

Withington Methodist News

March 2021



SUNDAY WORSHIP

Unfortunately due to the new lockdown rules to be implemented in January, we will be suspending 'in person' worship at Withington until further notice. However, as per the guidelines, we will still be broadcasting a live service on YouTube at the usual time of 10:45. The link and further information can be found below.

DEAR FRIENDS,

It's impossible to hold two thoughts in your mind at the same time. If you are praising, you can't be stressing. Conversely, if you are stressing, you can't be praising. Which would you rather do this week?

There are many ways to praise God and many psalms that can lead you in praise. Here are a few, in case you are looking for something uplifting to read: Psalms 8-10, 15, 18, 24, 29, 32-34, 46-48, 50, 66, 75, 76, 81, 82, 84, 87, 92, 93, 96-100, 103-108, 111-113, 115-118, 122, 132, 136, 138, 144-150.

Praise Psalms usually follow a pattern: They begin by encouraging you to praise the Lord, then come reasons to praise Him followed by a prayer or expression of hope for what this great God will do.

Here's an example:

Psalm 100

It starts with encouraging you to praise:

1 Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs.

It gives you a reason to praise:

3 Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

It gives you a way to praise:

4 Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name.

It crescendos with hope because you have praised:
*5 For the Lord is good and his love endures forever;
his faithfulness continues through all generations.*

While you were reading that you were thinking about God and His greatness rather than you and your problems, weren't you?

"His faithfulness continues through all generations." If that's true, He's going to be faithful to you today. And tomorrow. And in every day of trouble. I once heard someone say: "You should say one hundred 'Praise the Lords' every day." That person's point was that we were made to praise God. It's good for our souls and our hearts, and our hopes and our outlook.

Once we understand the value of physical health, we want to spend some time in exercise every day. Likewise, when we understand the value of spiritual health, we want to spend some time in praise every day.

Imagine yourself before the gate to God's dwelling place. In your heart, enter it right now with thanksgiving.

Wishing you a week full of loving, healing blessings,
Rev. Krystyna

A REFLECTION FROM CAROLINE WICKENS

Psalm 22 begins in utter misery and dejection. The words are remembered by Jesus on the Cross:

- ¹ My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?
² O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer
and by night, but find no rest.

The psalmist pours out words to God, lamenting the way in which life is so unbearably hard:

⁶ But I am a worm, and not human;
scorned by others, and despised by the people.

When I read this psalm, it brings memories of worship on Maundy Thursday, when in some traditions the choir sings this psalm at the very end of the service, while the church is stripped of anything beautiful in preparation for the horror and darkness of Good Friday. It's chilling to see a familiar building cut back to the bare essentials, a striking way of bringing the story to life.

In times like these, we need to draw on these words of grief and horror. We too can share the sense that God has abandoned us – we are isolated and alone in our grief and suffering.

Yet the psalm does not continue in this vein to its conclusion. After twenty-one verses of lament, there is a sudden, and complete, change of tone:

From the horns of the wild oxen you have rescued me.

²² I will tell of your name to my brothers and sisters;
in the midst of the congregation I will praise you:

Some scholars think that worshippers would have sung this psalm in the Temple, pouring out their hearts before God, and at this turning-point, there would have been some kind of symbolic representation of the glory of God to reassure them that God was with them and they were not forgotten. There is this assurance of the supportive presence of God:

²⁴ For he did not despise or abhor
the affliction of the afflicted;
he did not hide his face from me,
but heard when I cried to him.

This is who God is, this is at the heart of God's identity. God stands alongside those who suffer and turns towards them, giving them full attention, listening intently, completely focused. In a world where sometimes we are shocked and distressed by the troubles of others, God

is not put off. God is ready to look at a broken body, to listen to a breaking voice, and to respond with care and love.

In this time of ongoing pandemic and lockdown, we need to pay attention to the words of this psalm. It reassures us that even when our hearts are breaking with grief, God is alongside us, sometimes an unrecognised presence, but always there.

PRAYER LIST

We remember in our prayers:

Those who have lost a family member to COVID-19

Those struggling to balance work and childcare

NHS and key workers dealing with fatigue and stress

Cecilia,

Moses,

Thandi and Peter,

Promilla, Noel, Urima, Aima, Hannan,

Ann,

Stella,

Cliff,

Cliff's Mum and Dad,

Ruth,

Sarah and Daniel,

Barbara,

Lizzie and family,

Sylvain and family,

Georgine,

Ingenesia,

Ann,

Trevor,

The family of Phil,

Millie,

Nick,

Ian,

The family of May,

Krystyna,

Audrey



WORSHIP WITH US

Sunday Morning In Person Worship

As you will know, we are now in full lockdown again. Under the current guidance churches are permitted to continue to meet for communal worship if they wish to do so however, the circuit staff have agreed that in the Manchester circuit we will not continue with face-to-face worship.

