

Issue 26 • Spring 2022

The **Methodist** Church 

the
connexion



Doing Justice

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



Gareth Hill
Editor

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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It's hard to watch the news at present. Even for a news junkie like me – with 30 years as a reporter and editor before becoming a minister – the relentless tide of tough headlines is hard to take. My mother had certain expressions when facing the big issues of the world. She used to say with a sigh: "It's not fair, nor right, nor just."

Many of us will have found ourselves echoing that. Losses through Covid-19, the inability to visit loved ones in hospital and limitations on travel have all hit hard. And now there's Ukraine. For many it's not fair, nor right, nor just. But it hasn't been fair for a long time, if ever.

This edition of *the connexion* focuses on doing justice and looks at how Methodists are walking alongside the homeless, people on the edge of society or those simply struggling to cope. Community action and the long struggle for justice has been part of the Church's story over generations and the people we meet in this edition have enabled the voices of marginalised people to be heard. It's not about doing things for others, but working with them and standing alongside as they speak truth to power.

We can read the stories in this issue and be grateful that someone else stood up, without having our own hearts softened. These stories are not to make us feel better, but to highlight that need is found in every community: poverty, homelessness, hunger and more.

My grandfather, a Welsh collier, told me a story from the 1920s where there was no food in the house because the miners were on strike. They had enough for a pot of tea and would then go to chapel with no idea of what would happen afterwards. Suddenly, out of the blue, friends appeared with a food parcel from Canada, which they wanted to share as an act of grace.

Someone asked Jesus: "Who is my neighbour?" In this issue we see the answer.

Every blessing, Gareth

the connexion

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Donna, a client who uses the foodbank at Essex day centre
hope@trinity
(see page 18)

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Inclusive Methodist Church

The Inclusive Methodist Church initiative has been launched to support the Church in its commitment to justice, dignity and solidarity, ensuring that these values are lived out through our churches and communities.

The Inclusive Methodist Church aims to celebrate the rich diversity of people within the Church, to eradicate all discrimination, to treat all people justly and with dignity and to create profound change in the culture, practices and attitudes of the Methodist Church. These changes will see local churches, circuits and districts support all Methodists in living as people of justice and respect.

Churches will be provided with resources, such as an Inclusive Language Guide, as well as training and support to develop awareness and skills around diversity, with each Methodist encouraged to commit to lifelong learning about the rich diversity of human life.

God's Church – a home for all: walk for leadership diversity

At the end of February Daud Irfan, Methodist Youth President 2021/2022, completed a walk from his home circuit in Cardiff to Wesley's Chapel in London, raising awareness of the need for more diverse leadership in the Church. Daud was accompanied by his father, the Revd Irfan John, who is also the Wales Synod Enabler for Culturally Diverse Congregations.

The walk called on young people, especially those from culturally diverse backgrounds, to realise their leadership potential, and for churches and circuits to raise up their young leaders.

The walk set off from Rumney Methodist Church, Cardiff on Sunday 27 February and the pair walked 160 miles to London, stopping at Methodist churches along the way and arriving at Wesley's Chapel in City Road, London on Saturday 5 March where a service welcomed the walkers.

Daud commented, "We wanted to encourage Black British, British Asian and global diaspora leadership through this walk. Though the UK is becoming more ethnically and culturally diverse, this representation is still not often seen within the Church.

"I want to see more children and young people joining the Methodist Church, growing in faith and taking on leadership roles. In particular, as the first ever Youth President of an Asian heritage, I want to see more children and young people from diverse cultural backgrounds take on leadership roles within the Methodist Church."

THINK PIECE



What is 'doing justly'?



In 'Our Calling', we affirm "The Church exists to be a good neighbour to people in need and to challenge injustice." But what does it mean 'to challenge injustice'? The Revd Dr Jonathan Hustler shares his thoughts.

The Methodist Church has a 'Walking with Micah' project and currently every church can take part in conversations about justice. (To find out more, visit methodist.org.uk/walking-with-micah-justice-conversations.) It takes its name from the most oft-quoted verse in Micah where the prophet urges God's people to 'do justly'. But, we might ask, what does that mean? How do we define 'justice'?

Treating others justly

Justice is a word we use frequently and often now with a qualifier. I write this in February as I look forward to 'Racial Justice Sunday'. I was at the climate conference COP26 in Glasgow when I met our youth activists who campaigned under a banner of 'Climate Justice for All'. A number of campaign groups with a concern for fair trade have now

banded together to form the 'Trade Justice Movement'.

All three examples assume the way human beings live together and share the planet has placed some in the world at a disadvantage compared to others, and this can and should be addressed and corrected. All three examples are founded on an assumption that we should treat each other fairly.

When considered from this perspective, justice is not an idea or even an ideal. It is how we expect human society to be. We could spend time defining justice as a concept. Is it the same as fairness? Is justice impartial or does it have a bias to the disadvantaged? Can human justice ever be more than a pale shadow of divine justice? Such theological and philosophical thinking is important, but those three examples suggest analysis is not enough. Justice is about the active



Justice is about the active reordering of human society to address inequality and deprivation.



reordering of human society in order to address inequality and deprivation.

See, judge, act

Christian thinking about justice today has been influenced in many places by the work of South American liberation theologians in the last century. One of the methods they developed was 'See – judge – act'. They challenged Christians in positions of privilege to witness the suffering of others, to open their eyes to what was happening to people experiencing political or economic oppression.

That might sound obvious. However, simply to be aware of the condition of those who lack the basic necessities of life or are denied freedoms that we take for granted is the first step to challenging injustice. The liberation theologians urge us to see not from our own self-interest but with 'the eyes of Christ'. In the Christian understanding, justice and compassion cannot be separated.

Justice and peace-making

Once injustice is seen, there has to be judgment. Another underlying assumption is that we are all accountable before God for our actions. Someone is responsible for injustices. But what is wrong and who is responsible? This can be complex. We can see clearly when people are suffering, but unpicking the reasons can raise a number of complex questions. That is particularly true where the claims of one group to be treated with justice are countered by those of another group, who also have a narrative of

oppression. In the Christian understanding, therefore, justice and peace-making cannot be separated.

That implies that seeing and making judgments are not enough for the Christian. The call to do justly and to challenge injustice is a call for action. To take some obvious examples from the three justice issues noted above, we have tried as a Church to combat racial injustice by seeking to call out examples of discrimination and to open up opportunities that are currently overwhelmingly held by white people.

We are setting in train a series of programmes that help us to achieve our commitment to reduce our net carbon emissions as a Church to zero by 2030. To combat trade injustice, we continue to try to ensure that whatever we offer as hospitality is certified as being fairly traded and critically keep our financial holdings under scrutiny to ensure that the companies in which we invest operate ethically.

What we do as a denomination we can also do as local churches and as individuals. In the Christian understanding, justice and personal responsibility cannot be separated.

