

THE connexion

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Inspiring stories from the Methodist Church



SO MUCH MORE

The **Methodist** Church 

THE Connexion

Issue 36

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The Methodist Church

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Welcome to this latest issue of *The Connexion*. In her reflection on her sabbatical, the **Revd Kan Yu** speaks about how she found food for her soul. There is much here to feed us, with a rich and varied diet of articles.

The youth of the Methodist Church star in this issue with **Bea Hulme**, the Youth President, explaining why young people need encouragement, and **Phoebe Parkin**, a past Youth President bringing stories of hope from Colombia, where she helped young people learn media skills. **Emily Owen's** young niece inspires her to talk about why people get embarrassed by her crutch and how Disability Awareness Sunday with its 'Made in God's Image' theme is a chance to dispel ignorance.

The Connexion magazine is a window on Methodist activities both around the UK and across the world. We glimpse the beautifully renovated **Wesley Centre in Malton** and we hear from members of **Shoreline**, an online Methodist church, and from Stream and Carlo, two members of **Breathe**, a new Christian group for people in Nottingham.

You'll also find stories of Methodist love in action, such as **Heaton Park Methodist Church** welcoming thousands of weary festival-goers during the Parklife Music Festival, while Kate Powell explains the role of **Anna Chaplains**, who offer kindness and conversation to people nearing the end of their lives.

As we anticipate the end of Lenten abstinence and look towards the feast of Easter, this issue of *The Connexion* offers a number of instances of Methodists involved in the provision of food for body and soul. You'll read the heartening story of Methodists providing affordable groceries in **Venezuela** and the account of the unique work of the **Ark Café** in Buckinghamshire, which offers a chance for people with disabilities to learn skills and for those without others close to them to feel welcomed and valued over a regular coffee.

In so many ways, it is in the small moments that the great love of God, which we celebrate in this season, is made known. Those who know that we don't 'live by bread alone' can nevertheless make a big difference when (to pick up Emily Owen's reference in **We're all in God's image**) we ask with Winnie the Pooh "**What about lunch?**"

The Revd Dr Jonathan R Hustler
Secretary of the Conference

Highlights



Anniversary of United Church of Zambia

This year, the United Church of Zambia (UCZ), one of the Methodist Church in Britain's African Partner Churches, celebrates the 60th anniversary of its founding. The UCZ was formed in 1965 and is today the largest Protestant denomination in Zambia.

The Revd Richard Andrew, the President Designate of the Methodist Conference, was invited to preach at a special service marking the anniversary in Zambia.

Richard said: "It was a real joy to be part of such a vibrant gathering. The UCZ is a close cousin of the Methodist Church in Britain and has a lot to teach us about worship, evangelism and practical justice."

Art display at Southwark Cathedral

Behold the Man by Norman Adams, a painting from the Methodist Modern Art Collection (MMAC), will be on display in Southwark Cathedral in London from 5 March until 18 April 2025. *Behold the Man* is displayed as part of the yearly Lent art exhibit at the cathedral and is about the passion of Christ. A poster of the artwork is available for sale at the cathedral and online at methodistpublishing.org.uk



True soul food

A sabbatical, treats and delicious meals were not enough to nourish the Revd Kan Yu's weary soul. Could a silent retreat provide 'the bread of life'? She tells us more.

Food is essential to life. It goes further than providing energy, and is an essential part of our culture as we share meals with our families and friends. My Chinese tradition has this understanding at its heart. Instead of saying "How are you?" we convey our care when greeting others by asking "Have you eaten yet?"

As Jesus' disciples, during this season of Lent how do we relate to food? When he was tempted in the wilderness, Jesus proclaimed "Man does not live by bread alone." But without bread, how do we survive? Perhaps Jesus is challenging us, asking "What can truly sustain us as Methodists in the 21st century? Is it just the food that's brought to our doors via a few clicks on our mobile or computer screens?"

BURN OUT

Reflecting on my ministry, I was amazed at the moments when I thought I was running out of steam. I did not have any 'bread' to sustain my soul and it was tough to deal with the challenges in ministry and life.

Since 2021 I had been thinly spread, ministering to various churches as well as to a new community of people from Hong Kong who have migrated to the UK. I was not burning for God. I was burning out. A long overdue sabbatical was at hand, the perfect solution to quench my thirst and sate my hunger, allowing me to rest from my busy routine.

A holiday was booked, a pilgrimage planned, and visits, activities and meals out were arranged to ensure my soul would be restored as I did what I wanted, surrounded by the people I loved. Indeed, I had a marvellous time away from full-time ministry for three months. However, I still felt exhausted towards the end of the sabbatical. The holiday, the pilgrimage, the numerous visits and the yummy food did not address my inner weariness. Something wasn't right.

TOTAL SILENCE

I sought liberation by doing something totally different. I booked a retreat at a Jesuit Centre in North Wales. It was a silent retreat for three days. The only time I was permitted to speak was for half an hour of spiritual direction each day.

I threw myself in at the deep end to experience the total 'otherness' of God through silence. Little did I know that letting go of my power to speak, as well as locking away my mobile and severing all contact with the external world would be the greatest gifts.

A massive sense of space and time was suddenly made available. I was enabled and empowered to attune to God's voice in prayers and experience God's transcendent presence. Three days later, I was well fed: physically, emotionally and spiritually. Noticing the Lord was my shepherd, I absolutely lacked nothing. My contentment came from within. In John 6:35 Jesus says: "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry." Encountering the 'bread of life' had satisfied and replenished me as the beloved child of God. I was enough.

In light of this transforming experience, I recommend letting go of things we take for granted and putting ourselves in a 'wilderness' with God to open up a new pathway to a rich and content life in Christ. The Apostle Paul attests to this paradoxical truth: "For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes, he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich." (2 Corinthians 8:9)

What has sustained you in your discipleship? How will you follow Jesus' poverty to become rich in the eternal Christ? Perhaps Jesus is calling you to reflect and become replenished in this season of Lent.

Let me end my reflection by sharing a profound song 'Hosea (Come back to me)' written by Gregory Norbet. One verse says:



You can find spiritual
nourishment for Lent
and beyond at
methodist.org.uk/SoulFood



The Revd Kan Yu
is a presbyter in
south-west London
and works with
Hong Kong migrants
living in London.

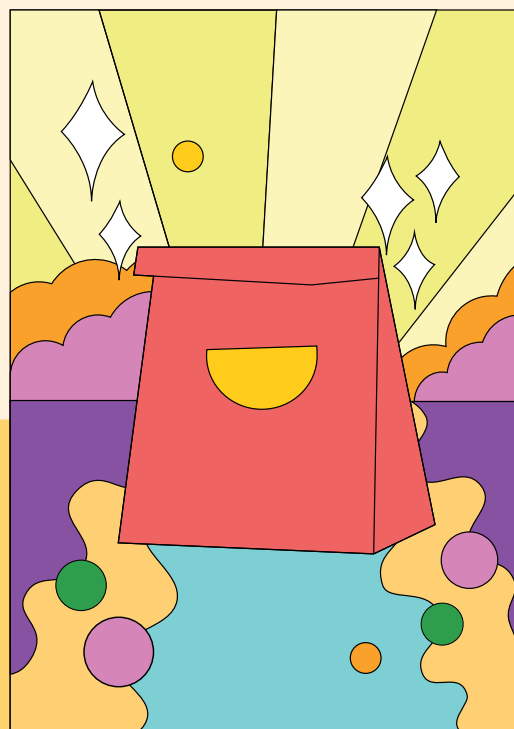
**The wilderness will lead you to your
heart where I [God] will speak.**

**Integrity and justice, with tenderness,
you shall know.**

**Long have I waited for your coming
home to me and living deeply our
new life.**

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To the wilderness let us go. There we will be laid bare to encounter the one true God in Christ who is always there, waiting to nourish us. Then we can nourish the world wherever God has placed us – all for God's kingdom and glory. Amen.





