

metconnexion

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FEATURING

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The Glorious Church



EDITORIAL

Marian Izzard

Many apologies for this delayed issue of MET Connexion. Changes within the team during the spring necessitated a slight reshuffle with the production of the magazine. This edition has been a collaborative effort between David Hull and myself. Thank you for your patience and understanding!

We are only a small team, with no central office as such, each of us working from home (myself part-time and Derek now full time) and others fitting in MET responsibilities in their spare time! The blessing of this digital age enables us to communicate frequently by email, phone and skype!

It is wonderful that Derek Balsdon our Development Worker is now working full-time with us (as of 1 September). He has been on a steep learning curve during this year of part-time work with us and has acquired many new skills with the website as well as getting his head around the wide ranging remit of the role. We are blessed to have him as part of the team.

The theme for this edition is The Glorious Church - a vision which David Hull, the Chair unpacks in his article. He speaks of a church filled with the glory and presence of God; a church where people are changed and transformed into the likeness of Jesus and a church that recovers its confidence in the gospel, its existence, and its purpose.

Our other articles reflect this theme in their different ways: Carolyn Lawrence (Vice President Designate for the Methodist Conference) speaks how God moves in mysterious ways and how opportunities come when we least expect them. Ben Juliano shares that one of the keys to revival is simply by following God's call on our lives. Ali Johnson shares how the impact of the digital world has revolutionized our lives and how it can help us as a church in sharing the good news with others. Chris Ritter from the United Methodist Church of America shares how the Glorious Church can become fractured as United Methodists face an uncertain future. Ken Robinson shares interesting insights about renewal in the Irish Methodist Church. Aimee Nott from one of MET's partner organizations All We Can explores the unique way the church is called to engage with global development. Danny Webster, from the Evangelical Alliance explores how the government can help Christians in the UK to stand with the persecuted church.

As most of you are aware, The Methodist Church in the UK is proposing to change the definition of marriage at the 2020 Conference. MET has provided the Remaining Faithful resources to facilitate and enable discussion on these issues that will be taking place in local churches, circuits and synods. Please do look at the centrefold of this magazine which gives the full range of resources, regional gatherings and a national event: Liverpool 200 next May.

We are most grateful for your prayerful support at this challenging time.

The Editor welcomes articles and Good News stories for future issues. The theme for the Spring edition will be The Challenge of Culture for Mission and Ministry. The deadline for submission is 1 March, but please do let the editor know well in advance if you would like to submit an article for a specific issue, to ensure space is reserved, as the Editor commissions articles at the beginning of the process. To submit or to ask permission to reproduce anything, please email: editor@methodistevangelicals.org.uk

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THE GLORIOUS CHURCH

David Hull

If you were to choose one word to describe the Church, which would it be? I would choose the word 'glorious'. I wonder if that describes your experience of the Church.

The concept of glory can help us plot a route through the whole Bible. From beginning to end, the people of God are on a journey. It's a journey towards the Glory. You can always tell where they are on this journey, depending on where they are in relation to the Glory. Sometimes they are very close to the Glory and sometimes they are a long way away.

There seems to be a growing consensus amongst biblical scholars that the very first readers of the creation accounts of the book of Genesis would have seen in them all sorts of symbolism related to temples. The suggestion is that, in creating the world, God was building a temple - the ultimate temple in which his presence would dwell. At the heart of this temple, he made an inner sanctuary, a holy of holies, called the Garden of Eden, in which human beings could encounter and enjoy the very presence of God himself.

Elsewhere in the Bible, the presence of God is referred to as 'the Glory' ('Shekinah' in Hebrew). The Fall tells the story of how human beings were shut out from the presence of God after sin entered the world and really the rest of the Bible tells the story of God's work to make it possible for us

to dwell in his presence again, to enter into, encounter and enjoy his glory. As the ancient Hebrews wandered in the wilderness following their escape from Egypt, God commanded Moses to make a tabernacle which they would carry around with them as the place where God's glory would dwell in their midst. There was a wonderful moment when Moses set up the tabernacle just as God had commanded him 'and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle'; he could not even enter because the tabernacle was so filled with the Lord's glory (Exodus 40:34-35).

It was this glory that guided them on their journey. If the cloud of glory rose up from the tabernacle and moved on, they broke camp and followed it until it came to rest, and there they stayed until it moved on again - a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. It was now possible, at least for one person, to enter again into the glory of the presence of God. Moses would go into the tabernacle and speak with God face to face as a man would speak to his friend. It was such a powerful glorious experience that, when he came out, Moses' face was so radiant with glory that the people could not bear to look at him and he had to wear a veil.

Their journey finally came to an end as they reached the Promised Land. One day, King David realised that, although he was living in a grand palace, God's presence was still dwelling in the tabernacle, a meagre tent. He set his

heart on building a temple for the Lord, though in the end it was to be his son, King Solomon, who would build it. Again, there's a wonderful description of the day the building of the temple was finally completed and Solomon dedicated it:

'When Solomon had ended his prayer, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the Lord filled the temple. The priests could not enter the house of the Lord, because the glory of the Lord filled the Lord's house. When all the people of Israel saw the fire come down and the glory of the Lord on the temple, they bowed down on the pavement with their faces to the ground, and worshipped and gave thanks to the Lord, saying, "For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever"' (2 Chronicles 7:1-3).

The journey had brought them very close to the glory again. They may not all have been able to enter it, as they would have liked to have done and as had been the case in the good old days of the Garden of Eden, but at least God was there, in all his glory, dwelling in their midst, and at least the priests could enter in as their representatives.

However, God warned them that, if they were disobedient to him, his glory would depart and they would be carried off into exile, which is exactly what happened. Ezekiel, the prophet, saw what was really going on in a terrifying vision: 'the glory of the Lord went out from the threshold

of the [temple] and stopped over the cherubim. The cherubim lifted up their wings and rose up from the earth' (Ezekiel 10:18-19a). The glory of the Lord's presence was carried away.

The glory had departed. They ended up a long way from home in exile. The temple was destroyed. They sat down by the waters of Babylon and wept, longing to return home and longing for the glory of the Lord's presence to return to them.

Eventually they did return in the days of Nehemiah and Ezra and they rebuilt the temple. There was another wonderful moment as they laid the foundation stone of the new temple. They sang the same songs as they had when King Solomon originally dedicated the first temple and there was the sound of great rejoicing, but there was another sound as well. The sound of rejoicing mingled with the sound of weeping. The older people wept because they could remember the first temple and this second temple was nothing like it, because the glory of the Lord's presence had not returned.

God did, however, promise that his presence would one day return and the rest of the Old Testament tells the story of those promises and the people's longing for their fulfilment. The promises were glorious - not only a temple, but the whole earth would one day be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord.



Many years they longed and waited, and still God promised, in the closing pages of the Old Testament: 'The Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight - indeed, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts' (Malachi 3:1).

They waited and waited. Then, one day, two parents climbed the steps of the temple, carrying their new-born baby in their arms. At the temple door, they were met by an old man named Simeon, who had been waiting just as everyone had been waiting. He took the baby in his arms and, praising God, said (in the familiar translation of the Book of Common Prayer):

Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace according to thy word. For mine eyes have seen thy salvation which thou has prepared in the sight of all people; to be a light to lighten the Gentiles and to be the Glory of thy people Israel. (Luke 2:29-32).

Welcoming that baby to the temple, Simeon described him as the glory of God's people Israel. Simeon saw it! The glory was returning. As John wrote in his gospel: 'The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory as of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth' (John 1:14).

God was finally dwelling in the midst of his people again. It looked nothing like they expected it to look. They had expected some kind of radiant cloud to fill the temple, yet now the glory was outside the building, amongst the people.

Jesus' first disciples recognised in him what they had all been desperately waiting and longing for: God had returned to his people, to reign as their King once more. In Jesus they encountered the glorious presence of God in their midst and they were surrounded by the signs of his presence: the poor were receiving good news, those held captive were set free, the blind saw, the deaf heard, the lame walked, the dead were raised.

His death and resurrection and ascension were central to it all. His shameful hanging on the cross was his supreme moment of glory. It was a glory that broke out from the darkness of the tomb and ascended to the highest place over all creation.

Then another remarkable event took place. On the Day of Pentecost, God poured out his Holy Spirit upon the Church, just as Jesus promised he would. Those very same disciples suddenly realised that they were experiencing the very same glorious presence of God within their new Spirit-filled community, just as they had done in Jesus. Through that new Spirit-filled community, Jesus was continuing his ministry on earth. Empowered by the Spirit, those followers of Jesus discovered that they were able to do in the name of Jesus what Jesus himself had done.

That's what it means to be the Church! That's why the Church exists and that's what the Church exists for. That's why the Church is glorious. Yes, of course, we are all weak human beings who continue to fall short of the glory of God and therefore the Church at the moment will always be less than it could be, but the Church is a divine institution, established by God, as the place where his glory dwells, continuing the ministry of Jesus on earth.

What word would you use to describe the Church. I would choose the word 'Glorious'!

Amazingly, that's also what it means to be a Christian. 'Do you not know,' wrote the Apostle Paul, 'that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit?' (1 Corinthians 6:19). You were created for glory too, to be a temple in which God's glorious presence dwells. I wonder if 'glorious' would be the word which would come to mind if you were to think about the fellow Christians you know. Perhaps it should be!

The Revd David A. Hull is Chair of Methodist Evangelicals Together.





FROM THE DEVELOPMENT WORKER

Derek Balsdon

By the time you read this I will have been in post for a year. I am enjoying this new ministry, and I am pleased now to be full-time with MET. It has been a steep learning curve, and there is still lots more to discover about this exciting ministry. We have recently moved into our own house in Congleton; we have stayed within the same town mainly so that Hilary and Jonathan can continue being part of Wellspring Methodist Church.

It has been great to attend the Bible teaching days at Gracious Street, Knaresborough, The King's Cross Church, Doncaster, and Digging for Treasure at Methodist Central Hall Westminster. These have all been good occasions for feeding upon God's Word. It has also been a privilege to attend Firefest, ECG, Cliff Festival and the Methodist Conference, and to meet many of you at the MET Receptions. At Cliff Festival I led a seminar entitled 'Spirit Empowered Mission', the seminar room was full of people, several of whom came forward to receive prayer to be filled afresh with God's Spirit.

It has been a privilege for Hilary and me to attend both the MET Prayer Conference at Willersley Castle and the South West Conference at Torquay. The theme at Willersley Castle was 'The Father Heart of God', and Rev Nick and Mrs Linda Holt helped us feel embraced in Father's deep love for us. Rev David Hull and family came for the Sunday morning Holy Communion service, during which I was commissioned for my role as Development Worker. David and others prayed over Hilary and me, especially for a fresh anointing

of God's Spirit; this was a very special experience. In Torquay Rev David Coffey gave excellent teaching on the theme of 'Mentored by Jesus,' encouraging us to walk more closely with Jesus day by day. On the Sunday, I preached at Goodrington Methodist Church in the morning, and at Plymouth Central Hall in the evening, with a few people responding to God and for prayer ministry at both services. On the Monday Hilary and I went to Wesley's Cottage on the edge of Bodmin Moor, where we shared with a group of local people about 'Hearing God's Voice'. In my MET role, I have also attended 'Navigating Change' and 'Charisma', a Charismatic and Pentecostal Church Leaders' Conference; both have been challenging and renewing.

Preaching and speaking appointments have also taken me to Grimsby, Wolverhampton, Birmingham, Stoke-on-Trent, Liverpool and Leeds. At the request of the Grimsby Leaders of Worship and Preachers meeting I shared some teaching about using different Gifts of the Spirit within Sunday worship, and then we had a time of worship and asked the Holy Spirit to minister to us. I nervously wondered whether or not anything would happen, and then some prophetic words were shared and a message in tongues was sung and then interpreted. God met with us in a meaningful way to build up the Body of Christ. In the Gornal and Sedgley Circuit, as well as preaching on Sundays, I also led a seminar on 'The Biblical Perspective of Marriage'. I have some space in my diary, so if you would like me to come to your church or circuit for

preaching and speaking engagements, please contact me.

Some of my work is desk-based, and this has included helping to put together our marriage leaflet 'Remaining Faithful', and then posting copies out across the Connexion. If you would like more copies for your fellowship group, church or circuit, please get in contact with me. I have also been heavily involved with getting four new MET books published; 'Looking at the Cross Through an Old Testament Lens' by Paul Smith, 'The Message of the Cross Today' in our Digging For Treasure series, 'Colossians: Hope in Desperate Times' by Kevin Jones and 'Embracing Grace' by G Howard Mellor. All of our books are available through our website. Learning how to put things on and off our website has been another challenge! I am in the process of adding 500 audio messages from past events onto our website, and these can be accessed through the 'Resources' tab; some have already been downloaded over 100 times!

Over the past few months I have had numerous pastoral conversations, phone calls and emails concerning deep worries over the direction of travel that Methodism appears to be moving along regarding marriage and relationships. Part of my MET role includes offering pastoral support and encouragement, so you are welcome to contact me. At the Methodist Conference MET hosted a number of events, including a packed fringe evening during which we heard excellent presentations on Remaining Faithful from a Church Perspective, an Individual Perspective and a Cultural Perspective.

