

Issue 15 • Summer 2019

The **Methodist** Church 

the connexion

So what's
the **story**...?

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



David Perry
Editor

What is the connexion?

Methodists belong to local churches and also value being part of a larger community. In calling the Methodist Church of Great Britain 'the Connexion', Methodism reflects its historical and spiritual roots.

In the 18th century a 'connexion' simply meant those connected to a person or a group – for instance, a politician's network of supporters. So when people spoke of "Mr Wesley's Connexion" they meant followers of the movement led by John Wesley.

Wesley believed that belonging and mutual responsibility were fundamental Christian qualities. The language of connexion allowed him to express this interdependence, developing its spiritual and practical significance in the organisation and ethos of his movement. Both language and practice are important for Methodists today.

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There are so many other things Jesus did. If they were all written down, each of them, one by one, I can't imagine a world big enough to hold such a library of books.

John 21:25 *The Message*

Recently I was minded to buy an anthology of the new Poet Laureate Simon Armitage's poems. Having heard him on the radio several times, I wanted to get to know his distinctive voice on the page. But what to choose? Where to begin to explore his poetic story? An anthology, whilst selective and subjective in its choices, nevertheless provides the broad creative sweep of a poet's artistic journey and is a good place to start. That's where the disappointment set in, as the latest available only reaches as far as 2014. So the last five years are missing and, for me as reader, that's five years of silence, as though his words are travelling from the far side of the universe and haven't yet arrived...

As the Gospel of John closes, we discover this same sense of incompleteness with a surprising admission that what we have is a subjective choice, a highly curated anthology and a small fraction of what could be shared. It is an editor's lament. What to include, what to omit? Whose voices are to be heard and why?

Of course this verse is only stating the obvious. If all of the people who encountered Jesus were to have had their recollections heard, repeated by others, shared as common memory and then written down for posterity just think how overwhelming that would be for a new Christian.

This year's presidential theme is 'So What's the Story...?' It's meant to initiate a treasure-trove of storytelling across our Church in the year ahead, because your voice matters and deserves to be heard. This edition of *the connexion* actually makes that a plea for today. The stories we share in these pages are only the merest teeniest, tiniest tip of a gigantic hidden iceberg of testimony which lies unremarked below the surface of our everyday life as Methodists.

So what is your experience of faith and of following Jesus? How might your testimony challenge, encourage or inspire others? How can you nurture those you know to feel confident and safe enough to share from the heart? Together let's break the silence and create an inclusive anthology for our times.

Love and peace,
David

the connexion

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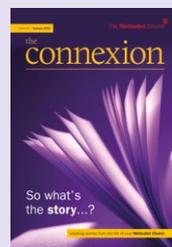


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Mummies Republic in Parliament

Winnie Baffoe (Issue 14, pages 16-17) offers this update from Mummies Republic.

“We would like to thank everyone who has prayed, gifted financially, and lobbied their MP. Although Conservatives were absent, Mummies Republic shared its experience of Universal Credit in Westminster to a room full of people who could make a difference. The following day and every Wednesday since, the Government has spent £250,000 advertising in the London *Metro* ‘facts



and myths’ about Universal Credit. Jesus tells us we each have our work, therefore we are to stay awake and be aware of what is unfolding around us (Mark 13:34-35)”.

University Chaplaincy

A new report has highlighted the positive impact that chaplains have on students and staff in higher education across the UK.

The Methodist Church currently has around 100 university chaplains placed in higher education establishments, both in paid and voluntary positions. The report, ‘Chaplains on Campus: Understanding Chaplaincy in UK Universities’ written by the Church of England, Coventry, Durham and Canterbury Christ Church Universities reported improvements in the atmosphere and the sense of community at institutions with a chaplain. View the report at www.churchofengland.org

New Head of Mission

Jude Levermore has been appointed Head of Mission, in a newly created role for the Methodist Church.

Jude has a background in leadership, having worked in charity and faith-based organisations at a senior level for over 20 years. She comes from the Discipleship and Ministries team at the Methodist Church which she led for the past seven years. In her new role, Jude will be supporting and managing work related to mission, evangelism, children and young people, public issues, global relationships, engagement and grants.





Embodying GOD'S grace

Our Methodist story is about caring for people, whether they're next door or in a refugee camp thousands of miles away, writes the Revd Dr Barbara Glasson, President of the Methodist Conference for 2019/2020



Miss Clark was about four foot high. I think she would have been taller except she was completely doubled over with arthritis. When she opened the door to us Sunday school kids, she peered upwards through her spectacles because she couldn't straighten up. Every year we took Miss Clark the biggest harvest marrow, and every year Miss Clark peered upwards and smiled thankfully.



Fifty years later, I am in awe of that diminutive old lady and the grace with which she received that obese courgette. After all, a marrow is a serious commitment even for a family of 12 with imaginative ideas on soup. But for an 80-year old spinster... Well, what did she do with it? I have to hope she had a compost heap!

Why am I telling you about Miss Clark? I think it's because in that one small gesture, she embodied something quintessentially Methodist. The love she had for us far outweighed the immediate dilemma of her vegetable basket. Miss Clark embodied God's grace.

I think that doing small practical things graciously is at the heart of who we are as Methodists.

Helping the Rohingya refugees

This idea struck me again on the recent trip I have just made to Bangladesh and Myanmar. I found it profoundly challenging to visit the refugee camps that are currently home to more than a million displaced people on the borders of the two countries. The Rohingya people are stateless. They belong nowhere and have no official citizenship papers. They are the victims of



WHAT'S OUR STORY *Question*

Which simple transforming gestures of grace that helped you might you share with others?



genocide, which can mean that members of a family – fathers, husbands, sons – may be taken off in the night and either killed or imprisoned.

The scale of this displacement is tragic. Its further tragedy is that the refugee camps are situated on a deforested area of the coast vulnerable to cyclones. At any moment the whole lot could be washed away – houses, women and children – everything and everyone.

Can we make a difference?

It would be understandable if we shrugged our shoulders in despair. But through the work of All We Can and Christian Aid, Methodists are supporting small projects that make a big difference. These include the provision of women's safe spaces. In temperatures of over 45°C, getting out of a tiny house into a safe space with a cooling fan can make life more bearable.

Connecting with people across the globe

We may feel like a small Church, because in the UK Methodism isn't as big as it used to be. But we are also part of the World Church. It is the DNA of the Methodist people to look beyond our small island for others to connect with us through a shared sense of belonging. Across the globe many of us continually and faithfully do small things very well. We can also be proud of our Global Relationships staff as they support the Methodist Church in remote places.

We need to see the bigger picture

Of course, we can be small-minded too. There are far too many accounts of Methodist churches being parochial and narrow minded. These range from petty

issues such as possessiveness over the church kitchen, through to carelessness of each other's feelings, gossip, homophobia and racism. Too many people have been damaged by our lack of vision or prejudice. We need to repent and re-open our hearts in courageous and gracious ways.

Encouraging signs as Methodists witness God's grace

Even so there are significant signs of hope. I see big strides towards a broad understanding of evangelism as we seek to express God's good news afresh in the light of our contemporary experience of grace.

But mostly, I am encouraged by the many 'ordinary' Methodists who work out what it means to be followers of Jesus. Because, like Miss Clark, you bring ongoing hope to a complicated world. You are possibly bowed down with cares, but nevertheless standing tall, as you witness in many small yet significant ways to the transforming potential of God's abounding grace.

