

THE connexion

Inspiring stories from the Methodist Church



There is room

The 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.

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While they were there, the time came for her to give birth. She gave birth to a son, her firstborn. She wrapped him in a blanket and laid him in a manger, because there was no room in the hostel.

Luke 2:6-7 (The Message)

The translation of this famous passage in *The Message* has a particular and disconcerting edginess about it, and all because of one word. Countless nativity plays down the years have informed their dotting audiences that 'there was no room in the inn' a phrase that conjures up images of bucolic English country pubs and former coaching inns packed to the rafters with revellers at Christmas. We might for a moment tut-tut at Joseph's lack of preparedness and failure to book ahead, before gliding seamlessly on in the narrative to the birth of Jesus. But, if we are willing to be woken to what God is trying to convey to us here and now in 2022, that word 'hostel' subverts the text, and places it in a very different interpretative space, one that is unfamiliar and full of threat.

No room in the **hostel**. Not a cheery youth hostel or a chic Instagram-esque backpackers' hostel, but a government hostel for refugees and asylum seekers. A cold, impersonal, hard place of law, barriers and boundaries, where your acceptance or rejection hangs in the balance. Now, how do we view Mary and Joseph? Is there room for them where we are?

This question is provoked sharply by our cover image. The Turkish photojournalist Guliz Vural, who shot the photographs for the article on Rugby World Kitchen in this issue (pp 22–23), travelled in a rubber dinghy full of refugees on the perilous nine-mile crossing from Turkey to Lesbos. Look at the image she took on the cover and you will see faces familiar from the Bible. Look closely and you will see Mary and Joseph. Look more closely still and you will see yourself. Guliz puts us in the boat with them, alongside, squashed together, vulnerable; looking, hoping, afraid.

From this divine perspective, and with heart-breaking clarity, we see that in God's story, without exception, there is room for all. Always room for all. The Church exists to incarnate this truth. In unsettling and threat-filled times it is a message that needs to be heard.

Love and peace, David

THE Connexion

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Refugees crossing from Turkey to Lesbos.
www.gulizvural.com

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Net zero in my neighbourhood

A key part of the work of the Methodist Church is to protect the environment: the 2022 Conference agreed a target of becoming carbon neutral (net zero) by 2030. Local churches are encouraged to join the Eco Church Awards Scheme, which includes a requirement to work with local environment initiatives.

Most local councils have targets for becoming net zero and churches can add their voice to these initiatives. 'Net Zero In My Neighbourhood' is a new resource from the Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT). It helps churches support their communities to hold councils accountable to their climate action plans. The practical step-by-step resource shows how to build a good relationship with your council and establish a meeting space for the community to come together to achieve net zero and move away from fossil fuels. Find out more at jpit.uk/net-zero-in-my-neighbourhood



Church at the margins

As the cost of living skyrockets, Deacon Eunice Attwood, Church at the Margins Officer for the Methodist Church, says: "My sense is that now is the time for our Church to focus on the millions in our nations experiencing poverty." Methodists are encouraged to join together as communities where people experiencing economic hardship are welcomed, affirmed and valued.

A vision for 'church at the economic margins' has been developed within the God for All strategy, agreed by the 2019 Methodist Conference and supported by the Evangelism and Growth team. The Church now has an online course on how to set up a church at the margins, and a webinar on offering a warm space this winter to people who can't afford to heat their homes. You can find the course and the webinar by searching methodist.org.uk and following the links.



I LOOK UPON ALL THE WORLD AS MY PARISH

THINK
PIECE

Room for all – a Wesleyan practice

The Revd Dr Paul Chilcote says 'a wide embrace' has always characterised Methodism and, taking our cue from Jesus, we make room for all.



We want every person to know to the very fibre of their being that they are welcome.

One of the most exciting aspects of the time in which we live is the rediscovery of Christian practices and a renewed understanding of their purpose. Spiritual disciplines create openings in our lives where the grace, mercy and presence of God may be experienced. These practices are means of grace – safe spaces in which our loving God embraces us.

Practices defined early Methodism. To use a more contemporary language, John Wesley laid out a 'rule of life' for the early Methodist people. He never viewed rules and regulations as an instrument of control, rather he conceived spiritual disciplines as instruments of liberation and empowerment. As in all other areas of Wesleyan theology, grace pervades

these practices, and a wide range of works of piety and mercy shaped early Methodists as a people of grace and love. Ultimately, those practices in which they engaged became ways by which Methodists participated in God's work of love, grace and *shalom* (peace) in the world.

Welcoming the stranger

The Wesleys invited their followers to engage with them in 'the practice of making room for all'. Think about this as a critical Wesleyan practice that fuelled the Methodist movement. Was it a work of piety or a work of mercy? Actually it was both. To make room for others entails some serious interior work. It involves making space in your heart for those who may

be different from you. It means asking God to change your attitudes and transform hostility into hospitality. It also involves exterior actions – opening your arms to those around you and offering compassion to those in need. It means asking God to teach us how to create a safe space for those who are outside, inviting them into the inner circle of our love.

Given the pervasiveness of this practice among the people called Methodist over time, a ‘wide embrace’ has always characterised our tradition. The Wesleys most certainly exercised a ‘preferential option for the poor’, with many people from the margins finding a home in the Methodist Societies. The Wesleys made room for all sorts of people in their burgeoning movement. There was room for all: rich and poor, educated and illiterate, women and men, black and white. Each generation of Methodists has taught this practice to the next generation. It is not too much to say that ‘making room for all’ is in our nature.

Wesleyan theology provided the foundation for this practice of inclusion. Bishop Brent’s well-known prayer identifies the origins of this hospitable spirit. The Lord Jesus “stretched out his arms of love on the hard wood of the cross that everyone might come within the reach of his saving embrace.” Methodists make room for all because Jesus makes room for all. For the Wesleys, being ambassadors of reconciliation entailed reaching out, welcoming and embracing. They believed that, through this ministry of hospitality, the world comes to know that God is love.