Nottingham Breathe Ministry



Nottingham Methodists have set up 'Breathe', a weekly group in a local bar, where people chat and study the Bible. It takes its name from Ezekiel 37 which speaks of breathing God's Spirit into people. We spoke to one of its members and to its organiser, Deacon Julie Morton.

"With Breathe, we have proper conversations."

Stream is a member of Breathe. He explains what it means to him. "My friend Carlo found a flyer about the Breathe drop-in sessions. I came along with him and have been a regular ever since. I think what Breathe provides is more than social. It's nice in a small group when you get to know each other, because church can be a bit big and a bit rushed, and people often spread themselves too thin. With Breathe, we have proper conversations, and we've started doing Bible study as well.

"I'm 56 and originally from Scotland. I came to Christ four years ago, after four years of terrible grief following my partner's death. During this time, when I was sitting in the park I was approached by Mormons one day and by Jehovah's Witnesses the next. I started taking an interest in what they had to say: they activated a great hunger to read the Bible and understand it. I also started praying every day. Within weeks my depression began to lift. Through the Bible and going to Breathe I started to explore Christ and discover the word of God. It really surprised me! After a few months I said to myself 'I've become a believer' and I've had a very strong faith ever since. I'm continuing walking in faith and it's the most amazing thing that's ever happened to me."

NEW PLACES FOR GOD

Deacon Julie Morton helped set up Breathe. She was stationed to the Nottingham North East Circuit in 2021 with a remit to work in Nottingham city centre. Julie, the Revd Loraine Mellor and others put their heads together and begun to imagine something new and exciting to engage people, in line with the New Places for New People initiative, part of the Methodist Church's 'God for All' strategy.

Julie says: "Being given a 'blank page' is both exciting and scary. I spent a long time praying and talking to people to get a sense of what was already happening in Nottingham and to build relationships. I gathered together a small core team to meet for prayer, usually online.

"The original vision was to lease a shop and have a multi-purpose space including a café/drop in and provide any support that people might need. There would also be some space to start a Christian community. However, we were unable to find a single suitable space, so we decided to hold different things in different places.



"And so the Christian community was birthed."

BREATHE COMMUNITY

Julie says "We found a pub called Revolution in Hockley who were open to us using their premises each week and so the Christian community was birthed. After a discussion with the church team about Ezekiel one week, we decided to call it 'Breathe'. It's been running for over 18 months now. Initially there were only about three of us, but we began to expand and now have a regular group of about ten, with others who join us now and then.

"We would still like to start a drop-in café, where people can call in for a cuppa and a chat and we are looking for the right location. Meanwhile Breathe is the focus of our work as we continue to ask God how to engage more fully with the life of the city.

"As Breathe, we are a community who talk through how the week has been, so that we have some understanding of one another's lives. We eat a light lunch and then take part in a discovery Bible study. Our intention is to create a group that is open, so anyone can walk through the door and join in.

"It hasn't been plain sailing. Breathe had to move to another Revolution bar because the first one closed, and we have had two unsuccessful attempts at drop-in cafés. We believe that being brave and putting a stop to something which isn't going to work is far better than pushing through when it isn't right.

"We don't have all the answers. At times it feels we don't have an answer at all. But we have seen signs of growth and are excited about the next steps. We look forward to what God might do through us in Nottingham city centre."

Sanctuary for festivalgoers

FIRST OPENING

Due to Covid-19, it wasn't until Saturday 11 June 2022 that we could open the Parklife Sanctuary for the first time. We had very little idea of what to expect. Across the 48 hours we were open we welcomed 350 people into the church to find a safe space to wait, recover, contact friends and family, or just enjoy a free hot drink and snack.



It was a really positive start, but there were many learning points too. For the 2023 festival, volunteers were provided with hi-vis jackets, business cards and an abundance of welfare supplies. We had a good social media campaign on #ParklifeSanctuary which received over 100,000 views on Facebook alone and we welcomed 2,300 people into the church across the weekend.

THOUSANDS VISIT

In 2024 we returned for our third year, which was the biggest yet. There were around 3,800 people crossing our threshold during the weekend and over 160,000 views and 60,000 plus engagements on social media! We opened at 10am both mornings and remained open until the last person had found their way home at 3am. Throughout, we offered free hot drinks and snacks. This year especially popular items were the foil blankets as it poured with rain on Sunday evening. We also offered phone chargers so people could replenish

Weary people visiting Parklife Music Festival can pause in Heaton Park Methodist Church to recover, wait in safety for friends, and enjoy a free snack. The church's minister, the Revd Jez Hackett, explains why it's so important.

In June 2019 our leadership team were discussing the recent Parklife Music Festival in Heaton Park, just over the road from the church. After the festival finished there were hundreds of young people wandering around looking for a way to get home or a place to recover from a day's partying. One member of the team remarked "If that was my daughter, I'd want to know she had somewhere safe to go. Is there anything we can do to help?" And so, the Parklife Sanctuary Project was born.



CHURCH VOLUNTEERS

"What a sanctuary! As ever most young people very appreciative that we are doing this. And a great team to work with."

"One girl, revived by the warmth of the church and a hot drink, thanked me, declaring she was a Christian. So, I said 'the One over all watches over us and we do the same in a small way and love to help'."

"My shifts have been wonderful – meeting fabulous young people and working with top teams. Thank you, Lord, for being with us all."

their phone batteries to contact friends, family or taxis. It was also quite simply a safe place to sit, wait and recover before heading home.

In 2024 we recruited volunteers to take a few thousand business cards into the festival itself, to spread the word about the Sanctuary. We also filled a prayer rota for the whole time we were open, so there was always at least one person praying for the Sanctuary while we were open.

VALUABLE SPACE

This is a space that is valued by all: festivalgoers, their families and friends, volunteers, members of the local community (who have reported a great decrease in antisocial behaviour during the festival since we opened) and the festival organisers. It is something the church and wider circuit look forward to each year. We have become known as 'the Parklife church' which is something we love!

Some of the comments we received from our volunteers and customers demonstrate just how valuable the Parklife Sanctuary Project is, and why we want to continue to offer this service.

With more learning points for next year, we can't wait to be back! This year's festival will be 14-15 June 2025. We won't be doing anything majorly different, just hoping and planning for more volunteers and guests!

FESTIVALGOERS

"The Parklife Sanctuary is a haven of tranquillity."

"You are absolute angels. We appreciate you taking the time to look after us. God bless you all."

"It's my first time here, the experience is awesome, welcoming and pure. Really appreciate you all!"



TAKE PART IN MISSION AT FESTIVALS



As part of its 'God for All' strategy, mission teams from all over the Methodist Church are attending a range of events from sports, to music festivals, to agricultural shows, to comic conventions, and more!

