



# The Methodist Church

## Children, Youth and Family

### **Methodist Recorder article by Mary Sharples, Social Justice Rep**

I have a strange relationship with anxiety. Like a lot of young people, it's something I experience on a daily basis in varying degrees – at best, it's sweating a bit at the prospect of walking into a lecture a couple of minutes late and at worst, it's constant overthinking that leaves me drained and exhausted from carrying so much tension in my body.

'But aren't you a drama student?' people often say, 'I didn't think you'd get nervous!' To a certain extent, those people wouldn't be completely wrong. For instance, I don't get nervous addressing large groups, I can handle pre-show jitters pretty well when I need to and I didn't panic when, at the last minute, I was roped into leading worship for 300+ children and young people at 3Generate. But being an extrovert with a love for Alan Bennett doesn't render you immune to anxiety and mental health doesn't discriminate based on your chosen university degree.

What I've found to be a particular trigger for my anxiety is the uncertainty of the unknown and, with this in mind, it's no surprise that coexisting with a pandemic is proving a struggle. It transpires that mental health doesn't care about your religious stance, either. So, where does that leave me as a person of faith? As Christians we're called to place our trust in the Lord, to navigate life with childlike faith. But trusting in God is hard. It's really hard. And not only is it hard, but to be prescribed Trusting-in-God as an antidote to anxiety is also incredibly unhelpful. I don't know who needs to hear it, but God does not cancel out anxiety and living with anxiety does not mean your faith is any less strong or valid.

A couple of weeks ago I was curled up in a ball on the sofa of my student house, crippled by such anxiety from reading one too many articles about COVID-19 that I was pretty much unable to function. When my housemate came downstairs, she didn't sit and tell me everything was going to be okay. She's a student nurse who'd been working at Manchester Royal Infirmary all week and she knew first-hand that everything was not okay. We both did. Instead, she gave me a long hug, made me a cup of tea and sat and binge-watched series 5 of *Merlin* with me for the rest of the day. She sat with me and my anxiety all day and, by her simply being there, I found comfort.

A slightly altered version of the Lord's Prayer, used by the Iona Community, asks God to save us *in*, rather than *from*, times of trial, which I think serves as a reminder that believing in God isn't a failsafe guarantee that, through faith, things will always be okay. It's the knowledge that when things are not okay, not even in the slightest - God is with us throughout, as our comforter and friend. In other words, and to quote

Sister Julienne from Call the Midwife, “God isn’t in the event. [God] is in the response to the event and in the love that is shown and the care that is given”.

In such scary and uncertain times, there are people experiencing anxiety in all corners of the world and, because this looks and feels different for everyone, there is no single piece of advice that acts as a cure. I can only tell you what works for me. Recently that has been reminding myself of Matthew 28:20 – Jesus tells his disciples that “I will be with you always, to the very end of the age”. He makes an eternal commitment to being there with us as a friend; in our laughter, joy, tears, fears and anxieties.

So yes, we are called to trust in God, but we are also called to live like Christ and, whilst we cannot cure anxiety, we *can* make a renewed commitment to being someone in whom others might find comfort, to being someone in whom the presence of God might reveal itself. So be patient, open and kind – with others and with yourself, and know that God is with you always, even until the very end of the age.