

THE connexion

Inspiring stories from the Methodist Church



WELCOMING EVERYONE

The Methodist Church



Welcome to this issue of *the connexion*. And welcome, too, to our new editor, Rachel Dalby. We are delighted that Rachel has joined the team and we look forward to *the connexion* going from strength to strength under her editorship.

Rachel is an experienced journalist, having trained and worked as a newspaper and magazine reporter, sub-editor and editor before moving into Christian media work ten years ago.

Her first experience of church was as a child attending a Methodist Sunday school with her friend in Nottingham. Rachel has since been part of several church communities as she and her family have moved round the East Midlands.

With a passion for environmental and social justice, Rachel promises to bring you inspiring stories from the frontline of Methodist local churches' work to share God's love and hope with their communities.

'Welcome' runs through this first issue under Rachel's watch. As I looked through the stories here, I was struck by how much justice and hospitality go together. We read of the welcome offered to asylum-seekers in Brighton and Hove, to Iranian migrants in Evesham, and to the new immigrants from Hong Kong in Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

Methodists offering a welcome in Brighton, Evesham and Newcastle continue a cherished tradition as Gary Best reminds us. Eighteenth-century Methodists lived in a time of significant population movement as changes in agricultural practices and the early industrial revolution transformed society in Britain. Among the many endeavours that Gary describes is the Strangers' Friend Society. It was a simple project – members subscribed to create a fund which would then be used to help those who (without family or friends) had no one else to assist them.

As the Joint Public Issues Team reminds us, the context in which we hear the call to be hospitable is one of increasing hostility to migrants and asylum-seekers. Each modern manifestation of the simple kindness of the Strangers' Friend Society challenges that hostility, and is (as Wesley described it) 'one of the fruits of Methodism'.

**The Revd Dr Jonathan R Hustler,
Secretary of the Conference.**

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 methodist.org.uk/theconnexion to change your order for *the connexion*, or to download the pdf.

Tell us what you think about this issue: theconnexioneditor@methodistchurch.org.uk

As each issue of *the connexion* is commissioned to a specific theme it is not possible to include unsolicited articles. Stories about local churches may feature in Methodist news and podcasts developed by Communications: mediaoffice@methodistchurch.org.uk

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Young people at Parkway Methodist Church in Bristol use street art to appeal for a kinder world (see pages 22-23)

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The Methodist Church

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Methodist projects granted more than £1m

Grants totalling more than £1m have been awarded to the Methodist Church by Benefact Trust, giving a huge boost to a range of significant Methodist projects. A grant of £500,000 will support projects that are part of 'A Methodist Way of Life' and £300,000 will support 3Generate, the Methodist Children and Youth Assembly.

Other grants from the Trust to the Church include £100,000 to support training courses for superintendents and ministers, with a further £200,000 for the supervision aspect of this work and £50,000 for the provision of online conferencing licences. Benefact Trust exists to make a positive and transformative difference to people's lives by funding, guiding and celebrating the work of churches and Christian charities.

The Revd Dr Jonathan R Hustler, Secretary of the Conference, thanked the Trust for its contribution, saying: "Once again, I am grateful to Benefact Trust for its generosity to the Methodist Church which has been transformative, helping us in a number of ways to continue to fulfil our calling."

New Methodist President and Vice-President inducted

The Revd Gill Newton and Deacon Kerry Scarlett, elected President and Vice-President of the Methodist Conference for the coming year, were due (at the time of going to press) to be inducted into their roles.

Gill is a life-long Methodist, raised in Cornwall, with experience of circuit ministry and has served as the Sheffield District Chair since 2014.

Kerry, from the Birmingham District, has a passion for justice and seeks to enable and amplify the voices of others.

Their presidential theme for the year ahead is Hidden Treasures, with the Church being encouraged to consider and pray about the challenges of following God when the path is unclear, and to celebrate the potential of the riches found where God is working.

Look out for articles by Gill and Kerry in the next issue of *the connexion*.

Hidden Treasures features in the 2023/2024 Methodist Prayer Handbook. Order your copy by phoning **0845 017 822**, or from methodistpublishing.org.uk



Baptism for small-boat refugees



They wanted baptism, but it was not safe in Iran.

One Sunday morning in February 2022, three Iranian asylum-seekers turned up at Evesham Methodist Church. Another five arrived the following week, then more followed. The Revd David Haslam provides a snapshot of the church's response, and of the asylum seekers' experiences.

Under the rule of the country's increasingly strict Islamic regime, people in Iran who are discovered to be Christians lose their jobs, are excluded from education, are harassed, and are likely to be arrested and prosecuted. In addition, Christian women face violent punishment and having their children taken away.

With this, along with our calling as Christians and as Methodists in mind, Evesham Methodist Church has welcomed our Iranian newcomers, being housed by the Home Office in a nearby hotel, with open arms.

Many of the asylum-seekers who have joined us were among the 45,755 people who braved the often treacherous weather and sea conditions to cross the English Channel in small boats last year.

Rani (not his real name) was among the first group of Iranian arrivals in our church. He told us about the group's fear of persecution in Iran due to them embracing Christianity. At home, they could only meet in small groups, and only if a phone call said it was safe. They wanted baptism, but it was not safe in Iran.

Bibles in Farsi

We immediately started running baptism classes for them. We sourced Farsi Bibles and started having our Bible readings in Farsi as well as English.

The church agreed that the newcomers were ready for baptism on Easter Sunday last year, and, after further preparation, they were confirmed at Pentecost. Our new members



were among our most regular attenders at services and Bible studies.

Before long, other Iranians living at the hotel came along for baptism and confirmation. They, too, spoke about their frightening journeys.

Birani (not her real name), who arrived at church with her daughter, told me: “Think about going on a trip but knowing that there’s no way back – it’s closed forever. You start the journey, but on the way thousands of thoughts come to your mind, what events are ahead of us? Every day that passes there is more time to think because the loneliness is absolute.

New challenges

“Now, think of arriving in a country you know nothing about – neither the culture, nor the language, nor anything else. Every day you face a new challenge.

“The hardest part was seeing my child crying every day and missing the things she had in her life back home – her bedroom, her toys, her friends. She asks me every day, ‘Mummy, when can I see my friends again? When can I see my grandparents again? When will we go back home?’ I have no answer. I just try to tell her everything will be alright.”

Suleiman (not his real name) was a farmer in Iran. He said: “I was in danger in Iran because of my Christian faith, and I had to leave without even saying goodbye to my family.

“It was my first time to travel abroad and I didn’t know any other language, so I didn’t know where I was or where they were taking me. When I arrived at a beach and got into a small boat in darkness and freezing cold, I didn’t really know where my destination was, but there was a light in my heart that gave me hope to overcome my fear.



“In total, my journey lasted almost two months. During this time there were many hardships – hunger, thirst, sleeplessness, thinking about my family. But one message from the Bible came into my mind and calmed me down – Jesus is like a light, and whoever follows him will not go into darkness.

“I am so thankful that I arrived finally in Evesham, and for the church’s welcome. I pray that God will keep my friends and family in Iran safe.”

Church family

All of the asylum-seekers who came through our doors quickly became part of the church family, and helped with moving furniture, making coffee and collecting hymn books. Some have been trained to erect our flood doors, which are so heavy that our ageing congregation can no longer handle them.

Alongside our spiritual care, Evesham’s Refugees Welcome Group is offering practical support, including basic English lessons.

Besides the Iranians, we have also welcomed refugees from other parts of the world over the past year. Some of them have children, so we have been able to restart our Sunday Club.



