

Issue 12 · Summer 2018

The **Methodist** Church 

# the connexion

## Vocation



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



David Perry  
Editor

**O**ur cover photo is a thrillingly dramatic action shot of the women's double-handed single-hull dinghy of Jess Lavery and Flora Stewart, members of the British Sailing Team and Olympic hopefuls for Tokyo 2020.

Flora is leaning right out over the side to get the sail in the optimal position to maximise the transfer of energy into forward motion. In order to do this she uses a singularly vital piece of kit: a trapeze system which is attached to the upper mast. With this she can lean out with confidence, knowing that she is securely held.

What is true of her vocation as an elite sportswoman is also true of her vocation as a local preacher in training. Here too Flora leans right out to the limit, maximising her willingness and enthusiasm to be who God has called her to be, knowing that she is held just as securely by God in her exploration of her calling as she is by the trapeze system of her dinghy.

Reflecting on this vital truth several questions come to mind; questions for individuals, churches and circuits which we should surely be asking. At this point in your faith journey what is God calling you to do? Where does God want you to be brave and lean right out? How are you going to maximise the impact of God's love in and through your life?

Put simply, what is your individual and collective vocation and what are you going to do about it?

These are vital questions as the Church seeks to be faithful to the ever-present stirrings of the Holy Spirit. Held by the love which always takes the strain, surely now is the time for us to lean right out to the limit and go with the flow of the amazing purposes of God.

That is why this edition of *the connexion* unpacks the key theme of vocation in its broadest sense. In doing so our hope is

***“that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you”***

Ephesians 1:18 (NRSV).

*Love and peace,  
David*

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# the connexion

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# Highlights



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## A luncheon club to ease loneliness

**C**ullen Methodist Church, Scotland, has organised a successful luncheon club to help bring together members of the elderly, single community.

Many local people did not have company when eating, so the church came to the rescue, hosting monthly lunchtime meals with hot food, great fellowship and a short talk.

The club is now such a success that people have to pre-book in order to secure a place.



## New Director of Evangelism and Growth appointed

**T**he Revd Trey Hall has been appointed as Director of Evangelism and Growth to support the development of the Church.

Trey Hall is a Methodist pioneer, church planting strategist and evangelist. He has established and led churches in the UK and the USA, served as Mission Advisor for the Birmingham District and coached scores of practitioners renewing inherited forms of church or launching fresh expressions of the Church.

## Mock royal wedding at Methodist Church

**F**leetwood Methodist Church joined up with Flakefeet Primary School to host its own royal wedding.

The mock service was led by the Revd Ruth Dunn who 'married' ten-year-old pupils Charlie Twitchet and Isabelle Sherlock as they took on the roles of Meghan and Harry.

Pupils were involved to help organise the event that featured stag and hen parties, suits and dresses, arrival by helicopter, a horse-drawn carriage ride through the town and a ceremony with the exchange of Haribo sweets for rings.



# All to Jesus I surrender: a Wesleyan theology of vocation



**Elaine Heath, Dean of Duke Divinity School and Professor of Missional and Pastoral Theology at Duke University in North Carolina, USA, explores our understanding of vocation through her experience as an educator of those called to serve in the Methodist Church**

**“**I came here to learn about God and grow spiritually. I’m not sure that I’m called to traditional ministry as a preacher. I am open to it but at least for now I don’t see myself as a typical pastor in the future.”

Over the past decade I have heard increasing numbers of seminary students make statements like this as they struggled to articulate their sense of call. While a growing ambivalence among seminarians about pastoral vocations might seem alarming for the future leadership of the Church, there is another, quite hopeful, way to read this trend.

#### **A new thing springs forth**

Through the words of Isaiah 43, God calls to us today: “Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?”

One of the new things that God is doing in the post-Christendom Church is calling lay Christians to deeper discipleship and more robust ministry as lay persons. This move of the Holy Spirit holds deep significance for how we understand both the ministry of the ordained and the vocation of the Church.

*I’m not sure  
that I’m called  
to traditional  
ministry*

Moreover, the Spirit is calling forth creative forms of theological education to equip laity to use their spiritual gifts in their own contexts.

‘Vocation’ comes from a Latin word, *vocare* – which means ‘to call’. Over the centuries we have erroneously come to think that a calling is only for a select few ordained persons whom God has chosen to lead the Church in “word, sacrament, and order”. We normalised a sharp division between clergy and laity in ways that stifled the gifts of the Spirit throughout the Church and created unrealistic (and unbiblical) expectations of the clergy. In a clergy-centric Church we came to think ordained people are ‘the ministers’ since pastoral work is their paid profession. But a new wind is blowing, the ancient/future breath of the Spirit bringing renewal to our Methodist understanding of vocation and what it means to be a missional Church.

#### **Saying “yes”**

This move of God bears many similarities to the original Methodist movement with its focus on small clusters of ordinary Christians seeking to live faithfully as disciples in a hurting world. Early Methodists



were mostly lay people, many of them from the margins of society. Their seamless blend of social holiness and personal piety reflected the holistic vision of primitive Christianity.

At the heart of God's call, in Wesley's theology, is the love of God reaching out to people. Saying "yes" to God's call happens when a soul responds to God's love by giving back to God all that one is and all that one has. The complete surrender of one's life to God, day after day, is the precondition for rightly discerning the ongoing call of God for both clergy and laity. Whether through Wesley's sermons such as 'The Almost Christian' or 'The Good Steward', or his tract, *The Character of a Methodist*, Wesley clearly details his expectation that genuine Christians have heard and answered God's call to holiness with a resounding "Yes! Here I am. Lord send me."

To be a baptized Christian is to be a called Christian, because the sacrament of Baptism is a physical prayer of surrender to, and full identification with, Christ and his

work in the world. Each time we come to the Lord's table we reaffirm our missional call, because to eat the bread and drink the cup is to say, "I am yours, Lord. Body, mind and spirit: I am ready to participate with your liberating, healing, and reconciling work in this world."

#### **Spiritual discernment**

Discernment of a call to serve in a particular place, type of work, or ministry is done both individually and communally. Indeed one of the important tasks of theological education today is to equip people with practices of deep spiritual discernment so that as individuals and as communities of faith, we can "keep in step with the Spirit" (Galatians 5), neither running ahead nor lagging behind.

What is most important is that we learn to say "yes" every time God calls. For if we will say "yes" to God's call, God will make a way. God delights in giving us what we need to answer our call and live into our vocations.

## Vocation

What "Yes" is God asking you to give?

# LAY

## vocation

Humbled by lay church members exploring their vocation, Paul Taylor, Operations Director at Cliff College, stresses the key role lay people play in the Methodist Church



**T**he question posed on Twitter was: “Why have you not followed a call to candidate [as a Methodist minister]?” One response came back: “Because I haven’t found a good enough reason to stop following my calling as a lay person.” This led me to reflect on what it means to ‘follow my calling as a lay person’ and the value of lay vocation in the Church today.

Lay people have always played key roles in the Methodist Church, from the central role

of the Class Leader in Wesley’s time to the ever-growing number of lay employees and volunteers today.

Yet we often undervalue the vocation of lay people. Frequently, our starting point is the list of jobs we have to do, and the need to put a name against each task, rather than exploring what gifts and talents individuals bring and how they feel God is calling them to use these.

This latter approach can be challenging for a local church, but can offer a more God-centred way in which the vocation of lay people is explored and responded to.

### Called to a second congregation

A group of us felt that God was calling us to establish a second congregation on a Sunday morning: a congregation that would meet the particular needs of the families and young people who were currently part of our church, and so provide an environment where it would be easy to invite others. We all had other roles in our church and circuit, and many of these had to be laid aside in order for us to focus on this new congregation.

Over the years this became a place where lay people felt able to explore their vocation as we were prepared to shape the congregation around its members at any particular time. Some examples





demonstrate this: at times the music was led by a large band and at other times we used CDs; at times someone preached a sermon and at others we had a discussion; at times we met in the church and at others we met in a coffee shop. Some 18 years later, we have seen many lay people becoming confident in saying “this is what I believe God is calling me to,” and in response we ask the question “how can we as a church respond?”

