of our existence, the cross invites us to see our surroundings differently by setting the scene from God’s outlook, not ours. In this respect the Shard is comically diminutive, for as a standpoint from which to gain a breathtakingly awesome view it is hopelessly outclassed and outperformed by the humble wooden cross outside Southwark Cathedral.

Why? Because it is from the cross, and the lofty vantage point of Christ’s risen presence alone, that we can believe and know in the heart of our being that there is nothing love cannot face. From this unique viewpoint we look out over the agonies, challenges and promise of life and find ourselves overcome by the sheer scale of God’s astonishing grace, utterly limitless in its height and depth and length and breadth. Overwhelmed by such a boundless vision, how can we do anything other than think big? The view from the Shard may be exhilarating; it is the view from the cross which alone has the power to transform us.

The stories in this issue of *the connexion* give us glimpses of what such ‘thinking big’ looks like when we take to heart God’s amazing vision of how life can be. What is the view from where you are? How might thinking big change your outlook?

Love and peace,
David

Go to www.methodist.org.uk/theconnexion to order more copies of *the connexion*, or to download articles for use in your own church magazine.

To send us your comments about this issue please email:

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the connexion

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Cover picture
View of the Shard taken from precinct of Southwark Cathedral

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Theology everywhere

Every Monday since July 2016, a new article reflecting relevant issues through a theological lens has been uploaded to www.theologyeverywhere.org

These easy-to-read blogs by different contributors from across the Connexion, offer light and accessible theological reflections for people to begin their week.

Bible Month is coming

In June this year, the Methodist Church will be encouraging preachers, teachers, churches and circuits across the Connexion to pick up their Bibles and spend 30 days reading the letter of James. Churches will be supported at: www.methodist.org.uk/biblemonth

More than £55,000 has been raised for our Haiti appeal. Thank you! Search the Methodist website for updates.

3Generate brings Methodist young people together

The 3Generate event for young Methodists took place over 25-27 November with more young people than ever taking part.

3Generate has doubled in size over the last two years with nearly 700 young Methodists aged 8 to 23 years gathered for fun, faith and fellowship.

Penny Fuller, Methodist Church and Community Development Coordinator with responsibility for the event explained: "The growth is so exciting, we were fully booked in some age groups.

"This is a very consultative event. We ask the children to help design the programme through groups meeting throughout the UK. It's very diverse.

"While there were adventurous outdoor activities and silent discos, there was a big emphasis on worship and debate. Young people chose how they wished to worship – ranging from art through to late night communion. Discussions were held in groups to ensure that voices of all ages were heard."

For photos, see the Methodist Church Facebook page.



As District Mission and Evangelism Facilitator in the Liverpool District, the Revd Rachel Deigh inspires us all to dream big

Inspired to think **BIG**

Love your neighbour as yourself

Above my desk is a card that says “Dreams should always be two sizes too big so that you can grow into them.” It’s a card that always inspires me to think big. Looking back, this really began when I received a Sunday school prize called *My Book About Hudson* telling the story of Hudson Taylor, a missionary to China. Aged eight, I didn’t really know what a missionary was, but the idea of someone going to the other side of the world to tell people about Jesus caught my imagination.

It seems God had planted something in me. A dream? A vision? I’m not sure, but gradually I began to see things differently, to

be curious and live on a bigger map.

Over time it can be hard to keep vision fresh and dreams alive, and to keep thinking big. It’s far easier, and often safer, to settle for the familiar and the known. When I find myself doing that, I return to the summing up of the commandments for challenge and inspiration:

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. And love your neighbour as yourself.” (Luke 10:27, NRSV)

What particularly challenges and inspires me, in equal measure, is the recurring word “all”.

Its challenge is in the offering of my love to God. It’s easy to pray, in the words of Peter, “Yes Lord; you know that I love you” (John 21:15 and 16, NRSV). But do I truly love you with ALL my being? All is a deceptively very big word!

In the marriage service, the bride and groom exchange rings saying “all that I am I give to you, and all that I have I share with you”¹, summing up the enormity of the commitment they have made. In effect saying “I hold nothing back from you”.

These commandments remind us that love should hold nothing back. However, my love for God (not to mention my neighbour) always falls short. I am thankful that the Covenant service reminds me of this challenge each year as I promise: “I willingly offer all I have and am to serve you, as and where you choose”².

Its inspiration comes when I remember that I am also shaped by God’s love for me. In loving God with all that I am (however imperfectly) I open myself to receive God’s love, loving me with all that he is.

This is where I see a thin line beginning to appear between inspiration and the mind-blowingly incomprehensible, as God’s ‘all’ is overwhelming and immeasurably greater than mine! My feet are kept on the ground as I remember the conversation between Lucy and Aslan in CS Lewis’ *Prince Caspian*, when Lucy comments on Aslan seeming to appear larger.

We accept and embrace the adventure of opening ourselves up to the ‘all’ of God’s love, little by little, as we begin to grow into all of God – each year finding God bigger. Taking us to new places, challenging our thinking, shaping who we are. Making all things new.

My prayer for the Church is for greater imagination, stretching beyond our experience into the uncharted territory of all that is yet to be. My prayer is to move away from our default position of “keep doing what we’ve always done, but do it better” into a bigger vision, springing from a holy imagination of all that God is and all that God can do.

The joy of being a connexional Church



May your dreams of God’s kingdom always be two sizes too big!

where we are planted, not just in local churches but also in circuits and districts, means that opportunities to experience something out of the usual are on our doorstep. So we have no excuse! Let’s be a curious people, let’s try new things, learn and grow, and find our place in the bigger picture of the kingdom of God, putting ourselves in the way of the Holy Spirit.

Serving as silent inspiration, *My Book About Hudson* still sits on my bookshelf alongside the resources I most frequently use for preparing to lead worship.

May your dreams of God’s kingdom always be two sizes too big!

¹ and ² *The Methodist Worship Book* www.mph.org.uk





On the cusp of the absurd

**National Learning and Development Coordinator for Scotland and Shetland,
Gary Williams challenges the Church to learn from the margins**

*Communities
of faith
are forming*

I saw lots of drugs use and violence, lots of sacrifice and sharing at Ferguslie Park, where I spent a good bit of time in the early 1990s. I worked in Ferguslie, a housing estate near Glasgow Airport, as part of my role as Scripture Union Scotland's Urban Coordinator. I was to 'walk the walk' here, one of the most disadvantaged areas in Scotland, to offer support to other urban communities in a manner which was credible and authentic.

The truth is that I wasn't ready for the challenge. During my time there, two members of our extended church family were murdered and one young Christian man took his own life. I also vividly remember a bank teller laughing in a local mum's face when she tried to open a bank account (her first one) for the church youth club. There was something about the address that caused great hilarity.

Now here's the thing: I believe that Christ is King of Ferguslie Park. I honestly do. That causes me no end of problems, and yet it fills me with intense hope. I can say that now, after almost twenty years. The truth is that when I left, I was broken and confused. What I had tried to do hadn't really added up to much. Yet I've revisited that place on many occasions. The families who taught me so much about real sacrifice are still in touch. My best man was Ferguslie born

and bred and although never rich, he was the most thankful Christian I have ever known. He shared his life with me in the most rugged and authentic manner. His experience of a tough upbringing and of young men 'having each other's backs' helped him to grasp something of the visceral depth of God's sacrifice in Christ.