How do we define 'justice'? This article has not answered the question with which it began and it is not an easy question to answer. It might be said that we know justice (or injustice) when we see it, but for the Christian that is not enough. We know justice when we see a situation, recognise causes and responsibility, and do something in response. See – judge – act.



The call to do justly and to challenge injustice is a call for action.



Doing justice

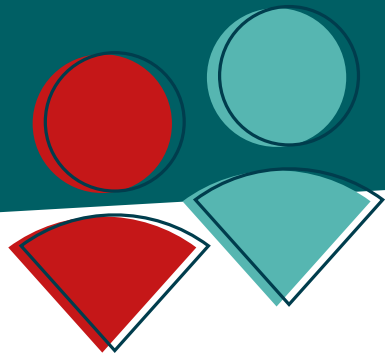
What have you seen in your community that calls you to act for justice?



To see not from our own self-interest but with 'the eyes of Christ'.

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

WALKING WITH MICAH



Walking humbly with God

Rachel Lampard explores our call to put Micah 6:8 into practice and seek social justice.



Over two years we are exploring what it is to be a justice-seeking Church.

I like walking. It gives me new perspectives, and it's the best way to absorb the sights and sounds of a new city, to notice and learn. When I had toddlers, we would walk together slowly – oh so slowly! At their pace and level I could see the things they saw, and appreciate what fascinated them. Now they are teenagers, there is nothing better than a long walk to

give us the chance to connect at a deep level. There is a natural rhythm of talking and silence, speaking and listening, making tender conversations possible.

Metaphorical 'walking together' has the same value. We can probably all point to times when we have walked alongside someone, or have felt accompanied. Where time, attention and value has been invested in the

relationship. When we feel someone has taken the trouble to get on our wavelength and see things from our point of view.

The 'Walking with Micah' project aims to help the Methodist Church in Britain identify and focus on its principles for social justice. Over two years we are exploring what it is to be a justice-seeking Church. The title comes from the well-known verse: "What does the Lord require of you, but that you do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8) Walking humbly with God has to be central to our calling to be a justice-seeking people.

Walking

On a human level, being alongside people, being with them for the journey, being in it for the long haul, can make such a difference. The presence of churches in local communities, the dedication of volunteers, week in, week out, enables this kind of walking alongside people. People who have experienced various kinds of injustices often come to expect rejection. Finding people, who are willing to walk with them in their life's journey, can help them discover their own dignity and self-respect.

I witnessed this 'walking' at a community café, where visitors are known by name and welcomed whether it has been a good week



or a bad week. It's a place where there's space to talk and be heard, and have the opportunity to serve food as well as be served.

Humbly

Humility is not a bad thing when we're talking about justice. Too often I have responded to something with a knee jerk reaction only later, as I learned more, to realise I did not have the full picture. Being humble in our walking opens us up to learn and be changed.

It was only after working alongside homeless people, hearing their experiences, anger, frustrations and fear, that I began to appreciate the scale of the challenges placed in their way by the unjust and immoral



'Do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with your God.'



It's a way of supporting people in deep poverty that is more dignified than handouts.



Doing justice

Where have you witnessed or experienced the impact of walking alongside?

Have you seen ways in which 'walking humbly' has transformed your church's justice work?

What impact might taking seriously the God of justice at the margins have on your life?



systems that permit homelessness in our society. People involved in foodbanks have been fired up to engage with their MPs about benefit sanctions, universal credit or crippling debt, when they have learned about the impact on individuals. I have learned so much through movements such as the Poverty Truth Network. Through these, people who live with poverty are able to tell their own stories. Through their testimonies they tell those with the power of decision-making about the reality of poverty, and identify insights and changes needed in policy and practice.

Yet being humbly open to learning from others might mean doing things differently. Church Action on Poverty co-ordinates the new Pantry movement. Instead of being given handouts, people in poverty can become a member and then choose and buy low-cost food. It's a way of supporting people in deep poverty that is more dignified than handouts. Pantries give choice and dignity to those who are marginalised. Community-owned pantries transform relationships, and the relationships of churches that host them.

With God

Walking humbly enables us to notice, to listen, to learn, and to be changed. But the full phrase from Micah is of course 'walk humbly with God'. What does it mean to walk where God walks? Responding to the call to tackle injustice is about growing in our discipleship as we reflect God's love and justice.

It also challenges where we put our energies and resources. We believe God's blessing, and therefore God, is with those whom society sees as being on the margins: the poor, the widow and the orphan, those

who are most vulnerable, those who have least power. Jesus said: "If you do it for the least of these, you do it for me." The Church of Scotland acknowledged: "A Church which takes the challenge of Jesus seriously must make the redistribution of her own wealth a priority. This is not simply an economic argument. It is a call upon churches to live by the liberating faith of the Gospel."¹

Walking alongside people, humbly learning from others, and looking to meet and grow in God in the places where injustice happens. These are some of the insights that have helped me wrestle with what it means to do justice. That's why I find Micah 6:8 such a helpful place to root our exploration of what it means to be a justice-seeking Church. The call to 'do justice' is far from being an intellectual exercise in what is 'right'. Nor should it be an exercise of power, doing justice 'to' people rather than being alongside them. Instead our call to be a justice-seeking people is received, strengthened and illuminated by walking humbly, alongside people and with God.

DOING JUSTICE

Justice conversations

1. What does a just world look like to you?
2. What are the biggest injustices our society or world faces?
3. And what are the most important things that could be done to tackle them? What do Methodists think?

The 'Walking with Micah' project is inviting everyone to take part in a justice conversation to explore these questions. People's answers will help to shape what the Methodist Church says and does to tackle injustice.

We have materials to help shape justice conversations in every context – worship resources, ideas for intergenerational conversations, session ideas, craft activities. At the heart of every justice conversation will be a commitment to listen, remembering the call to walk humbly, to explore where God is, and to reflect on what a just world looks like. For information about the project and how to submit your responses visit www.methodist.org.uk/walking-with-micah-justice-conversations



Our call to be a justice-seeking people is received, strengthened and illuminated by walking humbly.

1. *Sharing our Pain – Holding our Hope, Church of Scotland General Assembly 2002*

Rachel Lampard is leading the 'Walking with Micah' Project.



Singing about justice

One of the most popular contemporary hymns in *Singing the Faith* is Martin Leckebusch's 'Show me how to stand for justice' (no. 713). His starting point is a verse from the book of the prophet Micah: "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?" (Micah 6:8)

The website *Singing the Faith Plus* reminds us that each of the hymn's three verses echoes one of the 'requirements' of God. See www.methodist.org.uk/STF713

In **verse 1** Martin declares that to 'stand for justice' is to reflect the 'immense compassion' of God in the lives we lead.

In **verse 2** the focus is on kindness (in other Bible translations: 'mercy') as a response to our forgiveness and acceptance by Jesus, God's son.

Finally, in **verse 3** (which has affinities with the Methodist Covenant Prayer), the requirement to "walk humbly with your God" is paraphrased as submitting "in humility... to the truth which I have heard".

