

the connexion



Going for growth

But those who hope in
the LORD will renew their
strength. They will soar
on wings like eagles.

Isaiah 40:31 (NIV)



David Perry
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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John Gillespie Magee Jr, the 19-year-old Anglo-American pilot who died when his Spitfire crashed in Lincolnshire in 1941, began his poem *High Flight* with the exultant phrase: "Oh! I have slipped the surly bonds of Earth and danced the skies on laughter-silvered wings". His famous words come to mind when I look at our cover image.

I took the photograph standing on the cliff top above the expansive sandy beach at Filey, Yorkshire, which stretches for five miles all the way to the magnificent chalk cliffs at Bempton. Here at the edge of land and sea, a succession of paragliders were taking advantage of the late afternoon updraft to fly back and forth along the cliff line. Freed from the "surlly bonds of Earth" they soared effortlessly, held aloft by natural air currents.

In this moment of quiet wonderment I recognised that I was witnessing a contemporary visual metaphor for the promise voiced by Isaiah: "but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles" (Isaiah 40:31, NIV).

Held aloft by an invisible reality whose presence is tangible and can be felt, the paragliders don't question the breeze or doubt the thermals. They allow themselves to trust these truths of being on the edge and let themselves be lifted up and away.

And for a church living on the edge in so many ways, the prospect of hope, renewal and soaring with God is more than just enticing, it is the trusted and tested means of going for growth. A church on the edge is a church that is drawn inexorably to reconnect with God's presence at the edges and discontinuities of life. It is there that we are called to soar in faith, freed from the surly bonds of "we have always done it this way", so that we can glimpse in a fresh and reinvigorated way what our calling as followers of Jesus looks like today.

John Gillespie Magee Jr concluded his poem by affirming that he had: "Put out my hand, and touched the face of God". If we are going for growth, so must we.

*Love and peace,
David*

the connexion

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GOD IN LOVE UNITES US: prayerful discussion continues

A new set of principles outlining the qualities of good relationships was commended by the Methodist Conference in June for prayerful discussion across the Church, with final resolutions being voted on at the 2020 Conference.

The report, *God in love unites us*, makes a number of proposals including principles or qualities of good relating, an understanding of cohabitation, and to allow same-sex couples to marry in Methodist churches. Resources to support the consultation are: Guidance on Managing Group Discussions, Study Guide, Prayer Guide and a film of the Task Group's reflections on working together, available at www.methodist.org.uk/MandR19

New Head of Ministries

The Revd Dr Andrew Wood is the new Head of Ministries in the Connexional Team. He is stationed for an initial period of six years, while remaining as the Chair of the Southampton District for the beginning of this connexional year.

Andrew's role is to oversee the needs of the Church in the selection, formation, stationing and supporting of ministers. Andrew brings with him a full understanding of academic theology and experience of developing lay ministry.

New Secretary and Assistant Secretary of the Methodist Conference

The Revd Dr Jonathan Hustler became the Secretary of the Methodist Conference in June. Jonathan had been Assistant Secretary of the Conference since September 2017; prior to this, he was the Ministerial Coordinator for Oversight of Ordained Ministries in the Connexional Team.

Jonathan trained at Wesley House, Cambridge, and was ordained in 1992. His involvement in the training of local preachers and ministers has been extensive and he continues to write on pastoral theology, preaching and church history.

Replacing Jonathan as Assistant Secretary is the Revd Ruth Gee, who was previously the Ecumenical Officer for the Methodist Church. Ruth has been Chair of the Darlington District, served in the West Yorkshire District and is a former President of the Conference. Before entering ordained ministry, Ruth had a career in teaching.





THINK
PIECE

CONNECTING

with people for God

Tom Donaghue, Evangelist at Cliff College, says we can all reach out to people in our everyday lives to bring them to Jesus Christ



Our goal is to make disciples

This summer I was invited to a commissioning service for a team going on a short mission trip to Zimbabwe. When I arrived, a lady in her 80s was walking into church with a man in his 20s. I thought he might be her grandchild, but he turned out to be her neighbour. They had become friends while sharing the care of a sick neighbour's cat. The lady explained that she attended the church regularly but this was the young man's first visit.

I took as my theme the Bible verse Malachi 3:3: "He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver ... and refine them like gold and silver." In the service, I shared with the mission team that during this trip they could feel like being in a hot oven as they experience a new culture, meet new people,

encounter difficult situations and learn to work together. I encouraged them to take comfort, knowing that God is like the refiner. When putting silver in the oven, God will watch it throughout the refining process, to make sure it does not spoil. In turn they can trust that God is watching them. I concluded refiners know when the silver is purified because they see their own reflection in it. I said my hope for the team was that they would return from the trip refined and revealing more of God's reflection in them.

After the service, I spoke with the young man. He said that he liked my "speech" and it had meant a lot because he used to be a refiner! He went on to tell me that this was the first church service he had attended in his life. I asked why he had wanted to visit a



church now: it was because of his neighbour and new friend. He had seen something special in her and wanted to find out what that was.

Friendship and church growth

Reflecting on this made me think about growth. I thought how creative the lady had been to share her faith with a neighbour. Others might have been unwilling because of the age, gender and cultural barriers that might hinder conversation. What was clear in their friendship, however, was that she was genuine and authentic and he saw that something special of Christ in her.

It made me think about the kind of growth Christians should be looking for. Friendship was crucial in helping the young man explore his faith and come to church. We are all required to make disciples and it cannot be left to the preacher, teacher and evangelist. My short address was only a small part of the young man's story and he still needs the old lady's friendship as he investigates the Christian faith.

My favourite Bible passage is John 15:1 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-grower." It reminds me of a book called *The Trellis and the Vine* by Colin Marshall

and Tony Payne (Matthias Media, 2009). The vine symbolises Jesus and the image helps us remember that in order to grow we should focus on people and build relationships that help others to come to him.

The book says: "The vine is Jesus, and as we are grafted into him, we bear fruit ... The emphasis is not on the growth of the congregation as a structure – in numbers, finances and success – but on the growth of the gospel, as it is spoken and re-spoken under the power of the Spirit."

In New Testament times, Christians met in each other's homes, so churches were probably small, unimpressive gatherings. But God kept drawing people in as each member of the church in their own way was "speaking the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15), sharing their faith with the people they came across in their lives. As Matthew 28 says, we are all called to make disciples. We can do this through a variety of relationships and conversations. In their book, Colin Marshall and Tony Payne say: "our goal is not to grow churches, but to make disciples."

