

Issue 22 • Spring 2021

The **Methodist** Church 

the connexion

Love this
Calling

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



David Perry
Editor

Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. (Isaiah 43:1)

With its perfect conjunction of the sun and the Humber Bridge creating a golden version of our Methodist orb and cross, Mark Kensett's beautiful cover photograph is the perfect introduction to the theme of issue 22 'Love this Calling'.

The familiar orb and cross represents the glory of the risen Christ for all the world. Mark's photograph individualises this and makes it deeply personal. Notice how the shaft of sparkling sunlight extends across the water towards the viewer. Seamlessly and uninterrupted, it spans the distance between the resurrection light on the other side of the cross and ourselves, arriving right at our feet, inviting a response.

The radiant love of Easter reaches out to each one of us, wherever we are and whatever our circumstances. God's call upon our life is always to cherish this truth and to make it uniquely our own. As I look at the photograph I feel the reality of this afresh and dare to acknowledge that the words of Isaiah 43:1 are for me; that the symbolism of the photograph has my name on it. And yours.

For God calls each person to embrace their Christian vocation and to express this calling without reservation. The stories and testimonies in issue 22 demonstrate the breathtaking breadth and depth of God's imagination as God calls people in so very many and various ways to follow Jesus in our daily expressions of discipleship. Each of us has our own distinctive part to play in bringing God's purposes to fruition. God invites us to love this calling and to embrace the challenge of bringing it alive, secure in the knowledge that the one who calls us by name is the one who equips, nurtures and sustains us on our life's vocational journey, wherever it leads and whatever it entails.

As we are bathed in glorious resurrection light, God reaches out to us and calls us to be fully who we are meant to be. And God calls us to do everything in our power to ensure that this is everyone's truth, freed from all injustice and discrimination.

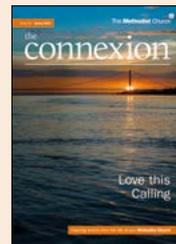
Love and peace,
David

the connexion

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The Humber
Bridge

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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.

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Highlights



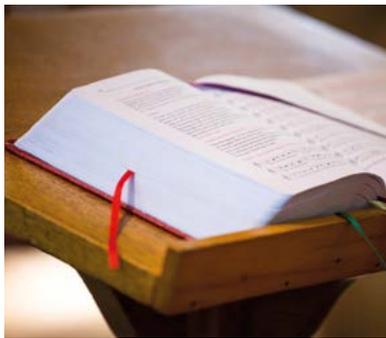
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Climate Sunday – has your church registered?

An ecumenical coalition is calling on churches this year to do one or more of these:

- hold a climate-focused service
- commit to take action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions
- add their name to a call for the UK government to take bolder action on climate change.

On Sunday 5 September, there will be a national Climate Sunday event to celebrate the commitments made by churches. Register to start planning your local Climate Sunday here: www.climatesunday.org

Presidency adapts to life under lockdown

The Revd Richard Teal and Carolyn Lawrence, our President and Vice-President, have had a year of office like no other. The pandemic has restricted face-to-face visits across the Connexion, but they have reached thousands of people virtually. In addition to their formal diary commitments, weekly Facebook Lives (facebook.com/MethodistPresidency) have reached over 26,000 users. Over 11,500 visits have been made to their blog and 450 calls since January to their free phone line reflection (0808 281 2695). The Presidency has been agile in responding to new circumstances in the most challenging of times.



Methodist Youth President Election Results

Daud Irfan from Cardiff will become the next Youth President following an election held online in December as part of 3Generate 365 (the Methodist Children and Youth Assembly). He will be appointed for the connexional year 2021/2022 at a service this autumn. He commented "I would like to thank all the children and young people who took part in the voting process. The focus of my year will be on God's Church being a home for all."



THINK
PIECE

Why am I here?

FINDING my purpose

I have sometimes struggled when it comes to conversations about vocation and calling, thinking such lofty aspirations were reserved for exceptional folk who, from an early age, know who they want to be and how they are going to change the world. At other times my socialist persuasions have led me to view vocation as the domain of the elite and privileged, a luxury beyond the reaches of those who simply need to earn enough to get by, or who because of gender, race, sexuality or disability find certain paths closed to them.

However, in my role in the Learning Network, I have been fortunate enough to have numerous opportunities for self-discovery and one in particular changed my view on vocations. A wonderful colleague, Nigel Pimlott, trained us to deliver an exercise based on the work of Simon Sinek, which helps individuals identify the fundamental reason for their existence.

Sinek asserts that most people know **what**

they do, some know **how** they do **what** they do, but fewer can articulate **why** they do **what** they do. When people answer the 'why' question they find their *raison d'être*. It is the end to which all other things are directed. Through the process I discovered my 'reason for living' is to support people through learning and development so they can realise their God-given potential.

My road to an education career

When I look back over my career, I realise supporting people has been the golden thread running throughout, despite a rather reluctant beginning! As a teenager I wanted to be an air hostess, or cabin crew as we would call them now. I loved languages and desperately wanted to explore the world so I decided this would be an excellent career. After finishing my French degree, however, the only graduate programme I could find with a bursary was a PGCE. With limited options, I enrolled. It was one of the hardest years of my life but when I completed my

*My 'reason
for living' is to
support people*



My soul still burned with a passion for learning

training, I went to Hungary to teach English as a foreign language and thus began my life in education.

Over the years, I have found a number of tools to help people discern their vocation. Ignatian spiritual practices, spiritual accompaniment, the Enneagram, Myers Briggs tests, coaching and supervision can all be hugely beneficial. However, life circumstances are ever-changing and during the pandemic I really questioned again whether I was in the right vocation. With so much need and suffering, was I really serving others?

Reaffirming my calling

A recent training event for existing supervisors helped me. In a 'goldfish bowl exercise"', Michael Patterson encouraged



me to talk about my vocation and the crisis of confidence I was going through. I shared my struggles of working online, feeling isolated, demotivated, zoomed-out and also my frustration at not feeling I was making a difference. Through some questioning, Michael skilfully led me through three dimensions of my work. Under the headings of 'soul', 'role' and 'context' he enabled me to see that my soul still burned with a passion for learning and development and that I loved my role as coordinator within a team of equally passionate and creative people. It was just the context that had changed and become a problem. As an extrovert, I was missing the human interaction that had been such a central part of my job, whether it was facilitating training days, meeting with groups to discuss mission, or planning events with much loved team members. He enabled me to be excited again by my calling and he reminded me of practices to help me keep going.

I am an unashamed lover of romantic comedy, and during our Covenant service this year I remembered a line from one of my all-time favourites, *Bridget Jones's Diary*. In the film Darcy (played by Colin Firth) says to Bridget he loves her just the way she is. In the sermon we were reminded that God loves us just the way we are.

Sometimes we have a problem believing that and loving ourselves becomes impossible, but investing in ourselves, in whatever ways we find most helpful, is not an indulgence. If we are able to discover our 'why' or where our soul, role and context connect, we can be liberated to be the people God has created us to be, and realise our calling, whether that be through our paid work, a voluntary role or our favourite pastime.

Rachel McCallam is the Learning & Development Coordinator for the Yorkshire Plus region.

"The supervisor and supervisee are in a metaphorical goldfish bowl being observed by participants, who listen and learn from watching a 'live' supervision session.



Coming out of lockdown, where do your soul, role and context connect?



Called to love her

NEIGHBOURS



Alison Ransome speaks to Laura Cooper, a member of Burniston Methodist Church in the North Yorkshire Coast Circuit about her call to respond to people in need

Laura has some remarkable stories to tell. They include working with Zambian women experiencing gender-based violence, giving her student loan to a family in Romania whose house had washed away, and more recently working on a building project in Mexico with her own young children. So, why is the photo of her, in this magazine, in the doorway of a beach hut in a cold northern town?