Although the falling cases of Covid-19 and the hopeful roadmap developed by the government is great news, we are continuing our decision to put 'in person' worship on hold. The safety of our congregation, stewards and preachers continues to be of the utmost priority and we don't feel it would be responsible to put anyone at risk considering the threat that this illness still poses.

In the meantime the Sunday morning worship will continue online, streamed on YouTube. We will keep you updated with other remote use resources.

Sunday Morning Live Stream

Please join us in Sunday morning worship, in video format on YouTube-

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fYyQGqqSA5M>



Virtual Coffee Morning and Bible Study

We have a virtual coffee morning every Saturday from 11:00 am and a fortnightly Bible Study every other Wednesday (6th and 20th January) from 10:30 am which you can also join by phone.

In order to join using a traditional or mobile phone:

Please dial 0131 460 11 96

You will be asked for the meeting ID: 841 4119 8605

Press the hash key on your phone. #

Wait a few seconds and press the hash key again. #

Manchester Circuit Sunday Evening Service

A warm welcome as ever to our worship tomorrow evening.

The Zoom platform will be open from 6pm for those who wish to catch up with others from their church, and as usual worship will begin at 6:30.

The joining details follow-

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84344057526?pwd=Z3d0ZW90TUlnZHdITktrZmtjZ3grUT09>

Meeting ID: 843 4405 7526

Passcode: 1901

One tap mobile +442039017895, 84344057526#

Daily prayer

If you would like to receive a daily prayer via text message, please sign up by texting Krystyna on 0777 6121 679. You can unsubscribe at any time.

Weekly conference call service

Every Sunday from 2:00 pm until 2:30 pm, feel free to join us from 1:50 pm for a quick catch-up chat before worship where you can also share your prayer concerns. The service includes: a reflection/call to worship, prayers, Bible readings, a short sermon and a hymn.

All you need to join is a traditional or mobile phone.

Calls are charged at local rate and are included in network bundle deals.

THE JOINING DETAILS ARE THE SAME EVERY WEEK:

To join the service please dial: 0333 0164 757

Give the room number: 79317515 #

Give the PIN: 8347 #

After giving the room and PIN number don't forget to press the hash key on your phone.

Reflections and written worship resources:

If you are not on email and would like to receive a printed copy of our mid-week, end-of-week reflections or written worship resources for Sunday, please contact Krystyna on 0161 612 2668.

WORLD DAY OF PRAYER

5th March 2021

The Day of Prayer this year will be different from any we have ever known. All over the world, people will be worshipping on the day as usual but in unusual ways.

The Day of Prayer is not only a global event: it is also an important date in every local ecumenical calendar – at least it should be. So the National Committee asks all branches to mark the day locally in whatever ways they can.

Many of you have expressed disappointment that the National Committee has chosen not to produce one service that everyone can join in with. There are a number of good reasons why we have not done this, not least the fact that we have 2,500 branches – only Germany has more.

We have been delighted at the enthusiasm shown by a number of branches to present this year's service in imaginative ways and thank those who have offered to share these with others.

Our prayers this month are about Vanuatu, the island country that has prepared this year's World Day of Prayer service. The prayers have been written by members of the National Committee. To watch the service put together for this year's World Day of Prayer click this link - <https://youtu.be/edQMgNFdRdo>

Coconut prayer

Praying while looking at a coconut from that life giving tree.

Its water refreshes,

Lord refresh us in your love.

Its inner flesh feeds,

Lord feeds us in your love.

Its oil is nourishing,

Lord nourish us in your love.

Its coir from the shell can be woven,

Lord wrap us around in your love.

Its leaves and trunk can build good houses,

Lord build in us the knowledge of your love.
So, we here on earth can be witness to your Love,
Given to us through your life-giving tree, the cross.
Amen. (Christine Miles)



Poem Prayer

For the beautiful islands of the South Pacific
Vanuatu with its coral reefs,
Tropical coloured fishes,
and black and white sandy beaches
We thank you.

Its red, green and yellow flag
We thank you

For Port Villa, the largest city
For traditional foods,
Salu-salu, attires, dances and songs
For baskets and woven placemats
We thank you

Its red, green and yellow flag
We thank you

Blessings beyond measure
Given to Ni-Vanuatu

Fertile lands, fresh air, sunshine too,
For blue waters of the isles,
We thank you.