Who in our lives could we share our gospel faith with?



GOING FOR GROWTH Question

What needs to happen if we are to make new disciples of Jesus?

LEADING

together in

transformation

Transformational leaders understand how to help people through change



The mark of a transformational leader is their ability to collaborate with others and facilitate change, says Emma Nash, Mission and Community Engagement Officer

My favourite TV priest is Father Michael Kerrigan, played by Sean Bean in the 2017 BBC TV series, *Broken*. The series is gritty, gripping, heartbreaking; not an easy watch at all. But Father Michael is a wonderful priest. He is a vulnerable, broken person – as we all are – trying to do the best he can for his parish in difficult circumstances. He cares for people; listens to them; gives them time.

Father Michael recognises injustice and calls it out when he sees it. In one episode, he inspires his congregation to a very satisfying act of vandalism in response to the scourge of the highly addictive fixed-odds betting terminals. In another, he declares publicly that the grieving single mother who responds to the unjust death of her son with grace, dignity and determination is more fitting to be his priest than he hers. Father Michael is a great example of a transformational leader.

Strong and weak leadership

The word 'leadership' can inspire strong emotions in people. Some of us have been on the receiving end of poor leadership and we carry scars, which shape the way we feel about leaders. Weak leadership can leave people feeling unsafe as chaos reigns and no one seems to be doing anything about it. On the other hand, leadership that is too authoritarian can result in people feeling squashed, abused or ignored.

Sometimes Christians do not like to think of themselves as 'leaders' because lording it over people doesn't seem a very Christ-like thing to do. Jesus himself said that was what Gentile leaders liked to do, "But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all" (Mark 10:43-44).

Transformational leadership

Research has found that strong leadership is not at all about forcing people to do things. Rather it is about gathering people together to work as a team to achieve something for the greater good. We need not just ministers to have this kind of strength, but also stewards, treasurers, lay workers and Sunday school teachers.

A key theme of the new team for Evangelism and Growth is transformational leadership. We are engaged in defining it, noticing it and encouraging it among Methodist people. We want to see the Methodist Church grow, and growing churches are led by transformational leaders: people who can lead others through change.

Helping people through change

Some of us like change, even thrive on it, but many of us don't like it, and we can all find it stressful. And yet growth, by definition, involves change. Transformational leaders understand how to help people through change. And this is not just change for change's sake. Transformational leaders see a vision of a preferred future and they want to move people toward it. In the case of Christian leaders, that vision is God's vision for their church and community.

Many of us are sceptical of the kind of leadership which says, "I have a vision, and this is what we're going to do – like it or lump it." But that is not transformational leadership. A transformational leader understands that they do not have all the information, all the ideas and all the expertise. They collaborate. They listen to others; they identify other people's gifts and skills and encourage them to use them. If you are good at getting people to share their ideas, helping them decide together on some action and motivate them to get it done, you are probably a transformational leader.

The best leader you can be

However you exercise leadership in your church – whether it's through preaching, teaching children, looking after buildings or running meetings – we want to encourage you in your leadership. We want to work with you to understand who you are as a leader and to develop your skills so that you can become the best leader you can be. Those of us in Evangelism and Growth are working on a transformational leadership pilot for the 2019/2020 connexional year to help leaders grow in leadership together. If you are interested in taking part, we'd love to hear from you. Read more about our work and get in touch at www.methodist.org.uk/evangelism



GOING FOR GROWTH Question

What experiences of transformational leadership inspire you? Why?

Neal Stanton conveys the excitement, energy and God's involvement in Zac's House, where he has been Pioneer Pastor for the last year



PLANTING for growth



GOING FOR GROWTH Question

What does being
"seen, valued and
loved by Jesus"
look like for you?

Zac's House is a kingdom community: Christ-centred, Bible-based and Spirit-filled, offering a place of belonging, and providing hope, healing and wholeness. Our vision is to be a fresh expression of church, relevant to today's culture. This formed as Superintendent the Revd Rob Cotton felt God calling the people of Knutsford Methodist Church to set up a new campus in the nearby town of Northwich – to

bring the love and hope of Jesus to that community. In our first year, we have seen exciting growth and a thirst for the gospel.

Reaching out

Zac's House Kingdom Community refers to Zaccheus. Just as Jesus went to Zac's house for tea, reaching out to him, so we are to reach out to others, engage in their culture and come alongside the broken, hurting and those without hope; sharing the love of Jesus and introducing others to God – who loves them more than they know. Over the last year, we have seen people transformed: physically, emotionally and spiritually. Through engaging with the local community, meeting together regularly to have fun, pray and enjoy life, people have responded in incredible ways.

When we invited Watoto Children's Choir in April, over 300 people attended



and 9 people came to know Christ. It was wonderful to see so many people enjoy this event and gain hope too.

Letting people know they are loved

Following the great commission in Matthew 28 and aiming to love like Jesus does, we looked at our purpose and identity, and sensed that the important values of our new community are to let people know that they are seen, valued and loved by Jesus. Our part is to pray, partner and participate in the kingdom of God in all we do and are as a community.

So we took part in Northwich's Christmas Extravaganza, creating a nativity scene through balloon modelling, and providing prayer and pizza. As we listened to people's stories, we offered them a slice of pizza and the opportunity to be prayed for. We were so encouraged that out of 200 slices of pizza given, 197 people accepted prayer! We know that by coming alongside people, they have felt valued and loved.

Working together with local church leaders we hosted a service at the new central Baron's Quay development, including a candlelit procession through town to the Salvation Army citadel. Over 200 people from all churches gathered to worship, celebrate and pray for Northwich, asking God to bless the community and to bring light and hope to all. What a fantastic experience to see so many united in the name of Jesus!

Emotional well-being; physical healing; spiritual reawakening

Many local young people admit to struggling with anxiety. Last autumn we ran Anxious for Nothing, a course by Max Lucado. We followed this by inviting people to attend Alpha, and have been so excited as people commit to following Jesus, others deepen their faith, and to see many miraculous healings! One of our team had struggled to walk for over 20 years, but now is hop, skipping and jumping without any need for a stick!

We have seen emotional and spiritual reawakening too. People's faith has re-ignited, and some renewed their baptismal vows in a powerful outdoor service.

