

Issue 23 · Summer 2021

The **Methodist** Church 

the
connexion



Be Bold

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



David Perry
Editor

“Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.” (Joshua 1:9)

As we emerge from the Covid-19 pandemic, we are confronted by both urgent and unparalleled need all around us and once-in-a-generation opportunities for brand new and transformative connections to be made between faith and life. Intimations of this fresh engagement are becoming apparent across the life of the whole Connexion. But might this vital activity be inhibited if it is not freed from the culturally tired structures and practices of bypassed religion?

As a dual carriageway takes traffic away from an old market town, post-modernity has increasingly been a highway that has enabled people to move on through life without reference to the history and present-day possibilities of Christianity. Churchgoing has been progressively bypassed by the communities in which we are set. But it would seem that ‘spirituality’ and openness to an experience of faith have not.

So we are living through a time of profound disruption and uncertainty, with all the cultural fluidity that allows for step-changes in approach to bear fruit, for both society and the Church. Whether we look to the climate emergency, the need for racial justice to be a lived reality, or the unfolding crisis in mental health, now is the time for radical shifts of commitment and approach. When women can’t walk the streets knowing they are safe, the time has surely come for rapid action nationally.

In times such as these the ‘same old same old’ just won’t do; just as it didn’t do in the first century Holy Land, sixteenth-century Europe or eighteenth-century Britain. God’s signature reforming activity in these epic times of transition shows us what to expect.

Christ calls us to be a compelling part of this societal metanoia¹ and collective national reformation. With a renewed vision of ‘God for All’, a passionate engagement with pressing public issues and a growing conviction that evangelism is for everyone, the Holy Spirit is stirring us up and moving us out once more. It is time to be bold.

*Love and peace,
David*

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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What do you think about this issue?

Email theconnexioneditor@methodistchurch.org.uk

1 A change in one’s way of life resulting from penitence or spiritual conversion.

the connexion

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*The Revd Sonia Hicks,
the President of the
Methodist Conference,
2021/2022*

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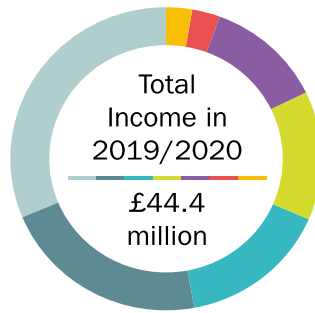
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Climate justice for all



Our COP26 workers from Britain, Uruguay, Fiji, Zambia and Italy launched their global Methodist call, Climate Justice For All, earlier this year, asking us to listen to those with experience of the climate crisis, call upon representatives, and commit to personal change. In a crucial year ahead of COP26, discover how your church can respond boldly at: methodist.org.uk/our-work/our-work-in-britain/environment-and-climate-change/cop26-climate-justice-for-all

Tread lightly on the earth

Eco Church is a free online reward scheme designed to equip your church to work towards environmentally friendly practices. Its purpose? To show that the Church is good news for God's earth. Churches complete an online eco survey about how they are caring for God's earth. The answers a church provides will collect points towards an Eco Church Award. Over 100 Methodist churches, circuits and districts have registered and won awards. To get involved, visit ecochurch.arocha.org.uk

Global help in Covid-19

The Global Relationships team are supporting partner churches and organisations around the world in the coronavirus pandemic. So far in this connexional year, out of its total budget of £216,000, the World Mission Fund of the Methodist Church in Britain has given £110,000 in Covid-related grants. This comes on top of £550,000 last year, from a total budget of £730,000. Among those helped in 2020/2021, are the Methodist Church in Peru to support pharmacies for indigenous communities and the Henry Martyn Institute in India to distribute masks and health kits to people in extreme poverty. The Global Relationships team stay in constant contact with partners and ask you to pray for them. Their work is part of the wider Methodist Family response to the pandemic, including All We Can.



THINK
PIECE

Let us be bold, not fearful

When I was a child, I was scared of the dark. I thought there were monsters waiting to devour me in the shadows. Part of me knew the shadows cast by the wardrobe or the dressing table weren't monsters, but that didn't stop my imagination going into overdrive! Fear paralyses us even when we know that there is no reason to fear.

It is no wonder that one of the first things said after the Resurrection to the followers of Jesus was: "Do not be afraid". Even after the women had been told about Jesus' resurrection, the disciples still cowered away, scared, paralysed by fear (John 20:19). Fear robs us of our God-given boldness. Fear distorts our vision so that we see danger and failure on every side. As we emerge out of the lockdown caused by the pandemic, how can we leave behind our fearfulness? How can we rediscover the boldness needed by God's servants in the world?

Bold women show the way

The story of the Exodus does not begin with Moses. It begins, suggests Allan Boesak, with the actions of three groups of women. In his book, *Children of the Waters*

of *Meribah*¹, Boesak shows us how the bold actions of these women bring God's saving grace to the pitiful situation of the Israelites, who were now slaves in Egypt. The first of these women are the two Hebrew midwives Shiphrah and Puah. The Bible does not often name women of faith in the stories of God's relationships with us. The fact that they are named tells us how significant they are and how much their boldness made an impact on the lives of others. The King of Egypt demands that the midwives kill all babies who are boys. But Shiphrah and Puah disobey these instructions because the text says: "the midwives feared God" (Exodus 1:17a). To fear God is to respect God. It is giving higher importance to the values of God over the values of the world. God commands us to love one another. That command does not say love those who are like you, or love one another when it is convenient to do so. It simply says love one another. Let our love for one another be bold.

Miriam waits and watches

The next bold person, in the story of the Exodus, is the sister of Moses.

*When our lives
are on pause,
it does not
mean that God
is absent.*



Miriam watches over the basket hidden among the reeds. From her vantage point, she is ready to spring into action at a moment's notice. There is a time to be busy and there is a time to wait. As Christians, we need to wait on God as we try to discern the next part of the journey. Waiting, not knowing how God will act, demands a boldness of a different sort. What if her brother starts to cry? What if a wild animal sees the basket? Miriam faithfully waits and watches.

Today, in many ways, lockdown has been a time of waiting and watching. As our buildings closed, it was not easy to discern the best way to fulfil God's mission in our communities. But the 'pause' button enabled me to pray with renewed vigour. Did Miriam pray to God as she watched and waited? Was she able to feel the presence of God as she maintained her silent vigil? When our lives are on pause, it does not mean that God is absent. How can we be conduits of God's presence for the communities around our buildings? How can those buildings be places of service as well as worship?

Pharaoh's daughter acts for justice

Finally, it is Pharaoh's own daughter who boldly enters this story of redemption. She is not a Hebrew, but she sees the plight of the baby placed among the reeds and she acts. Pharaoh's daughter weighs up the situation, "This must be one of the Hebrews' children,' she said." (Exodus 2:6b)

It is one thing to gauge a situation, it is another thing to act. In Egypt, the Hebrews were treated unjustly. The God we worship is the same God who demands that justice should be evident in the world. After the death of George Floyd, there were Black Lives Matter protests all over the world. People of every nationality were united in their demand for racial justice. Protests are good but the dismantling of racism requires each one of us to play our part daily. We are charged with seeing situations of injustice and taking bold action.

How bold are we willing to be? Let us not be fearful – let us be bold.

The Revd Sonia M Hicks is President of the Methodist Conference 2021/2022

The dismantling of racism requires each one of us to play our part daily.

¹Allan Boesak *Children of the Waters of Meribah: Black Liberation Theology, the Miriamic Tradition, and the Challenges of 21st Century Empire* (African Sun Media, 2020)

BEBOLD

What part is God calling you to play personally in dismantling racism?

Like fabric for a quilt, in our Maker's eyes we are each beautiful.



God brings us **TOGETHER** in a spectacular patchwork quilt

Weaving together a community that embraces all people, in their infinite variety.

BEBOLD

Which new patchwork of hope is God inviting you to join?

The Bible starts with a story about God taking things how they were and making them into something different. I'm someone who likes to make things, and I'm very attracted to this story.

Of course, I wouldn't go so far as to describe my workspace as 'Genesis chaos' (though my husband might!). In fact I rather love the things I start out with. If I'm making a quilt, my pile of fabric scraps might not look like much but, to my eye, many of the pieces are simply beautiful in themselves. Lots of them have special memories of people, or times past. In my favourite quilts, the pieces come with their own stories, now treasured and repurposed in creative hands.

Occasionally you might notice one that doesn't fit in very well, but that's important too. All quilters know that the work will be much richer if it's not made solely of things the quilter happens to like.

Coming together for a greater purpose

Sewing a quilt is, to me, a great image for everything coming together in harmony to make something greater than the sum of its parts, which is in the mind's eye of the Creator. This echoes what the writer of the Letter to the Ephesians speaks of when he describes God's purpose, in Christ, as bringing people with different gifts together into harmony (Ephesians 4:11-13).

