

Issue 20 • Autumn 2020

The Methodist Church 

the
connexion

HOPE

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



David Perry
Editor



May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Romans 15:13 (NIV)

This edition of *the connexion* magazine explores contexts and issues that are difficult, challenging, hurtful and vexed. What do we do when life puts a 'No Entry' sign in our way? How should we respond when racism, the Covid-19 pandemic, civil war, the climate emergency, ill-health, deprivation and church decline seem insurmountable and overwhelming?

The photograph above shows a simple heart of love placed against a familiar 'No Entry' sign. The image depicts a radical act which subverts the sign's given meaning, that of an absolute prohibition in red and white intended to terminate, block, frustrate, impede and obstruct the journey ahead. In this picture a simple heart of love offers an alternative reality, a different way of seeing and framing what happens next. A simple heart of love questions the assumptions and fears posed by the seemingly absolute denial represented by 'No Entry'.

Our simple hearts of love are capable of astonishing acts of hope. I placed the simple wooden heart, made of olive wood crafted by Palestinian Christians, onto the sign to depict this truth. The stories in this edition show what happens when we take St Paul's words to heart, and trust in the God of hope.

Love and peace,
David

the connexion

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The Revd Dr Paul
Nzakahayo
at the Queen's
Foundation

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What is the Connexion?

Methodists belong to local churches and also value being part of a larger community. In calling the Methodist Church in 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.

Go to www.methodist.org.uk/theconnexion to order more copies of *the connexion*, and for downloading the pdf to reuse articles in your own church magazine. Images are available at www.flickr.com/methodistmedia

What do you think about this issue?

Email theconnexioneditor@methodistchurch.org.uk

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Year of Prayer weekly online service for the whole Church

The Conference has declared 2020/2021 a year of prayer so that our Church's commitments to evangelism, church growth, church at the margins, and pioneering and church planting will flow from a deep, contemplative orientation to God's grace and love.

As part of this movement of prayer, a weekly online service offers the opportunity for all of us to ask for

the Holy Spirit's help to be a growing, evangelistic, inclusive, justice-seeking Church.

The service is live on Zoom and Facebook each Tuesday at 12.45pm and then available on Facebook. Designed to fit into a busy working day, it is just 15 minutes and is led by a different person from across the Connexion each week. Sign up here: www.methodist.org.uk/yearofprayer/

Reset the Debt

A campaign calling for debt cancellation for people forced into unavoidable debt during lockdown is launched by the Joint Public Issues Team and ecumenical charity Church Action on Poverty.

It calls for the Government to create a Jubilee Fund providing grants to pay off and cancel unavoidable debt accrued by the poorest households.

Around six million people have fallen behind on rent, council tax and other household bills because of coronavirus and almost one in five have borrowed money to pay for everyday essentials.

The Revd Richard Teal, President of

the Methodist Conference, said: "During lockdown churches saw people feed their families – but bills, even rent, went unpaid. They are now facing a crisis – demanding a compassionate and just response."

Jubilee is an ancient Biblical concept ensuring a just society where no one is trapped in poverty because of debts: On a regular basis land was returned to people, resources shared, slaves freed, land rested, and debts forgiven.

Write to your MP and support the campaign online and in your church community: www.resetthedebt.uk



#Godiswithus

The Methodist Church-wide 2020 Christmas campaign shares people's stories about their walk with God in this extraordinary year. It encourages Methodists to reflect, tell their stories, and reach out to others outside the Church, encouraging them to do the same.

Get involved at

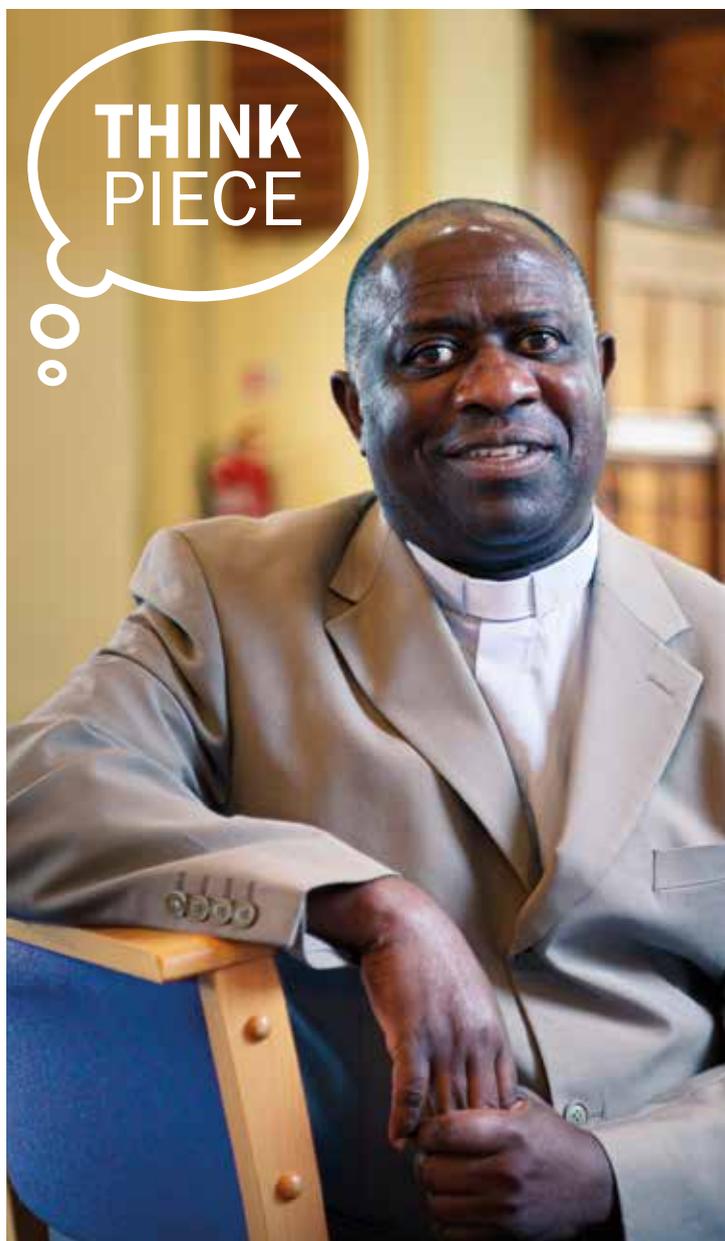
www.findingourhope.co.uk

This Christmas, take part in #Godiswithus



GLIMMERS

of HOPE



THINK
PIECE

The Revd Dr Paul Nzacahayo finds hope in Christians actively resisting racism

To live
hopefully, we
need to be
proactive

Professor Anthony Reddie concluded his contribution in the last issue of *the connexion* with the words:

“I have lost patience with a Church that has treated black people with benign neglect for far too long.”

I share his anger and despair. It is shocking and shameful that in 2020 we

need a campaign to ensure ‘Black Lives Matter’. The concept of slavery has left an indelible mark on our psyche. The ideology that caused western nations to traverse the globe taking over lands and people has left both white and black people believing one group of people’s lives are less worthy. We pass on these beliefs and prejudices to our children who, unless something changes, will pass them on to their own children. I agree with Professor Reddie that our Church’s record in eradicating this disease is not encouraging.

I am writing these words from a place of despair and anger. But I am also hopeful. My hope is not naïve optimism, but rather the kind of hope capable of standing in the middle of despair and imagining a different future. This hope enables me to resist racism in whatever form it takes. What gives me hope is that human beings have also proved that they can treat each other with godly love and care.