'Equipping for Ministry' is a weekend in March which MET runs for students and those within their first 5 years of ministry as Presbyters and Deacons. This year I provided the main content, about how forgiveness helps us stay fresh and serve well. We are grateful to Swan Bank Methodist Church, Stoke-on-Trent, for accommodating this event.

Being able to join in with the wonderful work that God is doing is a great privilege. We value your prayers for us, and appreciate your donations for the work of MET, and as I pray for the work of MET, I am praying for each of you and for your churches.

Yours in Christ Jesus,
Derek Balsdon



GOD MOVES IN MYSTERIOUS WAYS!

Carolyn Lawrence

CAROLYN LAWRENCE, VICE PRESIDENT DESIGNATE FOR THE METHODIST CONFERENCE 2020-2021, SHARES HOW GOD OPENED THE DOOR TO THIS ROLE AND SOME OF HER HOPES FOR THE METHODIST CHURCH IN THE COMING YEAR.

Life with Jesus is certainly an exciting roller-coaster of a ride! You just never know what is around the corner! When I went to the Methodist Conference at the end of June my job was to help look after our overseas guests and to coordinate the Global Relationships Fringe event. Little did I know that by the end of the week I'd have been elected as the next Vice President of Conference!

HOW DID I END UP HERE?

As with all the voluntary roles I have held in the Methodist Church in recent years, the role of Vice President of Conference was not something for which I was searching or pushing, but have increasingly felt that it was a call God had laid on my heart over the past couple of years. I had told God that I was willing to serve in this way if by doing so it would bring glory to Jesus. With a lot of encouragement from many people, I allowed my name to go forward for nomination at the Conference of 2018, but I was not elected and was very content to dodge the bullet, realising that it must mean God had another

direction for my life. I have been busy working in the Global Relationships team of the Methodist Church in London and had pushed the thought of Vice President to one side, thinking the call may be fulfilled in a future year.

The thought of offering for VP again, hadn't occurred to me but Mark and I agreed that whilst I wouldn't push myself forward, if someone asked me to stand again I would take that as a sign from God and test the call. As it turned out, at least 10 different people asked me if I would stand again so about 4 hours before the deadline for nominations, my form went in the box!

When I received the call to let me know I had been elected, I kept thinking they had made a mistake and that they would call me back later to apologise! I couldn't believe that God had chosen me for this awesome and wonderful task. However, it seems that God must have a plan in this for me and the church so it is with a sense of excitement and terror that I now find myself preparing for what lies ahead. Like Esther, I believe that God has called me to this task 'for such a time as this' and will be relying on the prayerful support of others as I prepare to be obedient to whatever God calls me to say and do.

It is always so amazing to see how God works out the details of things like this - my time in Global Relationships ended in August, and if it hadn't, I could not have considered allowing my name to



He worked out all those details in just the right way to fulfil his plans and purposes as he so often does in large and small ways as we walk in obedience to his will and lay our lives at his feet.'



go forward, but if I hadn't had the job, I wouldn't even have been at conference this year! He worked out all those details in just the right way to fulfil his plans and purposes as he so often does in large and small ways as we walk in obedience to his will and lay our lives at his feet.

HOPES AND DREAMS FOR THE YEAR AHEAD

Along with Richard Teal, the President designate, we have been asked to think about a theme for our presidential year. We are still fine-tuning this, but as I have been thinking and praying about the

year ahead with all its challenges, I really believe that God doesn't want me to be side-lined by all the issues facing the church but to really keep my eyes fixed on Jesus and aim to glorify him as much as possible. As Jesus said, 'Seek first the Kingdom of God and all these things will be added to you as well.' I believe that we need to keep our focus on those things that are of eternal value and seek a fresh anointing of the Holy Spirit for this time. I believe God still has a good plan for the Methodist Church and am daring to believe that revival and renewal are possible - both for individuals within the church and for us corporately.



During the year ahead, I hope to look at those churches, large and small, that are defying the trend and growing, both here and overseas, and find out what the key features of those churches might be. I hope that during my year of office I will have the opportunity to encourage people in their discipleship and maybe to challenge some of the things that hinder spiritual growth and maturity. I have a real passion for reaching out to those who don't yet know Jesus and also, as a teacher, to help people grow and develop in their faith through finding freedom in Christ from all the baggage of the past, through prayer, study of the bible and through being constantly filled with the power of the Holy Spirit.

I pray that over the coming years there will be people who come to know Jesus for the first time, people renewed and encouraged in their faith, people receiving healing and wholeness and being filled with the power of the Holy Spirit so that they become disciple-making disciples. I also long to see individuals who have been transformed by Jesus, going on to transform their communities, villages, towns and cities and even the world! I know I am only one person with a vision but thankfully it doesn't depend on me and we have a big God who can do more than all we hope or imagine!

I also have a heart for the Global church and love engaging with our sisters and brothers around the world and learning from their cultures and expressions of faith as well as their unswerving reliance on God and his word.

As I have travelled and ministered across different countries and cultures I

have been humbled and challenged by the way that people who materially have little or nothing, live with a dependence on God moment by moment that we in our materialistic culture know nothing of. One of the most awesome experiences I have had was on a recent mission trip to Kenya where I had the great privilege of preaching to women in a prison on the parable of the prodigal son. These women had nothing in the world's eyes and were at the bottom of the heap in their country and culture and yet I saw a vibrancy of worship and the joy of the Holy Spirit welling up in them in a way I have not seen anywhere else. They were aware of their total dependence on Jesus for everything - something we have lost but I long for us to regain in this nation.

I believe that if we want to see renewal in our lives and churches then it's not rocket science. I believe that we need to get back to the simple basics - get on our knees before God in prayer - repent of our arrogance, thinking we know the best way to grow the church and commit to total dependence on Jesus, without whose help we can do nothing. We need to commit to standing on God's word and ask him for a fresh infilling of the Holy Spirit. And we need to recognise that the church belongs to Jesus - he has said, 'I will build my church' and it is so exciting to see what he can do with an individual or fellowship when they are sold out for him and his glory.

A FINAL REQUEST

I have had so many words of encouragement from people all over the country and promises of prayer support. I realise that I can't fulfil all that this calling will demand of me and my family without the support of the many

prayer warriors up and down this land and across the world. I especially realise that as I step out in obedience to Jesus I am, and will continue to be, engaging in spiritual warfare and as Esther pleaded with those she knew to stand with her in prayer and fasting, I implore those of you who have the gift of intercession to stand with me and cover Mark and myself during these coming years. I also look forward to meeting some of you as I travel around.

Thank you for standing with me in this calling. The best truly is yet to come!

Carolyn Lawrence has a background in Primary education as a teacher and then as an educational Mission Partner with the MCCA in Guyana, South America. Since returning to the UK she has worked in a voluntary capacity within the Methodist Church both locally as a preacher and leader, and nationally in many roles, including the British Area Officer for the 'World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women' and more recently worked as part of the Global Relationships team of the Methodist Church. Carolyn is married to Mark, who is a Minister in the Plymouth and Devonport Circuit.





THE KEY TO REVIVAL

Ben Juliano

BEN JULIANO BELIEVES THE KEY TO REVIVAL IS FOLLOWING GOD'S LEAD.

I was recently introduced to the term 'Crisis PR' while watching the Netflix documentary 'The Great Hack'. Whenever companies experience some great scandal or disaster, they can hire a crisis public relations firm to reinvent their image and get them back on track. If a company handles a crisis effectively, they can often come out of it stronger than was possible before. It suddenly occurred to me that this is a pretty good analogy for the history of the Church. It is often the crises of the Church that God uses to bring about fundamental change, taking us back to basics, resulting in the explosive growth of His Church and the transformation of society. It is at these times that God's people can truly be referred to as the Glorious Church.

This was certainly the case for John Wesley - when he began his ministry the Anglican Church was in complete disorder. Many Anglican clergy had lapsed into deism - belief in a detached and distant God. Churches were empty and gin houses were full, with vulnerable women and children left to die on the streets. But it was into this tragic situation that God brought John Wesley. Under his leadership an entire nation would be brought back not just to churches, but into a relationship with the living God.

I believe that we stand at a similar point in history and that radical change

is necessary if the people called Methodists are to play a defining role in the renewal movement which has already begun and in which I am fortunate to have played a small part. It is my hope that my story as it is so far will serve, not just as entertainment but, in the words of Charles Wesley 'a trumpet voice on all the world to call'. A blueprint for what it might mean to reclaim vibrant Methodism for the 21st century. Not an institution, but a people united by a common vision and values intent on seeing God's kingdom come.

Here is my challenge to you: stop reading for a moment and tear this article out of the magazine. Then grab a pen, highlighter or however else you like to take notes. Expect God to speak through the details that jump out at you. When you're done, go back through your notes and ask God what he might be saying to you. Then figure out how you can get involved in what God is doing. He has a job for you to do as Methodism's 'sleeping giant' awakes.

My life did not begin normally. I was born three months early and as a result developed Cerebral Palsy. A disability caused by an injury to the brain which means that brain and body do not communicate correctly. It can take a variety of forms but in my case it meant that basic motor skills and walking did not come easily. It was a miracle that I survived birth at all and I didn't walk independently until I was two and a half and a whole host of other medical issues

made my childhood difficult. Wesley used to refer to himself as 'a brand plucked from the burning' and I like to think of myself that way too. I can see with hindsight that God's hand guided me from the moment I was born.

Having said that, it's only in the past few years that I have begun an intentional relationship with God and begun to walk in step with His Spirit. My dad is a Methodist minister in Florida and growing up I went through the motions of church but it wasn't until the unlikely arrival of MET's Chair David Hull in my small town that I encountered God for the first time. He had been invited by my dad to deliver a series of talks entitled Rekindling the Flame. On the first night he introduced himself as the Chair of Methodist Evangelicals Together and the Chaplain of John Wesley's school in Bath and announced that there were places available for American Methodists. As he preached on Jesus' words in Revelation 2:29: 'Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches,' I felt God say very clearly that I needed to go to Kingswood School to be his witness. It was a jarring experience and extraordinarily powerful.

When David, his family and my family spent time together that night, I told everyone what I felt God was saying. It seemed crazy, I was in my penultimate year of high school and the expense of sending me to boarding school in a foreign country with such a large family to support was unthinkable. I

never wavered in my belief that God's promise to send me to England would be fulfilled and by a miracle, generous donors stepped up to pay my way for the two years.

I arrived at Kingswood knowing I was supposed to be God's representative in a challenging environment but I was shocked to find that there were only five Christian students prepared to come to a meeting. I had no idea where to begin. But I was convicted that before I tried to evangelize someone else, I had to evangelize myself - develop a real relationship with God.

In my first weekend at school, David invited me to a meeting of district Methodists being held onsite where Gary Best, a former headmaster and prolific author of books on Methodism was speaking. He spoke about what it would take to revitalize Methodism and suggested the first step was to begin reading the Bible every day. To my horror an older gentleman sitting directly in front of me muttered 'That's a bit much.' Later, the same man remarked that he had more important things to do like playing golf.

It was at that moment that I came face to face with the deep challenges that lay ahead. Angered by his comments, I began to read my Bible. I had no reading plan or notes, I just read it. Even though it was a crude method, God honoured my obedience and every time I opened his Word before I went to bed, He met me powerfully. The air was charged with electricity.

It is my unwavering belief that if we want to see the renewal of the Methodist movement and to participate in the revival that is sweeping the nation, all we need to do is start simply. We need to read God's Word and expect Him to speak. Both personally to us as individuals but also collectively as the Church. There is nothing new about this approach. Wesley said of the Bible:

'I want to know one thing,—the way to heaven; how to land safe on that happy shore. God himself has condescended to teach me the way. For this very end He came from heaven. He hath written it down in a book. O give me that book! At any price, give me the book of God!'

Preface to Standard Sermons

And he expected to hear God and to see Him act on his behalf in the practical and supernatural, devoting three hours each morning to prayer.

Shortly after I began my reading and praying routine, my dad called to say that he had just discovered an evangelism tool called Alpha - a series of discussions designed to introduce people to the Christian faith. Each session began with a video and food, he thought it would be perfect for a school setting. I watched one of the videos and was speechless. They were like something I could watch in the cinema and clearly articulated what it meant to be a Christian but also was a safe space for people to explore faith. The man who pioneered Alpha, Nicky Gumbel of the Anglican HTB Church in London became an instant hero. David and I decided to launch an Alpha Course.

I gave a talk at one of Kingswood's Whole School Service introducing Alpha and invited people to join while David organised the first session. It was fantastic. 10 kids came to the first session but the second, third and fourth passed with no one showing up. I was devastated and figured I must be doing something horribly wrong. My dad suggested that I contact Nicky Gumbel to see if he could offer any encouragement. Even though part of me wanted to, deep down I thought he was crazy. The vicar of a 5,000-strong Anglican church, pioneer of the world's most effective evangelism tool tried by 27 million people, would surely not give me the time of day.

Still discouraged, I went on HTB's website, scrolled a bit and clicked on a random talk. I remember nothing about what Nicky and his wife Pippa said in the talk but I do remember that they read a letter they had received from somebody and I thought: 'Maybe they would reply if I sent them an email. I did, not expecting to hear anything back.