It has been both exciting and humbling to witness God shaping a church community through the gifts and experiences of the people involved. We have recognised the value of:

- a supportive community willing to let people grow and develop
- a leadership recognising people’s gifts and willing to explore ways in which they can be fully used
- a community taking risks with people, letting them ‘have a go’ and learning from the experience
- a culture of walking alongside each other; allowing a trusted friend to share our journey
- a priority of making space, away from the local church, to hear and respond to the will of God.

Cliff College has a long history of shaping and forming lay people, particularly through the ‘Cliff Year’ which was a year-long opportunity to live as part of the Cliff community, exploring vocation through a range of opportunities and experiences.

Some years ago this came to an end but, today, many lay people in the Church

are looking for an opportunity to explore God’s call on their life and, in response, we have relaunched the ‘Cliff Year’ as a gap year programme. This offers an opportunity for individuals – at significant moments in their life, whether just finished exams, just finished university, considering changing jobs – to take the time and space to be part of a vibrant community where they can explore their vocation, supported by others.

The Methodist Church is becoming more and more reliant on its lay people, both those in paid positions and those who volunteer, and at Cliff we see our purpose as both enabling them to identify their role as well as equipping them for that. We are passionate that lay people are well supported and equipped for the roles to which they have been called and are privileged to have the opportunity to continue in that task.

[www.cliffcollege.ac.uk](http://www.cliffcollege.ac.uk)



## Vocation

*In what ways is God calling you to get involved and “have a go”?*

*How might your church and circuit encourage everyone to fulfil their calling?*



# Pioneer ministry without the collar

**Bart Woodhouse is a pioneering lay evangelist working as Lead Pastor in the development of Ebbsfleet Community Church, Kent, whose ministry grew out of the VentureFX scheme exploring Christian discipleship and forming new Christian communities: Bart talks about how his call to lay ministry has become his reality through the guidance of the Holy Spirit**

**A**lmost twenty years ago I walked through the 'Joyful News' entrance to Cliff College. With a little apprehension I dragged my suitcase to my rather austere room and, sitting on the bed after waving my parents goodbye, realised this was the beginning of a new adventure with Jesus that would forever change my life.

During those three amazing years at Cliff College I made three significant decisions, which have proved to be the best choices I have ever made. Firstly, that I was being called into ministry. Secondly, it was *not* ordained ministry. And, finally and most wonderfully, that I should marry a beautiful and gifted fellow student, who thankfully said yes!

## **The pattern of God's leading**

It was not an easy decision to step back from the obvious route towards ordination. Most people around me expected me

to get ordained, and there was a little disappointment when I didn't follow through with this. Time and again I would hear the Spirit's voice calling me into ministry, but to something that didn't seem to match the role of an ordained minister – it was something else, on the edge, outside the normal structures, yet still belonging to them.

My next steps beyond Cliff were far from obvious, and on the encouragement of one of my tutors I put in a PhD proposal to Sheffield University, almost literally on the back of an envelope, to which they responded with an invitation and fee bursary! God had wonderfully opened a way forward with an opportunity I had never expected.

This has been the pattern of God's leading ever since, opening doors and closing others, with each step requiring a good helping of faith on my part. There have been tremendous ups and some rather





crushing downs over the last twenty years, but God has faithfully led me to the place I now find myself, as we set out, for the second time, to plant a church.

As I lead this new venture I am always impressed by how God brought me to be engaged as a church leader, on the edge of the Church's structures – focused on mission and evangelism, yet with a freedom that comes from my rather unique role as a 'lay' Pioneer Minister.

### **Revival that transforms**

Throughout this journey I have been captivated by a conviction that the Holy Spirit put into my heart on the night I recommitted my life to Christ in 1996: that nothing less than revival was ever going to satisfy.

Revival is a difficult word to use these days, not least because it took a beating during the heady days of the charismatic renewal and was further sullied by scandals and manipulative emotionalism during the 1980s and 1990s. But when I say the word "revival" there is something in my heart that literally shudders with expectation and excitement.

My understanding of revival has been most nourished when I read of John Wesley and George Whitfield's exploits, and the faith and heart of those early Methodists. It is this kind of revival that I feel called to run after, one where the Holy Spirit changes the spiritual climate.

### **Powerful relevance**

I know how this sounds and there is not the space here to explore these perhaps

idealistic sentiments, but here I stand knowing there is something afoot that demands my attention and foolhardy commitment.

The Holy Spirit will move and it won't fit the structures of our churches; it will look old yet be powerfully relevant, it won't be politically correct but will bring real justice, and love will be outrageously revealed as a holy force and not a fiction of compromise.

As I begin to form a new church here in Ebbsfleet I recognise more than ever that pioneering in the Spirit and pursuing revival has little to do with accepted strategies, and much more to do with the scandalous level of love I am prepared to open myself up to in my friendship with Jesus. Pioneers in the Spirit are being stirred up all over the nation: is the Spirit stirring your heart too?

[www.ebbsfleetcommunitychurch.org](http://www.ebbsfleetcommunitychurch.org)

## Vocation

*The Holy Spirit is moving to prompt revival. What demands your "attention and foolhardy commitment"?*



# Circuit stewards: the glue that keeps it all together



**The circuit stewards from the Hull (Centre and West) Circuit answer questions about their vital role in the Methodist Church**

## **What distinctive contribution do circuit stewards bring to the life of their circuits?**

We are a diverse group of people who bring many different skills and life experiences. We bring hard work, love and commitment. We provide continuity when leadership changes.

*We bring cohesion and support for churches struggling with change. We provide practical and pastoral support to ministers and lay staff and their families.*

We are the link between churches and the Circuit Leadership Team (CLT) – the eyes, ears and mouths of the circuit in the CLT and of the CLT in the circuit.

*Because we are members of churches we can bring an everyday perspective of life to CLT discussions, and participate in decision-making processes that affect local churches.*

We uphold the decisions of the Circuit Meeting in the churches.

*We are a bridge of support between the local churches and the circuit: enabling the circuit and encompassing the churches to operate, eg provision of ministers, manses, grants.*

Circuit stewards form a network of information between all churches and bring a feeling of unity among all members of the circuit.



## **What do you find most fulfilling about your role?**

Being part of a great team who support each other and laugh together. If a circuit steward is struggling others will often help with their duties. Confidences and problems can be shared with people who are able to see 'the bigger picture'.

*Attending Church Council meetings we get to see new ideas that churches are trying!*

Making a difference for God's kingdom and in people's lives. Helping and supporting local churches, and helping a plan come to fruition. Making improvements to the home lives of ministers, and supporting them in their spiritual growth.

*Working with Christians from other churches and discovering their gifts. Sharing faith and fellowship with like-minded people. The sense of joy when you see the work of God being fulfilled.*

Seeing new people come to know Jesus is exciting – and even more exciting is seeing 'old Christians' awoken to the realisation that Jesus loves them!

*Being a part of a large and amazing family that I meet when visiting churches and attending circuit events, and where I meet people and develop relationships; show interest in them; and care about their well-being.*

The fact that you are an active member of the circuit and do not feel isolated as a member of your own individual church.





### What do you find most challenging about your role?

The workload can be heavy at times and work/life balance is hard. It can be difficult to switch off.

*Individuals in the churches don't always see that their circuit is working for everybody. It can also be hard to convince church leaders and congregations that change is necessary. Communication can be slow and this impacts progress.*

Some ministerial staff forget that, as lay volunteers, we too have our problems. Others don't always make full use of the circuit stewards, which is frustrating when you believe you have something to offer.

*It can be hard to find people prepared to take on responsibilities and to find the patience to achieve long-term change. Making unpopular decisions can be difficult and the stationing process can be hard. Most challenging is the unforeseen matter which has to be resolved, and it is only the circuit stewards who have that responsibility.*

Complying with Constitutional Practice and Discipline (CPD) and outside legislation is a challenge. We often take on difficult roles that require knowledge outside our own experience, eg finance, property, management skills. And so we feel ill-equipped to be a leader with, for instance the responsibility for taking policy decisions, writing profiles and reports.