Racism and reasons for hope

Years ago I arrived in a new circuit to find a white colleague had taken over the manse designated for me. He believed that the manse my predecessor had vacated was too good for someone who had been living in an African hut and even had the audacity to say this to me. The circuit steward, a white woman, was enraged and asked my colleague to apologise. She stood her ground and refused to give up until I got that apology. This circuit steward gives me hope.

As a black tutor, when a group of white students made my teaching experience the worst they could make it, another white student, on seeing that I was being treated less respectfully than my white colleagues, decided to confront her fellow students. She called out their racism for what it was. They denied it, protested, and failed to recognise their racism. The student stood her ground until the whole situation



She stood her ground and demanded an apology



HOPE

How might you become more proactive, participatory and prophetic in eliminating racism?

was openly discussed. Her action gives me hope.

The white South Africans who spoke out against the apartheid policies of their government, risking their lives, give me hope. Those Christians who, in the clamour of shouts of “Send them back home!” offer migrants and strangers generous hospitality, also give me hope. The increasing number of white people who have taken up the cause of Black Lives Matter gives me hope. We have failed to honour and celebrate the act of these Christians who do not sit down and hope for the best, but are living models of hopeful resistance.

My hope is also rooted in the kind of God we believe in. It is the God who saw that Pharaoh and the Egyptians needed to be freed from whatever evil had corrupted their minds before they started to enslave and mistreat the Hebrews. God also saw that the Hebrews needed to be freed from the misery slavery had inflicted on them. The reading of the first chapters of Exodus presents us with an image of a God who is relentless in seeking the freedom of both the enslaver and the slave.

Action to root out racism

This hopeful resistance always leads to action and a change of behaviour. As Jürgen Moltmann says on page 84 of his book, *The Theology of Hope*, the point is not simply to interpret the world differently but to change the interpretation into a new reality of life. This call moves us beyond ‘well-crafted words and Conference resolutions’ to a Church in which racism is acknowledged and acted upon. To borrow the language of my colleague Jo Cox-Darling’s book *Finding*

God in a Culture of Fear, “To live hopefully, we need to be proactive, participatory, prophetic.”

So, there you have it: the pandemic of racism that is driving some of us to despair because it comes from fellow Christians, needs to be faced with honesty and integrity. We also need to honour and celebrate the glimmers of hope visible in the powerful witness of justice movements such as Black Lives Matter and in the generosity of fellow Christians.

The Revd Dr Paul Nzacahayo is part-time circuit minister in the Wolverhampton Methodist Circuit and part-time tutor at the Queen’s Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education





COMING TOGETHER

in hope
to fight
racism

The Revd Dr Jongikaya Zihle, Chair of the London District, says let's re-ignite hope as we restore the broken social contract that allows racism to grow

The 'social contract' is a concept in which a country's ruler and its citizens each have rights and obligations. When it works well, there is mutual respect and no oppression, racism or other societal ills. The social contract affords equal rights and opportunities to all. Everyone can work and contribute to their own and society's development and growth. When it breaks down, however, state institutions veer towards promoting the interests of one group over another. This skews the playing field and perpetuates a class system. It means some are treated as 'less than human'; less deserving of state resources and legal protection.

Our broken contract

In this country, we see many signs of a broken social contract. When government policies benefit a privileged class at the expense of the poor and marginalised, that's a broken contract. When the police segregate people and use racial profiling, that's a broken contract. When welfare policies (including housing provision and educational access) are separating communities and trapping the poor in a poverty cycle, that's a broken contract. Even in churches, there can be factors that perpetuate injustice. Harmonious race relations are also scuppered by health systems that negatively impact impoverished ethnic minorities. A recent Public Health England report, for example, showed BAME communities are more susceptible to contracting Covid-19 than other groups due to longstanding inequalities.

We see signs of protest. From the outcry by communities that felt enslaved arose the 'Black Lives Matter' movement, as well as antiracism initiatives and numerous peace and reconstruction projects. People 'bend the knee' in solidarity, sending a strong signal about inequality along with racial oppression.

Restoring the social contract

As a society, we are called to restore the broken social contract. We reject institutional racism, segregation, ethnic cleansing and imperialist notions of superiority. Methodists have always been catalysts for a 'social revolution'. John Wesley said in his preface to *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1739) "The Gospel of Christ knows of no Religion but Social; no Holiness but Social Holiness." As a Church we affirm hope-filled cross-cultural connections.

Hope resides in our resolve to work towards restoring this broken social contract. Our hope includes:

Strong intentions Injustices won't 'just work themselves out'. We have to stay true to our Methodist heritage and imbue scriptural holiness into all areas where we have influence. We must work towards equal treatment of the sexes and different races, and equal treatment and opportunities in churches to honour our Methodist Way of Life.

Speaking out We can influence change by speaking out when we see injustice. As the adage goes, "All it takes is good people to keep silent for evil to triumph." We need to reconstitute the collective human voice, tinged with righteous indignation against mass generalisations in crime zoning and racialised social control. To paraphrase American civil rights advocate Michelle Alexander, we need to do everything we can to avoid fortifying the mentality that cements a racial caste system.

Going beyond being 'just friendly' We must form true friendships with those on the margins who are discriminated against, and give them a voice. There is no justice in smiling and passing on. Real justice willingly walks with the derided and outcast.

Building a new inclusive community

We will do this in our cities, towns, villages and community estates in a joyful Christian spirit of mutual respect and gentleness (1 Peter 3:15-16); so all might prosper (Jeremiah 29:7).

Methodists have a great history of inspiring hopeful resistance against social injustice. Ours is a call to create transparent and open conversations with people from all communities. From our collective histories, we can learn lessons that will guide us in our endeavours to build a better, more humane society. We can no longer afford to ignore how others feel about the treatment meted out to them. We must understand how their pain and denigration may have robbed us of coming to connect, trust and truly love one another (John 17:21). We must open up a faith-based dialogue and resist bigoted efforts that pit us against each other. Returning to a social contract of fairness, equality and acceptance will redress suspicions borne out of racist tendencies. It will build trust so we can all work together for positive change.

We affirm hope-filled cross-cultural connections



HOPE

Into which urgent situations will you and your church speak out about injustice and actively construct a more inclusive community?

Further reading

Akala *Natives: Race and Class in the Ruins of Empire Two Roads* (2019)
Michelle Alexander *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* The New Press (2012)
Robin DiAngelo *White Fragility: Why it's so hard for white people to talk about racism* Penguin (2019)
Reni Eddo-Lodge *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race* Bloomsbury (2018)
Dennis Leonard *Your Best Days Are Still Ahead: Moving beyond yesterday's pain* Legacy (2006)
Ben Lindsay *We Need to Talk About Race: Understanding the black experience in white majority churches* SPCK (2019)
Simon Sebag-Montefiore *Speeches that Changed the World* Quercus (2016)

Only when it is
dark enough
can you see
the stars



HOPE

What bridges
of hope is God
prompting
you to build?



BRIDGES of hope

For the Revd Charity Hamilton, Middlesbrough's bridges are a visual metaphor, taking people from dark times of deprivation to the bright stars of hope

From Sydney Harbour Bridge and river crossings in Africa, to the Tyne Bridge and Middlesbrough's own Newport Bridge, Teesside steel has built the world. It earned Middlesbrough the nickname 'Ironopolis', testament to its prosperous industrial past. Such was the success across Teesside, that in 1862 William Gladstone said of Middlesbrough, "This remarkable place, the youngest child of England's enterprise, is an infant, but if an infant, an infant Hercules."