To explore doing something of your own at a local event, or to sign up to volunteer with an existing team, go to methodist.org.uk/FestivalsAndEvents

Encouragement for the Church's youth

b **Bea Hulme, 22, from Penrith in Cumbria is the Youth President. Bea explains why young people are the Church of today, not tomorrow, and how they need encouragement.**

I'm Bea, the Youth President for 2024/2025. I represent the voice of children and young people across the Methodist Church in Britain and advocate for them in the life of the Church. I ensure they are involved in decisions and feel valued members of the Church today, not just as future members and leaders. Involving our young people in the life of our churches benefits everyone, especially churches where young people attend.

My challenge is to encourage and empower young people throughout the year, and to reach out to them wherever they may be. At 3Generate (the Methodist Children and Youth Assembly held in Birmingham each October) and at the other big Christian festivals, it is easy to feel encouraged. Being surrounded by other young people, in a dynamic, positive Christian fellowship gives us confidence and boosts our faith. However, back at home, there may be only one or two people of our own age at church. In my home town, during the other 51 Sundays of the year when I'm not at 3Generate, being missional and growing in faith can be a bit lonely.

"Young people didn't feel like a priority."



NOT A PRIORITY

Many young people I've talked to feel like afterthoughts in their own congregations. My friend, Joshua, is a young person in a rural church where the youth population consists of just him and his brother.

I talked to Joshua about his experience of church. He said: "We lost our youth space a few years ago, and after that there wasn't much focus on youth. It changed my opinions on what church was like and its priorities. When they were looking at other spaces for our youth to use, they were all out of the way. A suitable space was never found, so there wasn't anywhere for us to go. Young people didn't feel like a priority."

These experiences of church are common among young people where there isn't a large youth population. But there are many young people who have found a welcome in their church. One person I know, when he learned that you can be a church

steward at 16, was excited and ready to help. Other young people have become involved with their church through taking care of the IT or audio equipment for services.

ENCOURAGING

I started leading worship at 16, when I volunteered to fill in initially just for a week. It may not have been the best worship the congregation had experienced but with training, mentoring and lots of encouragement I kept going and I remained involved in worship. Had I not been encouraged initially, I may not have become involved in church to the extent that I am now. I have experienced first-hand the effect that encouragement has on young people.

Encouraging our young people to get more involved in church life is the best way of ensuring our churches thrive in the future. We need to foster a church environment that makes our current young people want to stay and that will encourage generations to come.

“3Generate showed me that there’s so much more to church.”

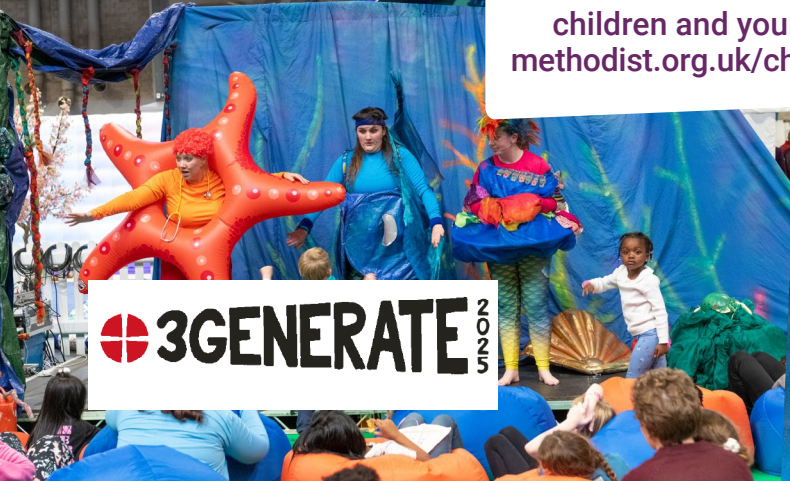
Joshua went to 3Generate for a second time in 2024. He came back fired up to get involved and make change happen in his church. He said: “Since 3Generate I’ve felt there is so much potential in the Church. 3Generate showed me that there’s so much more to church, and it’s made me want to get involved more.”

He became the youth representative on his church council, where his energy and motivation are infectious. He says: “You’ve got to make young people feel like a priority. We need to work together. Things need to change, and I think the next generation needs to be allowed to step up to ensure there is a future.”

Our children and young people are an enthusiastic, optimistic and positive force in our churches. We need to work together to support, nurture and harness that energy. We have such a great Church and our children and young people have to be at the forefront of all we do, both now and in the future.



Find out what’s available for children and young people at methodist.org.uk/childrenandyouth



3GENERATE 2025



The Revd Anna Carrington (left) and the Revd Yvonne Pearson outside Goostrey Methodist Church and Post Office

Vital village facility saved by church

A village church that stepped in to re-open a vital community facility is looking ahead to the initiative's first anniversary, Rachel Dalby reports.

The original Goostrey Post Office, in Cheshire, was forced to close in late 2022 after the owner of its premises died shortly after her 100th birthday. Not wanting the village, which has an ageing population, to be without the service, leaders and worshippers at Goostrey Methodist Church swung into action.

The Revd Yvonne Pearson, who was the Superintendent Minister of the Dane and Trent Circuit at the time, explained: "In order to continue, the Post Office needed new premises, and it was suggested that the church, just a few metres away from the original business, could be an ideal location."

GREAT OPPORTUNITY

With the next nearest Post Office being a fair distance away, the church saw this as a great opportunity to do something practical for the wider community that would, at the same time, bring more visitors into their building.

"We wanted to show God's love in action through loving and serving our neighbour," said Yvonne. "We'd already been engaging with our local community through Messy Church, Christian Aid lunches and other events, and we'd prayed about how we could further increase our community engagement."

Within weeks of the idea being discussed, a project planning group was formed and the process of bringing the Post Office into the church premises began. Architects' plans for a new fully accessible entrance were drawn up, money was raised for the alterations to the building, local authority permissions were obtained, and the necessary structural work was overseen.

DISTRICT SUPPORT

Alongside this, the church worked closely with the Post Office to get the required agreements and licences in place. Regular updates were shared with villagers through the local parish magazine.

With the support of the Chester and Stoke-on-Trent Methodist District, the Post Office opened for the first time in the church's vestry (which is still used as a vestry on Sundays) last summer. A thanksgiving service was held in the church to mark the occasion.



Many other Methodist churches are making the most of their property to serve local communities. For more stories like this, go to methodist.org.uk/Property/Inspiration

"While our church congregation is relatively small, our members gave a considerable amount of their time to keep this project moving forward and turn our vision into a reality," said Yvonne.

"We were very driven by the prospect that, if we didn't re-open the Post Office, a lot of people, especially elderly villagers and others who are less mobile, would have experienced hardship."

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Since its launch, the Post Office, which opens for a few hours on four days, has proved popular with community members wanting to buy stamps, arrange parcel deliveries and do their Post Office banking. For some users, a visit to the premises provides the only time in their day when they chat with other people.

The church, which recently said farewell to Yvonne due to her retirement, has welcomed probationer minister, the Revd Anna Carrington. Anna is keen to work with the congregation to consider how to continue developing their community engagement.

Anna said: "Hosting the Post Office is a fantastic opportunity for us, and we're now looking forward to seeing how God will call us to make the most of this in sharing God's love with our community."