Hospitality is part of holiness

The Wesleys viewed hospitality and inclusivity as critical practices in the quest for holiness. In fact, these are essential elements of holy living. This call to holiness has always been a central theme in Methodism. What makes holiness in the Wesleyan way unique, however, is its clear emphasis on a holiness of love: love of God and love of neighbour (all creation). Holiness is all about love. Holiness means restoration. Holiness means being like Christ. Holiness means radiance. The shining lives of God’s restored children have a critical role in the unfolding of God’s reign – to make room for all as a people of wide embrace.



At the table of the Lord we see this practice of making room dramatically enacted in the worshipping community. In the sacrament of Holy Communion we live the parable of inclusion. We say, through our actions, that we want every person to know to the very fibre of their being that they are welcome. One of Jesus’ most consistent practices was eating with new people in new ways. More often than not, this included those who were excluded and oppressed. Charles Wesley perceived the connection between inclusion and our family meal: “Come to the Supper come . . . Every soul may be his guest” (Hymns on the Lord’s Supper, VIII). As we engage in the Wesleyan practice of making room for all and celebrate around the table, we capture a glimpse of God’s beloved community in which all are welcomed and all are loved.



**Methodists
make room
for all because
Jesus makes
room for all.**



Where in your life
is God challenging
you to widen
your embrace?

The Revd Dr Paul W Chilcote is the former director of the Centre for Global Wesleyan Theology at Wesley House, Cambridge.



Too many families dreading the winter months as fuel bills surge and food bills soar.

Enough to live?



As millions are dragged into poverty this winter, the Right Honourable Gordon Brown supports churches campaigning for justice and offering practical help to their communities.



People understand the importance of community above selfish individualism.

Throughout history, all the greatest social movements have been built on the strongest of moral foundations. And across the generations, right up to current times, the Methodist Church has always taken the lead in fighting for social justice: from John Wesley's commitment to social reform and the abolition of the slave trade to participation in Make Poverty History and the work of All We Can.

This winter we face a new and urgent challenge. Fuel poverty is now at a level

unseen in modern times, with too many children going to school ill-clad and hungry, too many elderly citizens scared to turn up their heating, and too many families dreading the winter months as fuel bills surge and food bills soar.

In the Covid-19 crisis, our country discovered that we depend on each other more than we thought, and that we value what is rooted and close to home more than the distantly networked. We saw people understand the importance of community

above selfish individualism. We found that we don't just co-operate out of need: we have a human need to co-operate.

Now, this autumn, we are discovering that to be a good neighbour we have to do more than just sympathise with those in distress: we must do what we can to help people directly, not just with food banks, but with clothing banks, bedding banks, toiletries banks and fuel banks. For millions have found that, just as we cannot feel at ease living a life of spiritual meaninglessness, we can only feel comfortable within a world where rights and responsibilities are distributed according to morally acceptable standards.

Energy costs soar

At the start of October a new cap on energy prices means average bills are expected to rise to an unprecedented £2,500 a year. This represents an average increase of £10 a week in fuel bills, on top of April's rise of £14 a week. Fuel costs, according to Jonathan Bradshaw and Antonia Keung at York University, will consume an unprecedented 20% of the income of 4.1 million families in October. By May, that figure could rise to 7.4 million. For 2.2 million families, energy bills will take up an unpayable 30% of their income, and this could rise to 3.8 million families by May.

Add rising food costs into these figures. According to updated figures from Donald Hirsch at Loughborough University, despite government help a family of four on Universal Credit will be £1,450 a year worse off. Malnutrition among children has already doubled in the West of Scotland and one church charity, which used to send 75% of its food donations overseas, is now rerouting 80% of what it receives to families in the UK.

Warm welcome campaign

For the first time since the welfare state was created, it is now the food bank, not social security, that is our safety net, and it is charity, not Universal Credit, that is our last line of defence. To their great credit, churches and voluntary organisations are doing everything they can to help. I have nothing but praise for the hundreds of churches opening their doors to the elderly and the poor under the Warm Welcome scheme this winter. By offering families in need and pensioners a warm space when heating bills are overwhelming, churches are doing what they can with the resources at their disposal to ease pain and suffering. As well as organising food collections and hosting food banks, donors who have a little are giving generously to those who have nothing, which is why the Enough to Live campaign led by the Methodists and other faith groups for a more compassionate and just government policy deserves all our support.

We know that society is richer when we care for the poor, more secure when we care for the insecure and much stronger when we care for the weak. As winter approaches, the country's desire to come together in support of each other, seen so vividly in the commemoration of the death of Queen Elizabeth, is unmistakable. And it is by recognising the importance of the words of the Sermon on the Mount – and acting on them – that we give people not just shelter and sustenance but hope. The words of Micah 6:8: "love mercy, do justice, and walk humbly with your God" have inspired the recent Methodist campaigns against poverty. And as his contemporary Amos, urged us (5:24) it is our duty to "let justice run down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream."



It is our duty to "let justice run down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream."

For more information about the cost of living crisis including Professor Donald Hirsch's paper 'Enough to get through the winter' go to jpit.uk/enoughtolive

Find the Warm Welcome Campaign at www.warmwelcome.uk

The Right Honourable Gordon Brown was Prime Minister in 2007–2010 and the Labour MP for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath until 2015.



How will your church support the Warm Welcome campaign?

Deacon Tracey Hume is the District Community Engagement Enabler in the Newcastle District.

Alison Dunn is Chief Executive of Citizens Advice, Gateshead.

The Revd Matt Sheard is a minister in the Bede Circuit in the Newcastle District.



What more can your church do to "lift up and support those who are struggling"?



In Kibblesworth our church will provide a warm space, food, a listening ear.



A warm-hearted response to the energy crisis

As energy costs soar, churches in Gateshead are now 'warm spaces', welcoming in the community, writes Deacon Tracey Hume.

In the spring issue of *the connexion* ('Doing Justice') I described the work of the Gateshead Poverty Truth Commission (PTC). People living with poverty are being heard and real change is taking place. Now I can share a recent experience of working together to respond to the cost of living crisis.

In early summer, Alison Dunn, Chief Executive of Citizens Advice Gateshead, approached the PTC about setting up 'warm spaces'. These are public buildings such as libraries, community centres and churches that open their doors so people have somewhere warm to go in the daytime.