It turns out Laura holds in harmony both helping people around the world and caring for those in her own home and on her doorstep. Her faith is profound and yet simple. When I ask about this, she quotes civil rights' champion Martin Luther King who said: "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice anywhere" and "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that."

Laura has an intricate, yet simple theology. She says: "Where there is need, I do what I can to meet it, whether it's here in Scarborough where I live, or in Zambia where the richness of the land is being plundered by other countries. I give what's needed whether that's a bunch of flowers to a neighbour, or a roofbox full of clothes to refugees in Calais."

bottom up; they are loved by God and they pass it on. Faith should not be in your face, it's simply about being. So my calling is that I am called 'to be'. I am called to be me. Called to serve."

Laura's belief that we are all equal struck me particularly when she said, "There's no special reason about gypsies that makes them so welcoming. Nor do the Zambians who embraced me have superpowers. Equally there isn't something magical about me going to give aid to refugees in Calais."

Why wouldn't it be God calling me?



Love this Calling

As you read Laura's story, in what fresh way might God be calling you to serve?

Called to pass on God's love

Laura has a deeply ingrained sense of the world being God's and God loving all in the world. I ask her where it comes from. She says, "I've always been supported by fantastic Christians. The ordinary people in the church who make the cups of tea have always inspired me, I am blessed by these people. This is about church from the





It's all about humanity joining together and being equal in God's eyes. I support Chelsea [the football club], so have been known to say, in jest, that I have 'blue blood' running through my veins. The real truth of the matter, however, is that each one of us has exactly the same blood and we all bleed when cut."

Giving as you'd like to receive

We have all read stories of amazing people who serve others in amazing ways. I wanted to know from Laura what her reply would be to people like me who say, "I could never go overseas and do what you do."

Her response is generous but also deeply challenging. She says, "We are all better together – some people have time, some financial resources, some have wisdom, and some a smile for others. The key thing is to care for humanity, not to give to make ourselves feel better. If I need people to donate 500 pairs of socks, I need proper pairs of socks – what can I do with odd socks? How many one-legged refugees do we think there are? We all have a calling to

recognise people as equal to ourselves and loved by God. We need to give as we'd want to receive."

Laura went on to refer to one of the most well-known biblical passages on calling, 1 Samuel 3, which describes how Samuel and Eli do not recognise God's call in the night. I confess I had an inward groan, as it's such a 'go to' Bible passage about calling. I didn't expect to hear anything new, but as I listened, I realised that Laura was saying something different. She said that those who donate socks might not think they are responding to a call from God, but they are. When she is prompted to act she asks: "Why wouldn't it be me? Why wouldn't it be God calling? Why wouldn't it be God calling me?"

I'm taking away these deceptively simple questions to ponder.

Alison Ransome is the Coordinator for the Learning Network – North West and Mann, and Connexional Vocations Advisor for the Methodist Church. She is overseeing the **#LoveThisCalling** campaign.

Where there is need, I do what I can to meet it



Following Christ in the **BOARDROOM**



*I am a director
of a healthcare
provider
administering
thousands
of Covid-19
vaccines*

“Why has God put me here?” ponders Alan Kershaw, a business leader whose Christian calling has taken him into offices and boardrooms

God the creator makes us all unique, and expects us to be different from those around us. Yet as human beings we crave to be like everyone else; part of the pack. How do we find balance in the faith journey of our lives in partnership with God? We need to recognise that we are different, and to love each other for those differences and for who we are.

As I write, we are in the middle of ‘Lockdown 3’. I am a director of a healthcare provider that is administering thousands of Covid-19 vaccines to the most-at-risk people across the city of Salford. My career has been very varied: I have started up companies, shut them down, listed them on the Stock Exchange and just been a part of the wider team. I have been successful, but this has not always been the case, I have been made redundant and at other times been ‘laid low’. These have been incredibly difficult times – but on reflection they have often served a purpose – for myself, for my family, for the Church and for others.

God working through me

“How has God put you here?” has been a question posed around the family dinner table on more than one occasion. The answer is that often I do not know. I do know, however, that God was influential in making it happen. God opened doors (and shut other doors too) that have taken me in unexpected directions, which have sometimes left me quite baffled. When I look back, I can see that God was with me in both difficult and challenging times, as well as positive and uplifting ones. I believe that through God giving me these experiences, God was working through me to enable what is happening there to take place, and in a better way for those involved.

The experience and skills that I have developed through my life have been enhanced by being part of a ‘church family’ in whichever location I have lived and worshipped, and has shaped me into who I am today. As children of God, we are influenced by all of our life experiences; and

whatever the experience is, it will impact on who we are today and into the future. We cannot change the past but we can use it to change the future, which is why living with God close to us will give us the benefit of his influence on our lives.

We are all unique and God allows us to develop differently. The skills and experience that I have are different to what you have – and I have a lot to learn from you, and hopefully you can learn a little from me too. But it is not my skills in the boardroom, or my skills as a business leader, or my skills on a computer that distinguish me as a Christian. Rather it is how I go about these tasks, and the core Christian beliefs that give me that foundation.

Listening to God’s voice

I hope that God is working through me sometimes, if not always. I know that I am not perfect, and ask that God and those around me will forgive me for those times when I definitely get it wrong. Asking God, our family, friends and colleagues for forgiveness when we get it wrong is an important part of what makes Christians different in the world.

God calls us to be disciples throughout our lives. Not just when we are with our church family – but also when we are with our human family, and with those people that we spend our days with, in whatever situation that may be. As a church family, we need to continue to recognise the uniqueness of each one of us and the gifts that God gives us all to use, to celebrate our differences and to look to better support each other wherever we are in our journeys of life and faith.

I am thankful for what God is doing in our daily lives (whether obvious or subtle), and I pray that each of us will strive to listen more intently to that still small voice of our creator God, and that we will all be more closely yoked in partnership with God day by day in the lives we are called to lead.

Alan Kershaw is Chair of the Methodist Church Audit and Risk Assurance Committee.

We will all be more closely yoked in partnership with God day by day



How will your church make sharing what God is doing in your daily lives a priority?

Taking God's word into the **workplace**



The Revd Canon Alan J Robson is the Lincolnshire Agriculture Chaplain and sees much to celebrate in workplace chaplaincy

Wherever there is a workforce, a chaplain may be found



Love this Calling
In what new ways could your circuit engage with and support workplace chaplaincy?

I love this quote, which reflects on the meaning of vocation: “Neither the hair shirt nor the soft berth will do. The place God calls you to *is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.*”¹

Disciples of Jesus are called to dwell wherever there is need. This calling is a vital part of our Methodist DNA and heritage, and I believe chaplains have a vital role in bringing the message of God’s love to society. In 1999, whilst thoroughly enjoying circuit ministry, I had the privilege and calling to become the Lincolnshire Agricultural Chaplain. I have continued in this role while simultaneously serving two to four churches within various circuits. I am just one of a creative and enthusiastic band of workplace chaplains, who are embraced by and embrace frustrations, messiness and humanity. Each workplace chaplain intentionally enters a specific arena where people gather to either work, seek pleasure or healing – a “*place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.*”

Wherever there is a workforce, a chaplain may be found. You might expect to find them where “gladness and hunger meet” in retail centres, airports, microchip companies, power stations, port authorities, doctors’ surgeries – even on racecourses. Simon Pearson is a chaplain serving the needs of national horse racing. He says, “I absolutely love my work with Racing Welfare, the only charity that supports all the people who work in racing. I love the diversity and energy of this workplace!”

Another chaplain, Deacon Pamela Luxton, serves East Coast Caravan Park in Lincolnshire. She says, “I love this calling because, wherever I am sent to, it is a privilege to be alongside those I am with and the experience gained enables me to grow in wisdom, knowledge and faith.”

Bringing unconditional love to the workplace

Some chaplains are ordained, some are lay, and some are volunteers, but each senses a powerful calling and vocation within and outside the church walls as ‘spiritual care providers’. Each chaplain is working in “*the*





place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."