Doing small practical things graciously is at the heart of who we are as Methodists



THINK
PIECE

Called to be ordinary

Clive Marsh, the Vice-President of the Methodist Conference for 2019/2020, says we can further God's purpose in our ordinary, everyday lives



I wasn't brought up Methodist. Stumbling in from outside means that I brought some negative prejudices. Methodists (or 'the Wesleyans' as they were still called in our town in the 1960s) were a bit snooty, and looked down on 'our kind of folk'...or so it was thought (by our kind of folk). I wonder whether they were and did? I'll probably never know. They did sing a lot, had coffee mornings galore, and were allegedly friendlier than the Anglicans towards us (extremely non-conformist non-conformists). Though I did have Church of England school friends too.

The relevance of Christianity

This Christian stuff always was rather confusing. The Methodists put on a pretty impressive performance of Handel's *Messiah* most years. Even as a ten-year old, I found bits of it quite exciting. And one of my teachers was a Methodist and seemed to be an especially engaging and thoughtful person. The challenge all the time, was to work out how Christian faith mingled with, and helped make sense of everyday life.

Growing knowledge of Methodism

Forty years later, I have become immersed in British Methodism, married a presbyter, discovered other Methodisms across the world and in Britain itself, dabbled in its history and theology, and preached for

three decades. I have come to appreciate Methodism's purpose, story and function so much more. There are still aspects of Methodism that make me wince, though those are probably more to do with English middle-class comfort(ableness) than Methodism itself. Sometimes Methodism and middle-class smugness have merged, which is something that started as early as the 19th century, apparently.

Resourcing ordinary people to live Christian lives

Methodism will be truest to itself when, from within its own ordinariness, it looks to society's edge. It will not be trying to become a replacement government or social welfare agency. It will be resourcing spiritually (and even theologically) anyone who is developing a working Christian life and seeking to live by the gospel, through engagement with the Bible, prayer, worship, Christian conversation and political activism. And Methodism's own life will be challenged and shaped by what people find at the edge, in the 'in-between' spaces (faith and world, faith and faith, belief and unbelief), and in daily life.

The Church's task is not just to train individuals

It may sound as if we start with individual Christians, get them up to scratch, and

then they will do their stuff 'out there in the world', and God's kingdom will come. It's not only Methodism that has taught me that things don't work quite like that, and for three reasons.

First, there is 'social holiness'. That means that faith is fundamentally shaped in groups. Everyone has to have their own faith, of course. But we only latch on to it by being given it through others. And we are only able to maintain it by being supported by, and supporting, others. So by finding faith we join in with what's already going on.

Second, God is already 'out there'. I tremble whenever I hear people say that they are "bringing God into a situation." I appreciate what's meant, but it's misleading. God is always 'already there'. So Methodism's job, like any Christian Church or movement, is to contribute to that task. We help disclose where God already is and what God is already doing.

Third, the world is not evil. It can't be, because it's of God, and God's still active within it. An astonishing range of people, religious and not, are clearly engaged in the kinds of activities which mesh with God's will for the world. That said, the world's clearly not always functioning well. There are some real obstacles preventing God's reign happening (humans frequently being one of them). But where good stuff is being done, we need to acknowledge it. Where bad stuff is happening we need to work with others to resist it, saying why we think it's bad, and doing our best to get it stopped.

Our everyday, ordinary job

Those three insights – reasons why it is not the Church's task just to train individuals – are agenda items for Methodism's future. We may not be huge, and may yet become smaller for a while. But we have a job to do nevertheless, even in our everyday ordinariness.



WHAT'S OUR STORY *Question*

How can the church best support you as you live on the edges of daily life?

We have a job to do nevertheless, even in our everyday ordinariness



CHANGING

the church-growing environment

Church planting is part of our Methodist DNA

Matt Finch, the new Pioneering and Church Planting Officer in the Evangelism and Growth team, takes a look at our spiritual DNA and asks what it would take to switch on the growth genes

“Why on earth did they put a church here?”

This may be a question you ask during your summer holiday, as you discover a chapel down a narrow country road or in a peculiar part of the city you are exploring. You may never find out why or who, but what is certain is that, once upon a time, a community responded to the gospel in that place and a new church was formed.

Kindling faith

Stories of our Methodist past are inspiring. In recent years I have served in St Ives Methodist Church, Cambridgeshire. It sits on the banks of the Ouse River, overlooking a picturesque tiny island and nature

reserve. It was built there because John Wesley preached on that spot in 1774. Elizabeth Asplin was listening that day. Touched by God’s grace, she gathered a meeting in her front room. Soon, that gathering of worshippers became too big for Elizabeth’s little house, so they borrowed a barn. The barn became overcrowded, so they found this bit of land and built themselves a church building.

If we think about it, all our churches or chapels have a testimony like this. Faith has been kindled and churches planted by folks who had the gift to see what is possible. I’m inspired to think that each Methodist church began with a call to begin

a new church so the gospel could take root in a new way.

Essence and purpose

To use a phrase common at the moment, church planting is part of our Methodist DNA: our essence and purpose. We see it in our beginnings, but seeking new places for new people has not just shaped our past, it has the potential to shape our future.

The study of DNA is at the forefront of many disciplines including, but not limited to, medicine, agriculture and criminology. A fascinating investigation is how environment is a key factor in activating DNA, for good or ill. Genes can be switched on or off by factors such as diet, sleep, light or even certain chemicals.

For us as the Church it is perhaps time to go further than recognising our missional DNA and begin to consider the environment and factors which can activate that part of our makeup. What has switched off our original church-planting passion? And what can switch it back on?

Enabling new communities

As part of my new role in the Methodist Church I have been listening to different people and groups across the Connexion: pioneers and church planters, circuits and ministers.

We can all recognise the elements that have switched off our church-planting DNA. Much of our current thinking is about how we can sustain what we have in light of declining numbers of people, ministers and resources.

Is it time for us to rediscover that life-giving, pioneering element of who we are? Could we come alive as we enable new communities of faith to take their first steps? And I don't just mean on a new housing estate or in a new town. Church planting could happen as circuits and their existing worshipping communities recognise ways to reach those who have never joined them before.

Conversations – and actions!

In some places this is beginning already. Circuit leaders – both lay and ordained – are taking brave decisions where the potential for a new church is being explored.

The first step might simply be a question “Can we plant a new church?” Or, “Who would like to join a team to plant a new church?” We might need to allow new people to lead. Ordained, lay, diverse, or those we think are too inexperienced.

It starts with small conversations. A prayer meeting to seek God. An agenda item at a circuit meeting about planting a new church. A brave decision with our resources and a willingness to recognise that growing will mean changing.

This all contributes to a changed environment where that Methodist DNA can come alive again – just as with Elizabeth Asplin's achievement in St Ives. It leads to a desire to meet, include, invite, worship, grow and ultimately establish churches that will serve a new generation of Christians.

If the idea of church planting stirs something in you, act on it – and please get in touch!

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WHAT'S OUR STORY Question

What needs to change where you are for church planting to commence?



Grace, courage and imagination

The Revd Kathleen Richardson (Baroness Richardson of Calow), the first woman to be a District Chair and the first woman to be President of the Conference, tells how core Methodist values are vigorously applied to the challenges created by poverty and injustice

The Methodist Church has given me the most wonderful opportunities, privileges and experiences but I can honestly say that what I am now involved in, as an 81-year-old supernumerary, is possibly the most exciting.

Many years ago, the Methodist Church produced a report on the nature of the Church. One of the questions it posed was “What are the marks of a Church whose primary task is not to fill its pews but to embody the good news of Christ for the world?”