Alison said they were considering establishing these across the borough to respond to anticipated need this winter due to energy bill hikes.

Alison was one of our civic commissioners on the PTC. She wanted to run the idea of warm spaces by the community commissioners (people with lived experience of poverty who help shape the work of the PTC) and get their input. They gave valuable insights into what they felt the warm spaces should look and feel like and some of the underlying values that needed to be present.

Gateshead Council produced a Warm Spaces Charter that each warm space signs

up to and there is mandatory training that includes a contribution from one of our community commissioners. We were very keen the scheme should not be a couple of people in an office designing something for people in poverty, but it should be designed with them.

Together we're stronger

About a fifth of the 52 warm spaces across Gateshead are churches. I asked Alison why it was important to involve the PTC and faith organisations in the scheme.

Alison said: "It would be easy for me to sit in my ivory tower deciding my next good idea, but what do I know? Nothing. When I work with the Poverty Truth Commission I know I am working with people with real experience of the issues I'm trying to tackle. They know what it feels like to need a warm space, what would encourage them to walk across the threshold, and, importantly, what would stop them going. It brings realism to the project, it puts local people at its heart and it helps us to get it right first time. And of course Gateshead has a long history of working with the faith community; relationships are strong and there's great enthusiasm for collaboration and mutual support. As we started to develop this idea, talking to our faith partners was an obvious choice. It provides us with community reach, great buildings and committed volunteers right where we want to be."

A warm space for all

The Revd Matt Sheard is a minister in the Bede Circuit in Gateshead. He explains why his church wanted to become a warm space. "After hearing about the Warm Space scheme, God moved among a few of our church people. In their hearts they felt the need to increase what we were doing to help those who live in Kibblesworth. It is a former mining village in the North East of England and surrounding the church we have hidden poverty. The local school responds to the needs of low-income families in their care and we got to hear of people who had previously been financially stable and in employment who were now struggling to pay their bills due to the cost of living crisis.

"As the Spirit of God moved among us, we felt moved to feed the hungry, clothe



the naked, lift up and support those who are struggling, and to ask God to set the captives free. In Kibblesworth our church will provide a warm space, food, a listening ear and a charging station for phones and technology. It will be a place of love and welcome and our arms will be held open wide for all. It could be said our response is simplistic and yet what we have heard is that it will make such a big difference.

"When the Spirit invites us to participate in the work of God, it is an immense privilege, but it can also be scary. We cannot however let our fears get in the way of that invitation. As we see levels of poverty rise and inequality in our country increase, the Church needs to respond and reach out in love. It is the spirit of God that calls us on and equips us to share the love of God and be the good news of Jesus."



It will be a place of love and welcome and our arms will be held open wide for all.



We were able to match host families in Harpenden with those fleeing conflict.



Safe haven for Ukrainians

Methodists in Harpenden are saying ‘there is room’ and opening their hearts and homes to Ukrainian refugees, writes Louise Schlich.

Along with so many others, at High Street Methodist Church in Harpenden we have been watching in horror as Ukrainian lives, towns and communities have been torn apart by the Russian invasion. When the opportunity arose, we were keen to respond and help people affected by the war. In April, with the help of Methodist contacts in the UK, Germany and inside Ukraine, we were able to match a number of host families in Harpenden with those fleeing conflict and looking for sanctuary in the UK. We now have around 20 Ukrainians who have come via this route.

The wonderful hosts who have welcomed Ukrainians into their homes have done a brilliant job helping them every step along the way. The road has not always been a smooth one! First, our host families had to make contact with individuals and families in Ukraine and then the long (and often painful) process of visa applications began. After what felt like a very long wait for some, eventually visas were granted and travel plans were made. All our hosts and guests will admit to feeling apprehensive as they met for the first

time face to face at the airport. They were almost complete strangers embarking on a new life together in Harpenden.

It felt good to finally meet our guests and know that after all the preparation and dealing with bureaucracy we could offer a safe home to those arriving. Some guests are now well established in their new homes while others have just arrived. They are all slowly starting to build their lives and establish their own community away from their homeland. Most of them, like us, are strangers to one another.

Throughout the process, our church has been keen to ensure that our hosts are supported. They have been assisted with form-filling and now their guests are more settled, we have regular meetings where they can share their experiences, including the joys and challenges. One of our ministers is acting as chaplain to our hosts, offering them practical and pastoral support.

Building new communities

One of the joys of the situation has been witnessing how our church and the wider



community have come together, working in partnership to offer what help we can.

Our own church community has loved welcoming our new Ukrainian friends to worship on Sundays with us. We project the worship songs in both English and Ukrainian and we have enjoyed hearing their songs and prayers. We run a number of Ukrainian café events on a Saturday afternoon, so they can come together and get to know each other, and we have also welcomed them to other church events.

We also have a weekly drop-in for Ukrainians and their hosts in Harpenden. They use our church premises while another local church organises the sessions. Some are an informal time to have coffee and a chat, while at others there have been guest speakers covering relevant subjects including healthcare, finances, schooling and housing.

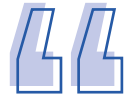
English lessons and practical support

Communication has often been a problem, in fact for many Google Translate is a lifeline! Some Ukrainians have little or no English, which is a real barrier to fully engaging in life here. So our church has formed a partnership with the County Council and are now hosting a number of English language classes once a week, offering both beginner and intermediate lessons.

There are many people within our community who were unable to host but are keen to help. We are blessed they can offer all sorts of assistance including one-to-one English lessons, lifts and financial support to cover days out or day-to-day travel costs.

Our town community has also welcomed our new residents and the Town Council continues to organise regular meetings with local churches and charities in order to coordinate our response to meet the needs of our Ukrainian friends.

It is good to be in a position to be able to offer something to people who have lost so much. Seeing our church and town community respond has been a real blessing and we are fully aware that none of this would happen without the kindness and generosity of individuals. We are all likely to meet Ukrainians who are making the UK their home, either temporarily or more permanently. Our experience is that they are so appreciative of the welcome they receive, so please offer whatever you can, even if it's just a cheery smile and a *'Laskavo prosymo!'* (Welcome!)