Every day you face a new challenge.

The Revd David Haslam MBE has been active on social justice issues all his ministry as a member of the Anti-Apartheid Movement, and as a founder member of the Dalit Solidarity Network and Church Action for Tax Justice. He has also been secretary of the Churches’ Commission for Racial Justice. He is a published author, and served in Coventry, Southampton and London before becoming a supernumerary minister in the South Worcestershire Circuit.



United against migration bill

A joint statement expressing opposition to the Government's new Illegal Migration Bill was issued in the spring by senior leaders from the Methodist Church, the United Reformed Church and the Baptist Union.

The statement, which has since gathered support from more than 1,500 church leaders in communities across the UK, reads:

"We are appalled by the proposals in the Government's Illegal Migration Bill to detain, punish and reject thousands of people seeking safety. They are completely incompatible with our Christian conviction that all human beings are made in the image of God, and are therefore inherently worthy of treatment which honours their dignity. Instead of dignity, these plans will foster discrimination and distrust, and cause immeasurable harm to people already made vulnerable by conflict and persecution. If ever there was a contemporary example of ignoring our neighbour and walking by on the other side, this is it.

When two in three people who cross the Channel to seek sanctuary in the UK are granted asylum following rigorous checks, it seems unthinkable to reject them before they have even had a chance to have their claim for asylum heard. Many people fleeing war and

persecution in countries such as Iraq, Iran, Syria, Eritrea and Sudan have been left with no safe and accessible routes to claim asylum in the UK, forcing people to make difficult and dangerous decisions. The UK falls far behind our global neighbours in welcoming people seeking sanctuary into our communities, and yet these plans essentially put a ban on claiming asylum and reject the UK's responsibility to play our part in responding to global inequalities and conflict.

We all agree that we cannot continue to see thousands of people risk their lives to reach safety in the UK, but the solution cannot be deterrence and punishment. As Christians, we believe that we should be among the first to welcome the stranger with open arms. We urge the Government to withdraw this legislation, to honour our moral and international obligations and to behave with compassion and fairness by establishing safe and accessible routes to enable the UK to play its part in welcoming people in need of safety."

Signed by

The Revd Fiona Bennett, URC General Assembly Moderator

The Revd Lynn Green, General Secretary of the Baptist Union

The Revd Graham Thompson, President of the Methodist Conference

Anthony Boateng, Vice-President of the Methodist Conference



Instead of dignity, these plans will foster discrimination and distrust.

What is the Illegal Migration Bill?

The Illegal Migration Bill is seen as the UK Government's response to migrant men, women and children crossing the English Channel in 'small boats' to come to the UK. However, the Bill's remit is much wider and is likely to affect the majority of people seeking safety in the UK.

If enshrined in law, the plans outlined in the Illegal Migration Bill will mean that anyone who arrives irregularly to the UK will have their claim for asylum automatically deemed 'inadmissible'. They could be detained indefinitely and returned to their own country or, if that's not possible, sent to a 'safe' third country.

Unveiled in March, the Bill cleared its final stages in the House of Commons by 289 votes to 230 in late April, and the House of Lords began debating it in May.

See jpit.uk/response-to-illegal-migration-bill for more information.



Cat Smith MP is the Labour Member of Parliament for Lancaster and Fleetwood and is an active Methodist.

Speaking truth to power

I am a Labour MP and a Methodist, and it is one of our core Christian values to show compassion to people in need and to protest at injustice.

The aptly named 'Illegal' Migration Bill has many flaws including its cost and unworkability. However, what I find most difficult to justify is its morality: it shows the Government abandoning its international obligations and turning its back on those in desperate situations.

There are many ways to act against this. As well as praying and speaking to others about it in your church and community, you can also contact your MP. Especially if your MP has voted in favour of the Bill, you can write to them, and even make a phone call to express your views.

If you send your MP a personal message and your address shows you live in their constituency, they will be less inclined to respond with a standard party message. The more letters and emails they get, the harder it becomes to ignore the idea that people really don't want this. If you get an unhelpful party line response, contact them again! It is our job to listen and to respond to your concerns.



Hospitality can overcome hate

Hazel Lee is an intern with The Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT) – a coalition of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Methodist Church in Britain and the United Reformed Church. Its statement on the introduction to parliament of the Illegal Migration Bill got over 1,500 signatures from church leaders. See jpit.uk/response-to-illegal-migration-bill



This golden thread of hospitality towards the outsider runs through the Bible.

It's difficult to switch on the news without seeing a tragic story of people risking their lives coming to the UK. How we respond is one of the most contentious and divisive issues of our time. The Government's policy towards asylum seekers, most recently seen in the Illegal Migration Bill, dehumanises and vilifies people who are seeking refuge in this country.

Again and again in the Bible we read of the importance of welcoming and loving the stranger:

"When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God."
(Leviticus 19:33-34, NRSVA)

And the importance of welcoming the stranger is reiterated in the New Testament:

"Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers."
(Romans 12:13, NRSVA)

This golden thread of hospitality towards the outsider runs through the Bible. We need to look no further: we are called to welcome the stranger into our communities with open arms, loving our neighbours who have come from far away as much as we love those who have always lived in our street. Many churches are already doing this and tell of dignity and hope, where those made vulnerable by conflict and persecution are now welcomed.

Hospitality has always been important in the Christian tradition. Jesus ate with the stranger and the outcast, welcoming all around the table. In the face of hostility towards people seeking asylum, we are called to 'build a bigger table'. By extending hospitality we can shine, offering a small light of welcome and hope in our communities.

Could you welcome asylum seekers and refugees? Why not invite asylum-seekers and members of your church and community to dinner, allowing them to share their stories as you share food.

We meet God when we meet with one another. In the face of hostility, there is real power in even the smallest acts of generosity and kindness; an opportunity to be light in the darkness.

Churches take migrant plan opposition to **Downing Street**

More than 1,500 signatures from church leaders “appalled” by the UK Government’s Illegal Migration Bill have been handed to 10 Downing Street.

The signatures from people across Britain were written alongside the joint opposition statement issued by the Methodist Church, the United Reformed Church and the Baptist Union.

Methodist Public Issues Team Leader, the Revd David Hardman, was among those who delivered the document that calls on the Government to withdraw the Bill, honour the nation’s moral and international obligations, and to behave with compassion and fairness.

The Revd Hardman said: “On a moral level, these proposals lack compassion and respect for people’s dignity. On a practical level, they fail to see that punishing people who cross the channel in small boats without offering alternative safe routes will only cause pain and increase the backlog of people who are stuck in unfit accommodation here in the UK.

Must do better

“Even while some MPs are pushing for further tightening of this cruel approach, we know that we can and must do better than this. We call on the Government to lead the way to change by creating and implementing new safe routes by which people can come to the UK to seek sanctuary.”

The Revd Ben Aldous, Principal Officer for Mission and Evangelism for Churches Together in England, added: “So many UK churches are already welcoming refugees and asylum seekers in their communities through language lessons, community cafes and much more. We want to see an asylum system that recognises the value that all people can bring to our communities when they are given the chance to integrate and



flourish. We urge the Government to work with communities to find better solutions for everyone.”

Pictured handing in the statement are (left to right) the Revd Steve Tinning – Public Issues Enabler for the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Revd David Hardman – Methodist Public Issues Team Leader, the Revd Tessa Henry Robinson – Moderator-Elect for the United Reformed Church, the Revd Dr Ben Aldous – Principal Officer for Mission and Evangelism for Churches Together in England, and Richard Reddie – Director for Justice and Inclusion for Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, and Coordinator for the Churches’ Refugee Network.



