

Issue 14 • Spring 2019

The **Methodist** Church 

the connexion

Making
and growing
disciples

Inspiring stories from the life of your **Methodist Church**



David Perry
Editor

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

Matthew 28:19-20 (NRSV)

The Church exists to make new disciples of Jesus. Nothing could be clearer than that. Indeed, a key part of our own self-understanding as a denomination is that we are a discipleship movement shaped for mission. This is fundamental to an appreciation of 'Our Calling' and is an essential lever for change where the need for change is most pressing, in churches and circuits all across the Connexion.

Making new disciples of Jesus and growing in discipleship are not optional add-ons to the outworking of our faith; they are its absolutely essential core characteristics and commitments. 'The Great Commission' radically shapes us and remakes us as a missional people. It clarifies our priorities and cuts through all the distractions of doing church, to help us see what being church is all about.

And at the heart of it is the continuing relationship with Jesus which brings flourishing, purpose and hope. The phrase "remember, I am with you always" is the essential promise which makes the whole enterprise of church possible in the first place. It is spoken with post-Resurrection authority and certainty into the doubts and dilemmas of this Good Friday world. It shimmers with Easter glory and indomitable joy. As such it is a timely wake-up call for the challenging times in which we find ourselves.

The New Testament makes clear that being in relationship with the risen Jesus changes, transforms and revitalises everything. What once seemed out of reach becomes normative. Expectations are upended. Enthusiasm becomes infectious.

This edition of *the connexion* explores what the The Great Commission looks like in the life of contemporary Methodism. Our theme of 'Making and growing disciples' invites us to look for those powerful glimpses of the living truth of Easter that signify the way ahead, and prompts us to rediscover the centrality of talking about Jesus and trusting to his presence.

Love and peace,
David

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the connexion

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Highlights



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Thy Kingdom Come is fast approaching

The global prayer movement takes place this year between 30 May and 9 June.

The invitation is for Christians to commit to pray – as a church, individually or as a family – in whatever way they want and wherever they can, so that others might know Jesus Christ.

In 2018 the Methodist Church became a key partner in Thy Kingdom Come – which enables the Church to live out Our Calling through evangelism.

You'll find our Methodist novena (nine days of prayer) for Thy Kingdom Come with this issue of *the connexion*. More copies of *I Hear You Differently!* are available through your District Thy Kingdom Come Champion. If you are unaware of your District Champion, email thykingdomcome@lambethpalace.org.uk

You can also find a Methodist Thy Kingdom Come service online at www.methodist.org.uk/thykingdomcome

For more information, to register and find other Thy Kingdom Come resources visit www.thykingdomcome.global

New Director of Global Relationships

The Revd Conrad Hicks is appointed as the new Director of Global Relationships for the Methodist Church.

Currently Assistant Chair of the South East District and a presbyter, Conrad brings a wide range of World Church experience. He has been a mission partner in Jamaica, a volunteer in Mexico, served as a superintendent minister with the Methodist Church in Ireland and as a companion of the British and Irish Methodist Churches to the Methodist Church in Guatemala.

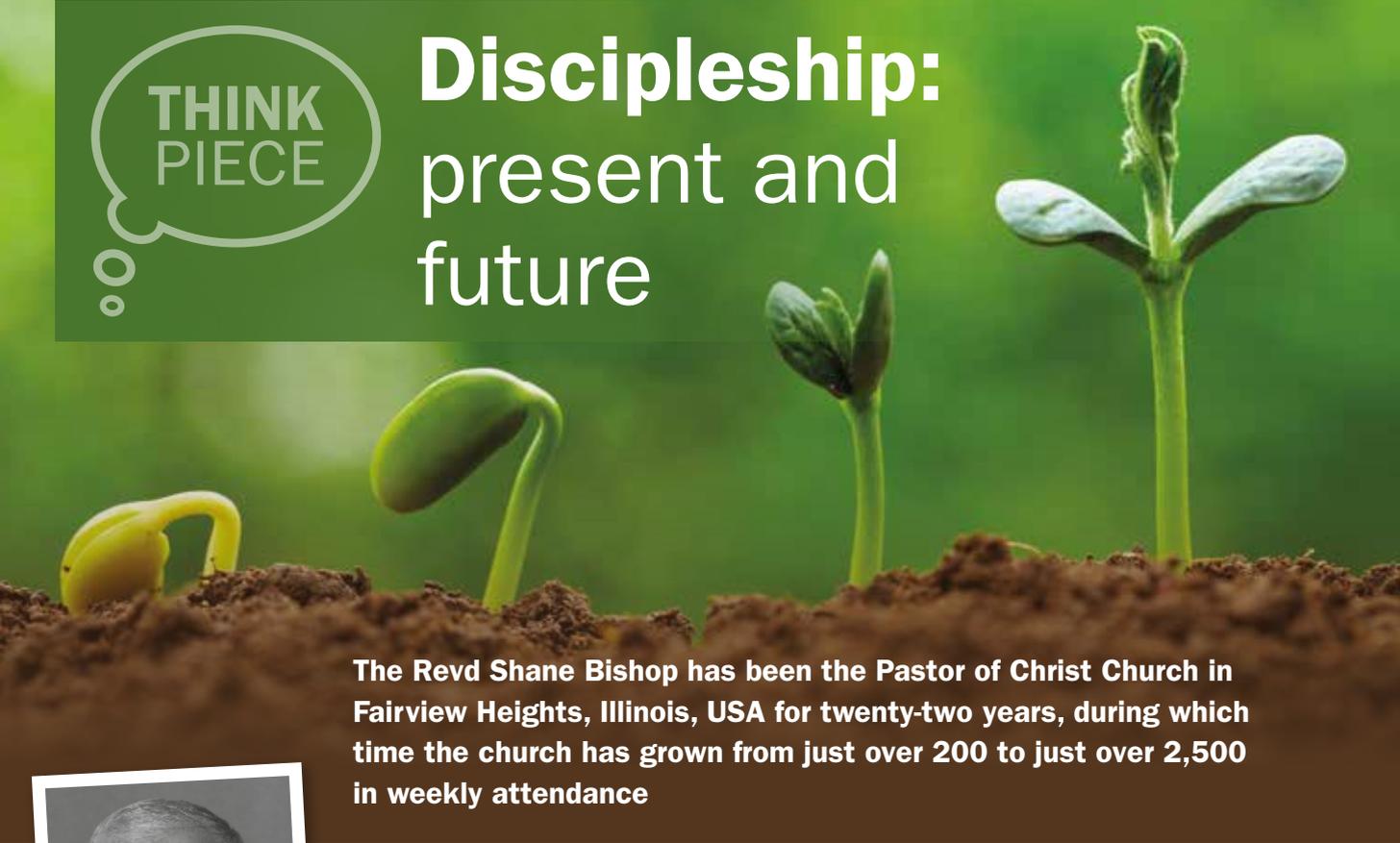
Conrad joins Global Relationships with a renewed focus to serve the needs of the British and Irish Churches and our global Church Partners.