Since then, much has changed for Middlesbrough. Some say it never recovered from the demise of heavy industry in the 1980s, and latterly the savage closure of the steelworks with the loss of thousands of jobs. It is one of the most deprived councils in England with 48.8% of neighbourhoods classed as deprived. It has 42% of children living in poverty and in 2019 the Cleveland police force was rated inadequate across all areas. On top of this, Covid-19 created an even more fragile economic, social and psychological state.

And yet Middlesbrough is a beautiful, hope-filled place and I wouldn't want to be anywhere else. I've come to learn that hope is born out of struggle. Martin Luther King Jr said, "I know, somehow, that only when it is dark enough can you see the stars." Hope is just that: it's seeing the stars because of and amidst the night-time place.

Political, emotional and spiritual struggles

On a political level, I make no secret of my infuriation that in 2020 in one of the most developed countries in the world, one of





our projects, Trinity Family Friendly Centre, is supplying hundreds of families with food parcels. Another, the Middlesbrough Asylum Project, is supporting many asylum seekers. I'm unafraid of politics and the incentive of hope gives me what some may consider a 'bolshiness' to speak honestly with a critical voice to people such as our local mayor, Andy Preston. Despite our differing political views, hope means I am never afraid to hang out with those deemed controversial.

Emotionally, it drains me to get yet another phone call from someone in extreme need, to read in the local news of another suicide, another serious assault, or another scathing article about our police force. Yet it is hope that offers me resilience to push on, seeing the light in those people and places undiminished by the night-time.

On a spiritual level, I find myself turning over that well-known question "Where is God in this?" with such regularity I bore even the most hardy spiritual director. However my questioning draws me into the divine dynamic of hope when I realise that we are in this night-time place together with God, pointing towards the stars and whispering to each other, "Look, look, look up."

Middlesbrough is a place of hope

There is so much of Middlesbrough inspiring hope and wonder. We have beautiful scenery, amazing architecture, the Teessaurus dinosaur park, Teesside Uni, the local arts and music scene, Embrace Teesside (an LGBTQI+ space for people of faith), and of course the Tees – also known as the Steel River. We have as well the very presence of God's own self, manifested in so many wonderful, brilliant people.

Hope is something I feel qualified in, having had my own personal night-time

experiences. We need to build bridges between our current night-time and the stars. Hope alone won't fix all the issues that the strong, courage-laden, Herculean, warm and friendly people of Middlesbrough face, but I am convinced that hope keeps them traveling on their night-time journey.

Local band Cattle and Cane in their anthem-like song *Infant Hercules* sing "The world won't forget Infant Hercules. We can meet the future, we can write a new page. Smoggie¹ til the day I die." I appreciate the defiant lyric, it reminds me of the Resurrection – that ultimate act of defiance over death. Resurrection lies at the heart of hope, the belief that one day those stars will fill the skies so abundantly that the darkness will be diminished, even destroyed. Middlesbrough is meeting the future, writing a new page, resurrecting every day.

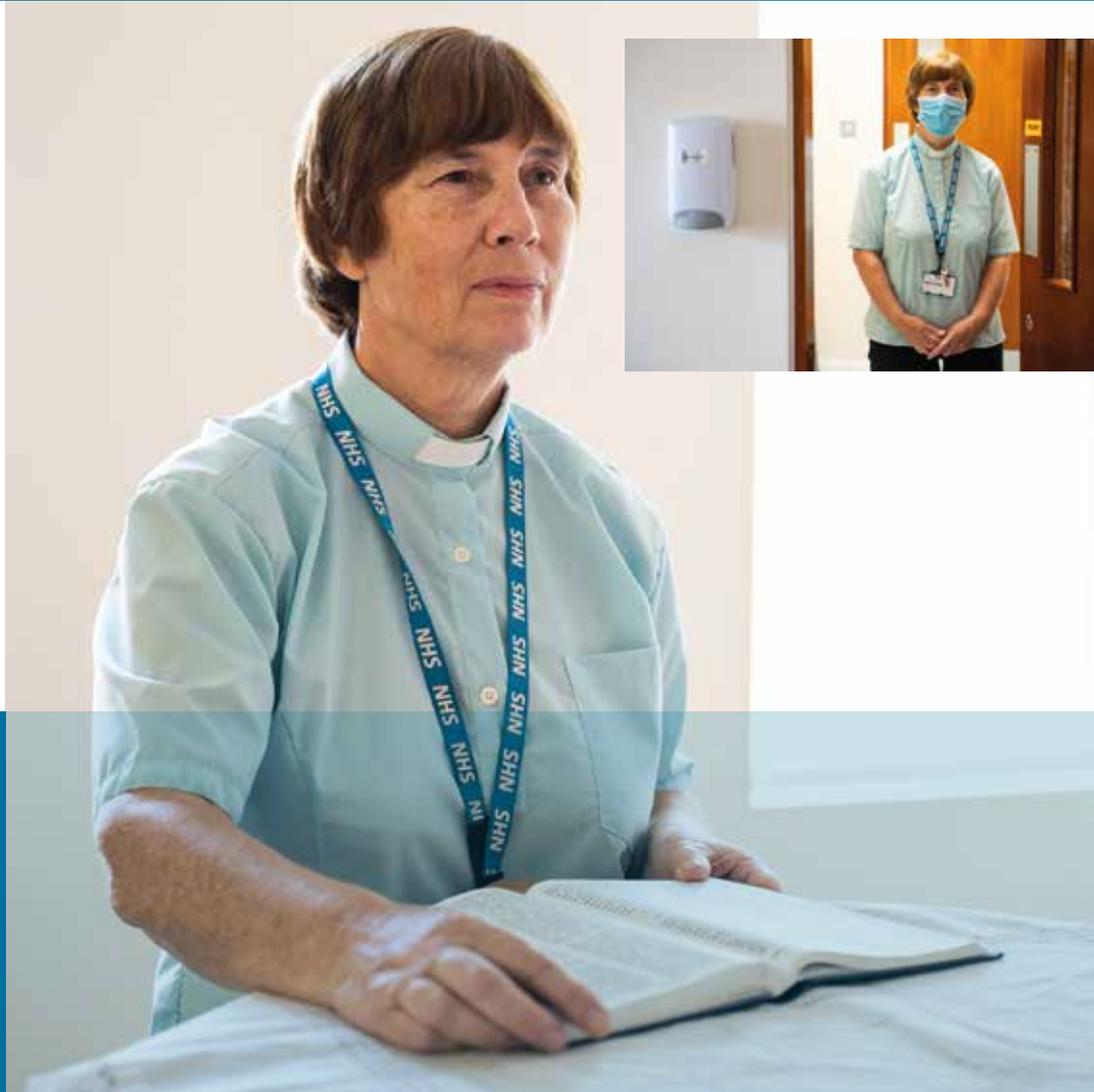
The bridge that means the most to me is the iconic Tees transporter bridge. Whenever I see it on the skyline I'm reminded that I'm in a place of great hope and that sits well with me. I'm in the best appointment, in the best circuit in British Methodism. I'm at home with hope here.

Resurrection lies at the heart of hope

¹ Smoggie is an affectionate term for someone from Teesside.