Kingdom community space

For some months we have prayed for a central office space in Northwich. And very recently acquired a space at the heart of town – at just the right time. Not only does it provide office space but also space for our community, where we can welcome people, listened to and pray for them. At exactly the same time, we saw the opportunity to create a Renew Well-being space – a ministry allowing people to 'set up spaces' where 'it's ok not to be ok'. Incredible, God's timing is perfect! The potential for this space is so exciting.

As we partner with others in the community and participate in building God's kingdom, we look forward to see all that God continues to do.

“Zac’s is amazing and really feels like I belong: I’m part of a big family.”

“I have valued all the amazing friends made here, and I have valued the courses because they’ve helped me learn more about God.”

“God has given me the opportunity through Zac’s to use gifts I did not even know I had.”

“I feel valued and loved in a community of fellow believers, and able to help and walk alongside the people in Northwich to share God’s love.”

“I love the generosity of spirit and support that lives within Zac’s.”

Calling people in Wales

to the **GOSPEL** feast

Companionship and nourishing food are bringing people in Wales to God, says the Revd Roger Hides, superintendent of Ceredigion Circuit

Appointed to the Ceredigion Circuit, I arrived in September 2013 eager to pursue mission opportunities in this beautiful seaside area. I was also to be chaplain at Aberystwyth University and have some responsibility in four Welsh-speaking chapels. But my colleague, Marty, based in Lampeter, has the main responsibility for the Welsh congregations (her grasp of the Welsh language is far better than mine), as well as being chaplain for students at the Lampeter campus of the University of Wales Trinity St David's.

Before I started, one of the English-speaking churches had closed. Then at the beginning of 2019 in view of dwindling numbers, the university's MethSoc decided to close. Another English church voted to close, as did one of the Welsh-speaking chapels. It was hard to see how all these closures fit with plans for growth! But this is exactly what I and the rest of the Circuit Leadership Team are working towards.

The situation is that Arminian Methodism has never been strong in Wales. Since John Wesley could not speak Welsh, the language of most inhabitants then, he

concentrated on English-speaking areas. He left the spread of Methodism largely to Howell Harris and the Calvinistic Methodists (who since 1933 have increasingly adopted the title Presbyterian Church of Wales). Also, the once-thriving MethSocs throughout UK universities have now closed, or merged with other denominational societies.

Welcoming students

At the start of term we greet students in the hope that some will want to worship with us.



GOING FOR GROWTH *Question*

Who needs to be invited to the gospel feast in your context?



Interestingly, for the last five years we have had up to 30 students from South Korea join us in Aberystwyth. We welcome them as they spend a few years away from home, friends and family, learning to speak English well enough to study here.

St Paul's Methodist Church in Aberystwyth has hosted students for over 60 years, enriching our church immeasurably. Sometimes we offer a church lunch on a Sunday and a 'Dinner Church' on a Sunday evening, where we serve a meal as part of the worship. We will be doing this six times this autumn.

The congregation of St Paul's invite students into their homes for Sunday lunch. It has fostered strong relationships which have continued long after graduation. Also on every term-time Tuesday evening in living memory, students have come to the Manse for the evening 'C & C' (Conversation and Cake). We share cake and other refreshments and chat about anything from student accommodation to faith and Brexit.

Nourishing body and soul

As a circuit, we continue to look for opportunities to be the Church of Jesus Christ in our communities, and to reach out to people – especially those who are struggling. As well as our daily Oasis coffee bar in St Paul's, Aberystwyth, and a weekly coffee morning in St Thomas', Lampeter, both run by volunteers, we have recently started a Pay-as-you-Feel Café every Thursday, in partnership with Aber Food Surplus. Supermarket surplus food (mostly fruit and vegetables) is brought to St Paul's on a Thursday morning. Our small team of volunteers decide what they can make with it, and produce a feast. Many people from

the community like to come to enjoy the food and make friends. They include people who do not otherwise come to church, as well as some who don't normally have a cooked meal.

An area of mission we aim to explore is the bilingual nature of our work. In the past, the Ceredigion Circuit has been a bilingual circuit. Currently, though, the Welsh work comes under its own Cymru Circuit, that covers the whole of Wales. But we feel being able to offer worship in Welsh is a mission opportunity. We would like to allow those who choose to worship in Welsh to go deeper in their faith, and this is something we can offer Welsh speakers in the community.

Feeding people spiritually on a Sunday, and physically during the week, are some of the ways we are going for growth. Charles Wesley wrote: "Come, sinners, to the gospel feast". In 2019, our call to invite people "to the gospel feast" is as strong as ever.

Charles Wesley wrote: "Come, sinners, to the gospel feast"



GOD'S

transformational plan for Swaffham

Sarah Rodgers and Geraldine Allen, members of Swaffham Methodist Church, share their story of the £350,000 church refurbishment and its invigorating new culture of mission



The words of English poet and hymnodist, William Cowper: “God moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform” (StF 104) could not be more apt for the transformation of our church.

Who would have thought that one of God’s audacious plans could come to life in Swaffham? So often the ‘big stories’ come from urban churches, and many only know our small history-rich market town en route to somewhere else.

Come all ... fresh courage take (StF 104)

We moved from Muswell Hill in north London to rural Norfolk joining Swaffham Methodist Church in 2011. Both professional musicians, we contributed creatively to church life, blissfully unaware of the Creator’s wider purpose!

A question was put to our Church Council: “Where do you see the church in ten years’ time?” It was a light bulb moment,

and a new vision for the church started as we pooled ideas and set up a church regeneration group.

From the outset, we knew that ‘church regeneration’ meant so much more than changing buildings, although essential for a more flexible, modern and well-resourced space. Church regeneration is also about mission, service, community and spiritual encounter.

With the experience of a £1.5 million building project at Muswell Hill, we set about consulting the church family and wider community in Swaffham. We needed to obtain permissions, raise £350,000, appoint professionals, oversee building work, and keep the church and community informed.

At the same time, we needed to develop our understanding of mission in the 21st century, so we took part in a course on mission-shaped ministry led by the Anglicans in Norwich. Afterwards, Dr Yasmin Finch, our District Mission Enabler,



GOING FOR GROWTH Question

How has this story inspired you to glimpse a new vision for regeneration where you are?



persuaded us to take the Cliff College course on pioneer ministry. For that, we wrote a 6,000 word essay, From Pew to Street, to capture the essence of our church's missional aspiration.