Poverty and unemployment

The circuit in which I am ‘sitting down’ is the Enfield Circuit – in one of the most northerly boroughs of London. When the circuit leadership team considered its strategy it identified five priorities, three of which were to re-evaluate ministry in the north-east part of the circuit, to consider how to meet the needs of many elderly people living in isolation and loneliness and to develop further work among children and young people.

The small church of St John occupies a large plot of land just inside the M25. It was bought by the Methodist Church in the 1950s and was successful in its day, with extensive youth work, but in later years has struggled to maintain

its membership – which currently stands at 11. The building is in a bad state of repair, although it is used by a pre-school nursery, uniformed organisations, an art class and a choir.

The estate served by the church is one of the most deprived in London. It is reported that 49.6% of its children are judged to be living in poverty. It has high unemployment, poor educational attainments and high levels of crime and anti-social behaviour.

Embodying the good news

We have chosen to demolish the old building and to build an intergenerational neighbourhood centre which we call The Space (Special Place for Adults, Children and Everything). The small group of members who have kept the faith alive and continued to pray for their neighbours have had the grace, courage and imagination to let go and trust the future:

- We have the support of the Enfield Council and we are entering into partnership with the two Methodist foundation charities – MHA (Methodist Homes) and Action for Children.
- We have a district grant for a community chaplain and are hoping to have a Methodist intern.
- We will have a pre-school nursery, lounge and coffee bar, meeting rooms, hall,



Responding to local needs rather than living off the spiritual capital of earlier generations



quiet room, canopied courtyard, community allotment and shed.

- Our community kitchen will be used as the basis for food distribution through the Felix Project.
- MHA will run a 'Live at Home' scheme with friendship, activities and support.
- Action for Children is considering supported accommodation for young people leaving care.
- A group of doctors will provide healthcare education.
- We are planning to engage with TLG (Transforming Lives for Good) to provide mentoring and support for young people.
- We will have homework clubs, youth activities and parenting and language classes.

Community development

We are working on the theological understanding of asset-based community development – that every person is a child of God, made in God's image, with skills and gifts, longings and dreams. We will bring to the table the assets of our Methodist heritage, our land, our faith in God's purposes and our Christian understanding of grace. We take note of a former Conference review of priorities

that asked churches to respond to local needs rather than living off the spiritual capital of earlier generations. It is our belief that spiritual capital can be uncovered as we listen to the stories people share and try to make liturgy that reflects reality of experience.

This is Methodism

I can even quote Standing Order 1004 to prove it!

The Conference has declared its commitment that the Methodist Church, in faithfulness to its missionary calling to evangelism, social caring and political justice, will strive to use its resources for all in society, recognising that this will mean especially taking sides with those experiencing poverty and inequality of resources, and has challenged the Methodist people to respond seriously and imaginatively to the issues raised by that commitment.

This is our attempt to respond seriously and imaginatively, and so to become part of the ongoing and emerging story of the people called Methodist.



WHAT'S OUR STORY
Question

What would having the courage and imagination to embody the good news of Christ in a fresh way mean for your circuit?

A man with glasses, wearing a light blue and white striped shirt and brown corduroy trousers, stands in a church. He has his hands clasped in front of him. The church interior features wooden pews, a blue carpet, and a stained glass window in the background. The lighting is warm and focused on the man.

Methodism: our heritage foretells our future

When we understand our Methodist roots, we can better see where God is leading us, according to historian and minister of the Wesley Memorial Church, Oxford, the Revd Dr Martin Wellings

When John Wesley described the origins of Methodism, he identified three key stages in its development. The third stage centred on events in London in the spring of 1738, when Wesley felt his heart “strangely warmed” by an assurance of God’s love. The second stage occurred across the Atlantic, in Georgia, where Wesley’s self-confidence was shaken and where his ideas of what constituted real Christianity were tried and tested. But the beginning of it all, the ‘first rise’ of Methodism, took place in Oxford, where the Wesley brothers studied and taught, and where a small group of like-minded friends meeting regularly to read, pray and serve soon acquired some mocking nicknames: the ‘Holy Club’, the ‘Bible Moths’, the ‘Supererogation Men’, and the ‘Methodists’.

Methodism in Oxford

There has been a Methodist presence in Oxford since the 1720s. It has changed tremendously over the years. By the early 19th century there were few, if any, Methodists among the students, and Methodist outreach concentrated on the settled population of the city. Later, the opening of the university to non-Anglicans and the growth of the city prompted the building of a new chapel, named after the Wesley brothers. The Wesley Memorial Church in the city centre still offers worship, witness and service to the people of Oxford, the students of the two universities, and hundreds of thousands of visitors who flock to Oxford’s historic sites each year.

Heritage and mission

Although we cannot compete with *Alice in Wonderland* or *Harry Potter* as tourist attractions in Oxford, connecting heritage and mission has been a central aim at the Wesley Memorial Church for the last decade. What has this involved?

Well, it has meant gathering stories of life and faith both from members of our current congregation and from our very rich and diverse history. Our fellowship now is multinational and multi-ethnic. It includes cradle Methodists and people from a whole range of other church backgrounds for whom ‘Wesley Mem’ is now their spiritual home.

But, as we have been discovering, our church has always included a cross-section

of the local community – some famous, some notorious, but most simply working out in daily and family life what it means to be a disciple of Jesus.

We have sought to share these stories, in order to evoke interest and to prompt questions. We set up a display *From Outrage to Outreach* focused on opposition to Methodism. We set this alongside the church’s current offer of hospitality to tourists, pilgrims, carers with young children, and the homeless.

Last year, as the country marked the centenary of the end of the World War 1, ‘story scrolls’ about the names on our war memorial, and our conscientious objectors, helped people to reflect on the dilemmas of faith in a time of conflict.

Heritage informs our faith

As well as researching our heritage and using it to share the good news of Jesus, our aspiration is also to draw on our heritage to inform, nurture and refresh our own faith. We don’t want to be a museum, but rather a community where Methodism’s living faith is expressed and proclaimed in the present.

And what might be the building blocks of that living faith? On any historical reading, the Methodist way of being Christian surely involves what our forebears called “evangelical Arminianism”. In other words, a conviction that the gospel is for everyone, and that it must be commended imaginatively and effectively to all. It involves a holiness of life which is both social and socially responsible. It brings wholeness and happiness. Its way of understanding the Church is connexional, recognising that we are interdependent and mutually accountable. And the Methodist way of being Christian is rooted in a lived experience of God’s love, and expressed in worship and service.

The way ahead

The brief for this article was to write about ‘Who we are and where we’re going?’ Two deceptively simple questions! By looking at where we’ve come from, we can see how varied and diverse ‘we’ are, and always have been, and be encouraged to celebrate and tell the story of our ‘many Methodisms’. We can engage critically and creatively with our roots. And, even if our destination is uncertain, we can travel hopefully and faithfully with God.

Our aspiration is to draw on our heritage to inform, nurture and refresh our own faith



WHAT’S OUR STORY Question

How could your church come together and use its varied stories of life and faith to inspire your contemporary witness?



Risk-taking **MISSION**

The Revd Gill Newton tells how a mission development support worker is helping good news grow across the Sheffield District

Imagination and vision! These are qualities that many individuals, churches and circuits within the Sheffield District display when it comes to finding ways of connecting with their communities. But sometimes they have lacked the confidence and courage to get those ideas off the ground.

So, from the development of a District Mission Policy and Action Plan a couple of years ago emerged the concept of employing a mission development support worker. Someone to get alongside our imaginative people and give them the confidence and skills to make their vision a reality; someone to help churches and circuits bring to life the District Mission Policy strapline, “Learning, changing and joining in”.