God sees us just as we are, ‘on the cutting room floor’, with all our individual quirks and idiosyncrasies. Like fabric for a quilt, in our Maker’s eyes we are each beautiful and treasured. In Christ, God not only brings us together, but purposes us to become something greater. Grace brings us into a new relationship with all God’s people and with the whole of the created universe. Togetherness, Ephesians tells us, was what was in God’s mind from the very beginning – reconciliation with God setting humanity and the whole of creation in right relationship with each other.

Making bold choices

Reading Ephesians is lovely. It’s a bit like sitting down with a cup of tea and browsing through my quilting or recipe books, which are full of lovely pictures of what things might be like. But we don’t get there by magic, or even by longing for it. As the founder of the Sikh religion Guru Nanak said, “Simply yearning is not enough”. A good intention is a great place to start but, sadly, it’s too often where things end. That’s certainly been true of some of my quilts. We have to turn our commitment into action. The quilter has to be bold, and put the scissors to that lovely piece of fabric. The cook has to break some eggs.

Making a quilt turns out to be challenging work, actually, and not unlike weaving the community of the Church. You have to make a start. Sometimes things happen by

serendipity, but generally it takes time and thinking to get it right. The aim is to create something whole from all the pieces which lets their individual qualities shine, not drown each other out. Each piece ‘makes’ the quilt by being there but, at the same time, each piece is ‘made’ by becoming part of the whole. There are decisions to be taken, and choices to be made – sometimes hard choices, because you can’t do everything at the same time. Sometimes you have to learn new skills. Sometimes – and this is hard – you have to recognise that things are not working out. You have to unpick what you’ve made, despite all the work you’ve put in, and go back and do that bit again.

Weaving a community

It’s a bold vision – especially after the last 18 months – to shape ourselves, not on our past but on the pattern of God’s work in Christ. But this is our calling as a Church: to live as one in Christ – a reconciled people, channelling grace, hope and renewal into the world. Our challenge is to make that wholeness a reality – weaving together a community that embraces all people, in their infinite variety, with their differing back-stories and present understandings. We are called to love’s ‘more excellent way’; to model gracious living in, to and for the sake of the world, in right relationship with our Maker, our sisters and brothers, and the whole created universe.



Barbara Easton is Vice-President of the Methodist Conference 2021/2022 and the Methodist Academies and Schools Trust Head of Service.

Connexional report 2020



As the 2021 Conference meets we are a Church emerging from the midst of a global pandemic, and sometimes adversity reveals who we really are. The following financial summary and two snapshots of the life of the Methodist Church, reflect the bold choices that are being made as we meet the challenges of the present age.²

The full Connexional Report demonstrates how the Church refocused its energy and resources on Our Calling, to respond to the gospel of God's love in Christ and to live out our discipleship in worship and mission. Through the 'God for All' strategy, we live out our calling to be people who share the good news. Through the 'Inclusive Church' strategy, we live out our calling to be a hospitable people who stand for justice. Above all, through our 170,000 members and 4,110 local churches, we live out our calling among our neighbours every day. With boldness, ingenuity and compassion, Methodist people continue to make God's presence known.

We remember that the 2020 Conference was like none other. It was no small task converting the Conference to a digital event – and many thanks to Cliff College for its hospitality and skill of its staff, and to members of the Connexional Team, who worked on site and from their homes. There

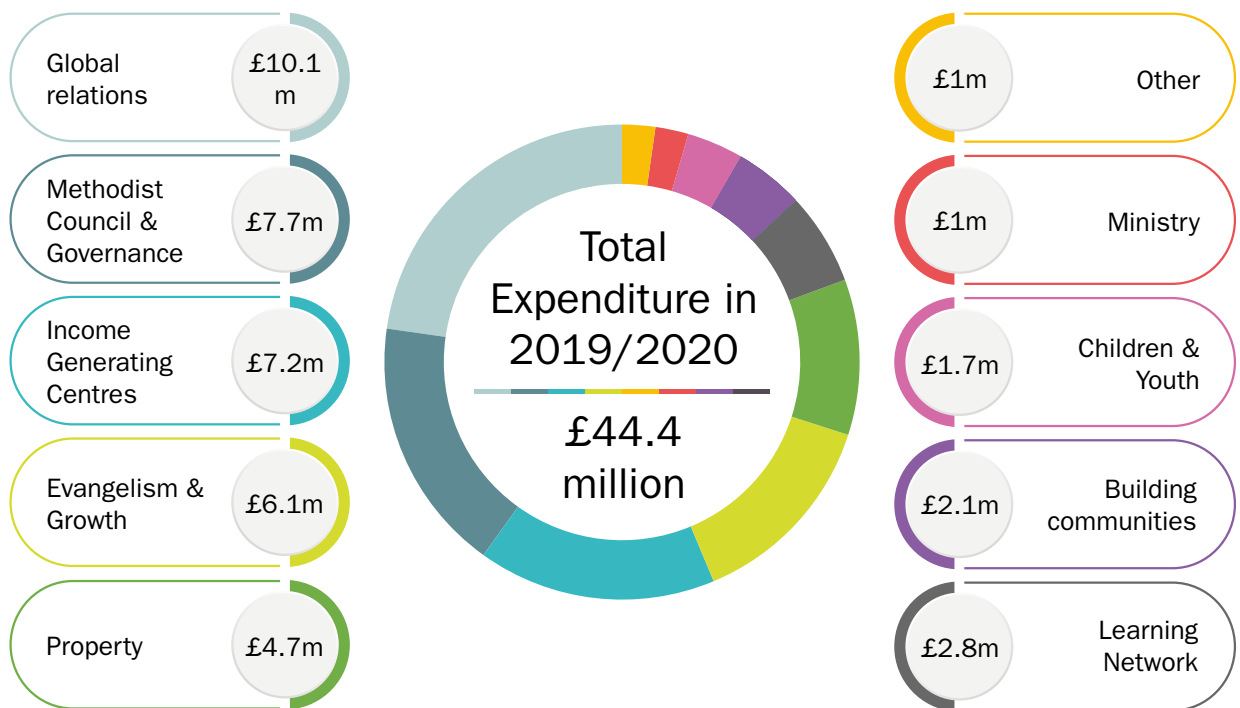
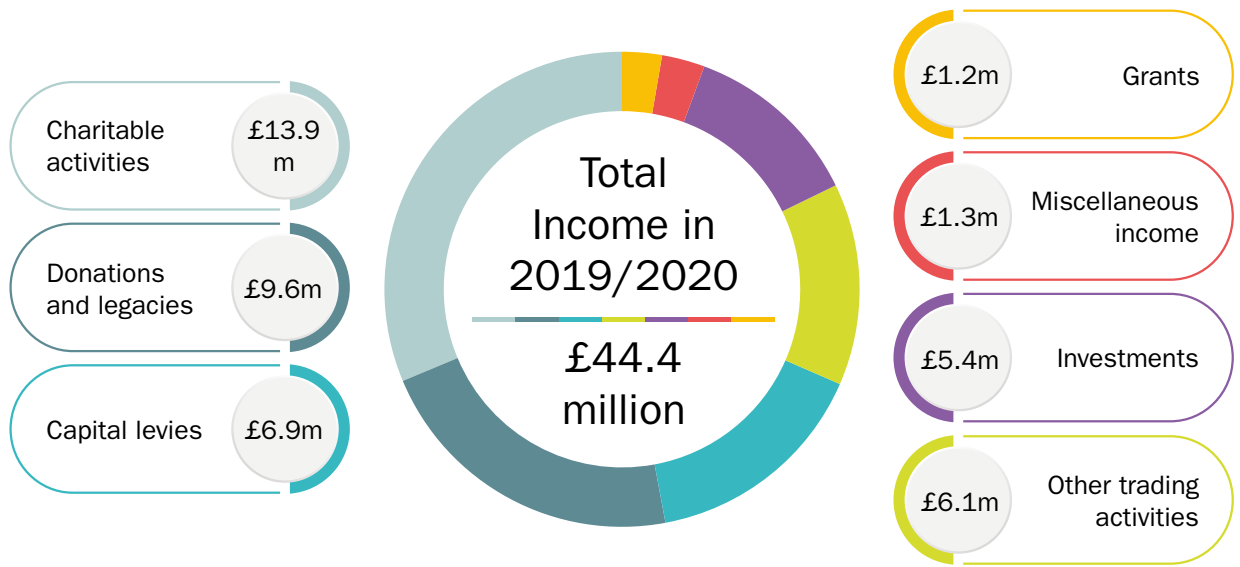
was something symbolic about being in a place associated for over 100 years with the mission of the Methodist Church as we renewed our commitment to sharing the good news and growing disciples.

