

Methodist Recorder article by Michael Pryke, Youth Rep to Methodist Council

Christmas 2020 – A Silent Night

I've seen people reacted to the Covid pandemic in a variety of ways. I've seen some people grab it by the scruff of the neck and make the best out of it. I've seen some really struggling with it. Covid has affected all of our lives in different ways, and I'd like to think that I was dealing with it in the first category, that I was trying to make the best of it but I must admit, at Christmas time. I found myself very much in the second category.

For a bit of context, I'm a youth worker and I live by myself about 170 miles from my family and where I would call home. Now I love my job – it's an incredible gift to journey alongside young people as they grow and flourish within themselves and in their faith too. I have an amazing team of volunteers around me of all age ranges and at different stages of their own faith journeys. Alongside this my minister, whom I have the pleasure of working with, and who is one of the many many unsung heroes of the Methodist Church.

You'd think all of this would mean that I'd be having a fairly easy time of things. Well, Covid struck and, like many groups, we found ourselves meeting online via Zoom. After many weeks of 'You're on mute' we've got to grips with virtual backgrounds, unstable internet connections and all the joys that meeting virtually brings with it.

Now Christmas was rolling around, and we were wondering how the heck to do a carol service online (turns out getting the young people to do their own version of the 12 days of Christmas is very hard but has some pleasing results) and I was planning on heading home. I'd not seen my family in about five months at this point and so I was looking forward to catching up with everyone (and the dog) over some good Christmas food.

And then it happens. Restrictions change and, just like that, all my plans (and the plans of millions of others) go up in a poof of smoke and, for the first time in 21 years, I won't be at home for Christmas. Cue Michael not being in the best mood and finding myself in the second group, struggling with why this is happening, why can't I go home, wishing that this had never happened and that I was tucked up at home eating one of Nana's mince pies. Covid sucks.

Resigning myself to fate, I prepared for a Christmas alone. This meant I had to start re-supplying my fridge, having spent the last week making sure it's empty. It meant having to

do Zooms with a happy face on and pretending that all was okay in the world. However, one of the many things I love about the Methodist Church is that it never ceases to be full of kindness.

Earlier I mentioned my minister, she's called Jill. Now Jill has a husband, two kids and her father living with her at the moment, as well as one dog and three cats. It's quite a houseful! On top of all that, like many ministers, Jill is working out how to steer her churches through the pandemic. At one-point Jill was preaching six times a week, but she does this all without complaint as she believes this is a small part of bringing about the Kingdom. On top of all this she decided to take me under her wing for Christmas and I became an honorary member of her family and got to spend my Christmas day with someone rather than by myself.

The Church at times can be a dark and lonely place, especially for those of us who work for it, but there are moments of outstanding light that remind you why you do this job. God is in all of us, God hasn't just upped and left because there's a pandemic going on. Much like us God is just doing things a little differently at the moment.

One day we will be back in our churches, singing our praises to heaven, but for now spare a thought for those ministers of the church, tirelessly working away behind the scenes trying to make sure everyone is happy and that churches continue to worship even during Covid. Remember that God came down to earth at Christmas to save us all and to bring a little bit of kindness into the world.