Neil Harland (*photo left*) came to this new role on a part-time basis. Straight away, churches and circuits benefitted from his encouragement and support in offering practical help and advice with grant applications and property consents processes; networking across the district with those facing similar challenges or

exploring similar ventures and helping to make meaningful connections between local churches and district and connexional officers. But, there was always more to do than time to do it!

So when connexional funding towards “projects responding specifically to the reaffirmation of *Our Calling*” became available, the district sought to make the Mission Development Support Worker’s role full time. We were delighted, alongside 19 other districts, to be successful in our application. It’s wonderful to see the range of projects emerging across the Connexion as we renew our focus on *Our Calling*.

New ways to live out worship and mission

With Neil’s support, encouragement and expertise we’ve seen some exciting developments across the district including:

- Priory Place, a Doncaster town centre church that had struggled to maintain its listed building or reach out in relevant ways, now making important links with the local council and other bodies towards becoming a high-quality





conference centre and café through a new partnership with Victoria Hall, Sheffield and Central Hall, Westminster. Priory Place's worshipping life and style has been reshaped and they are looking to employ a community outreach worker to help put their renewed vision and mission strategy into action.

- The Chesterfield Circuit appointing youth development and outreach development workers.
- The Art Gallery at 35 Chapel Walk, Sheffield establishing its own art prints and framing business to seek to build Christian community within its creative environment and so reshape its model of mission.
- The small rural chapel at Hope in The Peak Circuit, with the support of Deacon Lorraine Brown, the Peak Park Rural Development Enabler, hosting The Hub as a fresh expression of church involving cycling and other outdoor pursuits.
- Two churches at Hemsworth, in the Barnsley Circuit, and at Firth Park, Sheffield converting part of their premises into missional soft play centres.

This is just a sample of the exciting and innovative ways in which churches and circuits are seeking to “respond to the gospel of God’s love in Christ and to live out their discipleship in worship and mission”. This is how we’re seeking to make Our Calling real in the varied contexts and communities across our district.

Mission-minded people

In addition to encouraging this risk-taking mission, Neil has been instrumental in establishing and co-leading a regular Mission and Ministry Forum. The aim of these events has been to draw together mission-minded people from across the circuits to worship and pray together, to hear inspiring input from connexional officers, to continue developing the mission strategies in our circuits and to unlock the rich resources we hold. Two such events have successfully been held so far and we look forward to a third in the autumn where we will launch our new seed-funding programme.

Add to that the regular communications via social media and electronic newsletters to increase awareness of all this good news across the district and we have a growing sense of where God is at work and how we might pray for and encourage one another in our shared mission and calling.

Requests for support from our Mission Development Support Worker continue to come and more innovative projects are in the pipeline, so we’re excited about the future and look forward to exploring more imaginative ways in which our churches and circuits can make the elements of Our Calling a priority.



WHAT'S OUR STORY *Question*

In what ways can you and your district support and encourage mission-minded people?

Learning, changing and joining in

VIBRANT, GROWING and on fire for God

Like the early Christians, our faith is in God for an awesome future, writes Carolyn Lawrence, Vice President for Britain and Ireland, World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women, and Global Relationships Support Officer

As visitors arrive by boat into the Brayford Pool, Lincoln, a sign on the bridge says, “Where have you been?” When they leave another sign asks, “Where are you going?” Both are questions we should ask ourselves, as individuals and churches.

What's our story?

From the beginning, mission has been in the DNA of the Christian Church. The early Christians faced great opposition and were in constant danger. Yet they continued boldly to preach the gospel and live it out by the power of the Holy Spirit.

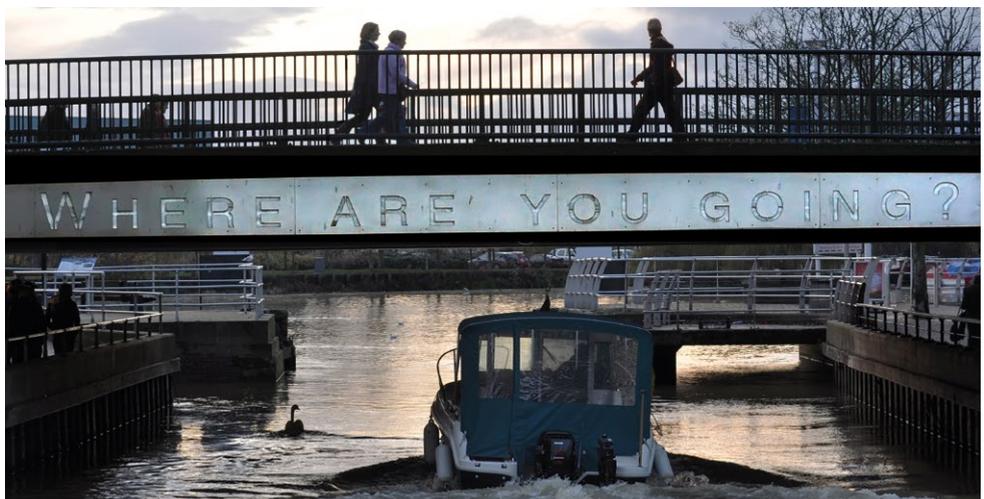
As a result the Church grew phenomenally. One of my favourite Scripture passages is Acts 2:42-47, telling about the lives of the early Christians. I see those verses as an example of the simplicity of our Christian walk. The apostles sold their possessions, shared their food, worshipped, studied God's word, prayed, and performed “wonders and signs” by the power of the Holy Spirit. The result? “Day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.” (Acts 2:43, 47, NRSV) Awesome!

In a similar way, when we look back at the history of the Methodist Church and read stories of John Wesley and the early



WHAT'S OUR STORY Question

Can you discern together what fresh vision God is giving now and what will happen as a result?





Methodists, we can't fail to be inspired by the way God was on the move, growing the Church and using it to transform society.

I have a real heart for the nations of the world. I find it inspirational to read how the Methodist Church took seriously Jesus' calling to: "go ... and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19, NRSV). The courage shown by some early Methodist missionaries, many of whom never returned home, makes for challenging and inspirational reading.

Our purpose today

I believe God hasn't finished with the Methodist Church and still has much work for us to do. We truly stand on the shoulders of giants and, as we build on the foundation of our forebears, we have a responsibility to carry their legacy into the future.

We need to focus on what's important

People in our society are crying out for relationship, a sense of belonging; looking for what will make a difference in their lives. As Christians we carry the wonderful

good news that there is a place where they belong and are loved; where they may find meaning and purpose. The good news comes from knowing Jesus.

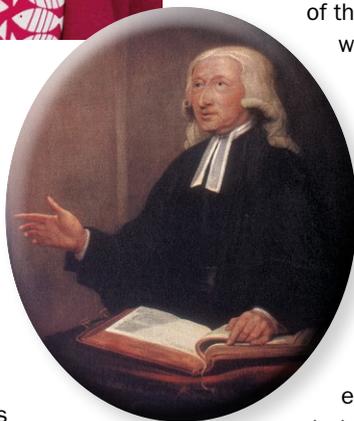
A fresh vision

We need a fresh vision of what God wants to do, both in and through us. Sometimes we overcomplicate and we need to live like the early Christians in simple trust and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Often we have become so clever planning strategies that we forget we can't do anything through our own strength. We have to realise our total dependence on God. We may need to set aside our carefully laid plans and stop doing things that are not bearing fruit. We may need to pause and see where God is moving so we can join in. Sometimes that will be confusing, taking us out of our comfort zone, but it won't be boring!