Where is hope in the middle of a **PANDEMIC?**



Hospital chaplain the Revd Lynda Cooke says hope was vital as the NHS coped with Covid-19

We could not have managed without that four-letter word, HOPE

I have been a chaplain for 19 years, most recently at Medway Maritime Hospital in Kent. It has been a privilege to minister to people with mental health challenges as well as those with physical illnesses. I remember the ones who struggled to cope with mental illness: those who lost all hope and those who found hope through staff and family members who cared for them. I am reminded how much we need each other and what a difference we can make to each other's lives. We can all be a source of hope even in the most challenging times.

In January as we began to hear about Covid-19 we didn't fully understand its impact and the loss of life that would occur. Patients were dying without their families in hospital. It was unprecedented and we didn't have the rule book for something so devastating. The pandemic was also challenging for staff. Some didn't go home to their families because they didn't want to spread the virus, and many staff worked long hours to save people's lives. Sacrifices were made willingly by all staff as they faced these huge difficulties.



Practical and spiritual support

Hope for me during the pandemic came in different ways. The community around the hospital offered discounts, food and drink, toiletries and much needed hand and face creams. The local community sewed bags for staff to take their work clothes home to wash safely. Local churches and the community helped raise money to support the hospital. The community really came together. It didn't stop patients dying or staff being exhausted, but it made a difference to know that people cared about them. I was very moved by the generosity of our community and will never forget the impact that it had on us all.

Lockdown was a challenging time for families with loved ones in hospital, particularly if they were dying, as no one could visit. Staff caring for patients kept in touch with the families, and when possible used phones and Skype to connect those who were very unwell with their families. As chaplains, we were privileged to respond to family requests to pray with their loved ones, particularly those who were dying. I was very humbled by the difference this made, bringing such hope and comfort at a time of despair. It was a powerful source of hope for me to know that we were making a difference to a family's challenging journey and also to the patients who wanted to connect with God. Amid all the devastation, there was hope.

During lockdown, the chaplains needed to find a way to reach out to people of all faiths and none, particularly to those who were dying. We contacted our local communities so we could pass on appropriate prayers to people from all faiths who were dying, or very unwell. We communicated with the wards, so that prayers could be spoken to patients, either by a staff member of the same faith, or a staff member who was happy to read it for their patient. All the staff worked as a team,

whether they had faith or not. Hope was given and received as some recovered and some did not.

Time to heal and recover

Patients, staff and families were all vulnerable to the virus' impact on mental health. Staff worked tirelessly and were deeply affected by the number of patients they couldn't save despite doing everything possible. It was a challenging time and the staff have needed support and help during this journey.

We are now in a very different place, with smaller numbers of patients with Covid-19. It's a time to heal, reflect and recover our resilience. We all hope that the pandemic will come to an end, but we are very aware that the number of people with the disease is now rising again. My source of hope and encouragement has come from Psalm 91, particularly verses 9-16. I have begun each day standing on the word of God, knowing it is true and faithful.

Hope is a powerful entity that draws communities together. It provides the cement needed for groups to work with a common aim. We could not have managed this unprecedented episode without that four-letter word, HOPE.

It has replenished our spirits both in the hospital and the community. With hope we will heal, learn and recover our strength.



HOPE

As winter pressures increase demand, what action can your circuit take to support NHS staff?

When they call to me, I will answer them; I will be with them in trouble

Psalm 91:15

Hope for God's

CREATION

post-Covid-19

Youth President Phoebe Parkin says everyone, from 5- to 85-year-olds, can address climate change and build a better post-Covid-19 world



The word hope is often associated with anticipation of the future and with optimism. But hope is also of the present. For me, to hope is to acknowledge what was, accept what is now and trust God for what will be.

I was elected in November 2019 to serve as Youth President on a platform of climate activism, but came into post in a very different kind of crisis. It seems almost impossible not to mention Covid-19, the changes it has made, and how it will change our future. One change is that 3Generate 2020 is not happening as a physical gathering. This has challenged the Church to rethink how to engage with children and young people and listen to their prophetic voices. It has been a real blow to those who have spent years preparing to deliver 3Generate at its current scale.

As well as preventing gatherings, Covid-19 has highlighted or exacerbated some of the stark inequalities within society, on both a national and international level. Our way of living has changed dramatically, with the virus creating previously unthought-of challenges. Although they have affected everybody differently, it is becoming clearer that some groups such as the BAME community, those living in poverty, and the mentally ill are disproportionately affected.

Additionally, as somebody who is particularly passionate about climate activism, I very easily feel overwhelmed by the huge challenge we face in saving the planet. Dealing with the virus has led to other issues, such as the climate crisis, being put aside. It is something that really does frighten me because the climate emergency needs to be addressed now – it can't be left to the future. It is also important to remember that climate injustice is rooted in racial inequality, political corruption and the unfair distribution of wealth on a global scale. All these problems, and the intricacies of addressing them, can make us feel really rather hopeless.

Young Methodists tackle climate crisis

One of the privileges of my role is seeing the enormous amount of work undertaken, often unnoticed, across the Methodist Church. From this, hope is emerging. The Green Agents of Change campaign is working to equip and enable young Methodists to tackle the climate crisis in conjunction with six COP-26 campaign

workers. COP-26 is a summit meeting at which global leaders will come together to discuss climate issues. The Methodist Church has six young people from across the globe to help facilitate and lead campaigns within the Church ahead of the COP-26 meeting.

Hope is also flourishing through 3Generate365, which launched in September. Its aim is to engage the whole Church in equipping and enabling children and young people to prayerfully discern and realise their calling. It gives me hope because it will enable an open and continuous God-centred dialogue to develop across the Church and across all ages and backgrounds, so a 5-year-old and an 85-year-old might help each other to grow in faith and take faith-inspired action as equals.

Hope through action

My hope for the Methodist Church is that, as followers of Christ, with our cross-background and cross-age insights, we can help the world post-Covid-19, to flourish in a distinctly Christian way.

One of my favourite Bible verses is “Faith without action is dead” (James 2:17). If we are to be the hope of the Church, we must start acting. We are called to be people of action. We are of God, because of God, and for God. We look at the ministry of Jesus, who fed the hungry, stood up for the oppressed and loved the marginalised. We too, as God's people, are called to work for a world that reflects God's abounding love for all. Not everyone is a Greta Thunberg or a Billy Graham, but we have to recognise, our own unique God-given gifts, and role in building God's kingdom.

“Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” (Ephesians 6:14-17, NIV)

If we are to be the hope of the Church, we must start acting



HOPE

The climate emergency needs to be addressed now: how will you respond to the challenge?

To get involved with Green Agents of Change visit www.methodist.org.uk/greenagentsofchange
To find out more about COP-26, email Pugmirem@methodistchurch.org.uk
For 3Gen-365, visit www.methodist.org.uk/3generate



HOPE

is a light that never goes out

From conversations with his dad to community initiatives, the Revd Kerry Tankard, Chair of the Yorkshire West District, finds hope everywhere, even in the grip of a pandemic



HOPE

With whom will you share your testimony to the hope that you see?

In *Sun Forest* Nick Cave sings “Like a wave ... the past with its savage undertow lets go”.¹

I was asked to offer my thoughts on the theme of hope. It may seem strange to begin with these lyrics, and you may question what hope I am thinking of.