I will never forget walking home from school a few weeks later to find an e-mail from Nicky and Pippa Gumbel in my inbox. I think I cried. They were so encouraging and even sent a personal video encouraging people to come to Kingswood's Alpha. When my parents heard the news they decided they were going to fly to the UK in a few months' time so that we could attend HTB's Leadership Conference which is held every year in the

Royal Albert Hall and welcomes Christians from all over the world.

My parents and I managed to meet Nicky and Pippa the Sunday after the conference and I am proud to call them and their entire team my friends and mentors. Needless to say, I went back to Kingswood emboldened. HTB and churches like it, look a lot like Wesley's churches would look like had they been planted today. My friend Pete Wynter, a pastor at HTB has even called for a 'new generation of Wesleys'.

After achieving my A-Levels at Kingswood, I left the UK to attend university in Florida. It wasn't a few months after I settled back in that David called to say he was filming the WHOTWAY video series and needed a host. I couldn't resist the invitation. And in a ridiculous turn of events, just weeks later filming was complete. Nicky called me to ask if I would speak at the Leadership Conference to 5,000 people. I opened my talk with my dad, Nicky and David in the audience by saying I never could have imagined being asked to speak at the conference God used to transform my life. I guess He's brought me full circle and I can't wait to go around again.

Ben Juliano is currently a student at Florida Southern College in Lakeland, Florida where is studying International Business. He is featured in MET's WHOTWAY video series.



THE DIGITAL CHURCH IN 2019

Ali Johnson

ALI JOHNSON, THE DIGITAL EVANGELIST AT CLIFF, CONSIDERS THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL ON THE CHURCH IN 2019. THE FUTURE HAS ARRIVED, HAVE WE ALL GOT THE MESSAGE YET?

We all know it! During all our life-times the world has been transformed right in front of our fingertips. The biggest revolution since the industrial age, commonly referred to as the digital revolution. We now live in a different world.

Whether it is in the home with a house becoming a hotel with the explosion of Air BnB or every car becoming a taxi, with the eruption of Uber, the digital world has well and truly made a paradigm shift in all our lives. It has disrupted banking, high streets, education, industry and communication.

The numbers are a little bit mind-blowing. Here are some update stats on where we are today:



There are 5.11 billion unique mobile users in the world today, up 100 million (2 percent) in the past year.

3.26 billion people used social media on mobile devices in January 2019, with a growth of 297 million new users representing a year-on-year increase of more than 10 percent.

Stats taken from <https://wearesocial.com/global-digital-report-2019> true as of Jan 2019.



There are 4.39 billion internet users in 2019, an increase of 366 million (9 percent) versus January 2018.

The digital revolution is without a doubt the most significant event in information dissemination since Gutenberg's printing press and arguably marks a much bigger shift in human communication. To understand the impact the digital revolution has had let's take a look at Taxis in New York. In 2012 it costs \$1m to buy a medallion. Few taxi drivers owned theirs; most leased them, paying around \$100 for one 12-hour shift.

The limited number of medallions issued by the city made each one highly valuable; individual medallion sale prices went from \$50,000 in the late 1970s to over \$1m by 2014.

(<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/oct/20/new-york-yellow-cab-taxi-medallion-value-cost>)



For taxi drivers, owning a medallion meant you had made it. Homes would be bought. Dream holidays would be taken. Children would be sent to universities. This was a life defining moment.

Then it all changed.

Uber and Lift arrived on the scene. Suddenly anyone with a car became competition. The medallion had no value. No one wanted it, drivers went into debt and the world changed for them. That is the world in which we now find ourselves. A digital revolution has taken hold and we are now living with the consequences.

The Church has lived through many revolutions and adapted to them but it might be good for us to look at the where we are in terms of the Methodist Church and the digital world. A piece of research was undertaken in the Yorkshire North & East Methodist District by Elliot Crippen, the Digital Communications Enabler. The research showed that across the 216 churches 8,223 members and 9,218 attendees, there were 90 websites and 94 Social Media accounts. See the full report here <http://www.yorkshirenemethodist.org/digital-resources/>.

The research shows that we have work to do in relation to our digital footprint. We now live in a generation that uses the phrase 'just google it' as a verb. This phrase is the key to unlocking knowledge and answering many questions. We live in a culture that if we want to visit a place, go to restaurant or go on holiday we google it. The Church experiences a similar journey within the digital world, our footprint and channels say a lot to others about who we are and what we believe in. I wonder what your Church's digital footprint looks like. What does it say about your community and why people should come and find out more?

Our aim at Cliff College is to equip the Church, if you are interested in engaging in a conversation about digital and websites then please do get in touch with me on a.johnson@cliffcollege.ac.uk

My new role at Cliff College, in partnership with the Methodist Church, is as a Digital Evangelist. We as a College and as a Church are beginning to think about how we engage and equip the

Church in a digital-led culture. A culture which is hard to navigate, constantly changing but gives us unlimited possibilities and endless potential. Here are a few of the exciting projects we are working on:

1. NATWIVITY

Natwivity, is the Christmas story told on Twitter and Facebook. It is a partnership between the Joint Public Issues Team (JUPIT) and Cliff College.

The beauty of the Natwivity is that it helps us imagine the thoughts and feelings of a group of people caught up in one of the biggest stories ever told, and the Twitter platform is a great medium to express that.

Watch out for its launch on 1 December on twitter on @natwivity or on our Facebook page.

2. THE STORY PROJECT

Our stories are gifts that deserve to be shared and The Story Project aims to give people both the platform and the confidence to share their story. The Story Project is a partnership involving Cliff College, The Evangelism & Growth Team, The Learning Network and local Churches and Circuits and has a number of aspects.

- The Story Booth - Collecting stories that will be shared throughout 2019/20, on social media. These can then be used by local churches and circuits, on their own social media accounts, to engage with people external to the church.
- The Story Website - The website www.storyproject.org.uk will both store and share the stories that are captured, host the resources and share some of Wesley translated letters.
- The Story Resources - On the website you will also find a series of all-age resources to help improve confidence in storytelling.

Check out it at www.thestoryproject.org.uk

3. THE CLIFF CAST

Podcasts are now the hottest thing in broadcasting, with the number of Britons tuning in doubling over the past five years.

Six million of us now listen to a podcast each week, according to industry watchdog Ofcom, and that number is steadily rising. There are now 700,000? active podcasts and over 29 million episodes, including content in more than 100 languages. (source <https://musicoomph.com/podcast-statistics/>).

Cliff Cast is our first adventure into the world of podcasting. It will be centred around encountering, equipping and engaging. We will look at real issues that are affecting the Church, bringing great contributors to help us think through these issues.

Check out our website www.cliffcollege.ac.uk and Social Media channels for more information.

Imagination is a key part of the human mind. Without it, we wouldn't be able to look at nature and imagine new ways of ordering its elements for our convenience - like clothing, housing, roads, medicine and, of course, the digital world.

We therefore need to use our imaginations to understand the future of digital experiences and their impact on the world around us. This can give the Church ideas of how to use and also engage in it. Let's jump into our time-machine and find out!

What will digital look like in 10-years-time?

1. A MOVE TO SERVICES

The web is overflowing with information and content. Hundreds of millions of websites feature a lot of content that no one reads—or will ever read. Although more content is inevitable for the future of digital experiences, we will also see more of another digital category altogether: services.

What are services, you ask? A service is an application with functionality that allows you to perform tasks. Examples include AirBnB, Facebook, Uber, Google Maps, user dialogue, orders, and online banking. We have already seen that the web becomes a service-led industry rather a content-led industry.

The big question for the Church is how can we use, enable and inhabit these services to help us fulfil our calling as followers of Jesus.

2. DATA DRIVEN

As we spend more and more hours each day on the internet, the content producers deliver more and more bytes of data - essentially flooding the web with so much content that no one will ever be able to even consume a tiny fraction of it.

Our data is firstly worth big money and secondly is becoming increasingly more important to us. Digital Ethics and our response to a data - driven culture will become a larger question for us as followers of Jesus.

3. VOICE

The use of voice in search has exploded, with up to 25% of searches online now being powered by your mouth instead of your fingers, according to HubSpot (<https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/voice-search-guide>). This will continue with growth of driverless cars, home control systems and smartphone assistants - activated technology is here to stay.

The technology offers the Church another platform in which to understand more of who Jesus is.

WHAT IS IN YOUR HANDS?

This question appears for the first time in Exodus 4:2, where God called Moses and told him to go and lead the children of Israel into the Promised Land. Moses however was afraid that they wouldn't believe him and he asked for a sign of the power of God and God asked him this question 'What is in your hand?' To Moses, it was just a staff used to beat stubborn sheep but to God, it was the instrument by which miracles will be performed. To Moses it was just a rod, to God it was an instrument for miracles. The staff by the power of God became the staff of God (Exodus 4:20) and it was used to part the red sea, perform the 10 plagues, bring water out of the rock etc.

And this is the question that is presented to us as a Church.



“

The digital revolution is without a doubt the most significant event in information dissemination since Gutenberg's printing press.

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UNITED METHODISTS FACE UNCERTAIN FUTURE

Chris Ritter

CHRIS RITTER DESCRIBES THE ESCALATION OF DIVISIONS IN THE WORLD'S LARGEST METHODIST DENOMINATION

The United Methodist Church finds themselves in a season of sober negotiations. The 12.4-million-member global denomination, many believe, has arrived at a point of irreconcilable differences following a February 2019 General Conference in St. Louis. The traditional view of marriage and human sexuality was upheld with the help of the growing international representation. Vocal opposition to the vote among Progressives in America and Western Europe has caused even stalwart institutional voices to now admit the denomination cannot continue as currently configured.

The special called 2019 General Conference grew from a moment of crisis at the 2016 quadrennial General Conference when the rejection of liberalizing legislation sparked rumors of formal division. By a narrow vote, the body decided to table matters related to sexuality and to instruct the bishops to form a commission to bring back recommendations. The urgency of the situation was heightened by the post-General Conference election of Bishop Karen Oliveto, a lesbian clergy unanimously selected by the progressive Western Jurisdiction of the U.S. church.

The ideologically diverse 32-member 'Commission on a Way Forward' met for months and developed three models for solving the impasse. A Traditional Plan affirming the current positions of the church was initially left in draft form because of perceived lack of support among the bishops. Instead, the bishops offered their support to the 'One Church Plan' (OCP) which changed the definition of marriage to the union of 'two adults.' Modest protections were offered for traditionalist conferences and congregations that did not want to ordain practicing LGBTQ persons or perform same-sex weddings. A more ambitious 'Connectional Conference Plan' to restructure the church into three covenants relative to homosexuality failed to gain traction.

The Bishop's majority recommendation of the One Church Plan ultimately reached consensus only with the promise that the Traditional Plan would also be brought in full legislative form. African bishops seem to have insisted upon this. So General Conference 2019 convened with three primary plans for consideration amidst what was described as the most prayed-for United Methodist General Conference in history.

In spite of the high-profile support offered for the OCP, the Traditional Plan was approved by a 54% margin at the four-day global conference. Key to this victory was a coalition of Africans, U.S. Traditionalists, Filipinos, and Eastern

Europeans. Due to parliamentary delays from the floor, some measures were passed without the amendments required to make them constitutional. But the remaining components of the Traditional Plan comprised significant accountability to church teachings. These include prohibitions against bishops ordaining clergy that do not meet church standards, limits upon charges that can be summarily dismissed by bishops, and minimum sentences for performing same-sex wedding ceremonies.

FALLOUT

UMC-Next is designed as a foil to the Wesleyan Covenant Association (WCA), a traditionalist organization formed in the aftermath of GC2016. Rather than settle matters, General Conference 2019 served to expose long-standing divisions. Several conferences in the U.S. and Western Europe vowed defiance. Full-page ads were taken out in U.S. newspapers to apologize for the actions of the denomination. Some African conferences have experienced loss of financial partnerships in America.

Self-described Progressives and Centrists in the U.S. formed a coalition called UMC-Next at a meeting convened at United Methodism's largest congregation, the 22,000-member Church of the Resurrection in Kansas. Rev. Adam Hamilton, the church's founding pastor, has grown increasingly vocal about his support of same-sex marriage after moving from the

traditional position several years ago. The UMC-Next Group indicated by a 57% margin their desire to form a new denomination. The group ultimately decided, however, to stay in the church through the May 2020 General Conference in Minneapolis.

Using GC2019 as a galvanizing event, UMC-Next successfully elected more Progressive U.S. delegates to GC2020, touting a majority in all five U.S. jurisdictions of the church. They seem to have fallen slightly short, however, of the majority they need to overturn church positions.

UMC-Next is designed as a foil to the Wesleyan Covenant Association (WCA), a traditionalist organization formed in 2016 in the aftermath of GC2019. Keith Boyette, the organization's president, has grown WCA to representation in every region served by the global denomination. The position of WCA is that, given the post GC-2019 situation, there should be an official and equitable division of the United Methodist Church for the sake of mission. A book of Doctrine and Discipline is being developed that will serve as the template for the 'Next Methodism' that WCA envisions. Features of this Discipline include a stream-lined structure, more theological cohesion, and reframing the role of bishops as spiritual leaders instead of administrators.