What do those who enter all these arenas offer to the mission and ministry of the Church as it reflects afresh upon the 'Methodist Way of Life'? I suspect every chaplain who is a 'guest' in predominantly secular contexts finds the presence and reality of God as they provide ritual support, counselling and care to the people they meet. Each echoes the power of unconditional love. A love that even the blind can see and the deaf can hear and the unfeeling can feel as each workplace chaplain journeys alongside their neighbour to *"the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."*

Ultimately lives can be changed through the consistent love of a workplace chaplain. A thousand stories could be told of light and life being found. Here are three such stories in Lincolnshire.

1. A volunteer rural workplace chaplain calls at a farm and speaks to the 25-year-old son who tentatively opens up. He is on medication for long-term anxiety and depression. He is at a loss and tearful, feeling he must keep the farm going. The chaplain ensures he gains all his entitlements, including his working tax credit, and gets his council tax reviewed. Over time she ensures the young chap and his worried partner gain a steadier footing.
2. A farmer who is clearly depressed and worried calls the volunteer chaplain. His brothers and sisters (partners in the business) are not getting on, there are issues with succession and the farm tenancy. The chaplain brokers a family

gathering and arranges professional guidance. It is agreed to work towards a viable way of farming for the next generation.

3. A family is affected twice by suicide. The couple's son dies and their daughter died in the same way eight years earlier. (Nationally farmers and farm workers still have one of the highest rates of suicide of any occupation at 45–50 per year.) As well as offering practical assistance, the associate rural chaplain supports them by listening to them, to ensure their pain and loss are 'held' respectfully and truthfully. The chaplain accompanies the bereaved parents to inquests and the coroner's court as their wills are rewritten and succession plans are altered.

Working as a chaplain is endlessly challenging and fulfilling! I have enjoyed so many wonderful encounters and felt God's nearness in countless surprising ways.

Lives can be changed through the consistent love of a workplace chaplain

¹ Frederick Buechner *Wishful Thinking – A Seeker's ABC* (1993, Bravo Ltd)



While hospitalised, Isabel Barlow found God's unfailing love and now wants to help others

Mental health in young people and the power of faith – my story



It's OK not to be OK

Young people's mental health is a big issue. Everyone will experience some sort of emotional crisis, whether due to loss or a tragic accident, and there are people and charities to

provide support. However, many young people are too afraid to approach the charities and people who can help, leading to severe and long-lasting mental health problems.

With the advent of social media and digital technology, our mental health is getting worse. Young people are told via social media what they should be, what they should look like and what grades they should be achieving, and they experience pressure and stress when they do not achieve these expectations. I feel passionately it's important to support young people and make it clear that "it's OK not to be OK".



I have been on quite a journey with my own mental health

My own mental health journey

I have been on quite a journey with my own mental health. I have fallen down, got back up again, and there were times when I felt that there wasn't really a light at the end of the tunnel. But I kept going because I knew there must be something worth staying

around for. I was very lucky in that I was able to find someone who supported me and he was able to pull me up from the pit I'd fallen into. I relied on him and he made me see that there is always a way to get back up.

I felt at my lowest when I became very ill and people close to me, including my dad, also got ill. I felt there was no one really looking out for me, and God also wasn't there any more. But even though I had lost my faith, faith had not lost me. The support I received from my church and community was overwhelming and it made such a difference to my attitude to life. Even though I was in and out of hospital and in ambulances every week, the people I love did not give up on me.

Near-death experience

It hit me one day that I could have died during a stay in hospital, but I didn't. My dad also could have died but he didn't. I realised there was a reason God gave me a mentor – someone that I could talk to who would help me through these hard times – and there is a reason I am here today.

While I was in hospital there was a moment when I knew my faith wasn't truly dead. It happened one evening. The nurse had just put my meds on the machine and walked out. Then the big alarm went off, which meant that someone needed defibrillating. I peered out of my window and saw a little girl lying on a bed, white as snow. The doctors shocked her multiple times and nothing happened but, as a doctor was just about to call time of death, she started to cough. It was a miracle. The doctors just put it down as a tech malfunction but there was something magical about the situation. As the little girl



sat up, she smiled at me – she was happy, even though she had just died.

Life is precious

This episode made me realise that life is short and needs to be lived. I was very lucky that I had a support system and I was able to get through these hard times. Now I want to return the favour. I want to spread the word of God and support people like my mentor supported me.

I can still see myself lying in a hospital bed staring up at the ceiling with wires and tubes coming out of me thinking “What I am doing here, what is the point?” But I now look in the mirror and see a girl who has come so far in her journey and wants to help change the world.

I want to support people who are on this mental health journey and do not see a light at the end of a tunnel. Even if I help just one person, that means someone will be able to go on and live their life. And I know I can do it as God could have got rid of me but he saved me. I do not want that to be wasted. I want to save someone else and show them the light at the end of the tunnel.

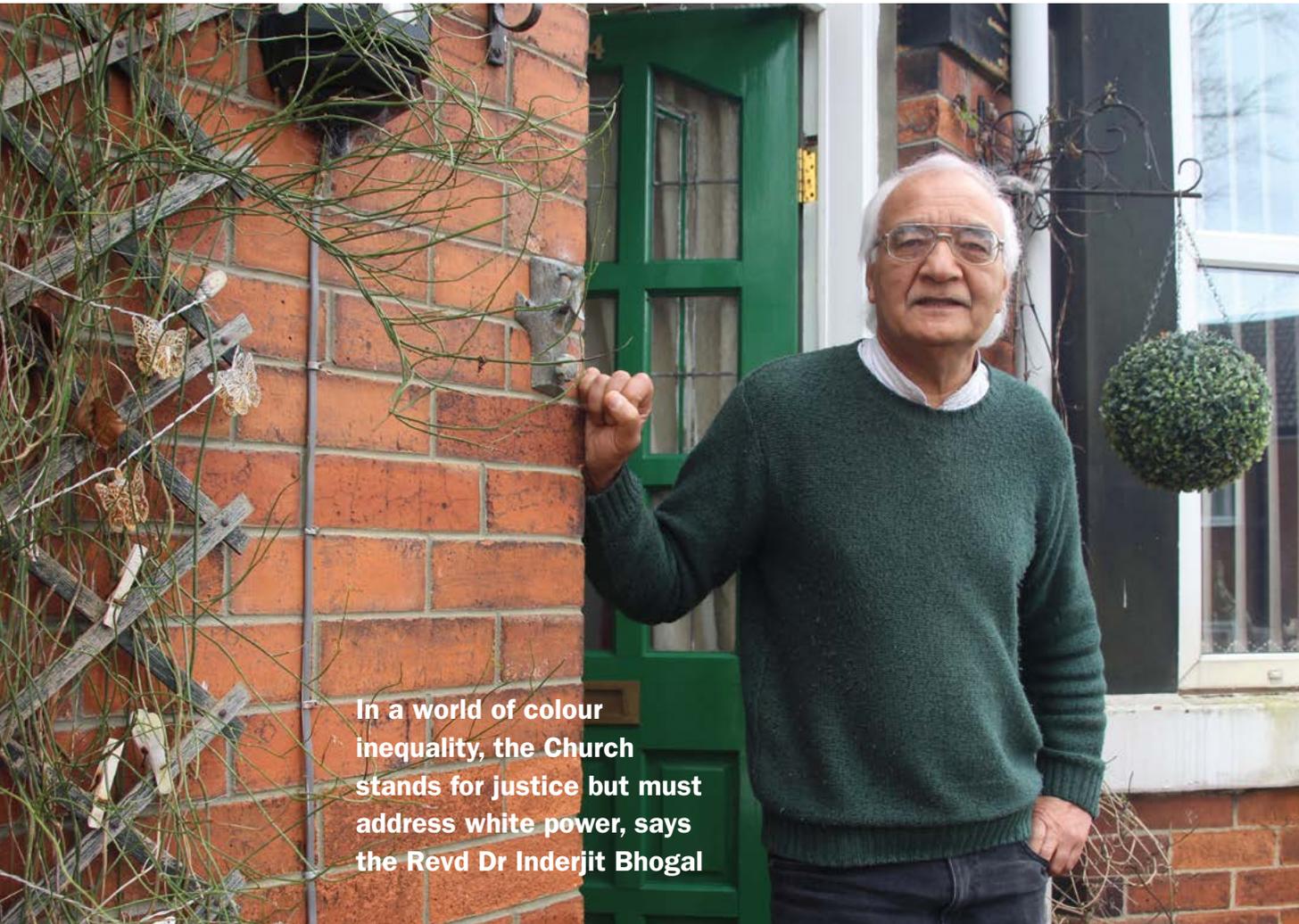
I knew my faith wasn't truly dead

 Love this Calling

What practical response does Izzy's testimony inspire in you?



