

the connexion

Arts in mission

Puppets on
the move

Icons-on-sea

Prophetic
pottery





Gareth Hill
Editor

Making connections

The deep mysteries of God have always been a catalyst for artists, sparking them to reflect on the nature of faith and grace.

At the same time, some Protestant Churches haven't always welcomed the radical questioning of artists who were willing to probe where clergy might not want them to go.

Many parts of the creative arts have found themselves in conflict with religious authorities – avant garde painters, even Elvis in his early days, for example. Yet colour, drama and vitality are all at the heart of God's story of creation, redemption and new life in Jesus.

This issue of *the connexion* tells stories from all over the world of how the people called Methodist have found the arts in mission to be a fruitful way to engage people with the Gospel.

With puppets and pottery, fine art and friendship, we cover a range of creative outreach stories – and many of them could be replicated in communities up and down the Connexion.

The feedback on the first two issues of the magazine has been very positive so we are planning to continue to publish and distribute future issues in the same way. Some have said that we should be publishing online only and avoiding the expense of print and distribution, but we have also heard that printed copies are welcomed by many who cannot easily access online publications.

So, for the next year, we plan to publish another three issues and send three copies to all the names on the mailing list, as we do now. This is more cost-effective than mailing varying numbers to different subscribers. We hope that sharing copies in this way will help us reach the widest possible audience.

Stay connected!

theconnexioneditor@methodistchurch.org.uk

If you have been given this copy but would like to receive three copies that you can share, please sign up at www.methodist.org.uk/theconnexion.

And if you have comments about the stories that you have read in this issue, please be in touch.

the connexion

Issue 3 • Autumn 2015

is designed and produced by Methodist Publishing on behalf of the Methodist Church in Britain © Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes 2015
Registered charity no 1132208



Cover picture

One of the giant nativity puppets in Leicester city centre last Christmas

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Information contained in this magazine was correct at the time of going to press. Views expressed in the articles may not be the official position of the Methodist Church in Britain.

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Past Cases Review: Courage, Cost & Hope

The findings of this independent review, a hugely significant piece of work, were made public earlier this year, and the focus of the Conference report was on the implementation of its 23 recommendations. The Conference agreed that the Revd Gwyneth Owen shall chair the body charged with ensuring that the lessons learned from the report are shared and implemented across the whole Connexion.

“The Past Cases Review has undoubtedly been a wake-up call for the Church, and one we cannot ignore,” said the Revd Gwyneth Owen. “The recommendations of the report are many and wide-ranging but at the heart of it all lies the need to bring about significant cultural change. Safeguarding is everyone’s responsibility and each one of us has a duty to do what we can to make the Church a safe place for everyone.”

The Revd Dr Martyn Atkins repeated the “full and unreserved” apology the Church made when the report was published. “It is essential that we recognise the failings of the past,” he said. “However, without a commitment to change and the willingness to take the hard steps to achieve that change, we know that an apology alone could never be enough. This is the challenge that lies

before the Church today and will be a continuing challenge for us for many years to come.”



[www.methodist.org.uk/
pastcasesreview](http://www.methodist.org.uk/pastcasesreview)

The President and Vice-President of the Conference



*The Revd
Steve Wild
(left)*



*Dr Jill Barber
(right)*

The Revd Steve Wild was inducted as President and Dr Jill Barber as the Vice-President of the Conference.

Steve issued this challenge, “Let’s take God seriously. I want to help us in the task of evangelism, to put mission on the agenda and give our churches an aim to win a person for Christ.” He urged the Church, in his inaugural address, to bring one new person to faith at every chapel or congregation across the Connexion. He also reminded the Conference that wherever we are led in our mission, God has gone there before us.

In her inaugural address, Jill spoke of the “four Ps” of Methodism: Prophecy, Pray, Passion and Protest. “Have we lost that passion for living out the gospel through social and political action?” she asked the Conference. “Is there a danger that we have privatised our faith, so that it makes us feel better as individuals, but we fail to relate it to wider community and global issues? I want to call on Methodists to get involved in local and national politics. To become a voice for change, challenging the politics of self-interest and upholding the politics of the common good.”

Fundraising Team

Have a look at our new web pages. You and your church will have at your fingertips all the resources you need to help you with your fundraising. www.methodist.org.uk/supportourwork



Fellowship groups report

The report, presented by the Revd Dr Martyn Atkins, highlighted the importance of being one family with one mission.

The Methodist Fellowship Groups, congregations of Methodists united by a shared ethnicity or language, announced their intention to grow in deeper relationships, mutual partnerships and genuine integration. About the report, Martyn said, “We are committed to find continuing and healthy ways to harvest the richness brought into our Church by international communities of Methodists. Indeed, every part of the life of the Church is made better because of our life together, and there is much that we can learn from each other.”

Other matters proposed as **Notices of Motion** were adopted. Highlights include:

1. extending condolences to the families of those killed in terrorist attacks around the world, offering prayers for all affected, condemning all forms of violence conducted in the name of religion, supporting efforts at challenging extremist ideologies that seek to undermine the liberties of civil society, and calling upon the Methodist people of Great Britain to engage in constructive dialogue with people of other faiths
2. encouraging members of the Methodist Church to make representations regarding future savings in the welfare budget, possible effects on the most vulnerable and encouraging the Methodist Council to ensure that the Connexional Team continues to work towards enabling the Methodist Church and its members to speak out alongside those affected by changes in welfare provision and challenge the structural causes of poverty in Britain
3. directing the Council to appoint a working group to prepare a draft Conference Statement and discussion materials on pornography that are appropriate for different age groups
4. calling on Methodist churches to consider offering sanctuary to at least one migrant person or family who have reached Europe across the Mediterranean, and directing the Secretary of the Conference to write to Her Majesty’s Government advocating a more generous and compassionate approach to this situation.

New President and Vice-President Designate

The Conference elected the Revd Dr Roger Walton to be President of the Conference in 2016/17, and Ms Rachel Lampard to be Vice-President. Both will start their year of office when the Conference meets in London on 2 July 2016. They will succeed the current President and Vice-President as the first item of the Conference’s business.

Roger is currently the Chair of the West Yorkshire Methodist District and the Methodist representative to the General Synod of the Church of England.

Rachel is the leader of the Joint Public Issues Team, which has for many years been at the forefront of campaigns about UK poverty, nuclear weapons and climate change.

Connexionalism

The Conference received a major report on what it means to be a connexional Church in the twenty-first century. The Conference recommended the report, and relevant sections of *Called to Love and Praise*, for study across the Connexion.

The report looks at the challenges to connexionalism, but also the strength and support that it brings. The report says “For Methodists connexionalism is not an abstract principle or a piece of historical baggage, but a way of being Christian.” The report asks hard questions about what connexionalism offers today, and although it offers its own answers, the whole Church is invited to discuss these as well.

Leaving the building...



The Conference took a couple of rare opportunities to leave the hall and venture outside.

