

APRIL 2004

1–2 Methodist Council meets

4 Palm Sunday

9 Good Friday

11 Easter Day

13–18 Easter People – Scarborough, Southport, Torquay

15 *Flame* May/June issue published

30–2 May. Sacred Space retreat for Methodist Youth and Children's Workers (Sheffield). Further info: Leslie Noon, Tel: 020 7467 5117

MAY 2004

9 Christian Aid Week begins

10–13 Fellowship of the Kingdom conference, 'Holiness in an Unholy World' (Derbyshire).

Further info: Revd Roy Queripel, Tel: 01773 822858

15 Connexional Link published

19 Disciple 2 training day, MPH Peterborough

20 Ascension Day

21 *Magnet* published, theme 'Yes, but...'

23 Aldersgate Sunday

30 Pentecost

JUNE 2004

4–6 World Mission Conference 'Latin America – Chaos, Cross, Celebration' (Swanwick).

Further info: Meg Bailey, Tel: 0161 432 3854
www.mwm.org.uk

6 Trinity Sunday

11–13 Women's Network annual conference 'Will you come and follow me'

Further info: 020 7467 5175

15 *Flame* July/August issue published

26–1 July. Methodist Conference, Loughborough

www.methodist.org.uk/diary

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A Message to Our Churches

Representatives of 61 Methodist, United and Uniting Churches around the world presented a message to the Methodist Conference 2003 at Llandudno. The full message can be accessed through the Methodist website (see below). The concluding paragraph says "We acknowledge how much we depend on one another as members of the universal body of Christ. We agree to strengthen our partnership links and to facilitate the sharing of theological insights, of information, of personnel and of material resources that will continue to be an expression of our participation in God's mission. We invite all our churches to join together in this commitment as partners in our common mission."

www.methodist.org.uk/information/worldchurch1.htm

Racial Justice

Beyond Duty is the latest report from the Racial Justice Office. It is both a personal and corporate challenge for Methodists and the Methodist Church. It offers specific recommendations for study and action, and also restates our biblical and theological basis for racial justice. The report reviews recent world events and their implications for racial justice, and provides proposals for action. *Beyond Duty* costs £1 and is available from the Racial Justice Office at Methodist Church House, Tel: 020 7467 5278.

racialjustice@methodistchurch.org.uk

The Methodist Church

Sharing News

From the General Secretary

Dear Friends

A challenge to think about*: Christians who want to get somewhere belong first to a small friendship group and only second to a worshipping congregation.

What counts as a useful small group?

1. A group must build trust. It needs to be a place where we can speak the truth – fearlessly but with sensitivity. If one member takes courage and talks about life's ups and downs, its joys and hurts, other members have to be good listeners, have to be supportive. A group must be a safe place. But it is not there to breed self-indulgence: it's pretty unlikely everyone will agree with us, or think us wise. Sometimes they will think we're pretty stupid. But they will not write us off. Or ridicule us. A good group exists to help us work through life's traumas and thrills, and to grow in maturity.

2. A group must be fair to all. You've experienced it, haven't you? One or two people do all the talking, and you feel you'll never be able to have your say. But everyone's voice counts. So there needs to be an agreement about everyone having a fair turn. And there needs to be a referee whose job is to monitor fair shares for all.

3. A group must give something to people outside the group. No group worth the name of Christian can be purely inward looking. The Christian life is about giving – giving time, giving attention, sharing our gifts, donating money. It's about action as well as talking; action which shows generosity and a passion for justice. So take a newspaper to your group; or a story about someone whose plight seriously challenges you.

4. A group must strengthen faith. So why not share what truly inspires us, or touches the heart, or purges the conscience? What moves us to prayer? It may be a book we've read, or a text in the Bible, or a film, a poem, a picture or a piece of music. Something that lifts the spirit, or makes us feel whole and free and glad to be alive – taken out of ourselves into something worshipful.

David G Deeks

*My last article produced lots of responses. Keep them coming! To generalsecretary@methodistchurch.org.uk or Revd David Deeks, Methodist Church House, 25 Marylebone Road, London NW1 5JR.

Vote to Combat Intolerance

The Methodist Council recommends that church members "reject parties that promote racist policies". In February, the Council passed the following resolution:

In the light of the notice of motion agreed by the Methodist Conference 2003, which "expressed concern at the recent high profile election victories of the British National Party in Burnley" the Methodist Council:

- Affirms that the Methodist Church is open to all in its worship, fellowship and service to the community. The policies and practices of those who promote racism and religious intolerance are incompatible with the Methodist Church's social witness, biblical teaching and our understanding of the love of God for all people.
- Encourages people to vote in local, national and European elections. While not endorsing any particular political party, we urge people not to vote for candidates who promote racist policies.
- Expects members of the Methodist Church to practise and promote racial justice and inclusion, and reject any political party that attempts to stir up racial and religious hatred and fear of asylum seekers.