WCA helps comprise the Renewal and Reform Coalition, a cadre of organizations aimed at restoring United Methodism to its biblical roots. Another group, the Africa Initiative, coordinates these renewal efforts with the growing African Church. Demographic trends indicate that Africans, already 40% of church membership, will one day represent a majority of votes in the General Conference. Less exposed to U.S. infighting, Africans generally favor preservation of the current institution and biblical reform. But dwindling numbers in the U.S. church make American evangelicals impatient for relief. Although they 'won' the vote at GC2019, they desire immediate freedom from entrenched institutional structures, open rebellion among clergy, and bishops who refuse to exercise accountability to the Discipline.

Progressive voices are organized through the work of the Love Your

Neighbor Coalition (LYNC). Member organizations include the Reconciling Ministries Network (an organization dedicated to full LGBTQ inclusion), Methodists in a New Direction (MIND), Black Methodists for Church Renewal, the Methodist Federation for Social Action, and the United Methodist Queer Clergy Caucus.

A new organization, UM-Forward, emerged from a May 18, 2019 summit and declares an agenda of liberation for 'Persons of Color, Queer and Trans people.' This group has recently distinguished themselves from other Progressives as avowed Liberationists. They issued a statement on August 28 sharply criticizing the both Centrists and the Reconciling Ministry Network for a perceived willingness to acquiesce to plans that allow the Traditional view to remain partially in effect in the UMC.

FAULTY FOUNDATIONS?

Further patches to the foundations of The United Methodist Church came in 2000 when 'making disciples of Jesus Christ' was accepted as the denominational mission statement.

The United Methodist Church was formed in 1968 as a merger between The Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren (EUB), a smaller denomination with Pietist roots among German American populations. Forged at the height of the Ecumenical Movement, the young denomination emphasized a theological method over a fixed set of theological beliefs. Alongside the Methodist Articles of Faith and the EUB Confession of Faith, it placed 'Our Theological Task,' a statement ensconcing Albert Outler's 'Wesleyan Quadrilateral' of Scripture, Experience, Tradition, and Reason. The church would not be held together by doctrine but by a commitment to broad, generous principles drawn from these sources.

It did not take long for the deficiencies of 'Our Theological Task' to surface. Besides being not particularly Wesleyan, it failed to provide much doctrinal guidance. 1988 revisions clarified that Scripture is the primary source for Christian theology and not just a first among equals.

Further patches to the foundations of The United Methodist Church came in 2004 when 'making disciples of

Jesus Christ' was accepted as the denominational mission statement. The change was made with little fanfare, but this memorable biblical mandate became a much-needed tool to focus the work of the church. The phrase 'for the transformation of the world' was added in 2008 to satisfy concerns that the statement did not adequately capture the mandate to impact societal structures. The mission statement has competed with the 2001 UMC advertising slogan 'Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors' which some have used to place inclusion and diversity as the core principles of the denomination.

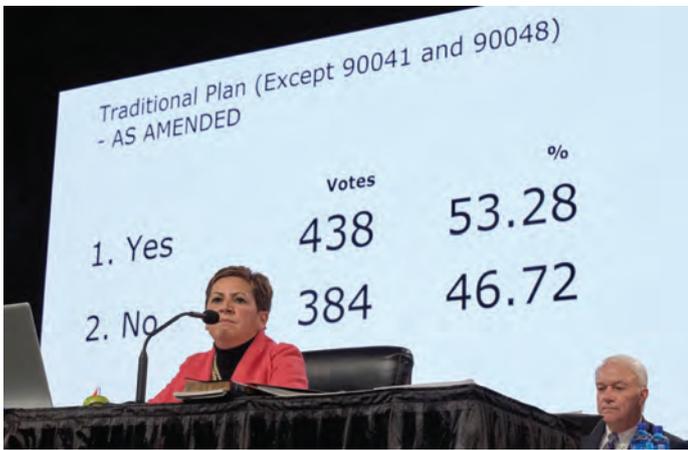
American United Methodism tends to be strongest numerically in those areas of the United States with a more traditional outlook. The entire Western Jurisdiction, covering a third of the nation, only has 300,000 members, compared to 2.6 million in the U.S. Southeast. Some of the more Progressive U.S. conferences are declining faster than their more traditional counterparts.

But perhaps the most significant force for reform has been the demographic explosion of the church in Africa. The UMC there is uniformly orthodox and culturally conservative in matters of marriage and human sexuality. In the last decade alone, one African Central Conference has jumped 329 percent. This is while membership in the U.S. and Europe has been on a fifty-year decline, losing five million members since the church's formation. Total African membership now stands at 4.9 million compared to the 7 million in the U.S. Efforts in 2008 to limit African influence in U.S. decision-making failed ratification.

BREAKING UP IS HARD TO DO

Admitting the denomination needs to break up and accomplishing this are very different matters. The centralized system ensconced in the Discipline makes structural change difficult. The general agencies of the United Methodist Church hold perhaps \$1.3 billion in assets and are under majority U.S. control. American annual conferences, the financial breadbasket of the denomination, hold significant assets and are often as divided ideologically as the denomination at large.

Of the \$6.3 billion in annual donations given through 44,000 congregations,



Bishop Cynthia Fierro Harvey observes the results from a Feb. 26 vote for the Traditional Plan, which affirms the church's current bans on ordaining LGBTQ clergy and officiating at or hosting same-sex marriage. The vote came on the last day of the 2019 General Conference in St. Louis. Photo by Paul Jeffrey, UMNS.



Florida delegates Rachael Sumner (front left) and the Rev. Jacqueline Leveron (front right) of the Florida Conference join in prayer with bishops and other delegates at the front of the stage before a key vote on church policies about homosexuality during the 2019 United Methodist General Conference in St. Louis. Photo by Mike DuBose, UMNS.

perhaps something over \$100 million annually flows to work in the non-U.S. conferences. African conferences would disproportionately suffer if funding was abruptly ended. UM congregations currently hold net assets worth some \$65 billion and most of these are tied to the denomination through the historic trust clause. Other U.S. denominations, like the Episcopal Church, have spent millions of dollars in lawsuits over disputed properties following unsanctioned divisions over human sexuality and marriage.

GC2020 LOOMING LARGE

The fact that the GC2020 legislation deadline is September 18 of this year has triggered a flurry of behind-the-scenes activity over the summer months. Unlike the time leading up to GC2019, there is no single group mandated to surface solutions. Work is being done by ad hoc groups.

Bishop Yambasu of Sierra Leone has assembled a multi-lateral group in the U.S. for the purpose of ongoing dialog. UM-Forward, the liberationist group, has promised to bring their own plan, but the details have not yet been released. Attendees to the Africa Initiative's Prayer and Leadership Summit in Nairobi in August were briefed on the three plans that have emerged to date.

The Bard-Jones Plan was authored by two U.S. bishops, one Progressive and one Traditional. It calls for everyone to vacate the UMC by exiting into one of three new

denominations. The general agencies of the church would become autonomous non-profit organizations or be variously shared among the 'new expressions.' Only the General Council of Finance and Administration would be left to mop up any administrative and legal obligations left by the old denomination.

The UMC-Next group offered a plan that envisions Traditionalist congregations leaving with their properties intact to form a new denomination. Enforcement of restrictions against same-sex marriage would be halted. The remaining church would hold a special General Conference to officially remove the restrictions and re-organize for the future.

The 'Indianapolis Plan' comes from multilateral negotiations among a group comprised of Progressives, Centrists, and Traditionalists who believe it is time to end the conflict. This plan is still in draft form and envisions two or three new denominations being birthed by United Methodism. U.S. Centrists would inherit the institution after a fair division of resources. U.S. Traditionalists at the Indianapolis table are trying to secure institutional autonomy for themselves and a fair share of denominational assets for Africa.

A TIME OF DECISION

Amidst all the posturing and distress, hope remains among Evangelical United Methodists for a renewed Connection that can recover the 'spirit, doctrine, and discipline' with

which we first set out. The Wesleyan Covenant Association has received overtures from autonomous Methodist denominations in the Americas seeking greater international connection. Irish-born Billy Abraham, Outler Professor of Wesley Studies at Dallas' Perkins School of Theology has written both of a 'Mexit' and the alternative possibility for United Methodism emerging as a 'unique, orthodox, global denomination.' The next few months should reveal which direction the United Methodist Church will go.

The Revd Dr Chris Ritter is an elder in The United Methodist Church and served as a delegate to the 2016 and 2019 General Conferences. He is the Directing Pastor of First United Methodist Church of Geneseo, Illinois (USA) and offers views and links to United Methodist topics at www.peopleneedjesus.net.



REMAINING FAITHFUL RESOURCES

**REMAINING
FAITHFUL** 
www.remainingfaithful.network

A network of Methodists committed to remaining faithful to the original Wesleyan evangelical vision, and to the biblical and apostolic understanding of marriage as the life-long union of one man and one woman and the only appropriate context for sexual intimacy.

To join, please contact Marian Izzard:
admin@methodistevangelicals.org.uk | 01983 642024
We welcome individuals, churches and circuits

For resources and details of regional events and our national conference, visit the website:
www.remainingfaithful.network



*Thursday 28 May (2 pm) - Friday 29 May (4.30 pm) 2020
Hope Chapel, Liverpool Hope University*

A two day conference for church leaders and members to ignite a renewal of the Wesleyan vision, develop a fresh strategy and to explore opportunities for a turnaround plan for Methodism.

Early bird rate (before 31 January 2020): £80
Bookings after 1 February 2020: £90
Includes evening meal on Thursday and lunch on Friday plus coffee & tea on both days. Also included: Liverpool 200 resource book.

A wide range of hotel accommodation options (including Travelodge and Premier Inn) are available near Liverpool Hope University, L16 9JD

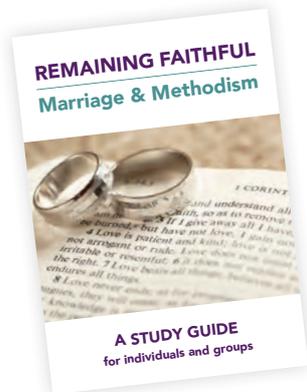
To book, please visit www.methodistevangelicals.org.uk/liverpool200
or contact Marian Izzard:
admin@methodistevangelicals.org.uk | 01983 642024

REMAINING FAITHFUL RESOURCES

For Remaining Faithful Resources, please visit www.methodistevangelicals.org.uk/remaining-faithful or contact Derek Balsdon: 01260 297609 or development@methodistevangelicals.org.uk

REMAINING FAITHFUL STUDY GUIDE

A 20 page study guide for individuals and groups to help explore biblical texts and theological issues concerning marriage and relationships



REMAINING FAITHFUL LEAFLET

A 4 page leaflet encouraging Methodists to the biblical and traditional view of marriage and relationships

SPEAKING FAITHFULLY

MET's response to the current Marriage and Relationships Connexional Consultation

FAITHFUL LISTENING

MET's response to the 2019 Conference report, 'God in Love Unites Us'

RESPONDING TO THE CONSULTATION

The Marriage and Relationships Connexional Consultation is now underway. Please take every opportunity to contribute.

With this edition of MET Connexion, you will receive our response to the consultation, which you may find helpful in making your own contribution. This is also available on our website: www.methodistevangelicals.org.uk

Please ask your Superintendent who your District Synod representatives are and write to them, setting out your views and asking them to be represented in every way during the consultation, and write in the same way to your Minister, Superintendent and District Chair.



REMAINING FAITHFUL REGIONAL GATHERINGS

An opportunity over a half day to gather for worship, hear vision for the way forward and to network, pray and share together. The gatherings are hosted and organised locally and MET provide all the content and information, including a running order, video presentation and Remaining Faithful resources.

Dates confirmed so far:

Bournemouth, 5 October 2019

10.00am

Barton Methodist Church,

01425 612510 | martin.keenan@methodist.org.uk

Doncaster, 5 October 2019

(& 14 March 2020)

10.00am

The Kings Cross Church, Hexthorpe, DN4 0EP

01302 855389 | richard.iball@btinternet.com

Stockport, 12 October 2019

TBC

For details, email

admin@methodistevangelicals.org.uk

Plymouth, 9 November 2019

10.00am

Plymouth Central Hall, PL1 1BA

01752 660997 | pmchoffice@btconnect.com

Penzance, 16 November 2019

10.00am

Chapel Street Methodist Church, Penzance,

TR18 4AW

01736 363052 | avcbolt@hotmail.co.uk

London, 30 November 2019

10.00 am - 1.30 pm

Methodist Central Hall, Westminster, SW1H 9NH

Bookings can be made via:

tinyurl.com/LondonRFN

07792 596318 | bart.woodhouse@gmail.com

If you would like to host a regional gathering this Autumn and/or next Spring, please contact Marian Izzard: admin@methodistevangelicals.org.uk.

EVANGELICALISM IN THE METHODIST CHURCH IN IRELAND

Ken Robinson

It is generally accepted that the Methodist Church in Ireland is more conservative than the Methodist Church in Great Britain. Though the island of Ireland is divided into 2, the Methodist Church in Ireland is one and ministers serve on both sides of the border. There are fewer members, local preachers and ministers than our sister church in Great Britain, and smaller circuits, but many would argue the evangelical ethos of the Irish Methodist Church still makes an enormous contribution to Irish society. Most Irish Protestant denominations tend to be low church with a broad evangelical ethos in contradistinction from the prevailing Catholic culture.