As a minister in circuits for 20 years, and now as a Chair of the Yorkshire West District, with one whole year of experience, I have seen the strain of the undertow of the waves people encounter. At the same time, I have often glimpsed people and communities emerge stronger, though sadly not always. None of us would invite tragedies or torments, and yet they visit us.

My dad has Waldenström’s macroglobulinaemia. It is a blood cancer and is killing him. He lives in four-week cycles of blood tests that tell him how it is progressing, how his medication is no longer improving his condition but only slowing his deterioration. Yet, ask him how he is, and he says he feels fine. In this final, currently unfinished, chapter of his earthly life my dad has changed. He rings every day and spends time telling me of the idiosyncrasies of his life in a nursing home (under lockdown) and then asks how

I am, how those I love are, and how my ministry is getting on. His interest in others is greater than in previous years. That gives me hope.

Congregations flourishing with hope

I think of a small chapel in our district, which if you visited on a Sunday morning you might think, “What’s the point?” There are only a dozen worshippers, at best, in a space that accommodates 150-200. That dozen, though, know the majority of their



¹ Words from *Sun Forest* on the album *Ghosteen* by Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds (2019).



*In weakness
they flourish.
That gives me
hope*

village. If you popped round in the week (pre-lockdown) you would find twice each week a Post Office in the vestibule. You would also experience a weekly toddler group, which incarnates a holy chaos, and a monthly lunch club where lives are valued by service, food and company. On Sunday the congregation might look weak. Yet in their weakness they flourish, just enjoying doing what God invites them to share in. That gives me hope.

Helping asylum seekers and activists

I receive word from a minister about the West Yorkshire Destitute Asylum Network (WYDAN), a project that runs across churches. They give up their buildings for a week or more to provide a home for those with no other place. They support people with food, shelter, a makeshift bed, conversation and company, active listening and practical assistance. Friendships and associations emerge across communities of experience; comfort and discomfort meet; and people are changed. The stories of those who access WYDAN involve loss, trauma, isolation and longing. No one can know fully what the asylum seekers are going through, but WYDAN is there. A box pew becomes a bedroom and a church kitchen a hub of community to serve strangers who have journeyed far from their own borders. All this help comes about because God first loved us. That gives me hope.

I attend a meeting with members of the Leeds Methodist Mission. This was once shaped by Oxford Place, a grand statement of Methodist mission and intent. Now the building stands empty, waiting for its future as a possible hotel to be determined. The

Mission however is alive in lockdown, with online meditations and reflections touching the city and its minds. It gathers activists and 'craftivists' who both long and work for change, but want to do so with others and not alone. It enables activism and resource contemplation, and develops a community that lives for God in the city of Leeds. The legacy of the past is reborn in the present. That gives me hope.

"Like a wave ... the past with its savage undertow lets go." I think those words capture the sense of how the Covid-19 pandemic currently, savagely, grips us. They also highlight that, ultimately, we will all be released from such undertows, to move forward again to the shore, like Peter who glimpses Jesus and passes through the waves to be with him. It is that ultimate hope that cannot be denied. As John 1:5 puts it, "The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it," or as Morrissey renders it, "There is a light that never goes out."

This gives me hope. Amen.

*A hub of
community
to serve
strangers*



BRINGING hope and wonder



Project lead, Simon Matthews, tells how the Southend and Leigh Circuit's Experience Project is feeding the needy and using augmented reality technology to enrich children's lives

In Jesus' time, many thought what good could come from Nazareth? It was a deprived area. Today the Experience Project is located

in a place with similar conditions. Our exciting new community project is based in Southend-on-Sea, Essex, operating out of the newly repurposed Whittingham Mission Centre. Statistics show that child poverty and the need for child protection are higher than average. Gang violence and substance abuse are a growing concern, and the effects of lockdown and poverty have made the need for this project even more pressing.

Southend is therefore a perfect location to share the message of hope, following in the footsteps of John Wesley, the founder of Methodism. The teachings of Christ concerning children form the foundation of our vision. "But Jesus called for the parents, the children, and his disciples to come and listen to him. Then he told them, 'Never hinder a child from coming to me. Let them all come, for God's kingdom realm belongs to them as much as it does to anyone else. They demonstrate to you what faith is all about. Learn this well: unless you receive the revelation of the kingdom realm the same way a little





People reacted in different ways, from being amazed to breaking down in floods of tears

child receives it, you will never be able to enter in.” (Luke 18:16-17, The Passion Translation)

Delivering food to the community

The Experience brings a fresh approach to social justice and its priorities are education and enriching the lives of children and their parents. One of its aims is to serve community meals alongside running a fun educational zone for children, to improve both their physical and mental wellbeing. Due to Covid-19 restrictions, these meals could not take place. Yet, despite the Covid clouds, opportunity sprung up and we took to the streets. Breaking new ground has been enthralling. Generous food donations from Ocado (approximately £2,500 weekly) enabled us to take the best quality foods to over 600 doorsteps – we felt like Robin Hood and Friar Tuck. We came across many elderly members of the community who hadn’t been out for the duration of lockdown. People reacted in different ways, from being amazed to breaking down in floods of tears. As the legs of organic New Zealand lamb passed over thresholds, perfect love passed over too. Tears flowed and fear retreated. We literally saw people’s faces change in front of us.

There are so many amazing experiences to share, but the highlight would be the ‘strawberry story’. A pregnant mother and her two children made a sign for their front door instructing all deliveries to be left on the doorstep. We knocked, placed four punnets of strawberries on the step and proceeded to another landing. On our return to the lift we met Kathryn and her two children. She looked very confused, and asked “Did you put them there? How did you know?”

I’ve been craving strawberries and haven’t been able to get out for the past few weeks. I can’t believe it – how did you know?” We told her we didn’t know, but the One who knows all things is even aware of her cravings!

AR creates a world of wonder

As Covid-19 restrictions ease, we wish to refocus our efforts on education. Despite certain funding withdrawals we believe in the Lord’s provision. The plan is to purchase and install multiple projectors that will create augmented reality (AR). This overlays digital content on the real world, enhancing reality with superimposed information. This technology will enable us to communicate narratives to bring biblical truths alive. Giving children positive experiences at a time when they are open to new ideas will have a beneficial impact on their spiritual, social and mental wellbeing. In after-school clubs and community meals at a switch of a button children will be transported using AR from the beginnings of creation to distant galaxies, opening Narnia’s doors to the land of wonder. As well as indoor activities, we have a vision to use AR to transform the rear playground into an urban forest learning zone.

From the beginnings of the Project we have experienced the heart of the ‘divine prospector’. Collaborating with God is exciting and leaves us in daily suspense of that which is to come. It’s our prayer that as we EXPERIENCE more of God’s nature, a merging of heaven and earth will unfold, bringing transformation to many lives.

The ‘Ancient tone of Hope’ is heralding a new day...

♥
HOPE

How will your church and circuit bring hope and wonder to life for those who most need to experience it?



Deacon Deb Marsh describes how boxes filled with art materials, laptops, flowers and more are bringing comfort and hope to struggling families



BOXES of hope

Their generous hearts yearn to bring hope into hopeless situations

I have the privilege of serving God in the Bude and Holsworthy Circuit in a beautiful context, surrounded by the oceans of the south west, but the pandemic has caused our communities to question where God is in this. However, we live in hope and as Romans 5:5 says, it does not disappoint “because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit.”