God's purpose worldwide

I work in the Global Relationships team of the Methodist Church and it is wonderful to hear how God is working in power around the world. In many places the Church is vibrant, growing, and on fire for God. We can learn so much from our sisters and brothers about complete reliance on God, even in very difficult circumstances.

Part of my role is to encourage British churches to twin with Partner Churches overseas so that they can form relationships and learn from each other.

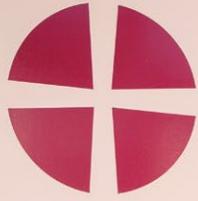


"I will build my church"

To achieve renewal we need to get back to basics – get on our knees before God in prayer. We need to stop arrogantly thinking we know the best way to grow the Church, and commit to total dependence on Jesus. Without that we can do nothing. We need to commit to making God's word the bedrock of our lives and ask the Holy Spirit to refresh us. We also need to recognise that the Church belongs to Jesus. He has said, "I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18, NRSV) and it is so exciting to see what he can do with an individual or fellowship when they are totally committed to God's glory. Let's give Jesus his Church back. The best truly is yet to come!

We need to pause and see where God is moving so we can join in

Passion for serving and sharing



伯明翰華人循道會

BIRMINGHAM CHINESE
METHODIST CHURCH



Praising and thanking God for her call to serve the Birmingham Chinese Methodist Church, the Revd Ping Ting Chen shares the story of a vibrant, growing community

*We have
witnessed our
Lord changing
lives*

The Chinese community has a long history in the UK. It can be traced to the early 19th century when Chinese sailors first settled in the port areas of London and Liverpool. In the UK Census of 2001, statistics quoted 247,403 Chinese people living here, or approximately 0.5 per cent of the UK

population. However, current estimates put the figure at 600,000 – including around 100,000 students, as well as the rapidly expanding number of British-born Chinese. These figures do not include undocumented migrant workers.

Chinese Methodists in Birmingham

The Birmingham Chinese Methodist Church (BCMC) is one of 13 Chinese Methodist Churches across Britain. It was established from several Chinese fellowships in 1994, which then became one of the local churches of the Birmingham District in 2004. The BCMC focuses on supporting students, families, and professionals recently arrived from the Far East, places such as Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, and mainland China; as well as the local-born Chinese community.

As a vibrant, all-age Chinese community, BCMC has people who are full of passion for serving, for loving and for sharing the gospel with each other. We have about 130 members who participate in Sunday worship and other church activities regularly.






WHAT'S OUR STORY
Question

What is God saying to you through this story?

To be able to worship in our mother tongue and our own liturgy, allows everyone at BCMC to enjoy an authentic worship and prayer life. Alongside spiritual nurturing of all, we aim to meet the needs of new arrivals to help them settle into life in the UK and the church offers advice and a support service for newcomers. It also provides social activities, such as clubs for the elderly who cannot speak English.

Growing by welcoming

God continues to bless the BCMC to multiply and grow as it reaches out to meet the needs of people of diverse backgrounds from across the Chinese community. At BCMC newcomers are welcomed and befriended; students find a safe place to share their homesickness and pressure of studies, as well as enjoy authentic Chinese food cooked by their brothers and sisters in the church. We have witnessed our Lord changing lives and drawing in people who did not know Jesus Christ – especially those who grew up under China’s communist-atheist education – to experience the love and freedom of God. Besides being a minority ethnic church, we desire to integrate with English-speaking churches and our local community – so BCMC members are exploring more opportunities for the congregation to grow. We are blessed to be in the diverse and multicultural Birmingham Circuit that understands our unique culture and needs and always supports our church development.

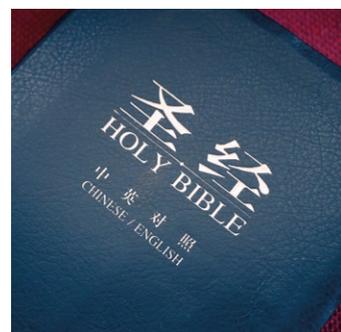
The Chinese Methodist churches in Britain exist to make disciples of Jesus to transform firstly the Chinese community, and then the world. Through our Methodist

Connexion and relationship with local ecumenical partnerships, we witness to what God is doing in the kingdom of God worldwide.

Changing dynamics

Our Chinese identity has never left us, no matter how long nor where we stay in a foreign land. But now, with China’s economic rise, the new generation of Chinese immigrants and British-born Chinese are taking the initiative to embrace globalisation. The strategy of our Chinese ministry in the UK must move with these changes. One of the significant challenges is young Chinese people, whether they were born in Britain or came here for studies. There is now a wave called ‘reverse migration’ which reflects how the latest developments in contemporary China attract overseas Chinese talent back to China looking for better opportunities. The Chinese Church in the UK acknowledges that this global transformation could significantly impact our local church. It is likely that we will receive more talented young people who are studying in the UK, as well as send more young people back to China or other Southeast Asian countries. What’s more, we need to be aware that unlike our first generation, the Chinese community in the UK is now a multilingual, multigenerational, multicultural dynamic.

Our desire to maintain our Chinese inheritance as well as our Methodist identity alongside our passion for sharing the gospel to all nations is what brings the Chinese Methodist Church in the UK together with our British brothers and sisters in testifying to the kingdom of God.



Racial justice: the unfinished agenda and everyone's business



Alister McClure, Head of Equality and Inclusion at an NHS hospital and Officer for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in the Yorkshire North and East District, says it's time to 'call time' on racial injustice

The Methodist Church has for many years considered racism to be contrary to the gospel, and a sin. It is deeply saddening to find, in 2019, that racism has not been dealt with fully in our churches or society, and that there seems to be an increasing tolerance of racism because some people view it as ‘freedom of expression’.

The 2017 Methodist Conference received the report ‘The Unfinished Agenda – Racial Justice and Inclusion in the Methodist Church’, which acknowledged the urgent need for the Church to create racial justice. One response to this was a three-day symposium, organised by the Connexion’s Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee, to which representatives from all districts were invited. I attended and was subsequently asked to reflect on the experience for *the connexion*.

Becoming informed

As I write, the words ‘check your privilege’ are in my mind. As a White British person, I must first recognise that my reflection is influenced by the fact that I have privilege as a White person, and do not see or experience racism in the same way that people from Black, Asian or UK-Minority/global-majority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds do.

Privilege is not the same as advantage. Privilege is when a problem does not affect us personally, therefore we can (and often do) miss its impact on others. And whilst White people can experience racism, it is rare and usually overt, whereas BAME

people also experience subtler, institutional, cultural and societal forms of racism. As a rule, societies, organisations and, yes, even churches, have a dominant culture, which marginalises and belittles other cultural expressions. Individuals, therefore, often adopt beliefs, behaviours and language that have an unconscious bias towards the dominant culture.

So, for a region of Great Britain like rural Yorkshire, we felt it was especially important to engage in ‘The Unfinished Agenda’. We recognised that, as a predominantly White British region, with a distinctly Yorkshire culture, our need to be educated and informed about racism was especially important. We, as a district, were checking our privilege.

Stories of hurt

The symposium was organised over three days to give attendees the opportunity to submerge themselves in their own stories and the stories of others and to uncover and reflect on uncomfortable truths before attempting to find a way forward. Common ground was found in the stories and experiences of the people from BAME backgrounds, the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people and the disabled people who were amongst the participants. What I found shocking, although not entirely surprising, were the stories of hurt that people had experienced, and the deep impact that had on people’s well-being. So what can we do?

It is our responsibility as Christians to look, always, for the image of God in others



WHAT’S OUR STORY Question

With whom do you need to engage in deep listening?