Jesus is King of Ferguslie Park! Some local Christians are being turned upside down by Jesus. It's wobbly and difficult to understand and it's often hard for many of them to see their part in God's grand plan of redemption for the estate and for the world, not least when many daily pressures around poverty and powerlessness persist. But King Jesus is somehow present in all the streets of Ferguslie, bringing hope, forgiveness, renewal, justice and redemption. Is that absurd?

I am exercised by the fact that Methodism seems to be losing its presence most rapidly in housing estates and inner city areas. Yet when I carried out research last year into evangelism in five Methodist churches/projects in disadvantaged communities across Britain, I found that small communities of faith are forming. There is space for people to shape what happens, there is honesty and vulnerability where leaders and participants often face the same issues. No one seems to be



'fixing anyone else', but instead there is a sense that people are journeying together and learning together.

In these places of fragility, awe and wonder, perhaps the Church will see and experience renewal. It's not that Ferguslie Park or places like it are full of saints; far from it. It's not that infant mortality or premature death or loan sharks on the streets have all been eradicated; absolutely not. There is still despair, anger, injustice, evil, rage and frustration alongside sacrifice and compassion. There is hope and redemption because there is not one square centimetre of Ferguslie Park to which Christ does not lay claim – soiled, stained yet beautiful.

But isn't that absurd? Wouldn't it be more sensible for God to be a thoroughly decent bloke who rewards people living in decent places, who put in a decent shift, a disciplined life or a good innings? And what about the vast majority of Methodist churches serving village or suburban areas – surely people in these places are not inured from hardship or pain, anxiety, depression or bereavement? Isn't Christ King of these places too?

It is absurdly true and beautiful to know and follow a God of grace and justice who lays claim to the whole world and who is active within it, despite lots of apparent

evidence to the contrary. And many people are suffering in places that we would not necessarily consider to be poor or disadvantaged.

But if we bring the people on the margins (some of whom live in inner city estates) to the centre of the life of the Methodist Church in Great Britain, will we not be more likely to be faithful in all of our neighbourhoods?

Let's be faithful, let's live on the cusp of the absurd, and let's see what happens.

*Jesus is
present in
the streets*





Andrew Bird is a minister in the Winchester, Eastleigh and Romsey Circuit, and a pioneer of The Rooftop locally



Previously an atheist, Dennis Pethers has a passion to see a worldwide movement of Christians sharing their faith



Inspired to seek a fresh vision

The Revds Andrew Bird and Dennis Pethers inspire us to go to rooftops to see local communities as God sees them

Andrew

“The times, they are a-changin’,” sang Bob Dylan, the latest winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature. In another song, he wrote: “The answer, my friend, is blowin’ in the wind.” The Swedish academy giving the prize declared that Dylan “created new poetic expressions.”

Britain, the West, the globe are changing; transforming from previously known, solid traditions and institutions, evolving into a more fractured, flexible, fast-paced environments. Yet this is a world where God is dynamically at work with age old principles – and ever new methods. Our God’s big promise is to make all things new (Revelation 21:5).

The call and challenge for the Church in every age includes identifying where God is at work, then joining in. It’s a high calling, wonderful privilege and great adventure. The trouble is, this also entails personal sacrifice.

For example, taking the challenge of openness that includes releasing ourselves from small traditions, which may have become a hindrance to personal and corporate growth. The answer, my friend, is in the wind of the Spirit. To catch the wind, we need to stop,

look and listen. Then we set sail. Jesus followers, experiencing the joys and risks of trusting in our outward-looking, border-crossing, Saviour.

For my wife and I these principles literally came home to roost: we adopted sibling children. Our known world and comfortable traditions became obsolete. We needed new ways of thinking, being and doing. New ways of expressing love, compassion, mercy and patience. A culture transformation that’s ongoing for our lifetime. Sometimes we adapt well, other times we feel lost. All the time the Spirit is with us and we know we are abundantly blessed. A family under creation and re-creation.

My circuit responsibilities include the privilege of encouraging and enabling churches who wish to engage with our transforming world. We are helped in this adventure by working with The Rooftop.

The Rooftop process helps churches explore afresh where God is at work in their communities. What might that look like? And how might we join in? It gives a fresh, bespoke framework to shaping ourselves for the Spirit’s work today: to write a new song (Psalm 96:1) and start singing fresh poetry.

The Rooftop is already helping Methodist and many other churches across the UK. It is also helping churches in the United States, South Africa and Australia. It will soon begin in countries across Europe and Africa. A key moment will be a Global Encounter planned for 10 October 2020.

www.therooftop.org
Email Rooftop’s UK pioneer, Samuel: **SamuelBragaTavares@therooftop.org**



A city-wide Rooftop Encounter at the Shard, London

Go beyond the walls of all we know

As I read the story of Peter, I felt strongly that the Church today needs to go to a ‘rooftop’ to seek a fresh vision of God’s heart for the lost and then join Jesus in his mission, to reach people beyond the walls.

So I began taking leaders to rooftops to look across their community and to ask God to help them to see it as he sees it. Over the past few years, The Rooftop has become a global movement that is helping churches, regional, national and international ministries to join Jesus in his mission as they go through a dynamic three-step-process:



Christians go to a rooftop, look at the community and ask a new question: “Jesus, how do we see these people as you see them and join you in your mission to reach them?”



In small groups, Christians are equipped and empowered to engage with people who are beyond the walls of their churches.



Continuing in small groups, Christians are equipped and empowered to make disciples who will in turn make disciples.

The Rooftop’s leader, Dennis Pethers, explains.

Dennis

A number of years ago I was sitting in a hotel room wondering how this rapidly changing world can be reached with the good news of Jesus Christ when there are many churches that seem to be filled with people who have so little passion, or confidence, to share the gospel. My sense was that the Church needs to rediscover God’s passion for lost people, and to receive his power to engage them with the greatest news in the world. To put it another way – there is a need for an awakening!

I felt led to the passage in Acts chapter 10 – where the Apostle Peter went to a high place, to a rooftop, to pray. He saw a vision and experienced a revolution in his heart and mind – an awakening!

He saw for the first time that God’s love is for all people everywhere.

So, Peter went beyond the walls of all that he had ever known to join Jesus in **his** mission: “to seek and to save what was lost”. Then the gospel spread across the world.



Leaders gather for a Rooftop Encounter at Methodist Central Hall, London



ABOVE Syntiche Dedji is Partnerships Support Officer for the Methodist Church in Britain's World Church Relationships Team

RIGHT Japanese monks praying outside North Korean Labour Party building, Cheorwon, South Korea

The **biggest** dream of all

Big prayers for peace and unification across a divided Korea captured Syntiche Dedji's heart as she represented the Methodist Church on a recent trip to South Korea

South Korean Christians know how to think big. They believe that with a bit of faith and a lot of hard work anything is possible. I witnessed this first hand during my time in Seoul, South Korea, as a participant of a ten-day ecumenical workshop.

Organised by the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCCCK), this cross-church gathering was part of the global campaign for a peace treaty on the Korean peninsula.

Although it is more than 70 years since the independence and division of the Korean peninsula, the geo-political situation in North East Asia continues to be explosive. While some people may claim that "the situation for reunification in Korea is no longer hopeful," as explained by Dr Noh Jung Sun, Chair of the NCCCK's Reconciliation and Reunification Committee, "what is hopeful are the people." They have a great vision for peace, reconciliation and reunification, and are determined to strive on until this vision becomes a reality. This

was evident outside the notorious former North Korean Labour Party building, where we met two Japanese monks – who go there every day to chant for peace and justice. And it was evident during the Monday Prayers for Peaceful Reunification.