We want to see an asylum system that recognises the value that all people can bring to our communities.



I thank everyone who provides such opportunities for refugees.

Britain's first **Methodist Churches of Sanctuary**

Five churches that make up the Brighton and Hove Methodist Circuit have been recognised for their ongoing work with refugees. Michael Ivatt reports.

Lafa arrived in the UK in 2019, having fled the discrimination, persecution and violence towards Kurds that is a dimension of Syria's long-running civil war – one of the world's largest displacement crises.

As one of the estimated 5.5 million refugees who have left Syria during the past 12 years, she faced the daunting prospect of having to survive alone in a foreign country, unable to speak more than a few words of English.

Then, last year, she moved to Brighton with her then few-months-old son, Azad, and heard

about a parent and toddler group being run by Dorset Gardens Methodist Church.

Having already committed to do all they could for refugees as part of a pledge by the Brighton and Hove Methodist Circuit, the church welcomed Lafa and her son with open arms.

New friends

Lafa said: "I really like coming to the group because I have made new friends, and I can now speak some English words because I met friends who speak English. My child enjoys his

Michael Ivatt is the Methodist Church in Great Britain's Senior Media Officer.



Is your church interested in becoming a Church of Sanctuary for people fleeing violence and persecution?

See churchofsanctuary.org for more information about the recognition scheme, which evolved from the City of Sanctuary movement.

time a lot. I thank everyone who provides such opportunities for refugees.”

Making the parent and toddler group welcoming to everyone is just one of the many ways in which churches in the Brighton and Hove Circuit are striving to journey with refugees. In recognition of that work, they were recently awarded Church of Sanctuary status at a special service that took place at Dorset Gardens Church.

Hospitality

All five churches in the circuit – Dorset Gardens, Patcham, Stanford Avenue, Woodingdean and Hove – received the award, making them the first Methodist churches, and the first Methodist circuit, in Britain to achieve Sanctuary status.

The City of Sanctuary movement began in 2007, when Sheffield became the UK’s first ever City of Sanctuary. Since then, hundreds of local councils, schools, universities, libraries, theatres and more have been awarded Sanctuary status, pledging to create a culture

of solidarity, inclusivity and welcome. Brighton and Hove became a City of Sanctuary in 2015.

The Revd Andy Lowe, the circuit’s Superintendent Minister, said: “As individual churches, and as a circuit, we feel there is a gospel call for us to be places where welcome, hospitality and inclusion are the norm. Loving our neighbour whoever they are, wherever they come from, is central to our faith and must be at the heart of all we do. Receiving these certificates is a mark in an ongoing journey to live out that command to love.”

The founder of the City of Sanctuary movement, the Revd Dr Inderjit Bhogal, preached at the service to celebrate the awards. He said: “This recognition of the support that these churches offer migrants comes at an important time when our Government is making coming to the UK seeking sanctuary increasingly difficult.

Support

“Applying for asylum is not a crime, but criminalising people for even trying to get to a safe place is a crime against humanity. Detaining and deporting them without even considering their story and claim is immoral and unethical. Those who exploit already vulnerable people by making money from them are those committing the crime. Stop them, don’t stop the boats. The Government also should halt inhumane responses to a human catastrophe, and aid already vulnerable human beings.”

The five churches have all pledged their ongoing commitment to support refugees, inviting Lafa and many others in her situation to church services to share their stories and speak about their fears and their lives.

Church members have collected clothing for refugees living in hotels, while church buildings host refugee social events. Some members have offered accommodation to Ukrainian families, and others are helping with sourcing school uniforms and equipment for children. The churches have also been working with a local university to support students and their families arriving from countries including Afghanistan, Syria, Ukraine and Iran.



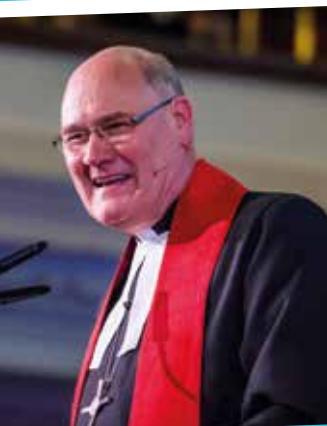
Applying for asylum is not a crime.

More details about the Brighton and Hove Methodist Circuit’s refugee work are available at brightonhovemethodistcircuit.org.uk/supporting-refugees

Reflection



We will challenge injustice!



The Revd Dr Roger Walton is a supernumerary presbyter who has served the British Methodist Church in Stourbridge, Liverpool South and St Albans Circuits and was Director of the Wesley Study Centre, Durham. In 2011–2019 he was Chair of the Yorkshire West District and in 2016/2017 President of the British Methodist Conference.

The call for us to challenge injustice as part of 'A Methodist Way of Life' is hard, reflects the Revd Dr Roger Walton, but all is possible when we act together and in God's grace.

'A Methodist Way of Life' (MWOL) has 12 commitments, including praying daily and challenging injustice, that help us respond to God's love in Christ.

The commitments are challenging. Praying daily, learning more about our faith, speaking about God with others – these are not easy. We can aspire to them, but they are hard to live out consistently every day. 'We challenge injustice' is a commitment we may find unsettling because it can be costly. It can take energy and courage to speak out against racist comments, protest at the hostile treatment of refugees, or make changes in our behaviour and ask others to do the same for the sake of the planet.

How do we embrace serious discipleship and not become so paralysed by the MWOL commitments that we are reluctant even to try them? There are three things I'd like you to notice.

First, they are prefaced with the words "as far as we are able, with God's help...". They are not something we do in our own strength but by

drawing on God's grace. We are joining God's mission and if we fall, fail, or miss the mark, God does not condemn us but is alongside, enabling us to go on participating. And at those times when 'we are not able' we are still part of the Church. When we can't pray, we are part of a Church that prays; when we can't physically get onto the street to protest, we are part of a Church that does.

Contribute

We can contribute in different ways. A woman I know is an indefatigable letter writer. She is housebound and her way of protesting is to write to MPs and local officials holding them to account.

Second, notice the use of the word 'we', rather than 'I': we are in this together. Yes, there will be times when an individual makes a stand, but the basic call to fight injustice is to the body of disciples, the Church. In the 'Walking with Micah' report to the 2023 Conference there is a story (see box) illustrating that everyone has a part to play in fighting injustice.



Protest against deportation

The Quaker Meeting House in Chelmsford is near the Crown Court. In 2018, 15 young people were charged with aviation security offences after breaching Stansted Airport's fence and locking themselves together around the front nose-wheel of an aircraft being prepared to deport 60 people to Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone. The protesters claimed that they were acting to prevent human rights abuses taking place.

Members of Quaker Meetings nearby supported the protesters' non-violent stance in opposition to mass deportations. Some Quakers provided accommodation to defendants and family members. Chelmsford Meeting House became a sanctuary and base for the defendants and their supporters, with Quakers providing food. Local Quakers, the defendants and some supporters held a Quaker Meeting for Worship on the evening before the trial started. Many Quakers attended the vigils held outside the courthouse at key points in the trial and brought food for the participants. Some Quakers offered spiritual and pastoral support to defendants and supporters. And on many days of the trial, Quakers sat conspicuously in the courtroom to show their solidarity with the defendants.

All of these people were involved in different ways – standing in solidarity, praying, making food – according to their personal gifts or preferences. All had a part to play. The Stansted 15 were acquitted on appeal, after the Court ruled that there was no case to answer.



It can take energy and courage to speak out against racist comments.