We might be a smaller Church than we were, but we are determined to be a Church that is better fitted to face the future, whatever the future might hold. Above all, at the 2020 Conference, we prayed together and we continue to pray. This was and is a year of prayer for the Methodist people as we rediscover the power of prayer. It is only in God's grace that we can fulfil Our Calling and it is through prayer that we seek, we receive, and we become channels of that grace.

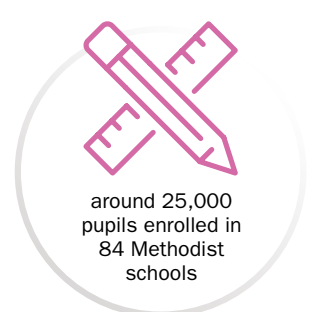
The Revd Dr Jonathan R Hustler
Secretary of the Methodist Conference

² See the complete Connexional Report 2020 and the full Financial Report to August 2020 at www.methodist.org.uk/media/20538/1196-consolidated-report-and-accounts-2021-v7b.pdf

The **numbers** that tell us where we are:



The **Methodist** Church in Britain has:





The Conference voted to increase the work on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) throughout the Connexion, through the development of the 'Inclusive Church' strategy. It called on Methodists to engage with the issues in their own daily lives, to confront and challenge all racism and other forms of unjust discrimination; and directed every circuit to convene a forum for reflection, conversation and planning. It also voted to incorporate into the 'Inclusive Church' strategy work already started to ensure the inclusion of people who are intersex or transgender.

The Inclusive Methodist Church (draft definition)

1. Welcomes in safety all who wish to be part of the life of the Church whether through worship, learning and caring, service or evangelism.
2. Upholds the discipline of the Methodist Church in the face of discrimination, rejecting and resisting all types of behaviour that are discriminatory or belittling.
3. Celebrates diversity in the variety of God's creation.
4. Represents the diversity of the Methodist Church throughout its life and structures and affirms that there is no place for discrimination in our processes of selection, discernment and appointment.

Through the 'Inclusive Church' strategy we are seeking:

Attitudinal, cultural and systemic change

This will be achieved with a sustained and long-term commitment to winning hearts and minds, identifying where change is most needed, and raising levels of self-awareness.

To end discrimination

Leadership from the victims of discrimination can help make this possible, as can making the systems and procedures of the Church more accessible, transparent and accountable. The Church will empower the voices of those who have suffered discrimination to ensure that they are heard in the life of the Church and inform its decision-making.

Improved inclusive standards

The Church seeks to embed 'Inclusive Church' standards across the Connexion, using guidelines underpinned by Biblical theology and supported with rigorous scrutiny.

Diversity in leadership roles

We are taking initiatives to address the issue of under-representation within leadership roles across the Church, especially with regard to Black and Asian people as well as those from other minority ethnicities, and women and disabled people.

'God for All': The Connexional Strategy for Evangelism and Growth



The 2020 Methodist Conference voted overwhelmingly to implement a new strategy for evangelism and growth. 'God for All' commits the Church theologically, culturally and financially to deepen its mission to be growing, evangelistic, justice-seeking and inclusive.

'God for All' prioritises helping new people become disciples of Jesus, starting hundreds of new churches, and raising up new lay and ordained leaders to join God in engaging diverse communities across Britain. The strategy also focuses significant energy and resources on developing young evangelists, serving marginalised communities, expanding the Church's digital presence, and helping Methodists live out their faith.

'God for All' started officially in September 2020 with the launch of a 'Year of Prayer', which includes weekly online prayer meetings. These midday services, with accompanying British Sign Language interpretation, attract hundreds each week.

'God for All' has eight core areas:

Centred in God

250,000 commitment cards for *A Methodist Way of Life* were distributed across the Connexion.

Everyone an Evangelist

A new 'Evangelism for Leaders' course is running four times in 2021, with hundreds of people already booked in.

Transformational Leadership Learning Community

A one-to-three-year

programme of teaching, reflection and coaching is underway. It equips Methodist leaders with skills and confidence to bring about local transformation. After a pilot in 2020 with 45 people in eight teams, 13 teams have already booked to start the journey in 2021.

New Places for New People & Church at the Margins

In 2020/2021, ten District Chairs and their teams are joining with Evangelism and Growth staff in a year-long process to discern and plan proposals for starting new Christian communities.

Every Church a Growing Church

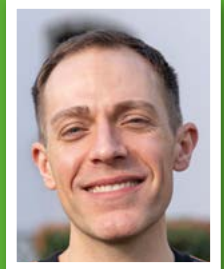
Available online is a practical eight-step guide for churches and circuits to write a helpful and effective mission plan, supported by the Mission Planning Toolkit.

Young Evangelists, Pioneers and Leaders

The Children, Youth and Family team are expanding the ONE Programme, including planning for a significant increase in vibrant residencies/site placements. The programme also explores leadership in disciple-making, evangelism, and pioneering and planting.

Digital Evangelism

#GodsWithUs, the Methodist Church Christmas 2020 campaign, shared good news through 24 stories of individuals and their experiences over the past extraordinary year. Local church engagement with #GodsWithUs was very high and extremely positive.



Trey Hall, Director of Evangelism and Growth, commented:



I am delighted that the Methodist Church is emphatically engaging with these bold, missional commitments. We want every aspect of our commitment to evangelism and growth to flow from God's amazing grace. It signals a direction of travel for deep gospel transformation, not only for the next five years, but also for the long-term future of our mission and our whole life together.



Step out boldly into **EVANGELISM**

As we emerge from the wintry grip of lockdown, we are each called to act courageously and participate in God's mission plan, says Holly Adams.



The first half of this year felt like a bitter winter, trailing into an exceptionally cold spring. Our emergence into warmer weather has felt slower than a snail's pace but now, at last, I am donning my walking boots and backpack and enjoying stepping out into the sunshine, ready to follow new paths. And as I do so, hopefully our nation is tentatively emerging from this long hard time of pandemic.

Emerging from a situation involves listening and planning. It's not passive; it involves moving forward and outwards. It takes courage. It means to step out, to take with you only what is needed. This is how God calls us into mission and evangelism: we are called to boldly follow new paths outwards, into the unknown. As we emerge from the pandemic, our task is not simply to return to our old familiar ways, but to face the choices and challenges ahead and consider what new way God is directing us.

When Jesus sends out the disciples in Matthew and Luke's Gospels, he tells them what to take and where to stay, he tells them to heal the sick and proclaim the kingdom of God. In the same way we are sent out now – to go boldly, to share the whole good news of God with one another, with our friends, our neighbours, and our communities.

Stepping out from the comfort zone

Being sent out to share our faith might feel risky or uncomfortable, but so often in the Bible we see God calling people out of their comfort zones. For Abraham, Moses, Ruth, Mary, the 12 disciples, and so many others, saying 'yes' to God's call required a bold stepping out into adventure, into the unknown.

But what if we don't feel very courageous? We should take heart that our biblical heroes were not superhumans – like us they were afraid, uncertain and exhausted. But like them we are not left on our own when we follow. As the Lord tells Joshua, "Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go." (Joshua 1:9)

Our boldness comes from this knowledge – God is with us and with God all things are possible.

Going boldly reaps rewards

I once found myself chatting to a stranger in the street near where I live and I mentioned

I was a Christian. The stranger was not but told me part of their story, which involved some sorrow. I asked if they'd like me to pray, but before I knew it, they had taken my hand, closed their eyes, and were praying out loud for the first time. I was shocked – I had taken a risk, I thought I was the one meant to be praying – but God surprised us both. We both found our courage and met our God on the street that day.

You might think God has not called you in this way. You might think you don't have enough time, energy, or enthusiasm. You might think you are not equipped for evangelism or that it's not 'your thing'. But all of us are called to participate in the life-changing work of God, and you will find that God goes with and before you as you follow that call. Step out boldly with God. If not now, when?

Next steps

How will you go boldly to proclaim God's good news at this time? It means praying for others to meet Jesus. It means regularly telling people what God is doing in your life. It means inviting others in – to your home, to your church, to prayer, to encounter. It means speaking of your faith with courage. Going boldly asks you to prioritise and plan for mission as a church. It demands that you are attentive to God's activity all around you and celebrate it. It asks you to build community, and let others bless you as you bless them, and to use your gifts generously and uninhibitedly.

When you go boldly, you leave behind that which is neither faithful nor fruitful. You take with you all that you are, the person God has made you. You leave aside your lethargy, and you make room from your fear and your weariness for God to work. You take with you the truth of God's goodness in your life. You put your boots on and step out boldly, emerging from the winter of inwardness, turning again and again towards the summer of God's radiant, ever-outward love.



Step out boldly with God. If not now, when?