These are organised by the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea, who have decided to hold weekly prayers for peace and reconciliation until the Korean peninsula is at peace. We attended the 104th prayer service. As we entered, we were all given purple scarves. Red is the colour for North Korea and blue the colour for South Korea, therefore purple represents both countries.

We concluded the service by holding hands and singing: "We long for unification, this is our dream and our mission. With our whole being we'll labour, 'til unification comes. Oh come, restore our people. Restore our country as one. Reunification welcome, unification come."



Koreans have a great vision for peace

Losing nothing and finishing well



BELOW Homeless person on the street of Edinburgh, and a view of Edinburgh where the Revd Yangsun Yi made her first mission trip



Originally from South Korea, the Revd Yangsun Yi is a first-year probationer in Exeter Coast and Country Circuit

When I first explored Exeter there was a surprise waiting for me. Young people addicted to alcohol and drugs wandered and loitered between charity shops in the street where my church is. That street connects with another which is full of expensive brand shops.

This reminds of my first mission trip to Edinburgh. My role then was to approach people walking around the city to share the gospel of Jesus Christ. I still remember that I made every effort to talk with as many people as possible. It was not an issue at all to me who they were, whether they were beggars or alcoholics, or clean and healthy people, because in the eyes of the Lord God they are all those for whom Jesus died to complete his mission.

Jesus set the example for his disciples when he says: "For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of

him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day." (John 6:38-9, NRSV) Having been led by the Spirit since the very beginning of his ministry, Jesus completed the mission given to him by the Father with the last words of his earthly life, "It is finished." (John 19:30, NRSV)

Therefore, for me, the theme 'thinking big: vision' means that through the guidance and help of the Holy Spirit I will follow Jesus Christ, so that I lose nothing that the Father has given me and can also boldly say that "it is finished".

Furthermore, I hope and pray for all who have faith in Christ through the Spirit, and all who haven't yet faith, that in him they also complete their mission that the Father has given to them. Thus, we all also may say "it is finished," as Jesus did, when we breathe the last breath of our earthly life.



The Revd Yangsun Yi is based at Sidwell Street Methodist Church, Exeter

Doing God's will – be bold to the finish

Thinking bigger by thinking smaller



This April the Principal of Wesley House Cambridge, the Revd Dr Jane Leach, commissions its new buildings and vision to rededicate the college to the service of God



Out of ashes grew God's call to something bigger

It was originally conceived as a house of residence and formation within the University of Cambridge for Methodists studying for ordained ministry. From 1921 to 2014, Wesley House Cambridge served the British Methodist Connexion as a place of initial ministerial education. When the Methodist Conference of 2012 voted to rationalise its training resources, and consequently withdraw activities from Wesley House, there remained in central Cambridge the college buildings, governed by the Wesley House Trust. But what to do with them?

As the college trustees and staff gathered for prayer and to discern a way forward, we painfully recognised that clinging to the past would deliver us no new vision for the future. Yet we recognised, also, that to be faithfully Christian we could not abandon the past – as if God had not formed us through

it. Rather, we needed to allow memory and imagination together to give birth to the future.

Out of the ashes of disappointment grew a conviction that God was calling Wesley House to something smaller – to sell our buildings and rebuild fit-for-purpose premises on only part of the site; and to something bigger – to live on the larger map of global Methodism and seek to support both ordained ministries and the ministries of the whole people of God.

Over the last three years much has changed, as what becomes smaller allows for bigger vision. We have expanded our trust purposes, rebuilt our premises, restructured our staff teams, launched a free access online journal, established an Easter School for local preachers, welcomed some 50 overseas students and academic visitors, trained all the British District Chairs in supervision and designed a suite of online modules for distance learning in the UK and beyond.

Seeing ourselves now as 'not just an old theological college in Cambridge', we hope that our founding charisms of intentional Christian community, cutting-edge scholarship and passion for God's mission will be increasingly considered by British and overseas Methodists as resources belonging to us all. We look forward to supporting your work across the Connexion and worldwide.

www.wesley.cam.ac.uk/nearyou



In this together

Tim Baker witnesses Jesus' call to love our neighbour put into action on a global scale

When Jesus is asked "who is my neighbour?" he tells the story we know as The Good Samaritan. In that story it is the most unlikely person of all who sees the opportunity to help someone in need – and responds.

With All We Can, I have been blessed to see transformation brought about in unexpected places through the strength of relationships. When you visit dusty, isolated, poverty-affected villages in Jharkhand, India, or walk amongst the devastation of natural disasters in places like Haiti or Nepal, it feels a long way from our own lives, homes and Methodist churches.

However, All We Can is connecting churches and individuals in the UK to some of the world's poorest communities. For example, by introducing people to Prossy and her friends in Uganda at Harvest, and connecting us all with people we can pray for and hear from on a regular basis. It is such relationships being established across the

miles that are bringing relief and development, but also bringing hope – because a better world is possible.

Jesus expresses that hope when he invites us to love our global neighbour as much as our local neighbours, and ourselves. Despite the distances, the differences, we are all in this together. At All We Can, it is our vision that every person's potential be fulfilled, no matter what circumstances they were born into or find themselves in. We also believe that, working together, our vision is achievable.

Key to this are the relationships we have nurtured with determined local people who want to see change in their communities. If we all work together and commit to doing all that we can, then a better world is possible. That is what motivates me as I travel around the Connexion, meeting people and sharing our work – knowing that relationships can and will change lives. Will you join with us in putting that vision into action?



Tim Baker is the Churches & Volunteers Officer for All We Can, Methodist relief and development, as well as a Methodist local preacher

Sign up to receive information about All We Can's Lent devotional resource at www.allwecan.org.uk/lent

Prossy and her friends enjoying fresh water in Uganda



Glimpses of the big picture



Climbing Kilimanjaro enlarges Rachel Matthews' vision for pioneering new ways of being Church with children who have special needs, their families and communities across the Vale of Stour in the West Midlands

Climbing Kilimanjaro is a metaphor for my journey of faith

I am continually talking to God and asking for his guidance on where next. Last year God asked me to go to Kilimanjaro. I wasn't sure why, but with hindsight a few months later I know that this was his gift to me. Climbing Kilimanjaro was, and is, a metaphor for my journey of faith and the pioneering path God has called me to.

There was a group of 12 of us. We climbed Africa's highest mountain together, ably led by a Tanzanian guide who showed us the way and set the pace.

Some days, the walking was easy, the sun shone on my face and I felt that I could manage anything.

Other days, it was difficult, with steep hills to climb and awkward terrain underfoot.

Many times, it was simply a case of just putting one foot in front of another, trusting our guide, that he would show us the way and not let us fall.

The whole experience on that mountain was a life-changing one, but it was perhaps our penultimate day of walking that spoke to me the loudest.

The sun was shining, the path was straight and we started the day with enthusiasm. We were told to expect an easy day of walking, as we headed towards base camp.

After a few hours, the base camp was nowhere to be seen. The sunshine had been replaced by grey cloud; we saw only a grey landscape and felt a bitter wind whipping across our faces.

The journey was taking twice as long as



expected and enthusiasm wavered as we began to question and doubt our guide.