There is an interview with Martin Leckebusch also in *Singing the Faith Plus* where he talks about hymn writing. You can find it here: <https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-faith/worship/singing-the-faith-plus/posts/taking-a-broad-approach-the-hymn-writing-of-martin-leckebusch>

*Show me how to stand for justice:
how to work for what is right,
how to challenge false assumptions,
how to walk within the light.
May I learn to share more freely
in a world so full of greed,
showing your immense compassion
by the life I choose to lead.*

*Teach my heart to treasure mercy,
whether given or received –
for my need has not diminished
since the day I first believed:
let me seek no satisfaction
boasting of what I have done,
but rejoice that I am pardoned
and accepted in your Son.*

*Gladly I embrace a lifestyle
modelled on your living word,
in humility submitting
to the truth which I have heard.
Make me conscious of your presence
every day in all I do:
by your Spirit's gracious prompting
may I learn to walk with you.*

*Martin Leckebusch (b. 1962) Words: © 1999,
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Doing justice

What kind of grace-filled lifestyle could you embrace?

Christmas justice in prison



Within the walls, residents wait. They have no choice.



Chaplain Sue Culver urges us to: “Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them.” (Hebrews 13:3)

I spend some of my time as a prison chaplain at HMP Oakwood. Near Wolverhampton, it is one of the biggest in Britain, housing up to 2,200 prisoners. It’s a purpose-built prison, which opened ten years ago and, from a distance, you could be forgiven for thinking it is a distribution centre or industrial warehouse because that is exactly what it looks like.

Waiting and praying

Within the walls, residents wait. They have no choice. They are all there for a reason of course, and the punishment for whatever crimes they have committed is to have their liberty denied. So they wait. They wait for their sentence to be served, wait for loved ones to visit, wait for their food to be served, wait for healthcare to be given, wait for a chaplain to respond. They wait for doors to be unlocked, toilet rolls to be distributed, the

clock to tick, and so on, and the waiting is exhausting. The coping strategy of some is to submerge themselves, at least for a time, in an illicit drug-fuelled parallel world, often with devastating consequences.

The run up to Christmas offers particular challenges. As the world outside the prison walls is taken up with the excitement of tinsel



Doing justice

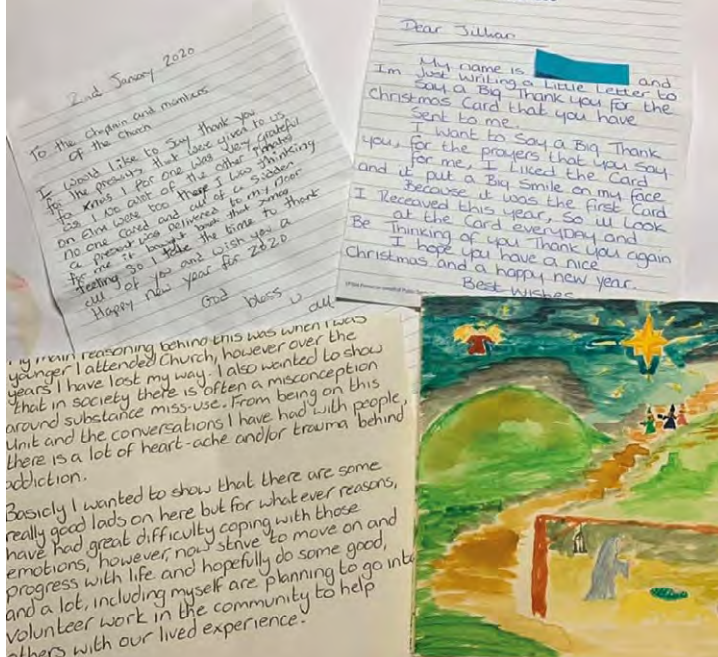
How could you commit to support a prison ministry near you?

and turkey, within the prison environment how on earth does anyone offer Advent as a time of purposeful waiting and preparation for an incarnate God? How is Advent time any different from the chronological time these men are trying to kill? More importantly, it is difficult to speak of the existence of God, the knowability of God, and the love of God in a place that primarily is a place of control with regimes that are essentially graceless.

In my experience, in prison the currency of prayer is priceless. To spend time in prayer with a prisoner who is lonely, lost, grieving, or simply miserable, is one of the most humbling experiences of my prison day. Of course you could argue that it helps a little more time pass if a prisoner can buttonhole the chaplain for an hour. However, more often than not, these conversations reveal a brutal honesty about the darkest depths of despair those having to wait face as they consider why they find themselves incarcerated. To be able to speak of a God who waits alongside them within those darker-than-dark places, and who calls ordinary people to pray and be alongside them is one of the most powerful expressions of faith that I witness.

Advent prayer project

I began a small initiative called the Advent Prayer project, asking for 80 volunteers from local churches to pray for an individual prisoner by name as part of their daily Advent devotions. The prisoners were on the drug rehabilitation unit. As well as praying, volunteers wrote a Christmas card and



sponsored the provision of a small gift of a mug, some socks and a few sweets for Christmas morning.

The response was amazing: those holding individual prisoners in their prayers had a connection to a person they didn't previously know and continued to be mindful of them beyond Advent. I am still regularly asked if I know how 'their' particular prisoner is doing, and whether or not they have finished serving their sentence. I also get asked if I am still able to keep in touch with them, and can the project be repeated next year.

Giving out the Christmas cards and gifts was a very moving and sacred moment accompanied by exclamations of joy, tears and shouts of "Miss, Miss! Read my card for me because I don't know how to."

After Christmas on the unit residents were rolling up their trouser legs to show me their socks, and squabbling over who could make me a cuppa in their new mugs. Their precious Christmas cards remained pinned to the walls of their cells because, for some, it was the first expression of unconditional care they had experienced in their lives.

So on either side of the prison walls we offered our prayers and experienced longing and goodwill. We held those we encounter before God each day during the heady mix of Advent preparations because, if nothing else, the coming of the Christ child teaches us it's OK to be human. There is the spark of the divine in each of us. When we prepare for Advent together, in our own way we experience something that is bigger than we are as individuals, and we can truly say Christmas, blessed Christmas has come again.



Their precious Christmas cards remained pinned to the walls of their cells.

Deacon Sue Culver is a minister in the Cannock Chase Circuit and a chaplain at HMP Oakwood.

Reflection

Policing and God's justice



The Revd Jason Cooke is Minister of High Street Methodist Church in Witney, Oxfordshire.

Former police officer the Revd Jason Cooke reflects on the complexities of justice.



These boys collected knife and gunshot scars and memories of their dead friends.

I joined the police when I was 23 years old, and it opened my eyes to the many layers of our society, most of which are often hidden. Looking back I recognise that I was a Sunday Christian at best. I needed a kick up the backside, one that would eventually come from the most unexpected of sources.