Wesleyan inspiration

An entry in John Wesley's diary on 18 October 1790:

"At Dereham no horses were to be had and so we were obliged to take the same horses to Swaffham. A congregation was ready here and filled the house and seemed quite ready to receive instruction."

This became a touchstone for us – that we were still "a congregation ready to receive instruction." It inspired the spiritual aims for the church regeneration project, which we called Moving Forward in Faith.

Alongside the preparation and planning for the buildings, we held Moving Forward in Faith workshops and discussion groups. One of the great outcomes was training and commissioning nine worship leaders.

Our building is revitalised to include:

- a fully refurbished sanctuary
- an open space that can accommodate

up to 100 free-standing chairs

- renovation of features, such as the original Georgian benches in the gallery
- a state-of-the-art audio-visual system
- a new servery and assisted access door to other facilities
- a green energy heating system powered by air-source heat-pumps, helping to reduce the Methodist carbon footprint.

But our most wonderful new feature, spanning an entire wall of the church, is a mural with John Wesley preaching by local artist, Eddie Goodridge (below).

His purposes will ripen fast (StF 104)

Through asking people "What has God given you a passion for?" our church now has a number of new projects, including:

- drop-in sessions on two mornings a week
- a Traidcraft stall
- cinema church with family films
- a housegroup focusing on the resource *Talking Jesus*
- Let's Talk About – TED-styled talks on topics such as climate change, caring for our planet and genetic engineering.

So what do people think?

Kathy: "It's lovely because it is light and refreshing and much more welcoming."

Barrie: "I feel privileged to be part of the close of one era and the start of another."

Sandra: "We have the opportunity to reach out to people, some of whom may not have had the opportunity to find a faith."

Our District Chair, the Revd Julian Pursehouse summed up:

"Through faith, persistence, vision and hard work [Swaffham] now has a modern, accessible, flexible and highly innovative church building that inspires joyful worship and creative community engagement! It offers us all an insight into what the church might look like in the 21st century as we find the courage to embody and share the story of who we are as God's people."





Going for GROWTH in Yorkshire

As Chair of the Yorkshire North and East District, the Revd Leslie Newton is committed to growing flourishing missional communities

A desire for our culture to be reshaped afresh by the gospel

The Yorkshire North and East District was formed in September 2017. Early on, we asked ourselves the question: “What hinders local churches and circuits from fulfilling Our Calling?” This challenged us to think hard about how the district could best resource and help everyone in our 15 circuits and 220 churches.

We recognised a desire for our culture to be reshaped afresh by the gospel. We wanted to:

- help people discover their vocation
- be prepared to take risks and be friends with failure
- develop new confidence in appointing leaders
- change our structures so that they stimulate and support growth.

We are committed to cultivating flourishing missional communities, characterised as:

- **communities** where people gather and connect with openness and hospitality, sharing in real life together – true fellowship – in deep relationship and community with God
- **missional** in the sense of living with an outward focus; sharing faith, serving, loving, welcoming, being prophetic and responding to the needs of the world
- **flourishing** which we define as passionate, growing, healthy, lively, real, fruitful and disciple-forming.

Our priorities for growth

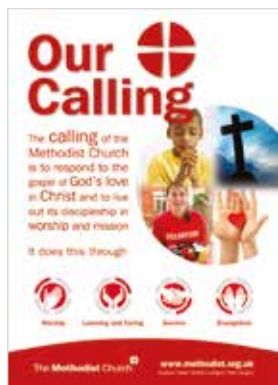
We have committed ourselves to four district priorities to help local churches

and circuits to embrace Our Calling, and cultivate flourishing missional communities. They are:

- 1. Growing lay leadership** We take seriously our Methodist heritage and remember that to grow we need well-equipped, confident and accountable local lay leaders.
- 2. Reimagining worship** We encourage churches to have a renewed sense of ownership of, and imagination about, their worshipping life.
- 3. Developing ‘our voice’** We want people to feel confident about ‘telling their stories’ and telling the story of our faith. We also hope they can be bolder in speaking out and taking action in the face of injustice.
- 4. Remodelling governance** We want to avoid distractions and time-wasting. We’re committed to finding ways in which governance is handled well with a minimum of time and energy.

Exciting initiatives to share the gospel

To help translate our priorities into action, we have invested in a District Circuit





Support team. The Revd Steve Barlow, the Revd Ruth Parry and Heather Shipman offer active and bespoke responses to staffing shortages and help circuits work through reshaping and reimagining ministry and mission. A developing feature of this work is the rediscovery of local lay ministry and leadership, which frees up presbyters and deacons to offer their distinctive and complementary ministry.

For a wide range of reasons, many people in our communities are way beyond the reach of our existing churches. Supported by an Our Calling connexional grant, we have therefore formed a new team, the **District Pioneer Nursery**, to identify, equip, release and support lay pioneers in beginning new work. It has the objective of planting new flourishing missional communities in ways and places that we



have not yet begun to imagine.

We are aware that starting something new is relatively easy, but nurturing fragile growth can be demanding work. Our two leaders, the Revd Andy Lindley and Liane Kensett (above and below), are establishing their 'potting shed' and we are excited to see pioneers emerge and new plants sown over the coming few years. We talk of establishing 50 new plants in the next five years.

Finally, we held **Flourish**, a major district gathering in October 2019. Around 1,000 people from all around the district gathered for a weekend in Scarborough of inspiration and celebration, worship and fellowship. There was a children's and youth stream of events, some time when we all gathered together and a wide range of workshops.

Thankful to so many and to God

In these ways and others we are excited about what's happening within the Yorkshire North and East District. We are thankful to so many people from around the Connexion and beyond who are investing in this district and helping us fulfil our priorities. There are so many creative, imaginative, entrepreneurial and gifted people! I am hopeful that we are finding fresh confidence and courage to be the people God's calling us to be: passionate in loving God and in loving the world God came in Christ to save.



GOING FOR GROWTH Question

In your situation
what does
'going for growth'
look like?

Reshaping and reimagining ministry and mission

So what's
YOUR
story



**THE
STORY
PROJECT**



We all have a story to tell and The Story Project will inspire us to share our own God-stories according to Ali Johnson, a member of Evangelism and Growth, a new team supporting our Church-wide focus on sharing the good news of Jesus

Stories can unite and empower us. Daniel Taylor, Professor at Bethel College in the USA, said: “Human beings are innately social creatures, and stories are the single most powerful glue that binds us together. One definition of a community is people who share common stories. People know who they are and who they belong to by the stories they tell together.”