A light at the end of the tunnel



In a world of colour inequality, the Church stands for justice but must address white power, says the Revd Dr Inderjit Bhogal

OUR CALLING to end racial injustice

God calls us to build a justice-based Church

The difference is that white people have power

I arrived in the UK with my parents in 1964. My first home was in Dudley, ten miles from Smethwick, where Enoch Powell delivered his “Rivers of Blood” speech in April 1968, just a few days after the assassination of the Revd Dr Martin Luther King in Memphis, USA. These events mobilised me to strive against racial inequality, which made no sense to me as a teenager, or at any time since. I have worked for racial justice in Methodism and beyond for longer than the Children of Israel were in the wilderness. It is central to our calling and must be sustained without ceasing. It calls for responses at the heart of worship and prayer, theology and preaching. There

remain obstacles of injustice and exclusion and there is resistance to change.

We can do better and God beckons us on. God calls us to build a justice-based Church, where justice is served with mercy and humility, a Church where we all in our immense diversity are honoured members in the one Body of Christ. It’s a Church with no superiors or inferiors, no centres or margins, with one goal always to “..strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness” (Matthew 6:33). Everything follows from here and the pilgrimage towards our goal is stronger if we work with ecumenical and international partners and fully respect each other.



Holy Communion is not only a 'foretaste of the heavenly banquet', it is also a revelation of the Church and the world as they are meant to be. In a world of inequality, war, bigotry and climate change, the Church can be one body symbolised in the one bread we share, a sanctuary for all. We can stand in solidarity with each other in our suffering humanity, not in charity but with justice, mercy and humility, seeking the safety and fulfilment of all.

The journey so far to racial equality

Considerable energy has gone into worship, prayer and work for racial justice. We have helped influence some individuals and institutions. There has been progress in terms of the promotion and development of black leadership and black theology. There are more senior black people in the Church. Black Methodists have occupied the most senior lay and ordained roles, for example as President and Vice-President of the Conference, and as Youth President. Many black Methodists are superintendent presbyters and circuit stewards, but I want to see more black Methodists in roles such as district chair, and in senior connexional roles.

Despite obstacles, black Methodists have made contributions to policy and process changes and given leadership. We have been at the heart of finding new directions in building an inclusive and intercultural Church. Along the way, we have endured hurts and disappointments. A leadership role as a black person is a tough place and requires additional spiritual, emotional and physical stamina. Holding high office does not remove the feeling of being on the margins, and can induce malice from opponents. I have often found myself saying, "let us not grow weary in doing what is right...let us work for the good of all" (Galatians 6:9-10).



Addressing white power

Our attention remains fixed on addressing the nonsense of racism. With a theology that insists we are all made in the image of God, and genetics that affirm we are one human race, why does discrimination based on skin colour persist in people who value all the beautiful colours of God? How can we strengthen our resolve to work with people of all faiths and professions to promote racial justice?

Sybil Phoenix used to say "racism is prejudice plus power", and these words were incorporated in the Methodist Conference report 'Faithful and Equal' (1987). Sybil insisted that while we all have our prejudices, the difference is that white people have power. This is how the world is structured. White people have to address this colour inequality as integral to addressing racism. Sybil was saying this 40 years ago. What now?

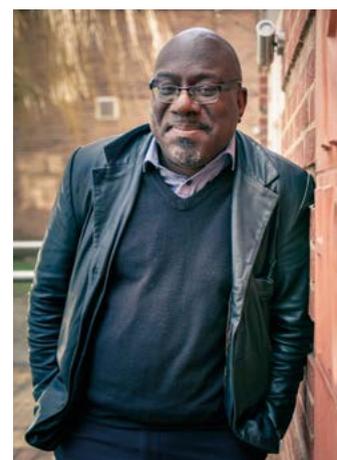
I conclude with prophetic wisdom from Professor Anthony Reddie, a foremost Methodist thinker and theologian. In an article last year, Anthony offered incisive and insightful analysis and reflection on a journey in Methodism 'from racism awareness to deconstructing whiteness' in the quest for racial justice. Previously he wrote of the need to move beyond 'apologetic rhetoric' by which Churches can resist progress towards the achievement of justice. He argues that redefining 'the norm' is necessary in the Methodist Church if we are to move beyond rhetoric of apology towards a more determined and intentioned mode of challenging injustice, be it on the grounds of race, gender, sexuality or disability, and build equity and full inclusion. I direct you to Anthony's scholarship.

The Revd Dr Inderjit Bhogal is a leading theologian and Methodist minister.
www.inderjitbhogal.com

It's a Church with no superiors or inferiors, no centres or margins



How will your district set about redefining the norm of challenging injustice and building full inclusion?



For Professor Anthony Reddie's books and other writings, visit
www.anthonyreddie.com



Invited to be GLOBAL Methodists

Hosting Ruda from Zimbabwe and Sopha from Cambodia enriched our lives and created vital global connections, writes Catherine Hickey, Programme Officer in Global Relationships

Between 2018 and 2020 the Methodist Church in Britain hosted two Global Mission Fellows as part of an exciting programme, new to Britain.

Birmingham District welcomed Rudaviro Mvundura from Zimbabwe, while Wesley's Chapel and Leysian Mission in London hosted Sopha Touch from Cambodia.

Through these placements, Ruda and Sopha supported the calling of the Methodist Church in Britain and deepened their understanding of God's call on their own lives. They also brought vital connection with the World Church – a key reason why Birmingham District and Wesley's Chapel hope to host Fellows again.

The Global Mission Fellows programme is a two-year leadership development scheme focused on social justice. It's open to people aged 20–30 from around the world, including from Britain. Fellows train together for three weeks before taking placements of up to 22 months in different countries.

Having Sopha made us more aware of our call to be global Methodists

The placements provide opportunity for Fellows to live out the programme's three core values:

- engage with local communities
- connect the Church in mission
- grow in personal and social holiness.

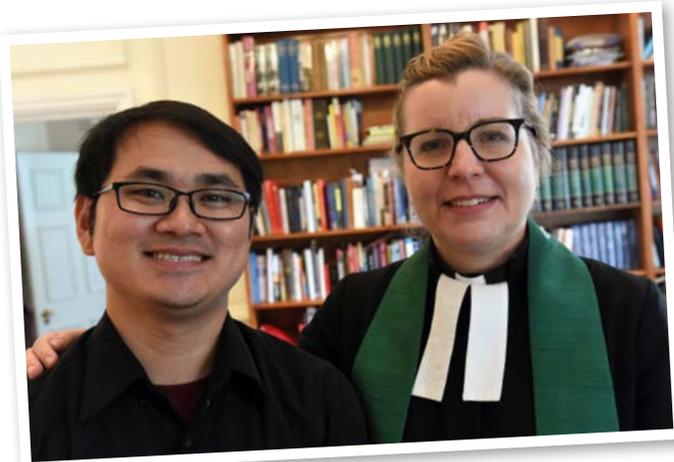
The Methodist Church in Britain is an affiliate of the programme, which is run in partnership with the United Methodist Church. The Global Relationships team coordinate and support the programme in the UK and host churches cover some of the costs.