My first job was as a response officer. I worked in one of the busiest policing areas in the country and within a few months there wasn't much I hadn't been exposed to. I loved working there. That was apart from one particular road, the 'red light district'. I remember one night moaning at a colleague who stopped to speak to one of the sex workers. It made me uncomfortable. I didn't like what they did, and it didn't sit well with my so-called Christian beliefs. Talk about having a plank in my eye!

Gangs and justice

After four years, I joined a small unit of six officers. We dealt with issues that needed a more robust and targeted response than other departments could give. One of our first assignments was to tackle street sex work and the gang culture that went with it. God really does have a sense of humour! Gang culture is brutal and the reasons for it are complex, but as I spoke to these young boys (most were males aged 15-20) it was abundantly clear that they did not come from the same life that I had known.

Scouts get badges, but these boys collected knife and gunshot scars and memories of their dead friends. One 16 year old I arrested carrying a large amount of heroin was clearly a nice boy caught up in a whirlwind, yet in the eyes of the law he was guilty and likely heading to prison. Though I did my job that night, I felt no joy in it and it didn't feel like justice. I am grateful that in Jesus there is a judge who knows all things and can judge fairly.

Caring about sex workers

And then there were the sex workers. Those women whom I was so objectionable to, I eventually came to deeply care about.

A number of churches have looked confused when I've started my testimony with

the words "I owe so much to sex workers." But my contact with these ladies were the most profound teaching years of my life. Those women came to trust me and eventually share their stories with me. They are not my stories to share with you, but it was hard to hear about the crimes committed against them. I remember one of them telling me of a horrific event but she wouldn't let me do anything about it. Her words were despairingly true, "But Jason, no one would believe me." She was right too, because the story of her life left her with many labels and our society had no time for her.

We had tremendous success reducing the number of sex workers in the area, but the newspaper headlines about us hid a reality. The reduction in numbers were not all success stories. For each woman we helped escape prostitution, many more died of overdose, suicide and murder. Making the age of 30 was an achievement.

Justice and compassion

In all this I've learned that justice is more complex than I can fully understand. We all know that justice is right and good, but have you noticed when we judge ourselves, we tend to lean more towards mercy?

My job in the police was to investigate crime and put those I believed were guilty before a judge. Yet I started to realise that as I got closer to Jesus, my heart increasingly cried out for mercy for so many of those whom I was arresting. I knew they were guilty, but love and compassion made me desire a different outcome for them.

Jesus died to offer us that alternative. His heart was moved in love and compassion and by offering to remove our sins from us, justice is still done, as the judge himself takes our place and pays our price. God's grace really is amazing.

This is what I carry into ministry from the police. Our mission is everything. We cannot become a Church that cares more about singing songs and drinking coffee, and in doing so keep the good news to ourselves and from any soul who may occasionally stumble through the front door. That world would be rather... unjust.



Doing justice

How does hearing honest stories from people caught up in the justice system challenge our complacency?



My heart increasingly cried out for mercy for so many of those I was arresting.

The Revd Tracey Hume
is a deacon and
District Community
Engagement Enabler in the
Newcastle District.



*A system
that produces
beggars needs
to be repaired.*



Justice for people in poverty

Through the Poverty Truth Commission the poorest have a voice and influence, says Deacon Tracey Hume.

As a deacon, listening to those who find themselves marginalised through poverty and partnering with them to seek a more just future is a natural place for me. In Gateshead, we have used the Poverty Truth Commission model to make this happen.

Hearing stories

In 2014 I was running a foodbank in Gateshead, hearing stories of struggle and meeting people disempowered and at the mercy of decisions made about them. I heard about Poverty Truth Commissions (PTCs), which had first been established in Scotland. The concept was that no lasting social change could happen if the people most affected by policies and decisions did not have a voice and a part in creating those systems. The slogan of the Poverty Truth Commission is “Nothing about us, without us, is for us.” I loved this idea.

Over the next four years I worked hard to build relationships with local government, agencies and local people. By 2018 I felt it was right to initiate our own PTC in Gateshead and we appointed a community worker, Lucy

Zwolinska, to work alongside me to establish it. We brought together Gateshead people who had experienced poverty in its different forms. We got to know them and facilitated sessions that helped them find the best way to share their stories.

Sharing stories

On 5 March 2020 our community commissioners (those with lived experience of poverty) stood at the front of the Gateshead Civic Centre Chamber, where the decisions were usually made *about* them. There was a room full of invited guests including senior civic leaders.

They told their stories of truth and injustice. It was a holy moment. They were heard. They were *really heard*. We then invited senior civic leaders as well as people in charities, business and other agencies to join the commission to work together to seek change.

Working for a new story

During Covid lockdowns we took the Commission onto Zoom. We spent six months getting to know each other and to listen to each other's stories, identifying common



*“Nothing about
us, without us,
is for us”.*



They told their stories of truth and injustice. It was a holy moment.

themes we could look at together. In May 2021, three task groups were set up to meet monthly: Community Resources; Families and Caring (including Housing); and Benefits and Finance.

We began to see change happen, not just in changes to policies and practice, but in all the commissioners. We saw changes in their confidence and sense of self-worth, and many went on to participate in national Poverty Truth Commission work and engage in university research projects.

In December 2021, our community commissioners also represented Gateshead at a meeting with the government Cabinet Office. It was heart-warming to see them speaking truth to that level of government.

Moving forward

We didn't expect to have the opportunity to work in a new way with the Council in Gateshead. One of our members is a senior researcher at Northumbria University and has developed a model of co-design, which builds on what the Poverty Truth Commission was trying to do.

Instead of making tweaks at the edge of current policy and practice, professionals and people with lived experience of poverty (the civic and community commissioners) are working together to design a new system based on mutual listening and understanding. In March we begin a pilot scheme working with the housing department of Gateshead Council to redesign the standards that properties must meet when they are let to new tenants (the Lettable Standards). This affects

every Council tenant and could have the most profound impact, helping many Gateshead residents.

Part of Jesus' manifesto was to bring freedom for captives. The Poverty Truth Commission has given us the chance to enable voices from the economic margins to be heard and to be a key part of working towards system change and a more just society.

I am reminded of this quote from social rights activist Martin Luther King which for me sums up so much of what the Poverty Truth Commission and our co-design work is all about: "True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar. It comes to see that a system that produces beggars needs to be repaired. We are called to be the Good Samaritan, but after you lift so many people out of the ditch, you start to ask 'maybe the whole road to Jericho needs to be repaved.'" ¹



Doing justice

How can we resist speaking for marginalised people and enable their own voices to be heard?

1. As quoted in *The Irresistible Revolution* by Shane Claiborne. Zondervan, Michigan (2006) and used with permission.



Ending homelessness for good

Manchester has a vision to end the injustice of homelessness says the Revd Ian Rutherford.



Our desire to “loose the chains of injustice” (Isaiah 58).

I am often asked what drew me to become a member and then a minister of the Methodist Church. I refer to three key elements in Methodism – a zeal for evangelism, a striving for holiness and a passion for social justice.