"Something we're already doing is handing out seasonal treats, along with invitations to Christmas and Easter services, to people who use the Post Office. This gives us great opportunities to have meaningful conversations with villagers who don't normally attend church."



Malton's revived treasure

f Following a lengthy £2 million restoration and transformation, Malton's historic Wesley Centre is now a vibrant church and community hub fit for the 21st century as Paul Emberley, the Development Lead, explains.

The market town of Malton is the gateway to the Howardian Hills in North Yorkshire and the Wesley Centre is a prominent part of its history. It's a large Grade II* listed preaching chapel designed by the Revd William Jenkins, the itinerant Methodist minister turned architect who was commissioned by John Wesley to build 13 such chapels around the country from 1804 until the late 1820s. His designs were influenced by Wesley's Chapel in City Road, London, on which he also worked.

An almost perfect cube in architectural form, the church was designed by Jenkins as an auditory preaching space. It's one of only 40 Grade II* churches in the Connexion and is an important part of Methodism's heritage. Historic England says it's at the upper end of Grade II* and considers it to be of 'national significance'.

DISASTER AVERTED

A quinquennial inspection in 2015 spelled certain change for the 1811 building. The large roof structure had catastrophically failed, and an urgent decision was needed. Should the building be saved?

After extensive consultation it was decided to opt for the development of a new vision. It was a brave choice, as we

could have more easily closed its doors permanently and thanked God for times that had gone before.

A major redevelopment project was instigated, with three out of four phases now completed. Three factors influenced the decision to create such a new vision.

First, the population of Malton and nearby Norton-on-Derwent is expanding. In 2015 the combined population was around 14,250, predicted to rise by 50% before 2027. At more than 20,000, the enlarged town and catchment area would be the single most populated area in the district of Ryedale. Malton is thriving with weekly markets attracting large numbers of visitors. The Malton Food-Lovers Festival attracts up to 50,000 people – many of whom pass the doors of the Wesley Centre at the rate of up to 1,000 per hour.

Secondly, there were few spaces for the community to use. The Wesley Centre could meet this need and is also particularly suitable as a location for classical music. With its good natural acoustics, the building could be a fine classical concert venue. We're even doing the unthinkable by reinstating a large historic pipe organ as part of the fourth and final phase of works.

The final factor is that it could be opened up to the wider community to create a sustainable future. Regular concert programming, conferencing, a new professionally-operated café, and large scale banqueting will each deliver valuable revenue streams.

**"Should
the
building
be
saved?"**

COMMUNITY HUB

Following its partial reopening before Christmas 2024, the building is now open daily and the vision of it being at the heart of the community is being realised. It provides new spaces for charities and community groups to meet at an affordable cost, welcoming everyone regardless of their gender, sexual orientation, or of their religious or political views. This is a core ethos of the Wesley Centre.

One key user is the Malton Free Fridge, which redistributes good food donated by supermarkets and FareShare. Around 30,000 people use it each year, many of whom are on the fringes of society and gather at the Wesley Centre not only for free food, but for conversation, warmth, fellowship, and for help with social issues. The initiative has strong environmental credentials too, preventing thousands of tons of food from going to landfill each year.

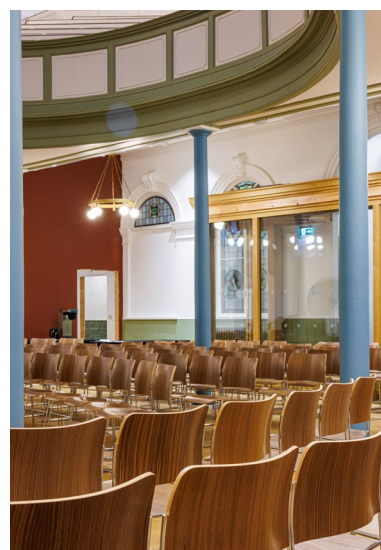
LONG JOURNEY

It's been a long journey and not one for the faint hearted. We've seen the roof repaired, an adjacent building converted for commercial use and fully let, and are nearing completion of the restoration of the large 550-seat main space. It's hoped that the final phase, which includes the reinstatement of a new three-storey annex, will start later in 2025. Methodists in Malton have met continually on this site for 214 years and will do so for many more years to come in a building that's now equipped for the 21st century.

The project is an example of responding to the Connexion's call to reimagine large property assets where there's a demonstrable case. The Wesley Centre scheme was identified as a model example by the Listed Buildings Advisory Committee and the then Connexional Property Development Committee for how large Methodist property assets might be used for missional outreach in a growing community.

Getting the vision right from the outset was critical. There have been plenty of bumps in the road. But we believe that initiatives in Malton will reap rewards, and as a consequence there will be opportunities now for the current church itself to grow.

"It could be opened to the wider community to create a sustainable future."



You can read more at maltonwesleycentre.org

The Property team at the Methodist Church offers support for churches to make their buildings an integral part of their mission plan. Go to methodist.org.uk/property/mission



WE'RE ALL IN GOD'S IMAGE

Disabled author Emily Owen says Disability Awareness Sunday is an opportunity to educate ourselves about disability and make church welcoming to all.

"Some people don't know what to do. They look embarrassed," observed my 13-year-old niece, Abi, as we took a break from shopping. We tucked into our pizza and began to discuss disability.

Abi has grown up with disability. She has been reminding me not to forget my crutch ever since she could talk. I need a crutch when walking outside and at times I need a wheelchair. Abi has sat on my knee from babyhood as I travel about in my wheelchair, and now she's also one of the best wheelchair pushers around.

"It was my crutch that embarrassed people."

She has been speaking clearly for me to lipread ever since then, too. Disability is normal to her. So she was nonplussed when people stared at my crutch and gave me a wide birth while shopping.

"Why are they like that?" she asked.

I think the answer broadly lies in two words: poor education. If people haven't learned about disability, if they have never come across disabled people in everyday life, how can they be expected to be comfortable with it?

MY STORY

Before I lost my hearing, I am not sure I'd have known how best to communicate with someone who can't hear. I'd never met anyone in that situation. I only began to learn when living with deafness.

I was born able to hear and, until the age of 16, I had no idea that there was anything wrong with my health. Then I was diagnosed with NF2-SWN, a condition that causes tumours to grow on nerves anywhere in the body including, in my case, the auditory and spinal nerves. Hence I am deaf and struggle with walking (among other things).

AWARENESS

Disability Awareness Sunday (DAS) this year falls on 28 September. According to the disability charity Scope, there were 16 million people living with disabilities in the UK in 2022. Sixteen million! I'm not good at maths, but I think there's a fairly high probability that some readers of this magazine will encounter disabled people in their lives.

“Why are they like that?” Is that a question we want the 16 million disabled people and their relatives to be asking about our negative attitudes?

A month or so before our shopping trip, Abi and I were at the theatre, along with the rest of the family. We were there to see ‘My Fair Lady’, for Abi’s birthday. It was not a captioned performance, but I remember the songs from when I could hear; they are in my music memory.

Before the show, ushers in the auditorium held up screens showing phones and cameras crossed out, indicating that phones should be switched off and that no photography was allowed.

Abi nudged me: “Those signs are for you, so that you know too.” She realised I would not have heard the announcement, and it didn’t occur to her that the theatre had not made the signs especially for me. It didn’t occur to her that people wouldn’t have intentionally worked to make sure I’d be included.