Its red, green, black and yellow flag
We thank you. (Audrey Eccleston)

A Prayer for Vanuatu 2021

Holy God, Creator of the heavens and the earth and all that is in them: –

We join with the Christian women of Vanuatu in praise to you

- for fertile land and fresh air
- for the sweet melody of the birds, for land animals and the mysterious creatures of the deep
- and for the sounds of children playing.

We thank you for the example of the Christian women of Vanuatu

- for their trust in you and
- for their fortitude as they struggle to provide food for their families and education for their children
- things that we in this country so often take for granted.

We ask your forgiveness for our thoughtlessness, our carelessness and our lack of foresight which has led to the pollution of the environment and the current climate emergency, and is causing irrevocable damage to Vanuatu and to other low-lying Pacific islands.

We pray that you will help us

- to listen more carefully to you and to your Word
- to build our homes and communities on its strong foundations
- and to work together towards a world where resources are used more sustainably;

where justice and peace reign; and where all your creatures can live in safety and harmony.

We pray in the name of Jesus
Amen. (Elizabeth Burroughs)

MOTHERING SUNDAY -FOR THOSE EXPERIENCING LOSS

14th March 2021

For many women, and men too, Mothering Sunday is a day on which tightly constrained emotions are liable to be ambushed and exposed.

Those who have lost children or been unable to conceive a child, or who have recently lost a parent or close relative, may well tread cautiously around this day: perhaps wishing - trying - to participate in community joy at the smiles and gifts of children for their mothers; perhaps feeling more than usually isolated.

The great joy expressed by Hannah and the decision to offer her son, Samuel, into a life of religious service (1 Samuel 1:20-28: one of the readings suggested for Mothering Sunday) has to be set in the context of her very great sorrow at being childless (1 Samuel 1:1-19).

The ambivalence and grieving that can accompany Mothering Sunday finds expression in three of the hymns suggested on Singing the Faith Plus for use on this day.

“God of Eve and God of Mary” (StF 119), for example, has the ability to widen our appreciation and definition of parenthood.

The hymn was written specifically for Mothering Sunday by Fred Kaan when he was serving as a part-time minister for a small housing estate congregation in Swindon. A few years later, he was asked to write a companion hymn for Father’s Day (“God of Adam, God of Joseph”). In both hymns, he gives thanks for the possibilities of parenthood and for inspiration found in the loving heart of God, but one phrase occurs in both texts – it gives particular thanks “for those who have no children, / yet are parents under God”. (See also Alan Gaunt's hymn We gladly celebrate and praise, StF 120.)

For some, even this possibility may, at times, be too hard to contemplate. And, in any case, all grieving is personal and unique. Fred Pratt Green offers the suggestion of a wordless acknowledgement that might be helpful for those for whom grief is too raw for words:

If we've no breath for praise,
no thoughts to frame a prayer,
we know you need no words of ours
to prompt your care. (StF 616)

Finally, Alan Luff's hymn, "God grant us words to speak" (StF 647), will be suitable in any number of contexts. Mothering Sunday, with the shadow of the cross falling ever more darkly over our Lenten reflections, may be one of them. He helps us pray to find the right words "to ease the pain that others feel" and points out (v.4) that, even as he was being crucified, Jesus' "thoughts amid death's strife / were for the ones whose pain he healed / by words of love and life."

NEWS FROM THE CONNEXION

03 FEBRUARY 2021

Report from the January 2021 Methodist Council

The Methodist Council was held online 26 - 27 January 2021

During the first day, Council members spent the afternoon in designated focus groups looking at the strategy documents for five areas of work: Climate Change, Property Guidelines, Oversight and Trusteeship, Education, and Budget. The results of their discussions along with recommendations were then fed back to the Council on Wednesday.

Climate Change

The Focus Group wholeheartedly agreed with the statement of the 2020 Conference Memorial M6 that 'the global climate emergency is a crisis for God's creation and a fundamental injustice'. It noted that this is a crucial year for climate action as government delegations from around gather for COP26 in Glasgow later this year.

The Council recommended adoption of the ambition to become a net zero church by 2030 noting that achieving this depends upon a significant commitment of resources, and effective engagement across the whole

church and substantial work to many church buildings. The Council stated that if endorsed, all District Mission plans should demonstrate how movement towards net zero would be achieved. Further consideration will need to be given to the means for measuring progress.