### As leaders, what are your priorities?

Raising awareness of and commitment to mission and outreach. It is important to help congregations see church as being the people, not the building, and to grow God's people to be vibrant and energised in doing God's work.

*Supporting the physical, emotional and mental well-being of staff, both lay and ordained.*

We want the circuit to succeed and to encourage all the churches to share in the vision – to think beyond the bounds of their own front doors. We try to ensure finite resources are deployed in the most efficient way.

*We need to 'be' Jesus to those outside the Church so that if we are asked "why do you behave like that?" we can say it's what Jesus would do.*

To be a unit that enables the circuit to be 'Spirit led, with a heart for Jesus and a passion for mission'.



### What qualities do you think a circuit steward needs?

The ability to show love for God, each other, the circuit, the churches and the world. Also, patience – in bucketloads!

*The desire and willingness to help ministerial staff, church members and the circuit steward team.*

The ability to be a team player. No person in the circuit is more important than any other.

*Integrity, commitment and the ability to know when to listen, when to offer advice and when to walk away. Fortitude, tenacity, discernment and the ability to be rational and level headed.*

A good knowledge of how Methodism works.

*The ability to be Spirit-led, to have a heart for Jesus and a passion for mission.*

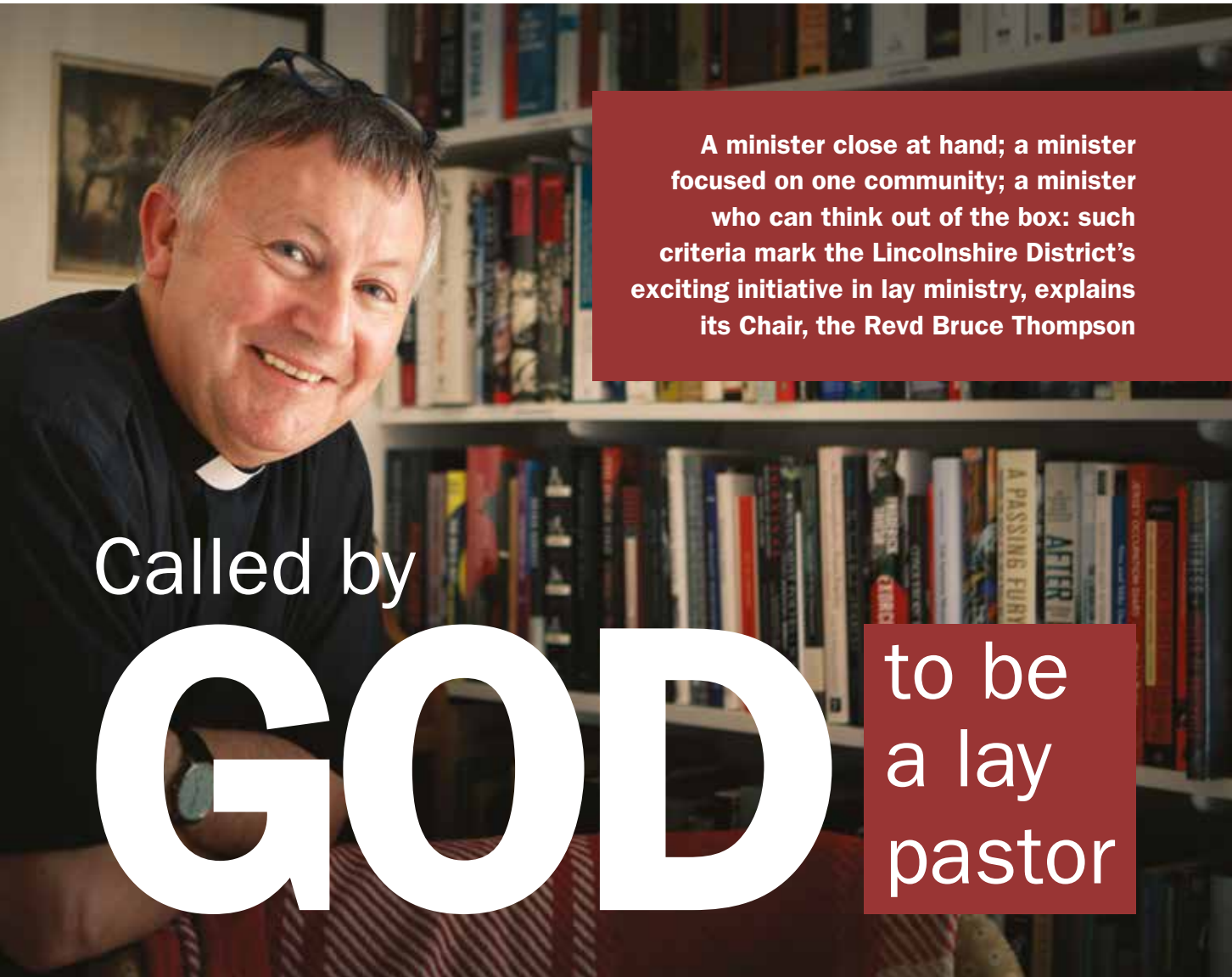
A deep Christian faith, ideas to improve the work of the circuit, an optimistic outlook, and a sense of determination.

*Most of all we need pragmatism, flexibility, ability to think outside the box and respect other points of view, a sense of humour, and, sometimes, a very thick skin!*

## Vocation

**Who is God calling to be a circuit steward where you are?**

**How can you support your circuit stewards in this vital ministry?**



A minister close at hand; a minister focused on one community; a minister who can think out of the box: such criteria mark the Lincolnshire District's exciting initiative in lay ministry, explains its Chair, the Revd Bruce Thompson

Called by

GOD

to be  
a lay  
pastor

**I**t was in 1996 that the then President of Conference the Revd Nigel Collinson encouraged the Methodist Church to consider the possibility of “a pastor in every church”. Since then, with our Toward 2020 Vision programme, we may not be able to fulfil such a challenge in its entirety, but in Lincolnshire we have recognised the tremendous possibilities of appointing pastors to chapels.

This scheme has not been a ‘stop gap’ for merely seeking to fill a vacancy when our ordained ministers are so thinly stretched. But it has been a carefully prayed for deliberate decision to ascertain who might be called to such a ministry, to share in a discernment process, to train and commission 12 Local Church Pastors in six of our ten circuits. We strongly believe that God is directing us to local, lay, contextual ministry.

*A pastor in every church*

We are now three years into the project and Local Church Pastors have complemented those lay and ordained ministries already present in circuits. They have inspired and encouraged local chapels; they have engaged in local communities; they have been a rich blessing in developing mission.

It would be false to claim that the scheme has been without hiccups. However, it is clear to all of us involved that any difficulties we have experienced are far outweighed by the positive presence of people called by God to this work. We are also continuing to learn from the experience and seeking to hone a ministry we believe is vital.

If you wish to know more about the scheme then please do not hesitate to email me on [revbrucet@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:revbrucet@yahoo.co.uk).

# Introducing some of Lincolnshire's Local Church Pastors



Liz Hudson

## Liz Hudson's work is for the people

When I enquired about the role listed in the circuit letter I was impressed to see that it required someone who would be a "visible presence in the shopping area of the village". If it is one thing that I can do, it is shop! So a chance to shop for God, well, how good is that?

And indeed, working in and among the folk of the village is an enjoyable part of my job. The florist told me that she would have said, had anyone asked, that the Methodist Church was closed. She was pleased that this was not the case. That was three years ago. Since then we have given out Christmas gifts on the high street each year, held assemblies in the school, hosted the school choir, received donations from the shops for our flower festival, become part of the Remembrance Day civic services, and more!

But my job involves so much more than the village. The minister and I work closely to provide richer worship and prayer experiences. We share pastoral care and church council duties. We consider ourselves a team working with and for the people of the Church.