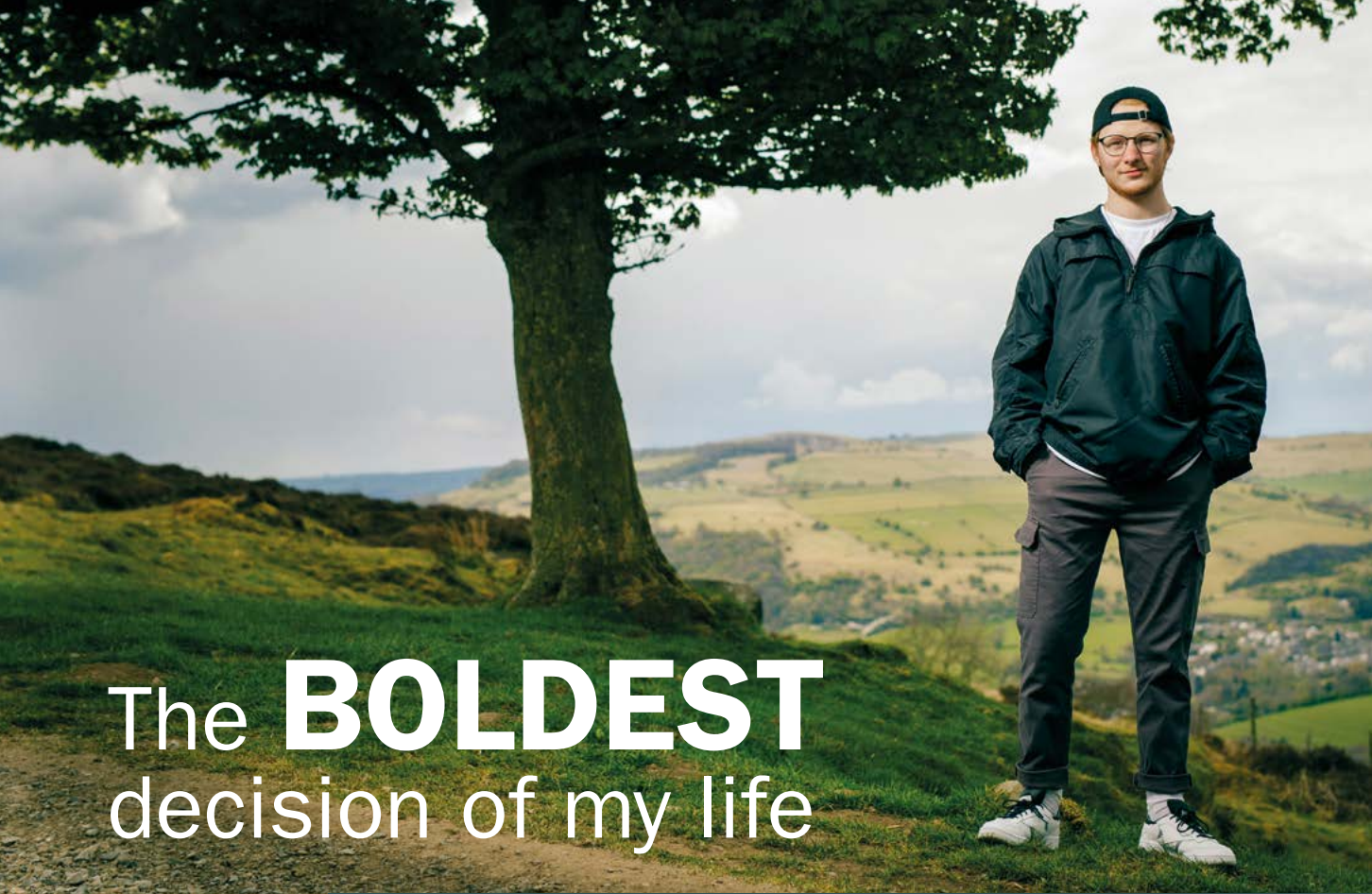
BEBOLD

How will you go boldly to proclaim God's good news at this time?

Saying 'yes' to God's call required a bold stepping out into adventure, into the unknown.

Holly Adams is Evangelism and Contemporary Culture Officer in the Evangelism and Growth team.

To find out more about the ways you can be equipped for evangelism, visit: www.methodist.org.uk/evangelism



The **BOLDEST** decision of my life

**What's the boldest decision you've made?
For 3Generate Youth Representative Ben Andrews
it was not to go skydiving or mountain climbing,
rather to follow his heart and study theology at Cliff College.**

Being bold is so much more than a jump out of a plane.

Not just when you're a young person like me, but all through life, being told to 'be bold' can lead to confusion and miscommunication. I have noticed people have preconceived ideas about what being bold is, and what it should be like. To some, being bold is doing something physically adventurous such as going skydiving or climbing one of the tallest mountains in the country. For others, including myself, it does not have to mean doing something extreme in the eyes of everyone else. Your extreme could be a whole different idea to the next person's view of it.

For me being bold is so much more than a jump out of a plane. Being bold is a jump out of my comfort zone. It's taking some risks, stepping out, being confident, and being courageous. This can be seen in many different ways. A bold decision for me was when I took my next step in life after finishing college. At that time I was doing pretty much everything I loved:

I was studying music and photography, two subjects that I was passionate about, and I had a great group of friends around me. Even within college I learnt ways to be bold: I had opportunities that had helped me grow in confidence, for example I had opportunities in theatre, in music performance, and in doing photography that people asked me to undertake for them.

Music, photography, or something different?

Things were going pretty well, but like everyone else, I had to figure out what I was going to do once I finished sixth form. Was I going to continue to study music at a higher level and keep photography as a hobby, or was I going to go on to study photography and keep my music going as a sideline with the people I was with? However something quite different to that happened. Music and photography were very much my comfort zone. I was good at them and in many people's eyes it would have been a

BEBOLD

What bold jump out of your comfort zone is God calling you to take?



Stepping out and being bold can get you to places you had not thought you could reach.

great choice to stick with them and progress through education doing one or the other. On the other hand, for months I had something going round my head. It was to keep both music and photography as hobbies and to study theology at Cliff College.

To many people it came as a little shock, but the more I prayed about it, thought about it and talked it through with people such as my youth worker it seemed like the right choice. And sitting and reflecting about it now, it was the right choice. I met so many new people through taking that step out of my comfort zone, and I learnt a lot more about myself. I have had many opportunities which I would have never seen coming.

I'm not trying to say everyone who is confused about what to do after sixth form should think about studying theology, but what I do want to say is stepping out and being bold can get you to places you had not thought you could reach, and it is quite possible that you will be able to learn things almost every time that you do step out of your comfort zone.

God is there with you

The most important point about being bold and stepping out into certain situations is to remember wherever you are going and whatever you are doing, God is there with you. One thing that I always keep in mind when I may end up a little out of my depth is that I know God is with me, and even if things to go wrong in my eyes, it is OK. I always bear in mind 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

("So we do not lose heart") as I know it can be easy to lose heart in certain situations, and it may feel like those momentary afflictions that are happening are getting the better of us. But they do not last forever, and they are far outweighed by glory, a glory that is eternal. So whenever I take a step out to be bold, I do so knowing that even the smallest step I take is still an important step. Even when things seem like they may not be going right, God is there with me. When it seems we are caught up in afflictions, we have the sure knowledge that we share eternal glory with God by our side.



To many people it came as a little shock.

Boldly engaging with people in our neighbourhoods



‘Risking with God’, Hayley James connects with people in all kinds of communities.

Ever since I first began ministry, I have been passionate about mission, connecting with people outside the Church and equipping the people of God to engage with their neighbourhoods. For me a neighbourhood isn’t limited by physical boundaries. As well as where you live, your neighbourhood is your workplace, your knitting group, cycle club, favourite coffee shop, online community, and your barbers. Any place where community exists, and people share life counts as ‘a neighbourhood’. Finding ways to connect with people in these places has always been a focus of my life. I’m excited to now be doing this with The Neighbourhood Project in the Liverpool District.

This life of faith is an adventure, with the need to be bold and courageous.

Courageous example of Joshua

The life of Joshua has always been particularly significant for me. It reminds me this life of faith is an adventure, with the need to be bold and courageous. We are called to follow wherever God leads us. We

recognise that no matter how great things are in this moment, God always has more planned. Just like in the book of Joshua, God promises to be with us every step of the way.

When God spoke to Joshua on the cusp of his new venture as he prepares to enter the Promised Land (Joshua 1:1-9), I wonder if God’s call to be “bold and courageous...” was meant to echo the words Joshua spoke to the Israelites 40 years earlier after spying on Canaan (Numbers 14:6-9)? It reminds Joshua that God is still the same; God will do what God promised and will be with them every step of the way.

Working with God in our neighbourhoods

As we face this new season, both as individuals and churches I wonder what God is saying to us? What are the words we need to hear? What do we need to be reminded of and challenged with? Where is God leading us as we come out of lockdown and explore our new rhythms?