Eco Circuit and Eco District launched

A new scheme continues the commitment of the Methodist Church to reduce its impact on God's creation. Eco Circuit and Eco District awards will support growing interest in Eco Church. Developed by the Methodist Church and A Rocha UK, the organisation behind Eco Church, they provide recognition of the concerns of circuits and districts in their care of creation and will encourage further local church engagement with Eco Church. <https://ecochurch.arocha.org.uk>



Discipleship: present and future



The Revd Shane Bishop has been the Pastor of Christ Church in Fairview Heights, Illinois, USA for twenty-two years, during which time the church has grown from just over 200 to just over 2,500 in weekly attendance



The church has been led by some core values concerning disciple-making that guide it in pursuit of its mission of “connecting people to Jesus Christ”.

Disciple-making core values

Offer Christ as revealed in Scripture

Though the means by which churches reach the world must constantly be renegotiated, the centrality of Christ for salvation and the authority of Scripture must remain non-negotiable. We must hold fast to our central



Christological message, while being creative with how we present that.

Laser-focus on the mission

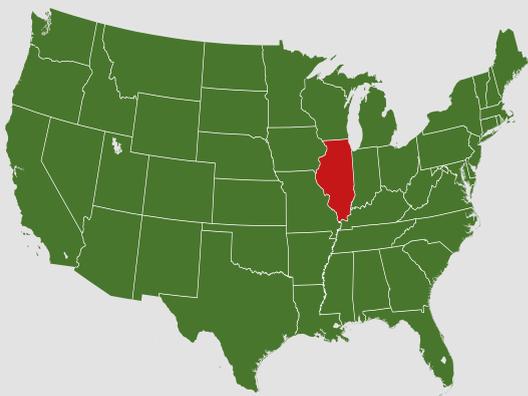
We do not have available resources to be non-strategic around our mission. A shrinking budget is a blessing in disguise for you to focus resources on what is working and discontinue ineffective programmes. Christ Church is the largest and most diverse church in The United Methodist Church Conference, with people of all races, political persuasions, and social-economic status. We can't be all things to everyone but, by being laser-focused on our mission, we are able to transcend many things that divide us.

Celebrate orthodoxy

We believe Christ was born of a virgin, performed miracles, rose from the dead, fills the Church with the Holy Spirit and will return for his Church. This is our best stuff! No apologies.

Offer experiential worship

Worship is the most important thing we do. If there are not people in the seats, there will not be dollars in the plate. If there



are not dollars in the plate you are out of business. And if you are out of business you are out of ministry. Worship services must move, inspire, motivate and challenge people. Excellent worship is a major part of our discipleship strategy!

Think forward

A wise mentor taught me to read futurists, analyse the world around me, anticipate trends and have a church prepared to be effective once the future arrives. It is the difference between a young football player chasing the ball and a more experienced player learning to anticipate where the ball is going to be. My mantra has been simple but clear: “Don’t play catch up. Anticipate. Get out in front.”

Current trends and discipleship implications

People are seeking community

Effective churches will grow larger by getting smaller and offering people more places, days and times to worship, study and connect. Church shifts from a place to be once a week to a place to belong every day.

People are seeking purpose

Churches will engage in community transformation from a disciple-making context rather than a humanitarian context. This will require uniting ‘doing good things’ (which most churches do well) with evangelism (which most churches don’t do at all).

Increasing spirituality

People are spiritually oriented but spirituality and Christianity have never had more distance between them. Might your local church become a community house of prayer? Responding to local, national and world events with prayer services may offer the church a place in the community.

Bricolage – building with what you have

As churches have fewer resources, they must allow that scarcity to foster innovation. This requires focusing on what you have, not what you don’t have. Focus on who is in your community, not who used to be, and focus on maximising existing resources.

Denominational disintegration

Denominational reorganisation and eventual death will be painful and distracting. Think resurrection, clarify your mission and envision a ‘future and a hope’ beyond where you are now. Play for the end game of effective congregations in pursuit of the Great Commission.

Lines between clergy and laity are blurred

Ministry will be increasingly led by bi-vocational pastors (ordained or not) as faith groups grow smaller and less defined. We must equip the laity for ministries previously reserved for clergy and professional staff. If everyone is going to be in ministry, everyone must be prepared.

Church is both actual and virtual

This involves going beyond simply filming content that was designed for live audiences and moving to the creation of unique content for virtual audiences. The goal is to create a warm online community that enjoys the benefits of pastoral guidance.

The big finish

We live in a world that is going to continue to surprise and shock us. Perpetual change is the new normal. There is but one question before us: “Is your church prepared to make disciples in this new reality?”

Think resurrection, clarify your mission and envision a ‘future and a hope’ beyond where you are now

D?

DISCIPLESHIP Question

What core values energise you as the Church seeks to connect people to Jesus?



Community

VISION

for discipleship and evangelism

As Director of Evangelism and Growth, Trey Hall muses on what 12-step programs and secular running clubs can teach the Church

A few years ago I was driving on the motorway in a traffic jam. Alongside me, between interminable rows of cars and lorries, passed a tandem bicycle; one of those two-seater, two-person bikes. And if that wasn't weird enough, there was only one guy riding the bike, careening dangerously all over the M6; the person who should have anchored the back seat was nowhere to be seen.

Do you ever try to live your life that way? We know we are created by God to be interdependent. We know we absolutely need others to grow, but we forget and try to ride the bike alone.

What can the Church learn about discipleship from 12-step communities?

When I realised in my late twenties that I had a drinking problem, I was determined to sort it out by myself. I bought some self-help books, downloaded the Alcoholics

Anonymous literature and got serious about getting sober.

Suffice to say the all-by-myself approach did not work. Ironically, it was when I isolated myself (ostensibly to do some intense reflection) that I ended up pouring a drink. For a few years I went in and out of sobriety, until a trusted friend said: "Trey, you're not going to get free until you admit that you can't do this on your own. This is not you on a tandem bike by yourself. You need other people or you'll never recover."

My friend was right. I needed other people to get freed up for real life. Not just life *without* my drug of choice, but life reverberant *with* freedom, joy, and vocation; surrendering to the Ocean of Mercy who is God.

Although designed for those overcoming addiction, the 12-step program offers profound wisdom for *any* Christian seeking to grow in discipleship. John Wesley wrote: "Every one, though born of God in an instant, yet undoubtedly grows by slow degrees."

Discipleship is that slow process of consciously receiving and responding to the gospel – so over time, by God's grace in the messy beauty of our real lives...

- we recover the image of God in ourselves and our communities
- every dimension of our lives is drawn towards alignment with Jesus
- we find ourselves in fuller participation in Christ.