Finally, in *Our Calling* (the Methodist Church's guiding principles) challenging injustice comes under the heading 'Service', which also includes helping people, and social justice often grows out of social compassion. Some churches host 'welcome' meals for refugees in order to offer friendship and to discern the issues that they most need support with. In my local church, a couple set up a Ukrainian support group for those fleeing the war, which has helped hundreds of people settle into a new life. It

has also led to us being part of a cooperative sending supplies to Ukraine and has raised awareness that, in the UK, not all refugees are treated the same. Some refugees are met with hostility and prejudice and find their rights restricted. Social care on its own may not be enough. We also need social justice.

If you are new to Methodism, or would like to be reminded of the 12 commitments to living 'A Methodist Way of Life', visit methodist.org.uk/mwol/



Many of the arrivals have left behind treasured relatives, friends and colleagues.



Settlers gain freedom from fear

A Tyneside Chinese Methodist church that launched with 40 members in 2012 is now welcoming around 200 people to its Sunday services. Rachel Dalby hears from some of the members and their leaders.

The first half of this year has been very special for Newcastle Chinese Methodist Church. Since January, it has welcomed over 60 new members. And, for the first time, the church has issued bilingual membership cards – in English and Mandarin Chinese – to all members, regardless of their origins, to symbolise their unity.

Yet sadness permeates this story. Many of the arrivals have left behind treasured relatives, friends and colleagues in order to escape the more restrictive laws introduced in Hong Kong.

The church, which meets at Brunswick Methodist's central Newcastle site, has seen its influx as the result of the launch of the British National (Overseas) visa in 2021. So far issued to more than 150,000 people, the visa enables Hongkongers to live in Britain

for five years, after which they can apply to remain permanently.

Among the newcomers is Fung Tin, who, together with his wife, was desperate to leave behind his anxieties about the situation at home.

Problems with sleeping

He said: "During the Hong Kong Protests in 2019, my wife, who was a teacher, regularly had problems with sleeping. Back then we had made up our minds that this could not go on as it was affecting our family relationship. Then the BN(O) visa scheme was announced.

"On arriving in England, we felt lost. We worked hard on getting used to life here, taking small steps. There have been ups and downs, but I think we have gained more than we have lost."

Rachel Dalby is Editor of the *connexion*.

Two years ago, another newcomer, Jennifer, felt suffocated by the situation in Hong Kong. She said: "There were so many restrictions. There was a chance that we could relocate to another place and we felt Britain may be a good choice, so my family decided to come here."

"Here, I started from zero. I must rely on God for every step, so I find that my relationship with God has become much closer. I am so grateful for all the friends I have made in the [Newcastle] church, as we help each other. These friendships and blessings from God are bigger than my problems."

Worry about children

Another newcomer, Bun Gor, who used to serve in a Hong Kong church, left his job in construction to travel to England. He said: "I chose Newcastle because I have friends here – people who can help. And there seems to be less competition for jobs in Northern England than in the South." Now working for a local construction company, he hopes to serve at his new church once he has settled in.

Catherine is one of the many new church members who brought children with them. She said: "As people born and raised in Hong Kong, we were especially worried for the younger generation. The major reason why we decided to move to England was for our children and their education."

"Things haven't gone exactly as we'd planned, but I think it's given us a chance to learn to obey and trust in God's leading. Not once have we regretted or doubted our decision to move here."

Haven (16) said: "While I had many worries about moving here, it was less scary than I thought it would be, and I now feel safe."

Emotional trauma

Pastor Jacqueline Shuen leads Newcastle Chinese Methodist Church. She said: "Many of our brothers and sisters from Hong Kong carried emotional trauma and fear with them when they moved here."

"I expect myself, primarily, to be their companion – to walk with them; to live out the Methodist core values and beliefs to help them; to make them feel at home here."

Pastor Jacqueline is supported in the church's running by the Revd Paul Cleever-Thorpe, who is the Superintendent Minister of the Newcastle Central and East Methodist Circuit. He said: "This growth in membership has given us an even greater incentive to help our Chinese church to develop a new

leadership structure and to encourage and equip those of all ages in the church to use their gifts.

Equipping lay people

"The congregation draws upon the resources of the wider Methodist Church and offers all of us the opportunity to learn from how these fellowships are not only growing numerically but are also equipping lay people to step into leadership roles."

"In March, our Chinese church commissioned 11 new people to serve on their leadership team. What wouldn't your church give for an influx of such committed and talented people?"



Many of our brothers and sisters from Hong Kong carried emotional trauma and fear with them.

A video recorded by Newcastle Chinese Methodist Church that tells more of its story is available to watch at methodist.org.uk/HongKongToNewcastle/





A justice-seeking Church



Rachel Lampard has led the Walking with Micah project while on secondment from the Joint Public Issues Team, which brings together the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church to work for peace and justice.

Rachel was the Vice-President of the Methodist Conference in 2016/2017.

What does a just world look like? And what are we, as Methodists, called to do? A new framework to guide our action for justice has been shared at the Church's 2023 Conference. Rachel Lampard explains.

Two years ago, the 'Walking with Micah: Methodist Principles for Social Justice' project was launched to help the Church to focus on our principles and priorities for justice, and to increase our ability to seek God's justice.

Since then, many people have held Justice Conversations in their communities to reflect on what social justice means, and what contribution Methodists are called to make to a just world. Together, we have looked at what we can learn from our history, and we have dug deep into how our theology helps us in wrestling with doing justice.

This listening exercise has resulted in a new report – 'A Justice-seeking Church'. It provides a framework consisting of key principles, priorities and practices to support

the Church's action for justice over the next five years.

Methodists and Methodist churches are already acting locally, nationally and internationally to seek justice. 'A Justice-seeking Church' is, therefore, not a new programme. Instead, it offers a framework to help us to do three things: to be more confident in articulating the basis of our calling to act justly; to join together the strands of what we are doing to increase our effectiveness, and to align what we do with our understanding of God's love in the world.

Principles for justice

How do we anchor our understanding of God's justice in turbulent times? The report offers six principles that describe God's just

character and, therefore, what it means to seek justice. The principles do not tell us everything we need to think or know. Nor do they mean that we no longer need to think, pray, or confer with each other. Instead, they are a powerful expression of what keeps us rooted as we wrestle with injustice. They will help us to articulate our call to justice, both inside and beyond the Methodist Church, and support us in our discernment together, as we continually face new challenges.



Priorities for justice

What is ours to do when we can't do everything? The report identifies five priorities for justice to focus our efforts in order to achieve change. These bring together the need for justice with Methodist action, energy and story.

These priorities – poverty, climate, refugees, discrimination and peace – offer an opportunity to combine our action in local churches with campaigning, working alongside global partners, and praying and worshipping in order to increase opportunities and impact.

Practices for justice

How do we act in ways that enable sustainable, flourishing, transformative, actions for justice, and are rooted in God? The report encourages people to reflect on what we do and how we do it.

For some, doing justice may involve helping to meet people's immediate practical needs or contributing to longer-term change through campaigning. Others will be involved in building community power and relationships, using financial choices to achieve change, or using creativity to offer public hope or lament. All of these actions have a place in a justice-seeking Church.

We may, as individuals, have different strengths and preferences. Some actions may be more needed at particular times and places, but we should not focus on social action to the exclusion of other forms of social justice. We are each called to join in with God's kingdom plan, and, together, our acts become powerful.