I have a deep passion for the gospel and bringing good news to those God has given me to serve. They include people on the margins of our churches and in our communities who struggle every day not just with the pandemic, but with the activities of daily living. Over these last few months we have seen a huge rise in mental health issues as people struggle with home

schooling, job losses, the trauma of losing loved ones and with not being able to grieve in the usual ways. Young people struggle with self-esteem issues. They are not able to spend time with friends, they feel let down over their exam results and are disappointed at not getting closure at the end of the school year. Domestic violence has also been on the increase and there are so many more issues. Where is hope in all this?

Taking hope to the community

I am blessed to be a minister in a church with believers filled with the Holy Spirit. Their generous hearts yearn to bring hope into hopeless situations within our community. So I knew they would rise to the challenge when I told them we needed to bring people in our community hope. I said

we needed to encourage folk to look for the light at the end of a tunnel, to assure them that the Church is there for them and with them, and that we will continue to hold them through this time.

Let me share with you some of the actions we have been taking during the pandemic.

One of our members had a vision for sending out 'boxes of hope' to those who really needed them, because she knew she was blessed. From that vision thanks to the generosity of church members, the council, and some local businesses we were able to secure funding for the project. And when we began taking out the boxes of hope to people in need, we found other members of the community came forward to support us. As in the Bible story of the boy who gave his five loaves and fishes to help feed the 5,000, God blessed us to be a blessing to a large number of others.

Making everyone feel special

Working closely with our school coordinators we were able to identify many families who were struggling with home schooling. In our boxes of hope we included art and craft sets, educational packs, laptops for those with no access to online learning and much more. But we didn't want to stop there because we knew that parents too were beginning to lose hope and were starting to struggle on a day-to-day basis. We made sure that they too had something that showed we cared for them. We supplied beautiful bouquets and pamper packs for the mums to make them feel wanted and special. We also included chocolates and treats for the dads. We wanted to give



everyone a little bit of hope in a hopeless situation and show we cared for them because we knew that's what Christ was asking us to do.

The boxes of hope have opened up many conversations for me with people who would never darken the door of a church building. It has been a time of healing and encouragement as they realise they have somewhere and someone they can rely on. One mum said: "You came on the day that I felt my lowest. I felt dreadful, I never believed anyone cared. I have never been given flowers before in my life, my children stopped shouting and smiled. Thank you for giving me hope that things will get better."

We also wanted to bring hope to our elderly community, so with the help of a local Christian baker and a team of volunteers we have been delivering countless cream teas to those who are isolated and alone, and to our local nursing and residential homes.

We will continue to respond where we can with the love of God, and would encourage everyone to reach out. Even in the smallest of ways God can bring hope to those who are crying out for it.

The boxes of hope have opened up many conversations



HOPE

What vision has God given you which could be turned into a generous-hearted practical response?

Apart but together: new ways to worship offer a path of hope



The Revd Flis Randall, Superintendent of the South West Wales Circuit says their innovative ways of worshipping offer great hope for the Church's future

The South West Wales Circuit includes stunning areas of great natural beauty from the Pembrokeshire coastline with its magnificent cliff top walks and beaches, to the Carmarthenshire countryside. It stretches from the Brecon Beacons in the north to the river valleys and wildlife-rich estuaries in the south. If you ever need a reminder of what our creator God can do

and the hope that we have in God, you can see it right here on our doorstep. We are blessed indeed.

However, even in our beautiful corner of the UK, we too are affected by the pandemic. But when I was reading the Saturday newspaper I was struck by the number of stories with the word 'hope' in the title. Maybe that word is always there, but in reality, I think 'hope' featured



HOPE

What does
hope look like
in your context?

so strongly because of the times we find ourselves in. There's a definition of hope that goes something like this: "Hope is a psychological necessity if people are going to envisage the future at all." That seemed borne out by the newspaper articles. It also rings true within our circuit. So, what does 'hope' look like for us here at this time?

While our rural setting has given us some protection from high Covid-19 infection rates, we have needed hope to get through this pandemic every bit as much as people living in cities. The hope that folk have clung to has felt very real, very sharp and very necessary. As a ministry team we have tried our best to continue in love and service throughout the pandemic. We have tried to support people in this uncertain time and to bring the love of Christ as we have gone along. What we have been doing and how we have done it gives us great hope for the future of the circuit.

Zoom worship

The hope in the gospel of Christ that worshipping brings is something that sustains people through all seasons of life, and particularly in times such as this. Right from the beginning of the pandemic we ensured that everyone who wanted to had access to worship, whether through our weekly Zoom services, our daily website devotions or via worship sheets that we post out. Zoom worship has surprised us with the sheer numbers engaging, and we are pleased that those who struggle to get to 'face-to-face' Sunday services are able to participate online. We are excited and hopeful at the prospect of where this initiative will go, alongside regular church.

Church without walls

In our circuit we believe our God of hope goes before us in all things and we try to affirm that in all our missional activity. A major new project has come out of a collaboration between the Wales Synod and Synod Cymru, resulting in a bilingual Christian community plant in St Clears, a small Carmarthenshire town with no Methodist presence and only traditional church on offer for its residents. We purchased a new manse in the area and in September 2019 we stationed Deacon Jon Miller (bottom right) to this role. His first few months included, as he would put it, 'loitering with intent' in the town centre, meeting, listening, and making relationships with people. He put on a successful Nativity art trail at Christmas, and when people wondered what he would do next, he created a Facebook page. Its name was a



Our God of hope goes before us in all things



response to many who had asked, “Where is your building?” or “What church are you from?” which are really questions about our space, borders and barriers. We had been very clear from the beginning that not only did we want this project to be a community that was inclusive, but that we would not be actively seeking a single place to meet. Instead we wanted to inhabit and incarnate in the town. We were to be a church without walls and so the project became Yr Eglwys heb Furiâu/The Church without Walls.

When Covid-19 and social distancing came knocking, Jon led prayers for the local community out in the open in the centre of town, using the Facebook page to publicise them. And when we entered lockdown, Facebook, Instagram, and podcasts all became the only vehicle for the project’s witness and mission. The Church Without

We were to be a ‘church without walls’

Walls took on a new meaning and a new direction. Jon began guiding people in developing their own spirituality through a rhythm of daily prayer, moving on to using Lectio Divina and Visio Divina (text and video-based reflections) to connect with God, with outdoor worship at the weekends. Jon says of this, “With this work has come an upwelling of spirituality in the people who engage with our posts and with it an upwelling of hope for the future of the Church in this area of Wales, both in the ministry in St Clears and in the rest of the circuit as they engage alongside or hear about what has been happening.”