For us, in the Liverpool District, The Neighbourhood Project is part of our new season. Its approach to mission is focused on the scattered church, and seeks to:

- help us move outside the walls of our churches
- channel God’s love to the people with whom we spend most of our time in our daily lives
- purposefully grow worshipping communities rooted in our neighbourhoods.

The Neighbourhood Project is about doing less, not more. It’s about slowing down and





*Your neighbourhood
is your workplace,
your knitting group,
cycle club, favourite
coffee shop.*

BEBOLD

What bold initiatives does God have in store for your neighbourhood?

*I'd rather be
risking with
God, than stuck
in a desert.*



being present to the people we are already connected with, seeking to understand what God is doing in our neighbourhoods, and joining in. We are defined by our core values of imaginative practice, prayerful discernment, intentional community and lifelong learning. Committing to these values, rather than to programmes and activities, shapes who we are as people and creates space for God to move.

At the heart of our work is the missional community. It's a place for members of the project to be encouraged, equipped and empowered to become everyday missionaries. We meet regularly to share life, pray for and with one another, talk about our work and neighbourhoods and listen to God together. The community offers a safe space to reflect, be honest and gain confidence as we seek to live out our lives following God's voice. As we move forward, our intention is to respond to others as they are drawn to God, enabling them to explore their spirituality in creative ways.

It's exciting work but trying new things can always be scary. As we step out in faith, we are trusting God will guide us. Not having clear programmes could seem risky; it's difficult to define and quantify, harder to get your head around; but our values keep us grounded. It would be easy to have a

preconceived 'programme of activities', but we are committed to relating to people first and seeing where God leads.

We can't say where things will be in a year, two years, or five years, but we've made peace with not knowing. We don't need to know the end of the story before we begin. Joshua certainly didn't know how things would pan out. We have a culture where mistakes are OK, and failure isn't the enemy. We give ourselves permission to try things out, be creative and explore new approaches to mission and community.

The Israelites were stuck in the desert for 40 years because they didn't trust in the power of God. At some point we have to take a leap into the unknown. Will it work? Only God can answer. But I'd rather be risking with God, than stuck in a desert. How about you? What is God asking you to be in the mixed ecology of church? Who's missing from your congregation? What creative ideas are there within your community? What's holding you back? What might *your* neighbourhood project look like?

Hayley James is the team leader of The Neighbourhood Project. You can find out more at theneighbourhoodproject.co.uk

Thank goodness nothing happened...



When violence against women is rooted in a sexist culture, why do we call everyday harassment 'nothing'? Time for a bold rethink, says Rachel Lampard.

The relief as I put my key in the lock, turn and shut the front door, blocking out the fear that someone's following me. Or the deep breath as I get off the train, and walk away from the group of men who are insisting on sitting too close to me. And the ebbing away of tension as I escape the party where I smile and keep a determined distance from the wandering hands.

These are all situations where I have walked away thinking "Thank goodness, nothing happened." Nothing happened. I wasn't assaulted, beaten, raped, murdered. Thank goodness. Nothing happened. Yet if we are going to be bold in tackling the stain in our society of violence against women and girls, we have to confront the myth that 'nothing happened'.

The statistics are shocking: on average every three days a woman is murdered by a man, and every four days a woman is murdered by an ex or a current partner. Two police officers have been charged with sickening misconduct offences following the murder of Bibaa Henry and Nicole Smallman. Since the murder of Sarah Everard in March, as I write, a further 22 women have been killed.

Everyday sexism creates conditions for violence

We don't live in a binary world where women experience either murder or 'nothing'. Rather we need to face up to a culture that normalises the everyday mistreatment of women and girls and creates the pre-conditions for ever-greater physical violence.

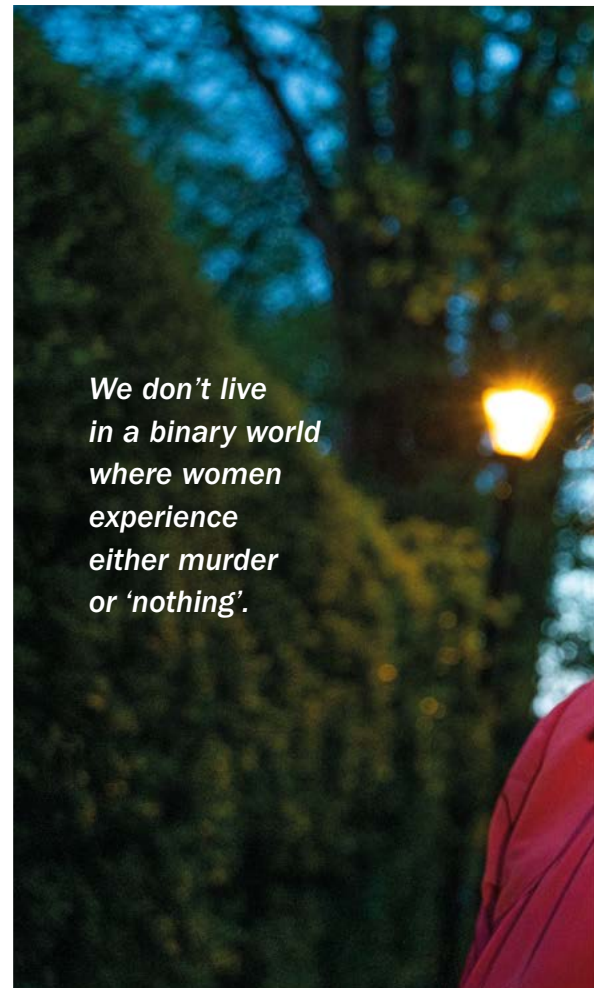
This is not a 'women's issue' but a justice issue.

When women describe situations when they have been frightened, intimidated or terrorised, they often end with the phrase '...nothing happened'. Everyday experiences that most women will recognise and none will wish to repeat are dismissed or underplayed, even by women themselves, because they didn't result in the most extreme forms of physical violence.

In my relief that 'nothing happened', I nonetheless have internalised a sense of fear that most women share. I have cultivated a heightened awareness of those around me when I'm out. I walk the long route home, I avoid using minicabs, I avoid making eye contact, I carry keys in my hands, wear trainers, talk on the phone... Undoubtedly I will teach my daughter similar strategies for her safety. And with her I'll be glad when 'nothing happens'.

Calling out minor violations

But something is happening, both to women and to our wider society. A report by the Church of Scotland says: "Where mundane violations are ignored and unchallenged, girls and boys learn powerful messages



We don't live in a binary world where women experience either murder or 'nothing'.

about what is acceptable, what is allowed, and who pays the price.”

It is these unspoken messages about what is normal or acceptable which create conditions for gender-based violence. They objectify and dehumanise women, helping to lead to the ‘rape culture’ increasingly reported in schools and universities. Mundane violations warp relationships between people, distorting our images of each other as God’s precious creations, created in God’s own image. This is not a ‘women’s issue’ but a justice issue.

The women whose stories we read in the gospels would have heard many unspoken messages that would have shaped their behaviour, and the relationships and culture they were part of. These were women who were excluded for health conditions, who experienced stigma, who were shamed or shunned. They lived with these daily violations. But then they met Jesus and experienced the transforming power of God in their lives. They encountered God’s justice as experiencing right relationship, with God and with others.



Building right relationships

To tackle violence against women and girls, we, too, have to long for this right relationship. We must support campaigns to protect women from abuse or stalking, and be good allies if we witness threatening situations. But working to build right relationships will also mean calling out the messages which sadly still inhabit our own church culture – the sexualised comments about female ministers or leaders (“I wish I was a bit younger!”), the criticisms which are rooted in assumptions about gender roles (“People do find you rather bossy”), as well as unasked-for physical contact. For although these may appear minor – ‘nothing happened’ – they shrink a woman’s self-worth and grow a culture that enables or permits greater acts of violence.

So I will teach my daughter how to be safe. But I will also try to teach my daughter and my sons what right relationships look like. I will rejoice that they are all made in the image of God, and as such, then in the words of the Ghanaian Methodist theologian, Mercy Amba Oduyoye, “One is expected to practise the hospitality, compassion and justice that characterise God.”

PS You couldn’t make it up. Last night I went to meet a photographer to have some shots taken of me for this article. A man started to walk behind me, commenting on how I looked. I greeted the photographer with great relief, and the man asked if we were together. Instinctively I said “yes”. The man then apologised – to the photographer! – and walked away. Speechless.

We have to confront the myth that ‘nothing happened’.

BEBOLD

How might your circuit engage practically with this crisis to support women and educate men?

Rachel Lampard was Vice-President of the Methodist Conference in 2016/2017 and was the JPIT team leader. Currently on secondment, she is leading a project on what it means to be a justice-seeking Church.

Mental health matters!