Offer whatever you can, even if it's just a cheery smile and a 'Laskavo prosymo!' (Welcome!)

Louise Schlich is a Mission Coordinator at High Street Methodist Church, Harpenden.



For whom will your circuit now be making room?



John Wesley argued for measures to help those most in need and to stop victim blaming.

Politicians must stand with the poor

Appalled at the spiralling numbers in poverty, Labour MP and Methodist Emma Hardy says politicians must take urgent action so all might flourish.



In February 2022 our country was united in horror as Russia invaded Ukraine. We saw the very best of people at the very worst of times. Thousands signed up to offer their homes to fleeing refugees and collecting points were overwhelmed with donations, resulting in empty shops becoming makeshift distribution centres. Local faith groups came together in events for united prayer and the call for peace and unity rang out across the country. There were powerful displays of unity in Parliament too, as MPs stood together to applaud the Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky. These actions demonstrated what I have always believed: people are good and people care.

However, there is a limit to what individual acts of charity can achieve. In the face of a long decline in living standards, local charities, faith groups and food banks are now inundated with requests for support. Where once they supported a few who had ‘fallen through the net’, now they are essential for many working people. Driving past queues for food outside one of my local churches is no longer extraordinary; the opening of a food bank in the constituency is no longer newsworthy. Working people in poverty and inadequate state support have become normal.

As a Christian and a Labour Party politician I cannot accept this. I wonder at the lack of anger at those queues of people needing food; the absence of outrage when the Trussell Trust announced they gave out 2.1 million emergency food parcels in the last financial year; or our acceptance that children’s charities are donating baby milk and clothing to newborn babies. Since 2010, successive governments have abdicated their responsibilities, passing the burden of care to charities, faith and community groups.

Charities can’t do everything

Too many in our nation lack what they need to flourish, and the day-to-day struggles they endure ultimately narrow their concerns to their own survival, meaning they have less to spare for others. In my own constituency, a local community group has stopped delivering food parcels because of the cost of petrol and food banks report that while demand is up, donations are down.

Setting aside any moral arguments, off-loading the cost of support from general taxation to the voluntary sector is not working: the Resolution Foundation now expects the number of people living in absolute poverty to rise by 1.3 million people next year, a figure that includes 500,000 children.

Unsurprisingly, trust in mainstream politicians has fallen to an all-time low. According to a survey by Carnegie UK, 41% of people now say that democracy is not working and 76% of the public in England don’t trust MPs to take decisions that will improve their lives. The abuse that MPs receive comes in waves and some of my friends and family ask why I still want to do it. But I cannot give up. I see poverty, disillusionment with politics, anger and fear feeding extremism and the search for scapegoats. Minority groups in our country are paying the price. Sky News reports 76,884 racially and religiously aggravated offences were recorded in 2021, an increase of 15% from 2020.

Don’t blame the poor

I will not abandon the political landscape to bigotry, violence and hate. I passionately believe there is room for all to flourish in our country. John Wesley argued for measures to help those most in need and to stop victim



ROOM FOR ALL

What more can your church do to stand with the poor in your community?



blaming: “So wickedly, devilishly false is that common objection, ‘They are only poor because they are idle.’” We need his reformist zeal again today.

My faith is both my shield and my inspiration: we all are equal, we all are loved, we all are valued. We can continue to do our work as Christians supporting those in need, but to paraphrase Desmond Tutu, it is no longer enough to be pulling people out of the river, it is time to go upstream to prevent them falling in. Real change requires the law to change and that is why I am a politician. The cost-of-living crisis we face is not an immutable act of God. It is the consequence of decisions made by people and we have the power to greatly influence its effects. What has been described as a potential humanitarian crisis is not inevitable or acceptable. Once again, I return to the words of John Wesley: “Be ye ready to distribute to everyone, according to their necessity.”



Emma Hardy is the Labour MP for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle.



People are good and people care.



Young people **call for inclusion**

Iraj Irfan says as a Youth Rep she is inspired to share her faith, work for justice, and help the Church reach out to people of all ages, backgrounds and ethnicities.

Hello! I'm Iraj Irfan and over this past connexional year, I have been serving as an elected Youth Representative to the Methodist Conference. I have thoroughly enjoyed my role and loved being part of the Youth Rep team. We are a diverse group of young people, who are not only diligent in the work associated with the role, but often tend to work collaboratively on projects we are passionate about. These are often projects on different aspects of social justice, climate justice and how we can be a more inclusive Church.

Earlier this year, I had the opportunity to work alongside the Global Church Youth Rep, Eli Atif, to facilitate sessions at an event about racial justice at Wesley's Chapel in London. This event was an opportunity for young people to gather, share their experiences, and to learn together what it means to be an ally to those facing discrimination and how we, as Christians, can respond to difficult situations. The passion and eagerness the young people had for social and racial justice was overwhelmingly clear, and they were so keen to share with others what they had learned. It goes to show that our young people are ready to speak up against injustice; they only need an opportunity and a platform to do so. We emphasised placing God in the middle of all our discussions because no matter what problems we are facing, the Bible teaches us that we are never alone.

Inspired by my dad

Growing up, my big inspiration regarding social justice was my dad, the Revd Irfan John. He works across Wales as the Synod Enabler for Culturally Diverse Congregations. Through his ministry and with the everlasting support of my mum, Raheela, he selflessly helps asylum seekers and refugees of all ethnicities and religions. A quote from my dad that I heard when I was very young has been with me my whole life: "As Christians we must win people for Christ through our good deeds." This inspires me to be kind to others, and to care for the world we live in, because in doing so we share Christ's love. Acts 13:47 says "For so the Lord has commanded us: 'I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles, so that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.'" It is a reminder for us as Christians to be a positive light in this world so that through us people may get to know God's love for the world and for humankind.



In the parable of the Good Samaritan, the good neighbour showed real love by going out of his way to help, cleaning the dirt and blood from the injured man, and providing him with a safe place to spend the night. He was willing to get his hands dirty and to show real love. As a Church when we seek social and climate justice, we must be willing to actively show our love for our world and the people around us.

