

Issue 13 • Winter 2019

The **Methodist** Church 

the
connexion



Journeying



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



David Perry
Editor

The theme of this issue of *the connexion* is Journeying, which at this time of year carries with it all the gravitas of a defining theological imperative. I say this because the season of Christmas and Epiphany is the rich story of journeys made, of divine and human moving in and moving on, of faith being energised to action by ancient promises, prophetic clarity and the gathering momentum of hope.

Having journeyed through the wonder, mystery and intimacy of the Word made flesh, and been moved like the Magi to find out the truth for ourselves, we are now led to the baptism of Jesus and the beginning of his public ministry. The journey of 'God with us' takes us from the most profound revelation of divine solidarity in Bethlehem, to the warm embodied breath of that glory standing amongst and alongside the searching mass of humanity at the river Jordan.

The narrative impetus of the Christian year in January gathers us up into this flow. It bids us journey ever deeper into God's journey with us. This movement is one of heart, mind and feet, reflecting the collective name given to the early Christians: 'the Way'. We are followers of Jesus, not static, moribund spectators of Christian tradition, because the One who stands amongst us calls us to journey together in the ongoing narrative of liberation for all, ourselves included.

All of the contributions in issue 13 reflect this dynamic. Not surprisingly the rich pattern that emerges is encouraging and inspiring, thought-provoking and profoundly challenging, just like the biblical story itself. One way or another, we are all on the move.

Love and peace,
David

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Evangelism on every agenda

To strengthen Our Calling, the new Discipleship and Evangelism Cluster is supporting evangelism in churches, circuits, and districts throughout the Connexion. Trey Hall, Director of Evangelism and Growth, said: “As people across the theological spectrum find authentic ways to share the good news, we increase our confidence and capacity to make new, deeper followers of Jesus.”

To kick-start this, early in 2019 every circuit will receive free copies of the *Talking Jesus* course. Along with *Talking of God Together*, sent to every circuit in autumn 2018, *Talking Jesus* helps people to share their faith in practical ways.

Supporting *Our Calling* district experiments

The Methodist Church is match funding a limited number of district projects committed to evangelism and launching ‘new places for new people’. These pioneer projects, church plants, missional communities and fresh expressions centre on people unaffiliated to the Church. For example, Yorkshire North and East will start a ‘Pioneer Nursery’ to support new projects. Manchester and Stockport will appoint a part-time church planting officer to equip leaders for the multiplication of new churches. Birmingham, Sheffield, and Newcastle will all expand their missional objectives to start new expressions of church.

Susanna Wesley #susanna350

This January marks the 350th anniversary of the birth of Susanna Wesley, “the mother of Methodism”. Famous for her sons John and Charles, Susanna deserves recognition in her own right as a writer, theologian and teacher. To commemorate Susanna, a new collection of her writings will be published this Spring, while many events are planned throughout the year.

www.methodistheritage.org.uk

Longer Tables, Lower Fences

The Methodist Women in Britain’s Easter Offering 2019 dedication service ‘Longer tables, lower fences’, features stories of shared hospitality across the world.

The worship encourages us to consider how we might build longer tables, rather than higher fences, as we share whatever we have and connect with our neighbours.

www.methodist.org.uk/easteroffering



GOD calls us to journey

*All journeys
require an act
of faith*

**Regional Learning and Development Officer for the North West and
Mann Region, Simon Sutcliffe, sees journeys as adventurous and
dangerous acts of faith**

In most cases I love to go on a journey; the thrill of discovering something or somewhere new, the joy of arriving at my destination. I particularly love walking in the hills and spending time outdoors. The delight I experience on reaching a summit of a new mountain makes the arduous journey worthwhile. Of course, not all journeys are enjoyable. Walking home in the rain after a busy day at work because the car has broken down might not fill you with the same pleasure as an energising ramble in the Yorkshire Dales!

Faith

I do want to suggest, though, that all journeys have at least one thing in common; they always require an act of faith. In Ian

Adams' beautiful little book *Cave, Refectory, Road* (Canterbury Press, 2010) he identifies "the road" – the place of journey – as a space that is both adventurous and dangerous. To journey is an activity that takes you beyond the stability of now into an unknown. No journey is ever identical – so even if you make the same journey every day, there will be different features to it.

I often wonder if Moses' dilemma at the burning bush (Exodus 3) was not simply a lack of self-confidence, but a lack of faith that periodically returned to the Israelites throughout the Exodus. Moses was called to lead the Israelites out of an oppressive present into an unknown future and all he had to rely on was the voice of a divine being who claimed to be the God of his ancestors. Moses, utterly unprepared for





Journey into an unknown future



How strong is your trust in God? Why?

the task before him, was asked if he could trust God (who has been faithful in the past) to hold out a future for him and his whole community. When a people accept God's call to journey, they place their trust in God who, through Jesus, not only has promised to be with them in the here and now, but "to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20 NRSV). This is a God who holds out a future before us, however unknown and unpredictable it might be and it is because we can place our faith in a future held by God, that we have hope. To go on a journey is a hope-filled act of faith.

Trust

There is a striking story in Luke's Gospel where this act of faith is given a practical outworking. Jesus sends the 70 disciples "ahead of him ... to every town and place he himself intended to go" (Luke 10:1, NRSV). Notice how Jesus does not go with them or ahead of them, instead they are asked to go on a journey trusting the instructions that Jesus has given. More than that, they are told not to take any supplies with them, no emergency rations, no safety net in case the journey turns out badly for them. They simply have to trust that somehow, whatever this journey has in store for them, it is held within the economy of God.

I find it interesting that these early disciples were not to take anything with them, it meant that they could only survive for a short time before they needed the support and hospitality of others. It reminds me that the route of the word *journey* comes from the Latin and French for *day* or *daily*. Perhaps when Jesus taught us how to pray "give us this day our daily bread"

(Matthew 6:11 NRSV), he was hinting at the same act of faith required by the 70 disciples. Perhaps, in the desert when God commanded the Israelites to only "gather enough [bread] for that day" in Exodus 16 there was a hint of the faith required by Moses to begin this journey in the first place. Perhaps, it is deep within our narrative to trust in a God who calls us to journey into an unknown future, concerning ourselves only with what is needed for today and having hope in a yet-to-come held by God.

I started by telling you about my joy of walking in the mountains. Over the years I've learnt to carry as little as possible in order to make my pack light and manageable. If God is calling the Church to journey out, maybe we have to learn to do something similar and then simply trust in the God who calls.



I've learnt to carry as little as possible

Evangelism as journeying 'with'

The Revd Stephen Lindridge, Chair of Newcastle Upon Tyne District, stresses the centrality of our prayer and day-to-day witness for evangelism

It is November 2018 and young people at 3Generate, the Methodist Youth Gathering in Southport, receive hundreds of letters. Each letter passes on something of the writer's journey in faith to every young person who receives it.

The journey that unites us

The letters were all so different: some detailed what triggered the connection between the writer and God, others noted how they began to think about God, and many talked about what they overcame in their life and how Jesus brought freedom and transformation.