Together we support new initiatives that come from the people and help them to become the best disciples for Christ that they can be. My ministry enlivens our local church and the church in turn enlivens my relationship with and response to God. There is mutual growth and renewed discipleship for us all. This sums up all my varied work.

Although I hold my membership elsewhere, I now love coming just to worship with the wonderful people at the chapel. We have a bond, grown through our love of God and our desire to serve the local people of God.

## For Nikki Coles being a Local Church Pastor is sharing God's generous love

My role covers three main areas: to offer pastoral care to the church community, to take the local church out to the community and to bring the community into our church. This is a huge ask, but then we have a huge God who calls us to be his hands and his feet in this world.

I have realised that the gift of love given to me by God is my greatest asset; and my greatest role in this place is to share that generous love with every person, no matter how deeply or fleetingly they are connected to the Church.

I have had the privilege of offering comfort to the bereaved, taking funerals and a service of Baptism, offering prayer and a listening ear to people on the street or in the shopping centre, and taking extended Holy Communion to those who are housebound. But for me the greatest thing has been seeing the local church grow in its outreach to the community; our doors are now open nearly more than they are closed and people walk in off the street to have their needs met, whether spiritual or physical.

Part of my role is to get to know all who come here, and to encourage and enable them to use their gifts in the service of God. We have a fantastic artist whose work now adorns our walls. With the help of a retired couple who used to run a restaurant, the church now regularly serves lunch to over 25 community folk followed by a game of scrabble, to keep our minds active!

People here have a renewed purpose, a sense of worthiness and most importantly a vision for the future. They know that God loves them and still has work for them to do, despite their sometimes advancing years, aches and pains. They say they feel boosted by having someone solely for them and it shows!

*We're seeing prayer and worship life deepening*

Nikki Coles





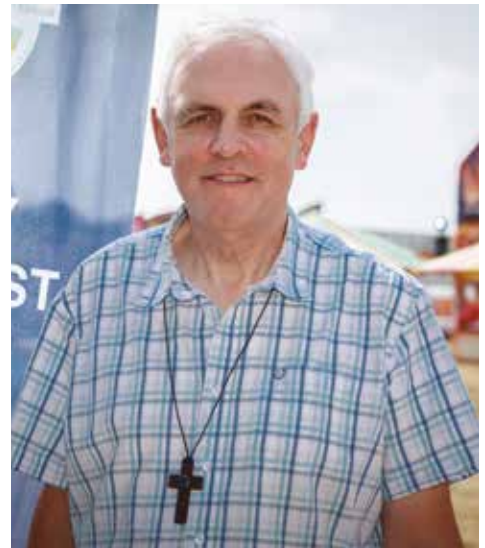
### Mike Joyce builds local connections to bear fruit

When I heard God's call to be a lay pastor, I had no idea what that meant, or how long I would wait for it to happen. I'd been a local preacher since the age of 19, a church steward, and more recently worship leader, and small group leader. I had been a town councillor, and chair of a small benevolent trust. So what more was God asking of me?

Ten years on I find myself as the Local Church Pastor for two churches (one my own) in Epworth and Scunthorpe Circuit, and quickly began to discover what 'pastor' means. My stated responsibilities in the pastoral area were Baptism services, funerals and extended Holy Communion.

These duties have taken me into many homes, to those terminally ill and those dying, to grieving families, the lonely, the elderly in residential homes. I have not actively sought to conduct funerals, but am often asked to do so. I have recently, on two occasions, supported bereaved parents. To come alongside folk in such circumstances needs far more than I have in me, and I lean on God who never fails.

I'm still involved with several community activities where I have seen God touch lives. One annual event is vital in this regard:



Winterton's Agricultural Show, where, along with others, I'm on our stand for the whole weekend. Many connections are made here, and the networking/seed sowing will bear fruit I know.

It is great to have the support of our minister and work with her, including deputising for her, and together we're seeing prayer and worship life deepening.

One rule from John Wesley's *12 Rules for a Helper* is what I seek to live by: "Go always, not only to those that want you, but to those that want you most."

  
**Vocation**

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*Local Church Pastors:  
what would this bring  
to your context?*

Liz and Nikki with their Superintendent the Revd Jade Bath



# Our Calling: my calling



**The Revd Dr Jonathan Hustler, the Assistant Secretary of the Conference, challenges us all to consider our callings**

**“G**od’s people are called to be set apart to love and praise God so that the world may believe. This double dynamic of turning to God and turning to the world is central to understanding ministry.”

These words are from the draft statement ‘Ministry in the Methodist Church’, which the Conference has commended for study, discussion and prayer. That statement goes on to remind us that the ministry of the Church is the ministry of the whole people of God – lay and ordained, female and male, young and old.

## **Some are called and set apart**

Within this understanding, the Church believes that some people are called and set apart for particular ministries. Over the last few years we have been acutely aware that fewer people have offered to be set apart in this way than many in the Church had hoped. This is a particular problem for presbyteral ministry.

This realisation makes it vital that we ask each other the question “what is your calling?” That is not simply because we need more presbyters to serve our local churches, but because the Church will only find what it needs to love and serve God when we are all exercising the ministry that God wants us to exercise. We need to think about vocation.

## **Issuing challenges**

Each minister will be invited to challenge at least one person each month: “Within the

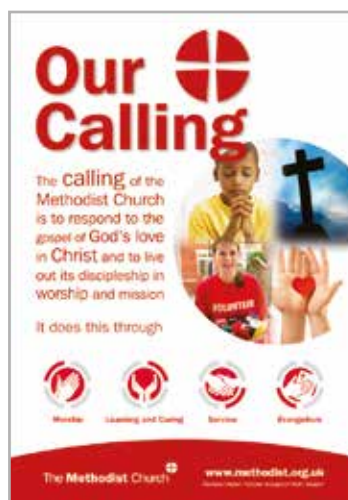
calling of the Church to turn to God and to the world, what are you called to do and to be? Are you called to continue as you are? Or are you being called to play a different role in leading worship, or in helping the Body of Christ to grow, or in witnessing in action or in words? When you see others doing those things, do you ever think ‘that could be me’?”

More details about this challenge will appear soon on the Methodist Church website.

One of my colleagues was asked to make a presentation about vocations; he told me afterwards that he had found it personally unsettling.

Talking about vocations always is unsettling – because as a Church we can only live out Our Calling if I discern and live out my calling. And you, yours.

[www.methodist.org.uk/ourcalling](http://www.methodist.org.uk/ourcalling)



## Vocation

*In what ways is God unsettling the status quo to prompt fresh thinking about Our Calling?*

# A calling to ministry and athletic excellence

Flora Stewart, who took up sailing at the age of 12, believes she is called to be a Christian athlete in the British Sailing Team: her goal is to be selected to represent Team GB at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, while alongside this she is training to become a local preacher





**M**y expatriate Scottish parents met at a Church of Scotland church in London, but our family moved back to Scotland when I was eight so my memories growing up are all based around the Solway Coast and messing around on my grandad's boat. Both my parents and grandmother are elders in the Church of Scotland, so as a family we were always in church on Sundays. Throughout my childhood I believed in the risen Lord.

### The joy of sailing

When I took up sailing I just loved the freedom to go as fast or as slow as I wanted. To be honest I just wanted either to go as fast as possible, or capsize! My very supportive parents drove me around the country so I could race in different competitions. I knew from a young age that my goal was to go to the Olympics.

I sailed most weekends when I was in my final couple of years at school, so attending church on Sundays wasn't really an option. For years I would miss spending Easter Sunday with my family as there was always a regatta taking place. This was one of the sacrifices I made for my sailing.

I went to Bath University where I graduated with a degree in Sports Performance, and then moved straight to Weymouth, going from sailing at the weekend to sailing during the week. For the first time in my life I had weekends free.

### Discovering my identity

I made it a mission to find my own church, and boy, did I try church upon church! Just when I had nearly given up hope in finding one, my mum suggested I try the Methodists. So there I was, in November 2014, in Weymouth Bay Methodist Church.