Walk for diversity

As a Youth Rep and sister, I have worked closely with the Methodist Youth President Daud Irfan, who is the first Youth President of South Asian heritage, and I have seen the tireless work he has done. Daud inspires many young people, especially those from ethnic minorities, to follow their mission and calling in the Church. His theme for the year, 'God's Church, a Home for All', is very encouraging and energising, highlighting the importance of diversity and inclusion within the Methodist Church. In March 2022, I joined both my dad and brother as they walked from Cardiff to London for the purpose of encouraging young Christians from different ethnic backgrounds to pray upon their calling and to step forward into leadership roles within the Church.

As a Church, I believe that it is important to remember that if we want to be inclusive, justice-seeking and a 'Home for All', then we must be steadfast in prayer and rooted in the Word of God. Micah 6:8 says "He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" We must walk with God, letting God lead and empower us with the Holy Spirit so that we can fight for biblical justice, keeping in front of us our mission of sharing the gospel and reconciling people with God.



Our young people are ready to speak up against injustice.



ROOM FOR ALL

In what fresh ways will you be "kind to others and care for the world"?



No matter what problems we are facing, the Bible teaches us that we are never alone.

Iraj Irfan was a Youth Representative to the 2022 Methodist Conference. To find out more about the Youth Reps, visit methodist.org.uk

Holly Adams is the Evangelism and Contemporary Culture Officer for the Methodist Church.



Room for meaningful conversation

Holly Adams, Lucy Zwolinska and Mollie Pugmire describe the Hope & Anchor, a drop-in space at Greenbelt Festival where 'matchstick sessions' ignited meaningful discussions.

Holly Adams writes: are you tired of 'small talk'? Do you wish that once in a while you could speak, share and listen with others about something real? Are you wondering how your church could be a bold, safe space to explore big issues and have meaningful conversations?

Welcome to the Hope & Anchor! A bit like your local pub or café, it's a space for connecting with others and this summer the Methodist Church took it to the Greenbelt Festival for the first time. The venue had a non-alcoholic bar and tables and chairs where people could meet and have meaningful conversations with both friends and strangers. We facilitated discussions on difficult issues in 'matchstick sessions' where we put conversation prompts on the tables to encourage participants to talk about

everything from justice and evangelism to faith and identity.

The venue was hosted by a team of (mostly) young adult Methodist volunteers, who talked, listened to, and prayed with the people who came. Let's listen in to a conversation between two volunteers, Lucy Zwolinska and Mollie Pugmire, as they reflect on their experience.

Lucy: Hi Mollie, how was your weekend at the Hope & Anchor?

Mollie: It's been wonderful. It's been so nice to interact with the punters.

Lucy: Completely. It feels such a privilege to be part of meaningful conversations. When I came to the first 'matchstick session', I



Are you tired of 'small talk'?

thought my role was just to sit in, but it was more than that. Because we'd told people it was a space for meaningful conversation, they came ready to share, to the point that towards the end I found myself getting a bit emotional, and this gorgeous woman who I'd never met, said: "Lucy I can see this means a lot to you, do you want to talk about it more?"

I told her a little bit about what I was feeling and why. She was maybe a few generations older than me, but she'd had similar experiences, both when she was my age and now, and I felt a real connection with her. I know at Greenbelt everyone is really friendly, but it takes something more to go deeper with strangers, and I think we've found a way to do that at the Hope & Anchor that makes it a really sacred space.

Mollie: I agree. I had a similar conversation with a lady. It was really lovely, and we'd never have talked about those things had we not been in that place and had the willingness to go a bit deeper and get to the heart of difficult issues. And that was with a stranger! But I've also got a lot of friends who came to Greenbelt this year, and they really enjoyed joining us in the Hope & Anchor where we were prompted to have conversations that we wouldn't have otherwise had, despite being friends for a really long time. It's been really fulfilling. What's going to be important is working out how we intentionally can have those deep and meaningful conversations at home, outside the buzz of the festival.

Lucy: Yes, because it does take a bit of bravery doesn't it? When I sat down and saw the prompts on the table about the conversations we could have, I felt a little knot in my stomach about some of the vulnerability it could expose. I've noticed sometimes that people get a bit teary in those conversations and I think it's because that knot is unravelling, which is cathartic.

Mollie: That's so true!

Lucy: And actually, after one of the conversations I had yesterday I got in touch with a friend, which I'd been putting off for a long time, about something that had come up in a matchstick session. I wouldn't have done it without that conversation with the stranger yesterday. So already, on some level I've taken this outside Greenbelt.



Mollie: Wow, that's really good. It's really exciting that people have been so receptive, so open to the conversations we're having in the venue. This all would have failed if people had come in and seen the conversations we were having and said "No, thank you." And it would have been easy to do that because some of the conversations have been quite tough. The trust that people have placed in us and in the Hope & Anchor as a place where they can come and share their feelings safely is testament to the atmosphere we've been able to create. People's willingness to be open has allowed others to speak and share.

Lucy: So, if you had one tip for people outside Greenbelt, if they wanted to have more meaningful, heartfelt and healthy conversations about things that really matter, what would your tip be?

Mollie: Oh, that's a good question! I think sometimes we just expect people to pour out their hearts to us, but we're not prepared to reciprocate, to pour out our hearts in



It feels such a privilege to be part of meaningful conversations.



To be a follower of Jesus is being real with people and allowing them space to be real with me.



return. I think the conversations we've had here have been strong because there's a sense of doing this together and we'll go as deep as each other allows. Being able to offer some of my story means other people aren't quite so scared of being judged.

Lucy: Yes I think that's important. And I think it's probably one of the ingredients of a full and meaningful life full of connection and community. And for me, one of the core principles of what it means to be a follower of Jesus is being real with people and allowing them space to be real with me.

Mollie: Yes, that's what it all comes down to: getting below the surface.

Lucy: I think if you lived every day in the spirit of the Hope & Anchor, meeting people and having deep and meaningful conversations in which you're prepared to be vulnerable, the world would be a better place. The world would be full of people who are richer because they've learned from the experience of others and feel more able to be fully themselves.