Property Guidelines

The Council adopted the strategic guidance notes for the use of property in mission, for use across the Connexion. These replace the property strategy and highlight again that property is an expression of mission, theology and ecclesiology and we are saying something about ourselves as a Church in the way we deal with property. Our sharing together of this resource is critical.

The Council discussed issues related to the present Connexional Priority Fund levy on property sales and replacement project criteria and the Model Trust 20 policy concerning sales and leases at less than best price. Proposals will be brought to the Council for full consideration in March.

Oversight and Trusteeship

The group discussed three proposals: An 'Executive Council' to replace the Council and Strategy and Resources Committee and to be the Trustee Body registered with the Charity Commission; the number and purpose of committees that are needed for the work of the church to be governed and managed; and the minimum size of a local church, the number of trustee bodies needed by a circuit and the necessary size of a local trustee body. With the first proposal the group wanted to make sure that a variety of voices were heard and wished to emphasise the valuable role of the Presidency in the Executive Council. With the second proposal, the group emphasised the need to give some thought to different ways of conferring, so that different voices are enabled to participate, and the importance of new ways of working being a central part of this work. With the third proposal the group was undecided about the preferred minimum number for the size of local churches recognising that it is not simply about numbers but about discipleship and how a local church is living out its mission in a particular context.

Education

The draft Schools' Educational Strategy, which is currently out for consultation, builds on the work of the Education Commission and outlines a strategy for the Methodist Church for the next 10 years, which encourages the Church to grow our presence and extend our influence in children's education as an expression of the gospel. The draft Strategy was warmly and widely welcomed by the focus group who found the Trusts are working in a profound way. They discussed: work with children who have special educational needs; early years' nurseries as part of the strategy; recruitment and training; online assemblies; and the mental health crisis provoked by the pandemic.

Budget

The group discussed the five year projections focusing on potential reductions in the level of the District Assessment and looking again at how 'means to pay' is assessed. It was recognised that any reduction in the District Assessment has an impact on the expenditure budget. Representations had been made to the Secretary of the Conference asking for the connexional budget to pay for all ministerial stipends for a year from September 2021 at a cost of approximately £44m. The Council agreed that the request was not affordable for several reasons including restricted funds that cannot be used for paying stipends, properties that provide income that could not be sold in the short term, and that the majority of the Church's reserves are not held in Connexional Funds but by individual trustee bodies across the Connexion. The Council will consider the budget in detail at its March meeting, in order to present it to the Conference.

Domestic Abuse

Council members heard from the Connexional Team's Safeguarding Adviser, Tim Carter who introduced the updated Domestic Abuse policy and procedures. Mr Carter said Domestic Abuse has always been an issue for concern, particularly over the past year when incidents of Domestic Abuse have increased in society during lockdown. He said the updated policy reiterated the Church's commitment to victims and challenge those who have the power to abuse. A scrutiny group was appointed to undertake detailed scrutiny of the policy and procedures, and was delegated the authority to sign the policy off on the Council's behalf.

Israel/Palestine

The Methodist Council gave consideration to the memorials brought to the 2020 Conference, M7, M8 and M9, that call for the Joint Advisory Committee on the Ethics of Investment (JACEI) to advise the Central Finance Board of the Methodist Church on a revised policy on investments related to Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories. The memorials ask for an adjustment to the existing policy of engagement and selective disinvestment such that there is an avoidance in “all companies that profit from activities in illegally occupied areas, as a matter of ethical and economic justice”. The Council requested that the JACEI review the Central Finance Board Policy Statement on Israel/Palestine within a manageable timeframe and propose a schedule for this work to the Conference.

The Council noted with thanks donations totalling £359,000 from the Joseph Rank Trust an independent grant-making body which aims to advance the Christian faith and to help the less fortunate members of society.

A statement on Modern Slavery was adopted by the Council for year 2020-21 which covers activity such as the Connexional Team’s procurement processes and due diligence in relation to existing suppliers.

In the afternoon session on day two, the Secretary of the Conference, the Revd Dr Jonathan Hustler, made a presentation to the Council on ‘Looking to the Future’. He focused on three areas for a post-Covid church pointing out that the pandemic has accelerated many changes that had already started. Dr Hustler said that while there may be a light at the end of the tunnel for Covid, there is not for climate change and the effects of global warming are having an impact on whole communities. He also pointed to the impact the Black Lives Matter protests had on communities and what ‘whiteness’ means. He talked of the importance of moving from words to action highlighting the Methodist Church’s ‘Inclusive Church Strategy’. Despite the Church being smaller than it has been, he concluded by saying there was cause for ‘informed optimism’ from the Methodist past to the success of A Methodist Way of Life. Groups were invited to discuss the presentation and then fed back their thoughts and observations to other members.