Our practices are also about how we act. Do we sometimes assume that we know what needs to happen when we should, in fact, be asking the people who are experiencing injustice, and, indeed, be supporting them to act? The report suggests that we need to find more ways to be 'with' rather than 'for' people in our justice practices.

The future?

In the face of so many challenges, the future can seem overwhelming. Yet 'A Justice-seeking Church' offers a foundation as we discern what God is calling us to do. It gives us a vision for doing justice together as we continue to seek, in the words of the Bible, to "do justice, and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah, 6:8, NRSVue).

A film and a short guide about the report will be available in the autumn, and more resources to support churches and groups in engaging with the principles, priorities and practices for justice will be produced over the following months.



How do we anchor our understanding of God's justice in turbulent times?



How do we act in ways that enable sustainable, flourishing, transformative, actions for justice, and are rooted in God?

For the full 'A Justice-seeking Church' report, see methodist.org.uk/walking-with-micah/



In her early career, **Judy Rogers** worked in Western Samoa and Papua New Guinea with the Council for World Mission before living in Sumatra, Fiji and Tanzania through her husband's work. Married with three grown-up children, Judy is a member of St Andrew's URC and Methodist Church in Skipton.



Faith challenges hopelessness

With an estimated 100 million people globally forced to leave their homes last year, places of refuge have never been more vital. Judy Rogers glimpses life inside a refugee settlement.

Small houses with tin roofs started to come into view as we drove the final stretch of the dusty road towards the Osire camp. With Windhoek, Namibia's capital, 150 miles south, and the nearest town a 90-minute drive away, the feeling of remoteness was overwhelming.

Run by the United Nations Refugee Agency, the settlement hosts around 7,000 of the world's 32.5 million refugees. Most of its residents have fled the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). A few are from Zimbabwe, Rwanda, Burundi and other countries where, for various reasons, their lives were in danger.

While my placement host, the Revd Colin Gertze, brought our car to a halt at the gates, I realised that our visit was about to join up some dots in my own life. As someone who has worked with asylum seekers at home in North Yorkshire for 17 years, I had recently met a refugee who had journeyed from Namibia. I was about to briefly sample part of her life.

High level of cleanliness

We had permission from the Bishop of the Methodist Church in Namibia to visit Osire, so, after a few formalities, we were allowed through the gate to meet with three members

of the camp's Methodist church. Travelling towards the church, I was really struck by the high level of cleanliness and orderliness everywhere I looked. The camp felt very safe.

I was surprised that many of the houses, which were very small, had their own gardens. It felt just like any other village. Incredibly, there are 20 churches of various denominations in the camp. There is also a police station, clinic, tuck shop, hairdressers, tailor's and several schools and kindergartens.

Special moment

Walking into the Methodist church – a stone structure with a tin roof – was a very special moment (although it was incredibly hot inside!). The leaders and some of the 158 members had begun extending the building a while ago, but had to stop when they ran out of money. This has left part-built new walls about a metre outside the present structure.

Church services attract a huge congregation in comparison to the small building. Unfortunately, the members haven't received communion for two years as no ordained minister has been there to officiate due to the settlement's remoteness.

Boniface leads the church, which was established in 2007 by a group led by the



I was really struck by the high level of cleanliness and orderliness everywhere I looked.

Revd Kameya (who, himself, was a refugee living in the camp). Originally from the DRC, Boniface, his wife and children have lived at Osire for eight years. I was also introduced to Kobota, the church pianist and bass guitarist, and Silvano, the church steward. Like Boniface and his family, they fled the DRC to escape the pressures and dangers of what, at 25 years, has become one of the world's longest running conflicts.

The group talked with me about daily life. Most of the space inside the settlement is used to grow vegetables, and areas outside the perimeter are used for small-scale farming (including fish farming). Each family is given maize, beans, cooking oil, salt and sugar once a month. Sometimes, they are given wood or paraffin to cook with.

Christian faith

Boniface explained that it's practically impossible to move on from the camp. He said their only options were to either return home, which would be too dangerous, get a rare sponsorship from an employer to enable them to work in mainstream Namibian society, or get an even rarer opportunity to go to Europe as part of a foreign government scheme. The hopelessness of their situation cannot be overstated, yet the men talked a great deal about the hope that their Christian faith gives them.



The hopelessness of their situation cannot be overstated.

It was extremely hard to say goodbye at the end of our two hours together. I was acutely aware that, while I could drive away, and would later return to my life in the UK, my new friends and every other Osire resident would, tragically, continue to be stuck there – their lives on hold.



Judy visited Osire during a Methodist Church 'Encounter Worldwide' placement with the Methodist Church in Namibia. The Encounter programme offers Christians (aged 18 and over) in Britain and Ireland the opportunity to spend three to twelve months sharing in the Methodist Church's mission, life and culture in another part of the world. See methodist.org.uk/encounterworldwide/ for more information.



Wesleyan passion for social justice

As large swathes of the world's population continue to face social injustice, John Wesley's words resonate just as loudly today as in the 1700s, writes Gary Best.

John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, often described himself as 'God's steward to the poor' and saw the huge gap in society between rich and poor as fundamentally un-Christian. He urged his followers to be guided by the gospel message, which was governed by a desire for fairness and justice for all. His younger brother, Charles Wesley, reflected this in one of his hymns: "Jesus, I fain would find...thy yearning pity for mankind, thy burning charity".

At a time when hours of work were phenomenally high, John urged businessmen to earn their living without exploiting people and to give workers a living wage:

"How many are there in this Christian country that toil, and labour, and sweat... but struggle with weariness and hunger together? Is it not worse for one, after a hard day's labour, to come back to a poor, cold, dirty, uncomfortable lodging, and to find there not even the food which is needful to repair his wasted strength?"



John Wesley ran food banks, recycled clothing, created homes for the widowed.

Attending to the poor

Methodists were instructed to live moderately, spending their money only on "plain necessities.... [and] reasonable wants" so they could give generously to charity. John Wesley ran food banks, recycled clothing, created homes for the widowed and orphaned, offered

advice and help to those unable to afford medical care, regularly visited prisons, set up schools for those denied an education, and supported animal rights.

For John there was no such thing as 'the undeserving poor', hence his willingness to help people from all backgrounds, including foreign prisoners of war and, through the Stranger's Friend Society, migrants. Everyone was a child of God, even the ungrateful or the repulsive.

Charitable giving

He said, like the love of God, a person's charitable giving should "soar above all scanty bounds, embracing neighbours and strangers, friends and enemies; yea, not only the good and gentle, but also the forward, the evil, and the unthankful".

Money was important only for the good it could do. He told the wealthy "In seeking happiness from riches, you are only striving to drink out of empty cups. And let them be painted and gilded ever so finely, they are empty still."

People who thought giving money was enough made John wary. It was not a substitute for personal action and helping people first-hand. He created rotas for society members to visit the sick and dying and encouraged Methodists to join volunteer bodies that offered practical help to the poor and to visit prisons and campaign for penal reform.

Unfair taxes and slavery

John had a low opinion of most politicians. However, he did try to influence Government. He advocated increasing taxes on luxury goods and making significant cuts in military and naval expenditure so more could be spent more on domestic needs. He attacked the agricultural monopolies that artificially kept food prices high and tried hard to persuade the Government not to go to war with the American colonists.

Most famously, though, John constantly opposed slavery from the 1730s onwards. His 1774 *Thoughts upon Slavery* became the first widely read anti-slavery pamphlet in both Britain and America:

"Notwithstanding ten thousand laws, right is right and wrong is wrong. There must still remain an essential difference between justice and injustice, [between] cruelty and mercy ... You act the villain to enslave them ... Give liberty to whom liberty is due, that is, to every child of man, to every partaker of human nature ... Do with everyone else as you would he should do to you."