Emily with the Revd Joy Langford, minister of St Andrew's Methodist Church



The charity **Through the Roof** encourages churches to meet with disabled people in their community. Emily Owen and Through the Roof have prepared resources for Disability Awareness Sunday 2025. To find out more, visit throughtheroof.org

As churches, we have the good news of Jesus to share. To help people feel included maybe we can put in wheelchair ramps, install hearing loops, offer large print Bibles and hymn books, and make space available for those who feel overwhelmed...

“Those are for you” we might say to disabled people.

Disability Awareness Sunday can help us begin to add “So that you know too.” It can help us on the journey to the place where it is unthinkable that someone can’t be included at church.

INCLUSION

Going back to that lunch in the shopping centre when Abi said: “Some people don’t know what to do. They look embarrassed.” Maybe you don’t know what to do. Please don’t be embarrassed about that. Disability Awareness Sunday is an opportunity for churches to begin a conversation, to start – or continue – thinking about inclusion. Disability Awareness Sunday is for you, so that you know too.

A favourite quote of mine is from Winnie-the-Pooh: “It is more fun to talk with someone who doesn’t use long, difficult words but rather short, easy words like ‘What about lunch?’” Disability Awareness Sunday is a chance to come together, celebrating each other. Let’s not focus on complicated obstacles, but on simple essentials.

Spiritual care in later life

The Methodist Church was a co-founder of the Anna Chaplaincy national network, offering emotional and spiritual support to older people. We spoke to Kate Powell, who until recently led the Anna Chaplaincy team in Alton, Hampshire.

In 2010, Methodist minister Keith Underhill and Anglican vicar Peter Dolores, both working in Alton, shared a vision to care for the spiritual wellbeing of older people. They signed a covenant to collaborate on various areas of outreach and set up the Anna Chaplaincy. The name derives from the story of Anna and Simeon in Luke's Gospel. Anna was a faithful older person who recognised Jesus as the Messiah.

From those early beginnings it has been scaled up with the support of the Bible Reading Fellowship to become a national network of over 1,000 Anna Chaplains and Anna Friends (volunteers). They all share a belief that the spiritual and pastoral wellbeing of older people matters.

"Thank you so much for arranging for Kate Powell to visit my mum."

CARE HOMES

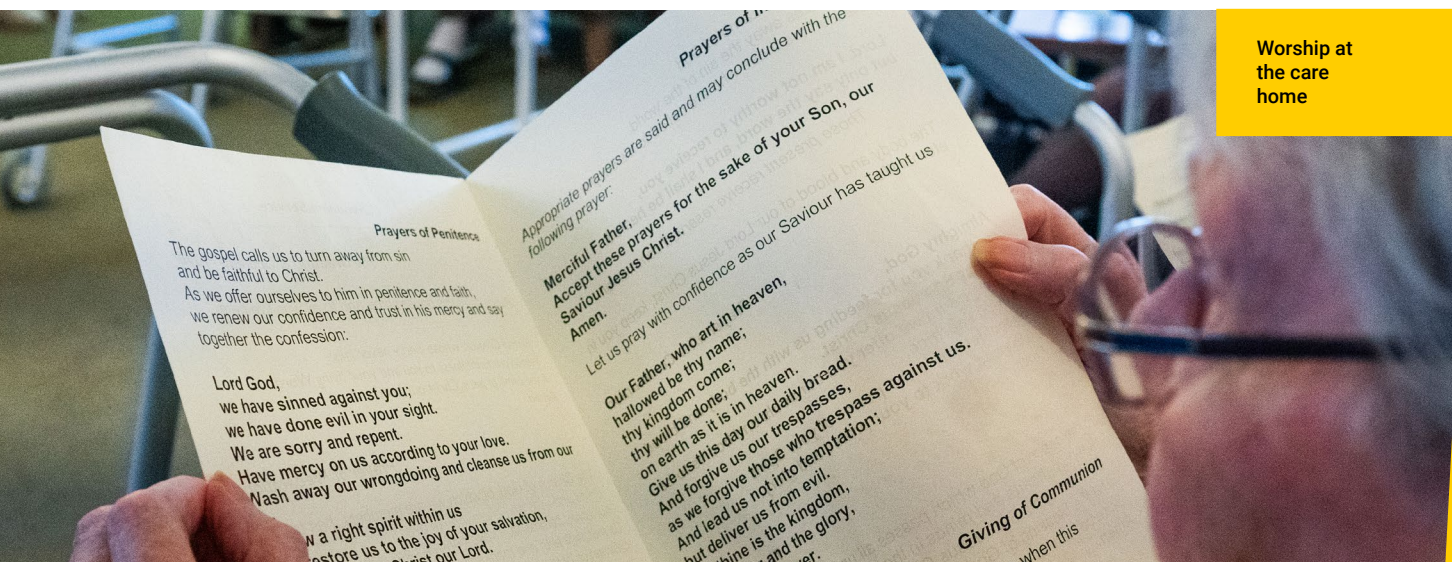
In Alton, Kate's team of 15 volunteers lead services in 11 care and residential homes with hymns, readings and prayers. They also spend time listening to residents' joys and sorrows. While some were churchgoers, others have never been to church before. Services are now so popular some of the care homes use a larger room to accommodate residents wishing to attend.

Kate says: "It has been a pleasure to see the services in care homes around Alton flourish. They give a sense of unity and belonging to the residents and we have witnessed an increase in the number of carers and activity coordinators participating in the services too. It is an honour to be able to create and share a sacred space with residents and staff."

COMMUNITY

The Anna Chaplaincy team can be found engaging with older people who attend the local Methodist coffee morning every Tuesday coinciding with the town's market day. There are many laughs – and sometimes tears – as people from the community encounter someone who listens attentively and empathically.

But the Church's mission is to reach outside its walls and it's a priority for the Anna Chaplaincy to become a presence in the community by attending secular activity groups. These include lunch clubs, coffee mornings, the library club, groups for people with Parkinson's or dementia and many others.



Worship at the care home



Kate Powell with a resident at an Alton care home

Sarah is the organiser of a monthly lunch club. She says: "We welcome the Anna Chaplain whenever they are able to join. This club is a chance for older people to eat and talk together and it's an opportunity for the Anna Chaplain to be with those who need support whether due to illness, bereavement or loneliness."

CELEBRATING

To show how much the Anna Chaplaincy values older people and their unique life stories, Kate instigated a regular feature in The Alton Herald called 'Growing Old Gracefully'. In it she interviews Alton residents and it has become a popular feature. It promotes the ethos of the Anna Chaplaincy, explaining it's there to meet the spiritual and pastoral needs of all older people regardless of whether they have faith or not.

Over the last couple of years, local healthcare providers have started referring patients to the Anna Chaplaincy team. As a result, the team visit people in their own homes where they

have participated in meaningful conversations about life, death, faith and family.

Alton resident June said: "I can't talk about my death or pose questions about end of life with my children because they get upset. But I do want to talk about it and I've been able to do so with the Anna Chaplain, which has been such a relief."

Recently the local community hospital has called on the Anna Chaplaincy to visit patients in hospital who have voiced specific spiritual needs. It's early days, but the feedback has been positive. For example, Philippa, a relative, said: "Thank you so much for arranging for Kate Powell to visit my mum at Alton Community Hospital. Mum really enjoyed meeting her and she was so kind and thoughtful."