12 FEBRUARY 2021

Church leaders call for Government to stop housing asylum seekers in barracks

Church leaders from across denominations, including the President and Vice-President of the Methodist Conference, have written an open-letter to the Home Secretary about housing for people seeking asylum.

The full text of the letter is below:

Dear Secretary of State

Open letter: Asylum accommodation

We have watched with growing concern events unfold at Napier Barracks in Folkestone, Kent and are extremely concerned about the welfare of asylum seekers housed across Ministry of Defence sites.

As you know, in the absence of safe and legal routes to apply for refugee status outside the UK, many have no choice but to make a dangerous and perilous journey to seek safety from conflict, persecution, and violence. After such a traumatic journey, having had to often spend time behind wire fences in refugee camps, it is simply insensitive to house people in such environments. In a global pandemic it is nothing short of irresponsible and risks the lives of residents and staff alike.

Even as a temporary measure, ex-military barracks are unfit for purpose and entirely inappropriate. Requiring members from different households to use and live in shared facilities greatly increases the risk of infection and residents cannot be held responsible for virus transmission rates when social distancing is not possible.

We are therefore calling for an immediate end to the use of military barracks as accommodation for those seeking sanctuary in the UK. It is not a fair or justified response to your legal duty to house asylum seekers who would otherwise become destitute. We understand it is the Government's intention to move all individuals in contingency accommodation into suitable dispersed accommodation as soon as reasonably practical. Can you therefore confirm that the Home Office will not expand the use of military

barracks for contingency accommodation and whether the Government will set out a timeline for their closure.

We do appreciate the unprecedented pressures the Government is facing to provide accommodation to those who are awaiting a determination of their status, following the welcome decision not to evict people from asylum accommodation through a period of the pandemic. However, a long term sustainable action plan has to be put in place to secure suitable, dignified dispersal accommodation. Steps to speed up accurate processing of asylum applications will also reduce pressure on the system.

Our shared faith as signatories to this letter, leads us to view all human beings as equal and deserving of respect, dignity and welcome. We have witnessed at first hand, the generous welcome provided by civic and faith groups to those seeking protection. When asylum seekers are housed within communities, it allows for better integration and access to support services. Asylum seekers are often no longer seen as “other” but as neighbours and friends. It is in this environment that asylum seekers physical and mental wellbeing can be protected, and they are also able to better engage with their asylum application.

We ask that the Government continue to work constructively with local authorities, devolved administrations and support organisations to secure sufficient and appropriate dispersal accommodation in local communities and to end the use of barracks as a matter of urgency.

We look forward to hearing your response to the issues raised.

Yours sincerely,

The Bishop of Durham, The Rt Revd Paul Butler

Cardinal Vincent Nichols, Archbishop of Westminster and President of Churches Together in England

Rt Revd Paul McAleenan, Lead Bishop for Migrants and Refugees, Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales

The Bishop of London, The Rt Revd and Rt Hon Dame Sarah Mullally DBE

His Eminence Archbishop Angaelos, Coptic Orthodox Archbishop of London

Hugh Osgood, Free Churches President of Churches Together in England

Revd Dr Paul Goodliff BA MTh, General Secretary, Churches Together in England

The Bishop of Loughborough, The Rt Revd Dr Gulnar (Guli) Francis-Dehqani BA MA PhD

The Bishop of Dover and the Bishop in Canterbury, The Rt Revd Rose Hudson-

Wilkin

The Bishop of Bradwell, The Rt Revd Dr John Perumbalath Chair of Churches
Refugee Network in Britain and Ireland

The Bishop of Bristol, The Rt Revd Vivienne Faulk

The Bishop of Reading, The Rt Revd Olivia Graham

The Bishop of Croydon, The Rt Revd Jonathan Clark

The Bishop of Oxford, The Rt Revd Steven Croft

The Bishop of Worcester, The Rt Revd Dr John Inge

The Bishop of Southwark, The Rt Revd Christopher Chessun

The Bishop of Gloucester, The Rt Revd Rachel Treweek

The Bishop of Leeds, The Rt Revd Nicholas Baines

Pastor Agu Irukwu, Redeemed Christian Church of God, and Pastor Jesus House
President of Churches Together in England