Members of the Conference left to join in with various activities taking place as part of a local Christian event. From a beach prayer labyrinth, to remembering lifeboat crews to a visit to the “jam chapel”, different groups took to the streets of Southport.

The usual Wednesday Communion service started outside the Conference venue, overlooking the boating lake and sand dunes. The singing and preaching attracted some attention from local people, before the members and visitors marched, singing again, back into the hall for communion.

When the Christmas lights were turned on in Leicester city centre last year, crowds watched the nativity story acted out by seven three-metre high puppets made by local community groups.



Puppets on the move

Ruth with the puppets

The Art & Spirituality Worker at Bishop Street Methodist Church, **Ruth Joy**, and **Rachel Parkinson**, Superintendent Minister of the Leicester North Circuit, discuss how they helped bring things to life on a giant scale and how making the puppets turned out to be just as important as their eventual use.

Rachel: When I first saw giant nativity puppets at Greenbelt, I remember thinking “we could make those”. But I still can’t believe that we actually did it!

Ruth: They did defy all our expectations didn’t they? Making the journey from Leicester to Crosby to meet the “In Another Place” team, who made the prototype puppets, was a vital step.

They gave us so much more than the basic skills. The whole day was full of generosity, fun and a real sense of all things being possible to those who believe.

Rachel: Looking back I feel that so much has been Spirit-led. It’s true that we already had some of the basics. We developed a core team drawn from four churches to ensure that basic jobs – such as making the puppet frames and undergarments – would get done. We also had a small budget and a timetable dictated by the events we’d promised to appear at. But while we knew how many puppets we wanted to make, we never ‘designed’ them. The characters emerged as we went along.

Ruth: That freedom was essential to engaging all sorts of people in puppet making. Believing that God made us all creative is central to my work as an arts and spirituality worker. When we see communities working creatively together, we see God at work in the midst of them. The key is finding ways to unlock that potential.

Rachel: I think my favourite example of that was when we realised that the Brownies had already been taught to finger-knit. The



Leicester city centre

question was where could finger-knitting be used? It ended up on the Angel Gabriel's head, arranged into golden curls. We also knew that working with fairly large groups of children in schools and youth clubs would be a problem. Bead-making turned out to be a perfect solution. Which is why our Magi are the Kings of Bling!

Ruth: So the project evolved around the contributors, not the other way around. It was wonderful to see and hear people pointing out the things they had made. It might have been a tiny thing ... just a ribbon woven into the cuff of one of the Magis' cloaks ... but it was part of a large and glorious whole. The first time we walked the puppets out into Leicester City Centre in the pouring rain, people just stopped in their tracks when they saw them. The whole experience has been so rich.

Rachel: "Rich" is a good word to use because it works on so many levels. Not least the friendships that have grown up through this ... you and me being just one example. I also loved the fact that at the heart of the project we had seven young people as puppeteers. They were such fun to work with. And they've become quite possessive of their puppets ... they want first refusal at taking part again this year. Because of course there will be a "this year". One of the team is already planning how to make a giant donkey puppet!

A story for the here and now

Film can grab the viewer's attention and get a point across in a way that rivals all other forms of communication.

It's also great for getting people at your church working together on an outreach project, according to Richard and Jordan Chambers from Kibworth Methodist Church.

"We've now made four short films which all premiered at Good Friday and Christmas Carol services over the last two years," said Jordan. "They add an interesting element for the local community: come to church and see a local film premiere!"

"Don't let access to technology put you off. Our first film was filmed on an iPhone attached to a DIY tripod improvised from an old music stand!"

Richard said they set the footage to a soundtrack of church members reading selected Bible verses telling the crucifixion and Resurrection story, with music composed on a keyboard in their spare room.

"There has never been a better time to use film evangelistically," he said. "Short films can be shown on digital projectors in services, uploaded to the Internet and shared with millions through social networking."

"It doesn't need to be expensive; creative ideas and good planning will always overcome technical difficulties."

"Creativity and talent – technical, planning, musical, acting – are all gifts that God may have equipped you with to spread God's word through film."

"In an era in which some fear the Word of God is being drowned out in the media, we can use Christian film to put the message right back out there!"

An example of their work is www.youtube.com/watch?v=1-wEtkaaNE – "A Story For The Here And Now". Written by fellow church members, this was a contemplative piece for Good Friday 2015.



*City of Stone,
Lou Davis*

Dreaming of God

**Lou Davis is a VentureFX
pioneer at Edinburgh Dreams**

I was in my early twenties when I realised that the times I felt closest to God, I had a paintbrush in my hand.

Art was a hobby back then, something I did in the evenings after a long day at the office to help me switch off from the day.

That revelation came as a surprise to me then but thinking back on it now, I don't know why that should be. I think that perhaps it was because I'd seen God as a lover of words but not images.

It's true that the Church has had a mixed history with visual art, swinging back and forth between venerating and obliterating images. The Bible can be just as confusing. When it speaks of art at all, it can often be as a warning against the worship of statues and temples in the place of God.

However, there's a lovely passage in Exodus (chapter 31 if you want to look it up), where two craftsmen, Bezalel and Oholiab, are commissioned to make decorations for the temple out of the precious donations from all the

people; of metal, stones, wood and fabrics. These multi-skilled craftsmen were filled with God's Spirit in order to enable them to fulfil their work. It is this Spirit that I believe all artists intrinsically recognise.

I now work in Edinburgh with artists, musicians, poets and other people who work in the creative industries. I meet very few who do not recognise God's work in theirs. They may not use the same language that I would. They talk about divine inspiration, or the muse, or the power of the universe, but when we dig a little deeper we often realise we experience the same thing. We share an understanding that the best work we produce is not quite our own, it may be gestated and birthed through us, but we know it originated somewhere else.

I would see this in my own artwork as God's Spirit at work in and through me and I recognise it in others' work when I visit galleries or attend performances.

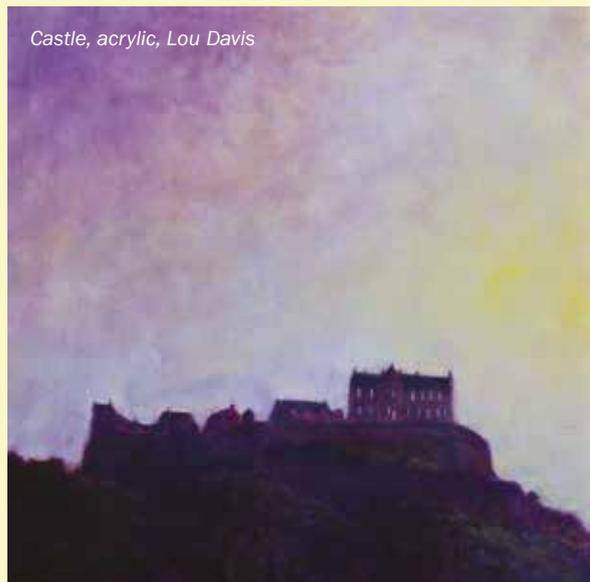
Visual arts have a particular role in our culture; through making and appreciating art we are enabled to communicate about the vital things in life that rarely find a place in our conversations. Through art we can contemplate life, death, spirit, beauty, love, depression, violence and hope.