There was, however, one significant, common element. That common element echoes through all the letters written to 3Generate and through every story of faith I have ever heard. It will come as no surprise that a sense of journey is something that unites us as followers of Jesus.

Not just the moment of decision

When we think of evangelism, we would be foolish to consider only the moment of decision. One of the contributing factors to anyone's journey is undoubtedly the accompanying prayer, often offered by anonymous souls who dedicate themselves to pray for others, maybe for many years.

This praying is an essential part of the journey travelled, and perhaps the transformation that occurs in an individual's life is the result of this kind of persistent prayer.

Do we try to hurry God up on the journey? At times we may find it hard to trust God when we question why a journey to faith seems to take such an incredibly long time for some people. Yet allowing God to do what God does best in our lives, little by little, is too often taken for granted.

Intentional grace

The gospel of Christ knows of no religion, but social; no holiness but social holiness.

John Wesley, *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1739), Preface, page viii.

Holding intentional grace for someone's life is the social holiness we long for. As unique individuals, we all experience God in unique ways, whether that be an encounter with Christ through cognitive belief, or the godly behaviour of a friend, or the spiritual experience of something we cannot explain.

I guess many of us don't think we are well skilled in evangelism but it is very often more straightforward than we imagine. It is rarely a clever argument or an amazing bit of street preaching that makes someone sit up





Dear friends,

God speaks to each of us in very different ways, and that's OK.

Let God speak to you in your talents in your gifts and in what you can uniquely do.

You are perfect in God's eyes so don't let the world change you from who you are.

Love, Laugh and be hopeful about the future for God is with you.

No matter what the world may say God says I Love You, so love God and all who you meet.

One of the many 'letters of faith' passed on to a young person at 3Generate

and take notice of Jesus. The Talking Jesus research (<http://talkingjesus.org>) tells us that most people say it's you... an ordinary person, as a family member or friend, journeying in life with them; the choices you make, the kindness you show, the prayers that you offer, the lived-out faith that you graciously display.

So many people today are more open for conversations on what you think and know about Jesus, than at any other time in recent history. If you are able to share with honesty and respect, many of our friends will want to know more. Who is this Jesus who loves you? Will he love me too? This is apt evangelism and this is an essential part of our own journey as we follow Christ.

The road is long

If we perceive evangelism like a journey, as opposed to an event, then we can see that our opportunities to both share and demonstrate faith are present every day. It also reminds us that a person's response

Evangelism is more straightforward than we imagine

one day is not necessarily a static response for all time.

"If people were interested in faith then surely they would ask us," you might think. This is a common, false presumption made by many Christians today. What if our friends are actually thinking the opposite? "If they wanted to tell us about their faith or invite us to church then surely they would have done so. Maybe they don't want us to come along."

People in our Western culture often find faith in Jesus through a Christian friend or family member who has journeyed with them for some time. To quote an old song from The Hollies, "The road is long with many a winding turn." We rest in the assurance that the Spirit of God is our ever-present companion on that journey and we are confident of the final destination.



Is all journeying pilgrimage?



Jill Baker, Past Vice-President of the Methodist Conference in 2017/2018 and a former President of Methodist Women in Britain, offers her definition of pilgrimage

The question posed by the title is a difficult one to answer. Whatever pilgrimage is (and it has been many things to me, including a lifeline) it is not an exact science. My definition of pilgrimage develops constantly, but generally includes the five features explored below.

Intentionality

The decision to go deeper with God, whether by making a physical journey or through an inner quest, can come about in many ways. I like to use the word 'restless' here; not as Augustine used it, but positively: a God-given restlessness which compels us to move out of whatever rut we find

ourselves in and discover a God who is bigger and wilder than we may have realised. A faith journey needs intentionality; it is a daily, hourly, step-by-step choice to keep going. Sometimes that's relatively easy, sometimes it's hugely demanding. So pilgrimage is, generally, more than wandering... but it can start out as wandering. Journeys undertaken with no meaningful purpose can become pilgrimages, perhaps through an exciting discovery on a path which seemed routine – a bit like Moses' discovery of the burning bush.

Leaving things behind

How do you pack for a journey? How do we prioritise what baggage we take with us into the next lap of life? How does the Church, at local or national level, discern what to keep from the past and what to throw out of the backpack because it is making our journey painful or slow?

Departure can feel like a challenge, but it can also be a liberation. Only when we travel without something for a while can we be freed from its unconscious tyranny; whether a hairdryer or a heresy, too many clothes or too many rituals.

Liminality

Coming from the Latin word for a threshold, the word liminality expresses the idea of 'living in between', a hallmark of pilgrimage. The pilgrim leaves what is known to



travel towards a destination which will be welcoming and safe, but the journey itself is a time of transition where anything might happen.

“For we have here no lasting city, but we are looking for the city which is to come” says the writer to the Hebrews (13:14, NRSV), and that sums it up for me. The American theological ethicist Richard Niebuhr says something similar, defining pilgrims as “persons in motion, passing through territories not their own ... seeking another shore, a shore that will complete us...” Crossing the Pilgrim Path to the Holy Island of Lindisfarne (photos left) is a liminal experience where the physical ambiguity of a walk which is neither on land nor on sea reinforces the sense of crossing between worlds – it can feel vulnerable.

Sacred centre

It is perhaps this liminality, this vulnerability, which makes the pilgrim open to some sort of encounter with the divine, perhaps the single most defining feature of Christian pilgrimage. That is not to suggest that a pilgrimage is a kind of bear-hunt to track God down – far from it. Post-Reformation Protestant opposition to pilgrimage was made partly on the grounds that God is



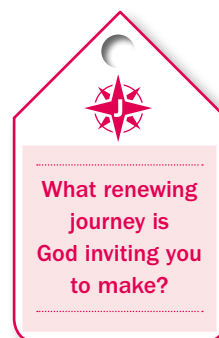
everywhere and it is not necessary to travel to find God. Very true. Yet many pilgrim sites are well-known as ‘thin places’ – the prayers and devotions of countless pilgrims leave their mark. Such an encounter may not occur where or when or how the pilgrim expects – God is mystery. RS Thomas in his poem *Pilgrimage* expresses this so well:

**“... He is such a fast
God, always before us and
leaving as we arrive.”**

Transformation

As Christians, it is our hope that we are constantly being transformed – again, pilgrimage is not a prerequisite for change. But there is something about a journey, something about putting one foot in front of the other for days (or hours, or even minutes) which feeds renewal. A combination of intentionality, living lightly, undergoing transition, encountering God... these factors lead naturally to development, to new perspectives, to altered priorities, to quickened resolve.

Come Holy Spirit, wild goose of God, lead us to the next stage of the journey.



**What renewing
journey is
God inviting you
to make?**

**Only when we
travel without
something for
a while can we
be freed from
its unconscious
tyranny**



The love-walk

**The Youth President of the
Methodist Church 2018/2019,
Jasmine Yeboah, reflects on
the duality of her experience of
walking with Christ**

My life has been a journey, and throughout this journey there have been ups and downs. At times I made wrong turns, but through it all God, who I call Daddy, has never left my side.