Trust God and let the good news flow through every fibre of our being

And it is impossible to fully engage with these things without a community of other disciples. You need someone else to get on your tandem.

New Connexional Evangelism and Growth Team

I'm thrilled to be part of the new Evangelism and Growth team as the Methodist Church reaffirms Our Calling. We're starting a conversation we hope will reverberate across the theological spectrum – a movement of diverse people with the confidence to listen for, live out and speak of God's goodness in public.



Towards an inclusive understanding of evangelism

Some resist evangelism because the word conjures images of coercion, fear, shame and intolerance. In my opinion, we should absolutely reject those destructive tactics. The word 'evangelism' comes from a biblical Greek word, *euangelion*, which literally means 'good news'. So if we're properly evangelistic, we're committed to good news – not bad news – in all of our motivations, relationships, words, and actions.

Some people think of evangelism as merely a list of techniques and practices. But evangelism is much more than a list – it's a lens, a way of regarding and reflecting on all we are and do as Church, as we ask "how is this activity or belief orientated to the good news?" Our social justice, small groups, youth and children's work, property

development, hospitality, etc, find deeper life with that question in mind and heart.

We believe the Methodist Church is called to help tens of thousands of unaffiliated people become disciples of Jesus: to find companions for the journey in new churches and inherited churches that are alive and growing. But this audacious hope will only be realised if we trust God and let the good news flow through every fibre of our being.

What can the Church learn about discipleship from a secular running club?

I've been a serious runner since I got sober. When I moved back to the UK, a friend invited me to check out his running club, the Birmingham Swifts. I emailed and within a few hours received a message welcoming me and promising to meet me if turned up. I showed up, a bit nervous that it would be awkward, that people wouldn't be kind, that



Evangelism is a lens, a way of regarding and reflecting on all we are and do as Church

I'd run at a slower pace than everyone else. But that guy who promised to meet me did indeed meet me, ran part of the course with me, and invited me to the pub with everyone afterwards.

The club has also devised an ingenious way of running as a *community*: instead of dividing people based on ability they identify several 'circle back' points along the route so that we can all run at our natural paces and with those of different paces, circling back until the whole community reaches the identified point and then starting off together again on the next leg of the journey.

This running group started five years ago because one guy had a vision. Now there are hundreds of active participants whose lives have been changed because of this community.

Next steps

We've got a long way to go, but God has never failed us yet.

- Please pray for our whole Connexion, that we centre in God and take Holy Spirit risks.
- Look out for upcoming developments as we follow Jesus together into prayer and action.
- Watch our new video, meet our new team, and discover new resources to help you and your church engage evangelism as part of the discipleship journey at www.methodist.org.uk/evangelism

- How and where does your church publicly describe its reason for existence, its self-understanding, its vision for community, its animating purpose?
- How many people in your church understand their ministry as inviting people, especially friends, colleagues, and family, to come and see, and hear?
- What consistent practices does your church have to make sure people are generously welcomed, sensitively introduced to others, and followed up with?
- How do your church gatherings create space for people of different 'paces' and experiences to feel connected to God and to each other?
- What do you have available for people who are just beginning the spiritual exploration journey, and for those who are taking further steps?
- What does the discipleship pathways 'map' in your congregation look like? Can you draw a picture of how the process of salvation and transformation might take place within and through your church?
- Do you have fun together as a community? Do you hang out on a day besides Sunday? Do you invite others to the party? Is there joy pervading your common life?

D?

DISCIPLESHIP
Question

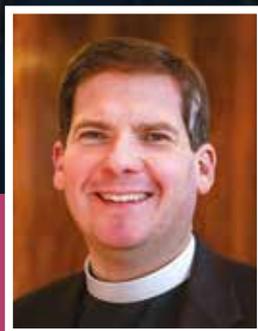
What do you think the Church could learn about discipleship from the Birmingham Swifts?

The dynamic task

The task of the disciple is something more dynamic, that requires us to move, to learn, and to witness



Take risks to talk of God, says the Revd Canon Gareth J Powell, Secretary of the Conference



Our Calling' has, as one of its key strands, the desire to 'make more disciples of Jesus Christ.' Such a desire should flow naturally from our encounter with Christ as we seek to explain to, and explore with, others the challenge of being made in the image of God. At each point in the history of the Church there has been a challenge to take risks, to commit to talk of God, and to make new disciples. This is not new, but how we express our own experience of God is ever new.

When we become swept up in the day-to-day concerns of church life, we could be forgiven for thinking that the task of making disciples is about making the numbers a little less worrying. But when we refocus our eyes on Christ, we are reminded that *being* a disciple of Christ is inextricably entwined with the work of *making* new disciples – inviting others into a deeper relationship with the living God.

Discipleship is outreach

It is important to be reminded of the dynamic nature of the calling of a disciple of Jesus. In John's Gospel, to be a disciple is to be drawn into God's missionary outreach: "As the Father has sent me, so I send you" (John 20:21, NRSV). The word 'disciple' (*mathētēs*, meaning 'learner') had previously been applied to pupils gathered around a teacher in a particular place, but Mark's Gospel applied it to those who literally 'followed' Jesus, a travelling preacher and healer. Here the task of the disciple is something more dynamic, something that requires us to move, to learn, and to witness.

I am delighted that the new evangelism and growth unit within the Connexional Team will be working with local churches across the Connexion to help us to live out our dynamic discipleship so that we, in turn, might 'make more disciples of Jesus Christ.'

D?

DISCIPLESHIP Question

How could you be drawn more fully into God's missionary outreach?

JOURNEYS with others

The Revd Nicola Wooller spends half her working week in circuit ministry – with congregations in Perth and Blairgowrie, Scotland – and the other half engaged in the massive challenge of creating new Christian communities across an area of about 30,000 square miles



As Christians, we talk a lot about discipleship. We say we need to make disciples and quote Matthew 28:18-20 as often as we stir our tea. But we rarely go on to explain what we mean by making disciples; and when we do, it often involves people coming to church and completing a course.

Jesus made disciples by spending time with people and looking for their potential. He interacted with them, challenged them and travelled with them and discipleship happened naturally from a group of people journeying and learning together for over three years. Discipleship is always a 'journey with others' because Jesus always calls disciples into a community.

No quick fixes

The work I do with 'Missing Methodists' and 'Churchless Christians' across Scotland, making disciples and creating community, is a great challenge.

I think, though, that even greater than that is the challenge of our current cultural context. In a culture where casual and immediate gratification is the norm, people are more likely to walk away from or be excluded by a community when the going gets tough, rather than stick at it and work through problems.

I've been in Scotland since September 2017 and have begun what feels like a very slow process of getting to know people, meeting them where they are and journeying alongside them. I have a stall that I take to various local events, Highland Games, boot fairs and agricultural shows. It offers a place of quiet and calm in the busyness. A place where people can stop, pray, leave prayer requests, paint blessing stones, purchase handcrafted items and find out more about God and more about Methodism in Scotland.