Our tasks

Deep listening

In his ministry, Jesus demonstrated deep listening and deep insight, especially when talking with people considered to be different. Too often the experience of BAME people (as with other ‘minorities’) is trivialised by others, when meaningful change is needed. It is human nature to listen in order to reply, but a greater skill is the ability to listen to someone tell their story in a way that seeks to understand, honour and validate the person, and to reflect on what an appropriate response should be.

Valuing and nurturing people’s talents

Jesus often saw in people, not only the skills and talents they knew they had, but greater things. It was evident that many people felt their skills and talents were overlooked or undervalued, and their abilities questioned or diminished – often because of the deeply hidden or unconscious biases of others. It is our responsibility as Christians to look, always, for the image of God in others – which does require us to recognise and deal with our own unconscious biases and views.

Diversifying our leadership

All organisations and societies tend to create leadership models that are already familiar, which has the impact of leadership teams being in the image of the dominant culture. We need to create space for leadership at all levels in the Church to become more diverse.

Let’s truly value the image of God in all people

Is **God** doing a **new** thing in The United Methodist Church?



The Revd Kennetha Bigham-Tsai meditates on tremendously painful divisions in The United Methodist Church; she is Chief Connectional Ministries Officer of The United Methodist Church Connectional Table, and is based in Chicago, Illinois

There is joy and delight in new life, despite the pain

I grew up Baptist and attended a little white clapboard church in what was then a largely African-American community in Austin, Texas. At the time, my church sat on a dirt road on East 16th Street in my hometown. My grandmother, Allie Mae Sneed, was the imposing matriarch of the church. She lived right down the road. When Sunday services and events were over, we retired to her house for supper and her famously heavy pound cake.

That was the church experience of my childhood. Church was where I learned to speak in public and where I learned the cadence of the men's opening prayers. (Women could give announcements or read Scripture, but were not allowed to lead prayer in our church.) Church was also where I learned the importance of the Bible, but an interpretation of its words that mostly excluded me because of my gender.

Call to inclusive ministry

Many years later, when I experienced a call to ministry, I realised that I could not stay in a church that limited the ministry of women. I decided in 1994 to become United Methodist, because of Methodism's Wesleyan emphasis on grace and its commitment to inclusion. What I saw in Methodism was an understanding of God as all-encompassing love. I saw an understanding of God as welcome and invitation – as a God who could invite me, an African-American woman, into the fullness of the ministry of the Church. Though I would later find that The United Methodist Church was not perfect in terms of race or gender, I found a home there.

A crisis of identity

We are now at an impasse over whether or not lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender or queer (LGBTQ) people can find a home



in The United Methodist Church. At the 2019 Special Session of the UMC General Conference, The United Methodist Church toughened its restrictions against gay marriage and the ordination of gay clergy. In so doing, we greatly wounded our LGBTQ siblings. We also greatly wounded the witness of the Church in many areas, and we greatly wounded ourselves. Since then, we have been in great turmoil.

The root of our turmoil is a crisis of identity. This identity crisis is rooted in very differing understandings of Scripture and ways of interpreting the Bible. It is rooted in very differing understandings of God and of the inclusiveness of God's grace. Our identity crisis is rooted in very differing understandings of what it means to be the Church in mission in the world.

This crisis of identity has revealed differences that are so deep and so fundamental that we may not be able to stay together as a Church. Already, very painful discussions are taking place throughout our denomination, and we are grieving. We are letting go of what we thought we could be together. And many of us are heartsick over the ministry that might be lost because of our impasse.

Hope

Yet, despite all of this, I am still hopeful. Because, as painful as this time in the life of the Church may be, God can still do a new thing in Methodism. Indeed, God is always doing new things – troubling and stirring the waters in continuous acts of re-creation. The prophet Isaiah noted as much when he shared this promise from God:

For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating; for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight. (Isaiah 65: 17-18, NRSV)

This time in the life of The United Methodist Church may be painful. But, truth be told, bringing new life into the world is always painful, as any woman who has given birth knows. Yet, there is joy and delight in new life, despite the pain. There is joy and delight in the promise of a new creation, despite the difficulties of bringing it forth.

We know that our sisters and brothers in the Methodist Church in Britain are praying for us and with us as God gives birth to something new. We are, and will continue to be, thankful for your prayers and for the witness of our common faith.




**Please pray
for our sisters
and brothers
in the UMC**



WHAT'S OUR STORY
Question

What does this story inspire you to share?

Reflection



Cornwall District Retreat and Spirituality Officer Amanda Stevens reflects on communities physical and imagined

Local community

Once upon a time my faith story was closely interwoven with the community surrounding a Methodist village chapel in West Cornwall. I went to Sunday school there, was accepted into membership there and was married there. The congregation changed, as the three chapels became one in a smaller building and the big chapel closed, and my story continued elsewhere in another chapel near where I lived with my growing family.

After ordination training, with Anglicans and people from the United Reformed Church, I found new Christian communities in towns and hamlets and at retreat centres. Across county borders I trained with Roman Catholic friends to become a spiritual director, and I started running guided prayer retreats with them in the Catholic Church. Being a church leader meant adventures with people of all faiths and none, in many different communities.

Imagined community

Recently a friend asked me "Where is your community?" This profound question made me reflect on the fact that my idea of community has changed. It has become 'imagined'.

In his book *Imagined Communities*, historian Benedict Anderson uses the idea of people across the world being linked by reading the same newspaper even if in different languages. In his concept of imagined communities Anderson was talking primarily about nationalism, but Christians could say the Bible or the liturgy has the same effect.

When I go to the Catholic mass on holiday in France, I may not know the words – but I am joined into their community through bread and wine, and through the Cross of Christ. And while the *Methodist Prayer Handbook* is an expression of membership of the worldwide Methodist community, the 'imagined' Christian community is bigger even than that.

When I was in Prague I went to the nearest Methodist church, but found myself being directed to the English-speaking congregation across the city. This felt unnecessary. It would have been enough to have been among friends and to share with them at the Lord's table, experiencing the familiar gestures and symbolism. Even if worshipping in a different language, the fellowship of other disciples would

have been encouraging and reassuring for someone away from home. While language differences fragment us, commonalities – imagined communities – unite us.

Created community

At home, my community is centred around the Degibna Prayer Chapel just outside Helston, in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. When the chapel roof blew off in a bad storm a few years ago, the congregation began seeking a new vision for the place. Through attention to the Scriptures and through prayer it became clear that, despite its isolated location, the chapel was at the centre of a loosely defined community comprising a few holiday cottages, dog walkers, horse riders and the National Trust. A 'Friends' group – of people from both within and outside the chapel – was formed, and money was raised.

Over time the building was made accessible, up to date and flexible. A farmer with land behind the chapel gave a small plot to be a prayer garden as long as the chapel remained under the Methodist banner. When the worshipping community was deemed too small to meet the assessment, the Friends renamed the building the 'Degibna Prayer Chapel' and opened it as a circuit, district and local community resource to be used for worship, prayer and reflection.

The chapel hosts a monthly 'Oasis' act of ecumenical worship that takes whatever form the leader wishes, and it is also open every Sunday from Easter to the end of September, providing tea, coffee and the space itself. People write their prayer requests in the chapel's book and there is a group that makes sure the prayers are said. Often, in the week, the chapel is booked for quiet days, or by the local astronomy group. There is no fixed charge, but donations are welcomed. The chapel has become the centre of an imagined community. This is my community.

Christ's community

But my community is also bigger than that. I have come to realise, through the practice of prayer and meditation, that I am part of an imagined community that is bigger than Degibna or even the whole Methodist Church – and it is Christ who links us and points onward to this wider and ever-changing vision of community.