Let me give you some background to my life. I grew up knowing the concept of God, but I never had a personal relationship with God. However, when I accepted Christ Jesus into my heart, according to Romans 10:9, I believed that I had received my salvation. I wish that I could say the journey has been easy and that as soon as I spoke the words “Jesus is Lord” I turned into Super Holy Jasmine, but I can’t.

A life turned upside-down

In all honesty it seemed as if everything got much harder. I felt as if my whole life was turning upside down. The more I read Scripture and prayed, the more my eyes were opening to certain truths about myself. I did not really believe that God loved me. I thought that God only loved the good people, and I was far from good. But the biggest truth was that I did not even love myself.

I could not even forgive myself; how could I forgive other people? The saying is true; you cannot give what you do not have. But Daddy-God really began to work in me, dealing with issues that I thought I had already dealt with. At times it brought me to tears. I just wanted God to let go and give up on me because I found it easier to give up on myself.

On one occasion a child I know hurt their friend. The child was upset and scared that she would get in trouble. It was as if the child felt that her actions were unforgivable and that I would hate her for a mistake I knew she did not make deliberately.

I corrected her in love and gave her a big hug. At that moment it was as if God was saying “Now you understand”. Tears flooded my eyes because I had always felt like that little girl – but now I understand that nothing

can separate me from the love of God (Romans 8:31-39).

The more God revealed the truth of Calvary and the price that Christ had to pay to save humankind, the more I was able to receive that love and give it to others; to the gangsters on my estate, the homeless people on the road, the young people at church, people from other religions, those with no religion at all and even the people who had deliberately hurt me.

Two pictures of me

On this love-walk that I have been journeying on with God, I have learnt I must give God first place in every area of my life and my identity. In the photo you can see two pictures of me, and at first glance you might think that girl in the white dress is the better version of me.

Truth be told, the girl in the tracksuit is the me who is walking the love-walk physically; she is the one who has felt pain but keeps smiling. She is the one who prays for people on street corners and always remembers where she has come from and how much God loves her.

The girl in the white dress, on the other hand, is the spiritual me – righteous through Christ, joined with the Holy Spirit. She is the one who wants to spread the love of God to everyone! These two girls work together, and in the midst of all of this is God doing God’s perfect handiwork.

Continuing the journey

Throughout my journey there have been countless moments when God has used my friends in church to share a word from their experiences, or a prayer or even a hug, and it gave me the strength to continue the journey when things got hard.

So you may ask “where is God leading the Church?” My answer is simple: walk with love, and you will see.

*Walk with
love, and you
will see*





Journeying **together** with the human sexuality debate

The Revd Sam McBratney is currently Chair of Dignity and Worth, and the Revd Paul Smith is a past Chair of Headway, now Methodists Evangelicals Together: they are both contributors to two Connexional Working Parties on Marriage and Relationships. Their conversation is a product of the pilgrimage of understanding that our Church has undertaken since the Conference first passed resolutions on human sexuality in 1993



Caring about each other and recognising Christ in one another

SAM (ABOVE RIGHT): Remind me how we met?

PAUL (ABOVE LEFT): Like all good Methodist friendships, it began at the Conference! I seem to remember that you had been invited to speak about preaching and you said some rather complimentary things about me – much to my embarrassment!

S: Yes, I remember now. I remember, too, the shock on people's faces when they saw us in the local café having lunch together! But out of that came a Notice of Motion about excellence in preaching, and I think that shared passion for scriptural preaching has been at the heart of our friendship all along.

P: Yes, I believe in preaching. I suppose part of the reason is that I have sat under great preaching in the past and seen how God met with people through it.

S: Your preaching ministry has been an inspiration to me. But the last ten years have allowed me to get to know you and I really appreciate that. Having a laugh together has helped to cement our friendship! But over that time, we've also experienced difficulties in our lives and our friendship has enabled us to be honest and care for one another.

P: We may disagree profoundly about some very important issues, but that does not mean that we have any excuse for not caring about each other and recognising Christ in one another. I have come to admire very much your personal integrity, your pursuit of truth and your deep desire to live under the lordship of Christ – which is quite a challenge when the conclusions you come to are so different from mine.

S: You'll make me blush! If I had to say what has been foundational for me in

our friendship, it has been your utter commitment to the truth. We have now served on two working parties on marriage and same-sex relationships, which has not always been easy. But I have never doubted that what you said comes from that commitment. I admire, too, that your determination to speak honestly has not always been popular in the Church and you've been made an outsider. That experience feels familiar...

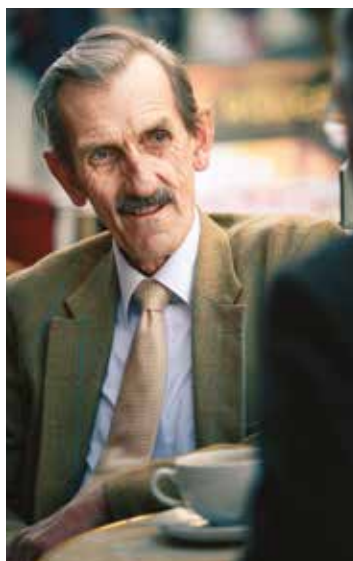
P: I guess in that respect, but for very different reasons, our experiences are quite similar – but if popularity had been our goal we would never have got into this in the first place!

S: I don't know about you but I have been surprised and humbled by the way our friendship has touched others in the Church: "If you two can get on, there's hope for the rest of us!"

P: There's a strange irony here I think. We were both recruited on to the working parties because we represented different perspectives on a serious issue. But the progress we have made has not been because we concentrated on those things, even though we did; but because we saw the things on which we disagree in the light of the things on which we agree absolutely. So I am brave enough to believe that if we can unite on this common ground there's a pretty good chance that we will be able to work the rest out.

S: I want to give you the last word, Paul, but also to acknowledge publicly the loving care and wisdom you have shared with me. I feel really blessed we have been on this journey together. Thank you.

P: Well thank you, and your friendship continues to mean so much to me too. In my more ambitious moments I dare to hope that our friendship might serve as an example to others. We do not have to agree about everything, but we do have to agree about some things: the redeeming grace of God, the lordship of Christ, the transforming power of the Spirit, the heartbreaking lostness of the world and the vision of lives made new in Jesus. Given all that, there's hope – for the Church, but more importantly for a world that is dying for want of knowing him.





Different journeys

Chris and Vera Lacey began serving as mission partners in Colombia in July 2017: Vera is a Programme Development Adviser and Chris is developing communications platforms with the Iglesia Metodista de Colombia

Living a long, long way from home (about 5,300 miles or so), the concept of *journeying* has many different meanings for us.

Geographical journeys

The most obvious journey we have taken was the journey to Colombia, back in June of 2017, with two children and eight suitcases in tow. We weren't just taking a flight; we were journeying into the realm of a new language, a new way of doing and seeing things.

Yet, while we were apprehensive of what exactly might be ahead of us, whether or not we were doing the 'right thing' for our children, in many ways we were quite prepared for that particular journey; we'd lived in different countries before.

Similarly, we were prepared for the journeys that would take place within Colombia itself – we love, and have always loved, exploring new places. The journeying within the country as a family – to beautiful regions such as San Andrés island, Cartagena and Santa Marta – has been nothing short of amazing.