I have discovered that there is no quick fix to making disciples, despite my own enthusiasm. It's a process that takes time and courage; it takes investment in others and in their lives. Many things and experiences have influenced my work here, but one of the greatest influences has been Michael Henderson's book *Making Disciples - One Conversation at a Time*, because discipleship is really just about building authentic relationships and helping each other follow Jesus one discussion, one conversation, one heart-to-heart talk at a time.

With practice it's easy to turn meaningless chatter into a means of grace

Bringing Christ into the conversation

The book challenges us to examine how we use our words and presents ways to bring Christ into the conversations of our everyday lives – to give those around us a better understanding of who God is and God's love for them. We need to recognise the importance of having redemptive conversations; with practice it's easy to turn meaningless chatter into a means of grace, helping people become disciples and enriching their lives and ours in the process.

There is no single strategy. No rules that can just be followed and repeated. There is no limit to the ways a person can be told the good news of Jesus. So, 'discipling' in that sense is as varied as there are ways of telling the gospel story or living the gospel in front of people to draw them in.

Many of the people I have met are hungry for relationships with God and with others; yet at the same time they seem underprepared for, or unwilling to meet the costs involved. They have often been hurt by life or the Church; they not only need encouragement to try and become part of a community, but also have to be encouraged not to walk away at the first sign of trouble.

Our task

Possibly our task, when we are trying to make disciples, is walking through the doorway of community with people, a doorway that leads to a greater depth of understanding and relationship with God and with others. Loving others, especially the unlovable, is probably the greatest challenge for modern disciples, yet Jesus demands we do it. Christ calls all his disciples to treat other people with respect, an increasingly rare quality in today's world. I think this means sharing with others the costs of forming new relationships as we learn and develop on an equal footing, travelling on a journey of transformation together. We need to acknowledge, and welcome, the fact that we too should be changed through the encounters we share.

There is no limit to the ways a person can be told the good news of Jesus

D?

DISCIPLESHIP Question

How might "redemptive conversations" become part of everyday life in your journey with others?

God's radical inclusion



New Inclusive Church (NIC) is an experimental faith community/church, centred in God's radical inclusion that began meeting two and a half years ago in local coffee shops, gathering people who wanted to explore what it means to live out the love of Jesus in practical, unexpected and life-transforming ways: Deacon Kerry Scarlett explains

We were clear from the start that we wanted to be a community centred on God's radical inclusion, and that we wanted to affirm and enable the gifts of a diverse range of people in every part of church and community life.

Welcome as part of the culture

We had our first all-community Worship Gathering in the autumn of 2017. Many of our monthly worship gatherings are hosted by The Church at Carrs Lane, but we also borrow a variety of other spaces –

cafes, pubs and meeting rooms – so that we can keep getting to know people in different spaces and contexts. People become part of NIC for lots of different reasons. Some are disillusioned with church or have been involved in a church in the past but haven't felt truly accepted. Naomi came along after she met some of us at Birmingham Pride and got talking. She writes:

Me and my partner Lizzie were looking for an inclusive church after coming out to our family and churches – to mixed reactions. I offered to lead the Welcome Team because I'm passionate about the welcome being part of the culture of an inclusive church, not just a necessary politeness. The welcome shouldn't end at the door! For the first time I've felt comfortable inviting friends along to church.

Some people have no church background. They come because someone asked them along. Sophie first got to know about NIC through a friend:

She always seemed to be talking about the things she was doing with NIC, and the people she knew there, and I felt like it was somewhere I needed to go. I'm not religious, so the inclusivity of the church





D?

DISCIPLESHIP Question

In what ways could "God's radical inclusion" reshape your local church?

is what made me feel comfortable. I went along to a worship gathering prepared to scrape through with my awkward small-talk skills and came away with a community of new friends. If you want to know what it's like – just imagine an incredibly friendly, welcoming group of people who you can literally talk to about anything. NIC is a very special place.

Outreach through social media and baking

Our social media and online presence has been a significant factor in connecting us with new people. Ethan, who leads our hospitality team, writes:

I was led by God and Google to NIC just as it was getting going – I found myself surrounded by others with similar stories who just wanted to be included. Enjoying baking led me to the Hospitality Team. Providing a good cup of filtered coffee, a vegan chocolate and raspberry cupcake or a home-baked brownie is my way of showing all our visitors that they are valued. Over food and drink conversations happen, connections are made and relationships grow.

The vision of NIC is shaped by a Launch Team of 24 committed, engaged volunteer leaders, many of whom haven't been in a church leadership position before. There's a culture of trust, support, and creativity, which means it's ok to try new things, and when they don't work out, to pick ourselves up and try again.

Worship that works

In the last year, we've grown to a regular

congregation of between 70 and 80 people. We try to shape worship so that people can engage in the way that works best for them, whether that's staying in the main gathering, engaging in a choice of reflective activities at the back of church or going to get another coffee and cake. We're mindful of the variety of reasons why people might sometimes need a quieter place.

At every worship gathering, we intentionally make space to both hear and give testimony. We want to share honest, authentic stories about our own experience of God in our lives; stories which feel 'real' and which are about times of challenge, or waiting, as well as times of joy.

Over the next year, we want to begin meeting more regularly for worship and to keep thinking of creative ways to engage in evangelism and outreach but, above all, we want to keep exploring what it means to be a community centred in God's radical inclusion.

Our priorities

- A growing number of small groups that meet regularly in between worship gatherings.
- Building human relationships – with one another, visitors to church, and across the city.
- Making connections with other groups and communities who engage in acts of justice, mercy and compassion.
- Finding ways to join in with what God is already doing across Birmingham.



The Revd Anthony Clowes is the Lead Pastor of Potters Church, Stoke-on-Trent, which has always been an active church with many ministries and outreach programs – but in 2018 their leadership teams took time out to reconsider what kind of church God was asking them to be



Growing devoted disciples

God does not have a plan B. We are that plan!

Vision is vital for a healthy church. Without it, God's people lose focus and purpose and even "perish" (Proverbs 29:18, KJV). After a period of reflection and prayer we discerned that God was calling us to develop a community of devoted disciples; devoted to being followers of Jesus, devoted to learning and growing together and devoted to using our resources for God's kingdom purposes. Reflecting upon Acts 2:42-47, we dared to hope that if we were to become a church of truly devoted disciples, then perhaps God

might every day add to our number as with the Early Church.

Throughout 2018 we unpacked this vision with our congregations and started to monitor our activities, trying to focus our energies only upon programs and events that served our vision. The following three examples are areas in which this renewed sense of focus is starting to bear some fruit.