Unforgettable stories

In 1762, the British politician and aristocrat John Montagu, the 4th Earl of Sandwich, spent a lot of his time playing cards. He greatly enjoyed eating a snack while playing, but wanted to keep one hand free for the cards. So, he came up with the idea of eating beef between slices of toast, which would allow him to eat and play cards at the same time. This snack of two slices of bread with meat in between became known as a ‘sandwich’, and was one of the most popular meal inventions in the Western world.

Now you have heard the story, you are unlikely ever to forget how the sandwich was invented. The story will have conveyed this event far more powerfully than a series of bullet points or other facts. Telling stories is as old as human civilisation itself, dating right back to Palaeolithic people who depicted their lives on cave walls, through ancient civilisations of the Near East and Egypt and epic stories of ancient Greece. If much has changed in culture and technology since then, stories remain very much the same – it’s in our nature as humans to tell them. It’s also in our nature to listen to them. Stories are the way we communicate our feelings, emotions, beliefs and values. Stories impart truth and reveal our heart. Each of us has a story, and our story is worth sharing.

What is The Story Project?

Part of each individual’s story is their story with God. And this is what The Story Project is all about. Our stories are gifts that deserve to be shared so The Story Project gives people both the platform and the confidence to share their story.

It is being put together by a partnership involving Cliff College, the Methodist Church’s Evangelism and Growth team, Learning Network and local churches and circuits. It has a number of aspects.

The Story booth

We will have a ‘story video booth’ at

certain events to collect short video stories for sharing on social media throughout 2019/2020. The stories may also be used by local churches and circuits on their own social media accounts to engage with people outside the Church.

The Story website

The website www.thestoryproject.org.uk will both store and share the stories we capture and host resources to help build a culture of telling testimonies across the Church.

The Story resources

On the website you will find a series of all-age resources that can help to help improve confidence in storytelling.

The value of everyone’s story

One can sometimes get the impression that the only stories the Church values are those of radical conversions from dark pasts; the more sordid the details and the more dramatic the conversion the better. The reality of course is that most people’s stories are not like this and we can sometimes feel we ‘don’t have a story’. This could not be further from the truth. People value stories of people like them, who in their ordinary lives encounter our extraordinary God. The Story Project gives value to all types of story, the dramatic and the ordinary. We believe that all stories are important.

How to get involved

You can come to an event and share your story. Find out where the booth will be from the events listing on The Story Project website.

You can browse other people’s stories. Our website has loads of stories that will encourage, inspire and challenge you.

You can download stories to tell in your services.

You can check out the amazing free resources that we have and use these to support your own story telling.

Remember the story of the invention of the sandwich? Telling and sharing our stories is just as memorable – and can be life-changing both for you and your listeners.

www.thestoryproject.org.uk



GOING FOR GROWTH Question

In what ways will the sharing of stories be a blessing to your church?

Our new Youth President, **Thelma Commey**, shares her testimony

Thelma says:
“I pray that as I tell you my story, the Spirit of God speaks to you in a special way”

About nine years ago, I found myself in a vibrant yet unfamiliar church in Accra, Ghana. Attracted by the joy of the people, I became a regular attendee. I spent weekends participating in Sunday school, weekdays attending Bible studies, prayer meetings and choir rehearsals. I would take any opportunity to be there. You might think that this was because I loved God, but actually I had no idea who God was. It was really just an escape.

I had moved to Ghana with my mum and sister at a young age. Dealing with a new environment, processing the complexities of my parent's divorce and adapting to life in a single-parent family wasn't easy. I felt lost, hurt and frankly not loved. It was hard to vocalise at that age – and who was there to speak to? Also, I didn't know how to help my family or what to say. Watching my mum hurt, my sister cry and my dad leave was a heavy burden.

In my broken state, I would put on a smile, go to school and always do my best. Telling myself that people had it worse than I did, was my way of not confronting my pain. As with all ungodly fruits, the pain grew. It birthed bitterness, resentment and low self-worth. I found myself deep in many sins.



Finding God's love

Initially I believed it was the vibrant songs and dancing that attracted me to church, but it was actually a desperate need for God's healing. At 11 I accepted God's offer of love and it was truly a turning point in my life. I can't say every bad thing instantly went away but I began to walk with God, talk with God and feel God's presence. With every encounter, God exchanged my pain for joy, insecurities for confidence and filled me with all-consuming love.

Since then, every day has been a blessing and a challenge. There have been seasons in my life when I turned away from God and seasons when I was on fire. I have had times when I could feel God's very presence and times when I doubted. In all this, I've learnt that God is with me on the mountain tops and in the deepest valleys. Every day I grow in God through the Bible, prayer, fasting and fellowship.

What excites me about following Jesus is that you don't really know where you are going (at least I didn't and I still don't) but I do know that Jesus will never leave me. I agree with the psalmist when he says: "If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths you are there" (Psalm 139:8 NIV). I also know that God puts everything together for my good. Things I perceived as misfortune, God saw as an opportunity to bless me. God does not see things the way we do. I based my expectations of outcomes on the experiences of others, neglecting the fact that God was writing a unique story of my life through the lens of love.

Looking forward to a year as Youth President

After meeting God for myself, I desired to share my faith with the world in every way



*“At 11 I accepted
God’s offer of love
and it was truly
a turning point
in my life”*



possible. Not out of religious obligation to evangelise, but simply because I live in awe of God. Why would Jesus care for one like me? Jesus gave his life for me and calls me his friend even though I am still far from perfect. That’s the true loving nature of God.

My year of service is a God-given opportunity to devote myself to sharing this love. I believe there are many people in our

world today who are unconsciously searching for love. Looking for it in professions, people, entertainment and really anywhere that claims to offer it. I want you to know that Jesus loves you. Actually he loves us all in whichever state we are in. Right now, God loves you; back then, God loved you and forever God will love you unconditionally. Are you willing to accept that love?



GOING FOR GROWTH
Question

Could Thelma’s testimony be a timely gift from God to you?