Anthea Cox, Co-ordinating Secretary for Public Life and Social Justice, said "People working in local settings and facing the issues raised by the BNP have outlined the need for a statement from the Methodist Church. I hope that this resolution may be used to strengthen their work and achievements locally. I also hope that it will raise the importance of the issues so that all Methodists are encouraged to challenge racism and religious intolerance wherever these occur."

www.methodist.org.uk/news/index.htm

Safeguarding

The reason that the 'Safeguarding' policy evolved was because of a growing awareness that children need to be protected and nurtured in a safer environment, and that the Church was one place that should be safe. It is recognised as an important part of the Church's ministry among children that all people need proper standards of Safeguarding in the Church context.

Among the whole raft of Safeguarding measures (including training and awareness raising, policies for church and circuit, Safeguarding officers at circuit and district levels) the recruitment procedures for volunteers and the criminal records checks are simply one part of developing good practice. Nevertheless, it is an important task that we all need to see happens in ways that are legally appropriate and yet not too burdensome. These procedures are all about safer recruitment and safeguarding the vulnerable. The Methodist Church is committed to a gospel task in the nurture of children in a safe environment.

The Revd Pearl Luxon is Head of Child Protection and Safeguarding for the Methodist Church and is also responsible for running the Churches' Agency for Safeguarding. CAS was able to start processing applications for Criminal Records Bureau Disclosure for existing workers, volunteers, Ministers and Deacons from the beginning of 2004. It is an offence knowingly to employ someone who has committed a criminal offence against a child to work with children.

The *Safeguarding* handbook 2003 is available only from the Methodist Publishing House, £2.50 a copy (+P&P). Tel: 01733 325002 E-mail: sales@mph.org.uk

www.methodist.org.uk/information/safeguarding

www.churchsafe.org.uk

Urban Life and Faith

A new Commission on Urban Life and Faith has been set up to "promote a vision of urban life that analyses and addresses the realities of its delights, injustices and its needs". Chaired by Methodist minister the Reverend Baroness Kathleen Richardson, it will report at the end of 2005. It will spotlight work, especially by faith communities, that makes a difference in disadvantaged areas. The findings will help inform the Government's views on urban issues. The Government's own report *The State of Our Cities and Towns* is also due to be published in 2005. The Rt Hon Paul Boateng, Chief Secretary to the Treasury, who is also a Methodist local preacher, said "The role of faith groups in community regeneration and renewal is vital. The Government applauds this initiative on the 20th anniversary of 'Faith in the City'; my colleagues and I welcome the opportunities for effective partnership that it will undoubtedly offer."

www.methodist.org.uk/news/index.htm

Murray on the Move

Murray White, Media Relations Officer for the Methodist Church during the past three years and a member of the Communication Office team since 1997, left Methodist Church House at the end of February. We wish Murray and his wife Helen every blessing as they move to Tanzania to pursue development work and freelance writing.

METHODIST CONNEXIONS

This newsletter comes to your church via *Methodist Connexions*, the Connexional Link pack.

Talk to your church's Link person about other information sent to your church.

You can order any of these (in 10s) or the whole pack from: sales@mph.org.uk or Tel: 01733 325002

Achieving the Vision

Worldwide, the Methodist community has grown to over 39 million members, with many millions more on the community role. There are about 80 autonomous Methodist Churches in 135 countries. The body that links them all together is the World Methodist Council. President of Conference, the Revd Neil Richardson, says "What a mighty army for good this world community could and should be! But its collective witness is handicapped by lack of resources."

Under the title 'Achieving the Vision', the World Methodist Council recently launched an appeal to set up a \$20 million endowment to provide a regular flow of income (about \$1 million annually) to support its work. This represents an average contribution of about 35p from every member – not a large sum for Europeans and North Americans, but a considerable amount for Methodists in some parts of the world. Neil says "Our hope is that we can send a significant contribution from British Methodism."

The Methodist Council has agreed to an appeal to the whole Connexion on or around Aldersgate Sunday, 23 May 2004. Please support this appeal as generously as you are able. Donations may be gift aided through your local church before being sent, or through Methodist Church House if details are provided. Contributions should be made payable to 'The Methodist Church Fund' (c/o Ruby Beech at Methodist Church House, 25 Marylebone Road, London NW1 5JR) and clearly marked 'Achieving the Vision' appeal.