Frontline discipleship

We all know that discipleship is about the whole of our lives and is not just a Sunday experience. In his book *Fruitfulness on the Frontline*, Mark Greene writes that "most of us can't realistically be involved in church-based activities for much more than five hours a week. But what if we were equipping people to be fruitful for God in the other 115 hours that they are awake?" As we explored this theme on Sunday mornings, a highlight was hearing our members share their experiences of being 'frontline disciples'.

Peter understands how important it is to be a representative of Jesus in his





D?

DISCIPLESHIP
Question

How could “growing devoted disciples” become a priority where you are?

accountancy work place: **“I try to be a disciple at work in what I do and how I act. I try and keep honesty and integrity at the centre and treat people fairly. I don’t always get things right but I always apologise when I’m wrong. On the occasions when I get an opportunity to share my faith, I grab it. A client once told me she had been diagnosed with breast cancer; I asked if I could pray for her and she said yes. When we offer to pray with people in trouble, they rarely say no.”**

If we want to grow devoted disciples, then it’s vital that we recognise the primary places of discipleship for our people and do our very best to support, pray for and equip them.

Life Group discipleship

The Methodist Church has a rich tradition of small-group discipleship. In his book *I Believe in the Church*, David Watson argued that small discipleship groups are the very best place to “encourage spiritual growth, strengthen unity and mobilise for service and evangelism.” Christians who are part of small discipleship groups grow in their faith much faster than those who opt out.

I’ve been in the same Life Group as Sandy for the past three years. She writes:

“I came to church as a non-Christian to explore the idea of God. I enjoyed it but there was never any dialogue. I had lots of questions and was thirsty for more. I heard about Life Groups but was quite nervous of them. Since joining one my faith has grown. I’m now putting in far more time into knowing God and growing my relationship with God.”

Mission-shaped discipleship

I love the title of John Ortberg’s book *If You Want to Walk on Water You’ve Got to Get Out of the Boat*. Indeed, Christians ‘grow as they go’. As a member of a new church plant and leader of an outreach to asylum seekers and refugees, Jayne has stepped out of her comfort zone. She explains:

“I heard a talk one Sunday about meeting the practical and emotional needs of the most vulnerable people in our community. There was an overwhelming need for a drop-in centre to support asylum seekers in our city, so I signed up! God does not have a plan B. We are that plan! Seeing the church family open their hearts and homes to those seeking safety feels like true discipleship.”

When we step out in faith and join in God’s mission it can be daunting, but there’s no better place to grow in our discipleship.

At Potters, we’ve got lots to learn about developing a disciple-making culture but we are starting to be far more intentional about making it our main focus.



Winnie Baffoe is employed by Bermondsey Central Hall Methodist Church as a 'Fresh Expressions' pioneer worker and coordinates the group 'Mummies Republic' – made up of women and their children living on the margins in Southwark



The vulnerable are living precarious lives on the edges of our communities

Discipling enables resilience

To me, as a missionary, discipling is best expressed in the words of the 18th century writer and abolitionist Olaudah Equiano: “After all, what makes any event important, unless by its observation we become better and wiser and learn ‘to do justly, to love mercy, and walk humbly before God?’”

Discipling as a journey

I understand that in my service as a disciple of Jesus my nail varnish will get chipped, my clothes will get dusty and my eyes will be impacted by the scale of injustice in the community. This will drive me, bothered and bewildered, into action.

Discipling means being able to grow whilst on the journey of life. I began with an immature understanding of what it means

love the Lord with all my heart, mind and soul and this resulted in the absence of work-life balance – and consequently the moral and physical decline of both my work and person.

I had to go back to the beginning and read God’s word – where I found an example to follow in Luke’s Gospel, in which Jesus retreats regularly. I adopted his discipline of prayer as a rhythm of life, which placed God as the centripetal force in my life.

Discipling as a community

“I don’t know why but when I come here, I feel peace,” is the constant phrase of one of our members.

Mummies Republic welcomes those with little or no wider social network. As a community group of women with primary-aged children, we meet to build resilience: Some households in our community regularly experience the presence of vermin or the absence of heating, hot water or electricity; their complaints are not enough to make the landlord effect change in a timely manner.

D?

DISCIPLESHIP Question

How will you rise to the challenges of building resilience in your community?



Others experience the failures of the Universal Credit system for social security payments, which leave single-unit families without money to buy food or school clothes. Fewer landlords are accepting housing benefit in payment, therefore driving families further away from their local connections. The vulnerable are living precarious lives on the edges of our communities – in the words of one member: “A life on benefits is a life managed by another.”

Being together in our poverty, praying together for answers and strength, serving each other with food, experiences, hopes and fears as a community of mothers – this is us together reaching for the hand of God.

Discipling as social accountability

In our meetings members share their experiences of oppression, toil and friendlessness; they work tirelessly in their jobs, yet social mobility remains out of reach. “Again I saw all the oppressions that are practised under the sun. Look, the tears of the oppressed – with no one to comfort them! On the side of their oppressors there was power – with no one to comfort them” (Ecclesiastes 4:1, NRSV).

Ecclesiastes proposes opportunities for collaboration. It is a stark contrast to such misleading television programs like *Benefits Street*, disparaging those dependent on financial support from the public purse.

Brexit and Universal Credit are creating the conditions of Rudyard Kipling's *We and*

They: “All the people like us are We, And everyone else is They.”

We existing disciples have a duty to be present and make ourselves accountable in our communities. Both the oppressed and oppressor need a friend: through the Holy Spirit let our work provide mediation to enable truth and reconciliation.

Discipling is action

For that, Mummies Republic is collaborating with Applecourt Arts, the Methodist Church's Joint Public Issues Team and our local food bank to create a play about poverty. It demonstrates how Universal Credit has impacted – and is impacting – negatively on the lives of people experiencing poverty.

Our plan is to perform in the Palace of Westminster where Mummies Republic can speak their truth to the policy makers. But we need you – a local constituent – to write to your Member of Parliament (MP) asking them to go to the performance.

Our dream is for every MP in the country to see this play – and respond supportively against the effects of Universal Credit. Imagine if every Methodist lobbied their MP to see our performance, and each MP took action in Parliament? Think of the power to bring change for those who are most vulnerable!

Read more about Mummies Republic and donate to support our work at <https://southlondonmission.wordpress.com/>





Suffering, kingdom and patient endurance

As the Methodist Chaplain to students at the University of Bath, Karen Turner interacts with young adults from many different backgrounds and in lots of contexts; and often asks herself how all these relationships and conversations can be a part of a deepening discipleship

I chat to students on the bus, in our neighbourhood, on campus, in coffee shops, and around the table in our own home

I noticed recently that, in the first chapter of Revelation, John describes discipleship as sharing “in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance” of Jesus (Revelation 1.9, NIV). This might not be something we normally advertise about church but I wonder if it might describe the challenge and glory of discipleship not just for the early Christians but for this generation, too. We may not face persecution, but following Jesus in our culture takes tenacity and will require support along the way. We are learners in the way of Jesus; we need one another and we need our relationships to be honest, real and deep.