In that contemplation, art offers something beyond the tight logic of words. When we learn this vocabulary of visual art and we can pour our grief into a charcoal image or our joy into a vibrant painting, then we are learning to create something that resonates with others. This is the beginning of all transformation; a meaningful connection. See www.edinburghdreams.com

Lou Davis



Castle, acrylic, Lou Davis





Below: "An Angel made for me in Petaling Jaya, one of my most treasured possessions," Steve Pearce

Beautiful Gate

Pastor Chin took my hands and looked me carefully in the eye, keen to learn who I was and why I was there. Conscious of my European size and unfamiliar accent, I sat next to her wheelchair and took advantage of the time she offered and the interest evident in her sharp eyes.

What she made of me I do not know, but what I discovered moved me deeply.

In Acts 3, Peter and John met someone at the Beautiful Gate who was lame from birth and they offered what they had: the name and love of Jesus of Nazareth. In Malaysia, Pastor Sia Siew Chin, has been doing just the same for twenty years, to similar, wonderful effect.

Beautiful Gate is a place where wonderful things happen for people living with disability. It is the work she started with the support of the Methodist Church in Malaysia, first in Kuala Lumpur and now in several centres across the country.

Her vision is clear, to share the love of Christ with people who live with disability. The objectives of the Beautiful Gate ministry include enabling the development of a healthy self-image, a good social life and self sufficiency.

The Methodist Church in Malaysia is a lively, growing church that often finds vibrant and creative ways to carry out its mission in a country where Islam is the state religion, though the constitution guarantees freedom of religion. Christians are only 10 per cent of the population – 60 per cent practise Islam and 20 per cent are Buddhist. There are real tensions and difficulties, but

most parts of the Church's life proceed unhindered.

John Ling, Chairperson of the Missions Council of the Methodist Church in Malaysia, says of Beautiful Gate, "It is a successful project and is going from strength to strength. It has now spread from one centre to quite a few branches already in different regions."

He says a church body can run operations like this better than the government or any other organisation in the society.

"The ingredient for success is love, which Christian churches are able to provide and build into the ministry. Love can go much further than care."

Pastor Chin is constantly leading this organisation further into new areas. The Beautiful Gate Disabled Performing Arts Troupe was launched by Pastor Chin with government help from the Culture, Arts and Tourism Ministry in 2003 and consists of 25 disabled performers and 15 volunteers.

At the root of this initiative are the belief that disabilities do not prevent people experiencing the beauty of the arts and the intention to create in the disabled community an aspiration to experience the beauty of art.

In an Islamic country the Christian faith may not always be as explicit as some would like, but it is clearly foundational for all this work, ensuring its quality and survival. Art and beauty moved me to tears on this occasion, and I am sure many others in Malaysia and beyond have seen the love of God through this Beautiful Gate.

Steve Pearce,
Partnership Coordinator for Asia

Opportunities for people with disabilities to offer the beauty of the arts to others are part of a vibrant project in Malaysia. Steve Pearce meets the driving force behind Beautiful Gate.



New Parks New Friends

A tentative venture into the community has transformed the life of a small church a mile from Leicester city centre.

New Parks Methodist Church found the outside of their building transformed by community artists as they prayed for how God could help them relate to people around them. Now this link has developed new possibilities in mission, said retired Deacon Judith Wray.

"It started with a feeling that the church wasn't relating to the community," she said. "We started a small prayer group in the home of one of the members on the estate, praying with completely open minds.

"I knew from the experience of working on estates that God always has something for us to do, so we were not racking our brains, but praying that God would show us."

Then, at a flower festival on the estate they met the Soft Touch Arts Group.

Judith said: "We had never heard of them, though they had been working on the estate for two years. We wondered if they could help make our tired church building look beautiful.

"They jumped at the idea, as they needed opportunities for their *Style your Space* course to create artwork to enhance the community.

"Our church building had five blocked-in windows after vandalism. We agreed on a tree with the fruits of the Spirit as the design. The Soft Touch group put their own stamp on the idea, using hearts for leaves and cupped hands for the tree trunk and branches and the work was done by a very enthusiastic group of mainly young people. The only cost to the church was re-plastering and painting the window spaces."

From that first encounter more developed. It was suggested the church, which has about 30 members, could have a vital role befriending lonely people so *New Parks New Friends* launched as a drop-in at the library.

"We feel we are where God has led us to be, to offer opportunities for people to be friends and enhance community," said Judith. "If people want to engage in faith then that's great but it's not our prime aim. Actually the first week we met a man who came and wanted to re-engage with faith after many years, which was great."



Part of the tree mural on the side of the church

To the cross – and beyond

A simple prayer labyrinth has helped one church connect with its community for five years.

Stamford Methodist Church has seen more than 200 people walk the journey to prepare themselves for Easter and has strengthened its ecumenical links as friends from other churches join in.

"At least one person who came to the first Passiontide Prayer Labyrinth found a living faith and has become a regular worshipper with us. There may be others!" said the Revd Andy Fyall, who developed the labyrinth after experiencing it for himself at Easter People in 2001.

A labyrinth is designed as one path to the centre of an intricate design and back out again. There is only one route and it's impossible to get lost. The design encourages prayer, meditation and spiritual transformation.

There are a series of prayer stations along the route, each with a theme, biblical reference and an action. For example, the crucifixion is represented by a free-standing cross covered in purple drape. Attached to it are Jesus' last words from the cross and pilgrims are invited to hammer nails into the cross.

The Stamford Passiontide Prayer Labyrinth was written and formed in 2011 by a small group led by Andy. Reading the Gospel Passiontide narratives, they designed the labyrinth as a journey through Holy Week and Easter.

"We run it on Maundy Thursday leading up to our evening act of worship but also run one in Advent leading up to the Sunday before Christmas Day," said Andy

Appropriate folk are available to 'meet' people at the end of their journey of prayer.

"Sometimes this is simply a brief word, but a number of people want to talk about their experience," said Andy. "It's often those visiting from outside the established church who have found the experience deeply significant."



Icons-on-Sea

Starting with a blank canvas is always daunting. When that canvas is an entire town centre, just how do you get going?

Pioneer presbyter Hannah Bucke tells how her work in Southend has captured the imagination of the town through art.

“I could never have imagined *Icons-on-Sea* when I started as the town centre minister in Southend in 2013. I didn’t know what I would be doing to pioneer a new ministry with no congregation or building. I just knew I had to be here, to try something new.

“After a few months of getting to know people, opportunities started to appear, such as the manager of the shopping centre offering an empty shop during Holy Week.