Mollie: Amen, Lucy! That captures just how I feel.



So, what about you? How can you facilitate conversations like this in your local community? Jesus consistently is our model for how to have intentional conversations. We can follow his example to help people talk about the issues, people and questions that concern them most. Conversations that deeply connect people are essential in all of our mission and ministry as local churches. At the Greenbelt Festival we were blown away by the willingness of people to share their thoughts deeply and openly. We've had rich experiences of God in our discussions. We've experienced how real conversations change us, change our relationships, and maybe even change our world.



How will your church intentionally engage with others in conversations that are deep, vulnerable and real?

If you want to know how, all around the Connexion, we are discovering the vital role of conversation and community in our mission and discipleship, you can listen to the new Hope & Anchor podcast, coming soon from the Methodist Church. Keep an eye on www.methodistchurch.org.uk/evangelism this autumn to find it.

The Revd Dr Jonathan R Hustler
is Secretary of the Conference.



Refreshed, flexible and hospitable

'Enlarging our tent' to accommodate more people is a powerful metaphor for the Church today, writes the Revd Dr Jonathan R Hustler.

I'm writing this towards the end of one of the hottest and driest summers on record. I was glad during July that we had space for a gazebo in the garden. I was reminded as we put it up (and I tried to remember how to lift the side panels and connect the guy ropes) of the words of Isaiah: "Enlarge the site of your tent and let the curtains of your habitations be stretched out; do not hold back; lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes." (54:2)

In a number of places, connexional leaders have reflected on our emergence from Covid-19 in the light of the experience of the people of Israel returning to Jerusalem from the exile in Babylon. Much of that narrative was of building in stone, constructing walls, fortifying and creating permanence. But the prophet who spoke to people in those days signalled a glorious future, of which the image

of an enlarged tent is a part. It is an image that speaks not so much of permanence and security, as of flexibility, openness, hospitality and, perhaps, vulnerability. But it is also an image of airiness: as the curtains of the tent are expanded refreshing breezes blow through.

A tent large enough for all

I find myself asking if that is the image that we need in this moment of the Church's and the nation's life. It may feel counter-intuitive, but as we wrestle with decline, and churches and circuits are hit by spiralling energy costs, are we called to resist the temptation to retreat into ourselves and instead to expand our presence? Enlarging our tent means welcoming the refugee, being more prominent in speaking out and serving those who struggle, and being open to all. As we do so, we feel the wind of the Spirit blowing through our lives.



A glorious future, of which the image of an enlarged tent is part.



The Spirit is prompting you to enlarge your tent: what will you do about it?



Methodist visionaries saw need and set up the Methodist Seamen's Mission.

In Christ there is no east or west



The Methodist Seamen's Mission is expanding, offering a warm welcome and practical support to thousands of seafarers far from home, writes Alexander Campbell.

The Seamen's Mission of the Methodist Church has always been a place of welcome, where people could rest and find themselves. The full title of this Methodist charity is 'Queen Victoria Seamen's Rest' (QVSR) and in this fast-moving chaotic world it is good to know that charities such as QVSR exist and still provide the weary traveller with a place of rest. John Oxenham's hymn says "In Christ there is no east or west, in him no south or north, but one great fellowship of love." In this spirit of love, QVSR has been welcoming seafarers from all over the world for nearly 180 years.

The charity, founded in 1843, made its home in London's East End, which back then was London's docklands area with around 100,000 seafarers daily looking to join ships or disembarking from them. There was a



great deal of poverty, and diseases such as cholera devastated the population. The area was full of gin palaces and other 'dens of iniquity' to tempt the returning seafarer away from heading home to their family with their wage packet. This is where the early day Methodist visionaries saw need and set up the Methodist Seamen's Mission to look after seafarers and their dependants.

Times have changed and the port has moved east towards Tilbury. Containerisation has transformed the maritime industry and



What would a "risk-culture based on faith" release in your context?

technology means ships are much more efficient and less labour intensive. Around 95% of all goods arrive in the UK via ships. Some of the largest container ships carry up to 28,000 containers with a crew of just 20–30 seafarers, and the turnarounds can be as little as eight hours including unloading, loading and departing on their onward journey. The average turnaround of a large container ship is only around 16 hours.

Expanding our mission

Friday 15 July 2022 was a historic day for QVSR: the day that saw us expand our work beyond the Port of London. The charity is a slow burner; it has taken us just 179 years to consider expansion as a viable option!

The project, which started back in 2015, sees the charity take over seafarer centres' operations in Felixstowe, Immingham and Bristol. QVSR will now welcome around 50,000 seafarers each year on behalf of the Methodist Church. The centres were gifted to QVSR by the Sailors' Society, the Mission to Seafarers (run by the Anglican Church) and Stella Maris (a Catholic charity). They felt that QVSR was better placed to oversee these operations and develop the welfare works within these ports. QVSR took over operations of the London Tilbury and London Gateway Seafarers' Centres on the River Thames in 2019 and it was the successful management of these set-ups that led to our ecumenical partners inviting us to take up this new opportunity. We recognise the great responsibility we take on and are determined to develop these centres and add value to the great works already going on in each locality.

Risks based on faith

This has been a long journey for me personally. When I took up my appointment as Chief Executive back in 2003, QVSR was struggling to find its place in the 21st-century maritime sector. There was a real danger that we might close our doors like many other maritime missions. But we believed that God still had work for QVSR, so we adopted a real risk culture that was based on faith. Our philosophy was 'If it's God's will it will happen: God will open the doors.' Therefore we stand here today and we acknowledge and give thanks for God's faithfulness and guidance. Jeremiah 29:11 says "For surely I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to



give you a hope and a future." Today QVSR stands before you with 'hope and a future'.

QVSR has always been about people. As well as the newly expanded seafarer centres operation it has a large Mission building in the East End of London where it accommodates up to 173 men each night. The building historically offered accommodation to journeying seafarers, but today it accommodates retired seafarers, ex-servicemen and others in need of accommodation. The charity has invested £8 million upgrading all its rooms hotel standard en-suite accommodation.