We were even just about prepared for the

journeys for work: typically involving twelve hours of driving through the hills, to some of the poorest places we have ever seen, such as the community of Brisas del Mar. The church has built a clinic here, helps to negotiate land rights, provides food for malnourished children, and works with youth who were orphaned by Colombia's decades-long conflict.

It has actually been in the midst of the most simple things that the most important journey has happened





Spiritual journeys

The journey we weren't prepared for was the spiritual one. I don't just mean experiences like the first church service I attended in Brisas, which took place under a thatched awning right in the centre of the community and was packed full of people of all ages and all nations, singing and praising God.

No, the tool of God's choice over this past year has been something quite different. Let me blunt – quite often it's boring here. The pace of work and of life in general is so much slower than we are used to, and, after coming from a series of very busy jobs, that has been a massive shock to the system.

So it seems somewhat ironic that, by journeying to the other side of the world, the most important journey I've taken has been with God himself. It has actually been in the midst of the most simple things that the most important journey has happened – in times of extended and unexpected peace and quiet.

Journeys to safety

Recently, we started working with the church in Bucaramanga, which is situated close to the Venezuelan border, and that's given us yet another perspective on journeying. Venezuela, once the richest country in the region, has declined so much that two-thirds of its population currently live in extreme poverty. People have lost all that they had in unprecedented inflation, and the cost of food doubles every month. Doctors do not have even the most basic medications for their patients. And this desperation feeds crime, which has skyrocketed and is the third highest in the world.

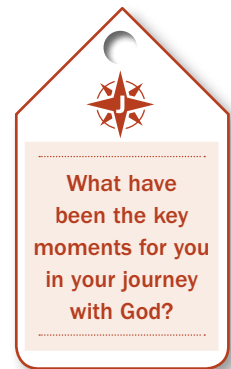
So it's of no surprise that people are

fleeing their country, and themselves journeying to Colombia – the immigration office publishes the figure at 50,000 arrivals every day. For many of them, it is the beginning of a 16-hour-a-day journey on foot lasting 20 days until they reach Ecuador. At the beginning of the year there were about 600,000 people from Venezuela in Colombia and the number was expected to rise to 1 million by the end of 2018.

You can read more about what the Church is doing here to help these poor people on their journey, both physically and spiritually, at www.icmetodista.org/en/venezuela

If you are so inclined, please do donate to the cause to help their plight. Our prayer for them is that, on their own journeys, they would not only find much needed medical help, food, and education, but also an encounter with the Lord who – during times when, in the words of Matt Redman, "all is stripped away" – so often comes to us during the course of a journey, in the way we least expect it.

Chris with the project team in Sucre (BELOW) Vera with the project team in Bucaramanga



Ministers on the **MOVE**



Stationing is central to Methodism: District Chairs, the Revds Jennie Hurd, Richard Hall and Helen Cameron explain

“Are you moving *again*?” asked an old Anglican friend. “Honestly! You Methodists! Can’t keep still for five minutes!” You may think he had a point.

It is characteristic of Methodism that ministers are connexionally stationed to appointments, with the expectation of moving on after a time under the system of ‘itinerancy’. Usually, ministers who feel called to move make this known, and circuits seeking ministers do the same. On behalf of the Conference, prayerful work is done annually to match them, with the heartfelt intention that the right people will be matched with the right appointments. Stationing is not an easy process. It requires patience and trust from all involved. It makes great demands of everyone.

**Stationing
requires
patience
and trust**

Why do it, then? Why put ourselves through this system? As a practice, it goes back to the days of Methodism’s founder,

John Wesley. For Wesley, it was a vital mechanism for mission and evangelism. Ministers were (and are) sent where needed, as an expression of what it is to be part of the people of God, who are all called to journey with Christ. Jesus calls us to follow him, but he also sends us to do his work, as the very end of Matthew’s Gospel tells us. Furthermore, for Methodists, the stationing of ministers is an expression of being a connexion. Ministers are ordained to serve the whole Church, whose ministry does not belong to just one group of people but to all. At best, ministers equip and enable the Church’s mission, wherever the need is greatest.

The issues we currently face

Ministers and circuit appointments vary enormously. This diversity is something we celebrate and is a gift. Getting the right combination (or match) of minister and appointment requires considerable effort and wise, prayerful discernment. Getting the stationing wrong can be destructive, and does not lead to the flourishing of God’s people or ministers. A visit after a stationing matching round is an important part of the discernment process and requires open-hearted exploration between the minister and the circuit. God can surprise us all but during the process we have to be honest with each other about hopes and needs.

The stationing process requires us to be flexible. At times in the life of a minister the need to support elderly parents at a distance can be an anxiety. The needs





of a partner's employment or education of dependents can sometimes require careful handling. However, sometimes we talk as though only Methodist ministers move location frequently or are sent to new locations and that simply isn't the case. Great care is taken, but clearly a minister can only be matched or directly stationed to where appointments are available and where the mission of the Church requires a minister to resource and enable the ministry of all in a particular place.

We have fewer ministers to station than we have circuits seeking ordained ministers. We need more candidates for ordained ministry and a more creative approach to ministry teams of lay and ordained. We also need a willingness to do new things and serve in new contexts.

Stationing: how it works

Deacons, including probationer deacons, are stationed directly by the Warden of the Methodist Diaconal Order. Probationer presbyters are stationed directly too.

Other presbyters are stationed after a matching process.

The stationing matching group (SMG) is made up of all the District Chairs, a number of lay Stationing Representatives and connexional officers. Presbyters and circuits, in consultation with their District Chair, are asked to prepare profiles on a standard template that describe the ministry offered and sought. The circuit profiles are then scrutinised by a small group to determine which are the most critical to fill first.

From these profiles, presbyters and circuit Invitation Committees are asked to produce an indicative list of five appointments/presbyters that they believe best match their needs. The District Chairs then present these lists in the context of the SMG meetings in November, December and January.

When the SMG meets there is knowledge in the room of every circuit and presbyter in the process. Circuits are matched with presbyters one by one and to ensure

The Stationing Matching Group

We have fewer ministers to station than we have circuits seeking ordained ministers



How might all those engaged in stationing be better supported?

fairness these are considered according to a random selection process. At this stage all matches are provisional allowing for a further process of discernment; no one is considered matched until every presbyter available is matched.

At the end of each SMG, when matches are finally agreed, presbyters are asked to visit circuits. Together, circuits and presbyters discern whether their match is a good one or not. When a match does not hold the presbyter and circuit both

re-enter the process. For those circuits and presbyters not matched in any of the first three rounds of SMG, a smaller group consults on a monthly basis to continue the matching process until the Conference takes place in June.

Deacons and probationer presbyters and deacons visit their circuits after being directly stationed to them.

Ultimately it is the Conference, meeting annually, which agrees to the stationing of all ministers.

Some of those recently appointed share testimonies of being stationed



Steve Swan

“I received a phone call during the second round of stationing matching in December to ask if I would be prepared to look at a critical appointment which needed filling following the death of a minister in the active work. When I reflected on my call to serve God and the Church wherever needed, I agreed to explore the possibility. The informal conversations and information gained during my visit to the circuit that weekend proved to be a positive experience. I notified my District Chair that I was willing to go. I was then asked to move mid-year as the need had become more urgent. It is a joy to be in a place where I am meeting a vital need and fulfilling the call that God has put on my life.”