Most Revd Father Oluwole A Abiola, OBE, President, Council of African and
Caribbean Churches UK

The Revd Clare Downing, Moderator of the General Assembly of the United
Reformed Church

The Revd Richard Teal, President of the Methodist Conference 2020/2021

Mrs Carolyn Lawrence, Vice-President of the Methodist Conference 2020/2021

Dorothy Kendrick, President, Independent Methodist Connexion of Churches

Commissioner Anthony Cotterill, Territorial Leader for The Salvation Army in the UK
and Republic of Ireland

Revd Judith Morris, General Secretary, Baptist Union of Wales

Revd Meirion Morris, General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church of Wales

Revd Dan Yarnell, The Fellowship of Churches of Christ in Great Britain and Ireland



22 FEBRUARY 2021

Presidency support for Housing Commission report

Following the launch of the Archbishops' report on the housing crisis, *Coming Home*, the Revd Richard Teal and Carolyn Lawrence, President and Vice-President of the Methodist Conference, have made the following statement:

“We welcome this report and are glad to have been able to contribute to this valuable research through the secondment of a member of staff to the team.

"The people who suffer the most as a result of our national housing crisis are the poorest and the most marginalised in our society. Covid has exacerbated this and the major structural challenges we face as a community are likely to become more apparent as millions more find themselves vulnerable to losing their homes or being unable to afford good quality housing.



"We need new and ambitious ideas to enable a positive environment where quality affordable housing is available to all and we hope that this report will be a catalyst towards an achievable vision for homes for every individual and family which allow for human flourishing.”

CELEBRATING LGBT+ HISTORY MONTH

A view at how the Methodist Church focused on LGBT+ History Month.

LGBT+ History Month is an annual celebration of the lives of LGBT+ people and aims to educate and raise awareness of the challenges that the LGBT+ community face. What began in the US in 1994 is now celebrated in many other countries around the world.

In the UK, it has been celebrated in February since 2005, beginning as a Schools Out UK project to coincide with the anniversary of the abolition of Section 28 in 2003, the legislation that stated that local authorities and schools were not allowed to 'intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality'. This legislation did irreparable damage to young LGBT+ people who were taught that being lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender was shameful and something to be hidden away. The impact of that teaching still resonates in many LGBT+ people's thinking and psyche.

The organisation 'LGBTPlus History Month' that facilitates the month in the UK, brings together free resources, especially designed for schools, to educate on prejudice with the aim, stated in their strapline, of "Claiming our past. Celebrating our present. Creating our future." However, the month is not just celebrated in schools. Many organisations are now enabling the LGBT+ people within their organisations to be visible and proud especially during the month of February, and events are being held to celebrate the month in many towns and cities in the UK.

The Methodist Church and LGBT+ History Month

This is the first time that the Methodist Church has focused on LGBT+ History Month. It is a good year to begin, since the theme of LGBT+ History Month this year is, 'body, mind and spirit', something that as Christians we are all too aware of. This holistic view of who we are in God, made complete in body, mind and spirit through the sanctification of the God of peace, and blameless in Christ (as 1 Thessalonians 5 verse 23 reminds us) is something we all strive for in our Christian journeys of faith. A reminder that this grace of God is available to each one of us, whatever our sexuality or gender, is

powerful indeed.

LGBT+ History Month is a great opportunity to enable our LGBT+ members to be visible and proud of their identity as LGBT+ Christians within the Methodist Church, in body, mind and spirit.



Looking back at Conference decisions on same-sex relationships

The Revd Mark Rowland is a PhD student at the University of Leeds exploring queer holiness and also works as Free Church Chaplain at the University of Warwick.

It was as long ago as 1979 that the Methodist Conference first received a report about marriage and sexuality and of course there have been LGBT+ people in the Methodist Church a lot longer than that. Sometimes the way our conversations go and the way the questions are framed can make us think that LGBT+ people are somehow a new topic or that the theological or biblical questions are ones we have not had much opportunity to consider.

It is, as my principal in theological college used to say, a bit more complicated than that. One of the challenges of the conversation has been that reports and debates in Conference have not often made their way into the awareness of people in local and churches and chapels. Growing up in a Methodist Church in the 80s and 90s, I can remember hearing only one reference to LGBT+ people, which was not positive.

In 1992, the Conference agreed its Statement on a Christian understanding of Family Life, the Single Person and Marriage. This Statement remains authoritative today and in my own personal opinion, much of it is still very helpful. However, LGBT+ people are noticeable by our absence, which is all the more striking given the consultation also running on the 1990 report of the Conference Commission on Human Sexuality, which would report to the Conference the following year when it met in Derby.