As one in four struggle with mental health issues, the Revd Carla Quenet describes the Church's role and response.

Boldness and strength come in many forms and guises. Supporting and speaking out about issues of mental ill health can require immense strength and profound confidence. To be strong about such issues isn't offering an illusion of wellness nor is it about easy fixes, rather it's about being honest even at the risk of being vulnerable, being willing to listen attentively and resolving to make a difference.

I am passionate about this issue as from personal experience and through journeying with close family and friends, I recognise first-hand the devastating effect mental ill health can have on individuals and those who care for them.

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought pain and devastation to so many, but I have also noticed small glimmers of hope. They include people:

- thanking others for their contribution to society
- becoming genuine friends with neighbours
- taking the time to ask "How are you?" and waiting to hear a frank reply.

The pandemic has been for many a dreadful experience yet it has also been a catalyst, encouraging individuals to be sincere about their mental health and wellbeing.

It's essential to have meaningful conversations about mental health, to listen to individuals and to provide gentle care. Informed and non-judgemental listening is vital, alongside a willingness to 'walk beside' people, feeling the blisters of their journeys as we travel together.

Tackling the stigma of mental ill health

People often describe how speaking out about their compromised mental wellbeing takes immense courage. I delight in the increased media coverage around wellbeing but despair at the underlying stigma and misconceptions associated with mental ill health. As one in four adults in Great Britain experience mental ill health each year, we will each come into contact with it regularly and knowing how best to respond is vital.

I firmly believe that the Methodist Church must engage with the task of destigmatising mental ill health. Having a better grasp of what it is, and indeed, what it is not, is essential. I am thrilled that the Methodist

The Methodist Church must engage with the task of destigmatising mental ill health.

Church in Britain is helping resource the training of a number of mental health first aid instructors, who in turn will roll out training enabling individuals to become mental health first aiders. This training is about equipping people to respond positively, and in my experience it:

- creates a culture that is more accepting of mental health issues
- provides individuals with more confidence to deal with issues
- highlights when medical intervention is critical and signposts where to find it
- provides a better understanding of others' mental health.

Importantly the training helped me to better understand my own mental health.

Church mental health projects

The way we embrace and support people living with mental ill health within the life of our Church speaks volumes. Across the Connexion I have noticed various ways this is happening, including the Church leading and funding school projects promoting self-esteem and positive mental health and wellbeing. Mental health teams have been invited to support students and staff in educational establishments at times of crisis, for example a team was invited to support a college community after a student died by suicide. Other church initiatives include:

- wellbeing officers to encourage the holistic wellbeing of a community
- listening services, such as those supporting the bereaved
- peer support groups
- services such as dementia awareness training and dementia cafés to support individuals with specific needs and their families and carers
- projects to reduce social isolation for people of all ages
- wellbeing projects using techniques such as massage and mindfulness
- counselling and cognitive behaviour therapy services delivered by qualified professionals.

These projects are examples of individuals being given the opportunity to speak about

diminished wellbeing. They take the daring step of engaging with people who are often shunned by their community and seek to make a positive and often life-transforming difference to them.

I rejoice that the Methodist Church is promoting positive mental health and wellbeing but let's not pretend the task complete. We need to continue to listen to voices such as 3Generate, which keep such matters on our agenda.

I hope and pray we will always be a Church that nurtures emotional resilience, inspires and promotes positive wellbeing and mental health practices and seeks always to support and encourage everyone. May the Methodist Church be known as a Church that strives to promote positive mental health and wellbeing with boldness and strength.



The Revd Carla Quenet is the Learning and Development Officer for the Yorkshire Plus region. You can read more about mental first aid in her blog: methodist.org.uk/about-us/news/the-methodist-blog/supporting-wellbeing-through-mental-health-first-aid-training

The pandemic has been a catalyst, encouraging individuals to be sincere about their mental health.

Training enabling individuals to become mental health first aiders.

BEBOLD

In your context what is the best way to embrace and support people living with mental ill health?

Be bold, be strong

GLOBAL STORIES

The song “Be bold, be strong, for the Lord your God is with you” reflects the incredible hope and resilience of people across Brazil and Africa during the pandemic, say partnership coordinators Sandra Lopez and Dr Olubunmi Olayisade.



Sandra Lopez speaks of Brazilians' hope

In the pandemic, is our hope only in social distancing measures, hygiene protocols and the vaccine programmes? All of these are worthy, but in Brazil, Methodists also put their hope in almighty God and in their calling to preach the love of Jesus Christ to their communities.

Brazil now has a Covid-related death toll of over 400,000 and economic hardship faces millions. One of the worst-affected cities is Manaus, the capital of Brazil's Amazon region. Methodists in Manaus have not stopped preaching the gospel in their communities and finding new ways to share the gospel. Last year, District Bishop Fabio Cosme started a fortnightly virtual prayer and discipleship group in his condominium. Many people in this group had not heard the gospel and several made a firm commitment to follow Christ. It is hope and confidence in Christ that has encouraged our partners to preach the love of God boldly under difficult circumstances.

It is hope and confidence in Christ also that inspired the district

to launch its 'SOS Manaus' campaign to support indigenous communities affected by Covid-19 in the Amazon region. The campaign has supported hundreds of people with food packages, hospital equipment, PPE and hygiene kits.

The district's missionary boat, which would usually transport Methodist volunteers and medical personnel to support thousands of people living in communities along the Tucumã river with medical services and the gospel, is now grounded because of the pandemic. However the district obtained permission from local authorities to charter a plane to take much needed medical support and food items to isolated communities that are affected by Covid and often forgotten by local authorities.

It is this boldness, fuelled by God's love and hope, that can inspire us in the UK to take every opportunity to reach out to our communities with the gospel, regardless of our challenging context. We have hope in Christ, therefore we are bold!



Dr Olunmi Olayisade says Africans are remaining strong

In these difficult times, lament we shall, for the loss of our loved ones, livelihoods, broken relationships, dispersed communities and disrupted schooling, but we shall not reject God. Despite the natural disasters, wars, human trafficking and xenophobia, we boldly declare in the words of the song 'Waymaker' that our God is a "way maker, miracle worker, promise keeper and light in our darkness." We remain sensitive, reverent and alive by God's grace; we shall again dance to the beats of 'Jerusalem' (2 Corinthians 7:10-13). Following are three stories of resilience from different parts of Africa.

1. Jessy Eben in Cameroon, Central Africa

Gunshots, gruesome killings, streets full of soldiers, kidnappings, school boycotts and lockdown have all characterised our lives for over five years. Covid-19 only made the situation worse. Despite these challenges, we still visit the markets; we attend church because we believe in God's promises; and our children go to school for a better life. We are resilient – a few minutes after hearing gunshots, we are up and out again going to work. We return home claiming that God has not given us the spirit of fear and remains with us wherever we go.

2. Enoch Osafor in Ghana, West Africa

"Times are hard, but God is in control," exclaims Madam Yowah, who lives in Kojo Ashong, a farming village, 40km from Accra. She has Buruli-ulcer related deformities that hinder her from gaining employment. She was trained in snail rearing through the Buruli-ulcer project supported by the Methodist Church in Britain, and sells the very large snails (a local delicacy) to support her family. The Covid-19 pandemic has adversely affected her business, reducing her income, nevertheless, she daily trusts in God, believing God will "give us this day our daily bread". This is the lot of many Ghanaians, who struggle in business, yet maintain their faith through the Covid-19 pandemic.

3. Vicky Sikhakhane in South Africa


I was touched by a five-year-old boy, Baxolile, taking care of his 18-month-old cousin Luyanda. Baxolile tried his best to keep Luyanda alive in the absence of their parents, who would leave them



unsupervised for weeks. Baxolile carried Luyanda to the side of the road, seeking help for his cousin and taking her to hospital. Luyanda eventually died of malnutrition. Natural boldness and courage is innate. It is "the God force" allowing us to do what needs to be done without being forced; rather, instinctively knowing it is the right thing to do. It is also this boldness which enables us to deal with racism daily; to speak out against double standards; to boldly be the voice of the weak and vulnerable and to appreciate that child participation is in their best interest. In spite of the adversities we face, both young and old continue to courageously stand for what is right as God commands us.



BEBOLD
What action do these stories of hope and resilience inspire you to take in response?

A woman with short dark hair, wearing a blue clerical top with a white collar and a large ring, is sitting on a beige sofa. She is looking towards the camera with a slight smile. The background shows a framed picture on the wall.

Bold and courageous action **now!**

A year after the murder of George Floyd, three black Methodist leaders in Birmingham speak boldly about equality, diversity and inclusion in the Church.

The Revd Farai Mapamulua

It has been a difficult 14 months. The Covid-19 pandemic forced me to face my own mortality and the uncertainty that comes with it. It also peeled away the protective layers of institution, yet again to reveal the glaring inequalities that pervade our society.