I am a city centre minister at the Methodist Central Hall in Manchester, which is a hub for social justice, mission and service: ‘at the heart of the city with a heart for the city’. We practise compassion and campaigning. We speak out in the public square and we act in

solidarity with those affected by injustice. Working for justice offers hope and there is the constant opportunity ‘to give a reason for that hope’ to all we serve alongside.

Four aims

I have four aims for city centre ministry: encounter, encourage, engage, enact.

Encounter and encourage The focus of my friar ministry (‘ministry as guest’) is within the shops and businesses of the vibrant and creative northern quarter of Manchester. Every time I encounter someone, there’s an opportunity to encourage and bear witness to the love and compassion of God.

The focus for encounter and encouragement within Central Hall itself is working with a number of social justice organisations based in the building. These include Migrant Support, which supports refugees and asylum seekers; Safety for Sisters, who work with those affected by gender-based violence; and Carisma, which empowers young people.

In addition, we have Café Central inside Central Hall, which works with those leaving prison; Befrienders which offers a safe space to talk for those finding life tough; and Reboot which walks alongside people as they get back on their feet.

Engage We engage with civic authorities, public sector agencies, and people from the business and voluntary sectors over the prevailing social justice issues here in Manchester. We want to end rough sleeping and reduce homelessness. We also want to support refugees and asylum seekers, help people who can’t afford food, pursue climate justice and challenge hate crime.

Enact I join with others (especially Citizens UK) to bring about change and we lobby government about social justice issues. I also work closely with the Mayor of Greater





Manchester, Andy Burnham, as his faith sector lead on homelessness and housing and I am a trustee of the Greater Manchester Mayor's Charity. I also chair the Food Security Action Network.

Justice for the homeless

In relation to homelessness and the other social justice priorities, as Methodists we are called to witness the love of God, to encourage those working to make a difference, to engage with civic, business and community leaders to forge partnerships for change and to enact a new future with hope.

As faith sector lead on the Homelessness Programme Board, I have contributed to the development of the Greater Manchester Homelessness Action Network and the outcomes are positive and progressive. Our vision is to end rough sleeping and reduce homelessness. We identified the obstacles and now work to achieve our goal.

Our approach to the homelessness crisis can be summed up as reduction,

respite, recovery and reconnection. We want to prevent rough sleeping in the future (reduction); provide a safe place for people off the street (respite); manage issues, stabilise individuals and help them become independent (recovery); and enable them to work and lead meaningful lives within the community (reconnection).

We want to properly tackle homelessness. It's not enough simply to help a person in their current situation; we want to provide them with the support to participate as an active member of the community in which they live.

A safe place to sleep

'A Bed Every Night' has operated across Greater Manchester since November 2018. The scheme is not a sticking plaster approach. We seek to give people emergency short-term help and then move them into the right permanent accommodation and support them so they can stay off the streets for good. We want to build supportive, therapeutic relationships for their time of personal crisis.

We are now using the time following Covid to work out how to ensure that people do not return to the streets. We have a prevention strategy to implement in all ten Manchester boroughs that calls for an open strategic conversation as we build a system change, a new future. The Church plays a key role in this conversation given the extent of our involvement on the frontline, and our desire to "loose the chains of injustice" (Isaiah 58) and take care of "the least of these" (Matthew 25).



At Central Hall, we practise compassion campaigning.



Doing justice

Can a commitment to 'encounter, encourage, engage and enact' change our own community?

The Revd Ian Rutherford is Minister of St Peter's Church in Manchester and City Centre Minister at Methodist Central Hall.



Whenever we help the least of these we do it for Christ.

Justice for marginalised people

Essex day centre hope@trinity is bringing God's love and practical aid to the most needy, explains the Deacon Janet Jenkins.



As a Methodist, I value social justice and, as a deacon, I feel called to work with the poor and marginalised. I am privileged to follow that call. I work in Clacton and Jaywick in Essex, an area of acute poverty and deprivation.

When I was sent to work in Clacton, I was asked to expand the work with the homeless and vulnerable, which at that point was just a Monday lunch club. I soon found it was impossible to work with those addicted to alcohol and drugs in a building with toddler and WI groups. So after working with amazing architects and raising over a million

pounds together, we managed to transform our building, creating a day centre for the homeless and vulnerable called hope@trinity. The model we use is one of hospitality: the people who come are regarded as guests and we are hosts.

Isolation, poverty and ill health

Social isolation is one of the biggest problems and a key factor in alcohol and drug abuse. Housing is also an issue, as the housing benefit our guests receive is not adequate to cover their accommodation. They all have to top up their rent out of their Universal Credit and so have very little left to feed themselves (sometimes only £10 a week). Many do not have enough money to heat their homes. This is not justice. Many do not have the skills to gain employment or to look after themselves.

The charities we work with, who help with housing, health and mental health problems, realise that many guests need long-term dedicated care. During the pandemic, the groups working for the homeless came together as SHELLS (shelter and health enlisting local support) to fight for justice and work with those in need, including providing vaccines. We met on Zoom and it was hosted by the alliance transformation lead from the NHS.

We worked together to gain justice for the voiceless. They include a woman from Bulgaria who, despite working hard in this country for many years, lost her settled status due to Brexit and didn't have enough money to go home; a man living in his car because of serious mental health problems; and people who cannot move on in their lives because



Doing justice

Can people's social isolation be a catalyst for understanding our mission differently?





they believe they can only survive if they self-medicate with alcohol or drugs.

Building trust

Working with our team we can help. But most importantly, as hosts, we build trust. As a minister, our guests know that I am available for any conversation, confession, or prayer. They know that I will never proselytise or judge. Because of this I can guide people to our professionals, whom they would otherwise avoid as part of the establishment. Just last week, I managed to persuade a woman who has many mental health problems and was in denial about homelessness, to seek help.

The work we do is often frustrating. During the pandemic many were taken off the street and put into temporary accommodation – only

to be thrown back on the street again after lockdown! For many under 35, because of lack of adequate housing benefit, all we can do is offer a sleeping bag, warm clothing, hot food and washing facilities.

Following Jesus' example

We no longer live in a country that provides a safety net for the most vulnerable in our society and people are encouraged to judge those who cannot cope without knowing about their back story. But Jesus cared passionately about the poor and the vulnerable, and began his ministry by embodying this passage from Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is on 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 free." (Luke 4:18)

We at hope@trinity have the honour of doing this. We display God's love, enabling people both to socialise and become a community of care. With our professional colleagues we free people from the 'prison' of addiction, help them receive healthcare, and by acceptance and lack of judgment we show that everyone is valuable and deserves to be loved.

There is no time scale or tick list. People will move on, given the right place and time to gain confidence and flourish. This is the social justice that drives us to do this work, knowing that whenever we help the least of these we do it for Christ.



A day centre for the homeless and vulnerable called hope@trinity.



Deacon Janet Jenkins is a Minister in the Tendring Circuit.



It hosts five weekly ESOL classes to help people learn English.



One charity is Space4U, which works with asylum seekers and refugees.