John constantly opposed slavery from the 1730s onwards.

At the heart of Wesley's social justice was his belief that everyone was a child of God and therefore had an intrinsic worth. A collier at Kingswood, Samuel Tippett, who had worked in mines since the age of nine, wrote this of the change that Methodism brought to his view of God and of himself:

"I know I am a poor, lost, self-condemned sinner, yet my Master [Jesus] loves me exceedingly ... Though I am poor, yet in Him I am rich. Though I am despised, yet in Him I am precious. Though I am black [with dirt] yet I am comely."

This change in self-perception and recognition of one's worth helps explain why Methodism became so important socially and politically in the 19th century and played such an important role in the development of the trade union movement and the Labour Party.

Methodists are always called within our communities to be, like Wesley, stewards to those in need and campaigners against prejudice, oppression and discrimination.

Gary Best taught history before serving as headmaster of Bath's Kingswood School for 21 years. A lay preacher for 50 years, he was also a volunteer lay warden for 10 years at the New Room in Bristol, responsible for creating its new museum and visitor centre. He is the author of 20 books, including many on Methodism such as *In Their Words* (2018), a much-praised account of early Methodism.



Putting the writing on the wall for a **better future**

A youth group is keen to send a message of hope to its community and the wider world.





and how peaceful the world could be.” At the centre is a woman, with her fist in the air, making a stand for social and environmental justice. Behind her, a banner that reads “Where there is faith there is hope” connects both halves of the pictorial story.

“I’m really happy to be taking part, though I feel a bit shy” says Eros (14). Saskia (13) adds: “I feel super-proud to be joining in. It’s an honour because this is a piece of art that will be part of our community for a long time.” The pair are from the youth group at Parkway Methodist Church in Bristol involved in painting the picture on the church’s wall.

They want their community to see that, while things seem really bad at the moment, there is hope for a brighter future, and that their hope comes from their faith in God. By including representations of themselves in the mural, in the form of their online gaming avatars, they seek to show that they, as young Christians, understand their own role in contributing to a more just society.

We are the future!

“As children, we are the future! It would be great to have more education about politics, economics and the law so that we can be equipped to make changes in the future,” says Saskia.

The minister at Parkway, the Revd Richard Sharples, came up with the idea of the mural as a way to help the church engage with residents in the St Werburgh’s community, an area of the city known for its street art.

“People in the youth group were really keen, and they went out and looked at the street art that was around them,” he says. “They contacted Silent Hobo – one of the artists whose work they liked most – and he agreed to work with them. Together they workshopped ideas before coming up with an overall design.”

Issues chosen by the group to be represented in the mural include racism, lack of respect for people’s gender identities, climate change and pollution.

Phebe (11) is particularly concerned about pollution in the world’s oceans. “The turtle on the mural represents the effect of plastic pollution on marine life,” she says.

Asked what he would like people’s reaction to the mural to be, Alex (14) says: “Help us to make our future better!”



Where there is faith there is hope.



Help us to make our future better!

Between their bursts of intensive work, the young people take it in turns to step back to check the quality of their section of the artwork. While they’re mainly spraying coloured paint within lines sketched onto the wall by their professional artist supervisor, it can be hard to see, close-up, if things are working out.

Bit by bit, through many hours of patience and determination, the 8 x 4 metre mural takes shape to reveal, on one half, the group’s interpretation of the most damaging things going on in today’s society. Debora (18) explains: “The other half of the picture represents how we want the future to look,



Challenging racial injustice

Bevan Powell is the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Advisor for the Methodist Church in Britain.

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the racist killing of Stephen Lawrence. Bevan Powell reflects on society's progress towards racial justice, and on the contribution that we, as Methodists, are called to make.

Stephen Lawrence, from a Methodist family background, was 18 when he was murdered in a racially motivated attack in 1993 in southeast London. Stephen Lawrence Day is held each year on April 22 – the date of Stephen's death – to remember his life and legacy.

This national day of commemoration is a chance to recommit ourselves to the fight for racial justice. For me, it's always a period to pause and reflect. I take time to assess societal progress in terms of race relations based on the lived experiences of myself and of those who look like me and share a similar cultural context.

For the Methodist Church, it's an opportunity to engage fully with our strategy for Justice, Dignity and Solidarity. It's an opportunity to consider how we might 'walk with Micah' and live the realities of being a justice-seeking Church. It's an opportunity for each of us to consider the role we might play in bringing about a truly inclusive Church.

Stephen's murder and the aftermath of a failed police investigation into his death deeply resonated within African and African Caribbean communities who sense they are over-policed and under-protected. These unhealed wounds continue to scar the landscape of race relations and race equality in Britain today.

Testimony

As a founding member of the National Black Police Association, and a serving member of the Metropolitan Police Service, I continually have Stephen's parents – Baroness Lawrence and Neville Lawrence – in my thoughts. I have worked closely with them, organising fundraising events and giving evidence to the McPherson Public Inquiry into Stephen's death.

During my testimony to the Inquiry, it was my Christian faith that empowered me with courage to provide evidence against a formidable, £3 billion-a-year Metropolitan Police Service. Added motivation came from

knowing that my two colleagues alongside me, Leroy Logan and Paul Wilson, shared the same strength of faith and a deep-rooted desire for change and justice. We outlined the Met's ineffectiveness in terms of race relations both internally and in the delivery of its services to the public, and, crucially, provided a definition of Institutional Racism.

The Stephen Lawrence Report led to a number of reforms within the Met and other public bodies. These led to a more proactive approach to investigating racist crimes, including the detection of hate crime. Family liaison officers, responsible for keeping victims' families informed about an investigation's progress and providing them with support, were introduced. Change also included a new system for reporting racist incidents, and a requirement for all officers to undergo diversity training. A range of measures aimed at increasing diversity was also implemented, including new career development opportunities for officers from underrepresented groups.

Challenges and change

The significant challenges and change undertaken by the Met at the time of the Inquiry, provides significant lessons for us as a Church as we continue our journey to becoming fully inclusive.

However, the recent Casey review into the Met which, sadly, highlighted failings that I thought had been resolved, demonstrates the dangers of complacency and the consequence of shifting our attention away from discrimination and inequality in our society.

As Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Advisor to the Methodist Church in Britain, I reflect not only on the life of Stephen, but also on

the continuing work of his mother, Baroness Lawrence – one of the most influential people in race equality in our country.

The Lawrences were catapulted into the public gaze, not through choice but through an unceasing desire to bring about justice for their son. As Methodists, we are called to challenge injustice and to see God in each person we encounter.



A prayer for Stephen Lawrence Day 2023, written by the Revd Nigel Cowgill, a Chair of the Methodist Church's London District, along

with a poem by Aaron Bent, who has performed at 3Generate, the Church's children's and youth assembly, can be found at methodist.org.uk/stephen-lawrence-day-2023



Churches Together in Britain and Ireland has brought together 14 leading Christian thinkers and theologians to discuss

the legacy of Stephen's killing, and the current state of race relations in Church and society in Britain and Ireland. Watch the videos of these inspiring discussions at ctbi.org.uk/stephen-lawrence-legacy-conversations/



These unhealed wounds continue to scar the landscape of race relations and race equality in Britain today.



As Methodists, we are called to challenge injustice and to see God in each person we encounter.