At first the task of turning QVSR around seemed impossible but in the words of the missionary Hudson Taylor the impossible became possible through the grace of God: "There are three stages to every great work of God: first it is impossible, then it is difficult, then it is done."



QVSR will now welcome around 50,000 seafarers each year.



Three stages to every great work of God: first it is impossible, then it is difficult, then it is done.

Alexander Campbell OBE is Chief Executive of the Seamen's Mission of the Methodist Church. To find out more about the work of QVSR visit qvsr.org.uk



At these first events we enjoyed food from Syria, Yemen, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Sudan, Somalia, Iraq and England (rhubarb crumble!).



World Kitchen

There is room for all at the Hub Café in Rugby where refugees from 15 countries cook, socialise and learn English, writes the Revd Jane Gaffney.



A few years ago, our church hosted a course run by the charity Livability. Those attending were challenged to think about not doing things for others (our usual mentality, at which our church is brilliant) but instead to walk alongside people, empowering them to take the lead, because it is only through this that lasting change happens. This change of thinking led us to take a different approach in our work with the local community.

During the pandemic, our church started to befriend a Syrian family who had moved to Rugby five years ago. The mother and others from the Syrian community started to regularly volunteer in our café. We noticed the joy they had in being able to cook and share some of their own food, and we certainly loved the new recipes!

Encouraged by this and inspired by the Heart & Parcel organisation in Manchester (which brings immigrants together to cook and learn English) the idea of World Kitchen was birthed. People from ethnic groups within Rugby who might be socially isolated were

invited to come and cook their own food in our café. They were the hosts and we were the guests. This represented a huge shift in power dynamics and was a very humbling and enriching experience.

Successful pilot scheme

In November 2021 we received grant funding from Warwickshire County Council to run a pilot with three World Kitchen events. We used the grant money to run food hygiene courses and buy induction hobs, pans and store cupboard ingredients. Most importantly, the host cooks had £20 supermarket vouchers to buy their own ingredients. Along with our Syrian families we invited others who were socially isolated and refugees staying in a local hotel (all young men).

At these first events we enjoyed food from Syria, Yemen, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Sudan, Somalia, Iraq and England (rhubarb crumble!). The aroma was incredible! The food was fantastic and so was the atmosphere: there was joy, passion, laughter and an incredible sense of community. Our Syrian ladies invited family



They were the hosts and we were the guests.

and friends and we were so proud to be able to include them. One friend, an Algerian Muslim lady, who was very nervous initially of coming into the church said of her first visit “I have been so welcomed.”

After the initial pilot, we received further funding to continue and so we were able to include refugee families living in a different hotel close to the town and we found numbers increased way beyond our capacity. It was messy; it felt crazy, but it was so good. Some of the men went on to become volunteers in the café, desperate to have something to do with their time, and friendships have grown.

One of the painful outcomes is the speed at which refugees can be relocated to other cities. We feel the loss of no longer seeing our friends, but we hope and pray that the welcome they have experienced with us has given them hope to be part of their new community. Of course, we continue to welcome new arrivals.

English classes and clothing

We were blessed in having a trained counsellor who attends church and who ran a really helpful training session on ‘What to say/not say to refugees’. As we got to know people, we became more aware of their needs, so now we offer weekly English classes, run by an ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) teacher, who came into our café one day offering her time. A number of church members and their friends support her as part of the ESOL team.

In partnership with a company called Community Welcome we also help with clothing, sorting donations and putting on clothes events for refugees. Our church members have been overwhelmingly generous in their gifts.

We feel so blessed as a church to have people from so many different countries joining us (from Syria, Eritrea, Somalia, Yemen, Ethiopia, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Afghanistan, Turkey, Kurdistan, Hong Kong, Ukraine, Qatar and Algeria). In recent months we have welcomed people newly arrived from Hong Kong and Ukraine both to World Kitchen and to the English lessons. And recently we welcomed Iranian and Syrian Christians to our worship, and we have now linked with Gideons International, who are providing Arabic–English bilingual copies of the New Testament.



There was joy, passion, laughter and an incredible sense of community.



How might a huge “host to guest” shift in power dynamics bless your church?

Finally, we have come to know a photographic journalist who travelled in a boat with refugees from Turkey to Greece. Her photos, including the one on the front cover, tell a story that needs to be heard and we hope to get funding to hold an exhibition.

The Revd Jane Gaffney is the minister at Rugby Methodist Church in the Rugby & Daventry Circuit.



I became convinced a ministry outside the gathered Church could be part of my vocational journey.

Pastoral care for the Army

The Methodist Church has a distinguished history serving the military community in the Royal Army Chaplains' Department. The Chaplain-General, the Revd Mike Parker, and the Deputy Chaplain-General, the Revd David Barrett, are both Methodists. Here they talk about their ministry.



How did you become a chaplain?

Mike: I attended a theological students' course at Bagshot Park (a former home of Army chaplaincy). During that time, I became convinced that a ministry outside the gathered Church could be part of my vocational journey.

David: When I was serving as a circuit minister I sensed a call to share in a ministry rooted in mission beyond the local church and very different from what I was used to. The appeal was a new challenge, an adventure of faith and above all, a desire to serve soldiers.



What are your responsibilities?

Mike: As the Army's professional head of chaplaincy, I advise our military leaders. With the help of my senior leadership team, I ensure the delivery of pastoral care, spiritual support and moral guidance to everyone in the wider Army family. As well as engaging with soldiers, I work with the Army's senior leadership and represent the Army at national events.

David: I do whatever the Chaplain-General tells me to do... I ensure the Royal Army Chaplains' Department delivers the kind of chaplaincy support the Army needs and deserves. The responsibilities are broad, from working on policy, recruiting and training, to supporting overseas operations, and visiting units and chaplains. I also engage with the Church and wider society. I work with a great team and together we try to make a positive difference.

What are your priorities?

Mike: The changing demographics of society are replicated in the Army community. To support this diverse group of people, I require a diverse cohort of chaplains from

across the faith and belief spectrum. I also need to modernise the language and tools of chaplaincy to secure its professional status. These are very important but they are secondary to the true purpose of chaplaincy: caring for the Army's people.