A model for ministry

Andrew Root, in *Faith Formation in a Secular Age*, suggests the story of Ananias in Acts 9 as a model of ministry for our time. When Paul had a profound spiritual experience on the road to Damascus and lay, literally,

blinded, he was in need of the ministry of someone brave enough to pray for him and gently lead him to participate in the faith community, who would help him begin to make sense of how his world had been upturned.

We don't know, of course, but we can guess that not everything fell instantly into place for Paul. There was a lot of theology for him to think and pray through in light of his experience and it was ten years before he wrote his first letter to a Christian community. Discipleship might be catalysed in a moment but the lifelong chemical reaction fizzles on, supported by the prayers of the community.

Prayer and community

It is easy to forget that prayer is what makes any ministry possible. With prayer, even among 25,000 students, it becomes possible to run into the same people several times in a week in whom God is



Discipleship might be catalysed in a moment but the lifelong chemical reaction fizzes on

already at work, or find yourself sat next to someone on a bus who is struggling, or befriend a student who you are later able to support through a crisis. Following in the footsteps of Ananias, for me, is about trying to listen to how the Spirit is leading and being willing to sometimes get it wrong.

God's kingdom is made of people and I love to be a part of bringing people together who might not otherwise mix. When running a 'drop-in' with cake, I know that initially some students are only there for the free food. However, over weeks, relationships develop and both Christian students and those who have no faith begin to get to know one another and speak about things of importance, including spiritual things. The cake becomes the excuse, but not the real reason that they gather.

I know a few students with Methodist backgrounds and many more with no Christian background at all. We host in our home each week random students who I've met, alongside some students with Methodist backgrounds and their non-Christian friends. They are a friendly and welcoming crowd and are willing to talk about their reflections on Bible passages as well as holding their lives before God in prayer. Regardless of where they are on their faith journey, they are happy to be included.

In Bath we also host a residential Christian community for students, supported by the 'extended' community from the Methodist church next door. Here, eight Christian students actively work out their faith together with daily prayer, shared meals and service. Our hospitality is making this potentially life-transforming year possible, as we learn what it means to live out the call to be family together.

Authenticity and tenacity

Young adults long for experiences that feel real and authentic. The more we are willing to be honest about our own faith journeys, the more they might want to share their stories around our tables.

Are we willing to talk about the moments when we knew that God was near and also how we have kept going when we felt let down?

Some of us, like Paul, may have had a 'blinded by the light' moment; however for all of us it takes time to allow God to complete the artwork of holiness in us. That which keeps us going is what will call students deeper into this adventure: sharing our sufferings and praying with one another, and, like Ananias, being open to including the least likely people and patiently walking forward together.

D?

DISCIPLESHIP
Question

Who might you gather with to "make sense" together?



COURAGEOUS

world-changers for Christ

Boosting faith and building community is the discipleship aim of 3Generate, say three of the Church's young people

Having space to discuss faith and other topics in a safe environment has boosted my faith



What an inspiring weekend! At 3Generate each year young people from across the Connexion gather to engage in issues that are important to them. They stand up, they speak out and generate dialogue with the Church to take action together.

But even more importantly, 3Generate enables young people to realise that they are not alone on their discipleship journey.

Jasmine, Youth President 2018/2019:

As Youth President, I represent 3Generate to the Church. But I also visit, listen and watch the way in which young people are empowered on their discipleship journeys.

Being a disciple means being a follower of Christ, and it is so important to follow Christ daily in order for us to lead people to him. You cannot lead people to a place you have never been or experienced yourself.

Hear, share, learn

And discipleship is not just introducing people to Christ, but actually encouraging them to walk with Jesus in their daily lives. That makes 3Generate a crucial tool for

children and young people to use, grow with, and flourish in their discipleship journeys. It is where young people meet with each other; hear others' stories and share in their pain, their battles. Discipleship is helping them to learn and holding their hands through the storms. There is a story behind every person, and when we hear about how God is there with them, strengthening them – that's what gives us hope. And that grows faith. That's discipleship.

Courage

My 2018/2019 3Generate theme 'Courageous' encourages children and young people to follow Christ with boldness on their own discipleship journeys.

Sometimes that means doing something which has never been done before – which requires obedience and courage. It takes a lot of faith to be a disciple of Christ. The way I try to encourage people as the Youth President is on social media. I encourage them to have faith as disciples of Christ. At youth events I inspire people to follow Christ; to believe the word of God and show them that the word of God is not





outdated but relevant and can be applied in our generation today. For me, social media is a big discipleship tool: it allows me to stay connected to the young people beyond 3Generate – to encourage them on their faith journey, as well as share my own experiences. As we walk together we are able to strengthen each other in following Christ – to become world changers.

Discipleship journeys

One thing that we must all remember: you are not the only person on this discipleship journey. We are all walking together. As we follow Jesus we share our lives and what we learn, and that helps other people on their journey. Here, two of our representatives (reps) share how their roles have deepened their own discipleship journeys.

Gemma, 3Generate Council Rep:

To me, discipleship is all about enabling others to experience the love of God, to hear about the ways of Jesus and then to build a community of disciples who are following Christ.

I feel called to serve young people and build such a community of young disciples within the Methodist Church. At 3Generate we hear first-hand from young people about the things they are facing and experiencing. If we can shine God's light into these situations and encourage them to shine the light God has placed in them, this to me is discipleship. It is building up and encouraging young people to be all that they are created to be, and then empowering them to go out and make disciples themselves. We know that we don't go alone.

Charlotte, 3Generate Conference Rep:

3Gen has been a massive part of my faith journey since I started attending about

seven years ago. Meeting up with other young people and having space to discuss faith and other topics in a safe environment has boosted my faith so much and has helped me to feel like I am not on my own. 3Gen has allowed me to build friendships and it has opened doors to opportunities that I would never have thought possible.

3Generate allows us as young people to be aware of the Methodist Connexion beyond our local churches; of issues that affect us all and how we can respond as followers – disciples – of Christ. The relationships we form during 3Generate help us to grow in understanding other people, our nation and the world.

D?

DISCIPLESHIP Question

How do you respond to the call to be courageous and follow Christ with boldness?

3GENERATE

The Children and Youth Assembly of the Methodist Church

- Includes a programme with elections occurring on the 3Generate weekend to fill representative roles for the year: Methodist Conference Reps (3), Methodist Council Reps (3) Ecumenical Rep (1), British Youth Council Reps (3) World Rep (1), Social Justice Rep (1).
- Sends three representatives to the Methodist Conference each year to report on the discussions of the young people at their Assembly.
- These reports are presented as four manifestos – specific to 3Generate's age groups.
- Over the last five years, the Conference has agreed many ground-breaking resolutions that came from 3Generate, for the Church to engage with locally. These have included the impact of:
 - mental ill health, exam stress and knife crime.
- From 3Generate's programme to share faith stories, the Conference has adopted 'A Year of Testimony' for the connexional year 2020/2021.