As we despondently walked in single file, praying for a breakthrough, the clouds suddenly shifted – we were blessed with a momentary glimpse of the campsite ahead of us. But as quickly as it appeared, it disappeared once again.

I remember that so clearly because it felt like a gift from God... a glimpse of what was to come. It gave us all the encouragement we needed – to keep on putting one foot in front of the next to reach our destination.

I learnt many things on that trek to the summit of Mount Kilimanjaro. But perhaps the most significant of them all is that, as a pioneer, I've tried many new things and whilst I'm desperate to see the full picture and their results, often I can't. It's been very much a case of trusting God to show me the way and look for those small glimpses of truth along the journey to keep up the pace.

My god-daughter, Florence has special needs (you can just see her in the photo, right: she has brown hair, sitting on the left). So it was on my heart to explore what we could offer as a circuit to Florence, her friends and her family.

I have been walking together with the Pioneering Pathways Network for three years now. Although some days have been an easier terrain to tread than others, we have kept holding God's hand and have now established a number of initiatives we are proud of. These include:

Special Spirits – a holiday club for children with special needs and their siblings, with coffee and cake for parents.

Lifted Spirits – a support group for parents of children with special needs, run by parents.



Full of Spirits – celebrating the important role siblings play for children with special needs.

Parents' training – my colleague Jo Yair works closely with Care for the Family to deliver ongoing training for parents of special needs children.

I have felt further blessed this year as we have begun to work with a flagship special school called The Brier. Many of our children attend and it offers the opportunity to deepen our connection with the local community.

I know from my experience on the mountain and the work I'm involved in, that God is our guide, showing us the way. Although some days are tougher than we expected, or parts of the journey are slower than we had hoped, we know that God has the destination in his hand and we can trust where he is calling us.

www.thatsthespirit.org.uk

Rachel Matthews

Part of the Pioneering Pathways Network



It felt like a gift from God... a glimpse of what was to come





Placing church at the centre of community

Thinking big challenges an ecumenical alliance of local churches across Nidderdale, Yorkshire, to aim high, engage with community, have fun and give praise to God according to the Revd Mike Poole, Superintendent of the Pateley Bridge Circuit

Climbing out of Pateley Bridge to the top of Coldstones Cut, a massive art installation at 1,375 feet above sea level, you gain a spectacular view of the countryside. It can be a bit breezy on the best of days people in Nidderdale will tell you, but it's worth the effort.

Here we held an Easter sunrise act of worship. Six months previously, having arrived in the circuit as new superintendent, my suggestion had been met with bemusement by ecumenical friends. With brave souls and warm hearts however, it took place. It was windy, it was cold but it was praiseworthy to the God who has called many before to mountaintops and then sent them back into the towns and cities below to tell of his love.

God indeed calls, sends and equips as his people respond. When in 2007, more than 200 people witnessed the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding for the inauguration

of Church in the Dale (CitD), neither they nor the 20-plus church leaders lacked faith to see this ecumenical commitment through. With the same level of faith today, CitD participates in the mission of God by placing Church at the centre of community.

Nidderdale is north of Harrogate and Ripon. Classed as an area of outstanding natural beauty it attracts many visitors. So maintaining local Church presence is not without challenges, although its folk are hard-working and industrious.

The annual September agricultural show was exceptionally busy last year with over 9,000 attending. In keeping with tradition, it was heralded with an open-air service of thanksgiving led by CitD. Commenting afterwards on how uplifting the occasion had been, one lady added, "It was memorable. Together, you all looked like priests!"

On reflection, I'm less concerned with how we sounded or how we looked. More important is that we were seen. Being visible, at the centre of community is part of





FAR LEFT The Revd Mike Poole with Anglican vicar the Revd Darryl Hall on Coldstones Cut

LEFT AND BELOW Arriving at the church on time in 1940s bus for forties style wedding blessing

the calling of the Church and that is made all the more effective when Church and community align their thinking.

The Tour de Yorkshire cycle race passing through Pateley Bridge was a great example. The Revd Darryl Hall decorated St Cuthbert's Anglican Church tower with a large cycle and rider logo. It gave the perfect message, showing the town to be a place of joy and welcome.

We opened the Methodist Church for hospitality and a superb view for spectators. Through our doors that day came a couple from Lancashire. They told me their son was competing in the peloton. So in the midst of all the tea, cake and the excited visitors I offered prayers for him. They stayed with us for most of the day.

Afterwards I received an email from this couple with a photograph capturing the moment their son rode past them as they cheered him on. "We'll not forget the prayer and welcome that you provided for us," they wrote. "By the way, our son finished in the top 19!" What a result and what a witness for church in the centre of community.

When Pateley Bridge hosted its 1940s weekend we thought creatively how we might have CitD right at the center. We approached the organisers with the idea of a 1940s wedding re-enactment.

Whilst met with initial puzzlement amongst ecumenical friends, Revd Darryl and I worked together to make the concept a reality. Not only did we enlist our churches' flower ladies to set up a wedding dress festival entitled Coupons and Confetti, but we created a service of thanksgiving for weddings topped with a service of blessing for a couple who turned up in fabulous 1940s attire.

They travelled in a 1940s coach up the high street to the Methodist Church – filled to capacity with people who clapped, cheered and sang praise to God.



The majority, not regular church goers, experienced the grace, joy and welcome of God who flings the doors of his Church wide open to all.

So where, we might ask can Church be found in rural Nidderdale? Certainly not behind closed doors lamenting former days. To support Pateley Bridge's bid in the Best British High Street competition, we took Church into the shops on Harvest Sunday morning with our Messy Church families.

Accompanied on guitar and ukelele, we sang our song of thanks to our wonderful shop keepers, who in their amazement and gratitude responded by asking us to host the welcome for the visiting judges. What an occasion! What a confirmation of Church at the centre of community!

The church is being seen, being visible, at the centre of the community



The world is already here



Working alongside people of other cultures and denominations across the Wembley Circuit enriches and transforms the Revd Elaine Joseph's ministry as Superintendent

There is a vibrancy and energy about Wembley that touched me the first time I walked along the High Road.

It echoes my experiences as a Mission Partner in Trinidad. The multiplicity of languages, cultures, faiths and ethnicities made this Black British-Caribbean Christian woman feel at home.

In the depths of Wembley, Confirmation classes and pre-marital counselling are divine encounters with people on the fringes of the Church. Children, youth and adults journey together on adventures of faith, where questions, discussions and other media help us share our faith with each other. It is great when they make connections between Scripture, theology and their daily lives. It's exciting to see young people's faith growing and hear them share their testimonies with the wider congregation at their Confirmation. It's also heartening

to see senior citizens' faith deepen as they actively engage in prayer meetings and Bible studies.

When couples come for pre-marital counselling we meet as strangers but, over time, develop a trusting relationship where they openly share their concerns, questions and joys. I am grateful for the privilege of journeying with all these people through the changing seasons of their lives.

Closer to the stadium, I encounter football fans at Wembley Park station, when a self-appointed 'cantor' raises a rallying song. Meanwhile, other supporters throughout the station join in with one voice and carry me along up the stairs with their song, in 'surround-sound'.

It is hard not to feel the passion with which supporters follow their teams, players, managers. Young, old, male, female, Black, White, Asian, football and

*Engaging
with fanatical
supporters*



*Vibrancy
and energy
in Wembley*

rugby fans, and concert goers invest time, money, energy to be there to cheer on their team or their favourite artists. This passion was also tangible as fans left Wembley in droves for Leeds to watch cricket and rugby at Headingley.