David: Our calling is to care for the Army's people. As Deputy Chaplain-General I want to ensure that we have the kind of chaplains we need and who are well led, motivated and skilled to do the work faithfully and effectively. In our setting, caring is about offering pastoral care, moral guidance and spiritual support to all. The need is as great as ever for such a ministry.

Does the Methodist Church support you?

Mike: The Methodist Church is one of the most engaged and supportive of the sending churches. At no stage in my service have I felt 'outside' the Connexion and this is largely thanks to the prayers and concern of the people called Methodists.

David: As an Army chaplain, I have always felt tremendously affirmed and supported by the Methodist Church. The prayers of the Church have been a source of strength and encouragement, and local churches and circuits have given me a welcome wherever I have been based.

How do you find overseas operations?

Mike: I learnt my 'trade' as a chaplain on operations. To kneel and pray with a dying soldier while his colleagues continue to fight in the distance brings unique insight into sacramental ministry. To pray God's blessing and peace in the brokenness of that moment



The soldiers, who are at the heart of it, give so much back.



and offer whatever comfort I can is the timeless calling of the Army chaplain.

David: The best bits have always been those spent with soldiers on operations. Paradoxically they have often been the most difficult and demanding. Being deployed, often with other chaplains, provides me with abiding and deep memories. I have shared laughter, tears and everything in between with remarkable young men and women.

What sustains you as an Army chaplain?

Mike: I couldn't do this work without the conviction that God has called me to it. There is great diversity in the community I serve. To support these people, in the name of the Methodist Church, is a huge privilege. Even in the most difficult situations, there are times of hope and grace that speak of God's faithfulness to the world.

David: My vocation is underpinned by a sense of the grace of God and a commitment to



follow God's call. It has not always been easy to keep going, but I've always felt that Army chaplaincy has had a deep value and importance. The soldiers, who are at the heart of it, give so much back. Moving around every couple of years to all kinds of places in the United Kingdom and overseas has given a varied ministry. There has rarely been a dull moment. It has been all I had hoped for and more.



Are there new ways in which your circuit could support and encourage Army chaplains?

To find out more about Army chaplaincy, visit army.mod.uk/who-we-are/corps-regiments-and-units/royal-army-chaplains-department
 The Army needs new chaplains. If you, or somebody you know, may be being called to be an Army chaplain, please email ArmyCG-Chaplain-Recruiter@mod.gov.uk

Reflection



A community with space for all

Deacon Sarah Jane Rigby reflects on working with a parenting group where everyone is welcome, and seeing God's creation anew through a child's eyes.

I am a deacon in the Romford Circuit, working in an outreach centre for the local community. It is a new position, and I am blessed to meet lots of new people and get to know them. I'm trying to see what God has planned for the centre and how we can come together: it's both exciting and scary. I have been in this role for a year now, and I still feel in the honeymoon stage.

Part of my role involves meeting with groups who already use the centre such as Home-Start, and along with working in the local school it is proving to be the highlight of my ministry.

Drop-in centre

Home-Start is a charitable organisation that uses locally trained volunteers to support families with young children through difficult times. They are truly compassionate and give help and advice without judging. The families they help can be struggling with post-natal depression, isolation, physical health problems, bereavement and many more issues.

Home-Start run a free drop-in group at our outreach centre, open to parents with toddlers, as well as carers and grandparents. While the children play, the adults get to chat, share, listen, and care for each other. Watching friendships develop is wonderful. Everyone is welcomed into the group, which reflects the diverse community in which they live. Each parent or carer has a particular need. They are listened to and practical help, if available, is offered. The staff from Home-Start are very empathetic to the families. They, too, have at some point lived in difficult circumstances, so they understand. There is never any condemnation or judgement when a story is shared. Each person is treated as an equal, regardless of age, race or problem. They are learning to be a community and it is a privilege to be part of it.

Discussing faith

Working with non-Christians enables me to talk about my faith – more than I do with Christians. Nearly all the faith conversations start when I'm asked questions about God. The questions are varied and because we respect and accept each other, they have confidence to ask the questions about faith they have never asked before. Offering a prayer when the Spirit nudges me is always a risk, but when the mums from Ukraine

accepted prayers, we all had tears in our eyes: it was a humbling and special moment.

In the group there are people of different faiths and none, but we all share and listen. We concentrate on what connects us and what we have in common. God is very gracious in those conversations and it's a group where there is 'room for all'. It is a safe place where all are really welcomed and loved for who they are.

Joy in nature

As well as Home-Start, another favourite ministry is at the school. Working with children can be so enlightening and grounding and I love their spontaneity. One wet Tuesday morning, leaving the outreach centre, I bumped into a group of school children, merrily singing with their teacher, on their way back from forest school. They stopped and said hello, and one exceptionally excited little boy, said "Deacon Sarah Jane, you will not believe what we have seen! We have seen the most amazing, beautiful thing. It was awesome!"

Of course, I had to ask about it. With hands outstretched showing the size of his find, he said "It was a great big slug! A-m-a-z-i-n-g!"

I have never thought slugs to be amazing or beautiful, but this little boy was so delighted, I could not help but laugh and join in with his excitement. The timing was perfect. I had come from having a difficult prayer time in the centre, where I just could not concentrate. It felt unsuccessful and to top it off I was missing my family and home town, so I was generally feeling sorry for myself. All that got blown away by one little boy sharing his joy in his find. It made me realise how often I fail to see beauty in things like slugs! How amazing that God works through the slugs and sticky messiness of life.

I find working with people from such a diverse community to be a true joy; building relationships is such a privilege and blessing. So too is meeting people where they are at, helping them to feel accepted for who they are and loved as a child of a loving God. I try to show Jesus' love is for everyone, not just for the few. It blows my mind still and hopefully will continue to do so for a very long time.

Sarah Jane Rigby is a deacon in the Romford Circuit.



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When the mums from Ukraine accepted prayers, we all had tears in our eyes.



They are truly compassionate and give help and advice without judging.

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