As a response to Our Calling to be evangelists, Geoff Bond (West Midlands Regional Coordinator), alongside Michael Harvey (Director of The National Weekend of Invitation) and Jo Yair (Ministry and Mission Coordinator Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury District) designed a 12-month training programme to help the Church reconnect with the imperative to invite those outside the Church to become followers of Christ – now known as the ‘Invitation for All’ project



Recommended reading

Creating a culture of Invitation in your Church by Michael Harvey
Unlocking the Growth: You'll be Amazed at Your Church's Potential by Michael Harvey and Rebecca Paveley



Invitation for All

The truth is that Jesus commanded us to make disciples

I have been a follower of Jesus for many years, and attended many Bible studies, seminars, and conferences. I must have listened to thousands of sermons and sat in countless prayer meetings.

Jesus instructs us to make disciples, not just be disciples

The truth is that Jesus commanded us to make disciples. The great commission is, at its heart, an outward movement. Of course we have the great commandment – loving God and loving others – but the greatest action we can take is to connect others with Jesus and if we never brought others to share in the most fulfilling thing that has ever happened to us then, ultimately, the Christian faith and the Church would disappear. The goal of the Church is not to add people to our Bible studies, but to multiply genuine disciple-makers.

So, could it be that in the act of making disciples, we actually become more like that which Christ designed us to be? We know that it was in the act of sharing faith that thousands of early Christians were transformed into new creations.

Personally, I know that I grow most and learn most when I am helping others. It gives me a place to apply what I'm learning and to take the focus off myself and place it on Christ and others, where it belongs.

Discipleship is linked to evangelism

The thrust of all first-century discipleship was to share Christ with the world he loves and died for. You just cannot be fully a disciple without being an evangelist. Of course, the opposite is also true. You can't be an evangelist without being a disciple. But somehow many people would rather be disciples without being evangelists.

The opportunity

"Beyond the walls of our churches are almost three million people who are open to being invited. Yet this is not happening, making it the greatest missed opportunity for churches. There are many people ready to say 'yes' – to an invitation to church or a suitable event. It is the INVITATION that is key, not the acceptance. However, when it comes to inviting, the barrier is fear"

(Michael Harvey). The opportunity is to:

- Equip churches to seize the opportunity to invite.
- Offer a united focus for churches to grow their capacity to invite.
- See church members – disciples – grow in faith.

Invitation for all

I invited Michael Harvey and Jo Yair to join me and train, equip and encourage our churches in invitation. The commitment is to attend the four group meetings with myself, Michael and Jo and to meet locally for one hour to talk and pray for someone, leading to making an invitation to church or a suitable event to find out more about the Christian faith and following Jesus.

The results in the initial four months

Twenty people aged between 15 and 70 have come either singly or in small groups to participate in what we have called our 'Invitation for All' project. The group has been running since November, with two meetings taking place so far. The early results have been very interesting!

- One person ran a holiday club and at the end produced a leaflet about a new Messy Church inviting all the club's families to come. Three families immediately took up the invitation.
- One person invited a friend to services over Christmas, the friend didn't make it but was very positive about receiving further invitations.
- One church set up a ramblers group and is sharing and inviting people to think about the Christian faith.
- We shared about the project at a church vision day and one person went off and invited three friends to church and they all came!
- One young person invited someone to church who immediately responded and came along.

As a disciple, perhaps a useful question to ask is: **What's the next step for me and what's the first step for my friends, neighbours, colleagues or family?**

D?
DISCIPLESHIP
Question

What does the idea of "invitation for all" spark in your imagination?



TALKING JESUS



Roy Crowne and Catharine Butcher of HOPE describe how Christians find new confidence when they start 'Talking Jesus'

“Now I feel confident talking about my walk with Jesus.”

That is the verdict of Paula, a Yorkshire mum who has been on the 'Talking Jesus' course and is now inspired to speak up about being a Christian.

She is not alone. The course is giving confidence to ordinary Christians across an extraordinary range of denominations, ethnicities and backgrounds, as they learn to share their faith.

Paula explained: "I'm not very good at speaking up and can never seem to find the right words. As a Christian I tended to avoid mentioning church to my non-church friends. That's what the Talking Jesus course changed for me. The videos were like windows; like being able to spy on yourself; objectively watching yourself avoiding telling people the good news. Why? For me it was lack of confidence. But the course gave me the tools to address this, the words needed and the motivation."

Practical and real

The Talking Jesus course is a six-part video-based course available on USB or

DVD. Short parable-style films set the scene for longer teaching videos, which include practical examples and personal stories filmed in real-life contexts.

The videos show both city and village settings, an aspect that particularly appeals to smaller churches: "We didn't feel that it's not for us in our little rural church," was the feedback from one.

The films and the teaching videos prompt discussion, and a course booklet gives members of small groups opportunities to personalise the course to their own



D?

DISCIPLESHIP Question

How will you take Talking Jesus to heart?

circumstances. Every group member is encouraged to pray for five friends or family members who do not yet follow Jesus.

Responses to Talking Jesus

The impact is tangible and effective.

Edinburgh church minister Gordon Kennedy said: "The response to the course has been more than I could have hoped for. One man in his 50s, a regular at Sunday church but still young as a believer, spoke of having had three conversations with people he met while walking his dog. Another, older man, told how he has taken the opportunity to speak of his faith and hope in Jesus when asked about his treatment for cancer. All at the course related that they are praying for the five names they wrote down on week one, and many have now had opportunities to speak to some of them about Jesus."

Since Talking Jesus was launched last year, more than 4,000 copies have been distributed and 18,000 booklets sold. In February, the Methodist Church gave copies of the course and workbooks to every one of its circuits. The Revd Canon Gareth Powell, Secretary of the Methodist Conference, said: "I commend the Talking Jesus course as one of the ways in which we might grow in confidence and witness to the love of God at work in our lives."

Roy Crowne, HOPE's executive director, and one of the team behind the project says: "The Talking Jesus course seems to have caught the need of the moment as people want to know how to put their faith

into words. The course is being used by an amazing number of churches."

The course enables people to speak confidently and naturally about Jesus day-to-day. Izzy from York gives a typical reaction when she says: "I now feel I have been given a toolkit to use in all sorts of contexts, and I have had some fantastic conversations as a result. I know now that my job is simply to talk Jesus – the rest will be up to God!"

One church in Stoke-on-Trent ran the course in a group for mums: "We thought it was fantastic. The videos were good for sparking discussion; I wouldn't have got as much from it watching alone. The stats were interesting and encouraging too."