Sopha and Ruda join their host communities

Sopha lived on site at Wesley's Chapel. He became part of the young adults' group and blessed the congregation with his musical gifts. He also served three days a week with Whitechapel Mission's ministry among homeless people. Superintendent the Revd Dr Jen Smith said "This made us see the extreme need on our own doorstep, and made it easy for us to be involved with its work."

She thought his presence was a gift, saying, "Sopha's passion for Jesus and personal humility made him able to make peace and build friendships with all sorts of people. His singing in the choir revitalised it as he was just fun to be around! Everywhere, his presence made people individuals, not just labels or issues."

Meanwhile in Birmingham District, Ruda focused on engaging with young people.



Using her gifts in relationship-building and worship-leading, she helped young people connect with each other and encouraged them to deepen their faith, particularly through regular youth-led services. Describing the impact this had, the Revd David Butterworth, Mission in the Economy Officer, said: "Birmingham was truly blessed receiving Ruda. Her presence changed dynamics and mindsets. Young adults could see they were not the 'only one' and the District recognised it did in fact have many young adults – they are now on the agenda!"

As Ruda's placement site supervisor, the Revd Butterworth drew together a support team from the District. He said "Although this was to offer Ruda a variety of engagement and fellowship opportunities, everyone benefited and grew through the exchange."

Ruda agreed, saying "They supported me from the day I arrived and provided a second home and family for me."

The impact of Ruda and Sopha's placements

For Ruda, a graduate of Zimbabwe's Africa University, adapting to a new environment, work and church culture brought significant personal and spiritual growth. Her time in the Birmingham District confirmed her call to work with young people. She said: "It gave me a platform to use my skills and

gifts and it was good to see young people grow in confidence."

Towards the end of the programme, she was offered a job as a youth pastor in the Coventry and Nuneaton Circuit where she is working now.

Sopha, who has a business background, returned to Cambodia with a vision to combine business and mission. But his time on the GMF programme and at Wesley's Chapel had changed his understanding of God's call on his life. He said: "I felt part of something bigger, not alone in mission. I connected with people in different ways, and had opportunities to go with God, to serve and bless others, but as God's ambassador; not just doing my own thing."

Back in Phnom Penh, Sopha and a Cambodian Fellow who served in Ireland are now together finding ways to respond to local needs.

Success of the programme

Ruda and Sopha were among a group of 57 Fellows from 29 countries commissioned to serve in 27 countries. (This included the first Fellow recruited from Britain, who worked with a migrant justice ministry in Hong Kong.) Sending people 'from everywhere to everywhere', the programme creates a network of personal relationships across Churches and countries. As Jen Smith put it: "Having Sopha with us made us more aware of our call to be global Methodists."

David Butterworth agreed, saying, "I urge other Districts to 'love this calling' and respond through the rainbow of possibilities with Global Mission Fellows."

The Covid-19 pandemic brought a halt to recruitment in 2020 but it is now underway again. If you are interested in being a Global Mission Fellow, or hosting one in future years please contact Global Relationships at gr.admin@methodistchurch.org.uk



Birmingham was truly blessed receiving Ruda

"I felt part of something bigger, not alone in mission"



What opportunities does this story open up in your context?



A calling to

PREACH

No longer able to ignore God's voice, Christophe and Michaela follow their calling to become local preachers. Here they describe their journeys.

A calling to preach can be a troubling, challenging thing

Christophe Borysiewicz

It had always been there in my adult life, lurking in the background, occasionally popping up its head to remind me, before I firmly shut it back in its box and encased it in concrete again. It had never been responded to or reflected on, always avoided. A calling to preach can be a troubling, challenging thing.

And then, in my late 30s, a pilot started up for a new local preachers' course. A couple of friends who were both local preachers asked, "Why don't you try it?" Sometimes God can be very hard to avoid, however hard you try.

So I did the course and have spent the last five years responding to and reflecting on what I felt to be my call to be a local preacher. I had two big reasons for avoiding it so much – one was my fear of not being good enough in all sorts of ways – not knowing enough about the Bible, not being worthy enough, and not being good enough at speaking in public. I suspect similar fears lurk in many people's minds.

The other, though, was more personal. I did not want to be 'a preacher' – one of those preachy types, who is forever going on about God and the Bible. I was worried what the world and my friends and family would think. I didn't want to put my head above the parapet.

Responding to and reflecting on God's call is an essential part of the process. The course has challenged me in all sorts of ways, though it has also been massively stimulating, and at times, a joy, and a time of great growth in my faith. Responding to my call, and learning how to preach and how to engage a congregation with the message of God's love and grace have been a revelation.

Responding to a call that had spent 20 years buried, has also been a liberation. We all have our reasons for avoiding God's call, whether to preach or to do other things, but having finally responded, my only regret is not doing it earlier. I would urge others to explore all those insistent calls they are avoiding.



Michaela Barker

I hear it often from others – from the great prophets in the Bible to other preachers – God was calling them into ministry, and they did their best to ignore it. I am no different. I ignored my calling for so long. Throughout my life God was calling me, but, being something of a control freak, I kept finding excuses not to answer.

Eventually I was in what might be termed a metaphorical ‘Elijah’s cave’ where I began to hear God as the still, calm voice; and this time I knew I had to respond. I embarked on a journey which included the need to ask for forgiveness, practise ‘holy habits’ and get more involved in church life.

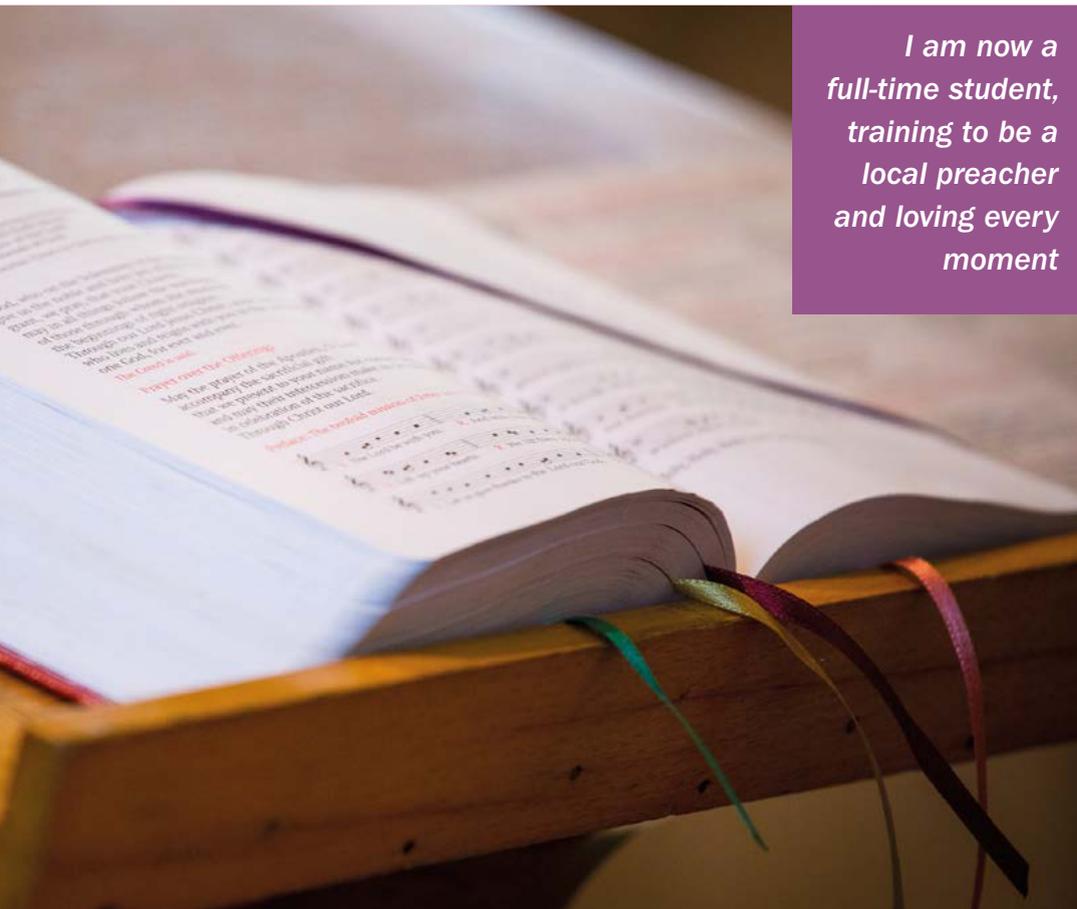
Once I had the courage to speak with others about this calling, I was delighted that they didn’t laugh and say “What, you?”