Then the murder of George Floyd in May 2020 and the ensuing 'Black Lives Matter' protests presented a new challenge, that of recognising this '**kairos**' moment for what it was. In an almost slow-motion lightbulb moment, it was calling not just people of colour, but the whole human family, to one final push against racism and all forms of oppression and injustice. But, of course, it is not a 'one moment in time', but a whole journey fraught with pain, and there inevitably will be pushbacks and denial. The path is rugged and treacherous. Yet I am proud to say as the Methodist Church, we

have responded positively, recognising that Black Lives Matter.

Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) strategies to work towards justice, dignity and solidarity for all Methodist people have given me the courage and boldness to use my own voice to protest, as I write and speak about all things that uphold the sanctity of all human life.

When we speak about justice-seeking and EDI, I like Dr Martin Luther King's vision of 'the Beloved Community' which came from Josiah Royce's 'the whole human family'. Josiah Royce in the early 20th century was a philosopher-theologian who founded the Fellowship of Reconciliation. But it was Dr King, also a member of the Fellowship of Reconciliation who popularised 'the Beloved Community', giving it a deeper meaning, which has captured the imagination of justice-seeking people around the world. For Dr King, the Beloved Community is not

We are called to courageous truth-telling in the quest for justice.



Calling not just people of colour, but the whole human family, to one final push against racism.

a dreamy utopian goal, but a realistic one that can be attained by a critical, bold and courageous people committed to methods of non-violence.

The writer of the book of Joshua encouraged his hearers in ancient times, and I think his voice still rings loud and clear today. We are invited to a new kind of boldness that empowers us and calls us to join with others in solidarity. I have learnt that boldness requires humility, and the desire to do the will of God – “to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8). This can only come when our confidence comes not just from within, but from the Holy Spirit. Boldness comes when we recognise our own weaknesses but are still prepared to boldly go where no one has gone before. Discipleship is costly; justice-seeking is costly – and few are prepared to pay that price. But we are called to courageous truth-telling in the quest for justice for those whom society chooses to ignore. Justice will come – for all people!

The Revd Dr Vincent Jambawo

Captured on the flimsy mobile phone in the hands of a shaking, brave teenager, the brutal murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin laid bare the complex network of institutional complicity and duplicity that cradle rampant racism locally and

globally. White Chauvin knelt on black Floyd’s neck until he died. Spontaneously and courageously, ordinary people rose in anguished and exasperated heroism against an impenetrable and intransigent wall of racial injustice to point out what is hidden in plain view by the privilege of white domination of the global world.

Woken from a self-induced stupor of ‘see-no-evil, hear-no-evil, speak-no-evil’, some church leaders condemned the politics of prejudice. Yet, with gruesomely inappropriate but telling symbolism, President Donald Trump stood in front of



It is no longer acceptable for the Church to be only reactive.



St John's Church holding a Bible, defying those demanding an end to injustice and inequality of race and skin colour.

How does the Church extricate itself from this quagmire of conflicting gospel-denying messages? Or is the Church simply too invested in its own culture and traditions to carry boldly and courageously the gospel that wrought it? For generations, the spectre of heinous racial prejudice has been striding Goliath-like up and down the aisles of human 'civilisation' threatening and mocking all into the silence of impotence.

The Church is God-commissioned to abandon the 'niceness' of false peace and put on the discomfort of justice, truth and love. Never has the call to 'be strong and courageous' been more pertinent. It is no longer acceptable for the Church to be only

BEBOLD

What does abandoning the niceness of false peace to put on the discomfort of justice, truth and love demand from your church?



reactive, or to merely stand in solidarity and offer sympathy. Now is the time for the Church to advocate for dismantling the structures and systems that fester prejudice. She can choose to perpetuate the status quo or she can be radical so that the stigmatised, marginalised and vilified are enfolded, loved and supported. Piecemeal and half-hearted cosmetic gestures will render her the enemy of the gospel instead of being the anointed vessel to proclaim it. Within her own ranks, she must not let the singing of hosannas drown the call for justice and healing.

Ermine Mitchell

The colour of your skin does not define you, but I believe that I was born a black woman for a reason. My life experience has not always being easy due to the colour of my skin and I still to this day experience racism in my daily life.

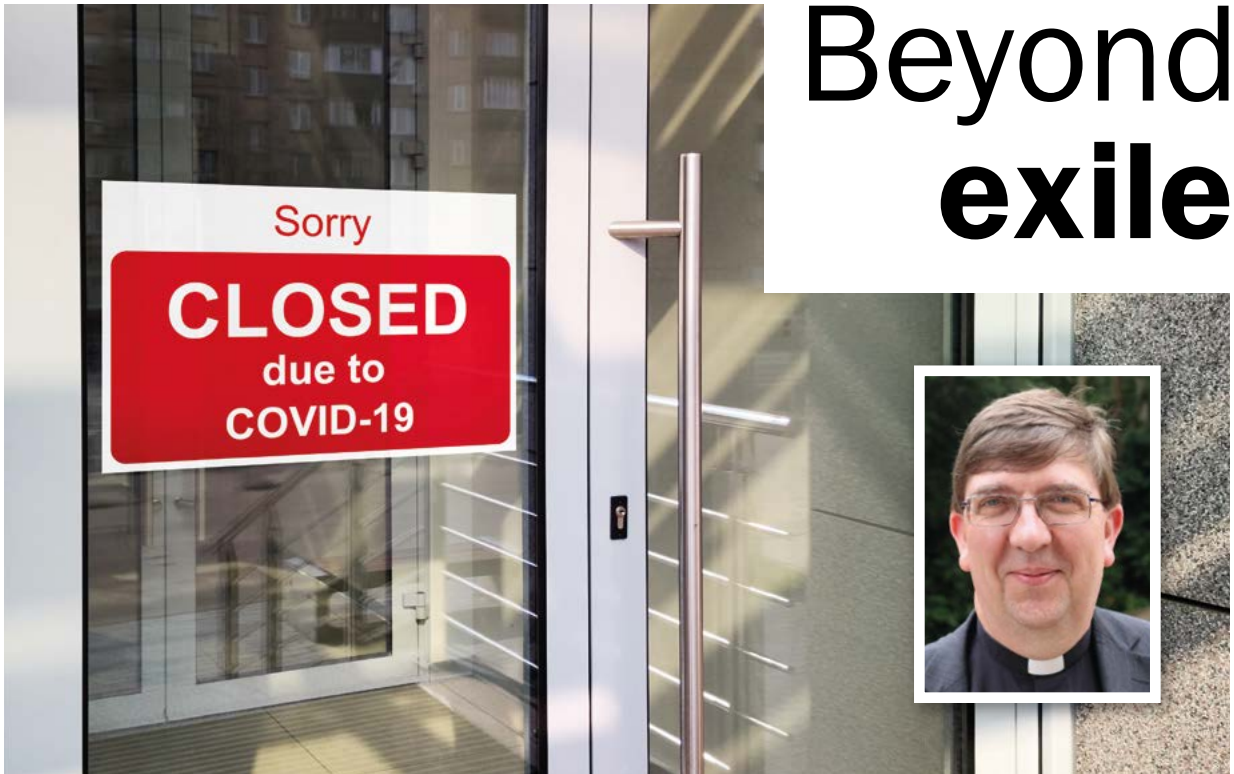
When Covid-19 hit us and George Floyd was murdered, I was left thinking the world was in need of a wake-up call. I have used this time to get more involved with things in the past I shied away from because they are sensitive but a reality and also very painful. I have experienced racism in church – it does exist. We have the opportunity to change this. We need to acknowledge that we have wronged our brothers and sisters of colour.

Stepping out of my comfort zone and talking about my experiences has enabled others to do the same. It's allowed stories to be told and heard. I am passionate that we embrace and welcome everyone irrespective of their skin colour, I want our children and young people to learn about equality for all. I want them to feel valued and loved by all.

Racial equality is a fundamental right. We are a diverse community, so I'm concerned this is not reflected in our worship or churches. Being involved in EDI and some district services has given me the courage to address this. I have been able to use my voice, and now it is being heard.

For generations, the spectre of heinous racial prejudice has been striding Goliath-like.

Beyond exile



After our lockdown exile, the Bible inspires us to rebuild the ‘Jerusalem of chapel worship’, writes the Revd Dr Jonathan R Hustler.

As churches reopened for worship, many will have used the service ‘Beyond Exile: a service to celebrate the return to public worship’ (available on the Methodist Church website). The title picks up the image of exile, which was used by many of us to reflect on going into lockdown last year when, in the words of Psalm 137, we found ourselves singing the Lord’s song in a strange land.