The Talking Jesus course was devised by Roy Crowne, Dr Rachel Jordan-Wolf, National Mission and Evangelism Advisor to the Church of England, and Bible teacher Dr Andrew Ollerton. It was created in response to the Talking Jesus research, which found that one in five of the people Christians talk to about faith wants to know more.

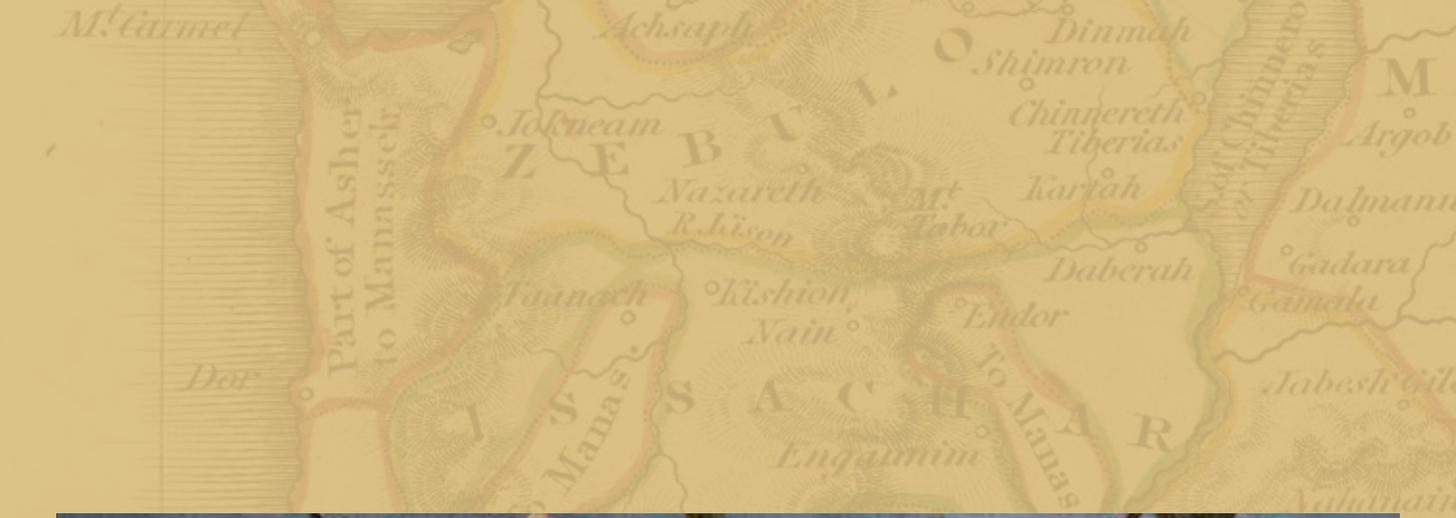
"It is so exciting to think that thousands of people are learning to talk about Jesus," says Roy Crowne. "We are praying that God will use every conversation, and that lives will be changed as a result."

**To find out more about the research and to order copies visit talkingjesus.org.uk
To order copies of *Talking Jesus* with *Talking of God Together* visit methodistpublishing.org.uk**

Speak confidently and naturally about Jesus



One in five people wants to know more about faith



Reflection

In the mid-fifteenth century the Medici family commissioned artist Benozzo Gozzoli to paint a series of frescos for the Magi Chapel in the Palazzo Medici, Florence. *The Journey of the Magi to Bethlehem* depicts a great crowd of people processing around three walls of the chapel, winding their way through the countryside towards Bethlehem, some walking, some on horseback; all richly dressed and well provisioned for the journey. Among the crowd, Gozzoli painted not only members of the Medici family, but also their friends and other leading figures of the day. He even painted himself in the procession, identifiable by his name written on his hat.

It was a common practice in religious works of art, particularly in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, to include the painting's donor, family and friends as bystanders, or even participants, in religious scenes. Rogier van der Weden's *Nativity* (c. 1445) has the painting's donor kneeling in homage before Mary and the Christ-child. More striking is Hans Memling's *Triptych of Wilhelm Moreel*. Its central panel shows St Christopher with the Christ-child, while each side panel depicts another patron saint; on one side accompanied by Moreel himself and his five sons, on the other by Moreel's wife and eleven daughters. They were quite literally painted into the picture.

Standing in the story

The 2017 'Deconstructed Nativity' exhibition at Sheffield's art space 35 Chapel Walk took this idea a step further. Artists and viewers alike were encouraged to take a fresh look at the sometimes too-well-known nativity narrative, with each piece of artwork focusing on a single aspect of the traditional scene. My review of the exhibition¹ concluded with the thought that: "Perhaps there are other well-known and well-loved biblical stories that would bear 'deconstructing' in this way, enabling us to stand within the story, to find deeper meaning, and to draw closer to God."

As a creative writer, one exercise that I find particularly interesting – and challenging – is to take a character from the Bible and write their story. To do this, I need to step into that story. I need to

stand within the story, in the midst of the noise, the muck, the action, and ask: What is happening? Who is involved in the story? Where does it take place? When? Why is this happening, in this particular place and at this particular time? What has gone before that has precipitated this event? Is the situation resolved? And what might happen next?

When I trained as a local preacher, I was taught always to ask of Scripture: If it means that, for them, there, then, what does it mean for us, here, now? Standing within the Bible story – especially the gospel stories of those who had direct encounters with Jesus – and asking such questions gives us a good pattern for our own discipleship. Asking: "What did Jesus (or his disciples) do *then*?" might well help us to answer the question: "What would Jesus do *now*?" And perhaps more importantly: "What should *I* do?"

Walking in their shoes

A proverb attributed to the Cherokee Nation encourages us not to judge a person until we've walked a mile in their shoes – another good maxim for Christian discipleship!

In the same way that we might step into the stories of Scripture in order to develop our understanding of discipleship, so we also need to step into the stories of people we encounter daily – to walk in their shoes – in order to live out our discipleship. Now, clearly I'm not suggesting that we should take a person to one side, sit them down, and demand to know the who-what-when-where-how-why of their situation – of course not! Rather, in order not only to *be* disciples, but also to *make* disciples, we need to paint ourselves into the other person's picture, to stand within their story, in all the complexity of their lives – and ours; with all their hopes and fears – and ours; with all their joys and concerns – and ours; with all their prejudices and preferences – and ours.

So as we stand within the stories of Scripture, as we walk in the shoes of those we encounter day by day, may we draw closer to God and to our neighbour, and may we find a deeper meaning of all that it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

What a fantastic work of art that will be!

By Judith Simms who is a local preacher, communications officer for Methodist Women in Britain and a trustee of ArtServe

¹ ArtServe magazine, issue 19, Spring 2018

The Journey of the Magi to Bethlehem, the right hand wall of the chapel, c.1460 (fresco), Gozzoli, Benozzo di Lese di Sandro (1420-97)/ Palazzo Medici-Riccardi, Florence, Italy

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