The next challenge was that I had no formal training and had never considered myself academic – my preferred learning style is experiential (learning through experience). With some trepidation I began a path of discernment, through the ‘Explore’ course online. Encouraged by a wonderful tutor and mentor (lately on Zoom) I soon felt at home, experiencing much joy as God

was revealed in new ways, and I gained confidence to share with others through preaching whatever God might wish to communicate.

As the pandemic hit, my working life was severely affected but I continued studying and found my digital skills much in demand, especially for online worship services in our circuit. I began to feel a powerful sense of belonging, growing in faith, supported by my family and church family.

Returning to work briefly, I discovered my passion had shifted to longing to spend more time with God and sharing God’s word. Despite my reservations about study, I enrolled at Cliff College for a degree in theology and ministry. I no longer try to control everything. At every stage of my journey God has opened doors, and placed the right people in my path, so I could gradually learn to lose my fears, trust more and follow my dreams – dreams I scarcely knew I had – without needing to know what the future holds. I am now a full-time student, training to be a local preacher and loving every moment.



I am now a full-time student, training to be a local preacher and loving every moment

Having finally responded, my only regret is not doing it earlier



Whom will you encourage to listen to God’s voice?



On being called, trained and formed

What's it like to have a calling to ordained ministry? Introduced by their Principal, students from The Queen's Foundation explain

Professor Clive Marsh

is the Principal at The Queen's Foundation. He writes:

I love my calling. I've known for over 35 years that it was to be helping others learn and explore. Through a variety of roles in different institutions and

settings I've been able to respond to that call and be a 'theological educator' (as the jargon has it).

I now find myself, in the midst of a pandemic, as the first lay Principal of The Queen's Foundation. It's tough stuff, but the thrill is the same, knowing what end-result is intended. We are supporting students and staff who have 'moved on', and are always moving on, in their learning and their discovery about themselves, God, churches, and the wider world. The theology they engage with interweaves with all of that, preparing them for different roles (ordained and lay). My work and life experience have made me realise there are all sorts of different people needed to do the tasks demanded of us as a team. Diversity is one of our key emphases. It's a great thing, but it's also very hard work. It demands patience, lots of listening, careful observation and honesty. It mixes together our social, denominational, theological and ethnic backgrounds, our personalities, our respective different abilities and all sorts of aspects of who we are as people. The richness of all this, though, is so deep and powerful that it's hard to describe, so it's better that three of our current students describe their calling to you.



I love my calling

Juliet Kisob

I was born into a Presbyterian Church family in Cameroon, and it was in secondary school there that I first sensed a calling for ordained ministry. However, things did not quite go as I hoped. There were no opportunities for women at the seminary. I went to university hoping that when I graduated, things might have changed, but they hadn't. I trained as a teacher and no longer pursued ordained ministry. I found other ways to serve God. Following a challenging period of widowhood, my late brother offered me the opportunity to study in the UK.

I had many dreams where I found myself in a harvest field, once feeling a divine presence speaking to me in a loud voice, saying, "You shall live." I cherished that moment but did not make a link with God's calling. I later completed a leadership training programme hoping to secure a job with a charity abroad. But I heard the same voice speaking strongly to me and directing me towards the Church. I spoke with my minister, also from Cameroon, and we prayed about it and I agreed to speak

to my superintendent. My church then discerned my calling and through prayer and encouragement revived, nurtured, and kept my calling alive.

Queen's has welcomed me and shown me the same hospitality, which I received from my sending church and circuit. Despite the times we are living in, the digital learning environment brings us together to learn and grow together. Being at Queen's is like looking into a mirror and learning to let go and let God's word challenge, nurture and shape me. Queen's is teaching me about the reality of the demands of ordained ministry and the blessed assurance that we are not alone on this journey. God is with us!



*Unprecedented
opportunities
to share
our faith*



What possibilities do these four testimonies open up in your imagination?

Helen Gardner

I'd describe my call to the Methodist Diaconal Order as a slow burn over a number of years; a gentle drum beat, which grew louder over time. I now thank God for the timing, as we are offered unprecedented opportunities to share our faith.

I am in year one of pre-ordination training on the Queen's Connexional Course pathway so I study part-time, over a long weekend once a month. I work as a Community Engagement and Mission Enabler for a circuit in beautiful Cornwall and I support my two adult children at university. I also offer help to friends and colleagues who've been plunged into home-schooling and devote any spare time to psychotherapeutic counselling for frontline workers during the pandemic.

One of the best things about studying part-time is that I am able to concentrate on all the God-given aspects of myself as I balance work, life, rest and re-creation. In the pandemic we spend so much time on our devices for work, school and to make essential contact with loved ones. We crave time offline and part of my diaconal calling is to spend time 'being' as well as 'doing'. Queen's provides an excellent online platform connecting us for learning and enabling us to 'be together'. We are also provided with an abundance of resources and reading to enable our independent learning. I have a tendency to procrastinate and the moors and sea are so tempting, so the regular cell group meetings, online coffee breaks and tutor meetings keep me accountable and in touch with fellow students. It is also wonderful to worship online with fellow students at Queen's chapel.



Does God really mean me?

Tiras Dainty-Share

It was with great hesitation that I finally answered God's calling, accepted God's purpose for my life, and began the process towards ordained ministry. There was, and continues to be, a sense of not knowing what lies ahead and uncertainty as I ask myself "Does God really mean me?"

As family and friends will concur, I have always been someone who likes to know every detail and plan ahead. This journey is different, but whenever doubts begin to creep in, I recall the words of Jeremiah 29:11: "For surely I know the plans I have for you says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for your harm, to give you a future with hope." These words have given me comfort and encouragement throughout the candidating process and continue to sustain me during my training.

Since moving to Queen's I have been able to immerse myself within its community. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, it hasn't yet been possible to experience Queen's in all its glory but I'm thankful that training has been able to continue online. It is a privilege to learn and live alongside others training for ordained ministry, from a variety of backgrounds and denominational and theological traditions. Although expectations have had to change, and Zoom has become my most used word, I continue to step out in faith and trust in the Lord, remembering the refrain: "Yesterday, today, for ever Jesus is the same; all may change, but Jesus never, glory to His name!"¹

¹ "Oh, how sweet the glorious message simple faith may claim" (Albert B Simpson, 1890)



Sharing in God's NEW CREATION

Following God's call is to share
in the recreation of the world, writes
the Revd Dr Jonathan R Hustler



I cannot now remember whether I wrote it or found it somewhere, but for many years I began meetings with a simple collect (and sometimes still do):

*Loving God,
We give you thanks and praise that you have
called us to your service.
Keep us always mindful of our calling
and grant that whatever we think or speak
or do
may be to your praise and glory. Amen.*

There is only one occasion that I can recall when someone has commented on it. "Do we have to thank God for calling us?" she asked.

Was I being insensitive to those for whom vocation seems a burden, who accept that God wants them to do the work in which they are engaged or to hold the office entrusted to them, but would rather be somewhere else?