Who are **we** and where are **we** going?

The Secretary of the Conference, the Revd Dr Jonathan Hustler, considers those who came before us and how their stories shape our own

Lives of saints

During the Middle Ages, 'lives' of saints were popular. They were circulated, copied and read widely. Those who have studied this literature have noticed how similar many of these 'lives' are. It is not simply that the writers copied each other's ideas or tried to demonstrate that their hero was as great as one of another time or place. Saints' lives were mimetic; people of prayer shaped their own lives around those who had gone before them.

Sharing stories of faith

Historians of 19th-century Methodism have noticed something similar. Methodist publications contained testimonies of those who had experienced an evangelical conversion and, again, these stories have a mimetic quality. Reading about one person's story inspired another to follow in a similar way. Perhaps it was that the earlier narrative suggested a form of spiritual discipline that the later Methodist picked up. Or perhaps it was that reading

about another's experience of grace helped somebody on the way to faith to discern signs of the Spirit's activity and open their heart to God. Whichever it was, sharing stories of faith enabled one generation of Methodists to say to the next, "This is how we have been blessed; you can be blessed also."

Imitation of Christ

Behind the 'lives' was imitation of biblical figures and, of course, of Jesus. One of the most popular of these works was Thomas à Kempis' 15th century work *The Imitation of Christ* (which Wesley included in his Christian Library). So, who are we? We are people who are shaped by the stories that we have been told, of Christ, of Christ's followers, and of the Church, by narratives of living close to God, loving others, and sharing the good news of the kingdom of God. Where are we going? As with Christ and with the saints, we are going wherever the promptings of the Spirit lead us in obedience to the Father's will.



Review of the year 2017/2018

Dear friends,

The pages of *the connexion* are full of inspiring stories of how the Methodist Church is responding to 'Our Calling', both at home and abroad. As we come to an end of another year of responding to the gospel of God's love, we want to celebrate some of the highlights of 2017/2018 through this short summary of the Annual Review.

There is a lot to be proud of: we've continued to grow in our evangelism efforts, in equipping and training the Methodist people and in serving our communities. We are so grateful to all those who have offered their time, talents and financial support. Please continue to give generously so that we can see our projects flourish – and the lives of many more people transformed through Christ.

Yours,

Doug Swanney
The Connexional Secretary

THANK YOU!

Review of the year 2017/2018



Thank you for your support and generosity in responding to Our Calling. You helped us raise £5 million for the connexional grant funds in 2017/2018. This allows us to fund projects that can reach out to people in Britain and around the world with the gospel of God's love in Christ, enabling us to live out our discipleship in worship and mission.

World Mission Fund

Your generosity towards the World Mission Fund (WMF) allows the Methodist Church to support Partner Churches and organisations, Nationals in Mission Appointments (NMA) post holders, scholarship students and mission partners engaged in healthcare, education and advocacy work in more than 65 countries.

For example, an annual grant of £36,000 to the Methodist Church of Sri Lanka is

supporting their youth and family work, including training workers. The WMF also provides support to overseas partners responding to emergencies, such as floods in South India and an earthquake in Papua New Guinea.

Mission in Britain Fund

The aim of the Mission in Britain (MiB) Fund is to support Our Calling through reaching those in need and sharing the gospel. During the year, the MiB Fund received an income of £955,000 and payments of £2.5 million were made.

Thirty grants were awarded using the whole of the Connexional Grant Committee's budget from the MiB Fund. We continue to meet the shortfall in income compared to grant expenditure from the Fund's reserves.

For the first time, grants awarded to Methodist Action on Poverty and Justice (MAPJ) projects totalled over £1 million, including our largest-ever MAPJ grant of £110,000 to the homeless centre at No. 11 Burslem (Swanbank Methodist Church) in Stoke-on-Trent. Just under £500,000 was awarded to three exciting church plant projects around the Connexion.

Thanks to the generosity of the Methodist people, many exciting projects have received funding. The MiB Fund has the greatest need for further donations and legacies in order to enable grants to continue to be made to innovative missional projects around the Connexion.

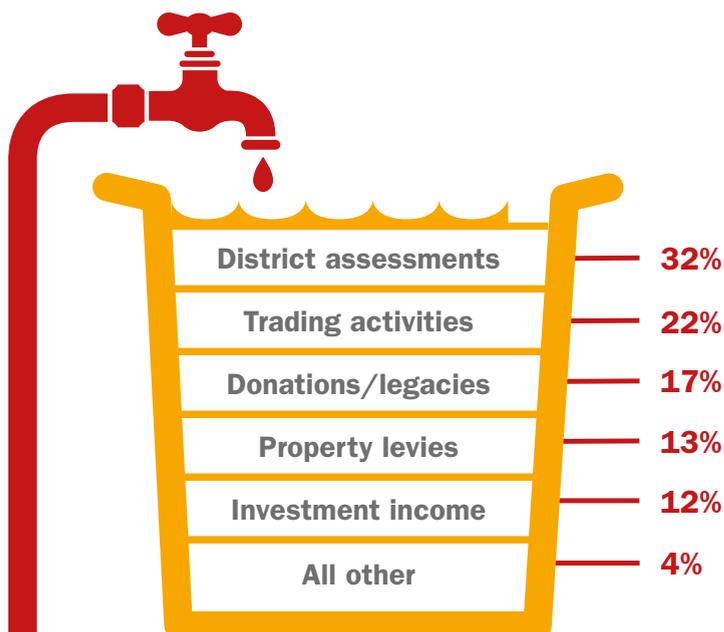
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	Movement in Funds					
	World Mission Fund		Mission in Britain Fund		Fund for Property	
	2016/2017 £000s	2017/2018 £000s	2016/2017 £000s	2017/2018 £000s	2016/2017 £000s	2017/2018 £000s
Income	3,486	3,389	881	955	642	632
Investment gains	1,427	1,034	292	226	214	168
Expenditure	(3,804)	(4,824)	(2,089)	(2,481)	(2,147)	(1,815)
Net transfers out	(828)	(902)	(57)	(57)	(28)	(54)
Movement in year	281	(1,303)	(973)	(1,357)	(1,319)	(1,069)

The year at a glance

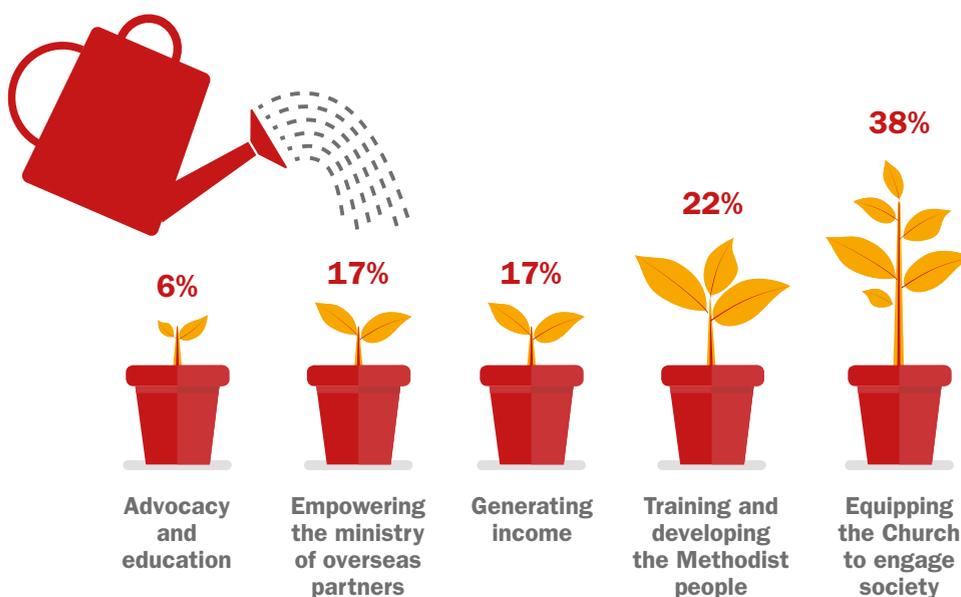
Overview of the connexional work of the Methodist Church in Great Britain