"Justice for Stephen is about all of us, every one of us, in society having justice. There are still too many young people who do not have a sense of hope, who just don't get the chance to live their dreams. I want all our children and young people to feel inspired, be confident and have hope in their own future. We are building hope but there is more to do."
Baroness Lawrence



Matthew Tattersall is
Director of Finance
and Resources for the
Methodist Church.

Financing Our Calling

As inflation bites and money is tight for everyone, have you wondered how the Church is doing financially? Matthew Tattersall gives a snapshot of the annual accounts for 2021/2022.



Global Relationships represents the largest area of our spending.

The Annual Trustees' Report and Accounts is an important document that details how Connexional funds have been used in the previous year. However, it takes great commitment to navigate the thousands of words and numbers contained in its near 100 pages. Behind all the numbers lie fascinating stories: donations and legacies given by our faithful members; the careful stewardship of our investments; and the expenditure incurred as the Church seeks to live out *Our Calling*.

As the summary of the accounts for 2021/2022 is laid before the Conference, it is appropriate to provide a brief summary of our financial position and to look ahead to next year's budget.

During 2021/2022, income rose by £16m to £56m. This was mainly due to an increase in donations to the Pension Reserve Fund; adding Y Care International into the accounts; additional legacies; improved investment income; and a gain from the sale of Methodist Church House.

Total expenditure during the period increased by over £7m to £47m. Of this, £41m was spent on direct charitable activities. The increase in expenditure was largely due to payments to the pension schemes and the inclusion of Y Care International in the accounts.

Spending on global causes

Global Relationships represents the largest area of our spending, reflecting the work we do with our Partner Churches and organisations across the global Methodist Church, along with the relief and development activities of All We Can (a Methodist charity) and Y Care International. During 2021/2022 our World Mission Fund supported a range of activities including providing solidarity grants to seven partners at times of crisis; offering assistance grants to 30 partners in need of essential support, and supporting five COP26 workers with

the 'Climate Justice for All' campaign as part of COP26 (the UN's annual climate change conference) in Glasgow. It also continued to fund Mission Partners across the world.

All We Can has responded to emergency situations across the globe including flooding in India and Pakistan; the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine; the cyclone in Malawi; and the earthquake in Haiti. It has also supported Rohingya and Syrian refugees.

Work in the UK

The Evangelism and Growth Team carries out work that is largely funded from the Connexional Priority and Mission in Britain Funds. During 2021/2022 the Team engaged with over 100 circuits through online or onsite meetings. Work was taken forward with each district to plan for new Christian communities (New Places for New People). The Team's work also included the sharing of the programme 'A Methodist Way of Life' which was well received at conferences and synods; establishing networks for advocates and practitioners of Church At The Margins; and growing the Rural Hope network.

As we look ahead to 2023/2024, the pressures on the Church's budget will continue to increase. In particular, inflation continues to cause fuel bills to rise; pay and stipends are increasing; and the income from the Assessment is planned to fall in real terms over the coming years. We face financial pressures right across the Church and we continue to look at how we can live within our means while still holding fast to the commitments in *Our Calling*.

Pension good news

One financial issue that has significantly improved over the past year is the position of the pension schemes. While the value of the pension investments has fallen, the pension liabilities have fallen by a greater amount, meaning the ministers' scheme is no longer in deficit. This has occurred due to the unprecedented and unforeseeable increase



Inflation continues to cause fuel bills to rise; pay and stipends are increasing.

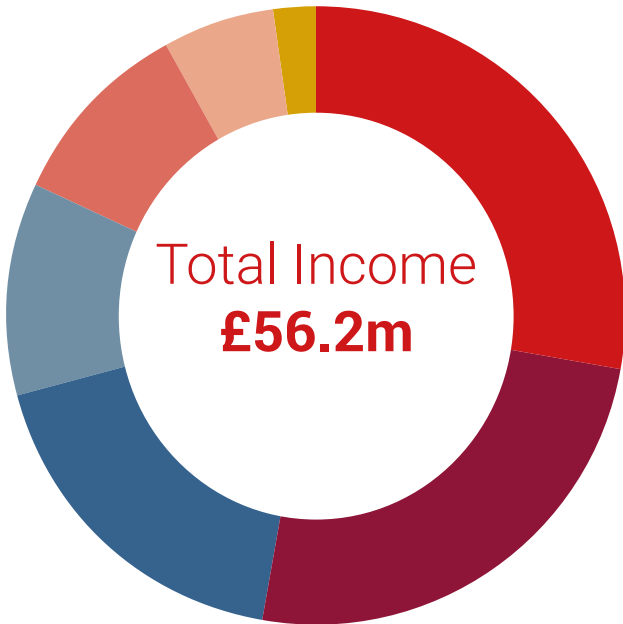
in interest rates that occurred following the invasion of Ukraine, compounded by the aftermath of the Government's fiscal statement in September 2022. As a result, the Conference will be considering proposals to suspend further payments into the Pension Reserve Fund. This will free up money for new missional activity and it will mean we can cancel the increase in circuit pension contribution rates for existing ministers that was due to take effect in September 2024. Should circumstances

allow over the next couple of years, we can even consider repayment of the funds so generously contributed in response to the Conference appeals in 2021.

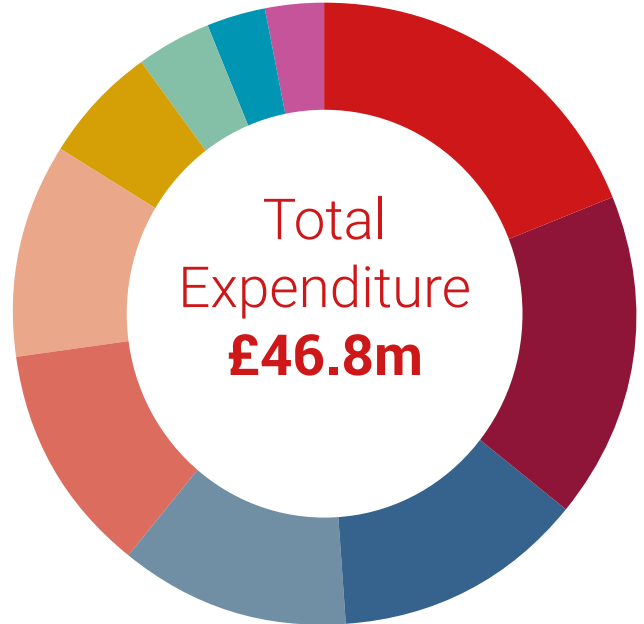
There are other financial positives to note as the Wesley Hotel Euston has returned to profitability following the pandemic, and another hotel has opened in the converted Camden Town Methodist Church in London. These will provide crucial funds over the coming years as other sources of funding become more constrained.



The Wesley Hotel Euston has returned to profitability following the pandemic.



- 28** % Donations and legacies
- 25** % Charitable activities
- 18** % Capital levies
- 11** % Investments
- 10** % Other trading activities
- 6** % Miscellaneous income
- 2** % Grants



- 19** % Global Relationships
- 17** % Ministries
- 13** % Evangelism and growth
- 12** % Trading entities
- 12** % Property
- 11** % Methodist Council and governance
- 6** % Learning network
- 4** % Building communities
- 3** % Children and youth
- 3** % Pension recovery plan

The full report is available at methodist.org.uk/trusteesreport

The future of Church finances

The Revd Tim Swindell says it's vital to engage with the finances that underpin the Church's work and to steward them efficiently so more people come to know God's love.



We are members of a Church that stewards enormous wealth.