Justice for refugees

The Revd Alana Lawrence describes the work of Trinity Centre in Cardiff, welcoming and assisting asylum seekers and refugees.

Trinity Centre in Cardiff is an outreach centre run by the Methodist Church, which hosts ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) classes, and is a base for many charities and community groups. It has been working with refugees and asylum seekers for the past ten years. 'Mission in partnership' is at the heart of its work, and it aims to empower people and provide much needed justice for disadvantaged refugees and migrants.

The Centre was featured in the very first issue of *the connexion* magazine, which is still available on the Methodist Church website. It described the Revd Irfan John's work with culturally diverse congregations in Wales. Irfan is still based at the Trinity Centre, but in recent years the Centre has expanded and many other activities have developed there too.

Unique space

The Trinity Centre has developed a distinctive operating model that provides groups with a greater sense of independence than traditional church outreach. It is not like anything else.

Treasurer Heather Cox says, "Visitors don't always get it when they come to see what we're doing."

The Centre is a community hub, giving different groups and charities a space to flourish. They become 'part of a family', finding themselves within an energising network that enables them to grow. As Richard Gaunt, member of the Trinity executive, says, "When you put two or three groups together, it is amazing what can come out of it – often completely unforeseen outcomes."

Wide range of groups

As well as larger and more established organisations such as The Red Cross and Welsh Refugee Council, the Centre is home to smaller charities that operate specifically within Cardiff. One such charity is Space4U, which works with asylum seekers and refugees. It a founding member of the Trinity Centre, providing food, clothing, and sanctuary to those in need, many of whom now volunteer at the Centre.

The Centre also hosts the Global Gardens Project, which has an organic kitchen garden,

growing crops from all around the world, which are shared with the local community.

One of the more creative groups at the Trinity Centre is the Aurora Trinity Art Collective. A member of its art group said: "I am always eager for Friday to come, and see all these beautiful faces, *Masha'Allah*. It's a diverse group which I appreciate."

For some, the Centre is their path to getting employment and integrating into British society. That is why it hosts five weekly ESOL classes to help people learn English, and helps those looking to learn more about the UK.

Sanctuary and justice for all

The pandemic seemed to bring everything to a shuddering halt during lockdown, but Jack Neighbour, the centre administrator, said they managed to keep in touch with users and are now seeing several hundred visitors a week.

When most activities ceased because of the pandemic, the Cardiff Methodist Circuit took time to reimagine what the Trinity Centre is about. They asked where the Centre stood in relation to churches in the circuit and to communities within and around the building. They also took stock of the building that was in need of major renovation so it could continue to serve its community and bring people together. The result was the development of the 'Sanctuary for All' refurbishment project; a radical reimagining of community building and mission in partnership.

The future of the Trinity Centre lies with the building itself. It must be accessible, welcoming, and the work must be founded on a sustainable approach to serve the communities engaged with the Centre for many years to come. In this way, we can bring justice to some of the most disadvantaged people in our society.

Although plans to renovate the building started before the pandemic, it is only in the past year that the Sanctuary for All project took shape. The Trinity Centre executive has worked tirelessly with architects, planners, funders and the Methodist Church.

As Cathy Gale, Superintendent of the Circuit, explains: "We're getting ready for two of the toughest challenges in the whole of the Trinity



Centre Project work programme – fundraising and overseeing the implementation of the Sanctuary Project.

"If we get these stages right, we will have tested in action a radically different way of working with partners in a 'family' of specialist organisations. More and more vulnerable people will get the help they need, local communities will be strengthened, and their heritage reinvigorated. And as every day goes by, the Church will continue learning what mission and outreach really mean."



Doing justice

How can we encourage the outsider to feel part of our family?

The Revd Alana Lawrence is Minister of Llanishen Methodist and Wesley (Caerphilly) Methodist churches.

To find out more about the Trinity Centre, contact Jack via enquiries@trinitycentre.wales



BRITE Box seeks to bring families together around food, sparking joy.

BRITE boxes feed hungry families

The Methodist South London Mission has long stood shoulder to shoulder with poor people and is providing meal kits for needy Southwark families, writes Peter Baffoe.

The 130-year-old South London Mission is one of the Methodist missions set up in the late 19th century in some of the most impoverished areas of the country. Over the past year we have reviewed our ways of working and developed three values that align with our vision and power our work: Respite, Regeneration and Revolution.

Respite describes a project that meets an immediate need, for example food parcels for hungry people.

Regeneration concerns long-term relationship-building with people in the community. The aim is to provide space and resources for people to gain confidence to pursue personal, familial and community social development.

Revolution is the stage when individuals, families and communities are equipped for transformation, using their experience to inform decision-makers and influence the direction of local and national policy.

BRITE meals for families

We intend every mission project should contain elements of the 3Rs. The BRITE Box

project is a new initiative that we believe does exactly that. BRITE stands for 'Building Resilience In Today's Environment'. It was initiated by the charity Voices of Hope, based in the London borough of Richmond at the start of the pandemic in 2020 to address food insecurity. BRITE Box is a meal kit designed for children and their families. It provides a recipe and all the ingredients you need to prepare a delicious meal for five people and can be recreated for less than £5.

It's hard to believe that in the 21st century and in a rich country like Great Britain we still have a significant number of people who can't buy enough food to feed their families. Most schools in Southwark have more than average students on pupil premium or who are entitled to free school meals. There are also a high number of families with no recourse to public funds and many more whose income is just over the threshold to qualify for support and yet still need help because of the high cost of living.

The borough of Southwark also has high levels of childhood obesity, caused by the poor diet of families unable to afford fresh vegetables and other nutritious foods.

By providing the meal kits, BRITE Box seeks to bring families together around food, sparking joy and interest in cooking and eating well. Using the kits teaches children new and improved cooking skills and helps to give them confidence.

Local partners

A local greengrocer in the world-famous Borough Market in London supplies all our fresh fruit and vegetables, and Bell & Sons Butchers, a family-run business based in the heart of Bermondsey, is the source of our meat and poultry. The project is financially supported by an international



Doing justice

Can you 'smell justice' in your church community? If not, why not?





BRITE Box embodies some of our core values and thinking around justice.



record company with offices next to the South London Mission.

Having local partners reminds us that as a Church we can't bring about change on our own and we work with local partners from different sectors to provide solutions to societal challenges. We all have our different strengths and gifts and by working together we can make a real impact.

BRITE Box and justice

BRITE Box embodies some of our core values and thinking around justice. Cooking is a

unique activity that employs all our senses. Good food smells good, feels good, tastes good, looks good. This is a lot like justice. When we look at our society, our community, our Church even, what are our senses telling us?

Does our society look like a just society? Does it sound like one; does it feel like one? A good meal is immediately recognisable: it warms the belly and nourishes the soul. Likewise, a just society is also recognisable and nourishes all its citizens. To create both a good meal and a just society requires patience and consideration of all the many different ingredients.