A HEART for the homeless



Mission team member Michelle Pellegrino visited the Bristol Methodist Centre where homeless people receive hospitality, care and support in Jesus' name



A shrouded figure lies huddled under a blanket on a bench, vulnerable and alone. All around him, cars whizz past and people hurry by, ignoring the all-too-common sight of yet another homeless person. If they were to pause for a second and look closely, they would notice that the feet of the concealed figure have two deep wounds – the marks of the Crucifixion.

The life-size bronze sculpture is by Canadian sculptor, Timothy Schmalz. The first *Homeless Jesus* was installed at Regis College, University of Toronto in Canada in 2013. Since then, you can find *Homeless Jesus* worldwide – on the streets of Argentina, India, Israel, Italy, Poland, Spain, and across the USA. In Ireland and the UK, these sculptures are in Dublin, Glasgow, Liverpool, London and Manchester.

The sculpture is a visual translation of Matthew 25:37-40:

“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’”

A home for people without a home

I recently visited a project that embodies this Bible verse, warmly welcoming the stranger and generously giving food, drink, clothes (and so much more) to people in need.

Stepping inside the Bristol Methodist Centre in Lawrence Hill is a heart-warming experience. The comforting aromas of a good meal drift out of the kitchen. People are chatting in little groups. In one room, an art workshop is in progress.

“Jesus had a real heart for the homeless and we try to follow in his footsteps by getting alongside the most marginalised and vulnerable,” says the Revd **David Alderman**, Superintendent of the Bristol and South Gloucestershire Methodist Circuit.

He continues: “Jesus himself was homeless, often relying on others to give him the gift of hospitality. Our Christian value of hospitality is at the centre of everything we do. We believe that everyone is made in the image of God and every person is valuable. We welcome anyone who needs our help, aiming to be a home for people without a home.”

Seeing the real human being

I was eager to speak to the guests and hear from them what difference the centre has made to their lives. Each person had their own unique and heartbreaking story to tell.

What I found most unnerving is how easily someone can become homeless. I meet



Ellie who used to live a ‘normal’ life, just like you and me, until not so long ago.

“For 15 years, I had a house, where I lived with my three children. Nowadays, I get shelter where I can or sleep on the streets, and my children aren’t with me anymore.”

Ellie is still young, but the lines of worry and exhaustion are etched on her face. She plays with her hands nervously as she continues: “My days are spent trying to get food and shelter. It’s tough out there, and for a woman, it’s dangerous too. But here at the centre, I feel safe. It’s the place where I feel the safest. I don’t know what I’d do without the team.”

I also chat to **Ferenc**, a Hungarian man in his mid-thirties, with long brown hair and piercing blue eyes. He tells me that ever since he had a nasty workplace accident, falling from a height of over 30 feet, he struggled financially, eventually ending up homeless.

“If it wasn’t for the meals they give me at the Bristol Methodist Centre, I wouldn’t be able to stay alive,” Ferenc says. He waxes lyrical about how nice the staff are, how they always have a smile on their face and a kind word to say to him. “Being homeless is a lonely life,” Ferenc continues, “but the staff here have helped me such a lot.”

The power of relationships

There are so many ways the Bristol Methodist Centre helps guests – from a health clinic, assistance with benefits and housing support to one-on-one counselling, shower and laundry facilities, and even free haircuts. But perhaps the way it supports its guests most is through ordinary, human interactions.

The relationships formed at the centre are a vital element of the healing process for people who have been through so much. People who are homeless are often cut off from others, which has a strong impact on their self-confidence and ability to change their lives for the better.

Perhaps Ferenc sums it up best: “I don’t think I could cope without the friendships



GOING FOR GROWTH Question

In what ways does this story prompt you and your church to be more attentive to those “when was it that we saw you” opportunities?

I've made here at the centre. I feel loved, that's the best way I can describe it." And as he says this, I was touched to see tears of gratitude in his eyes.



There is also a chapel on the premises. I spoke to **Ciaran**, who has struggled with mental health issues all his life. He came to a living faith through attending the chapel services. "I used to be consumed by anger and negative thoughts," Ciaran explains, "but I've become a kinder, friendlier and more positive person since I've opened my heart to the Lord. When you accept God into your life, you're not alone anymore."

I also met a much-admired figure here at the centre: **Chef Paul**, who creates delicious and healthy meals for over 100 guests a day. This is no mean feat, yet he insists that it's the best job he's ever had.

"A lot of people who are homeless are not given the time of day," Chef Paul says, "All they need is someone who will be nice to them, take the time to listen, and point them in the right direction."

The personal stories from the guests of the Bristol Methodist Centre – just like the *Homeless Jesus* statue – are a powerful reminder that our faith needs to be expressed through action, a Christ-like compassion and warm hospitality for the most marginalised and hurting members of society.

Advent Offering 2019

The Bristol Methodist Centre is the focus of this year's Advent Offering, which has the theme of 'Hospitality & Homelessness'. To find out more about how you can help people experiencing homelessness and read the full stories of those featured in this article please visit www.methodist.org.uk/adventoffering

The Methodist Church's views on homelessness

The 2019 Conference received a report setting out the actions taken since the 2018 Conference expressed its concern about the crisis in housing and homelessness. The Conference commended the work taken by churches and communities across the Connexion to support people experiencing homelessness and to provide housing and combat the housing crisis. The Conference agreed to encourage circuits and districts to consider increasing the social impact of property in local mission, and posed the question of how property might play a part in a holistic housing strategy of reduction, respite, recovery and reconnection. The Conference urged the Government to accelerate its targets to eliminate rough sleeping, allow local authorities to build more housing and to enable the building of more genuinely affordable homes as a means of building stronger and more cohesive communities.

For reflection

What are the housing and homelessness needs in your area?

What practical actions or support would help you to respond more effectively to these needs?

How do you think our churches should be responding to the housing crisis?

Are there practical ways in which your church might provide affordable housing, perhaps by redeveloping redundant buildings or excess land?

Questions taken from *More than Bricks and Mortar?* the Joint Public Issues Team report on housing and homelessness at www.jointpublicissues.org.uk

How can we help God's plan for **GROWTH?**



Miracles echo creation

In one of the most famous passages of his writings, the mid-20th-century apologist CS Lewis argued that it is entirely reasonable to believe the gospel accounts of miracles worked by the Son of God. The narratives only reflected (albeit in short form) natural patterns which God had imprinted in creation. Lewis argued for his first example that “the miracles of fertility” (the changing of water into wine and the feeding of the five thousand) reflected the wonder that we see in every harvest. In other words, multiplication is what God does.