Reflecting on her time in Alton, Kate says: "We are very proud to be part of this ministry, which started from Alton Methodist Church, to become the amazing national movement it is today." She knows her 'dream team' agree with her!

"It's an opportunity for the Anna Chaplain to be with those who need support."



Kate Powell was the Anna Chaplain for Alton from 2022 to 2024. More information about Anna Chaplains or becoming a volunteer Anna Friend is available at annachaplaincy.org.uk

Affordable groceries: love in action



Beatriz,
a bodega
customer

With hyperinflation sending food prices rocketing in Venezuela, a low-cost grocery shop is a practical way to care for God's people, Sandra Lopez explains.

I don't know about you, but popping out to the corner shop has been a longstanding tradition for me since childhood. When we run out of milk or bread, especially in the evening, the convenience of having a corner shop that's open late at night is easily taken for granted. But in a different part of the world there is a bodega (small grocery shop) that is more than just convenient – it's providing groceries that people otherwise couldn't afford. The bodega of Barrio 55 is becoming a place of provision, sustenance and hope for the local community.

"Provides the local community with the opportunity to buy basic food."

Barrio 55 is a neighbourhood in Barinas city, in west central Venezuela. The country has been in crisis for many years and there are no signs of it abating, given the obstacles to democracy and the

American economic sanctions. According to the United Nations Refugee Agency, 7.7 million Venezuelan migrants are residing in other parts of Latin America and the Caribbean, seeking to escape abject poverty. Though it boasts the largest crude oil reserves in the world, Venezuela's oil industry has collapsed. The low number of barrels of oil produced means Venezuelans have not seen the benefit of living in such an oil-rich country. The country suffers from hyperinflation, decreasing the value of salaries and making everyday purchases unaffordable.

AFFORDABLE GROCERIES

It's in this dire situation that The Methodist Christian Community of Venezuela serves its communities, one of which is located in Barinas city. The Bread of Life Methodist Church project managed the construction of the bodega in Barrio 55 and now runs what they call the Grocery Shop of 55 Neighbourhood. Its aim is to provide the local community with the opportunity to buy basic food, home and personal hygiene items at affordable prices.

The minister of the local church, the Revd Tomás Alfredo Camacho, tells us that most vendors sell their goods at a cost that is completely unaffordable for local families who cannot purchase even a small quantity of basic groceries. Now, people from the local community can visit the bodega to buy affordable essential food and hygiene items. A local woman, Beatriz Gomez says: "Before, the bodegas were all very far from me, and now I have one on my doorstep. Prices are very



reasonable and I can find everything I need, despite it being a small shop. I am so grateful to Tomás and Lilly and the church that has helped them to set up this corner shop.”

WORLD MISSION FUND

So how has The Methodist Christian Community in Venezuela been able to set up this local project? Thanks to generous donations by British Methodists to the Methodist Church in Britain's World Mission Fund, a grant was made to The Methodist Christian Community of Venezuela to enable the Church to carry out its mission work, as well as to help it become more financially self-sustaining.

The bodega is just one of several income-generating projects being established by the Methodist Church in Venezuela thanks to the World Mission Fund. In fact, the World Mission Fund supports 107 partner Methodist churches and organisations in Africa, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia and the Pacific. It helps them respond to the gospel of God's love in Christ and to live out their discipleship in worship and mission. They do this through evangelism and mission; work in schools and hospitals; helping with environmental projects and emergency situations, training and much more. Income-generating projects such as the bodega in Venezuela not only are a way of offering hope and support to local communities, but also help pay ministerial stipends and operational church costs.

So next time you enter your local corner shop, please pray for the Barinas community in Venezuela and for our Partner Church there, that they are able to continue being the light of Christ even in the midst of economic hardship.



“The prices are very reasonable and I can find everything I need.”



Sandra Lopez is the Partnership Coordinator for the Americas at the Methodist Church in Britain. Find out how **The Methodist Christian Community in Venezuela** makes a small profit through its bodega by buying groceries wholesale, and charging a low price to make them accessible to the community:



youtu.be/cTYQTBiTP_c?si=gwumJuevWA_4ewNt



Living out a Methodist Way of Life's commitment to care for people around us, we support such Partners as The Methodist Christian Community of Venezuela through the World Mission Fund. Find out more and donate at **methodist.org.uk/WorldMissionFund**



Pastor Tomas Camacho
serving a customer

Phoebe Parkin studies Spanish and Philosophy at the University of Edinburgh and was the 2020/2021 Youth President, elected by and serving the children and young people of the Methodist Church in Britain.



Encounter worldwide

In war-ravaged Colombia former Youth President Phoebe Parkin encountered mission workers teaching radio and other media skills to encourage young people to find hope in their lives.

“Aren’t you scared?”

“Well, you’ll drink delicious coffee at least...”

These are typical reactions I received when I told people I was going to Colombia. Like them, I knew little of what to expect. I was at the beginning of my Encounter Worldwide journey, a programme run by the Methodist Church’s Global Relationships team giving volunteers the opportunity to spend anywhere from three to twelve months working with one of their partners in another part of the world. The programme is part of the Church’s calling to serve across the world in response to the gospel of God’s love.

To my delight, I was accepted on to the Encounter Worldwide programme and was matched with El Centro EcuMénico para América Latina de Comunicación (CEPALC). Based in Bogotá, CEPALC is a non-profit organisation working with economically deprived people in remote regions.

WORKSHOPS FOR CHILDREN

Colombia is vast and the CEPALC team works within various contexts, including with indigenous groups and in areas still largely under paramilitary control. Their mission is to engage children in marginalised communities in conversations about their goals and human rights and to give them the opportunity to tell their own story. To that end, they create and deliver workshops on producing radio broadcasts and videos, they run their own radio station and they also produce a quarterly magazine.

Colombia is in turmoil: it’s enduring the aftermath of a conflict that lasted more than six decades and spanned the breadth of the country. There remains ongoing unrest in many areas and a culture of machismo permeates much of society. Where CEPALC works, girls are often presented with motherhood and marriage as the only viable life options. Many high-school students I met during workshops were surprised that, at 22 years old, I was unmarried and childless.

Femicide, domestic abuse and sexual violence are common. During a workshop in a primary school in Boyacá, when asked what makes them sad, many children responded, “No me gusta ver cuando mi papa golpea a mi mama.” (“I don’t like to see my dad hit my mum.”)

Finally, poor health and poverty are rife. At the same primary school in Boyacá, children have dental and respiratory problems due to the contaminated water from the local coal mines. Most have rotten teeth and hacking coughs. The coal mines employ nearly all the working population in the area and some of the children who participate in CEPALC's workshops will go down the mine if their families are unable to make ends meet.

STORIES OF HOPE

Despite all its problems, Colombia can be characterised by one word: hope. CEPALC believes each person who walks through their doors (they estimate they've had 60,000 workshop participants since 1978) is an agent for hope, an individual who is not defined by poverty and has inherent dignity and worth.

I met Wilson, 25 years old and a local in the mining town. Having himself witnessed the horrors of mining as a teenager, Wilson is working with CEPALC to prevent his younger siblings following his footsteps down the mineshaft. He coordinates the CEPALC visits and identifies young people as potential participants for the workshops.