Vida Foday

“As a widow, family support means a lot to me. Moving to the High Wycombe Circuit in the Northampton District was good for keeping me in contact with my family in West London. The move has been challenging due to the increased number of churches in my pastoral charge and the rural setting, which I have not been used to. However, this experience has taught me that God is bigger than our challenges. I have been overwhelmed by the welcome, love and support given me by the District Chair, Superintendent, circuit ministers, leadership team, supernumeraries and the circuit congregations.”



Deacon Alison McCauley

“I was a bit apprehensive how the direct stationing process would work for me and my family (including a son with special needs). I finally drew up a profile and dared to dream dreams of what could be new and exciting times ahead. I hadn't dared to dream for myself as big as the Order did: so it was a privilege to be matched with my new circuit – Melton Mowbray. And all those little things I had dreamed of seem to be here and part of what looks like a very exciting appointment.”

Moving forward

The Revd Canon Gareth J Powell, the Secretary of the Conference, recommends tools to help the Church on its journey



On a journey, it is helpful to have some tools at your disposal. First, a map – to show you both where you are and where you want to go, and to allow you to find connections between the two, discovering new points along the way.

Second, a telephone – a means of communication, and a way of sharing your direction of travel with others.

Third, a compass – to help you find ‘due north’ and to orient yourself accordingly.

Over recent months – as the Methodist Church has sought to give expression to the reaffirmation of Our Calling – the development of a Connexional Financial Strategy and a Connexional Property Strategy has revealed (in myself and others) an instinctive discomfort with the idea of ‘strategy’ in our churches. For many people, words like ‘strategy’, ‘management’ and ‘objectives’ conjure up images of boardrooms and bureaucracy – notions that surely have no place in a community led

by the Holy Spirit, which “blows where it chooses” (John 3:8, NRSV)?

But the Church is on a journey, and needs to be enabled to listen. Called by God, we cannot remain where we are – we must constantly be moving forward, learning more about God and God’s good creation, and finding new ways to share the gospel.

For the journey, we need a map – a record of where we are, and some indication of where we believe we are being called to go. We need effective means of communication, to make the most of the gifts our connexional nature offers. Most importantly, we need simply to cling to the Cross – the sign by which we orient ourselves; to scale its heights, in order to see laid out before us the landscape of God’s salvation.

The triumphs of Thy love display;
In every heart reign Thou alone;
Till all Thy foes confess Thy sway,
And glory ends what grace began.

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

We need a map



What does the challenge to be constantly moving forward entail for your own faith and for your church and circuit?



Worship



Learning and Caring



Service



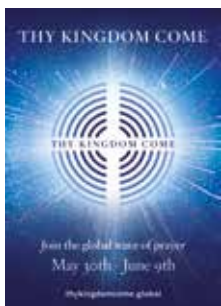
Evangelism

Journeying together in prayer and evangelism

Ed Mackenzie, Discipleship Development Officer, reflects on how *Thy Kingdom Come* can help the Church grow in its commitment to prayer and evangelism

Beacon event at Westminster Central Hall, London

Thy Kingdom Come
30 May to 9 June 2019
Sign up and find excellent resources
www.thykingdomcome.global



In a context of church membership decline, it can be difficult to know how best to move forward as the Church. What are the best strategies for evangelism and growth; the most effective ways to deepen faith?

While there are many helpful initiatives, what's always essential is prayer! Like children who know their parents give good gifts, we can approach God in prayer knowing that God wills our good and the good of those around us (Matthew 7:11). As Wesley once put it, "God does nothing but in answer to prayer."

Our Calling also recognises that a commitment to evangelism is essential; we are called to help others begin to follow Jesus. This was the risen Jesus' commission to his disciples (Matthew 28:19), and remains the Church's commission today.

Both prayer and evangelism are key dimensions of *Thy Kingdom Come*, a global prayer movement that invites Christians to

spend the period between Ascension and Pentecost praying others come to know Jesus.

The Methodist Church became a formal partner of this Church of England initiative in 2018. Numerous Methodist churches and circuits have taken part, including at Methodist beacon events in London, Cornwall, Leeds and Oxford.

As the Methodist Church continues to engage with *Thy Kingdom Come*, let us journey together in deepening our prayer and commitment to evangelism.



The Revd Loraine Mellor speaking as President of the Methodist Conference

Journeying in prayer

Prayer is central to *Thy Kingdom Come*, and also an expression of the Methodist commitment to worship. In worship, Our Calling explains, we aim to, “increase our awareness of God’s presence and to celebrate God’s love.”

Many Methodists who took part in *Thy Kingdom Come* spoke of the impact of praying together. One wrote that they felt “more motivated to pray and a greater sense of God’s activity in the world.” Another spoke of how their church struggled to engage with prayer but was now committed to running a weekly prayer group.

Individually, we can deepen our journey in prayer by committing to pray for five people we know who do not yet know Jesus. We may already be doing this, but *Thy Kingdom Come* gives us a focused period with a variety of tools to remember to pray for our ‘five’. You can, for instance, use wrist bands, prayer guides, and bookmarks.

Families can explore different ways of praying throughout *Thy Kingdom Come*. Many found the Kingdom Kit helpful with ideas for praying together at home. Suggestions include prayer through blowing bubbles, planting seeds – even setting off prayer rockets!

For churches there are lots of approaches for committing to pray corporately during this period. Churches can hold 24/7 prayer events, set up prayer stations, and use model services around *Thy Kingdom Come* themes.

Thy Kingdom Come is an excellent period to experiment with new and different ways of praying together.

Journeying in evangelism

Our Calling also commits us to evangelism, to making “more followers of Jesus Christ.” *Thy Kingdom Come* is an excellent means of refocusing on that.

Those who took part in 2018’s *Thy Kingdom Come* spoke of how their attitude to evangelism had been transformed. One person told of being amazed at specific answers to prayer for their friend.

As well as praying for our five, we could decide to do a prayer walk around our community. This simply involves walking around where you live, work or worship,

praying that God would bring transformation and change there.

Families can also think about how they move from praying for others to inviting them on a journey towards Jesus. While children might particularly pray for their friends, we can encourage them to think about how they might help them explore faith more deeply.

As churches, *Thy Kingdom Come* offers prompts to give out prayer cards across the community that your church serves. Invite those receiving the cards to fill out requests for prayer and return them to the church. These prayer requests can then form a focus throughout the period.

Transforming and renewing

As prayer and evangelism remain central for us within Methodism – flowing naturally from Our Calling – *Thy Kingdom Come* helps us commit to these twin priorities. By choosing to grow in these, so we and the whole Methodist Church will play our part in transforming and renewing our communities and nation.