“A good relationship with some creative Baptist leaders led to the idea of using the shop to tell the Easter story in an innovative way for those who wouldn’t go to church in Holy Week.

“Easter Icons was born: a pop-up installation at the Royals Shopping Centre. People could post their prayers in a model of the Temple wall, contemplate betrayal through the 30 pieces of silver suspended from the ceiling and reflect on the distortion of religious festivals at a large wooden cross stuffed with Easter eggs.

“More than 650 people visited our gallery that week.

“At Christmas we tried some ‘guerrilla worship’ with a flashmob nativity and

carols on the High Street. Actors in nativity costumes walked the town centre, interacting with shoppers. Then, with more than 100 singers and musicians, they created a nativity scene backed by carols and pop songs. That certainly stopped the crowds.

“At Easter this year we went onto the streets with an art trail during Holy Week: 14 pieces of conceptual art exploring Easter themes were placed on railings, a bike rack, in shop windows and even at the end of the pier.

“We drew on pop culture and media references, using a magazine cover, a charity poster, a newspaper headline among others. We wanted the pieces to feel like part of the cultural and physical landscape.

“Why use the arts in mission? Because we can be challenging, provocative, and playful but allow people space to reflect. Because they give people scope to interpret the Christian story for themselves. Because using forms of communication that people are familiar and comfortable with can offer a way into the unfamiliar.

“As one response to the Easter art trail to our Twitter account @IconsOnSea said: ‘Pity this is the last day; I’m not a Christian, but these are clever and thought-provoking. More next year?’ ”



Some of the provocative icons used in the Holy Week art trail.

Prophetic pottery

A unique evangelism project is drawing on craft skills and an Old Testament encounter to offer a gift of love to tourists.



“To me the pot looked relatively perfect. It reminded me that in the hands of the Great Potter how beautiful we can be moulded into.”

Pottery and the prophet Jeremiah are proving a winning combination for sharing faith with visitors to the Channel Island of Sark, as *the connexion* editor Gareth Hill found out.

Island potter Lorraine Nicolle has been a part of the Jeremiah Project since it began in 2009. She helps visitors to her shop throw a pot which then becomes a gift from the community’s Methodists, but there’s a bit extra...

Presbyter Karen Le Mouton and church members Sarah Cullen and Hazel Fry offer visitors a conversation about the prophet Jeremiah’s encounter at the potter’s house, recorded in Jeremiah 18 (see panel on page 13).

“We let people wander around and have a look, chat to them and get a feel about whether they are open to it,” said Karen, who’s often recognised because of her starring role in a recent series of

TV’s *An Island Parish*. “We then tell them the story of Jeremiah at the potter’s house and offer them the chance to throw the pot under Lorraine’s expert tuition”.

Lorraine, who is also a local preacher on trial, takes them into the workshop and gives guidance as they centre the clay, shape it and create a small bowl.

“Some want a lot of help and I almost hold their hands,” said Lorraine. “Occasionally you’ll get somebody who’ll say ‘just leave me to do it and if it works, it works’. With some people I just steady it so they’ve got a shape at the end.

“When it’s done I write their initials, Sark, the year, Jeremiah Project and Jeremiah 18: 1-6 on the bottom of every pot. We take their name and address and once the pots are fired I parcel them up and we send them with a note saying ‘with love from Sark Methodist Church’.”

Karen says that both the Bible story and the process of making the pot resonate with visitors.

“In the Bible story the potter was making a mess. It went wrong and he remoulded it.



Above: Karen Le Mouton (left) and Lorraine in the pottery

Right: The brightly-painted outside of Lorraine’s pottery and workshop on The Avenue, Sark





Top: Lorraine makes sure Gareth has centred the clay on the wheel before beginning

Middle: Some of Lorraine's pots drying out

Bottom: Beginning to shape the pot



it's free?' Well it is and we'll post the pot to them as a gift of love from the chapel. And it's that gift, and the fact that we expect nothing for it, that people find quite challenging.

"The only thing I introduced was bookmarks, because there are people who would have had a go but are on their way back to the ferry or haven't got time. There are also those that hear the story but don't want to have a go, so we give them a bookmark with the message on."

The scheme was the inspiration of a previous lay pastor, David Hollingsworth. It is part-funded by grants from the Channel Islands District and the postage is paid by Sark Methodist Church. They can offer one session a week at the fringes of the holiday season and three in high season.

The chance to throw a pot can be offered to anyone who walks through the door, said Lorraine. "People don't know they are coming in to receive anything and that they can receive or decline."

But the feedback proves that the scheme is having an impact. "We get a number of cards and letters from people and we know of a number of ministers who have made their pot and used it in their preaching," she said.

It doesn't matter what mess we make of our lives, God can do something with them.

"It's amazing what comes out in the conversations. People say, 'Oh I'm no good at anything like that', but we encourage them to have a go and they end up saying, 'Look at what I've done!' It's a real self-esteem boost.

"For others, as they do something with their hands, stories start coming out, especially if there's no one else about. People will open up as much as they want because, as everyone knows, when you go on holiday, you think you're getting away from all your problems but actually they go with you."

Lorraine and Karen have discovered that the hardest thing for people to do is just to accept the pots as a gift.

Karen said: "They ask, 'are you sure

"When the parcel arrived we looked up Jeremiah 18:1-6. I used the family Bible but my son used Google and I am afraid Google won! I think the Jeremiah Project is a great witness and I wish you well."

"It was a great encouragement to meet such lovely people at a very tough time in my life. Your project gave me renewed hope to carry on."

Jeremiah 18:1-6

This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: 'Go down to the potter's house, and there I will give you my message.' So I went down to the potter's house, and I saw him working at the wheel. But the pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands; so the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him.

Then the word of the Lord came to me. He said, 'Can I not do with you, Israel, as this potter does?' declares the Lord. 'Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, Israel.' (NIV)



From Brazil to Paris

A Brazilian in Paris

Exploring art, culture and faith in the heart of Parisian society.

Gustavo Faleiro tells us how he and his wife Dalila encouraged others to use their creativity for God.

“We come from Rio de Janeiro, where I was ordained a Methodist Pastor and also worked as a professional musician. My wife worked as a physical therapist.

“Since 2010 we have been in a fruitful ministry in Paris at *la fonderie*. It was founded in 2001 to encourage and embolden Christians working in the arts. It is a place to explore the relationship between art, culture and faith; disciple those with artistic gifts and provide a place for them to develop their art.

“It’s also somewhere to encourage others to discover, enjoy creativity and artistic expression.

“We focus on inviting Christians who are artists to help them build biblical foundations, encourage them to work and live as Christians and to serve as part of the church. We organize monthly and weekly gatherings, occasional weekend events, and conferences for artists.

“The Arts Center and Gallery, set up in 2006, is our other main focus. It’s a gathering place for artists to exhibit and perform in the

heart of the city where the public can display their work.