I knew this was where I was meant to be before the service even started. Everyone was so welcoming. At the time I was suffering from concussion, resulting in 18 months out of competition. In any athlete's life this is very challenging, and you feel like you lose your identity. But having that time to attend a church regularly, really for the first time in my life, I realised my identity wasn't just about being an athlete. It was about who I was as a person. If I was asked how I would describe myself today I would say I am a Christian athlete.

### A calling to ministry

There is a shortage of local preachers, certainly in the Weymouth Circuit, and there



had been a letter in our circuit magazine calling for local preachers. I thought it was something I could do.

This wasn't out-of-the-blue. Being the youngest in the family, it had been my responsibility to write and read the prayer on Sundays and on special occasions, and my granddad said at the time that I would be a great minister one day.

I prayed about the letter in the magazine, and spoke to my mum and grandmother about it. I felt I had a calling to spread the word of the Lord, and this went from an idea to a passion. The love from the congregation to me was also very important in making my decision.

One Sunday I was in church and we sang the hymn *I, the Lord of sea and sky*. The words of the chorus are:

*Here I am, Lord. Is it I Lord?  
I have heard you calling in the night.  
I will go, Lord, if you lead me.  
I will hold your people in my heart.*

Text and music © 1981, OCP 5536 NE Hassalo, Portland, OR 97213, USA. All rights reserved. Used with permission.

This was it: I was ready and waiting to be used in the kingdom of the Lord.

### Training for God's work

My mentor, David Ninnim, has taught me a lot. He is very understanding of my busy schedule and has gradually introduced me to all of the churches in the circuit. I have already been given some responsibility and I must thank all the folk who have given me feedback. Being an elite sports person, I know the value of feedback!

Training to become a local preacher also involves an online course, and while doing this my sailing partner and I are in full-time training for the Olympics. Neither of these things are easy, but I feel they are what God is calling me to do.

## Vocation

*Flora's story challenges us to be welcoming and affirming and actively to encourage people to consider their vocation. How will you take it to heart?*

*This was it:  
I was ready  
and waiting*

# Called to serve



The Methodist Diaconal Order (MDO) is both an order of ministry and a religious order within the Methodist Church in Britain.

**For Deacon Jacqueline Esama-John, following her call and challenge to be a member of the Methodist Diaconal Order equipped her to deepen her spirituality and personal faith in Christ**

**R**ooted in modelling the servant nature of Christ, my calling to ordained diaconal ministry has stretched my comfort zone and experience. It has propelled me to explore what mission and evangelism means globally by speaking out against injustice, and by enabling others to encounter God in Christ and live life to the full (John 10). This is the reality of making the Christian faith visible in a multi- and no-faith world beyond the walls of the Church.

#### **Otherness**

The contrast of my colonial roots in Africa and my life as a British citizen, living in Luton in south Bedfordshire, gives me a broad insight into the concept of 'otherness'. That helps me to proclaim the message of God's grace and love of Christ to all – not just to those who attend Sunday worship.

During my probation, I worked with six churches and communities across Luton, which involved:

- welcoming strangers
- gathering outcasts in two Messy Churches, at youth groups, coffee mornings and lunch clubs
- supporting the weak in three care homes for the elderly
- leading worship in churches
- leading Bible studies
- visiting the sick, suffering and dying
- engaging in interfaith dialogue and working alongside ecumenical partners.

#### **Bridge-building and befriending**

Leading Messy Church unsurprisingly led to questions about faith and about God in Jesus. Then being available to engage with people as they ask their questions is



profoundly humbling. I have been able to build trusting relationships, be the local church's presence in the community and demonstrate God's interest in people's lives without forcing the issue. This has also led to a few baptisms into the universal church of Christ.

### Welcoming the other

Luton is a diverse, densely populated multi-cultural town. God's love transcends boundaries of geography, race, religion, socio-economic status and even our own convenience. Such love demands giving and relationship.

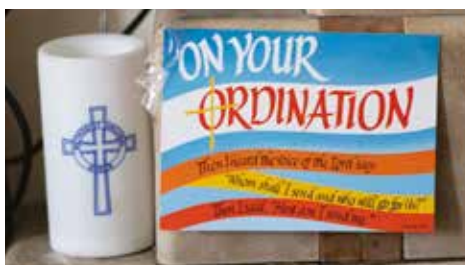
I live in a neighbourhood that is predominantly Muslim, and it is a blessing to model how faith can be a catalyst for good relationships and welcoming the 'other.' I have led a school assembly at an all-Muslim girls' school, participated in the ladies community *iftar* ending a day's Ramadan fast, and attended Ladies Lantern events to celebrate Muslim Women in Britain. Being a Christian is an important part of my identity and how I treat others is an important part of my worship of God. The Bible calls us to "love the Lord your God ... and to love your neighbour as yourself" (Mark 12).

### Learning to listen

The coffee mornings and lunch clubs are places offering friendship and space for sharing. When there, I offer a safe space and a non-judgemental listening ear. Through the house fellowships, I am grateful for being able to offer support whilst also celebrating the good things that make up communities.

Sometimes I find in pastoral care that trying to speak into people's many difficult and painful situations very challenging. I have learnt to listen more and pray for people in heartbreaking situations rather than give opinions. As deacons we are called to pray!

In modifying liturgies, and revising other materials, I have been able to help people with Alzheimer's disease 'to be present in the moment' even if they don't know what's going on around them. Seeing their family members and carers experience a sense of God's presence and grace is a tremendous gift and "an act of love", as a staff member in the care



home pointed out to me.

I was ordained on 1 July 2018. Part of my ordination retreat was to reflect on 'being and becoming', remembering Jesus' way of witness and service. I have been exploring how I could have a more active focus on 'being' and hearing those echoes of God in the ordination declaration:

**“Support the weak.  
Bind up the broken.  
Gather in the outcast.  
Welcome the stranger.  
Seek the lost.”**

The Methodist Worship Book  
© Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes

And so, called to be a deacon, I constantly seek to become more of a disciple of Jesus, joyfully inspired by the Holy Spirit, to encourage people to deepen their faith and trust God for the possibility of changing 'deserted places' to 'harvest fields'.

[www.mdo.org.uk](http://www.mdo.org.uk)



*How I treat others is an important part of my worship of God*

## Vocation

*Consider how God may be prompting you to rise to the challenge of transforming "deserted places" into "harvest fields".*

# The heart of ministry



Currently in his last appointment in the York Circuit, the Revd Ian Hill reflects on his vocation as a presbyter

**S**o much has changed since I started out in my first appointment. However, just as the gospel does not change, only the ways in which we express it, so it is with my own calling.

### Leading worship

Officially, a presbyter is called to a ministry of the word of God, sacrament and pastoral care. The great joy of my calling is not so much those things in themselves as the intertwining of them. The aspect I probably value more than any other is leading worship in my own churches, with the people I know and love. Because I know them and they know me, there is a rapport in worship that I find enhances and empowers it. This is the special privilege of the presbyter and one which I treasure. In fact I treasure it so much that I resent being absent from any worship in 'my' churches, but I have to accept that only God can be everywhere at once!

One of the things I love about worship is the 'buzz' beforehand. Many churches have tried to suppress this buzz, but I welcome it. Worship is collective, and our relationships with one another are integral to that. So I prefer to be part of the buzz. Stewards may

try to usher me into the vestry, but I have other opportunities to be quiet. I get a buzz from the buzz!

Presiding at Holy Communion is a similar privilege: giving people the bread and wine when you know their trials and joys is incredibly moving.

Some presbyters have the gift of calling each person by name as they give the elements; I could never risk this as my memory has a habit of failing me at crucial moments, but I try to think of the needs of each person in turn as I serve them.

### Representing God in the community

Of course I am well aware that presbyters are not just 'chaplains to the Church': we represent the Church, and therefore God, to the world.

This is the dimension that has changed most dramatically during my ministry. When I started out, the 'minister' was ex officio a member (and often the chair) of a wide range of community groups. School assemblies were almost a full-time job in themselves. Nowadays we have to work much harder to gain any foothold in the community, and the challenge of how to do this is our greatest concern. Even so, I feel it is healthy that we should have to earn

*People are prepared to share deeply*



the respect of the community, rather than receive it automatically.