The Methodist Church in Ireland is a small church, numbering 50,000 members out of an island population of 4,000,000, yet the Roman Catholic Primate of all Ireland, the Archbishop of Armagh, the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and the President of the Methodist Church in Ireland, representing the four main Christian groupings in Ireland are frequently interviewed and reported on. The Methodist Church in Ireland continues to offer Christ to all through worship, evangelism, friendship, compassion, care and engagement; all supported by individual and corporate prayer.

Irish Methodism has birthed 7 residential and nursing homes providing a caring, secure and sheltered environment for older people. This creates the opportunity for low key evangelism. Every home is connected to a local church and though

accommodation is not confined to Methodists the residents tend to worship in the nearest Methodist Church.

Over many years the Council on Social Responsibility has been in regular contact with politicians, often at their request, encouraging dialogue and compromise while holding them to account. The church often receives papers from various government departments seeking our point of view, thus this church, despite its size, has an enormous input into the decision making process affecting Irish life, north and south and helping to shape government policies that affect all citizens in both jurisdictions. This input was clearly demonstrated when the IRA invited Harold Good, one of our ministers to be one of only two witnesses as they decommissioned their arms, - a vital step in the peace process.

The 5 City missions, (3 in Belfast, 1 in Londonderry and 1 in Dublin) minister through social programmes and evangelism. They help those in need in all its forms but especially the homeless, hungry, refugees, alcoholics and poor through varied and imaginative programmes. Offering Jesus is part of the package.

Preaching, praying and pastoral care continue to bear fruit as people sit under the authority of the Bible faithfully expounded, listen to the claims of Jesus and are encouraged, supported and loved in their daily Christian experience.

Long established practices like chaplaincy work in hospitals, universities and prison along with continuing emphasis on education lead to exciting opportunities to share Jesus. Wesley College in Dublin was opened in 1854 and is one of Ireland's premier schools while Methodist College in Belfast which opened in 1865 is one of Northern Ireland's leading grammar schools. Both schools have an amazing record of academic, musical, dramatic and sporting achievement. The chaplain is a key figure in each school. It is thrilling to realise that future leaders in industry, finance, business and politics are being influenced as thousands of young people are reached every day. Ireland's agricultural base has not been forgotten. Gurteen Agricultural College was set up in 1947 by the Methodist Church and continues to provide superb training for young farmers. The chaplain has wonderful opportunities to get alongside young men and women, some of whom are away from home for the first time, and through friendship to share Jesus. A few years ago when the government of the Irish Republic began to rationalise the provision of farm education, Gurteen was the only non-government agricultural college that survived, - a testimony to the excellence of tuition.

Signs of renewal are evident in the rebirth of a number of older congregations. For many years the church in Killarney was only opened in the summer months but a retired missionary doctor and his wife, both Local Preachers, relocated to the town and began to work with and pray for

the locals. God answered their prayer in a mighty way with the church now open all year round and hosting 2 morning services each Sunday. The church in Waterford met in an old building with a small number attending, however an influx of people from other nations into the city has led to renewed life and vitality. The connexion has financed refurbishment and extension to the property providing for the needs of the growing congregation. Maguiresbridge in Co Fermanagh is a small village but the church there is bursting at the seams with an increasing number of young families. The old church in Moira, Co Down was demolished and rebuilt. Only opened last autumn already it has attracted new members and Maghaberry in Co Antrim was a dying cause before the Holy Spirit urged the leaders there to reach out to their Anglican neighbours and offer the Methodist building as a centre for united Christian worship. The building has been extended twice to accommodate the fast growing congregation. Craigmore Church was built in 1845 and for most of its life had a small congregation. It now struggles to accommodate all who attend for worship with increasing numbers of young families.

The Methodist Church in Ireland has entered into a covenant relationship with the Church of Ireland and over a period of years has explored what closer working relationships might look like. The Archbishop of Armagh accompanied by Episcopal colleagues participates in the ordination service and lays hands on each of our presbyters. This has resulted in an acceptance by the General Synod and the Conference of Interchangeable Ministry as the Church of Ireland recognised Methodist ordination. Looking to the future this arrangement will become even more of a blessing as secularism increases and will allow for united evangelistic ministry especially in small rural communities. Church planting has happened in Blanchardstown in Dublin, Kenmare in Kerry and Millstreet in Cork along with Cavan town. It is thrilling to see how the Holy Spirit is working in each of these places, and though small numbers meet to worship together they wait on God for the next steps in their development.

On the north coast of Ireland, the Surf Project operates. A former PE teacher and his wife had the vision of offering Christ through the medium of surfing. Their work has branched out with

invitations from several schools that send their children for a week to learn how to surf, and to learn more about Jesus. Since it started a few years ago, literally thousands of young and some older folk have been enriched and many brought into a closer relationship with Jesus.



In Lurgan Co Armagh, the container ministry which started 25 years ago has sent 40-foot containers to all parts of the world. The church built a warehouse where redundant equipment from schools and hospitals is repaired, packed and shipped abroad following requests from overseas. Recent gifts have included hospital equipment, computers, and theological books to Romania, Zambia, the Gambia, Malawi and Sierra Leone. When the doors of each container are closed, the volunteers gather round, join hands and commit the container and its contents to God. They praise God they have never had to pay a bribe to guarantee safe arrival.

The need for faith-sharing and evangelism encouraged the Irish Methodist Youth Department to invite young people aged between 18 and 25 to volunteer as young evangelists for 1 year. Now in year 31, it is difficult to overestimate the impact this initiative has had on individual churches and in the lives of those who served since a number have come into full time ministry.

The various departments of the Conference came together last Autumn to host 'One Mission' This was attended by over 500 people and was a day of vision casting, waiting on God and praying for the future direction of Irish Methodism while seeking his grace, love mercy and power. Arrangements are in hand for One Mission 2.

The influence of Cliff College has been extensive in Irish Methodism and in other Irish churches. Several hundred Irish Methodist students travelled to Cliff and many were later ordained.

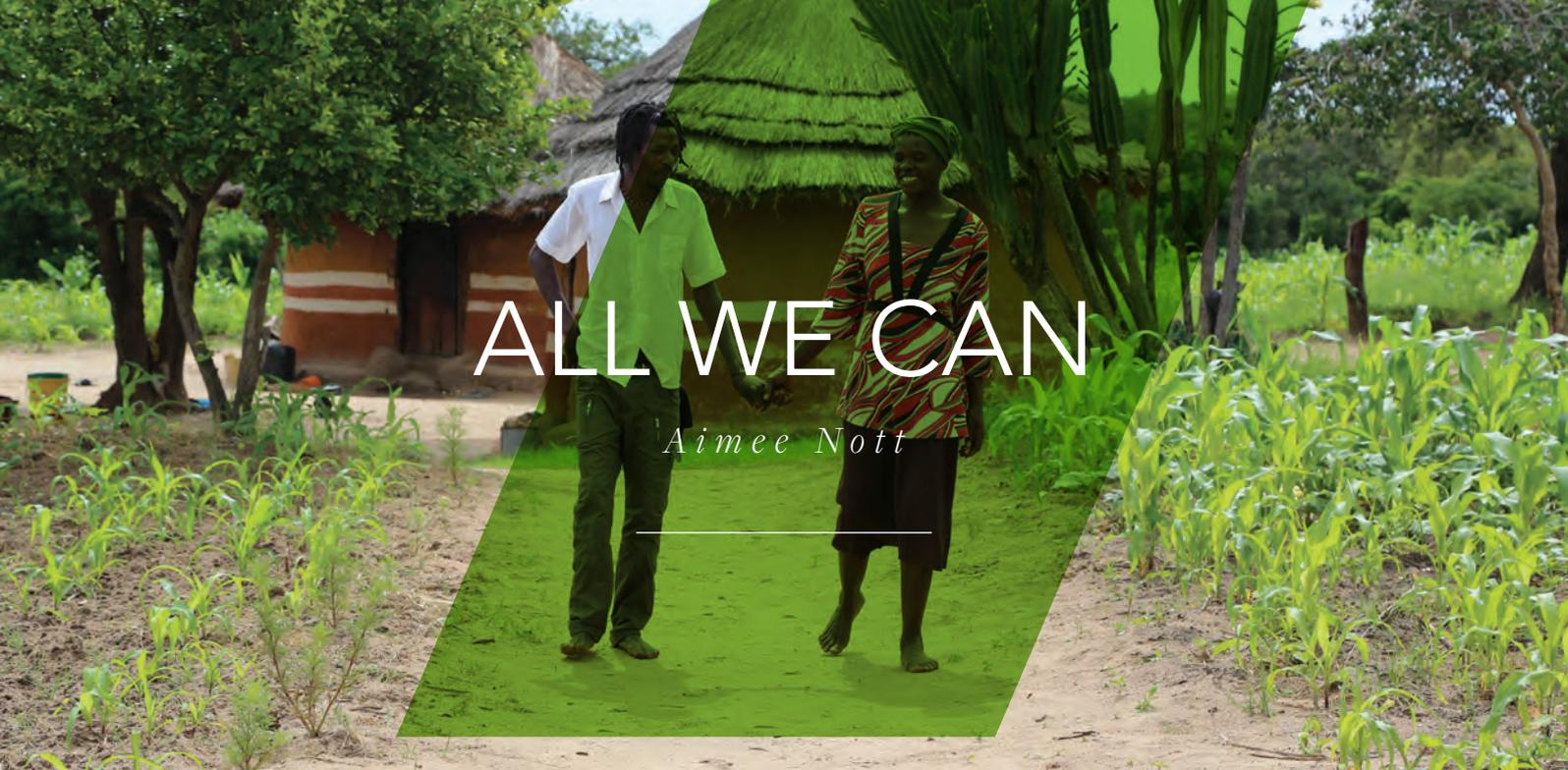
The above suggests that God is actively working within the Irish Methodist

Church and we are truly thankful for that. There are 2 areas of concern though: The Faith and Order Committee of the Irish church in common with churches around the world is examining the subject of Human Sexuality. No reports have been brought to Conference yet. The committee organised a day conference and promised every theological point of view would be represented. On the basis of this Headway Ireland asked if their views could be presented and were invited to contribute to the conference by suggesting a speaker who would represent the evangelical point of view. The Rev Vaughan Roberts from Oxford accepted our invitation and spoke wonderfully on the subject with clarity, conviction and grace. There is no doubt that his presentation made a powerful impact on the day. Headway Ireland had previously met with representatives from the working party and spent several hours arguing for the Biblical interpretation of marriage. As Headway Ireland keeps a watching brief we welcome the prayers of our friends in Great Britain and trust the Irish Conference will stand firm.

The other matter requiring your prayer is the restructuring of Irish Methodism. Prior to July 2019, there were 8 Districts superintended by part-time District Superintendents who combined their District work with their circuit responsibility. After much prayer and debate, Conference decided to reduce the 8 Districts to 3 larger areas and appoint full time District Superintendents. The rationale for this change is to release more time and resources for our members and ministers to engage in outreach, evangelism and prayer. Our hopes and dreams are that in every circuit throughout Ireland, the time now freed from bureaucracy will result in more emphasis on reaching out in the name of Jesus.

As we step out in faith we continue to look to the Lord and trust he will send even more of his renewing Spirit. We pray many will come to know Jesus that they will be grow in their discipleship and that he will anoint us afresh with gracious loving power from on high.

Ken Robinson retired from the active ministry of the Methodist Church in Ireland in 2018 after serving for 41 years. He was District Superintendent in the Lakelands District and the Portadown District. He is secretary of Headway Ireland.



ALL WE CAN

Aimee Nott

AIMEE NOTT EXPLORES THE UNIQUE WAY IN WHICH THE CHURCH IS CALLED TO ENGAGE WITH GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT

When asked to consider the theme of the Church and global development, my mind immediately began to rove through the many and varied ways in which the Church has shaped the world that we inhabit today. Since its inception, the Church has played a key role in bringing about positive change in the lives of some of the poorest and most vulnerable in our world. Through Sunday school sessions and history lessons, my eyes were opened to men and women of God who fought for a more socially just world - people like Archbishop Desmond Tutu and William Wilberforce, to name but two. When I went on to study history at university, I looked further back in time, exploring how monasteries were key in establishing and running some of the earliest infirmaries in Western Europe. In more recent years, it has been impossible to miss how instrumental churches in the UK have been in providing and managing the foodbanks which ever more people have come to rely on. The imprint of the Church upon our world is undeniable.

Similarly, when exploring the Methodist tradition, it is clear that the Wesleys were passionate advocates of social change - including (but not limited to) prison reform and the abolition of slavery. Susanna Wesley has been recognised

as a pioneer in education. Her legacy continues to this day, as thousands of children in the UK attend Methodist schools - their futures made brighter by the Methodist Church's commitment to the development of the whole person. We know our current society has much to thank the Church for - but what happens when we turn our attention overseas, and explore the role of the Church in global development today?

I joined All We Can, the official relief and development agency of the Methodist Church in Britain, in 2017 - and in the two years since I walked through its doors, I have learnt more than I could possibly have imagined about how uniquely well placed the Church is to bring about positive, lasting change in some of the world's poorest communities. While the language of development and the language of the Church may be different, at the heart of both is a concern to respond to unmet needs, to restore human dignity, and to enable people, especially those who are marginalised or struggling with hardships, to live life to the full and in doing so bring glory to God. Walking with people in their struggles is central to how the Church responds to God's love and grace.