Our total income: £43m




Income decreased by 6% compared to last year; mainly due to a decrease in property levies of 37%

What we spent: £50m



£41m spent on direct charitable activities

Expenditure rose by 4% compared to last year

The figures shown include the activities of related bodies such as Cliff College, All We Can and others. For the full list, please download the *Consolidated Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 August 2018* at www.methodist.org.uk/trusteesreport

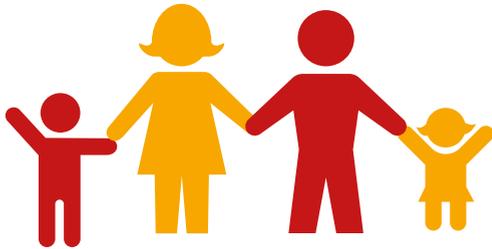
People and places

474,000 weekly visits
to Methodist churches to take part
in activities, groups, associations,
projects and events



places of worship, with
180,000 members

192,000 visits to Methodist
church services each week,



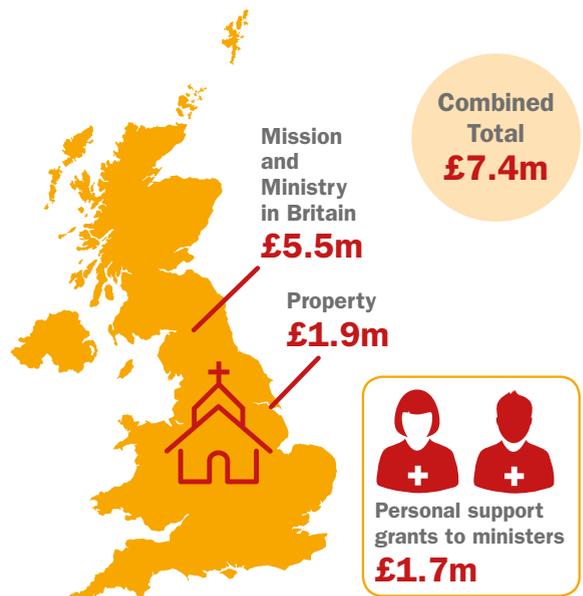
including **27,000** by children
and young people



25,000 pupils
enrolled in 86 Methodist schools

Total grant payments from all funds

**From Connexional Funds
and All We Can**



Review of the year

continued from page 27



Fund for Property

The Fund for Property exists to support various missional property development projects around the Connexion. During the year the Fund received income of £632,000 while payments of £1.8m were made.

As with the previous year, the Connexional Grants Committee awarded the whole of the grants budget, but supported 40 projects, compared to 20 in the previous year.

Due to the high number of grants awarded, no maximum awards of £200,000 were made. The two largest grants awarded were to Beckenham and Bedale churches which received £150,000 each.

The Methodist Church Fund

The Methodist Church Fund (MCF) exists to help resource the Methodist Church to respond to Our Calling: to worship God, to learn and care, to serve and to evangelise. The MCF's total income for the financial year 2017/2018 was £17m. It is largely funded through the assessment made on circuits via the districts.

The MCF supports the work associated with the decisions of the Methodist Conference, from challenging poverty and injustice to supporting partnerships ecumenically and internationally.

For example, this fund supports the training of ministers, lay people and local preachers. It also funds our work with young people including 3Generate, the Children and Youth Assembly of the Methodist Church. 3Generate 2017 saw 1,234 people take part in exploring the year's theme, entitled 'Wonderfully Prophetic'.

The MCF supports activities as diverse as the publishing of resources (both print and online, including the *Methodist Prayer Handbook* and the *connexion* magazine), and promoting the welfare of children, young people and adults through its safeguarding policies and procedures.

The MCF also supports the work of the Methodist Council, volunteer committees and the Connexional Team, who facilitate the implementation of the decisions made at the Conference.

Our Calling: to worship God, to learn and care, to serve and evangelise

3GENERATE

Our Calling and Priorities



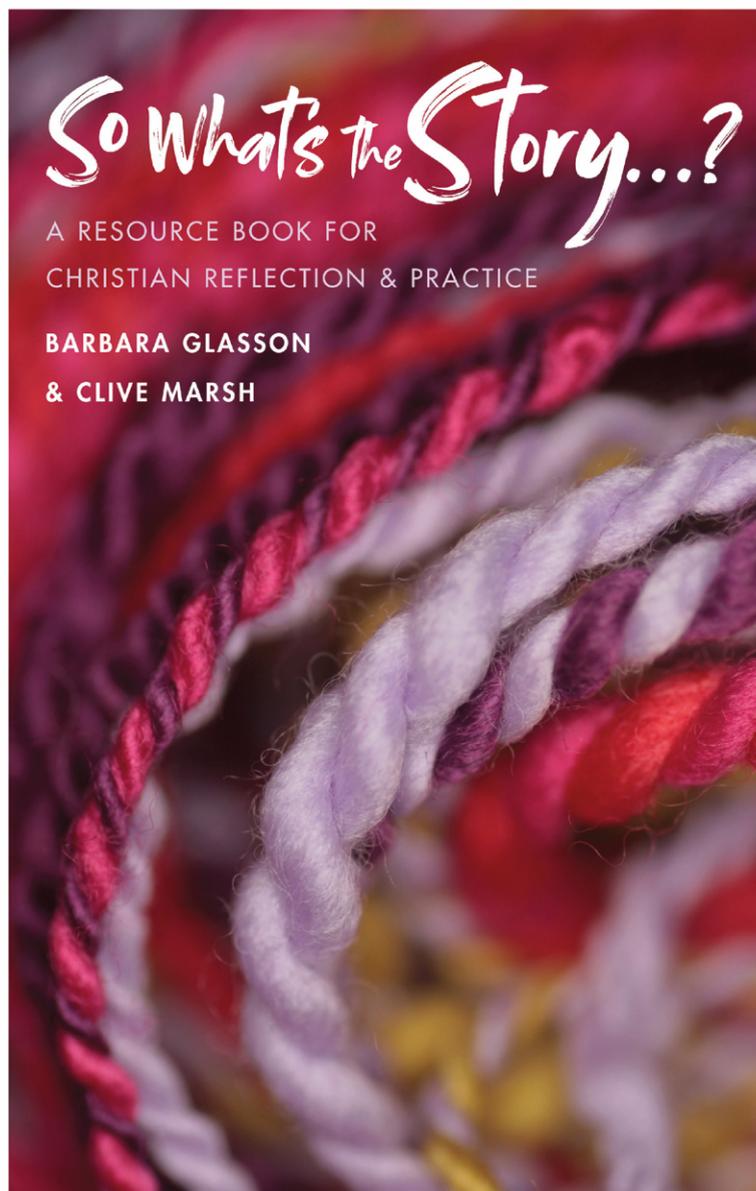
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The Methodist Church 

Our story • Your story Your neighbour's story • God's story



Life is an intricate tapestry of stories. How can we better understand other people's? How can we better express our own? How can a deep engagement with these stories be helpful to our life and witness, and on what occasions can they be unhelpful?

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