“The arts have a critical role to play in the redemption and transformation of culture: because of the huge significance of Paris, we network and exchange with many others working with artists and cultural designers, including innovative church leaders who are finding new ways for the church to participate in culture.

“The French church isn’t generally very welcoming to integrating art into the life and public expression of faith, and is passively inhospitable to artists who are often dissatisfied with its forms of expression and worship, traditions, and even its spirituality.

“In fact, clear communication of faith may close doors in galleries, concert venues and production houses. Yet by grace, excellence or innovation provides opportunity. We organise ministry around artists’ lives, helping them grow strong in the Lord.

“The arts centre and gallery at *la fonderie* generates a non-Christian atmosphere that helps us to establish honest and deep relationships with people without a ‘wall’ of being Christian.

“Some years later, we realized that many people, especially non-Christians, wanted to know more about spirituality and were feeling ready for a next step; to be part of a community of faith.

“L’*église Bonne Nouvelle* started in February 2013. Our dream is not to have a church for artists, or an artistic church, but to have a place where we can see and feel the kingdom of God – where non-believers feel comfortable to come with questions and conflicts, without judgment or preconceptions.”

Superstar Gospel

The familiar strains of Jesus Christ Superstar became a powerful way for people to encounter Jesus in Minehead.

More than 800 people watched the musical, performed by members of local churches and some with

no faith at all. The performances were so powerful that some members of the audience were moved to tears.

The impact on cast members was profound. Each was given a detailed pen portrait of their character, who had a significant encounter with Jesus. This gave added authenticity to the large crowd who were in Jerusalem to witness the triumphal entry and the trial by Pilate.

Lynne Wooldridge (producer and director), said that even those without a faith found the change from singing, “Hosanna!” to shouting, “Crucify him!” very challenging.

“By the end of the week we felt as though we had been blessed by an outpouring of the Holy Spirit,” she said. “Deep

Keeping it fresh

Sanctus 1 and Nexus are at the heart of city centre culture. Pioneer minister Al Lowe tells us how the projects relate art to faith.

“Beginning as two separate Fresh Expressions of Church, we have now merged with Sanctus 1 engaging in creative forms of worship and Nexus operating as an Arts café.

“Sanctus offers an openly-Christian approach to worship, including discussion, music, DVD clips and creative prayer responses. Creativity is an integral part of the services and we have also produced art projects which allow people to engage with the Christian faith.

“Nexus is more focused on those who do not currently engage with faith and uses art and creativity to facilitate relationships.

“We organise art exhibitions on a range of themes, run creative workshops and offer drawing classes.

“We live in a society where there are an increasing number of people who say they are ‘spiritual but not religious’, so we offer activities suitable for them too: Spirituality Film Night and Half Way, a midweek guided meditation broadly based on biblical passages.

“Art and creativity are great mission tools because we worship a creative God, who flung the stars in space, so any creative activity is in sympathy with God; creativity can be very spiritual.

“Not everyone who engages with art wants to talk and share their ideas; many are in fact very hostile to any form of faith conversation and are purely interested in art.

“We are always aware of the risk that for some creativity may actually become the focus of worship itself, but we know that art can also be a non-threatening third space in which we can engage people in conversation.” www.sanctus1.co.uk

Manchester’s Northern Quarter is a place of bohemian art, craft and coffee shops, independent retailers, clubs and bars, creating an atmosphere of creativity and vitality.



Nexus art café

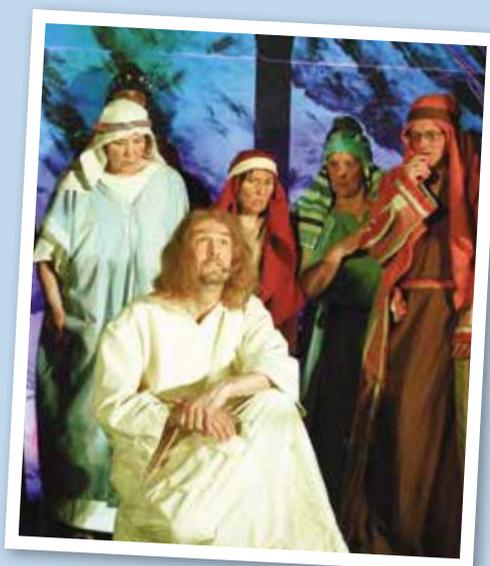


friendships had been forged and many had been deeply moved by the crucifixion and the Resurrection.

“At the end of each performance we gave out copies of Luke’s Gospel with guiding notes linking each song to the original text.”

The idea was to encourage those who didn’t know the story of Jesus’ passion and death to read the Gospel account.

“It was great to listen to Christians and non-Christians discussing deep questions like ‘was Jesus really the Son of God?’ and ‘why did he have to die?’” said Lynne. “A couple of people have asked to speak to our minister and have expressed a desire to start trying church out.”



Some of the cast of Jesus Christ Superstar in Minehead

“By the end of the week we felt as though we had been blessed by an out-pouring of the Holy Spirit.”

Changing the landscape

Art, faith and community outreach have combined in a unique project to help Methodists in Newcastle give new perspective to their evangelism, as Gareth Hill discovers.



A former church has become the innovative hub for a gallery and exhibition space that is putting faith at the heart of the city's cultural quarter.

The Holy Biscuit works alongside charities, the universities, faith groups, schools, artist collectives and other professional partners to present exhibitions, cultural events and educational opportunities as well as joining the conversation on religion in contemporary art.

"Having a place of welcome where artists feel free to express themselves and invite their friends along is key to telling the Christian story through art," said Lorna Bryan, strategic development manager of the project based at the former Shieldfield Methodist Church.

"For me it's a place where I'm not embarrassed to bring friends: the programme is respectable and how we handle exhibitions is of a good standard. There might be a way into conversation through what's on show or we'll facilitate an event where discussion is welcome or artists can describe why they've created something.

"I've certainly found myself in conversation with visitors who ask me about the nature of my work. Being a Christian I can't escape its effect on my life and my artwork is a part of that, so naturally when someone asks about my artwork I end up discussing faith and what I think God is doing in the world and me."

On the day I visited, the exhibition – *8 minutes 20 seconds* – came from a partnership with Northumbria University's

Think Physics project. The show was an artistic interpretation of the science behind the sun, marking 2015 as the UN International Year of Light. It takes 8 minutes 20 seconds for light from the sun to reach the earth.

It's an example of how the gallery makes links beyond the church, said events and outreach manager Amy Warmington, especially when some events can draw more than 400 people a night to the gallery.

"We aim to be cohesive and bring different people together. At Christmas we also brought together people from faith, science and art to look at the Christmas star.

"I end up discussing faith and what I think God is doing in the world and me."

"The arts are quite middle-class and inaccessible to some and our role is to engage them in a way they'll understand but with faith as well, if they're not having conversations in areas that interest them or in ways that are relevant to them, we're not going to be able to connect."