Issues like poverty and global development can seem daunting, and too large for us to tackle as individuals - but as Christians, we are compelled to act, and do all that we can to help others fulfil their God-given potential. It is this attitude that leads me to believe that the Church is called to

be a key player in global development. This is not simply because it is good, or 'the right thing to do' - but because we are commanded to: 'Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow' (Isaiah 1:17). The world might look a little different today, but our imperative to act compassionately towards those who are oppressed remains the same. In 2019, those that we consider oppressed could be the homeless man you walk past on your way to work in the morning; it could be the communities in rural Ethiopia unable to grow enough food to eat amidst a rapidly changing climate. There are always those for whom society has not dealt a fair hand.

A few years ago, as a student living in Australia, I remember discovering a Bible verse that I had not paid much heed to before. I was interning in an office which played host to the Australian arm of the Micah Challenge, and as such I came to see the following verse on a near daily basis around the building: 'And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God' (Micah 6:8). For me, this verse distils the essence of how I want to live my life as a Christian. But the challenge of these words can extend far wider than just a personal mantra. It is a call to action for the entire Church - a command to be front and centre when it comes to seeking justice in our world. It is a rallying cry to stand hand in hand with those prevented from fulfilling their God-given potential by poverty, war, slavery

and oppression - and to be instrumental in seeking to remedy this injustice.

In Jesus, we see someone who spent his life walking alongside the vulnerable and marginalised. The poor, the leper, the widow, the Samaritan - all were welcome at his table. All were valued, celebrated, and loved. In the same way, the Church, the body of Christ, must seek to imitate Jesus' radical love for those cast aside by society. It must be at the forefront of helping people impacted by changing climates, of protecting indigenous land rights, of developing sustainable livelihoods for those struggling to make ends meet; in short, it must play a central role in global development.

What is it that makes churches so uniquely well placed to engage with global development? Perhaps first and foremost is their physical and social position within a community. Churches around the globe are deeply embedded in the communities they serve, putting them in a pertinent position to help people in those communities seek the fulfilment God desires for them.

The Church is present for key milestones in people's lives, through births, deaths and marriages - meaning that it has a closeness to and legitimacy with those most in need. Being rooted in a local community means that churches can have a long-term presence, and are often able to utilise voluntary commitment from their members. This is particularly important in times of emergency, such as floods, famine or war, as the Church can quickly mobilise support and in doing so, save lives.

The local Church is present and active even in those areas typically deemed 'hard to reach' - which are often the areas where development interventions are needed most. Indeed, John Wesley famously stated in his journal that he looked 'upon the whole world as my parish'. In the same way, the Church acknowledges that no area, no matter how hard to reach, is beyond the love of God.

The Church can also be a powerful force for local and global advocacy, able to bring about real and tangible change. Leaders like the aforementioned Archbishop Desmond Tutu are testament to this; but equally on a smaller level, churches can advocate for the local issues happening on their doorstep.

Being a key advocate for the vulnerable and marginalised is just one of the ways that the Church can show God's love to his people in both word and deed.

As a faith-based organisation rooted in the Methodist Church in Britain, All We Can is well placed to partner with local churches as they seek to engage with development issues. Ever since All We Can emerged from a movement of compassionate Methodists responding to the refugee crisis during the Second World War, it has developed recognised expertise in global development - and can offer services to churches in the areas of relief, development, education and advocacy. It is that very same movement of generous, passionate Methodists that continues to bring about change and transformation in the lives of people living in some of the world's poorest communities today. One of the most exciting developments in recent years is All We Can's increasing commitment to work with overseas churches - precisely because of their position at the beating heart of communities.

That being said, working with churches does present some unique challenges. Churches cannot (and indeed, should not) function as quasi-NGOs. A church's mission and ministry go far beyond relief and development work, as they seek to administer to the spiritual needs of the community they serve. All We Can therefore takes the time to understand the vision and mission of the churches it works with in a holistic way, and identifies the particular areas and ministries of the church which align with All We Can's objectives: to engage with local people and organisations in some of the world's poorest communities to end the suffering caused by inequality and injustice.

But what does this look like in practice? As All We Can's Fundraising and Marketing Officer, I am lucky enough to hear regular stories of how people's lives have changed and their potential been fulfilled through our partnership with local churches. People like Peter.

After dropping out of school when his family were no longer able to afford his fees, 21-year-old Peter desperately needed a source of income to support his family. In Uganda, where Peter lives, 77% of the population are under the age of 30. Young people like Peter suffer disproportionately from unemployment

- making it ever more difficult for them to have happy, healthy, fulfilling lives.

To counter this alarming trend, with All We Can's support, the Methodist Church in Uganda has developed a youth entrepreneurship programme aimed at equipping young people with the skills, values and attitudes they need to succeed in gaining employment and securing a sustainable source of income. The scheme focuses on encouraging youth to start their own businesses and to lead initiatives which improve not only their own lives, but those of their wider communities as well.

Having shown a flair for tailoring, Peter was identified by the Methodist Church in Uganda to partake in this scheme. With their support, Peter was able to develop a business plan, and received a sewing machine and a sum of money to help kick-start his business. He now has a successful tailoring business set up in his own home - with plans to expand to a local trading centre in the near future. By recognising that youth are not merely passive recipients of support, but instead are active agents of change, All We Can together with the Methodist Church in Uganda are helping facilitate real transformation in the lives of Uganda's youth.

'In the past, we as a family barely managed to have an income' Peter revealed. 'With my earnings, I am now not only able to contribute to our family wellbeing, but I am also proud to be able to support my sister to get the opportunity for education that I never got.' The impact of the support given to Peter by the Methodist Church in Uganda and All We Can will not only transform his life, but that of his sister too.

At All We Can, we believe that relief and development should be considered an integral part of God's mission in his world, which the Church is invited to participate in.

Aimee Nott is All We Can's Fundraising and Marketing Officer. Born and raised on the London/Surrey border, she now lives in Reading and has worked for various charities since interning with TEAR Australia as a student in 2014. Aimee is passionate about the impact charities and the Church can have on confronting issues of global importance, including poverty and climate change.

STANDING UP FOR FREEDOM BECAUSE CHRIST HAS SET US FREE

Danny Webster

THE UK GOVERNMENT HAS BACKED A REVIEW THAT CALLS FOR INCREASED SUPPORT FOR CHRISTIANS SUFFERING FOR THEIR FAITH ACROSS THE WORLD. DANNY WEBSTER EXPLORES HOW THE GOVERNMENT CAN HELP AND HOW CHRISTIANS CAN STAND WITH THE PERSECUTED CHURCH.

An independent review of UK support for persecuted Christians has called for substantial changes in how Christians overseas are supported by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO).

The Bishop of Truro's independent report to the Foreign Secretary highlighted that the persecution of Christians should be considered as a global phenomenon, but one with a wide variety of triggers and drivers. Because of the gradual emergence of the problem and the range of causes, the review found that it has also "been significantly overlooked in the West". The report also reflected on the impact of the long term legacy of British colonial activity which meant British officials and ministers may be reluctant to criticise repressive practices overseas.

The review took evidence from within government, hearing from those in the UK and in embassies and high commissions around the world. It also spoke to key non-

governmental organisations including Open Doors UK, Release International and Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW). The final report from the review has been accepted in full by the government and since the change in leadership at the FCO Christian groups have pressed Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab to maintain the focus on this issue established by his predecessor, Jeremy Hunt.

In a key finding the report said: "Given the scale of persecution of Christians today, indications that it is getting worse and that its impact involves the decimation of some of the faith group's oldest and enduring communities, the need for governments to give increasing priority and specific targeted support to this faith community is not only necessary but increasingly urgent."

Dr Dave Landrum, director of advocacy at the Evangelical Alliance, welcomed the release of the report: "The challenge is immense, but the Foreign Office is an extensive and well-respected diplomatic network that can make a real difference in tackling these human rights abuses. It should make this issue a priority, not least because the freedoms to hold, express and change religious beliefs are the bedrock for all our other human rights and civil liberties. If religious freedoms diminish so will everything else."

Attention on the plight of religious minorities, and particularly Christians has increased in recent years, and the persistent campaigning of Christians in

the UK and beyond has helped achieve this. The United Nations has declared 22 August as the International Day Commemorating the Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief, held in 2019 for the first time. Prime Minister Boris Johnson marked this inaugural day by noting:

"Freedom of religion or belief is at the heart of what the UK stands for. We will do everything possible to champion these freedoms and protect civilians in armed conflict including religions, ethnic or other minorities."

He went on to refer to the Bishop of Truro's review and said: "We have accepted, and will implement, all of the Review's challenging recommendations. We will use the UK's global reach and programme funding to improve the lives of persecuted people."

The UK government has also established the John Bunyan Fund, which will allocate funding in its first year to gain a deeper understanding of the problem and what current support is provided as well as determine how best the government can take practical steps to bring about positive change.

As Christians it is important that we welcome and encourage government action to support our fellow believers around the world, especially those who risk and often lose their lives to worship freely. We should continue to press the government to stand up for religious

freedom for all and recognise where Christians in particular are suffering because of their beliefs.

The Evangelical Alliance's Religious Liberty Commission brings together member organisations that work in this area. CSW, Open Doors UK and Release International all have significant experience at working with persecuted Christians around the world and speaking up on their behalf, raising awareness with government and the media, as well as helping the Church in the UK to stand alongside those who suffer for their faith.

For example, each year Open Doors UK produce their World Watch List which lists the 50 countries where Christians experience the worst persecution. This measures the freedom Christians have to live out their faith in private, family, community, national and church life as well as the level of violence experienced. As a rigorous measure of what goes on across the world this resource has rightly received significant coverage, including an annual event in parliament to showcase the latest results and to inform parliamentarians about the situation facing Christians.

The 2019 list shows that North Korea remains the place where Christians suffer the worst persecution, a position it has held for the past 18 years. However, it is not alone, five years ago it was the only country to be ranked in the 'extreme' category, now it is joined by ten other countries, showing that worldwide persecution of Christians is getting worse.

In February 2019 David Linden MP asked 50 written questions to the Foreign Secretary asking what the government was doing to tackle persecution in each of the countries featuring on this year's list. In response he received a single response highlighting the Bishop of Truro's then ongoing review.

The persecution of Christians overseas has rightly received increased political attention, however, government action should not be an alternative to our action to stand side by side with those who suffer for their faith. As the Church across the world we should provide support where we can, and prayer in all cases to aid our brothers and sisters in Christ.

KNOW WHAT IS HAPPENING

The first thing that we should do is to know what is happening around the world. Sometimes it can be overwhelming to feel as though we have to know everything that is happening about every situation Christians are encouraged to care about. It can seem as though there is an ever growing list of issues that Christians should passionately support and I recognise that this can be draining. It can even lead to a sense of fatigue, but I would encourage you to take time to learn about the experience of Christians in places where they fear for their lives every time they go to worship, or risk arrest when they talk about their faith to their neighbours.

Perhaps a starting point is to pick a country or a region that you can learn more about, or maybe a global trend that is causing problems for Christians. For example, the rise of militant Islam has increased pressure on Christians not only in the Middle East but also in North Africa and beyond. State restrictions on Christian activity is another common theme that is worth investigating to see the countries where there are laws against conversion, or criticism of other beliefs. Open Doors' World

Watch List is a good place to start.
www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution

CSW have an extensive library of news updates and resources relating to the countries they work in at www.csw.org.uk. Along with other organisations serving the persecuted church they have resources you can sign up to receive via email or post.

PRAY FOR OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS

The enormity of the challenge facing Christians in some of the harshest regimes in the world should encourage us to reach out in prayer rather than despair. We may not be able to change laws restricting Christians in Uzbekistan, but we believe in a God who can. We believe that God works miracles in some of the most difficult circumstances and brings comfort and strength to those who endure suffering for their faith.

Release International is another organisation that helps Christians guide their prayers for the persecuted church, they provide daily email prayer alerts and other resources on their website www.releaseinternational.org/pray. I regularly receive Open Door's prayer diary through the post and it provides sobering reading but also stories of hope amid the darkness.

Brother Andrew, the founder of Open Doors and author of *God's Smuggler*, said about prayer: "If we want to leave an indelible mark on the world, there is no more powerful way to do it than by joining in God's purposes through prayer. Our prayers can go where we cannot. While many things may seem impossible from a human standpoint, in the realm of prayer there are no impossibilities."

PROVIDE SUPPORT

Just because we cannot do everything doesn't mean we can't do something. While situations may seem huge, and challenges immense, we can make a difference in our world today. We can write to our MPs to call on them to raise the persecution of Christians with the government and speak up for religious freedom in international negotiations. We can write to Christians overseas, CSW provide a service to link Christians with brothers and sisters in places where it is both safe for them to receive letters from Christians, but who are under pressure because of their beliefs.

We can join campaigns, protests and petitions and encourage others in our churches to join with us. All the organisations I've mentioned have resources for churches to learn more about the challenges and have speakers available to visit your congregation.

These organisations have many years of experience working with the persecuted church and have learnt what actions are helpful and what could contribute to further suffering. It is important that we respect their wisdom and guidance. While established organisations do not have a monopoly on providing support to Christians across the world our first response should be to know what is already being done and where we can legitimately assist rather than jumping in headfirst. I've heard incredible stories of people involved with Bible smuggling and working with underground churches, but I also know that the people involved have learnt many lessons very quickly, including some that others have learnt before and could have helped them avoid.