When I see fans on Sunday mornings going into the stadium I used to joke that they were going to their ‘church’. But the joke was on me, because I have yet to see droves of people coming to churches in the UK with such an air of excitement, hope and expectation. So I need to engage with these fanatical supporters, who flock to Wembley Stadium from across the country, and discover what motivates them to follow their team anywhere and everywhere.

Many years ago a wise Jamaican man said: “People is people” and he is right. Irrespective of language, culture, religion and status, basic human needs are the same. We all need to be loved, acknowledged and to know our purpose in life. The Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) explains what the Christian’s purpose is: to make the good news of God’s love accessible to the



world. Looking at the demographics of the London Borough of Brent, it is clear that ‘the world’ is already here.

So opportunities abound for us to witness to the good news about Jesus Christ in our own Jerusalem (Acts 1:8) by starting with people we know – after intentionally praying for them. Fulfilling the Great Commission doesn’t require us to journey to distant lands, but rather invites us to develop authentic, loving relationships beginning with a smile, a greeting, a conversation, a helping hand.

When the Holy Spirit strangely warms our hearts through these encounters, we will then be compelled to commit ourselves to go into our local mission fields.

Steve Green sang “People need the Lord” in 1984 and it is relevant for our ministry and mission in 2016.

*We are called to take His light
To a world where wrong seems right.
What would be too great a cost
For sharing life with one who’s lost?
Through His love our hearts can feel
All the grief they bear.
They must hear the words of life
Only we can share.*

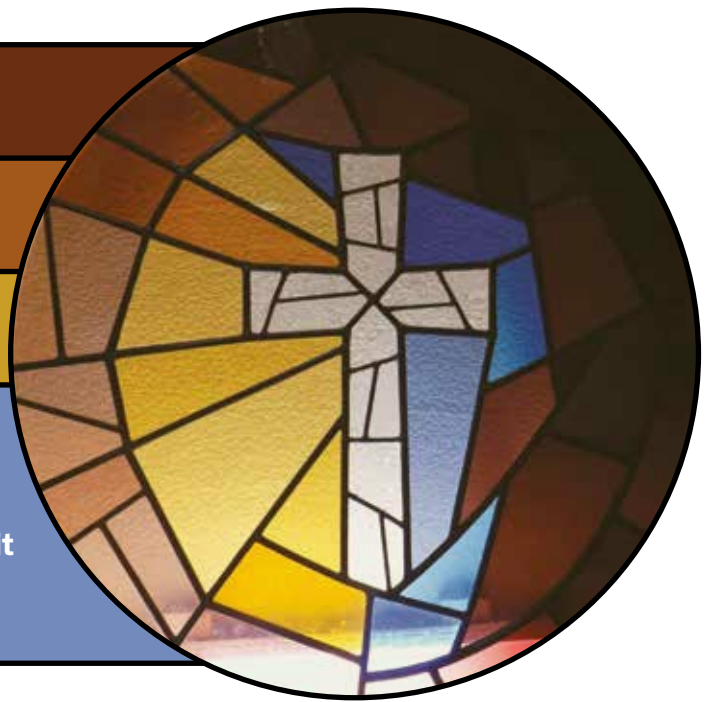
PEOPLE NEED THE LORD, MCHUGH/NELSON,
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People are waiting in our community for us to sow the seeds of the gospel into their hearts. God will provide for those who water the young Christians and the Holy Spirit will harvest the souls into the kingdom of God. Why are we waiting? Why are we waiting? Our Saviour is on the starting line, and urges us to “Go!”



A wonderful challenge to face

As more people are called to become preachers, the Revd Stuart Wild, Superintendent in Manchester, shares how one circuit meets the challenge of fulfilling God's vision



“I’m running short of people to act as mentors.”

Those are words that I never thought I would say. Immediately I added this rider which I truly believe, but it’s a wonderful challenge to face.

It’s a challenge because in the Manchester Circuit we have eleven preachers in training. There are four females and seven males. Ages range from late teens to recently retired. They include six different languages – English is a second, third and even a fourth language!

The call to each trainee has come in diverse ways. People have responded to direct challenge; to a personal sense of call; to a dream. One of our trainees brought a friend along to a tutorial (for moral support) and he was later challenged to seek a note to preach for himself.

We take training seriously. Prayerful consideration is given to the appointment of mentors and tutors. Studies are group based, but

always take the needs of the individual into account. At present we have four tutors who meet regularly to review progress and to offer mutual support.

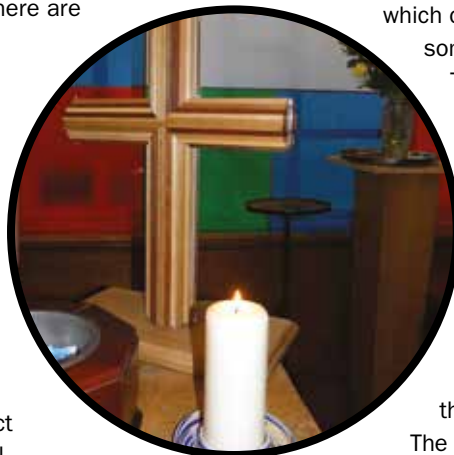
Twice a year all trainees and tutors meet together. They share food and have an opportunity to discuss experiences and progress. There is then study time which covers a subject that someone has requested.

Topics have ranged from children in church, to voice projection, to preaching on difficult Bible passages.

So why do I think so many people are taking up local preaching (and worship leading, but that’s another story)?

The short answer which I offer without irony is that

God is calling them. The long answer is that as a circuit we believe that God is calling people and we are praying that they will hear the call. When they respond; we seek to accommodate their needs as individuals and enable them to grow as disciples and preachers.



RIGHT Local preachers in training

God is calling people to local preaching



Stepping outside for the **BIG** picture

In ministry we can sometimes find ourselves so caught up in the day-to-day and week-to-week maintaining of church congregations and buildings, managing the expectations of what people think that their church and minister should be doing, that we miss the BIG PICTURE.

I was asked to write about what fires me up in ministry. When I thought about it, what really fires me up, gets me enthusiastic about the future of the Church, is when I get the chance to step outside of church buildings, away from the congregation and the expectations.

Over the summer I had the opportunity to do exactly that. I was the Synod Cymru leader, along with the Revd Cathy Gale from the Wales District, on a Youth Exchange between the Methodist Church in Wales and the Jamaican Methodist Church. We took a group of nine young people from both the Wales District and Synod Cymru over to Jamaica for two weeks.

This was not a holiday. These young

Welsh people encountered difficulties. They found themselves and their faith challenged. At times they wanted to get back on the plane and come home to familiar Wales. However, they did not give up or give in – because they had people looking out for them; they were connected.

Seeing how the young people loved and supported each other in spite of coming from different churches, being different ages or speaking Welsh or English as a first language, it showed me just what the Church of Jesus Christ could and should be!