The Derby Conference was tasked to consider that report and to make some decisions about the line the Methodist Church would take. Many feared the church would split and be irreparably damaged. Two parallel sets of resolutions were offered as possibilities: the A set broadly inclusive of LGBT+ people; the B set broadly the opposite. In the event, the Conference accepted neither and the resolutions that we now know as the 1993 resolutions all came from the representatives present at the Conference. They were not written as a set but were what emerged of the many offered. This is the reason that it sometimes seems like they don't hang together: they were not written as a set.

In hindsight, it seems to me that the wisdom (or providence) of the Conference at that time was to pass a set of resolutions that expressed the breadth of experience and theology that the Methodist Church could hold in relation to sexuality and relationships. The creative tension between the reaffirmation of the church's traditional teaching on marriage and the recognition, affirmation and celebration of 'lesbians and gay men' (I hope we would use broader language if we were writing today) and our ministry in the Church allowed space for the dialogue and journey that we have been on since as the Methodist Church. I think this was fittingly called a pilgrimage of faith.

We have then considered what to do about changes in secular law in the light of those resolutions. So in 2005/6, following the introduction of Civil

Partnerships, the Conference consulted and considered the resolutions again. It declined to alter the 1993 resolutions and concluded that services for civil partnerships could not take place on Methodist premises, but ministers could offer private prayers. The Conference declared that nothing stopped Methodist ministers or members from entering civil partnerships.

With the advent of same sex marriage in civil law, the Conference again convened a working party to consider the Methodist Church's response. By analogy with the decision on civil partnerships, the Conference declared that nothing stopped any Methodist minister or member entering a same-sex marriage. While it declined at that stage to allow same-sex marriages to take place in church, the previous guidelines were amended so as to allow services of prayer and thanksgiving to take place on Methodist premises following a same-sex marriage or civil partnership held elsewhere.

We have since been considering how to respond in terms of our own Methodist practice of marriage. The report God in love unites us is the latest step in this long journey and the Conference's decisions this summer will be the next chapter in this history. I personally hope that, in the providence of God, we take a courageous step to affirm in our practice that God delights in and blesses the love not just of male-female relationships but those of all LGBT+ people too.