Our church is situated in a poor area with people on the margins of society. It considers those disenfranchised by an unjust system and walks alongside them, helping them in whatever way it can. But that's not where it stops. Pressing Control and E on your keyboard when using Microsoft Word is a shortcut that will bring text to the middle of the screen. In a similar way, a successful church will bring marginalised groups and their experience to the fore. Embodying our 3Rs (respite, regeneration and revolution) we will lead them to being in the very centre of our society.



Peter Baffoe is the Faith & Community Development Worker in the Southwark and Deptford Circuit. To see Peter talking about BRITE Box go to: <https://vimeo.com/669331515>



They were trying to navigate the benefits and asylum system with English as their second language.

Justice for refugees and the homeless

At Lozells Church and Community Centre the staff are passionate about helping the most disadvantaged.



Lozells is one of the most deprived parts of Birmingham and its residents live with the injustices of poverty and inequality. The Centre's staff team, Eddy Aigbe, Salome Noah, Mima Yedale and Ian Nannestad, are committed to supporting people as they come for help and advice. The impressive range of help includes: English language classes, a nursery, Homestart, stay and play groups, dance to health, computer skills, mental health services, refugee support, benefits advice, a job club, drop-in sessions and emergency food provision.

Here three members of staff describe their work.

Ian Nannestad

Benefits advice worker Ian Nannestad says the Centre sees well over 500 clients a year and thrives on word-of-mouth recommendations.

He says "We provide advice on welfare benefits and related matters three days a week. We help clients to understand correspondence and make Universal Credit claims and we challenge decisions and assist clients to make appeals.

"Many of our clients do not have English as their first language and we enable them to access mainstream services. Much of my time is spent on the phone trying to make sense of decisions made by the Department for Work and Pensions or the local authority. The 'service' offered by authorities is often very poor: calls to the DWP can take up to 50 minutes to be answered. I also complete forms for disability benefits for those on long-term sickness benefits.

"We see well over 500 clients annually, achieving outcomes of over £100,000 in annualised benefit payments and around £30,000 in lump sum payments."

Eddy Aigbe

Eddy Aigbe, who has moved on to manage a church community and conference centre in Birmingham, was part of the Lozells' story for



Doing justice

How can you build a team to reach beyond Sunday and meet community needs?



11 years. He was the centre manager, church trustee and a member of the Circuit executive and has witnessed first-hand the power of community organising in the Church. Working in one of the poorest and most diverse communities in England gave him a ‘trenches’ view’ of the challenges people face.

He says “Through teamwork, community organising and partnerships, we have provided support and empowered individuals and families. The Centre helped me and my family to navigate the complexities of being classified as people with no access to public funds. People like that often find themselves in a challenging maze trying to get support from the various Council departments and the Home Office.

“As a new resident in Lozells, my family and I started attending the church when it was being refurbished for the community centre. I got involved first as a volunteer and then as a resident artist for a community project. The more I was involved, the more I wanted to do, to the point that I applied for and was eventually employed as a caretaker.

“I found myself blessed threefold because I had a place to worship, somewhere to contribute to people in need, and a place where, as an artist, I could help people with my art and knowledge.

“Through the Church, I have been blessed with skills that helped me become a leader in the Lozells community and the Birmingham Circuit. I raised funds, managed community projects and partnerships as well as a Grade Two listed church with a community centre, a nursery and spaces for projects and events.

“Although I’m leaving the Centre, I’m confident that it will get all the support it needs. The team at Lozells are capable of riding the Covid storm and continuing the good work. My hope is that other churches follow this model of mission in their communities and become places of welcome through the transforming love of Jesus.”

Alison Richards

The Revd Alison Richards says that walking alongside a volunteer at the Centre and his family, who were granted ‘limited leave to remain’ and then immediately became homeless, opened her eyes to the suffering of so many families in Birmingham.

She says “They were trying to navigate the benefits and asylum system with English as their second language and were living in one



Places of welcome through the transforming love of Jesus.



room in a B&B hotel (minus breakfast) and then in temporary accommodation miles from their school. Inevitably the children’s education and health suffered.

“Working with Citizens UK, we discovered that there were 3064 families in Birmingham in temporary accommodation in June 2020. Affordable social rent housing for families became one of our top priorities as we challenged those in power during the 2021 elections and got this onto the agenda of newly re-elected Mayor, Andy Street. Afterwards I was privileged to work briefly with Citizens UK on their national housing justice work with the government, which the Methodist Church is now involved in. We have a national housing crisis to which the Church must speak to bring about justice.”



We help clients understand correspondence and make Universal Credit claims.

To find out more about the Lozells Community Centre and its work, visit www.lozelsmc.co.uk

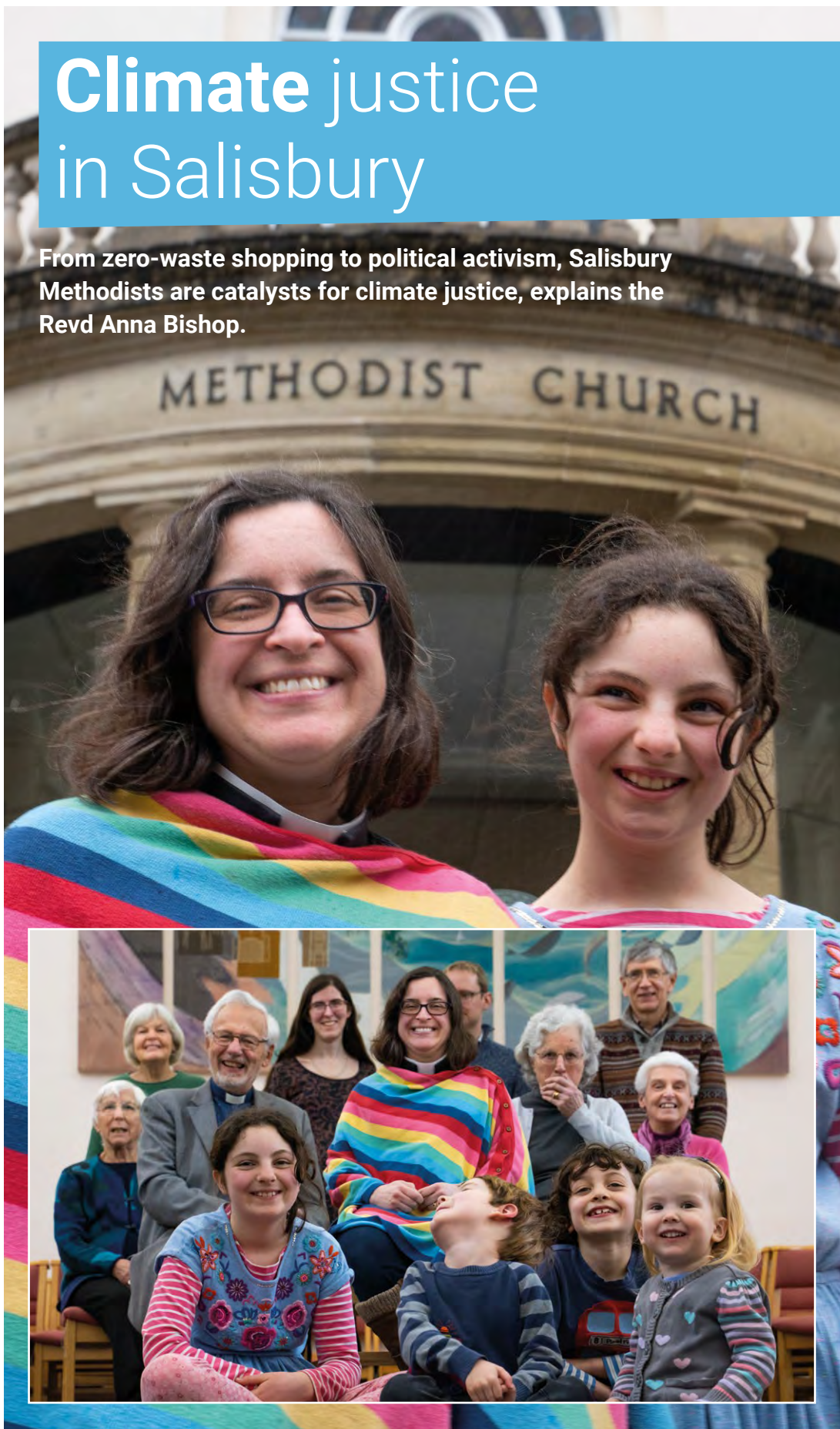
The Revd Anna Bishop is the presbyter of Salisbury Methodist Church.