Whatever circumstances our individual churches and chapels may find themselves in, we are all connected. Just as those young people gave fully of themselves to support each other, so the connexional nature of our Methodist Church means that all members are also looking to “build each other up” (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

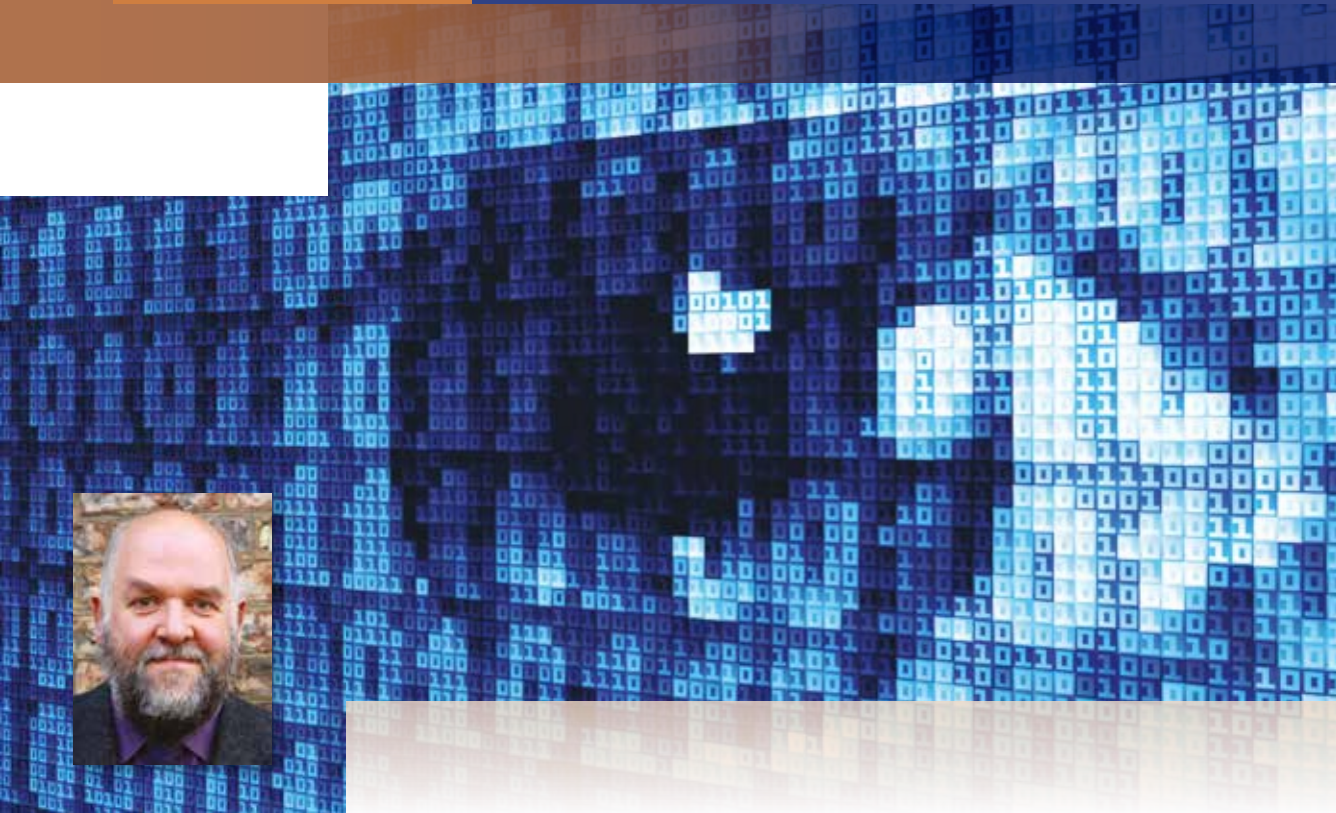
It is this BIG VISION of the Church which motivates me. No borders, no boundaries just God’s people united in love.

Leading young Welsh people to Jamaica fires Deacon Jonathan Miller’s passion for being church people outside Church



Digital vision

The Revd Pete Phillips describes the explosive growth of a network of digital discipleship researchers



In 2009 CODEC, the Research Centre for Digital Theology, was launched at St John's College, Durham: a Methodist minister (Pete Phillips) helping another Methodist minister (Brian Brown) to complete a National Biblical Literacy Survey, and an Anglican priest (Kate Bruce) writing up a PhD on preaching.

Since then CODEC has changed to become a research centre at the University of Durham, with a six-figure annual budget. We have six core members of staff – an administrator (Penny Bissell), five research fellows (Kate Bruce, David Ford, Josh Mann, Karen O'Donnell, Marika Rose), and a director (Pete Phillips).

But CODEC is in fact a much larger network of people exploring together the impact digital culture is making on contemporary pedagogy, the world of faith and discipleship, and on our engagement with the Bible and other sacred texts.

As research intensive staff, CODEC team members may be presenting public lectures

in theological training institutions or major universities; speaking at conferences like Greenbelt, New Wine, Spring Harvest, or PremierMedia's Digital Conference; leading a small group conversation in a local church; meeting with church leaders across denominations; giving a paper at an academic conference in the UK, Europe or the USA; or supervising a student working on a dissertation; sitting at a desk coding, watching a video, or writing a book; or creating a Lego movie of Psalm 139 (<http://bit.ly/legopsalm>); reading and writing papers; engaging with local and national government; writing funding bids for the UK's leading research councils.

Fundamentally our research is 'applied' – listening to voices from the public, from the pew and from the academy; both a servant of the Church and a prophetic voice to the Church; developing the practical outcomes of our research into reports, resources and training opportunities.

So we live a kind of double life. On the one



hand, we are committed to creating world-class research in our key areas – biblical literacy, digital pedagogy, digital discipleship and human identity in a digital age.

That means we often engage in conversations about digital culture with colleagues from Finland, Sweden, Germany, Switzerland, and USA. But on the other hand, we are committed to communicating our research in local engagement, with local churches and groups, translating world class research to empower the Church.

CODEC's project on Digital Discipleship (discipleshiprove.com), has become probably the leading, if not the only, collection of online resources for discipleship. Our BigBible website project (bigbible.uk) has consistently delivered quality content on Bible literacy and engagement since 2009.

From its inception to early 2016, the project focused on hosting conversations about the Bible and discipleship, with many dozens of authors contributing. From March 2016, the site has a fresh design with content centred on 'biblical literacy and reception in a digital world', in order to focus on CODEC's strength in the digital and still offer great conversations about biblical literacy.

CODEC staff are currently exploring opportunities to assist other denominations in their development of digital engagement across their churches. We are engaging more and more with Bible Society, Biblica, Biblegateway and YouVersion in exploring



biblical literacy at a global level, with some of our research exploring the use of the Bible in social media, attitudes to the Bible among digital millenials, and emerging projects on the Bible and the Catholic Church and the Bible and children.

Through CODEC's work on Preaching and Media Literacy we train ordinands, lay preachers and young preachers. Engaging with undergraduate, MA and PhD/DThM programmes, we train church leaders and pastors, including through a pioneering module on Biblical Literacy in a Media Age.

Every June, we offer a five-day intensive MediaLit course, which is open to everyone to explore digital culture, media engagement and some of the opportunities we now have for sharing the gospel. Just about everyone who attends says the course should be compulsory for all engaged in ministry!

CODEC is deeply grateful for the charities that fund us and the many partner agencies who help us to do our work. Please pray for us and for our research!





As circuit leaders think outside the box across the Cumbria District, the Revd Philip Jackson, Superintendent of the Wigton Circuit, sees chapel members' prayers bringing unexpected answers

PRAYING

the dream into reality

Start with a blank canvas

Across the Wigton Circuit, people are finding that one of the easiest prayers to say is not necessarily the easiest to live out. Every day, across the world, people pray “your kingdom come, your will be done” not necessarily thinking of the personal impact.