At the Christian high points of the year – Advent, Christmas and through Lent into Easter – the gallery curates its own programme when artists will offer a Christian perspective.

Even the beginning of the gallery's story is one of partnership, said the Revd Rob Hawkins, a minister in the Newcastle upon Tyne (Central and East) Circuit and a gallery director.

"The congregation ceased to meet and

"For me it's a place where I'm not embarrassed to bring friends..."

there was discussion on what to do with the building: possibly to sell and create student flats because it was on the edge of the new Northumbria University campus,” he said. “I was asked if we could do something to engage with the community, particularly students.”

At a community event, businessman Ramy Zack came over. He owns The Biscuit Factory, the UK’s largest art, craft and design gallery, which is directly opposite the site.

“What followed,” said Rob, “was an amazing partnership between a Jewish businessman, who put in nearly £100,000 of his money, and the Connexion. Because we were pioneering, it was quite a tortuous path to get approval but we’ve done it and it’s been built on a mutual relationship.”

As well as developing a reputation for quality professional art, there is now a spin-off called Painting for Fun (P4F) with people who have never picked up a brush or palette knife giving it a go. It started at the suggestion of a retired GP with one group at the Holy Biscuit and is spreading.

We went to Longbenton and saw about ten people, some of whom had been painting only for a few weeks, producing remarkable work under the guidance of self-taught artist Mick Feehan.

Lorna Bryan said: “The mission is not only to reach out to people in the arts but reach out to the local community using the arts and to recognise the potential to unlock what’s going on inside people and to encourage the Church to do both of those things.” www.theholybiscuit.org

Right: The ‘selfie booth’ under a constellation umbrella mapping the stars visible from Newcastle



All other pictures: Visitors looking at the artworks and interacting with activities that explore the science behind the sun



Heaven and Earth

The Collection was the initiative, in the early 1960s, of a Methodist layman, Dr John Morel Gibbs. He lived in Penarth, just outside Cardiff, and was Vice-President of the Methodist Conference in 1959.

What is the common language of Wales? From the experience in Wrexham over the past few months it is the Arts.

Working with Glyndwr University, 40 works from the Methodist Modern Art Collection were exhibited between the University's Oriel Sycharth and the town centre Methodist Church.

"The whole programme was entitled *Heaven and Earth* because it was a deliberate exercise in crossing boundaries," explains the Revd Richard Sharples who coordinated the project.

"As a circuit it was an exercise in evangelism, using the arts as a language common to both church and unchurched people alike." And did it work?

The Church saw nearly 1000 visitors to the exhibition with a similar number at the University and a further 600 people went to 1 of the 20 or so events in the 10-week programme.

There was poetry, music (choral, classical and folk), worship, workshops, devotional meetings, discussions and seminars, in Welsh and English. Many of these people had never been in the church before.

"One of the things which particularly delighted me," said Richard, "was the engagement of many students from the University's School of Art and Design; hang-

ing the exhibition, stewarding it and working with schools.

"Although the church and the Art School are just five minutes apart on foot, the journey seems like moving from one world to another."

The project has been used to inspire a Year of the Arts across the circuit, with each church organising at least one outreach event.

"So far we've got drama, arts and crafts, a flower festival, a barn dance, an art exhibition, a talent show, a choir and a brass band concert," enthuses Deacon Lisa Rathbone, who has a specific brief to encourage the use of the arts in this way across the circuit.

"In some cases, the events do present the gospel very clearly; in others they serve as pre-evangelism, breaking down barriers, lowering the threshold for people to come into church."

The exhibition attracted excellent coverage in the Welsh language media, and featured joint working between Welsh- and English-speaking churches. www.methodist.org.uk/artcollection

**Methodist Modern
Art Collection**



Performance Poet, Martin Daws, and Methodist Pioneer Minister, Gavin Mart, in concert at Wrexham Methodist Church
Bardd perfformio, Martin Daws, a gweinidog arloesi gyda'r Methodistiaid, Gavin Mart, mewn cyngerdd yn Eglwys Fethodistaidd Wrecsam



Paul Jeorrett in Glyndwr University's Creative Media TV Studio, and Revd Richard Sharples
Paul Jeorrett yn Stiwdio Deledu Cyfryngau Creadigol Prifysgol Richard Sharples

Nefoedd a Daear

Beth yw iaith gyffredin Cymru? O'r hyn a brofwyd yn Wrecsam dros y misoedd diwethaf y Celfyddydau yw hi.

Gan weithio gyda Phrifysgol Glyndŵr, arddangoswyd 40 o weithiau o'r Casgliad Methodistaidd o Gelfyddyd Gyfoes rhwng Oriol Sycharth y Brifysgol a'r Eglwys Fethodistaidd yng nghanol y dref.

"Rhoddwyd yr enw Nefoedd a Daear ar y rhaglen gyfan am ei bod yn ymdrech fwriadol i groesi ffiniau," eglura'r Parch Richard Sharples a fu'n cydlynu'r prosiect.

"Fel cylchdaith bu'n fodd i efengylu, gan ddefnyddio'r celfyddydau fel iaith sy'n gyffredin i bobl sydd â chysylltiad ag eglwys a'r rhai heb gysylltiad." Ac a weithiodd hyn?

Gwelodd yr Eglwys bron i 1000 o ymwelwyr i'r arddangosfa gyda nifer tebyg yn y Brifysgol ac aeth 600 o bobl yn ychwaneg i un o'r rhyw ugain o ddigwyddiadau yn y rhaglen ddeg wythnos.

Roedd yna farddoniaeth, cerddoriaeth (corawl, clasurol a gwerin), addoliad, gweithdai, cyfarfodydd defosiynol, trafodaethau a seminarau, yn Gymraeg a Saesneg. Roedd nifer o'r bobl hyn heb fod mewn eglwys o'r blaen.

"Un o'r pethau a oedd wrth fy modd," meddai Richard, "oedd y rhan chwaraeuyd

gan nifer o fyfyrwyr Ysgol Gelf a Dylunio'r Brifysgol; yn hongian y darluniau, yn stiwardio ac yn gweithio gydag ysgolion.

"Er mai taith gerdded bum munud yn unig sydd rhwng yr eglwys a'r Ysgol Gelf, mae'r daith yn ymddangos fel petai'n symud o un byd i un arall."

Defnyddiwyd y prosiect i ysbrydoli Blwyddyn y Celfyddydau ar draws y gylchdaith, gyda phob eglwys yn trefnu o leiaf un digwyddiad ar gyfer estyn allan.

"Hyd yma cafwyd drama, celfyddyd a chreffft, gŵyl flodau, twmpath dawns, arddangosfa gelf, sioe dalent, côr a chyngerdd band pres," disgrifia Diacon Lisa Rathbone, sydd â'r gorchwyl o annog y defnydd o'r celfyddydau yn y ffordd yma ar draws y gylchdaith.