It's a fair point. There are moments in most, if not all, vocational journeys when the disciple will struggle to find joy in what they are called to do and some will struggle more than others. I have rejoiced over the years with those who, after persuasion,

have taken on an office in their local church and subsequently found delight in it. However, I am also aware of those who have carried burdens they would rather lay down because (rightly or wrongly) they believed there was no one to take their place. There are those who initially resisted a call to a particular profession, recognising the cost to themselves or their loved ones, but went on to find fulfilment in their work. There are others who find periods of dry routine seem to become more and more common as the years pass.

A few years ago, I presided at Holy Communion on Easter Day. As I distributed the bread, I was suddenly struck by a powerful sense of being in exactly the right place at the right time. This is what I was called to be and to do. "To be created," wrote HA Williams¹, "is to be affirmed. Such affirmation of what we are is a major element in our experience of resurrection."

God in Christ is remaking creation and calls us to be a part of that work. To thank God for calling us is not about our particular delight or lack of delight in our vocation in that moment. Rather, it is to be struck by the sense of wonder at the privilege that is ours of sharing in the new creation.

*I was suddenly
struck by a
powerful sense
of being in
exactly the
right place*

¹ HA Williams, *True Resurrection* (London: Mitchell Beazley, 1972) p.53.

Postpandemic: what are our next steps?

As we emerge from the pandemic, *the connexion's* editor the Revd Dr David Perry, Mission Consultant in the Yorkshire North and East District, uses a photograph of stepping stones to reflect on a 'Kairos moment' – a Godly time of maximum opportunity for change to occur

As the restrictions of the Covid-19 pandemic begin to lift, it is clear the whole country is still coming to terms with a national trauma affecting every community. So many people are worn down, fatigued, low and struggling. Within the Church, all of this is true too. Looking at the photograph there is a strong sense amongst the grassroots of Methodism of just wanting to get back across the stepping stones to our buildings and to the craved-for normality they represent as soon as we possibly can.

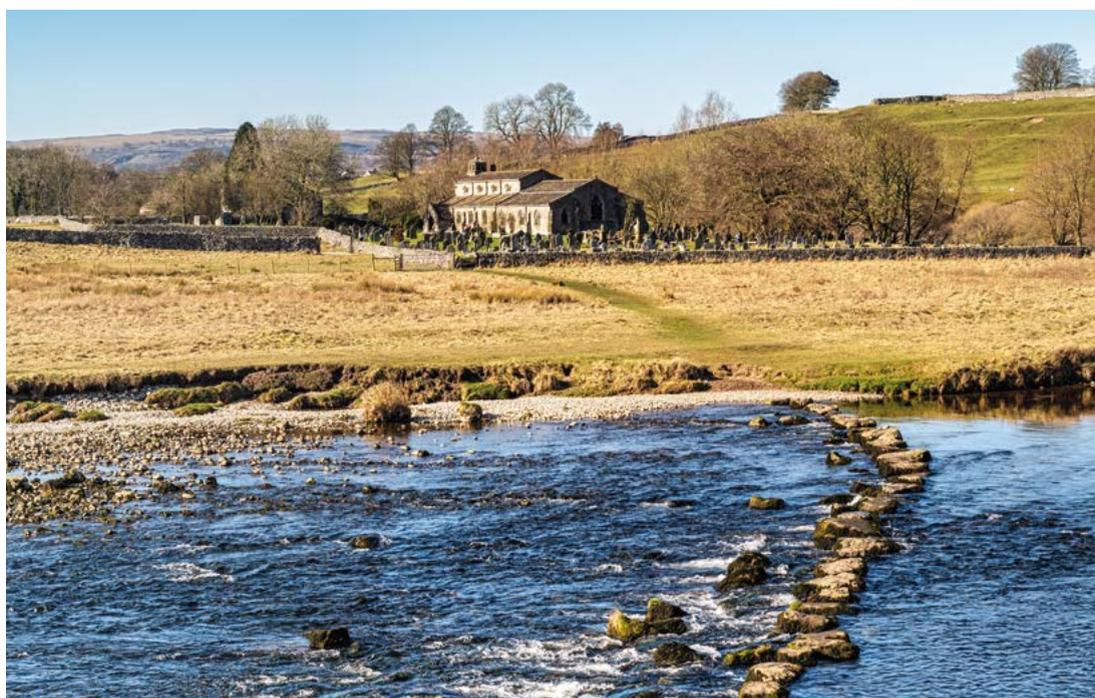
Of course we cannot take it for granted that everyone will be willing to return to how we used to do church before Covid-19. Absence may not make the heart grow fonder. Some will conclude that they are simply not going to put up with endless meetings or acts of worship that do not engage them. Having tasted freedom, they will look for better ways of living out their faith. So what new direction could we offer them?

Creating new places for new people

Many of us sense that church will never be the same again. We are in a Kairos period of accelerated transformation; of profound challenges to what was and of great opportunities for that which is yet to be. So while we return to the familiar, paths less travelled are also being opened up as a matter of urgency.

Taking the photograph of the stepping stones as a visual analogy for this challenge, we see some dwellings in the top right-hand corner, separated from the church by the width and depth of the river. Notice how we are on the same side as this community, the majority of whom decided long ago there was no earthly reason for them to cross over to the church. What if we decided to journey in their direction and connect with those who live and work there, engaging in fresh ways with the community we are called to serve?

Of course this is precisely what so many churches have been doing during the



As God's Easter people, which paths is God calling Methodism to follow in order to establish 'new places for new people'?

pandemic. As the usual round of church-based activities ground to a halt they reached out to their communities to meet profoundly pressing needs. The digital realm also opened up so many new and creative opportunities for making connections and keeping in touch. What if we established 'new places for new people' on this far bank?

Kairos moment at Easter

Thankfully Easter provides us with the defining example for Christians of a Kairos moment of upheaval and paradigm shift. What went before and that which came afterwards are radically different. For me the pivotal moment is found in St John's story of breakfast on the beach (John 21:4-13), where the risen Jesus enables the disciples to move from a despairing 'no fish' mentality to an 'every fish' passion.

After this encounter everything changes. From being fearful, the disciples become fearless. From being hidden away, they become visible and present in their communities. From being riddled with doubt, they become confident in God's presence and purpose.

Witness the story of Peter and John going to the Temple of all places in broad daylight and healing a lame person who was begging there (Acts 3:1-8), something unimaginable before Easter. This post-Pentecost chance

encounter becomes a missional setpiece as Peter says "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk."

What object lessons can we learn from these two disciples, which might shape our choices in our Kairos time?

- They have confidence in God
- They are proud and visible as followers of Jesus
- They believe Jesus can transform people's lives
- They instinctively put this belief into practice when they encounter someone in need
- They hold nothing back
- They are extravagantly generous and unexpectedly kind
- They show God's generosity and kindness are for everyone.

From the perspective of the lame beggar we see that God's intention and purpose exceeds our expectations.

So as God's Easter people, as we stand and choose in which direction we shall travel next, what do we have that we will willingly give to our communities in the name of Jesus? Might it be the courage and faith to be where they are, and together to seek fresh expressions of God's kindness and generosity there? Our next steps really matter.