Despite the lower profile of the Church, I still find to my enduring joy, that I, as a 'representative person' am welcomed into people's homes, in times of both joy and crisis.

### Opening an awareness of God

People may not be familiar with Jesus' teaching that "whoever welcomes you welcomes me" (Matthew 10:40), but I am reminded of those words daily. It is not just the welcome that is encouraging: it is that these people are prepared to share deeply. It is as if being with a 'minister' opens up their awareness of God, and this is both humbling and terrifying.

John Saxby, the former Bishop of Lincoln, writes about what he calls "vicarious faith", that is, the notion that people with limited faith tap into the faith of someone who is seen as better connected in the spiritual sense. When this happens to me, I am reminded of the father of the epileptic boy who says to Jesus, "I believe; help [me in] my unbelief." (Mark 9) It's fair enough to say that to Jesus; to say it to me creates a tremendous sense of responsibility. But as presbyters this is what we have to try to

shoulder, rejoicing that people feel able to trust us in that way.

I don't see myself as a great evangelist, and simply rejoice that others have this gift, but I do strongly believe that much of what I do is 'pre-evangelism' – helping people to be comfortable with the possibility of faith and to see the Church as a place where that possibility could be explored.

That's what I do: I represent the Church (and, therefore, Jesus) to people, and hope that they will warm to what they see.



Vocation

*If earning the respect of the community is vital, how might we achieve it?*

# When your calling lies elsewhere



Sharon, Tori, Heather and Karen are four women who tested their vocation to become ministers in the Methodist Church – and found that the answer was either “not this” or “not yet”: their powerful pieces of writing were composed following the Unravelling retreat offered to ministerial candidates whose calling was judged to lie somewhere other than in ordained ministry. They reflect on their journeys, their pain, the process of discernment and how you look to the future when it seems as if a door has closed

**I** hear you calling, but I cannot come in. “You know the plans you have for me” – I do wish they would become clear and apparent!

This was not a career choice, but something I heard as a *vocare*, a call. One I identified as a call to be a presbyter. To receive an answer of “no thank you” or “not yet” is more than a setback – it is your soul laid bare, your nakedness exposed.

Where is the light in the darkness? For me, words of comfort and assurance come not only from my Heavenly Father,

Mother God, but also my own earthly family, particularly my Dad (his presence is always around although he has gone to glory) who would have said “God loves a trier! Failure is part of learning, put it down to experience, girl!”

I would tell other candidates, “Your call is valid.” However, be aware that not everyone may recognise that. This doesn’t mean you aren’t called... it might be affirmation that you are not quite what is required with your particular gifts, in that particular role. You are worthy and blessed; thank you for daring to be vulnerable.

*Thank you for daring to be vulnerable*

**A**fter receiving the email with the “not recommended” from the Candidates’ Selection Committee, the person you end up turning to may have not experienced a disappointment like this in their lives and may not be able to help much. The fact that the Methodist Church has a retreat for those that have not been accepted for training is a really great tool to assist us in figuring out answers to questions.

The Unravelling retreat can help in providing a new direction – even though the frustrations of the past month, as well as the sense of feeling inadequate, remain with you.

If people ask me what I plan to do next, I tell them I am still a local preacher. Then I think of all the trials that Paul experienced and how his faith remained throughout. From his letter to the Corinthians, there is a verse that gives me hope for the future: “For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has—not according to what one does not have” (2 Cor. 8:12).

**M**aking the decision to candidate for ministry is one of the scariest things that you can do – but it is a call that you cannot ignore. You can’t watch the news, or even *X-Factor* or *Call the Midwife*, without seeing and hearing more than the story being told to you. Having a calling is all-consuming – you almost need to remind yourself that you still have a ‘day job’, and the family to feed!

Your call, and conviction of that call, grows stronger and if you are lucky that conviction is confirmed at Circuit and then District, and then finally, Connexion. But for some, that just isn’t the case.

You are left in a wasteland, surrounded by questions, with no answers in sight. And whilst you just want to run away from it all you can’t, because you are a worship leader or local preacher. You are a lay worker and still have that outreach to do. You are a chaplain with visits planned. You still have to continue like nothing has changed.

Put simply, knowing that you have a call to ordained ministry and it not being fulfilled is devastating.

**I** teach people with learning disabilities in a college but I felt that God was calling me to do more. I really wasn’t sure what I was being called to and resisted what I felt was my calling until I could resist no longer.

On reflection, the candidating process was an inspirational experience although I didn’t feel this way at the time. All the

way through the process I felt sure that if ordained ministry was not to be my calling then God would have another plan for me.

The experience of candidating has left me feeling obviously disappointed but really I feel encouraged. I have tested my calling. God has other plans for me and as God works in a mysterious way they will be revealed.

## Vocation

*All candidates for the ministry need love and support. They are brave enough to lean right out and dare to be vulnerable. Those whose calling is discerned to lie elsewhere deserve our respect and kindness.*

*How prepared are you to risk being vulnerable for God?*



# Christian vocation to social justice

**Rachel Lampard (left) and Lucy Zwolinska (below) both work for the Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT), Rachel as Team Leader and Lucy as Policy and Engagement Officer. Here they reflect on why following Jesus calls them both to seek peace and justice**

**Lucy:** When did you first start making the link between faith and politics?

**Rachel:** As a child it was impossible to sit around the Lampard family dinner table without talking about religion and current affairs! I was taken to vote from the age of five – and I’ve carried on the tradition with my own children.

**Lucy:** I first got excited about politics when I was living in Glasgow during the 2014 Scottish Referendum. I was at university and the atmosphere was electric. I witnessed really healthy and informed debate, as well as very high emotions. There was a mock election on campus, lots of art installations and theatre exploring the issues. There was a real sense that every person’s vote mattered.

**Rachel:** A key moment for me was as a teenager when I saw the explosion in rough sleeping – something we’re seeing again at the moment – and I went on to work in a day centre run by my church. It drew me towards two truths. Firstly, those who are on the street were suffering an immense injustice that was both deeply personal and deeply political. Secondly, it showed me that if Christians are called to follow a God of justice, then we need to act and pray for a world without these injustices. How about you? How did you make that link?

**Lucy:** Well, I went on to do youth work for Christian Aid, mostly around tackling climate change. Here I learnt that to make real structural change you have to convince those in power to join you.

**Rachel:** So it was an injustice that opened it up for us both – homelessness for me, and climate change for you.

**Lucy:** And I hear from people throughout our churches that they find the same: seeing people coming to foodbanks, and asking why they are hungry; welcoming refugees fleeing conflict and







*In those hard places we are changed ourselves*

poverty and asking what is happening to the hundreds of thousands of others. Having your eyes opened to the pain of the world hurts and it's sometimes tempting to shut them again.

**Rachel:** Isn't it? I certainly at times feel overwhelmed. We can't possibly deal with all the issues that our world struggles with. But at the core I hold on to the fact that we are a beloved people responding to God's love and worshipping a God of justice.

**Lucy:** Yes! I'm proud and inspired to be part of a Church where serving the most vulnerable and challenging injustice is recognised as part of Our Calling. Responding to God's love means loving all those who are made in God's image, and when you love someone you can't sit by and accept their oppression.

**Rachel:** What I like about Our Calling is

that it doesn't divide our Christian life into boxes. Through our worship of a God of justice we're opening ourselves up to living a holier life. So serving people and challenging the injustices we see is a result.

**Lucy:** When I tell people who aren't Christians that I'm employed by the Methodist Church to call for peace and justice in the public sphere it often elicits surprise and then a barrage of questions about the how and the why. The how is complicated, but the why is easy – Jesus' love is for everyone!

**Rachel:** Challenging injustice isn't always easy but when people see the Church speaking up for the most vulnerable perhaps they see something of God's love for them. And in those hard places we are changed ourselves, aren't we?

**Lucy:** I'm certainly being changed all the time. My prayer is that Christians everywhere continue to be changed on a personal level, and to effect change in our nations, so that we might be part of that foretaste of the kingdom of God.