The circuit, on Cumbria’s north-west coast, has seen a number of changes recently born out of that simple prayer. The small town of Silloth boasts six churches, many with dwindling congregations. Trinity Methodist Church is one of these, where a faithful group struggles to maintain a cavernous building. Eighteen months ago

church councils across the circuit wrestled with the need for change, acknowledging that Church as we know it does not appear to be attractive, nor meet communities’ needs.

In September 2015, Trinity embraced this need for change, with the Revd Philip Jackson helping members to think about other ways of doing church that might work. “We realised that attempting to choose a tried and tested model was the wrong way. So we started with a blank canvas,” recalls Philip. This involved a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis of the community, and then a challenge to imagine that Silloth

Allow God to lead the vision

had no churches at all – with everyone coming afresh to share the gospel with a community who had never heard of Jesus. What would they do? After some prayer the answer came back – “build a house!”

With the hymn “Let us build a house where love can dwell” ringing out loud, the congregation started on the difficult road of selling their church building and moving into a house as a place of worship and community.

For Dorothy Wallis, one of the members, it is about “connecting with people who don’t necessarily feel comfortable with traditional church. The house will provide a place to share our faith, offer the hand of friendship and show God’s love.”

This has not been an easy road to travel, and in the last few months planning problems have reduced the value of the chapel by around £80,000 throwing the project into doubt. Despite a number of other setbacks, the congregation has remained firm in believing that this is God’s vision for Methodism in Silloth. Members are holding to their faith that God will find a way.

Following this most recent hurdle, the Church Council made a decision to forge ahead with the missional elements of the vision using their current school room, and allow the building to catch up. A walking football session started in October and a drop-in ‘open house’ began at the start of Advent.

Working with Age Concern, the drop-ins have included computer sessions for older people to help them get online. The congregation also received the loan of sofas and have started to worship as if they were in the house, with most services being held in an informal manner (whether that is with five hymns or with none!)

The circuit’s Wigton Chapel has also been thinking big as members here struggle to contain worship and mission in their present building. Messy Church has grown to a fortnightly congregation of the church rather than a monthly missional activity, with numbers regularly pushing the ‘comfortable’ level in the hall. The congregation on Sundays also often makes the building feel ‘full’.

“An extraordinary Easter service with people seated in the ‘crush’ hall opened our eyes to the need for more space,”

Embracing the need for change

says Philip and so the church held its second 48-hour prayer weekend in September focusing on what the church might look like going forward.

Although a number of options had been talked about, the congregation was again given a blank piece of paper and urged to allow God to lead the vision and lead the way. At the time of the writing, members are exploring different ideas that came up through those prayers.

As the Cumbria District develops ecumenically, the shape of the circuit will change and this requires the circuit leadership to think outside the box.

Willingness to think big has started with these two chapels, one that has been in a culture of growth for some years and another that has chosen not to accept or manage decline but to fight it and pray “your kingdom come, your will be done”.

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Caring church

With a big vision to be a caring community at the heart of the city, the Revd Mark Dunn-Wilson tells what this means for Truro Methodist Church



Early on an autumn Saturday morning I was in our youth café when there was a knock at the door. A lady stood there. I did not know her; she did not know me. “Can you come and help this gentleman please? I think he’s been on the street all night and he’s really cold.” I started to go with her and as we walked, we spoke. “I’m not religious” she continued, “but I thought I’d come to you, because I’ve heard that you are a church that cares.”

That’s when I realised what a special people I was privileged to serve here in Truro. What a reputation to have built up in our local community!

In so many ways, that simple encounter and all that led to it, and has grown from it, sums up our Thinking Big Vision – to be and to build a caring community at the heart of our city. Truro is at the heart of Cornwall, a

county which hides its poverty well, which serves to keep our millions of tourists happy but can present a false impression for them too. Our membership may be higher than the average Methodist church but our age profile is probably similar.

Is there a Bible verse underpinning all that we seek to do? Jesus stands before the congregation and applies Isaiah’s prophecy to his own ministry in Luke 4:18-19 (NRSV):

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.”

*To proclaim
the Lord’s favour*



OPPOSITE All-church Sunday lunch
 RIGHT Men's fellowship
 CENTRE Midweek well-being group
 BELOW Beach worship

To welcome,
 empower and
 serve

This was the purpose of Jesus' ministry, and our vision is to be the outworking of that as the body of Christ where God has set us. Our mission is to welcome, empower and serve so that everyone can fulfil their God-given potential.

So what does that look like?

It looks like food bank and street pastors; it looks like a weekday café using locally sourced, ethically produced and fairly traded goods; it looks like a committed team of volunteers who run it, including some with special needs; it looks like The Well – our midweek daytime community offering a philosophy group, music for well-being, lunch, outings, speakers, Scrabble™ and space to be welcomed; it looks like Toddle-Along carer and toddler group; it looks like a community lunch; it looks like Truro Trundlers our own English Athletics-affiliated running group seeking to blend exercise and spirituality for everyone; it looks like partnering with one of our village chapels whose mission opportunities are considerable but whose human and financial resources are not; it looks like Muddy Church for those who want their 'Messy' a bit more extreme; it looks like a ground-breaking pastoral programme to support those with dementia and their carers; it looks like mission and ministry partnerships with local schools; it looks like a youth programme that seeks to grow missional communities for those who don't do Church; it looks like using technology – including a smartphone app – to inform, inspire, equip and bless; it looks like variety in worship provision which cherishes traditional models of worship and develops alternatives; it looks like well-resourced midweek worship (liturgical and all-age) for those for whom Sunday 'is a bad day'; it looks like avoiding the word 'contemporary' when we mean 'band-led', because worship inspired by organ and choir can be contemporary too; it looks like a family ready to grapple with the messiness of a 'you belong here, whoever you are' community because we'd rather welcome you than keep you out; it looks like an ordinary group of people trying to hold to the heart of Jesus in an often brutal, divisive world.



Our band-led Sunday morning worship is called 9:22 and starts, unusually, at 9:22am precisely. We found our inspiration as we read the Bible together as a church and came to 1 Corinthians 9:22: "that by every possible means, I may save some". And so, every week, we are reminded of why we bother! Jesus knew nothing of the division of salvation into spiritual, emotional and physical boxes of which the modern Church has become so fond. He came to proclaim the "Lord's favour" on all people, in every way. If that was his vision, then who are we to argue?

By every possible
 means, I may save
 some



Reflection



Make no little plans

Above our fireplace hangs a treasured possession, a framed drawing of a large lakeside city. Streets radiate like arteries from a magnificent central plaza; piers jut out boldly into the surrounding waters; civic buildings stand out proudly, symbols of the influence and security of the place.

Plan for a city

It's a print of Daniel Burnham's 1909 plan for the development of Chicago (below left), and treasured by us because of the years we lived there before returning to Britain last year. Burnham and his partner John Wellborn Root dominated American architecture in the early twentieth century. Their hopes for their home city and all its citizens, reflected in the plan, were for integration, healthy living and routine exposure to beauty. This plan for Chicago, though never fully implemented, shaped and influenced urban planning across the world for decades. Today, Chicago's architectural majesty, expansive parkland and iconic lakefront all pay tribute to their genius.

"Make no little plans: they have no magic to stir our blood,"¹ Burnham famously replied

when questioned about the scale of his ambition and the nature of his hopes for Chicago. He went on to describe the way in which high hopes and visionary labour guarantee for themselves a future, however they are received in the present. He could not have known how his words would prove true in Chicago's case.