I didn't set out with much of a vision when the Conference decided to elect me Connexional Treasurer eight years ago. I had more of a sense of imposter syndrome than an agenda, in all honesty. But I was determined to demonstrate that numbers aren't a mystery, or at least they shouldn't be. There is nothing intrinsically interesting about the note B-flat, unless it begins a symphony. Like individual musical notes, a number by itself means little, but put them together and they start to tell a story.

The stories behind the numbers matter. I'm thinking of activities enabled by spending; communities encouraged by projects we have funded; the accounts of evangelism, service, etc, built with hard work paid for by wages. I encourage you to try to understand the stories behind the numbers, otherwise you may never know what opportunities you have missed for sharing God's word, sharing your testimony, or enabling a community engagement.

Engaging with numbers

I am naturally a 'numbers person', but that doesn't exclude me from the worlds of words or music. I might not get much from a haiku or a sonnet, but I can appreciate Spike Milligan or a limerick. I'm not a musician, but I can still sing along heartily as only a Methodist can. We are not all numbers people, and despite what some of our politicians might wish to see, some will never be, but if we use that as an excuse *not to engage at all* with finances then we not only miss out, but we fail to understand the whole picture. If we don't participate, we allow others to determine the agenda. If we don't know what funds we have available and what we can afford, we rely on others to influence our priorities.

We are members of a Church that stewards enormous wealth. Few admit that they are the ones sitting on the wealth, and if we don't ask, we might not know that, maybe, it is us. Ask the simple questions and be persistent, until you get answers you understand.

Change, opportunities and new stories

The past eight years have seen huge changes in the life of our Church and for each of us individually. The next eight will see yet more change.

In our churches, the past three years have been devastating financially for many congregations. Covid-19 wreaked havoc on individuals and communities. And yet, nationally, our 'savings

accounts', the money and investments held by the Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes (TMCP) and the Central Finance Board (CFB) have remained largely the same. I know that, for many, this doesn't accord with your local experience, but the total amount our local churches have in reserve has not diminished.

Why is this? Is 'the centre' holding huge reserves? No! The policy I have been pursuing, along with the Connexional Team, has been to steadily reduce reserves and the plan is to continue to do so. There are reserves, but they are being reduced to no more than is necessary to continue planned operations. Connexional grants have been reduced as reserves have been steadily spent.

Nationally, we have been grateful to see that a key risk that I inherited, our pension fund deficit, has all but disappeared because of complex movements in the financial markets over the past year. This may give us an opportunity to redirect some funds to new purposes.

Locally, the picture is very mixed. There are a few churches and circuits holding very significant reserves that will last them many years. Most, however, are worried about how they will continue to pay the Assessment and maintain their properties.

The future

Financially, we face a future with even fewer people holding on to even larger sums of money as our properties are sold. If we, as Methodists, are going to move beyond where we currently are, and find a new story for our Church, we need to think more radically and generously. We need to discover where we can use our finances for new purposes in the wider communities where we live. We need to create new stories and projects that bring people to know God's love and to know that they are welcome. We have to tell our communities that there is room for them, and that 'A Methodist Way of Life', following Jesus, is a way to new life. We may then even find that these new people become disciples and write new stories for our Church.



We need to discover where we can use our finances for new purposes.



The Revd Tim Swindell is a Methodist presbyter and a chartered accountant. He has served as Connexional Treasurer since 2015. He also led the commercial team at Central Hall Westminster, worked as a director and trustee of several Methodist enterprises, and served as a school governor for over 18 years. As he moves on from being Connexional Treasurer this summer, he becomes a council member at the Central Finance Board, and a director of Epworth Investments, and looks forward to engaging in a different way with Methodist finances.



Delicious homemade cake and offer of a friendly chat mean that all kinds of people come in through our doors.



Serving up 15 years of inclusivity

In September, Haxby and Wigginton Methodist Church will celebrate 15 years of sharing God's love with the people who use their coffee shop. Martyn Holman explains how a low-cost (and sometimes free!) cuppa and a slice of cake can promote social justice.



Martyn Holman is a member of Aroma's management group and Haxby and Wigginton Methodist Church's finance group. In the past, he has served as a Methodist circuit steward in York and Hertfordshire.

Sunday afternoons at our Aroma coffee shop are well known in our town. When most other places are closed, and people's loneliness may be at its peak, those who most need us know that there's a warm and friendly welcome at our place.

With donations by church members covering the costs of our Sunday afternoons' cuppa and cake, customers dropping in at this time don't need to worry if they're a bit short that week. Our love – God's love – has it covered.

On the other six days of the week, our deliberately low prices, delicious homemade cakes and offer of a friendly chat mean that all kinds of people come through our doors. And our 'one behind the counter' scheme, enabling customers to buy a drink for someone who needs it in the future, means that nobody is left out.

Aroma was established in the centre of the small town of Haxby, just to the north of York, in 2008 when the church council and the North York Circuit (as it was then) recognised there was no coffee shop in the town.

Opportunity

This was a fantastic opportunity to take the church into the community in an accessible and inclusive way. It was a crucial ambition from the start that we would offer a place of welcome and friendship to everyone, irrespective of their background or circumstances, including those living alone.

I'm pleased to say that we quickly established ourselves as a focal point for people who live on their own, those who wish to talk with our team, and those who simply want to spend time in a warm comfortable

space (especially during the past winter, when many customers struggled to afford to heat their homes).

As coffee shop manager Mel Gray explains: "Wherever possible we take time to give our customers whatever support they need at that particular moment. Sometimes, that can be a simple thing like helping them to figure out something on their mobile phone. Other times, customers may be going through a serious problem, so we listen and, if it's appropriate, suggest places where they may get professional help.

Treated like friends

"We have several customers who have struggled with ill health and have come to Aroma on their 'good' and 'bad' days. One customer came straight to the coffee shop to tell us when they heard that they were cancer-free. They wanted to celebrate with us, so that made us all realise how much our friendly chat and listening ear had meant to them.

"The bottom line is that every customer, whether we know them or not, is treated like a friend, and I think people really appreciate that in the busy world we're living in."

We rely heavily on volunteers, and it's become increasingly clear over the years that they get as much pleasure from being at the coffee shop as our customers do. Some vulnerable adults volunteer with us, and their time at Aroma is so important for them.

One of them, who volunteers four times a week, recently told me: "If I know I have to be at Aroma it forces me to get dressed and out of the house." The relationships she has built with the coffee shop team are a huge support to her. Another volunteer said that having a laugh with the team was the best 'medicine' for her.

Wider impact

We also have volunteers who do placements with us in order to build their skills and experience to help boost their job prospects. For them, their time at Aroma is a real leg-up in their life.

Outside normal coffee shop hours, the premises are available for use by local community groups, such as craft clubs.

The running of Aroma is overseen by a management group, of which I'm a member. Any surplus profits are donated to local community projects and initiatives via the



We take time to give our customers whatever support they need.

Aroma Community Fund, controlled by the church. This means that the impact of Aroma on our town is much wider than the coffee shop's effect on our customers.

We're very grateful to God for enabling us to make such a huge impact on our community over the past 15 years, and we look forward to many more years to come.

Methodist Ministers' Housing Society



MMHS mark
75 years of
providing homes
for retired
ministers



Local preacher, great-grandmother
and former War Office worker
Barbara is 102 this year



Jenny and Trevor are shining –
because it's their Diamond Wedding
this year



Iris has completed 40 years
as a Puppy Raiser for the
Guide Dogs charity



Folk musicians Les and Di have
much to sing about – including 50
years of marriage



Lynn and Mannie have made their
home with us for eight years

Celebrate with us

www.mmhs.org.uk/75th