Over in San Andres de Sotavento, in north-west Colombia, I met Leidy. She told me how her experience with CEPALC inspired her to finish her studies before considering motherhood or marriage. Through CEPALC's training in making radio programmes, she now has a job at the local radio station, defying the expectations placed on young women in this area.

The women of San Andres, whose population is largely of indigenous heritage, worked alongside CEPALC to set up their own women's association, taking their futures into their own hands.

MORE INFORMATION

Find out more about the **Encounter Worldwide** programme at methodist.org.uk/EncounterWorldwide

SMALL STEPS

CEPALC is a small team on a mission to challenge mindsets in Colombia and it can feel like a David and Goliath story. However, CEPALC staff members and volunteers are buoyed up by stories like Leidy's, which demonstrate that change is happening.

That change is slow is because CEPALC works with people, not projects or products. Leidy and Wilson are not one-dimensional but complex, fully human people who fall in love, dress up for parties, share drinks with friends, make silly jokes, prefer their coffee one way or another. The stereotype is that Colombia is all about sexist, gun-wielding narcotraffickers, but it's also a country with unique people and challenges. And organisations like CEPALC show how hard many are working to build the country they believe in.

Encounter Worldwide showed me what mission looks like in this corner of the world. It's mission that meets people where they're at, which is creative and which doesn't give up, even if you can't always see the results quickly. And it's mission grounded in hope that the world is able to change.



All are welcome at the Ark

A chance conversation with two visitors to a new café at a Methodist church has given life-enhancing opportunities to around 70 young adults with learning difficulties.

Ryan, now 22, called in at the popular Ark Café in Marlow, Buckinghamshire with his mum Lynne shortly after it opened in 2021. After mentioning that her son had just completed a catering course, Ryan's mum was asked if he would like some work experience. It was so successful he now works there three days a week.

"I have learned some great skills, how to make coffee and serve customers," says Ryan. "It has given me a real sense of purpose. I just love it."

From this grew a scheme in which scores of young people with special educational needs benefit from working at the Ark Café.

One student volunteer, Sophie, 22, says: "The staff are so supportive. I will never forget the surprise 21st birthday party they threw for me."

"Our work with young people is a valuable community service."

Merson, 27, agrees: "When I first came here, I was too nervous to leave the kitchen. Now I serve at the front counter and enjoy talking to people who come in."

COMMUNITY AWARD

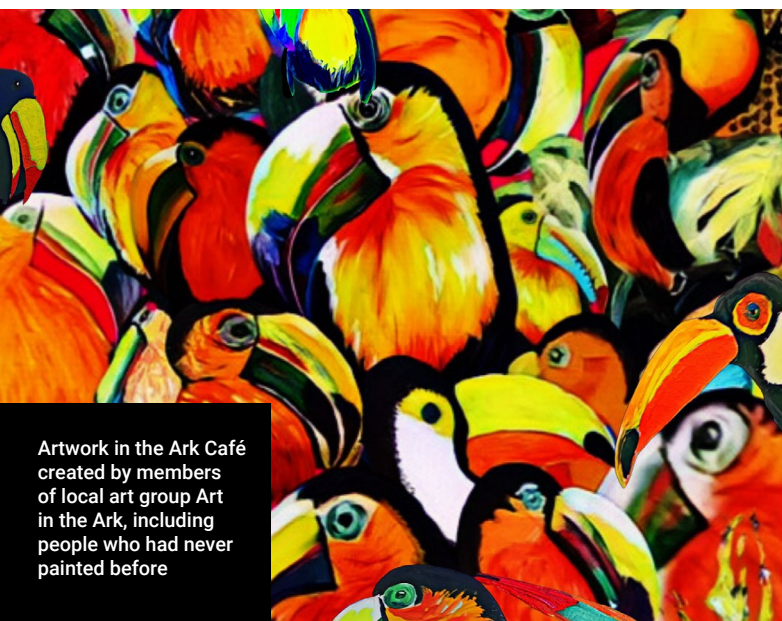
The bright and airy Ark Café, decorated with paintings from a local art group that meets there, is at the entrance to the Methodist Church in Marlow. Its unique, welcoming atmosphere and value for money menu have made it a big hit with the residents of Marlow, so much so that it recently won a community service award in the 'Hidden Gems 2024' competition run by Marlow FM Radio. It was praised for 'creating a safe space and valuable work experience' for people with learning difficulties. Manager Liz Riches is especially proud as the honour was the result of a vote by local people.

ACT OF FAITH

Liz explains the thinking behind the café's name. "Noah used the ark to create what you might call 'a safe space' – and that is a key part of our ethos." She was delighted by a customer review along the lines of "The Ark café may not be the fastest in the world but it is easily the friendliest". She went on to say: "People understand and enjoy the fact that our work with young people is a valuable community service."

"I have learned some great skills, how to make coffee and serve customers."

Liz has attended Marlow Methodist Church for 25 years and says creating the Ark Café was an act of faith. "When we



Artwork in the Ark Café created by members of local art group Art in the Ark, including people who had never painted before

opened, we had no idea how it would turn out. But we built it – and they have come. We now open six days a week. Offering opportunities to young adults with learning difficulties is a big part of what we do.”

Depending on the young people’s abilities, they work alone or with close support from the cafe’s four full-time staff and enthusiastic team of around 35 adult volunteers.

COMMUNITY HUB

The Ark hosts all sorts of informal groups for art classes and games such as Rummikub, Bridge and Mahjong. It also hosts charitable organisations such as Parkinson’s UK and an NHS-sponsored weekly meeting to advise on everything from getting a bus pass to welfare issues. In addition, groups who use other parts of the church for toddler playgroups and activities such as Pilates provide extra custom for the café. Bill, 72, who has breakfast at the Ark most mornings, says: “Everyone is so welcoming – and the lemon drizzle is the best.”

The Revd Kate Strange says: “When the Ark was conceived, brave folk of the church had a vision not unlike the prophet Isaiah, who captured God’s visionary words, ‘Behold I am doing something new.’

“They envisaged the Ark as a place where people would find common ground to meet, talk, find new skills and build friendships. And they achieved it. Those of faith and those of no faith can be found chatting together in a unique atmosphere. Inevitably there are challenges in being inclusive but we have embraced them as an opportunity to grow towards becoming a more tolerant, patient community, where all are respected and feel they belong.”



Ryan, Sophie
and Merson



AMERICANO DAVE

Manager Liz Riches tells the bittersweet story of a regular visitor to the Ark, affectionately known as ‘Americano Dave’ after his favourite coffee. “He came in at 9am every day and always had an Americano, but one day he didn’t turn up. We made some enquiries and found that Dave had sadly died. He had no family or friends so we organised his funeral and Minister Kate officiated. Not all cafés would do that.”

Shoreline: a thriving online church

Is it possible to launch a new Christian community with inclusivity and accessibility built in as standard? Rachel Dalby asks the Revd Wayne Grewcock.

In the Devon seaside town of Budleigh Salterton, Wayne is preparing a Sunday service. But it won't be delivered in a church building. Instead, the service will be online with people from all over the UK and Europe joining local worshippers. Known as 'the Shoreline Methodist Community', the online church offers Sunday services, daily prayers, discussion groups, and more.