2019 resources, including the Methodist Church nine-day prayer and reflection guide, will be available from www.methodist.org.uk/thykingdomcome



(BELOW) Church leaders at the Westminster event
(BOTTOM) Beacon event at Gwennap Pit, Cornwall



Our ecumenical journey

*Ecumenism
is not an
optional extra
but a gospel
imperative*



The Methodist Church's Connexional Ecumenical Officer, the Revd Ruth Gee, reflects on the many paths to Church unity

I am on an exciting journey with a wonderful variety of travelling companions who offer me gifts of new experiences and insights into the breadth and depth of God's love. The first three months of my new position have been varied, challenging and exciting.

The body of Christ

My ecumenical journey began in childhood when I lived in a Wiltshire village and worshipped with Methodists, Anglicans and Congregationalists. A visit to Taizé with a group of friends from university, meeting young people from different churches and nations, was profoundly influential. I am convinced that ecumenism is not an optional extra but a gospel imperative. Jesus calls us to be one, and only when we are one can we be recognised as the Body of Christ, made up of many different parts, working together and respecting one another.

Most journeys have their ups and downs and the paths we travel may be smooth or rough, direct or meandering and the progress fast or slow. The ecumenical journey is no different.

In these few months I have experienced some of the high points of our journey together. I celebrated with Methodists, Anglicans and Catholics on the Isles of Scilly as they affirmed their commitment to work together. I met with Methodists from the United Methodist Church in Europe at the European Methodist Council and also when we celebrated the 50th anniversary of our Concordat and planned for the future.

In September the Forum of Churches Together in England met at Swanwick in Derbyshire. Christians from 47 churches and other groups worshipped, talked and listened together. It was a glimpse of what might be possible when, by God's grace, we work together. Several young people from the Methodist Church were there. I want to encourage young people to discover the riches and excitement of ecumenism, just as I did in Taizé.

Coming together in response to need

In many local communities Christians work together, often in response to need. People come together to run food banks,

mark special occasions, respond to the decisions of local or national government and work in schools, hospitals, prisons and the workplace. Often now we work with Christians from Pentecostal and new churches and are encouraged and enriched by them. We know that we are stronger and more effective together.

We also work together overseas. I visited our Ecumenical Office in Rome and the director, the Revd Dr Tim Macquiban, introduced me to Fiona Kendall, a mission partner supported by the Church of Scotland and the Methodist Church in Britain. Fiona works with the organisation Mediterranean Hope supporting refugees and challenging governments to respond to their needs. When I met her she had just returned from welcoming 90 refugees from Lebanon.

Relationships and partnerships

Often we can work together informally but sometimes formal partnerships are necessary. Agreeing a formal partnership takes time and can sometimes be frustrating when things do not fall easily into place. Part of my work, and that of District Ecumenical Officers, is to support people who are doing this.

Nationally we are developing relationships with a number of churches in England, Scotland and Wales. Among these our Covenant with the Church of England continues to bear much rich fruit. People are discovering ways of working together not recognised as possible before. Covenant Partnerships in Extended Areas, where Anglicans and Methodists work together across overlapping areas within dioceses and districts, have been one way of opening up new opportunities. In some areas, as in discussions around the possibility of interchangeability of presbyteral ministry, the path can feel like it is going uphill as detailed and careful work is being done. We are building on what has already been achieved as we move further along our journey together towards unity.

In all this we must never forget that travelling together is not an option but a gospel imperative, fundamental for mission. We are called to be one in all our wonderful and challenging diversity.

I want to encourage young people to discover the riches and excitement of ecumenism



If travelling together is a gospel imperative, what are you going to do differently?



As Executive Officer of the Methodist Academies and Schools Trust, James Royal considers the lives of children growing up within Methodist schools

Journeying with school children

“My school is amazing!”

Tegan, Holly Hill Methodist/Church of England Infant School

“On the first day back, I was like: YES!”

Arlo, Rosehill Methodist Community Primary School

Venturing out into the world of school as a five-year-old is daunting, challenging and incredibly exciting. There are friends to make, skills to learn, facts to acquire, understanding to develop and a huge amount of fun to be had every single day. For the youngest of our learners in our 66 Methodist Maintained Schools, every day is a step on a complicated, delicate, and exhilarating journey. It is one on which our young travellers may take many different twists and turns along the way. It is incredibly difficult to predict where these journeys may take every individual child. But our challenge and duty to them in Christ is to make sure each child’s special gifts and talents are fully unlocked and that they are watched over in God’s love.

Outstanding schools

For the 15,000 children in our maintained primary schools between the ages of 5 and

11 from North Yorkshire to Eastbourne, their school experience is very good. Over 80% of our schools are currently good or outstanding (as judged by the Government’s Office for Standards in Education), which is impressive enough in itself and something to be very proud of. More notably, over 90% of our schools are currently good or outstanding (as judged by the Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools) and over 50% of our schools are outstanding Church schools. As mission projects for local circuits, our schools connect Methodism to young peoples’ lives and potentially the lives of their families with creativity, compassion and determination to achieve the very best that’s possible.

Community and commitment

Each one of our schools has a fascinating and colourful story to tell. One of these

can be heard at Blackrod Church School in Bolton – an Anglican/Methodist Church School with a specialist provision for children with autism. Back in 2003, Blackrod Church School had one of the highest numbers of unfilled pupil places in Bolton. It faced an uncertain future. Through a combination of community engagement, partnership development with the school's two excellent local churches and the will, commitment and compassion of a staff team dedicated to building a school family based on strong, understanding and meaningful relationships, it succeeded in remaining open. In fact, more than that it is now – 15 years on – full, over-subscribed, and at the heart of all the community does. These words cannot convey all the challenges, triumphs and pitfalls of that journey, but we can look upon it, and many others, knowing the vision ahead and the points to reach along the way are clear, achievable and very much worth striving for together.

Many pathways

But no journey is ever undertaken in isolation and many pathways will cross along the way. The experiences every one of our children have each day in their Methodist school are directly affected by what happens in their home; how the local church has developed its connections and relations with their school; what current thinking the Government has about school expectations and how, as a connexional Church, we are supporting, encouraging and sharing the very best, most inspirational practice – so that every child we care for can benefit.

Each family, each local church and circuit journey is unique and wonderfully special because of the people, resources and cultures engrained within them. The ups, downs, bumps and successes of government educational policy are well reported and debated. So where does that leave the influence of our Church on all these amazing young lives and those of the committed, skilled, creative and dedicated professionals who work with them?

Since the Church's Education Commission reported to the Methodist Conference in June 2012, the Methodist Academies and Schools Trust (MAST) has acted as



overseer for all our maintained provisions. Anglican schools have long benefited from established structures for engaging with and offering advice, support and development through their dioceses and local authorities. MAST is newer to this role. Our starting point is to build a real sense of connection through our annual school visits – a commitment of 30,000 miles, developing training as required and forming opportunities to network, share and discuss ideas. Our schools are responding wonderfully warmly and have a strong appetite for more input. With new and exciting funding relationships with Westminster College and Southlands Methodist Trust, the road ahead looks clear and inviting. Our plans to improve, grow and broaden the service and response to our schools that MAST offers can really take shape. We can think bigger, be bold and innovate and deliver, with the love of Christ, the best outcomes possible for all our children.

www.methodistschools.org.uk

“My personality's grown: I've really matured as well.”