God in Christ wants growth

This is God in whom we believe. The first command to human beings, “be fruitful and increase” (Genesis 1:28), is echoed in Jesus’ promise to his disciples at the Last Supper, that those who dwell in him will bear much fruit. There have been times when some in the Church have been reluctant to talk about growth, still less to

be ambitious in looking for growth or even to plan for growth. Perhaps this is not surprising, given that we have lived with numerical decline for as long as most of us can remember. But we still believe that multiplication is what God in Christ does.

What is Christ asking us to offer?

It can sound simplistic just to assert that God wants growth. A closer look at the miracle stories on which Lewis was commenting suggests a more considered and a more committed response. Uncomprehending servants were asked to fill water jars at Cana. The disciples were challenged to bring some food to Jesus on the hills over Galilee. The Son of God who multiplies asks us to offer – a little compared to what God might do – but to offer something none the less. If we are praying for growth, we are first of all listening for what Christ is asking us to offer.

The Secretary of the Conference, the Revd Dr Jonathan Hustler, considers our part in God's plan for growth and multiplication



GOD'S CALL

to ordained ministry



Ministry Development Coordinator, the Revd Paul Wood tells inspiring stories of people who found their vocation as an ordained leader



Throughout Scripture and Christian history we see that whenever the people of God are in a time of crisis the Holy Spirit raises leaders to show us the way. There is no doubt that the Methodist Church is, from some perspectives, in a time of crisis. I believe this should not lead us to despair, but to expect our God to act. Signs of growth will reveal new leaders as we see the Holy Spirit moving among us.

Traditionally the Methodist Church has identified its leaders from the priesthood of all believers (that is you and me, the Methodist people) before training and ordaining them as either presbyters or deacons. This notion of representative selection is foundational to the way we organise our Church.

Different roads to the ministry

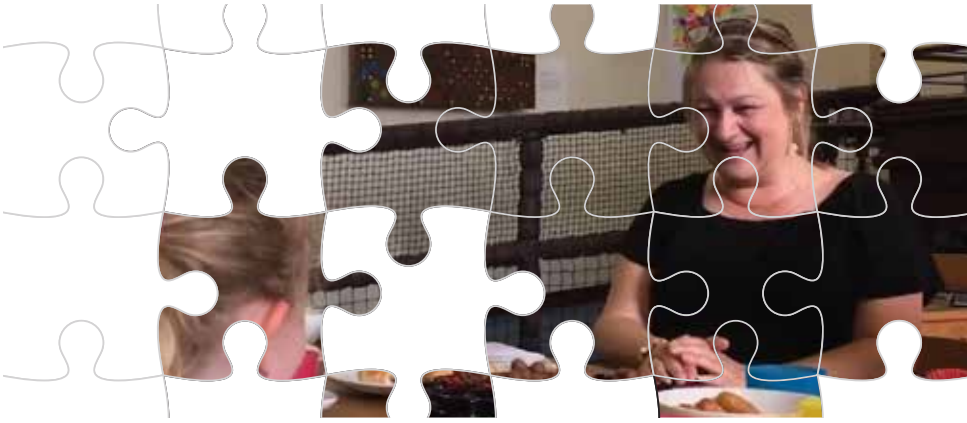
It may seem obvious to point out that no two ministers are the same – likewise no two candidates for ministry. What they all have in common is a story – a story of coming to realise that God wanted to

use every aspect of their lives in service and in bringing about God's kingdom here on earth. Recently, Ministries: Vocations and Worship in the Connexional Team has released short videos of ministers telling their stories, available at

www.methodist.org.uk/ministrystories

One is of Tracey. She tells that when she realised what a deacon was, it was like: "All the jigsaw pieces of my life came together as one." It was still not easy to take the step to candidate for ministry. She goes on to speak of a 'wow' moment, before thinking "I can't do that!" She was of course wrong – with God all things are possible. Now Tracey sees her role as a bridge between the local church and the community.

From a minister you might not expect to hear the phrase: "The second time I was arrested..." But that is part of Dan's story. A social activist who was arrested (and acquitted) twice, after dropping out of university, Dan struggled to know what to do. Someone suggested he might be a



“All the jigsaw pieces of my life came together as one”

minister, to which he replied “No that’s the worst thing that could happen.” But God thought otherwise!

Dan’s story resonates with Deborah’s. She was a local preacher and felt fulfilled in her career as a medical secretary. Then one Sunday at the pulpit she knew “in her head, heart and gut” that she could do no other than to candidate for the Methodist ministry. Her journey has led her to serving in Dorset Gardens Methodist Church in Brighton, an inclusive church where saying to someone: “Here is a place to be a part of; just be yourself” is at the heart of all members do (and indeed at the heart of the gospel).

Is your vocation in the ordained ministry?

Time and time again across the Connexion people realise that the ministry could be where they might be most effective. Kathryn, a presbyter in Stoke-on-Trent, speaks of recognising her call to ministry as the place where she could make a difference. After discerning, testing, training and stationing she grew into her preaching ministry. She

now confidently says: “I feel like I’m in the right place doing the right thing.”

Finally, Lansford echoes Kathryn’s words. He describes his journey from Freetown in Sierra Leone to his current station in Hull. Here he sees real transformation in people’s lives. “Don’t be put off by your own limitations,” he beams as he shares the joy of singing God’s praises.


Of course, not every one of us will be called by God to be an ordained leader. But why not take a look at these ministry videos? You’ll see and hear inspirational stories from people like you and me, who either jumped at the opportunity to candidate for the ministry; or did everything in their power to avoid it!

Do use the videos to start discussions in small groups, as part of a local arrangements service or as a personal time of reflection and devotion.

Let me know if your story chimes with any of them. I know that many rang bells for me!

Email Paul mvw@methodistchurch.org.uk
www.methodist.org.uk/ministrystories





GOING FOR GROWTH
Question

Who might you encourage to think about whether God is calling them to ordained ministry?

Reflection

CREATIVE

inspiration from the foot of the Cross

Anne Briant, a circuit steward in the Southend and Leigh Circuit, offers a creative response to our theme 'going for growth'

Creative journaling, for me, has evolved over the last 24 years, not as a daily response to hearing God but at times when images have come to me along my Christian faith walk. Some images have come in response to personal events, quiet times, national events and during retreats. Sometimes I have heard a song and words have jumped out. I am constantly surprised at how, as an abstract artist, I am given the images which not only speak to me, but also to others, in ways that are personal to them.