"Mewn rhai achosion, mae'r digwyddiadau'n cyflwyno'r efengyl yn eglur iawn; mewn eraill maen nhw o fudd fel gweithgareddau cyn efengylu, yn torri'r rhwystrau, gan ostwng y trothwy i bobl ddod i eglwys."

Denodd yr arddangosfa sylw gwych yn y cyfryngau Cymraeg, gan ddangos cydweithio rhwng yr eglwysi Cymraeg a Saesneg.

www.methodist.org.uk/artcollection

Dechreuwyd y Casgliad gan Ieygwr Methodistaidd, Dr John Morel Gibbs, yn y 1960au cynnar. Roedd yn byw ym Mhenarth ar gyrion Caerdydd, ac ef oedd Is-lywydd y Gynhadledd Fethodistaidd ym 1959.

Methodist Modern
Art Collection



in conversation with Prof Estelle Thompson

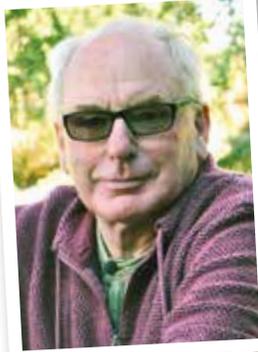
Glyndŵr, yn sgwrsio gyda'r Athro Estelle Thompson a'r Parch



Clive Hicks-Jenkins running a workshop with students at Rhosnesni High School

Clive Hicks-Jenkins yn cynnal gweithdy gyda myfyrwyr yn Ysgol Uwchradd Rhosnesni

Arts in mission



Above:
Damian Boddy

Right:
Closing Worship at
'Hearts on Fire,'
ArtServe Festival
2013



Making the truth about God known and changing people by provoking, disturbing and transforming them through the arts is a tough task.

ArtServe is an organisation with that mission. We aim to be “a movement of people discovering and reflecting God’s creative gifts shared among us, so that God is known more fully and lives are transformed.”

Barbra Streisand is probably best known as a singer/songwriter and actor, but she became an avid collector of art, about which she said, “Art does not exist only to entertain, but also to challenge one to think, to provoke, even to disturb, in a constant search for truth.”

We think this says a lot about mission and chimes with what we try to do in ArtServe.

There are myriad ways in which ArtServe seeks to be transformative, but two examples may point the way.

Our festival in 2013, *Hearts on Fire*, took its lead from Cleopas and his friend on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:32). Jonathan Evens and Peter Banks of Commission4Mission took us on an impassioned journey through the role of music in Christian history.

Fired up by this, we went into a drumming session with Sarah Westwood who, while not a Christian, enabled us to express our passion in such a way that the climax to our final worship was in itself transformative. Music isn’t an accompaniment to other

activity; it is alive, tangible, expressive and active.

This year’s festival in October – called *Theatre of Stories* – has engaged *Shifting Sands*, a theatre company from Derbyshire to take us through an exploration of communication, how we engage with and proclaim the Christian message.

The group is not Christian: they come with their skills and talent, not to show us their material, but how to use our material, the truth about God. Using the format of Mystery Play – more street than straight theatre – we are going to explore techniques that are unfamiliar to most of us.

It might even take a bit of vision and courage to come to the event, but it’s not a drama or acting workshop, it is a workshop for telling stories and engaging in mission.

It will involve music, writing, acting, symbolism, all directed with theatrical skill to send people out equipped with some new tools for God’s mission to us.

It is this mixture of secular and sacred that has inspired new creativity: to be sure there are plenty of Christian (Methodist even) artists, dramatists, musicians but if we are in the business of creativity, then we harness the skills from any source. Those who come from outside the church don’t bring any preconceptions of how it ‘ought’ to be done.

Damian Boddy



Information

Damian Boddy is a Trustee and Festival Organiser of the 2015 ArtServe Festival
www.artserve.org.uk

The Art of God's Love

A colourful combination of mission and art will seek to draw people to explore the creative goodness of God in Exeter next year.

Painting, graffiti, dance, sculpture, embroidery, music and much more will make up *The Art of Love* event which aims to captivate preachers, children and a host of artists.

"Most of us will have known some form of art, music, sculpture, poetry, dance, drama, or such like, go straight to the heart," said Professor Esther Reed, Associate Professor of Theological Ethics at the University of Exeter, one of the organisers.

"What if the church could speak of God with that same power? What if the artistic life of our churches could waken the spiritually dead?"

During Lent 2016, St Thomas Methodist Church, will host *The Art of Love*, an exhibition of colourful paintings by Methodist minister the Revd Peter Willis, and a range of mission-related activities. Banners and flags by local schoolchildren, paintings by local artist Brian Turner and from a monastery in Ethiopia, Eastern Orthodox icons, and more will also feature.

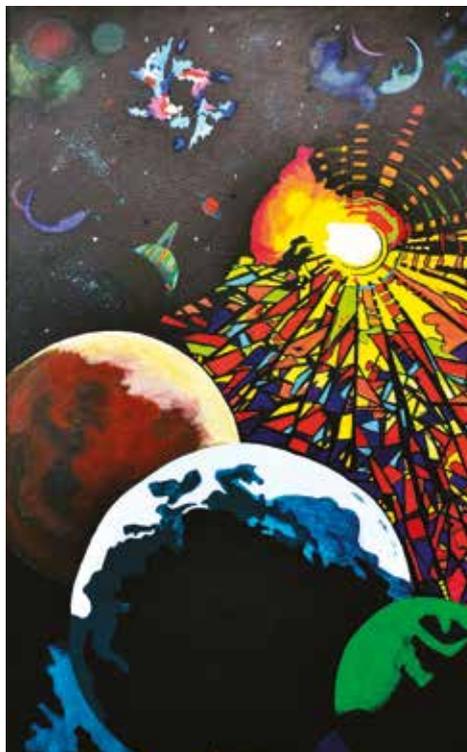
There will also be a day conference on 12 March, *Christianity and Culture*, about proclaiming the gospel today. The Revd Neil Richardson will lead the Bible teaching. Workshops are expected to include Preaching Today, Social Media Evangelism, Christianity and Film, Finding the Words and more.

Professor Reed said: "The Holy Spirit communicates in every time and context. We are interested in why and how the arts and diverse cultural phenomena stimulate receptivity to the divine Word, and ready hearts for the gospel."

"The Arts are curiously powerful in awakening dull hearts to stirrings of love and desire for communion with God."

For the *Art of Love* event, Brian Turner has been asked to sketch St Thomas's in a quirky style. A huge canvas will be set up in the foyer and visitors invited to paint a section as a community art project.