Adam, Wakefield Methodist School

“We try and take the rules and see them in our everyday lives.”

Iliana, St Peter's Methodist Primary School

“Whoever comes in – they're just welcome. It's like we're one big family.”

Cameron, Wakefield Methodist School



Be careful what you pray for!



The Revd John Simms reflects
on his unexpected journey



In what ways
does John's story
resonate with
your own?

The Revd John Simms has now been granted permission to superannuate early on the grounds of ill health.

As Methodist people we will all, I trust, pray a prayer at least once a year that can have serious implications for our lives and our faith – the Covenant Prayer.

Contained within that prayer are words that have taken on a whole different significance for me over the past two years: “Let me be ... laid aside for you...”

I began the 2016/2017 connexional year very differently from other years, as I was then on sabbatical in the United States. Sabbaticals are a very positive ‘laying aside’ of the routine life of ministry, and an opportunity to explore and be challenged outside of the normal boundaries. My stay in the States was such a time, giving me space to reflect on the course of my ministry in the UK, where I had just completed my first year as a superintendent minister.

My return to the UK led me into a conversation with the Circuit Leadership Team where I was stationed. The outcome was a decision to curtail my appointment after only two years, and for me to enter the stationing system again: a different and more challenging laying aside. A match was made; a visit undertaken; and an invitation was issued and accepted.

On the morning that my soon-to-be new circuit was meeting to approve my invitation, 6 December 2016, I left the manse, as I usually did, for a walk around the town. As I

was crossing a zebra crossing I was hit by a van and sustained ligament damage to my left knee and serious head injuries, and was rushed to a nearby hospital where I spent the next two days. I have no recollection of the accident, nor much of the hospital stay, but now I was being laid aside in a very different and a very difficult way.

The recovery was slow and frustrating. As an active person, who normally walked about four miles most days, being stuck at home was difficult. Reading was a problem as the head injury had caused some double vision which wasn't addressed for about a month, but I was able to listen to a lot of music, which is a source of strength for me. People were very supportive, without being smothering, though I found interaction with others a struggle. I returned gradually to work by the end of January 2017, but more than a couple of hours left me drained, and chairing meetings was out of the question! And as a consequence of the head injury my driver's licence was revoked for a year – a great hindrance to ministry.

One thing this laying aside did was give me more time on my own with God; trying to make some sense of what had happened and what the implications for me and my ministry might be. Very early on I decided to start a ‘gratitude’ journal, which gave me the chance to find at least one thing each day to be thankful for, rather than dwelling on my



The Methodist Covenant Prayer

I am no longer my own but yours.
 Put me to what you will,
 rank me with whom you will;
 put me to doing,
 put me to suffering;
 let me be employed for you,
 or laid aside for you,
 exalted for you,
 or brought low for you;
 let me be full,
 let me be empty,
 let me have all things,
 let me have nothing:
 I freely and wholeheartedly yield
 all things to your pleasure
 and disposal.

The Methodist Worship Book

misfortune. That was a great help in keeping my focus away from myself and more on God's grace and goodness. Throughout my recovery I was conscious, more than I had been in the past, of being 'held' – by God and by God's people, both inside and outside the Church, and that was and is a huge source of comfort and support to me.

Recovery continued slowly and gradually, and things became a little easier to do, though not the same as before. I moved to my new appointment in September 2017, but settling in was hampered by the lack of a driving licence until May 2018. Getting to know new people, new communities and new challenges has been very hard, and I continue to be troubled by memory problems, concentration issues and I get very tired very quickly. This has a knock-on effect for my ministry in general, and has led to some very serious soul-searching about whether that ministry is sustainable.

The journey I embarked upon as a lay worker and candidate some 30 years ago has not quite gone as I planned, and being laid aside for God has raised more questions for me than being 'employed' for God. But the One who called still calls me to follow, though maybe in a different way now.

Focus more on God's grace and goodness





Hospice chaplains: journeying with life and death

The Revd Karen Murphy, President of the Association of Hospice and Palliative Care Chaplains, considers her twenty years in hospice chaplaincy

“**C**haplains are collectors of stories, confidences, confessions, hurts and joys,” says Margery Collin, an experienced hospice chaplain (from *Chaplaincy in Hospice and Palliative Care*, ed. Karen Murphy and Bob Whorton).

This is an accurate description of a hospice chaplain’s work with patients and families living with a life-limiting illness. It is a unique and distinctive role within the multi-disciplinary team of the hospice healthcare setting.

Journey into chaplaincy

My journey into chaplaincy came through a church member who was on the board of a local hospice. I accepted an invitation to have a look around and was hooked. I became a volunteer chaplain and then worked part time before taking up my current post 13 years ago. No one has been more surprised than

me that I continue to work with death and the dying day by day and feel totally content to be doing so.

I work at Weston Hospicecare, a small hospice serving patients in Somerset. The hospice has an in-patient unit for patients with complex symptoms, a day hospice facility and community-based care. The chaplaincy offers support to patients and their families in the hospice and at home.

I entered the healthcare world as a total ‘rookie’ and found medical jargon in the healthcare sector is as prevalent as church-speak in our churches. Initially it was like being in a foreign country. But now, after over 20 years of chaplaincy, I am in danger of joining the jargon speakers and really have to watch that I don’t add to the distress of patients in this unfamiliar world. Patients and families speak of being on a journey they don’t want to be on, and the language of MRI and CT scans, alongside other abbreviations can make them feel increasingly isolated.

Questions of life and death

So what does a chaplain do when daily conversations revolve around the mystery of life and death? I never pretend to have many answers, if any. Our spiritual care assessment asks the following: “Do you have a faith or belief that is important to you at the moment?” This allows people to say yes, no or anything in between.

Most people will declare themselves to be non-religious, by which they generally mean that they do not attend a church or belong to a faith community. That’s my starting point and conversations spread out



How has journeying with life and death affected your experience of being grounded firmly in what you hold dear?



Encounters I have had with people with and without faith have pushed and pulled my own beliefs in many directions



into many interesting directions. It's been my privilege to accompany people who are re-connecting with faith, rejecting belief, or coming to faith for the first time.

Not surprisingly, people suddenly find themselves asking the big questions about meaning, purpose and hope. The chaplain's role is to be alongside, allowing the unspeakable to be spoken and to witness the patient's journey of spiritual exploration.

The role also offers plenty of scope for initiating opportunities for patients and their families to come together for celebrations, rituals and conversations, which build memories and mend hurts. On many occasions I have had to respond quickly and effectively to an expression of spiritual need for which there is no prepared script. Weddings and marriage blessings have a poignancy that need careful wording; conversations around reconciliation are precious moments for families coming together after years of separation; patients ask for children to be baptized, blessed or named and funerals are conducted that are greatly influenced by patient input.

Passion and challenges

My passion for hospice chaplaincy has not waned after 20 years. Every day brings new challenges and these have had a profound impact on my personal spirituality. The many encounters I have had with people with and without faith have pushed and pulled



my own beliefs in many directions. I am very grateful for this experience, which has enabled me to be grounded firmly in what I hold dear but sit lightly to other aspects of religious dogma and theological thinking.