Big plans for our cities

We currently find ourselves under a similar imperative as Christians: to 'make big plans' for our sharing of the gospel and our incarnation of God's grace in our own cities, towns and communities that possess a similar confidence. But we need to do so in ways that begin by listening carefully to the hopes and visions of our neighbours. In the past, our confident vision for the life of the Church was often also vested in architecture: grand buildings that reflected the influence of the institution and its members.

God's dreams for humanity

Now, our vision must be different for a different age: humbler, more open and relational, closer to those we seek to serve, responsive to their needs and attentive to





their search for fullness of life. We must be attentive too to the Spirit of God, already present and stirring at the deepest depths of all human lives with yearning, longing and hope, always desiring to bring us more fully to life. Indeed, in discovering the breadth and scope of God's dreams for humanity we find our own confidence to meet new challenges.

Writing later in the twentieth century of Chicago, the "City of the Big Shoulders"², Carl Sandburg acknowledged its critics and their accurate description of its urban struggles. But he went on to express his love for the city's confidence, that it was a place "with lifted head singing so proud to be alive"³. This is a stirring evocation of an orientation that we also need to rediscover. Not an arrogant pride, rooted in our own self-righteousness, but rather an innate joy that comes from our own rediscovery of the gospel's power and purpose in our own day and age, from our consequent ability to give

"an account of the hope that" we have (1 Peter 3:15, NRSV), and from our subsequent readiness for what Sandburg called the "building, breaking, rebuilding"⁴ that follows, no less necessary in the contemporary Church than in a great city.

As Caryl Micklem wrote, words can powerfully evoke the grandeur and beauty of the vision of our faith:

*When, in the rush of days, my will
is habit-bound and slow,
help me to keep in vision still
what love and power and peace can fill
a life that trusts in you.*

*By your divine and urgent claim,
and by your human face,
kindle our sinking hearts to flame,
and as you teach the world your name
let it become your place.⁵*

**The Revd Dr
Jonathan Dean
is a Methodist
Tutor at The
Queen's Foundation,
Birmingham**

¹ Daniel Burnham, 1846-1912, attributed 1907 in Charles Moore's *Daniel H. Burnham, Architect, Planner of Cities* (Boston and New York, Houghton Mifflin Co., 1921), Vol. 2, p. 147

^{2, 3, 4} Carl Sandburg, *Chicago* (First published in *Poetry*, Poetry Foundation, March 1914)

⁵ © Caryl Micklem, reproduced with permission from "Give to me, Lord, a thankful heart", *Singing the Faith*, hymn 520, vv 2-3 (Hymns Ancient and Modern, 2011)

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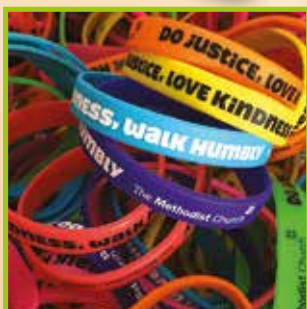
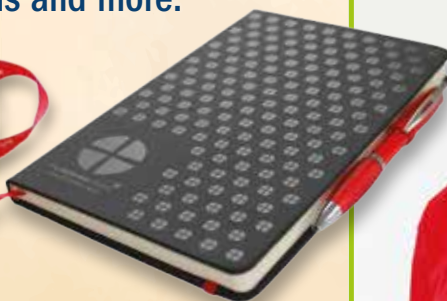


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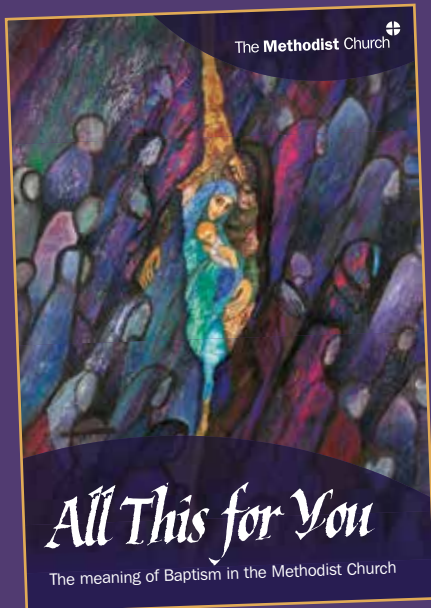
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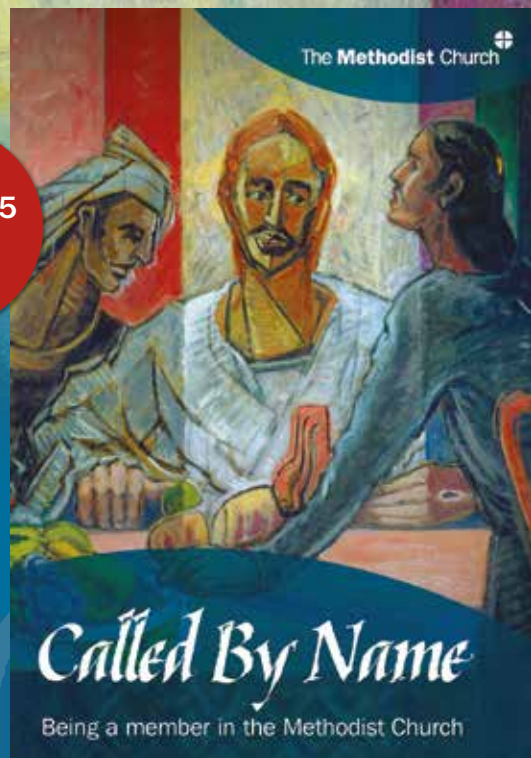
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The story of **light**

Be inspired and challenged by the big vision that motivates and energises the Revd Nick Blundell, Mission Enabler for the West Yorkshire District

Once-upon a time God the Creator says, “Let there be light”. Jesus the Redeemer says, “I am the light of the world,” and tells his disciples to “Let your light shine”. St Paul writes that “God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made his light shine in our hearts.”¹

Once-upon-a-time a young man in a dark place receives welcome, care, respect, from Christians. He wants to know where the light he sees in them comes from, he wants to shine like they are shining.

Once upon a time the Superintendents of the West Yorkshire District where I serve invite me to work on an evangelism initiative, and my experience and Bible suggest that the language of light has something important to offer. Thus The Story of Light is born.

The Story of Light is a district-wide initiative aimed at building confidence in the faith we have to share, and creating for our local churches a season in which to shine.

Building confidence is about us helping one another to hear our own stories, to recognise where and when

God’s light has shone into our lives, where it shines now, and having heard them, to put those stories into words. Confidence is being able to tell the story of light of which we are part.

Creating a season in which our churches can shine isn’t necessarily about doing more evangelistic stuff (although some will). It is about asking how, through current activities and existing relationships with friends, neighbours, people who use our premises, we can better reflect the light of God’s love.

Pentecost through to Advent last year was planning. Advent to Easter is preparation – much prayer, some review, and opportunities for learning. Easter to Pentecost will be time to present, to dare to share the story. Once upon a time, God...

For more of the story, including our handbook, visit www.westyorkshiremethodist.org.uk/mission-enabling-team

¹ In order, these Bible quotations are from: Genesis 1:3 (NRSV), John 8:12 (NRSV), Matthew 5:16 (NRSV), 2 Corinthians 4:6 (NIV).