On the roof solar panels generate clean energy.

Climate justice in Salisbury

From zero-waste shopping to political activism, Salisbury Methodists are catalysts for climate justice, explains the Revd Anna Bishop.



Individuals of all ages in Salisbury are involved.

In the small garden at Salisbury Methodist Church birds sing, a climbing rose blooms, and Jon teaches children to plant bulbs. His vision is to make this tiny plot of land in the heart of the city a green oasis and a haven for wildlife.

As he tends this neglected space, he aims to engage the whole congregation in creating a range of habitats in a garden that reflects the abundance of Eden, with flowers and food mingling together. Already he has planted bird- and bee-friendly plants and has begun composting, and there are plans for a rainwater irrigation system.

Church eco projects

Throughout our church building we have eco initiatives. On the roof, solar panels generate clean energy that feeds into the National Grid. When the children go in to wash their hands, passing the recycling station set up by our Scouts, motion sensors turn on low-energy LED lights for only as long as they are needed. Our Traidcraft stall is so successful selling its sustainably sourced products that it regularly donates to Traidcraft Exchange's work supporting businesses to become environmentally responsible and better able to cope with climate change.

We in Salisbury Methodist Church are aware that we are the beneficiaries of a past that exploited people and the resources of the global south. We believe this obliges us to take responsibility for doing all we can to put things right: we are a microcosm of what needs to happen globally.

Individuals taking action

Some environmentalists argue that only global-scale systemic change can limit global warming to 1.5 degrees in time to protect the most vulnerable. However, we cannot call for systemic change with integrity unless we are prepared to make individual changes as well. So this is what individuals of all ages in Salisbury are doing:

Grace, aged 10, is a 'Green Agent of Change' and writes regularly in the church magazine about her campaigning for a fairer world. This has included taking a Methodist banner to a 'Fridays for Future' school strike.

Ruth, in her 80s, was a founder member of 'Share Salisbury' in which people can borrow things they need, such as DIY tools, rather than buy them. It reduces waste and enables people to borrow unaffordable items.

Helen organised a pre-Christmas toy

exchange, so parents could donate toys and find preloved gifts for their children.

Diana has compiled a directory of local recycling opportunities and **Paul** includes a monthly 'five minutes for the planet' item in the church newsletter, suggesting quick and easy ways to go green.

Barbara joins the twice-monthly 'Pause for the Planet' demonstrations on the high street, where local members of Extinction Rebellion and Amnesty International, along with other activists, share silent meditation.

Jane gets an all-organic veg box from a company that uses no air freight. **Dan** uses only non-toxic cleaning supplies and is giving up air travel and **Nick and Margaret** have a 100% clean energy tariff for their home and encourage others to sign up.

Finally, **George**, six, is 'expert' at rescuing woodlice who have got stuck indoors!

Political activism

'Creation Embroidery' is a wonderful artwork in our church. In the run up to the international climate conference COP26 last year, Salisbury Methodists sent postcards featuring it to the Prime Minister, asking him to end all fossil fuel subsidies and prioritise finance for climate-vulnerable countries.

We also joined with others to host and walk and pray alongside others on the Young Christian Climate Network relay to COP26 and we passed on their demand for climate finance to our local MP, John Glen, who joined our Climate Sunday service last September. We asked John, who is Economic Secretary to the Treasury, about the Green Finance Strategy and how it will bring about meaningful change.

In everything we do, relationships come first, and we work with local activists of all persuasions to build networks for change. From individual actions to systemic change, for us climate justice is all about love.



It only takes 25% profoundly committed to a cause to activate a 'tipping point'.



Doing justice

In what ways does your 'army of ordinary people' work together to love God's creation?

Tipping point

As activist George Monbiot said on his blog www.monbiot.com/2021/11/19/domino-theory: "A small disturbance, in the right place, can trigger a massive response from a system and flip it into a new state." It only takes 25% of a population profoundly committed to a cause to activate a 'tipping point' and trigger others, like domino-toppling.

The Eco Group at Salisbury seeks to be the 25% that tips Salisbury Methodist Church, which will become the 25% that flips Salisbury and so on, until we are caught up in a transformation far greater than ourselves.



Methodist
Heritage

Welcoming visitors again!

Discover the heritage of Methodism by visiting one of the four museums, telling the story of Methodism from its origins through to the present day. Find out about over 150 other sites, from chapels to gardens, at methodistheritage.org.uk



Englesea Brook

The home of Primitive Methodism, 2022 is the 250th birthday of Hugh Bourne, one of its founders. From Heritage talks and services, to new exhibitions and the Heritage Conference, Englesea Brook's celebrations will last throughout this year.
engleseabrook.org.uk



John Wesley's New Room

Founded in 1739 and described as 'the cradle of the early Methodist movement', the New Room comprises its historic 18th-century chapel and an interactive museum of John and Charles Wesley's life and work in Bristol.
newroombristol.org.uk



Wesley's Chapel

Step back in time to immerse yourself in this iconic Methodist site: Visit John Wesley's first purpose-built London chapel, the house where he lived and the Museum of Methodism.
wesleyschapel.org.uk



Epworth Old Rectory

This impressive Grade 1 listed house was the childhood home of John and Charles Wesley. Built in 1709, Epworth Old Rectory will take you back in time to the formative years of these pioneering evangelists.
epwortholdrectory.org.uk

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Methodist
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