[www.jointpublicissues.org.uk](http://www.jointpublicissues.org.uk)

  
Vocation

*What are the issues in the world today that make you feel upset, angry or confused?*

*Lots of churches are 'serving' those in need. What do you think are the injustices behind that need?*

*Justice is a common thread through the Bible. How can we reflect on this in our worship and discipleship?*

*Pope Francis says he wants "a poor church for the poor". What might that mean where you are?*

**The vocation of the Methodist Church:  
a reflection from the Revd Michaela  
Youngson and Bala Gnanapragasm, President  
and Vice-President of the Methodist  
Conference 2018/2019**



## Called to offer grace and hope



*To live out  
our faith be  
connected to  
one another  
through  
the Church*

**I**n the early 20th century in Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka, archeologists found a carving in granite rock. It takes the form of a 'Nestorian' cross – now understood by scholars to have been carved by Persian Christians who settled in that part of Sri Lanka about 500 years after Christ. The cross is formed of leaves that represent the tree of life and the end of each of the arms is a pearl shape – pearls being an



important symbol to Eastern Christians and a reminder of Jesus' parable of the pearl of great price.

To mark our year of office, we have commissioned some Anuradhapura crosses to be made in Sri Lanka by a wood worker.

On one side of the cross is the word "hope" and on the other "grace", representing our joint themes of Radical Grace and Transforming Hope. This interweaving of our recognition of God's grace to all people and the hope that lies in responding to it is at the heart of the Church's vocation.

For more than 2,000 years, Christians have been working out what it means to respond to the story of God's grace, seen most clearly in Jesus Christ. Most Christians have understood that the way to live out our faith is to be connected to one another through the Church, which forms the Body of Christ in the world.

Those Persian Christians who travelled to Sri Lanka 1,500 years ago and formed a community in a new place, represent



something of the nature of the Church, even as we find it today. They understood their vocation to be one of setting out – ready to journey to unknown places; to seek out those who needed to hear the story of God’s radical grace and to offer transformational hope to the world.

The Methodist Church today is called to move to new places, the world has changed around us and we have not always kept up: some of our churches feel isolated and left behind, out of touch and disconnected from the world around them.

God does not call us to be comfortable: the same God who invited Mary to bear a child, who called Joseph to take his family to Bethlehem and then to seek refuge in Egypt – that God continues to call us from places of comfort, to join in the adventure of faith.

**What might a faithful discipleship that responds to God’s radical grace and offers transforming hope look like?**

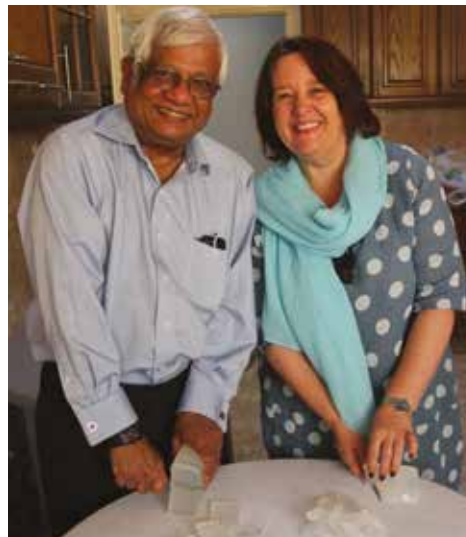
It might look like Baby Basics, at Sunbury Methodist Church in the Teddington Circuit, where people donate gifts for newborn babies and their mothers – a Moses basket, blankets, bibs, clothes, maternity pads and other really practical things that a new mum might need.

A card is included in the pack letting the recipient know that it is a gift, with love, from the local Methodist church. Midwives and health visitors let the project volunteers know when there is a mother in need of a pack and then deliver it to them, including to the local women’s prison. Hundreds of packs have been made up and given away and other Baby Basic projects are set up across the UK. For more details see [baby-basics.org.uk](http://baby-basics.org.uk)


It might look like the work that All We Can is doing with partners to support Syrian Refugees in Jordan. We visited women in a food cooperative in Irbid, northern Jordan, and learnt how Syrian and Jordanian women were working together, cooking and marketing food (photos below and above). It is particularly difficult for women to get work permits because they fulfill roles that are not regarded as priority. The cooperative allows them to earn a living, be more secure in their housing, educate and feed their children. For more details visit [www.allwecan.org.uk](http://www.allwecan.org.uk)

The Methodist Church is called to respond to the free gift of God’s grace and to offer transforming hope to all people, particularly those who live in poverty and on the very margins of life. That vocation is risky! It leaves us vulnerable and takes us to places we might not choose to go – but it is God’s calling for us to obey and as we respond God will bless.

**Follow the President and Vice-President during their year on Facebook**



*The Methodist Church today is called to move to new places*

  
**Vocation**

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*What might offering grace and hope look like where you are?*



# Vocation for women

**In considering her year serving the Church, Ex-President the Revd Loraine N Mellor calls women to step forward in using their God-given gifts to stand for leadership and bring change to the Church**

***Attitudes towards women have changed but we could do much more***

**I**t was July 2016, a warm sunny Wednesday morning of the Conference, meeting in Methodist Central Hall Westminster. The announcement had been made and I was rushed away to have photographs taken. As I was coming downstairs a past president's wife offering her congratulations said "so you have discovered it starts right now."

#### **Priority to listen**

I very quickly learned after my nomination that the Presidency was not my presidency but the Church's and I recognised what a huge privilege it was to serve the Methodist Church in this way.

I am not a Methodist by birth but by conviction: I care passionately about it and so after receiving the Designation I decided that a focus in my year would be to speak the truth; not to hide anything about our situation; to challenge and to advocate for

the Church I love and cherish. A priority would be to listen to as many



*Methodist Central Hall Westminster*

voices as I could but especially women leaders, both lay and ordained.

I have not been let down by these conversations. I have learned so much from the Methodist people and met so many women, especially those whose lives reflect women of the Bible as they support, encourage and lead; who are evangelists and missionary disciples; who are today doing it their way.

### Woman to woman

Through the last two years I have been very conscious of standing in the wake of women of faith who have served the Church as Presidents and who have impacted my faith journey: none no more so than the Revd Kathleen Richardson – making history in 1992 as the very first woman President. As a Church we then had to wait until 2001 for Christina Le Moignan, then in 2010 Alison Tomlin, and in 2013 Ruth Gee.

History was made again this year when I passed on the role of the Presidency to Michaela Youngson – the very first time a woman has handed over to a woman and now, like buses, three come along at once, as in 2019 Barbara Glasson will assume the Presidency.

When I handed John Wesley's Field Bible and the Presidential Cross to Micky on 30 June 2018 it was a very significant moment for us both and for the Church: it had been a long time coming, and notably it happened in a year when we celebrated 100 years since the suffragette movement and the

significant contribution women have made to our country and the world.

Long before entering theological college to train for ministry in the 1980s, I was appointed to be a steward at my church. You might not think this requires a mention but it was important then, and is still, as in the 130-year history of that church I was the very first woman to hold that position.

In 2002 I became a superintendent – the very first woman superintendent in that circuit. In 2009 when moving to Nottingham and Derby to be the Chair I was the first woman, one of only five women chairs at that time. I rejoice that we are having three women presidents in a row but as a Church we cannot rest on this – it should not have taken us until 2018 to reach this milestone.

### Women in leadership

I thank God that over the last 30 years attitudes towards women in the Church have changed. But we could do much more. We need women in our churches, who are often the majority, to step forward and to use their God-given gifts so that when women are nominated to positions of leadership it's not the exception. This last year I have met gifted women who are being held back by an old model of mission, ministry and discipleship. This must change.

Let's resolve to be more brave, more bold, more gentle, more loving, more caring, more determined to work together to support and encourage each other – to change the Church so that we are being inclusive in all areas of church life.