Youth work – hope for the future

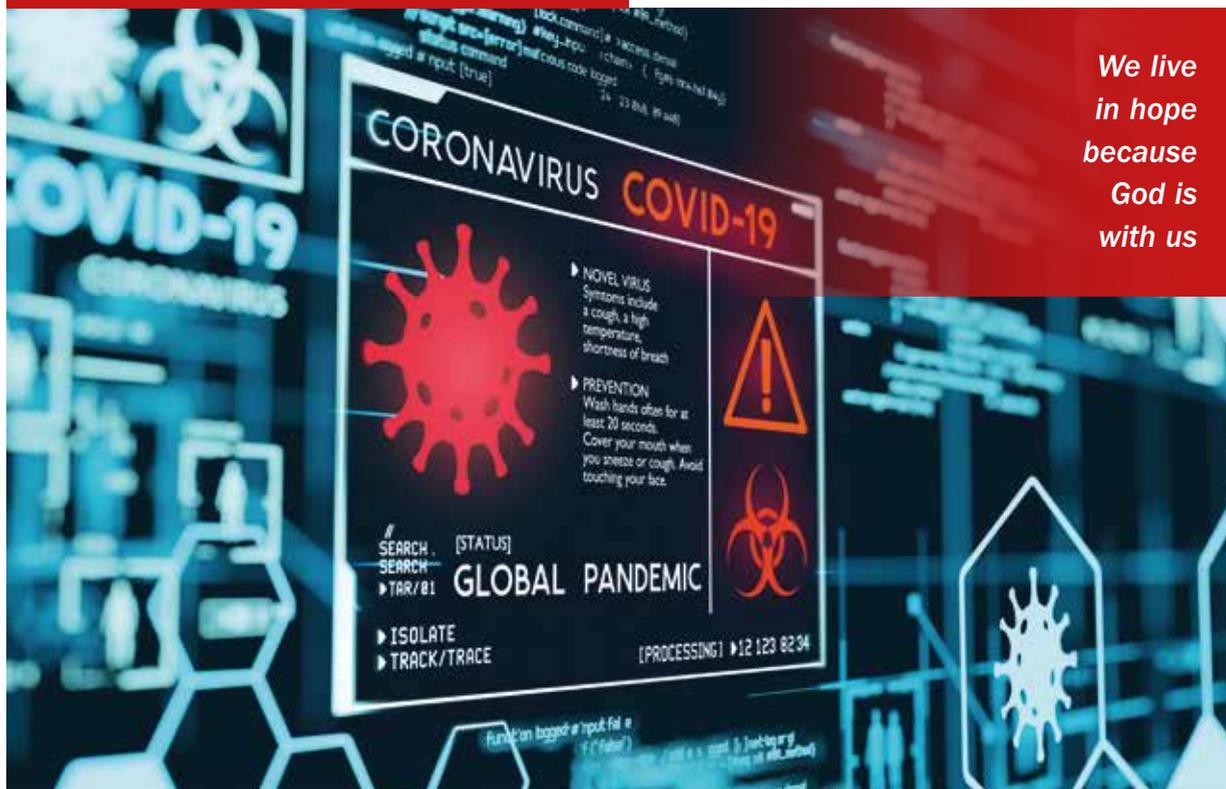
Our circuit has always been passionate about youth work. We think it brings confidence to the Church today, and great hope for tomorrow. As part of that commitment, over the past few years we have hosted several One Programme Participants who have worked in various projects across the circuit, bringing wonderful youthful enthusiasm, along with new and creative ideas. As I write this, our current OPP Samuel Bird (below right) is coming to the very end of his year with us, having worked for most of it in a new ecumenical youth café in Kidwelly. That café has had to close during the pandemic, but Sam has used social media to connect with young people and their families in engaging and innovative ways, and again we envisage this type of thing continuing even when we get back to normal.

Although we have had to cope with a steep learning curve this year with all the changes Covid-19 has generated, we are excited about what God has in store for us. We are full of hope for the future!



HOPE for the future

The Revd Dr Jonathan R Hustler,
Secretary of the Conference, says
in trusting God's words "Be not afraid"
we can hope for the future



We live
in hope
because
God is
with us

Early in the 1990s, Pope John Paul II gave a series of interviews (titled as *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*) in which he reflected on the approach of the new millennium. In it, he said that his hope for the future was founded on a key and recurring biblical phrase, "Be not afraid". It is the message of the angel at the incarnation, the repeated message of Jesus to his disciples, and it also echoes the words of the Lord to the people Israel in Isaiah 43 (a chapter close to our Vice-President's heart) in which the Lord says, "Be not afraid, for I am with you".

We live in times of uncertainty. The social and economic consequences of the pandemic are yet to become clear and we might find it hard even to say what we hope for the Church in 2021. But our hope is not an expression of a wish for good times to come. Rather, our hope is a state of being: we live in hope because God is with us.

Looking into an uncertain future, we stand on the threshold of hope. In Timothy Dudley Smith's words we are "Here on the threshold of a new beginning". The hymn (StF 684) goes on to remind us that we have "faith, strong to welcome all that lies before us, our unknown future, knowing God is there."

Those of us who are old enough might recall the apprehension that tinged our hope for the third millennium; in the early 1990s we did not know what the end of Communism might presage. The first year of the 21st century saw the drastic unsettling of expectations with the destruction of the Twin Towers in New York and we entered a different era. Now, the world has changed again due to Covid-19 and once again it desperately needs hope for the future. As God's people, we offer the key to that hope: it begins as we hear again "Be not afraid" and it finds its reality in God's presence with us.

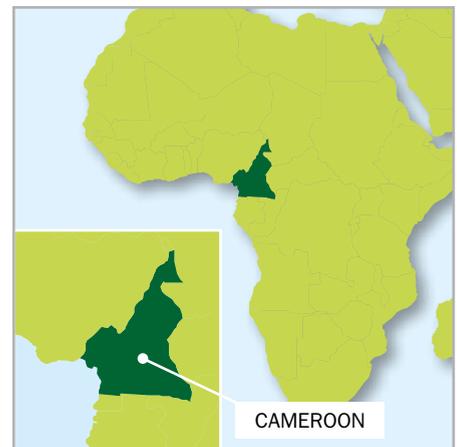


Strength and hope for glorious days are in our tears

Belittled, raped and abused, women in Cameroon bear the brunt of the country's suffering. Hear their story and how they hold fast to bright-burning hopes for justice, strength and a better future

Cameroon has a troubled history. To gain independence from Britain in 1961, Anglophone Cameroon (previously the Southern British Cameroons) joined the larger and independent Francophone Eastern French Cameroon. It was not a happy union and by 2016 had escalated into armed conflict with large numbers forced from their homes. More than 40,000 people fled to Nigeria while about 800,000 others relocated to French Cameroon. Around 300 villages were burnt with 3,000 people killed. Today, kidnappings are rife and schooling is non-existent.

Despite the instability of the region and desperate hardship, the Methodist Church in Britain is working closely with the Presbyterian Church of Cameroon to restore peace and alleviate deprivation. Rita and Jessy, two courageous women from the Anglophone part of Cameroon, come forward to tell their stories.



The African woman, a beautiful package of hope

Jessy M's hope is in the promises of God

We were raised to live for men and serve them – yet even in service we are mistreated, abused and violated. We are married as children without our consent. We have no say in the number of children we want and when we attempt family planning we are brutalised. Consensual sex has no place: we are in relationships to satisfy the men and our opinion does not count. We are circumcised to keep our libidos in check and **we have no right to say no**. When we do not conceive, we are the ones with the problem. When children are stubborn, we are blamed, and when we earn money, our income belongs to our husbands who 'know better'. Our right to life in dignity and liberty is denied.

When we are educated and empowered, we become a threat to our men and society; we are publicly insulted and reminded we are **just women** and our place is in the kitchen, even when we marry educated men. We are sexually harassed and raped at work yet have to remain silent. When we merit promotion we are denied that because we are just women. If promotion comes, the impression is that we traded our body for it. When things go wrong for our husbands, we are blamed. We are the punch bags and stress relievers. All blame is shifted to us and we are expected to soothe their pain in any form prescribed. Yet we smile and say **all is well** for African women because we have been indoctrinated that we do not have a choice, it is our cross and we **must** carry it.