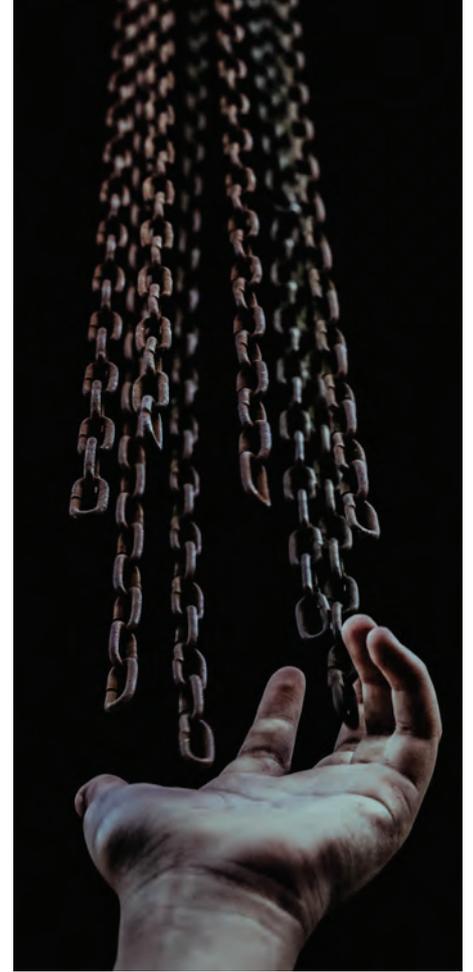
STAND UP FOR FREEDOM

Above all we should stand up for freedom. Freedom is often called for, and it is often repressed. As Christians we know that true freedom comes in Christ, but that in this world today we can help others live in freedom and experience some of the true freedom that God brings.

We cannot force people to follow Jesus, the Christian faith just doesn't work like that. But we can work for a world where people have the freedom to hear the gospel and the freedom to accept or reject it. That means we speak up for freedom when it is restricted, whether at home or abroad, it means we respect the reality that we live in a society of competing beliefs, but have confidence in the goodness of God and the power of His message.

We stand for freedom as we encourage Christians suffering for their faith, and we are encouraged by their faithfulness and the freedom they have in Christ in the midst of the harshest challenges.

Danny Webster has worked for the Evangelical Alliance since 2008 in a variety of roles in the advocacy team. He currently looks after media relations and oversees advocacy programmes and projects. Previously Danny worked in parliament and has degrees in politics and political philosophy. He is passionate about encouraging Christians to integrate their faith with all areas of their life, especially when it comes to leading in public life.



FORTHCOMING EVENTS



12th October
BIBLE TEACHING DAY
KNARESBOROUGH

1-3 November
REVIVE PRAYER WEEKEND
WILLERSLEY CASTLE

24 - 26 January
MET SOUTH WEST CONFERENCE
TORQUAY

FULL DETAILS AND
BOOKING FORMS AVAILABLE
ON THE MET WEBSITE:
METHODISTEVANGELICALS.ORG.UK



DEVELOPMENT WORKER FUTURE APPOINTMENTS

Please pray for Derek Balsdon, our Development Worker, as he ministers around the Connexion. Please consider how your church or circuit could be encouraged by his ministry.

October

18th - Sun 20 Flourish - Yorkshire North and East District
Weekend

November

17th - 9.15 & 10.45 Knutsford Methodist Church, Cheshire
19th - 20th Navigating Change, Swan Bank Methodist
Church, Stoke-on-Trent

RESOURCE REVIEWS

SAVED BY GRACE ALONE

*Sermons on
Ezekiel 36:16-36*

**D. MARTYN
LLOYD-JONES**

SAVED BY GRACE ALONE

D M Lloyd-Jones

*Sermons on Ezekiel 36:16-36
9781848718289
Banner of Truth | December 2018*

This book consists of 14 sermons preached by the late Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones in Westminster Chapel, London between 15 April and 15 July 1956. By this time, he was into the second half of

his 30-year ministry at the Chapel and his congregation was well established with his Sunday morning series on Ephesians and his famous Bible study on Romans on Friday evenings. These sermons were a series at the Sunday evening evangelistic services. As always with Martyn Lloyd-Jones this is a book that is hard to put down. Many waves of human optimism have passed and failed since 1956 but these sermons remain agelessly relevant as they tell of God's unchanging love and purpose.

The foreword summarises the whole tone very well by saying "As one reads these sermons one cannot escape the preacher's conviction that the whole of the Bible is God's word for all time"

We find an amazing systematic evangelical theology in this book as "the Doctor" starts in chapter one by emphasising the reliability of the Word, truth unchanged, the reality of the human condition by recounting that the people were in exile in Babylon because they had rebelled against God.

The human problem is diagnosed, noting that people always want the remedy rather than address the cause and, like the exiled people of Israel, need to realise the enormity of the rebellion.

The Doctor then describes how God judges and punishes sin and calls attention to the Biblical doctrine of the wrath of God. Man in sin does not change, neither does God's Holiness. He

then moves to remind us that salvation is not due to anything in us at all. It is all of God who vindicates his own name and holiness. This reminds me of the saying by Jonathan Edwards that we contribute nothing to our salvation apart from the sin that made it necessary.

He then relates the people coming out of Babylon into Canaan to our salvation, to understand the depth of sin and the height of salvation through the work of the Spirit, translated out of darkness. This gives us a clean, new heart with God's Spirit within us. He goes on to show how the Old Testament foreshadows the New Testament message and the cleansing Jesus brings by taking our sin on Himself. This gives a new heart, not just forgiven but changed, with a new spirit due to God's spirit within us, resulting in a complete salvation and restoring that which was lost.

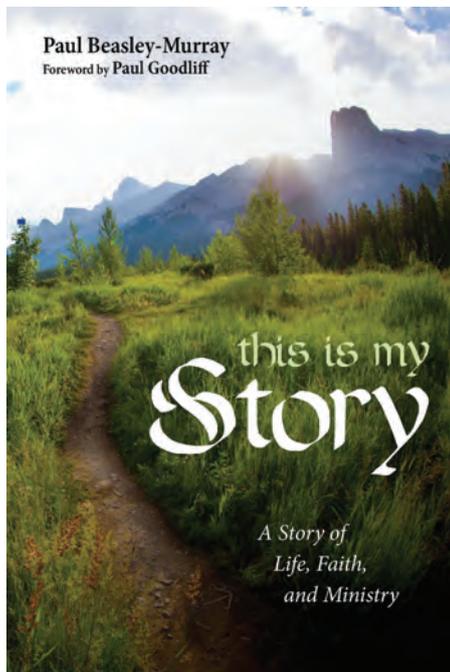
The Doctor then describes man in famine, with life not in communion with God not being Christianity. The unproductive age is desolation without God and barren spiritual periods are also barren secular periods.

In these days, when the Old Testament is often neglected in preaching and teaching, this powerful series is a very welcome correction. Likewise, is his drawing attention to key doctrines often neglected today. In chapter 12 he states "there are still people today who seem to be so dulled by sin that they cannot see the Gospel in the Old Testament. They

think it is not the same God, the same covenant, the same gracious promises, in the Old and New Testaments. But it is the same message-it is the form alone that differs—"

The final chapter titled "Saved by Grace alone" explains how our salvation undoes all the consequences of the fall - "our conception of salvation is totally inadequate unless we see in it this restoration to a living vital knowledge of God which is offered to us in the gospel..."; that we are put in a position beyond Adam in Christ. "In Him the tribes of Adam boast more blessings than their father lost". It is God's unmistakable work. A book well worth reading!

Reviewed by John McCartney



'THIS IS MY STORY'

Paul Beasley-Murray

If your grandchildren ever ask 'Who was my grandfather?' what will they be told? It was this question which prompted Paul Beasley-Murray to write his autobiography, and the rest of us are glad because it makes very interesting reading. The very early chapters read a bit like a eulogy at a funeral service - very interesting for the relatives, but

a bit tedious for the rest - but don't be put off. Once you get into it you will discover the life story of a very influential and sometimes controversial Baptist Minister.

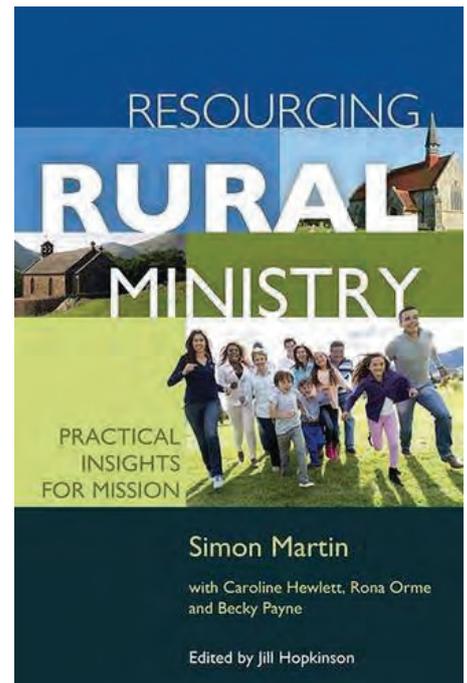
Born the son of the manse, Paul Beasley-Murray always wanted to be a Baptist Minister following in the footsteps of his father. His story recounts in detail the formative influences on his life, his childhood home, his education at Cambridge, his service overseas in both Europe and Africa, his pastorates in Altrincham and Chelmsford and his term of service as Principal of Spurgeon's College. During his pastorates both the churches were transformed into two of the fastest growing Christian communities in their areas. Whilst at Spurgeon's the number of students doubled as new patterns of training were introduced. But, like all ministerial careers there have been heartaches as well as causes for rejoicing. With openness and honesty, for example, he records his period at Spurgeon's with all the difficulties he faced, the struggles for power amongst his colleagues and the hostility which led eventually to the termination of his employment there. He is honest about the toll which that took on him, and especially on his family, his struggle to forgive and the judgemental attitude which he felt from the evangelical wing of the church. On retirement he knew the pain of the deacons of his church writing to say that in their judgement "it would be better for you no longer to go there!"

In addition to his various appointments Paul Beasley-Murray is a prolific writer, with a particular desire to equip the church and especially its ministers. With others he was a driving force behind the formation of 'Mainstream' - the Baptist equivalent to MET - although interestingly they deliberately avoided the word 'evangelical' in the title, and they refused to have a recorded membership, preferring simply to distribute a magazine regularly to keep people up-to-date.

This is a good book and an important read for all those who think that the grass may be greener on the other side, for ministers who struggle a bit and wonder if it's their fault, and for evangelicals who need to discover that not all evangelicals are the most loving people in the world.

Now retired, Paul Beasley-Murray is still influential in the College of Baptist Ministers. He still maintains his writing and now, together with his wife, worships at Chelmsford Cathedral where he received the warmest welcome from a very different wing of the church.

*Reviewed by Paul Wilson
Former Development Worker, and chair
of MET*



RESOURCING RURAL MINISTRY: PRACTICAL INSIGHTS FOR MISSION

Simon Martin et al

Abingdon: BRF, 2015, 208pp, £8.99,
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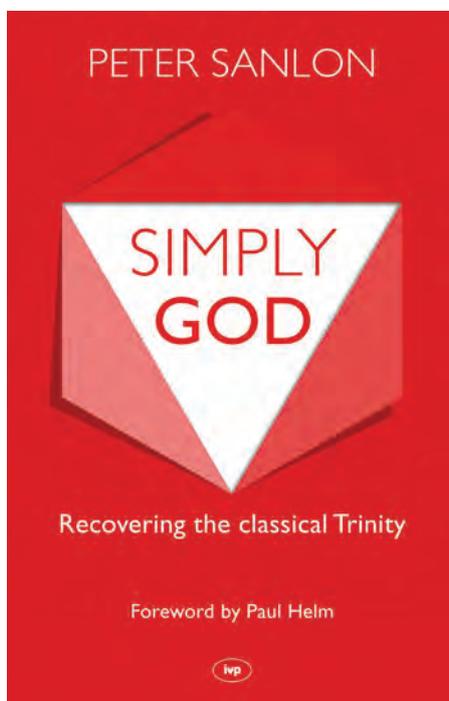
If you are looking for a practical understanding of the main issues, challenges and responses in rural ministry in Britain, this is the text for you. It's very accessible, straightforward and written by Simon Martin and others who are all associated with the Arthur Rank Centre (ARC) which seeks to equip the rural church for effective ministry and mission.

What I particularly like about this book is that it covers the main areas, at least as I understand them. Too many books on rural Christianity spend a lot of their time offering an analysis of the changing nature of rural communities, dealing with indices of rural deprivation, mobility and so on. This is important and helps us to understand the rural context in which we live out our faith and minister. But, too often they don't offer enough direct suggestion as to what we might actually do.

The chapters consider mission, worship, evangelism, messy church, fresh expressions, worship, discipleship, young people and multi-church ministry. I particularly appreciate the separate chapters on mission and evangelism. Too often these areas are conflated and the result is that being involved with people outside the believing community is considered to be evangelism. In reality that is mission which creates the opportunity for a more direct sharing of faith and a challenge to discipleship. This book very helpfully, in my view, gets this right.