The future of chaplaincy will be interesting as more people declare themselves 'non-religious'. It is my belief that chaplaincy in its most creative, grounded and effective form is of immense value to anyone grappling with questions of meaning and purpose as life comes to a close. Hospice chaplains have to ask those questions of themselves and are then able to remain alongside patients, saying little but representing compassion and hope.

Association of Hospice and Palliative Care Chaplains www.ahpcc.org.uk

The Methodist Church offers 'death and dying' web resources and links to other online material that respond to the needs of those requiring palliative care at www.methodist.org.uk/deathanddying/

Reflection

“You have made us
for yourself,
O Lord, and our heart
is restless until it
rests in you.”

St Augustine, *Confessions*

Reflecting on ‘journeying’, I found myself confessing my own restlessness. The positive side, I suppose, is a curiosity about the world and an eagerness to learn where God is at work in it, and in other people. In that context I’m constantly challenged to explore my own discipleship. But there’s also an undisciplined element – a difficulty about keeping my feet on the ground in one place; being a local preacher who can’t settle in one locality; spiritually itchy feet, restlessness.

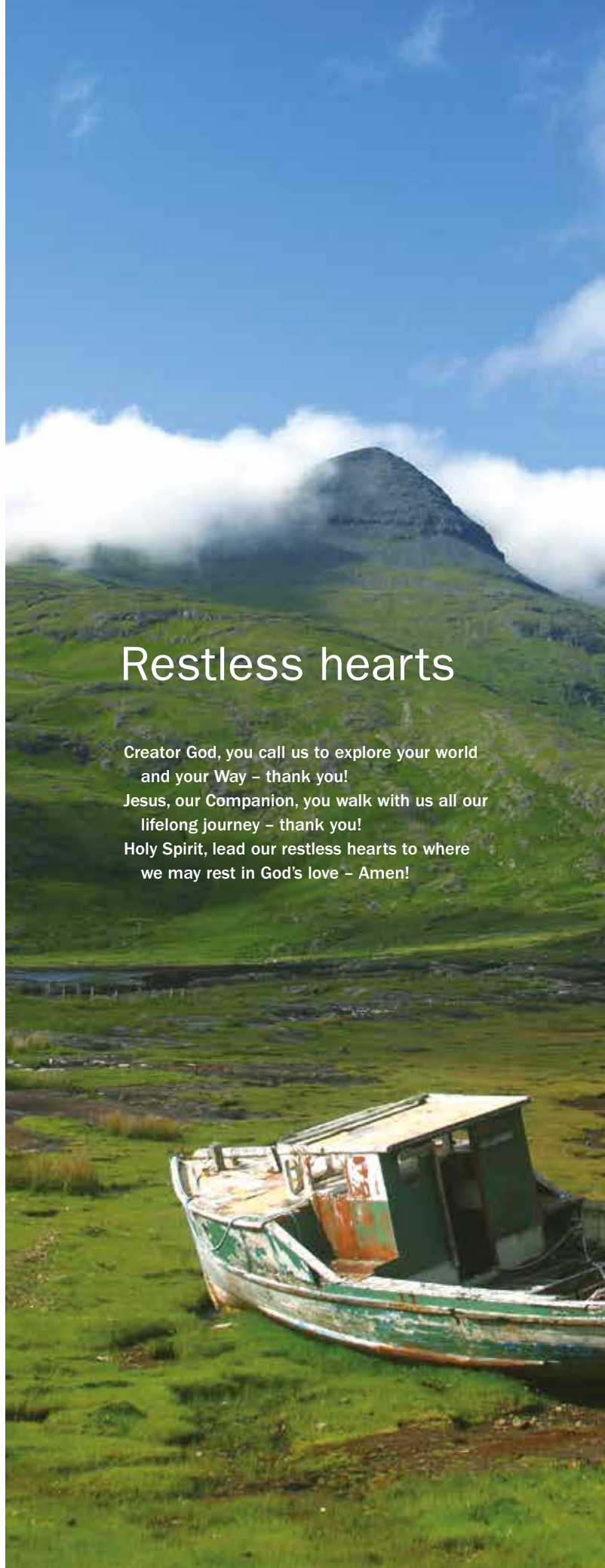
I had wondered whether to write about moving with connexional commitments from new town work in Peterborough to Nigeria to Notting Hill, to New Mills near Manchester, then to Iona and now Mull. Or to compare being Vice-President on a year’s pilgrimage, then Warden of the Abbey, Iona in a place of pilgrimage. Or would it be more relevant now to focus on the challenge of being an Ecumenical Accompanier (way outside my comfort zone) in the land that we call holy?

But the more I wondered what to write from my own experience, the more I remembered those who have accompanied and encouraged me, and helped me see the way ahead. So I want to share a poem I wrote for one of these companions on the journey. Methodist minister the Revd Dwin Capstick was a shepherd, a handyman and skilled at building community wherever he found himself. He was also an Ecumenical Accompanier: his time on the West Bank coming between the two times I served there. When he lived on Mull, he was the owner of a rowing boat which, with enthusiasm and a lack of realism, I bought from him. The story begins here...

**By Jan Sutch Pickard,
Past Vice-President of the Conference,
who lives on Mull**

Restless hearts

Creator God, you call us to explore your world
and your Way – thank you!
Jesus, our Companion, you walk with us all our
lifelong journey – thank you!
Holy Spirit, lead our restless hearts to where
we may rest in God’s love – Amen!





The voyager (for Dwin)

I bought this rowing boat from you
because I wanted, simply, to use it –
being a boat-owner was a long way from my mind.
I dreamed of working my way
along these shores you knew so well:
baling and playing in the shallows
then pushing out into deeper water.

For you this boat had no name,
was simply a small and useful vessel.
I freighted her with laughter and tears –
with the name Hilarity – but I've not yet
got round to writing that on bows or stern:
right now, what she needs is hands-on care,
scraping, sanding, oiling, coats of paint.

This year too many things have blown my way,
so many contrary currents,
leaving our boat (yours, then mine)
high and dry at the back of the shore,
bleaching in the sun and salt wind.

As you were dying, I was in a far country
among the shepherds, in the mountains.
Now back at sea-level, I stand idly
watching the working boats, running my hand
along this rusty keel, these flaking ribs;
reluctantly, I know it will be next year
before this boat's back in the water.

You'd made a noost¹ in folks hearts here:
they still keep asking after you,
missing your grin, your words and silences,
your hard-working hands, remembering
with gratitude how you mended, made things grow,
regretting your restlessness: suddenly
you upped anchor, went back to where you began,
then died, too soon. And now I know

that your ashes were launched by loving hands
on the windy moors where once you herded sheep.

You knew more about sheep and boats
and people than I ever will – and it tells.
While I wander the shore, wondering what's to be done
with a nameless boat stranded here, waiting,
for the inspiration or energy of another year,
you're ahead of me – voyaging on,
beyond tides and seasons, beyond words,
through the deep silence of the high fells.

¹ a noost (can also be spelled noust, a Scots word – I actually met it in Shetland) is a scooped out place above the shore-line where a boat is hauled up and kept safe from storms

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