We are the casualty of war used as sex toys, yet we have to beg to remain alive after multiple rapes. The Anglophone Crisis in Cameroon brought regression to our emancipation journey and we are experiencing more violations. Violence, rape and denial of mourning rights when we lose loved ones have become the norm. Covid-19 makes a bad situation worse putting our livelihood activities on hold.

But there is hope for the African woman and it burns brightly. The present is better than the past and we know the future will be far better than the present. Today we are more educated, more emancipated, more empowered and more involved in decision making. We have progressed from 'behind the man' to 'beside the man'. We *can* speak out when violated and seek help and justice. We are marching on from dependent to independent women, taking life-changing decisions and making informed choices for ourselves and our children. We are becoming bread

winners for our families. Yes, we are determined that our children **will not walk in our footsteps because we are 'generation equality'**.

Our mothers will be proud of our progress. That is the hope burning brightly in me, yes, because hope to me is the assurance that though the present is bleak, the future will be better. The prophet Jeremiah tells us that God has plans to prosper us and I trust that it is prosperity in every domain. This gives me hope because I believe in the promises of God.

The Brightness of Our Tears...

Our experiences as African daughters and women are mixed with fear, pain, sadness and loss revealed in the brightness of our tears, writes Rita M

We are nurtured yet tortured, loved yet despised,
valued yet sold out.
We bring joy but receive pain,
still the brightness of our tears keep the African
communities alive.

Some of our men who are fathers, brothers and
husbands have hurt us so deeply,
though we pride ourselves in them,
yet the brightness of our tears keep the African
communities alive.

As daughters and women we experience profound
violence from those who should protect us.
Violence compounded in these times of crisis:
socio-political unrest in the North West and South
West Regions of Cameroon and Covid-19.
We are battered, traumatised, assaulted, harassed,
raped and forced into marriages;
recipients of the tension, anger, disappointment, and
frustration of our men,
yet the brightness of our tears keep the African
communities alive.

Fighting, war, killings and blood in our once-peaceful
communities;
our children, brothers, fathers and husbands
kidnapped and slaughtered in front of us daily and
our right to mourn is violated.
We are left cold and bare, alone without our pride,
homeless, childless and widows,
still the brightness of our tears keep the broken
African communities alive.

We bear the brunt of poverty in family and society.
When we are economically dependent on our men,
we are called lazy and worthless.
When we are independent and part of the corporate
world, our womanhood is termed as not humble
and submissive.
We toil and give the best fats to our men hoping for
their warmth but we are hurt,
yet the brightness of our tears keep the African
communities alive.

Our communities are ravaged by the HIV and AIDS
and we are blamed.
We are most burdened; most vulnerable, infected
and care givers.
When our men, brothers and children are beaten and
broken by the infection, we carry their pains and
sufferings in our eyes, the pains and sufferings of
the communities in our eyes,
still the brightness of our tears keep the nation alive.

Yes! We are African daughters and women, strong
and resilient.
Our strength and hope for glorious days are in our
tears, the brightness of Africa.

This is my story...

This is our story...

*No photographs of Rita and Jessy were taken in order
to protect them from retribution*

Reflection on discovering hope and grace



*“If life can no longer be like that,
then what might it become?”*

Until lockdown, a small group of wounded pilgrims would meet from time to time at Selly Oak Methodist Church in the Birmingham Circuit. The name of our group is PH7. P stands for pain, H for hope, and there were originally seven members. We are people who live with different kinds of pain and weakness, but who also discover surprising strength and hope. Each of us has had to let go of some aspect of life before illness, and therefore we live with the question: “If life can no longer be like *that*, then what might it become?” We live with night questions, those unsettling, searching, sometimes terrifying, thoughts that come when sleep is impossible. We learn to depend on the love, care and patience of others. We become uncomfortably familiar with the possibilities and limitations of modern medicine.

Edge-folk

*We are the edge-folk,
travelling strange paths
under strange skies:
the shufflers and shamblers,
the mutterers and mumblers,
the battered and the almost broken,
the damaged and disturbed,
staring at the unseen,
dancing to the unheard.*

*With bent bones and bent minds,
and souls open to the stars,
called and calling,
questioned and forever questioning,
curious and curious,
leaning into the wind –
and always on the edge
of falling.*

*Not at home here,
we are always being moved on,
driven by – or towards
a shared dream
of that one infolded place.
where we are truly named.*

When we meet we leave a chair for the 'absent-present ones', those who cannot be with us. After a silence, we simply tell each other the story of how it has been for us since our last meeting. The telling is often bloody and broken. But in the telling and the listening we make discoveries. We come to know ourselves and each other, the heights and depths of embodiedness, the fragility and stubbornness of hope.

Today we all face what PH7 has been struggling with and celebrating. With the global pandemic, our world has been broken open. So much of what we took for granted is no longer possible. What might life become now? And are we all 'absent-present ones', a community of separatedness?

So perhaps wounded pilgrims have a

body-wisdom to offer. We suggest the following. **Leave** an empty chair. **Tell** each other the stories of how it has been. **Face** the pain and fear honestly. And **listen** for the whispers of hope. Hope will not take us back to the way things were. Instead it comes to us as a disturbance, something new that emerges from the cracks in the old. It comes as grace.

My own struggle to move into a new kind of ministry, to becoming a wounded pilgrim, has opened up a space where the words and the silences make poetry possible. When PH7 meets, another member, Donald Eadie asks for a 'Tony poem' to lead us into the silence and the storytelling. I include three of them here, all written initially for PH7. They are my way of thanking God for both the pain and the hope.

Hope

*Hope is the horizon of the curved world,
where seen and unseen are joined and
divided,
and suggested hidden lands invite
the soul to boundless journeying,
of finding and being lost from sight.*

*Hope is the seed born in darkness,
fragile and unconquerable,
whose urge toward the unknown light
will shatter stones and move the earth,
for an inherited promise of green.*

*Hope is the distant call of horns,
the hint of a scent
blown on a wind not of this world,
the memory of a summer dream
caught in some corner of the heart.*

*Hope's a graffiti defiance of grey,
unsilenced rumour of another way.
It is the fidget child, the student rage,
the troubled soul, the eccentric old,
the ill-at-ease here.*

*Hope is faith's refusal to believe,
gazing beyond vision, beyond presence,
always asking the strange question,
imagining and shaping a world
invented and discovered alike.*

Discoveries

*In the night:
a word of comfort
and a way through fear.*

*In the morning:
day that comes as gift,
a world opening into possibility.*

*In frailty:
the slow wisdom of the body,
the unexpected strength
to stay with this, to wait.*

*In loneliness:
a surprising solidarity,
a community of separatedness.*

*In the tears:
a freedom of honesty,
a path to compassion.*

*In the silence:
a space where love grows,
unhurried awareness of depths.*

*In another's words:
something we have known together,
but could not name alone.*

The Rev Dr Tony McClelland is a supernumerary minister in the Birmingham Circuit, whose active ministry was cut short by ill-health.



Peace. Comfort. Joy.

Throughout the pandemic and beyond, these three little words have never been more important. We're dedicated to enabling people to live later life well.

Can you make a difference to the lives of older people?
To find out how you and your church can support MHA, visit
mha.org.uk/church
#Godiswithus

Methodist Homes (MHA) is a registered charity in
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Photo taken prior to the Covid-19 pandemic.