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah tell the story of the Jews, who struggled to sing the Lord’s song in a strange land, returning to Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the city. It strikes me as I read the account that the return was a drawn-out process; it was over a period of decades that the exiles returned and rebuilding both the physical structure of the city and the community took time. As churches return and rebuild, we recognise it is not easy work – there is no quick fix!

Nor is there a route back to where we were. When the foundation of the Temple was re-laid by Ezra, those who had seen the former glory wept. The future will not be like

the past, though how unlike we do not yet know. The full impact of the pandemic on our Church and society will not be apparent for some time and anxiety and stress will remain.

Along with the weeping there was joy. The future was not like the past but there was much good in it and not only in Jerusalem. The experience of exile taught the Jewish people that God was not confined; Jewish communities scattered throughout the Ancient Near East – the diaspora – had found that they met God in worship where they were.

Rebuilding Jerusalem

The rebuilding of Jerusalem put the Temple back at the heart of the city as a pilgrim centre for Jews everywhere. This was the context into which Jesus was born and ministered. The diaspora was the context through which the good news of Christ’s resurrection spread throughout the Roman Empire.

Our exile has been to the Babylon of the online world; our diaspora may be to remain in the lands of Zoom, Facebook Live, and YouTube. The Jerusalem of our worship will take time to rebuild and some circuits might never be what they were before. However, as we build back, we open ourselves to whatever God will do in and through us, feeling confident of a greater future ahead.

Our exile has been to the Babylon of the online world.

BEBOLD

As God has blessed society through engaging with faith and worship online, what must now be carried forward urgently by the Church?

Boldly reaching out to those who don't know God



BEBOLD

Which new Christ-centred communities are waiting to be established where you are?

This will be an adventure that we can share in together.

Inspired by Joshua and the early Methodists, the Revd Darren Holland is creating new missional communities in Bolton.

At the beginning of the Book of Joshua, Moses, the reluctant leader of God's people for over 40 years, has died. Now God is calling Joshua to deliver the Israelites into the Promised Land. A new role is thrust on him. Joshua takes on a huge responsibility and there is no hanging about. The sense of urgency increases – we're only nine verses in and God has said three times to Joshua "Be strong and courageous". It seems to me that God is saying to Joshua "Hold your nerve." This last stage will challenge and stretch a people who had begun to doubt this time would ever materialise, but are now on the cusp of something new and are charged to hold their nerve because God is faithful.

Venturing into something new inevitably requires us to hold our nerve and to trust in the faithfulness of God.

Mission communities in Bolton

Being appointed a pioneer missionary at Bolton Methodist Mission is both very exciting and completely terrifying. I started in January 2021 at the beginning of the third lockdown, which was a challenge in itself. The job title piles on a lot of expectation and yet in reality pioneering is not new, but the very reason the Church exists at all.

Jesus commissioned his disciples to be pioneers who would go out into the world and create new 'Jesus-shaped' communities. Our own Methodist tradition stems from people who even today are still celebrated as model pioneers: men and women who married the good news of Jesus with bringing social change to benefit the poorest and most vulnerable, and created new communities that grew together in faith, love, knowledge and accountability.

They were people who held their nerve and helped form new places for new people.

The start point for me is always prayer, especially praying together. This is when we invite the Spirit to raise our awareness, open our eyes, ears and hearts to those we haven't connected with, and reach out to those who feel abandoned, rejected or estranged from God. It is a time to say "God, help us perceive the new thing you're doing."

Bold projects to support the vulnerable

Giving God the space to 'speak' has opened doors into partnering with projects that support some of the most vulnerable people in our town. One such initiative is Third Space, an established project working with vulnerable young men. It enables them to develop life and practical work skills and explore discipleship through a tailor-made 'Fit 4 Life' course. The project had become homeless through a rebuilding scheme, so we offered space at the Mission and we now work together developing relationships and exploring, among other things, how, and what kind of worship might grow from the community.

This summer we will be launching a new drop-in centre with the Langley House Trust, a charity that helps ex-offenders, and again are praying and thinking ahead to how we can complement practical support with opportunities for people to explore faith in a sensitive and relevant way.

I will soon be joining the town centre chaplaincy team to walk with, and if possible support, the many local business adjacent to the mission. We are also looking at how we can open up to offer hospitality as soon as restrictions allow.

Reaching out to people

On the surface, Bolton is a shadow of itself. Long-established industries are all but gone, a once envied and thriving town centre has been weakened by numerous out-of-town retail park developments and then further decimated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Yet despite the sadness there is a growing sense of God doing something new as churches overcome differences to come together to be a united blessing to the people of our town. To be part of a movement like this is exciting and inspiring, but it will require us to hold our nerve when the temptation is to put buildings and lettings first.



These are challenging times for the Church but they are also a time of great opportunity as, rooted in Scripture and guided by the move of the Spirit, we explore different ways of growing Christ-centred communities. Even though some – or many – may never be able to connect with our more traditional expressions of church, we can still create new places where people can encounter and experience the love of Jesus and grow in faith. My prayer is that no matter how much it challenges and stretches us, or how uncomfortable we may sometimes feel, this will be an adventure that we can share together.

Our own Methodist tradition stems from people who even today are celebrated as model pioneers.

The Revd Darren Holland is Pioneer Missioner in the Bolton Methodist Mission.



Angela Brydon reflects on Methodism's **BOLD TRADITION**

**Without a
doubt Wesley
was bold!**

I very much hope that having read the previous pages of *the connexion* magazine you are now feeling bold. The words of Joshua 1:9 have been of great comfort to me over many years:

“Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.” Even in the darkest, most difficult moments those words are a great comfort.

Boldness is something that has been present throughout the history of Methodism. John Wesley and his friends in the Holy Club at Oxford University were bold in the way they methodically lived out their faith and hence were ridiculed as ‘Methodists’ – a name we now proudly own. Wesley was bold enough to preach in the open air, sharing the message of salvation with all who would listen. He also stood up to slavery when it was deeply unfashionable to do so. Without a doubt Wesley was bold!

Boldly supporting equal opportunities

We Methodists have been bold when it comes to equal opportunities particularly for women. Even in the earliest days John Wesley authorised women to preach and





ordination of women was commonplace in the Primitive Methodist tradition. The year 1992 was a key date for the ordination of women, as this is when the Church of England decided they would ordain women. In the same year we Methodists celebrated our first woman President of the Conference, the Revd Kathleen Richardson (now Baroness Richardson of Calow OBE), and we have been ordaining women since 1974.

More recently the publication of the “God in Love Unites Us” report is taking a bold step in its message of unity even when we disagree. God’s love is so strong that it can unite us despite our differences.

Over the past year or so, we as a Church have rediscovered our boldness, when faced with not being able to use our buildings due to the pandemic. We have been bold and found new ways of being and doing church. Both in my own district and in the wider Connexion, I have heard and read of many examples of churches discovering new opportunities to be church, but that all required an element of boldness.

Let’s go forwards not backwards

As we, God willing, come out of the pandemic restrictions, will we continue to be bold? Or will we lose our courage in our desire to return to normality in our churches and communities? Many of our churches have connected with new people over the past year. How will we continue to build those relationships and so encourage folk to move forward in their faith journey? I have grown to detest the phrase ‘back to normal’. Let’s not go backwards, let us instead ‘move forward to a new future’. Many of us will be pleased that our church

buildings are once again reopening for public worship, however, do not forget that the doorways that allow us back in also allow us to go out – to go out into our communities and beyond.

Recently I have been drawn to some words in Haggai, one of the Old Testament ‘minor’ prophets. In Haggai 2:3-9 (CEV) we read: “Does anyone remember how glorious this temple used to be? Now it looks like nothing. But cheer up! Because I, the Lord All-Powerful will be here to help you with the work... My Spirit is here with you. ...and I promise that this new temple will be more glorious than the first one. I will also bless this city with peace.”

Many of us will have fond memories of our churches from years gone by. Now they have probably changed drastically. Yet there is reassurance in these verses from Haggai that ring true for us today. We are not alone, the Lord All-Powerful will work with us to rebuild our churches into something even more glorious than before.

Without doubt it has been a tough year, and many are tired and weary, and most definitely not bold. But being bold for God does not mean you have to do anything major, sometimes even the smallest change can bring new inspiration for the next steps in our mission. As well as having the Lord All-Powerful working with us, do not forget as Methodists we are part of an amazing Connexion, which includes folk in the Learning Network, as well as missionaries and enablers in districts and circuits, and the Evangelism and Growth team. I could go on!

So, let us be bold together, knowing that the Lord All-Powerful is with us each and every step of the way.

“Do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”



Angela Brydon is the District Discipleship Enabler in the Bedfordshire, Essex and Hertfordshire District.

Boldness in Learning



- **Ask** questions that don't get asked...
- **Delve** into diversity...
- **Research** with relish...
- **Prepare** to be transformed...
- **Grow** as a disciple...
- **Explore** the joy of God...
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