## Vocation

*What positive steps can the Church take to rise to Loraine's challenge for us to be inclusive?*



*Kathleen Richardson:  
President in 1992*



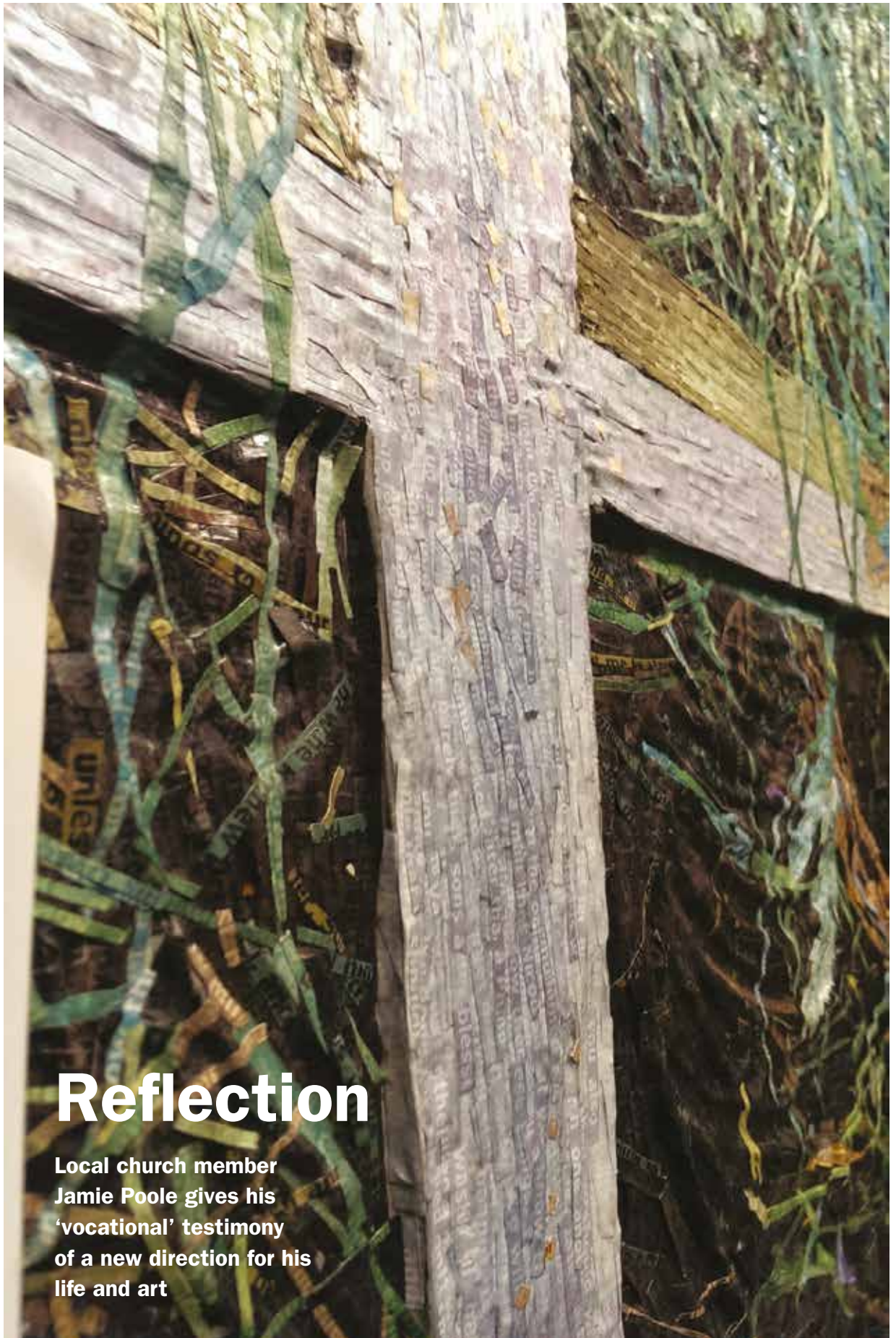
*Christina Le Moignan:  
President in 2001*



*Alison Tomlin:  
President in 2010*



*Ruth Gee:  
President in 2013*



# Reflection

Local church member  
Jamie Poole gives his  
'vocational' testimony  
of a new direction for his  
life and art

**A**t university, I began to hunger for artwork that expresses the power and force of life itself. I started to paint landscapes using rich colour and texture in my search for a spiritual connection with nature, the world and life itself. I felt I was moving in the right direction, but still missing something.

### Challenged faith

I had never considered taking a course to discuss Christianity until my lovely wife Sophie asked me to join her on an Alpha course in 2010. As a child I remember lying in bed talking to God about things and asking questions of God, but my family never went to church. This course challenged my preconceived ideas about faith. Sophie and I started going to Irthlingborough Methodist Church, where members welcomed us with open arms. I never looked back.

My new relationship with God began to lead me in a different direction in my creative work as an artist. This was tentative at first; however, when I had a full immersion Baptism in a birthing pool on 27 October 2013, things really started to change. I decided if I was going to declare my commitment as a disciple of Jesus, I wanted everyone one to see and feel the joy of the occasion. Being baptized in the Holy Spirit took my breath away.

### New art

To mark this major event in my life I knew that I needed to produce a new piece of artwork. It was a long time in the making: I attended many church services contemplating and praying for guidance. A painting that really inspired me was Salvador Dali's *Christ of Saint John of the Cross*, and I used this as a starting point.

In the Nene Valley near Irthlingborough are many lakes and I decided to use these as a setting to symbolise the water used in the act of Baptism, but also because they are local and reflect God's presence everywhere.

First, I made a wooden cross, and after photographing this near the water, I developed it into a full-sized image. Gridding the photo up into 4 cm squares, I then matched the grid on to the canvas. I was now ready to 'paint' the artwork with strips of colour-printed Bible passages and poems about Baptism.

These dissected words I then glued into



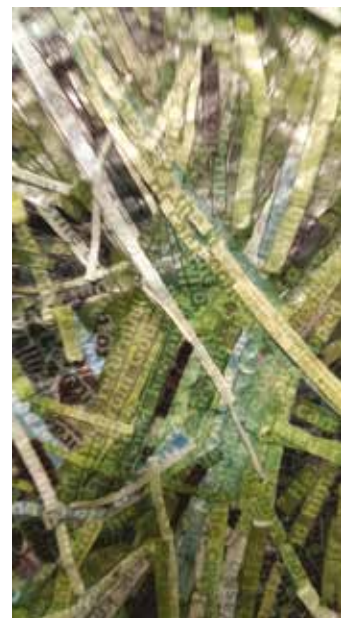
each square, one at a time, until the whole painting was completed. As I copied each square from the photograph, words and phrases were layered on to each other creating a dense textured surface revealing the image of the cross on the lake. Phrases and words, if you look carefully, can be read in the painting.

*Baptism* is an artwork that marked the beginning of a new direction in my life and work. It symbolises both my commitment to Jesus, the area we live in, and that I can use my talents to glorify God. Since then I have been making small Christian-themed paintings and prayer crosses, using the same technique based on individual Bible passages and poetry.

People from all over the world have bought my work on Etsy either for themselves or gifts for Baptism. One was even commissioned as a wedding present.

Jesus is a part of every moment of my life, I pray when travelling to work, when sharing my talents with others at workshops and art classes. Jesus is present in all that I do and it is my aim to do everything with him by my side.

[www.jamie-poole.com](http://www.jamie-poole.com)



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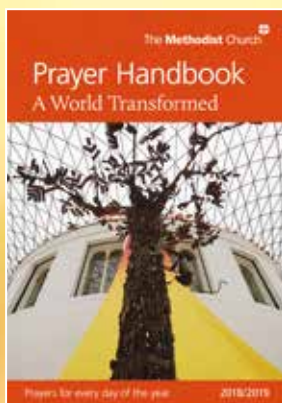
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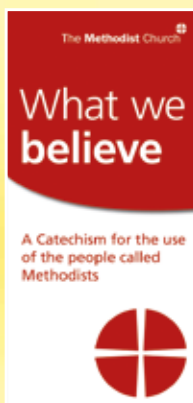
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