My one small criticism of this book is that it's a bit Anglican. That is fully understandable. The ARC (<http://www.arthurrankcentre.org.uk/>) is a largely Anglican organisation with a Methodist/United Reformed Rural Officer. The book refers to a lot of ARC resources and programmes which can be used for anyone, although at times there is more of an Anglican flavour. The chapter on 'multi-church ministry' is a good example where the Methodist norm is discussed but rather than strengths and weaknesses of a rural circuit being considered there is more of an introduction to how Methodists do things for others. I think more could be learnt by Methodists and others by a sharper critique of the current Methodist circuit.

This is a very good book that gives us a better understanding of the challenges and possibilities in rural mission and ministry. It does point to the need to produce more material that helps Methodists and other non-Anglicans understand their nuanced context. This is a fine resource that will benefit many.
Revd Dr Stephen Skuce



SIMPLY GOD: RECOVERING THE CLASSICAL TRINITY

Peter Sanlon

IVP, 2014, 240pp,
978-1-78359-104-6

One of the commendatory comments on the back of Peter Sanlon's *Simply God* describes it as 'a clear and winsome apologia for classical theism'. It is indeed admirably clear, occasionally winsome, and also a trenchant argument about who God is, One and Three. Sanlon re-states, explains and defends the church's traditional trinitarian theology, in an age which expects everything to be 'modern' and in which Christians may avoid the tough, and rich, work of delving into historical traditions.

In the introductory section, Sanlon argues the need to look again at what the Church has affirmed about God, in the face of many refusing to look at doctrine deeply or attentively enough. The traditions of the Church affirm God's otherness, and Sanlon critiques the ways in which Christians reduce God to 'one of us, but bigger'. Overall, the author affirms God's 'simplicity' - a technical term which he explains and keeps coming back to. Part I, on the 'oneness' of God consists of four chapters dealing with simplicity and perfection, time and

eternity, the problem of suffering, and the unchangeability of God. The shorter part II has three chapters exploring God's relationality, especially the nature of God as love. There is difficult material in many chapters, but the explanations are much more accessible than most discussions of these topics. Sanlon also demonstrates the pastoral implications of his arguments, though some of his illustrations or applications are more significant and persuasive than others.

In his final chapter, Sanlon notes some issues for Christians in today's Western world which might benefit from this theological argument. Given the depth of the rest of the book, the sections here are so short as to be rather cursory. But the reader who has stuck with this book throughout, and been challenged by it, has here some hints of where the arguments and the pastoral concerns could be lived out in God's world.

Each chapter ends with a 'Meditation'. This emphasises that each section is meant to feed prayer and relationship with God, not remaining 'merely' intellectual. However, they would perhaps have worked better in a poetic, rather than prose form. As they are, there's a danger of 'meditation' seeming rather didactic.

Sanlon writes from a conservative, reformed perspective. He has in his sights a number of targets: proponents of a kind of 'God is our buddy' theology, in which God's otherness is not recognised; theologians who have helpfully recovered the 'threeness' of God, in recent Western theology, but have in the process misrepresented God's 'oneness' in the traditions of the Church; and all who think that affirming 'God is one' lands us with a picture of a static, non-relational God.

Simply God is a challenging, appropriately rigorous and important book. While I would question some of Sanlon's argument, particularly his understanding of revelation, the call to delve into Christian understanding of God, with close attention to historical theological sources, is crucial and I would commend this book.

*Reviewed by Jane Craske
Director of Methodist Formation,
The Queen's Foundation for Ecumenical
Theological Education, Birmingham*

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LIVERPOOL 200

RENEWING THE WESLEYAN VISION



THURSDAY 28 MAY (2PM) - FRIDAY 29 MAY (4.30PM) 2020
Hope Chapel, Liverpool Hope University

A two day conference for church leaders and members to ignite a renewal of the Wesleyan vision, develop a fresh strategy and to explore opportunities for a turnaround plan for Methodism.

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CONFIDENCE IN THE GOSPEL

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PRAYING ALWAYS

Praying Always: In this time of change and upheaval we pray for the Methodist Church in the UK during this year of prayerful discussion, and for the European Nations during Brexit.

SCRIPTURES TO CONSIDER.

ISA 37:3, 'This day is a day of distress and rebuke and disgrace, as when children come to the point of birth and there is no strength to deliver them. 4 It may be that the LORD your God will hear the words --- sent to ridicule the living God, and that he will rebuke him for the words the LORD your God has heard. Therefore, pray for the remnant that still survives.'

LUKE 11:17, 'Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them: Any kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and a house divided against itself will fall.'

PROV 13:5, 'The righteous hate what is false, but the wicked bring shame and disgrace.'

- 1 Father have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy. Pray for the Methodist Connexion, and the result of the conference decision to go ahead with Same Sex Marriage. Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy. Pray for **Austria**.
- 2 Pray for God's Church in your area whatever denomination for the Gospel to be preached in love and power, for the decisions and discussions on human relationships. **Belgium**.
- 3 Pray for God's Father Heart to touch (President - Vice President - Members of Committees - Chairs of District - Superintendents - Presbyters - Deacons - Local Preachers - Stewards and members.) We love him because he first loved us. 1John 4:19. **Bulgaria**.
- 4 Jude 1:20 'But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit.' Pray for your wife, husband, children, grandchildren, brother, sister. **Croatia**.
- 5 Heaven is our true home. Read Revelation Ch 4, praying through the verses as God leads. **Cyprus**.
- 6 See Isaiah 9:6. Bring the names of God to mind, and ask him to reveal more of his character and nature to you. Pray for a renewed understanding of 'Scriptural Holiness.' That the Church would not stray from following God's will revealed in scripture. **Czechia**.
- 7 Today spend time drawing close to God in song, lost in the wonder of His name. Then pray for all Ministers and Churches that will be profoundly affected when our definition of MARRIAGE changes. Pray for those who will leave, for churches who are considering leaving. **Denmark**.
- 8 Pray for those involved in Mission and Evangelism, that they would have fruit for their labours. Missionaries, District Enablers, our MET development worker Derek Balsdon. **Estonia**.
- 9 Pray for churches and circuits to have vision to reach beyond their doors and that the Gospel would be clearly and lovingly proclaimed. **Finland**.
- 10 Pray for organisations involved in mission and Outreach, Student Christian Unions, YWAM, The Faith Mission, Tear Fund, Operation Mobilisation, Fresh Expressions, MET. **France**.
- 11 Pray for God's will and leading for all whose stationing is being reviewed, and for all who have started in new posts this September, and about the desperate shortage of Ministers. **Germany**.
- 12 Pray for anyone you know who needs God's blessing on their marriage, for all your leaders. For all our world-wide partner churches who will be affected by our conference decisions.
- 13 For our Nation at this time of change and uncertainty. For young Christians travelling on a year out, starting a job, or going to university. **Greece**.
- 14 1Tim 1:1-2 "I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness." Pray through these verses. **Hungary**.
- 15 Pray for the presence of God in our lives and Churches, His presence brings peace. Psalm 133:1 "How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity! ---- For there the LORD bestows / commands his blessing, even life for evermore." Pray for peace and forgiveness in our church. **Ireland**.
- 16 'Revival is God bending down to the dying embers of a fire, and breathing onto it until it bursts into flame' Christmas Evans. Ask God to breathe on to the embers of Methodism. **Italy**.

- 17 Ask for personal revival as well as national, bring your own family, brothers, sisters, parents, children, cousins, nephews, nieces and grandchildren before the throne of grace. **Latvia.**
- 18 Pray for all mission and outreach events in your own District. (Messy Church, Messy Community, Street pastors, food banks, Christians Against Poverty, and all local initiatives.) **Lithuania.**
- 19 Pray for our Methodist Mission partners working in the developing world. Pray for families on benefits and refugees. **Luxembourg.**
- 20 Please pray for the work of the Neema Mission (Methodist School) in Uganda, Rev Stephen Dhairawa and His wife Nakato, for the completion of the school buildings, for ability to feed 350 children daily. (www.acts-africa.net) **Malta.**
- 21 Take your sins (Words - Thoughts - Deeds) to the cross, there is always room at the cross for the repentant. As Christian's, repentance and confession should be our lifestyle. 1Jn 1: 8 "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." **Netherlands.**
- 22 Pray in repentance on behalf of our church and nations. Forgive those who wound you, pray for them. Romans 12:14 "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse." **Poland.**
- 23 Is there a habit or sin that needs breaking? In the light of God's presence sin is driven out and freedom is born. Pray for those you know who are suffering from addiction. **Portugal.**
- 24 Pray for a return to scriptural holiness, "The doctrines of the evangelical faith which Methodism has held from the beginning and still holds are based upon the divine

revelation recorded in the Holy Scriptures. The Methodist Church acknowledges this revelation as the supreme rule of faith and practice. These evangelical doctrines to which the preachers of the Methodist Church are pledged are contained in Wesley's Notes on the New Testament and the first four volumes of his sermons." Deed of Union. **Romania.**

- 25 Pray that the enemy's plans are thwarted. **Slovakia.**
- 26 A Welsh prayer, "O High King of Heaven, have mercy on our Land, revive your Church, send the Holy Spirit for the sake of the children, may your Kingdom come to our nation in Jesus' mighty name. Amen." The home nations England, Ireland, Wales, **Scotland.**
- 27 God's word to be rightly understood, preached and applied in our churches, his kingdom rules where his word is obeyed. **Slovenia.**
- 28 The Lord's Prayer begins and ends with the Kingdom, the scripture begins and ends with the Kingdom, the kingdom came in King Jesus, it comes in our hearts, and will come in its fullness. Thank God for the victory of our King. **Spain.**
- 29 Suggestion: Sit quietly in God's presence, and ask him to touch you with His kingdom power and Glory. Isa 44:3 'I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants.' **Sweden.**
- 30 Think on the eternal and trustworthy nature of God. Time is short, eternity is immeasurable, build your life and prayers on eternal values. **United Kingdom.**
- 31 Go over the prayers of the month and add your AMENS. **United Kingdom.**

Prayer requests for Praying Always are welcome please send them to Rev D Kevin Jones, kevtherev34@hotmail.com



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FROM THE CHAIR

The Revd David A. Hull

Dear Friends,

On holiday in the Brecon Beacons recently, we found ourselves driving down narrow country lanes with no idea where we were, or where we were going. We had asked for recommendations of local vantage points with children's play areas and had tried to follow the directions. It was time to give up and, with the children growing increasingly restless, I suggested we should simply see where the road would take us and enjoy the views along the way.

It was then that we passed a sign for Trefeca and a new adventure began. I had no idea we were staying so close to the home of Howell Harris, a contemporary of John Wesley and one of the leaders of the eighteenth century Welsh Methodist revival. We turned into the grounds of the house, now a residential retreat centre and, with the help of the traveller's trusty companion - an iPhone with access to Wikipedia - read up on the history of the area.

Harris had been converted in 1735, at the age of 21, through the preaching of the Revd Pryce Davies in the local parish church. He was refused ordination in the Church of England and so embarked on an itinerant preaching ministry. When at home, banned from preaching in his parish church, he resorted to preaching from his grandparents' grave in the churchyard.

We drove over to the parish church and located the grave. Standing beside it, where people had once stood to hear Harris preach, I was suddenly struck by the thought: independently from one another and many miles apart, Howell Harris and John Wesley had very similar experiences of conversion, rejection and revival. The Lord was working in very similar ways, at almost the same time, in the lives of people who were otherwise unconnected and a long way from one another. In fact, Harris' experiences of conversion, tomb-top preaching and the beginnings of revival all preceded those of Wesley.

When we tell the story of the origins of Methodism, we often begin on the evening of 24 May 1738 as John Wesley 'went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street', quite neglecting the fact that his brother Charles had a conversion experience three days previously and often completely unaware of what

had already happened in Wales. To do so tells a part of the Methodist story, but risks missing the bigger story altogether, a story of what the Lord was doing with a number of people quite independently of each other, at different times and in different places.

All of which leaves me wondering what the Lord is doing in our own day. A number of us feel we are travelling along a road within Methodism, not quite sure where we are and with no idea of where we are going. With so much uncertainty, there are great truths of which we can be certain. We can be certain that the Lord is at work, building his kingdom in such a way that nothing will ever be able to prevail against it. I believe we can also be just as certain that the Lord will be doing that same work with different people and in different places. For me, one of the wonderful fruits of the uncertainty in which we find ourselves has been the number of people who have emerged from around the country and who have come to join with us in walking this journey together.

Elsewhere in this magazine, you will find information about the launch of the Remaining Faithful Network. This new network will enable members of MET who wish to stand together in remaining faithful to the original Wesleyan evangelical vision, and to the biblical and apostolic understanding of marriage as the life-long union of one man and one woman and the only appropriate context for sexual intimacy. Whilst individual members may have other understandings of marriage and relationships, this has always been the position of Methodist Evangelicals Together and our predecessor organisations, and has been reaffirmed unanimously by our AGM. It also continues to be the position of the Evangelical Alliance, of which we are a member organisation.

Of course, whilst it has been a busy summer responding to the decisions of the Methodist Conference, the usual work of MET continues. I do hope I will see you at one of our events in the near future.

Rejoicing in our partnership in the gospel,



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