Making "Sacrificial Dreams"

The art piece opposite came to me in response to some words from our current superintendent, the Revd Pete Moorhouse, at our autumn circuit meeting in 2015 when he was sharing thoughts for the future spiritual growth of our circuit. A surprising inspiration, you may think! It is a reminder that we can be constantly surprised by how God speaks, if we are open and receptive.

The words "Sacrificial Dreams" became the image title and inspiration for the words that accompany it. The image and accompanying text were shared with the Circuit Leadership Team.

I created the abstract image using acrylics, on a metre-square canvas. The way I work is to take the theme, adding the paint, and regularly turning the canvas to work from all sides. The image emerges as I work. I use objects to print with, and sponges to create the lines.

It is finished when I sense the canvas 'balances', when it is turned round to view from all four ways up. Usually, for me, there will be one clear way that feels right.

Could I replicate the image? No, it is given for that time and situation. What can be seen in the image always excites me, as I pray about what is now before me!

A meditation in response to the artwork

Take your time to study the artwork, alongside these words.

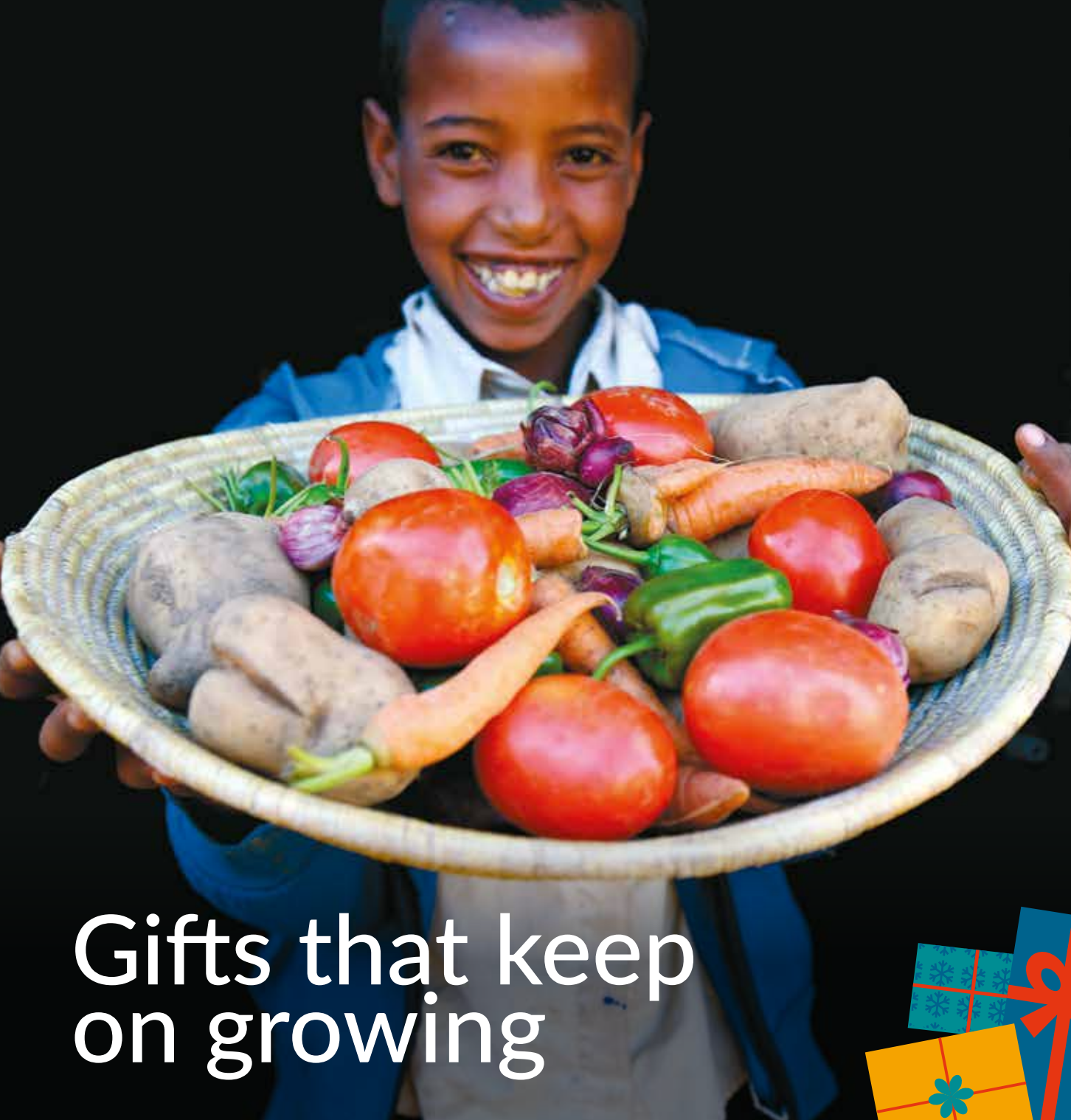
- On the right you can see a cross stretching two-thirds of the way down the side, behind which are sheltering two figures in black and dark blue.
- They are sheltering from what is being drawn to, thrown at, cast around and past the Cross.
- The movement of the paint, lines and marks indicate the challenges in our growth forward, not only personally, but as a Church.
- But... where do we find the faith to keep holding on?
- From the foot of the Cross. God's love for us through the Cross, keeps us strong.

This piece is an image with an enduring message. As I return to it in prayer seeking new insight from the message it gives, I am reminded that our journaling experiences may be for more than just ourselves.



Sacrificial Dreams

Cries from the heart, call to those around...
From small beginnings dreams emerge.
Immerse us, envelope us, revolve us, develop us.
Some are jewels, some flung at us, some flung across us...
Floating, grounded, overwhelming...
Some shout loudly, clear cut and solid.
Some fleeting whispers!
Some flow from the Cross, others to the Cross
Some glimpses, some recurring,
Some need repeating, some will become firm.
Some heard, some ignored and drift away
Some distorted, some change as they grow.
Some we carry, some will hurt us,
Some expose us and ridicule us.
Some will make us fearful!
Some we will not know or understand!
Where will they take us...?
Stay at the foot of the Cross, take strength!



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Methodist relief and development