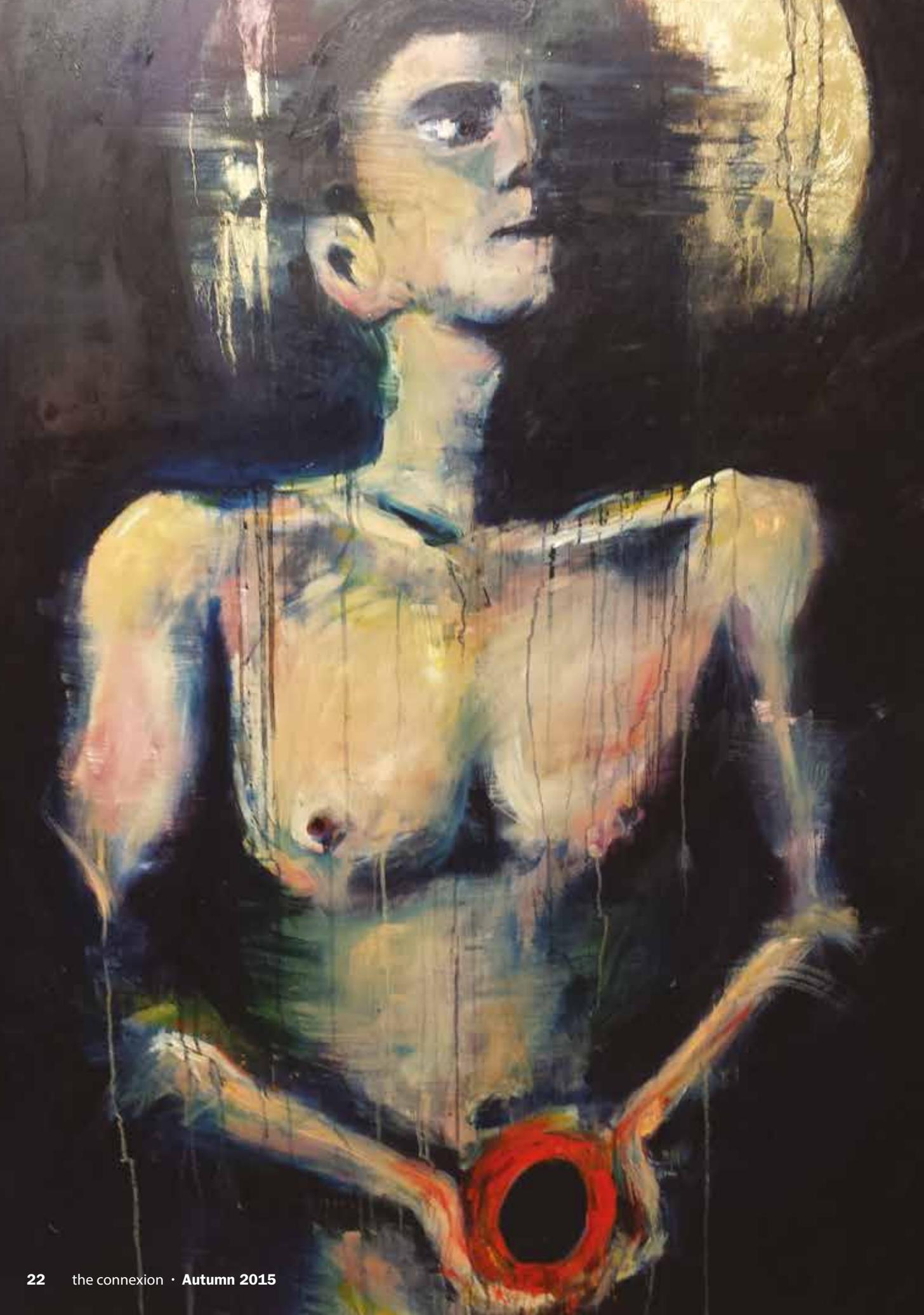
There will be interactive hot spots throughout the sanctuary: things to do, smell and touch. Local pupils are being invited to paint banners on the themes of love, Christianity or the community of St Thomas.



"Mission and arts have a long history together," said Prof Reed. "Bezalel built the Tabernacle in all its beauty (Exodus. 31:1-11), Miriam danced (Exodus. 15:20-21), Paul and Silas sang (Acts 16:25). As long as there has been a community of faith, there have been creative people eager to share their gifts, to enhance the day-to-day life and mission of God's people. Our prayer is to become more creative, to discover new and daring ways to integrate art into Christ's mission."

Above: 'Sun, moon and stars', no 6 of 11 original acrylic paintings on canvas on the theme of Creation by the Revd Peter Willis

Left: A picture on the Passiontide theme, no 1 of 11 original acrylic paintings 'Entry into Jerusalem' by the Revd Peter Willis



Reflection

“It’s very difficult now to paint. We move fast and painting doesn’t move like that. Painting’s something totally different. The way you get knowledge from painting is a very special, very slow thing.”

Stanley Whitney

*As an artist these words ring true
for my experience in the studio.
The process of painting is at times
frustratingly ambiguous,
tentative and risky.
It takes time for something new to emerge.*

*For me painting and prayer are inextricably entangled:
to paint is to pray
and Whitney’s quote resonates with both of these creative activities.
In prayer our journey into the Great Mystery unfolds over
seconds,
hours,
days,
years,
decades
and on to the depths of time.*

*There is a story of St Kevin
who went out into the forests of Glendalough
to pray with arms outstretched.*

*A blackbird alighted and laid her eggs
in the palm of his hand.
And so he waited for the eggs to hatch
in the midst of the deep mossy green,
patiently holding.*

*In silence and stillness, life emerges.
It is very difficult now to pray.
We move fast and prayer doesn’t move like that...*



he Revd Ric Stott is a Venture FX Pioneer in the Sheffield District where he is exploring new ways of being church, making art and contemplative prayer with a growing creative and artistic community. www.iaskforwonder.com

Painting: “Kevin Waits” by Ric Stott

Available August 2015

The **Methodist** Church 

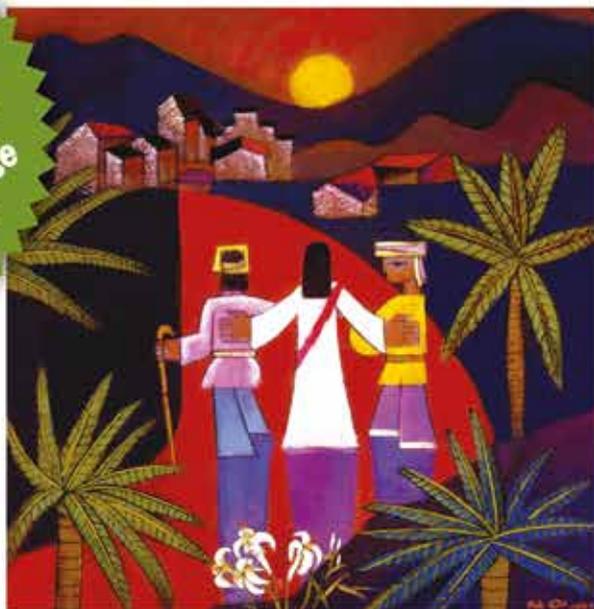
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