Wayne says: "People can access our Sunday service, prayer gatherings or discussions in ways that help them most. Some watch Sunday worship live on Zoom and others watch the videos at a time that suits them. Some like to join in the conversations on Facebook. And you don't have to use Zoom. If you prefer, you can listen in using your landline."

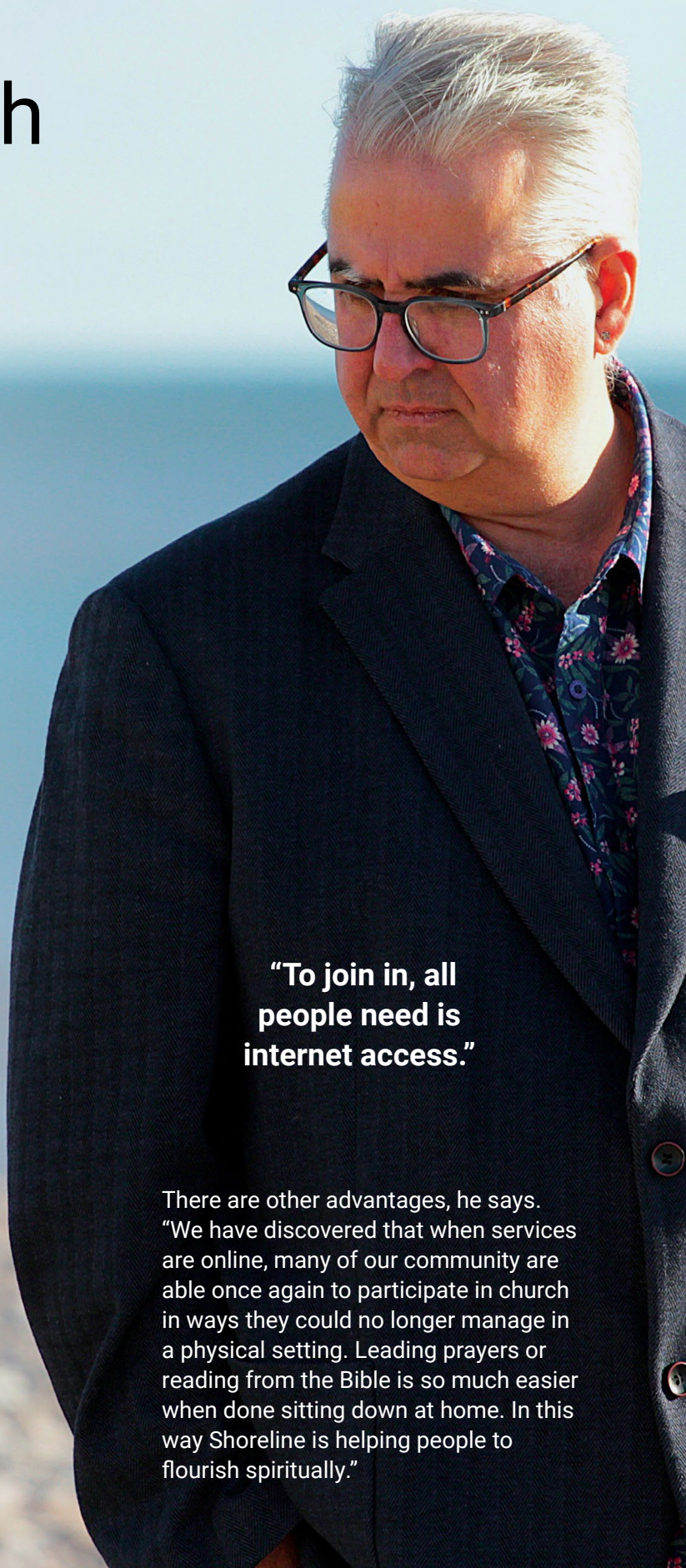
ADVANTAGES

With around 96% of British households having internet access, Wayne is keen to use digital means to take God's love to new audiences. For many reasons, it may be more convenient to access church services digitally. The closure of many chapels due to their ageing and declining memberships means that older Methodists currently make up the majority of Shoreline's Zoom gatherings.

"We've got regular members in their 90s who join in from their care home or their own home because they're either no longer able to get to a physical place of worship, or their local chapel may no longer be open," says Wayne.

"To join in, all people need is internet access."

There are other advantages, he says. "We have discovered that when services are online, many of our community are able once again to participate in church in ways they could no longer manage in a physical setting. Leading prayers or reading from the Bible is so much easier when done sitting down at home. In this way Shoreline is helping people to flourish spiritually."



OPEN TO ALL

As its minister, Wayne is keen for the online community to be distinctively Methodist; contributing to the Church's expansion of its 'God for All' strategy with Shoreline's digital presence. Services feature prayers, reflections and guest speakers on themes linked to social justice and other aspects of a Methodist Way of Life. They also broadcast prayers every weekday on Facebook and YouTube at 8am, midday and 9pm.

Wayne is passionate about creating new opportunities for people to encounter the sacred and stresses anybody can join in and feel welcome. He says "With Shoreline, there are no church doors to walk through, no fear of being asked to sign up to a rota, and no inferred commitment to attend every week. To join in, all people need is a device with internet access or, for an audio-only experience, a telephone line."

BEGINNINGS

Wayne has been a Methodist minister for 27 years. When the Covid pandemic struck and people were confined to their homes, he found himself answering a call to set up a new expression of church. He started services on Zoom as a temporary measure and found it had a value of its own.

Wayne says: "Our story is a journey from a temporary Covid solution to a growing community online church that is constantly discovering how to worship God and live the Jesus way. While online church isn't for everybody, and we know that there are still people who don't have internet access,



Shoreline provides another way of being part of a Christian community, and it's one that has inclusiveness and accessibility built in."

PRAYERS

With an aim for Shoreline to serve all age groups, Wayne attended last year's 3Generate, the Methodist Church's annual national assembly for children and young people. He invited them to 'write a postcard to Jesus', focusing on their hopes for themselves, their community and the world. The postcards were taken back to Devon and turned into weekday prayers for the Shoreline community.

Another source of prayers has been a pebble cairn that Wayne started on his local beach during the pandemic. He says "It began with a small pile of stones and a note from me inviting people to add a pebble with a prayer written on it. It's since attracted hundreds of additional pebbles.

"I've seen that, if you provide a space for people, whether that's an invitation to place a pebble on the beach, or an invitation to tune into a service from home, they will respond."

The Revd Wayne Grewcock is based in the Exeter Coast and Country Methodist Circuit. To find Shoreline, go to: facebook.com/shorelinemethodistcommunity and youtube.com/@shorelinemethodistcommunity



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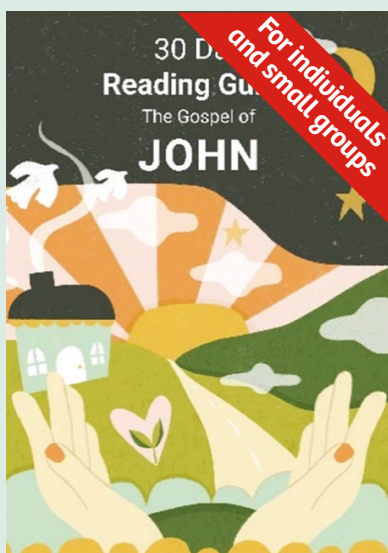
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