Engaging in fresh ways with the community we are called to serve

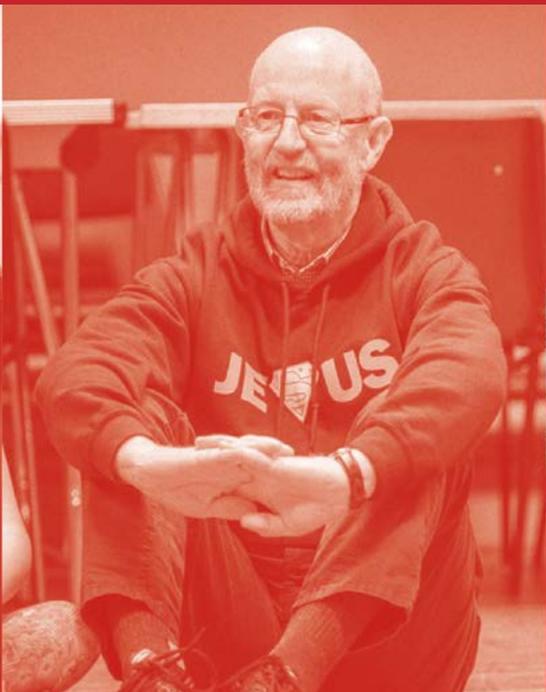


Easter provides the defining example for Christians of a Kairos moment

Sit still, in
the presence
of a caring
community, to
hear God's call

REFLECTION

on Love this Calling



In 1 Samuel 3, the boy Samuel heard his name being called as he slept in the Temple one night. It took a while for Eli, the Priest, to realise what was happening. He eventually recognised the boy was being called by God, and he was able to instruct Samuel how to respond. “Just say, ‘Speak Lord, for your servant is listening.’” (1 Samuel 3:9)

God's call to people is an invitation to become truly who they're meant to be. For this reason, we 'Love this Calling', because it's about becoming fully ourselves.

The name that is given to you at birth comes from somewhere deep within a parent or guardian and connects deep within the person you already are. Something says to a parent or guardian, “She looks like a Jessica” – or “He looks like a Daniel”. But even before you have emerged, God already knew you, and had formed a personality through which you would shine in this world.

No person is 'self-made', however, and we need to be surrounded by a loving community to fully realise ourselves.

Samuel needed other people: he needed Eli to help him receive God's call. The family and community into which we arrive, will hopefully be a nurturing environment to help us go on a journey of discovery, to become the person God made us to be.

The first thing that Samuel needed to do was simply to lie still and listen. We, too, need to become still and listen. *A Methodist Way of Life* is a discipling and contemplative resource that helps us in the presence of a caring community to sit still and hear God's call. It helps us to develop the regular spiritual habit of 'commitment'. Following the format of *Our Calling, A Methodist Way of Life* invites us to slow down for a moment – to breathe in and out – and make a commitment to God. We affirm: “**We will...** pray daily... worship regularly... listen for God...”

Each commitment is made collectively. We make them not simply as individuals, but with the support of our faith communities. Among the many tasks of the Church is to help every person to hear their unique

As we respond
to God's call,
we find God
is out there
ahead of us

The Revd Novette Headley is Superintendent of the Leicester West Circuit.



calling from God, and then to enable them to fulfill that calling. This could be through training and equipping or through signposting to other agencies, while at the same time holding that person within the community of care.

Growing up in the Methodist Church, I heard many sermons about God's life-changing call to different people, including Abraham and Sarah, Moses, Samuel, Jeremiah, Mary, and the disciples. I used to worry that God might call me to do something that was far beyond my capabilities. Could I be courageous enough, talented enough, and faithful enough? We recite those same apprehensions in our minds each year when we renew our Covenant with God. Yet the truth is, God will call us to do something that already fits with who we are – even if that vocation terrifies and stretches us. We 'Love this Calling' because even as it exposes our limitations, *in our weakness*, we discover God's strength.

We 'Love this Calling' because it is an imperative to learn, grow and discover more about our inexhaustible God. As we respond

to God's call, we find God is *out there* ahead of us. When Jonah eventually responded to God's assignment to go to Nineveh to warn the people about the consequences of their wickedness, he discovered they were more receptive to his message than he had anticipated. We may worry about launching out to introduce God to others – at the keep-fit class, in the school staffroom, on the hospital ward, or at the foodbank. But to our surprise, we find that we meet God among the very people to whom we thought we were introducing God's message. Can we identify familiar images and practices of Christ – hospitality, compassion, integrity – among the strangers we meet as we engage with our neighbourhood and community?

Our Calling implies that every person is needed; every person is a gift of God to the whole community. The God who *needs* nothing from us, still seeks to work in partnership with us for the healing of our world. This is what God was doing when he took on flesh in the form of Jesus of Nazareth. We participate in that work as we say 'Yes' to God's call.

God will call us to do something that already fits with who we are

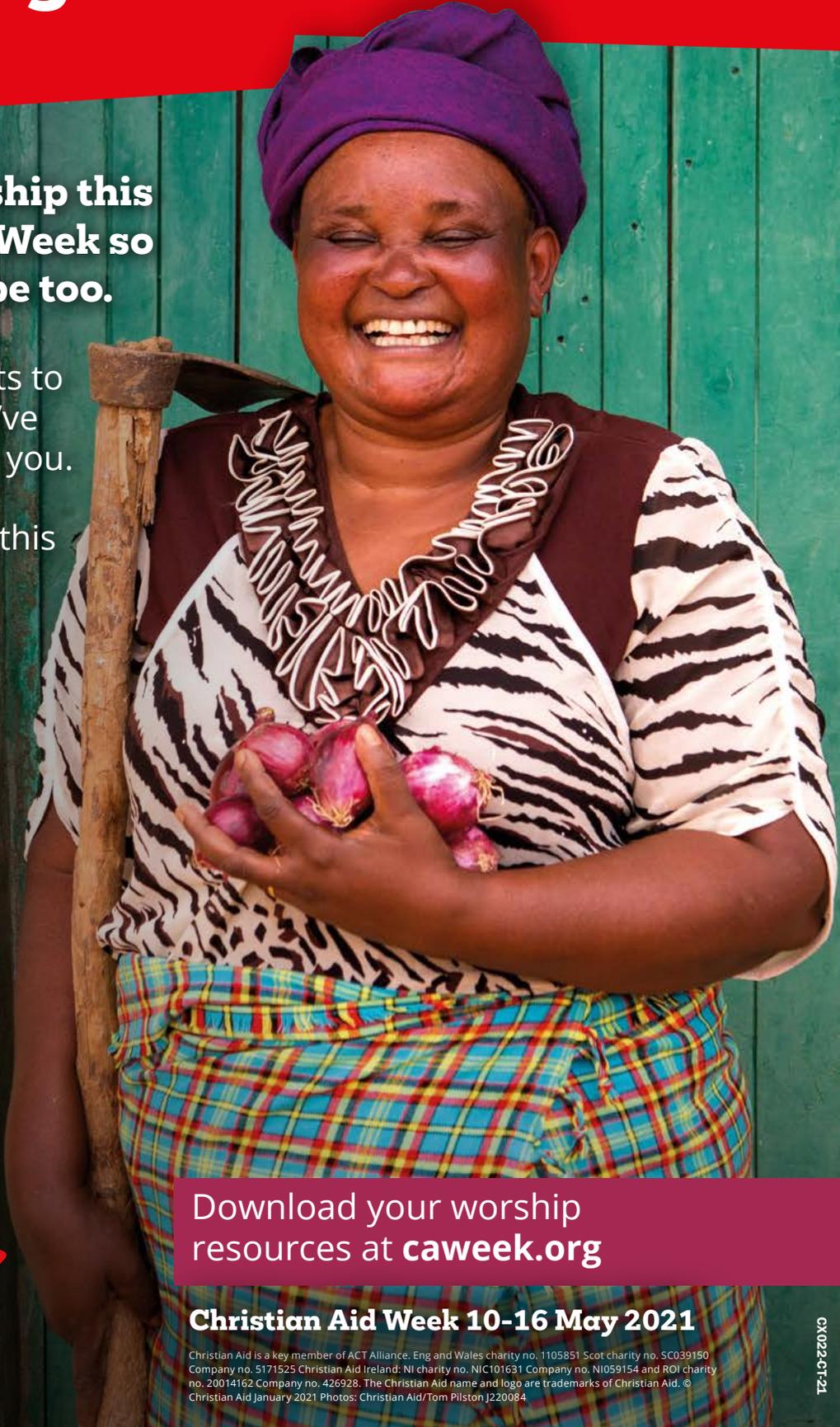
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