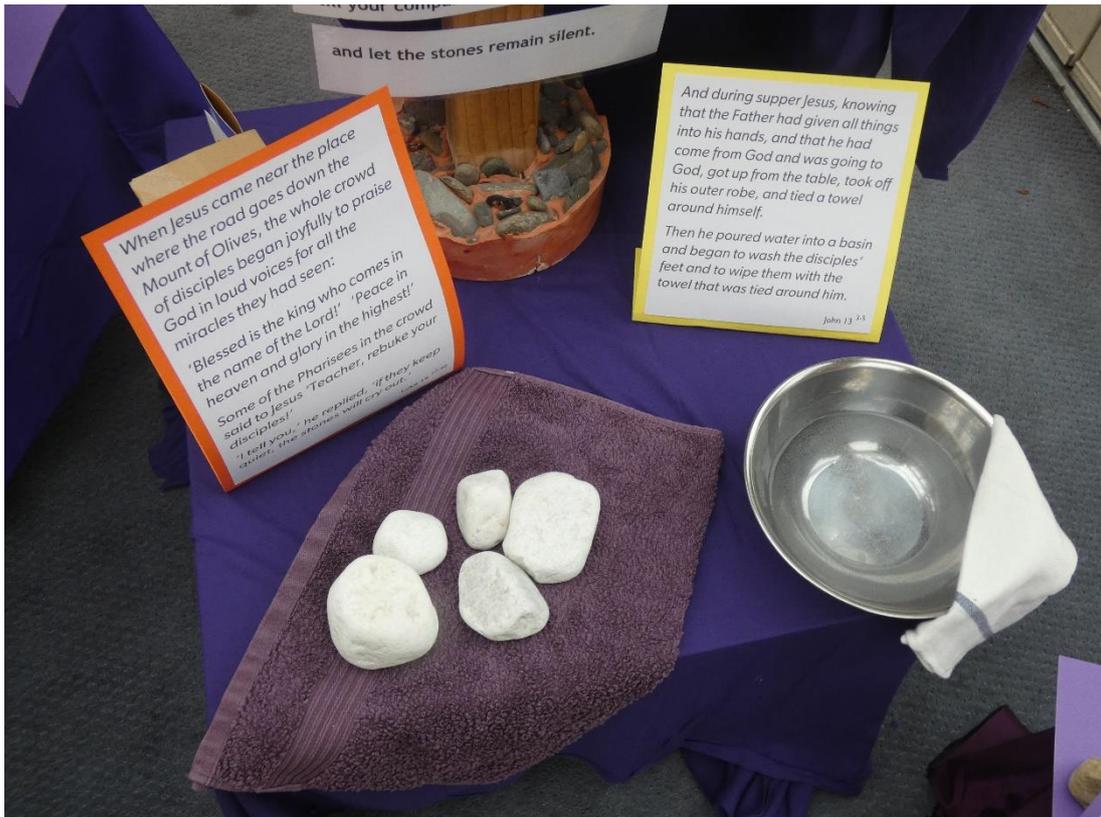
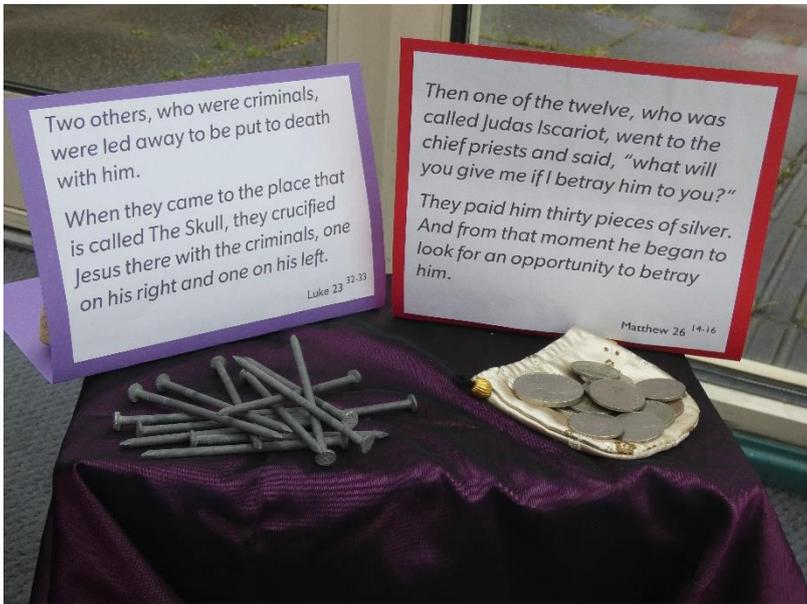
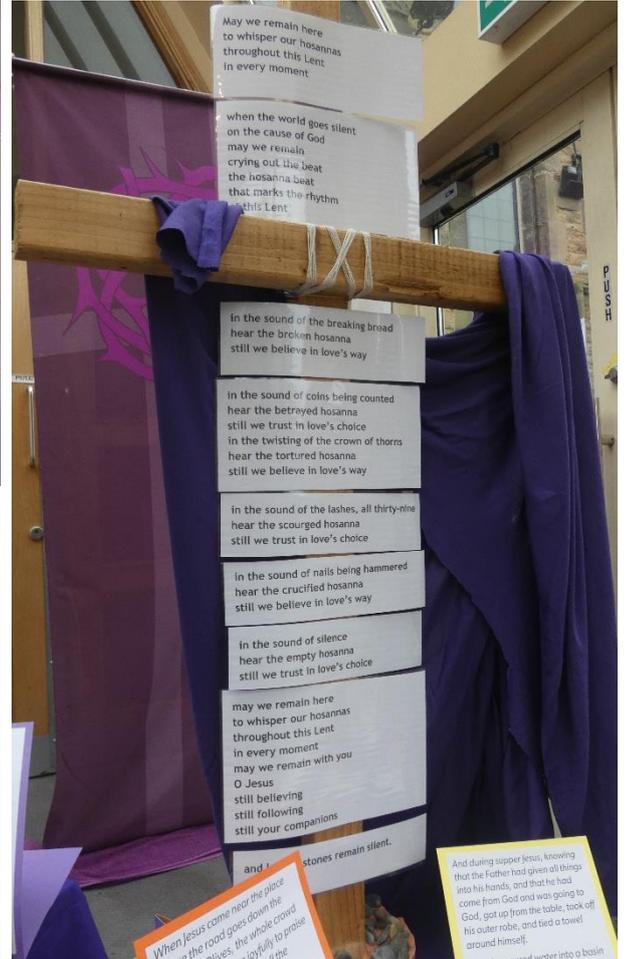
The Revd Mark Rowland



LENT DISPLAY

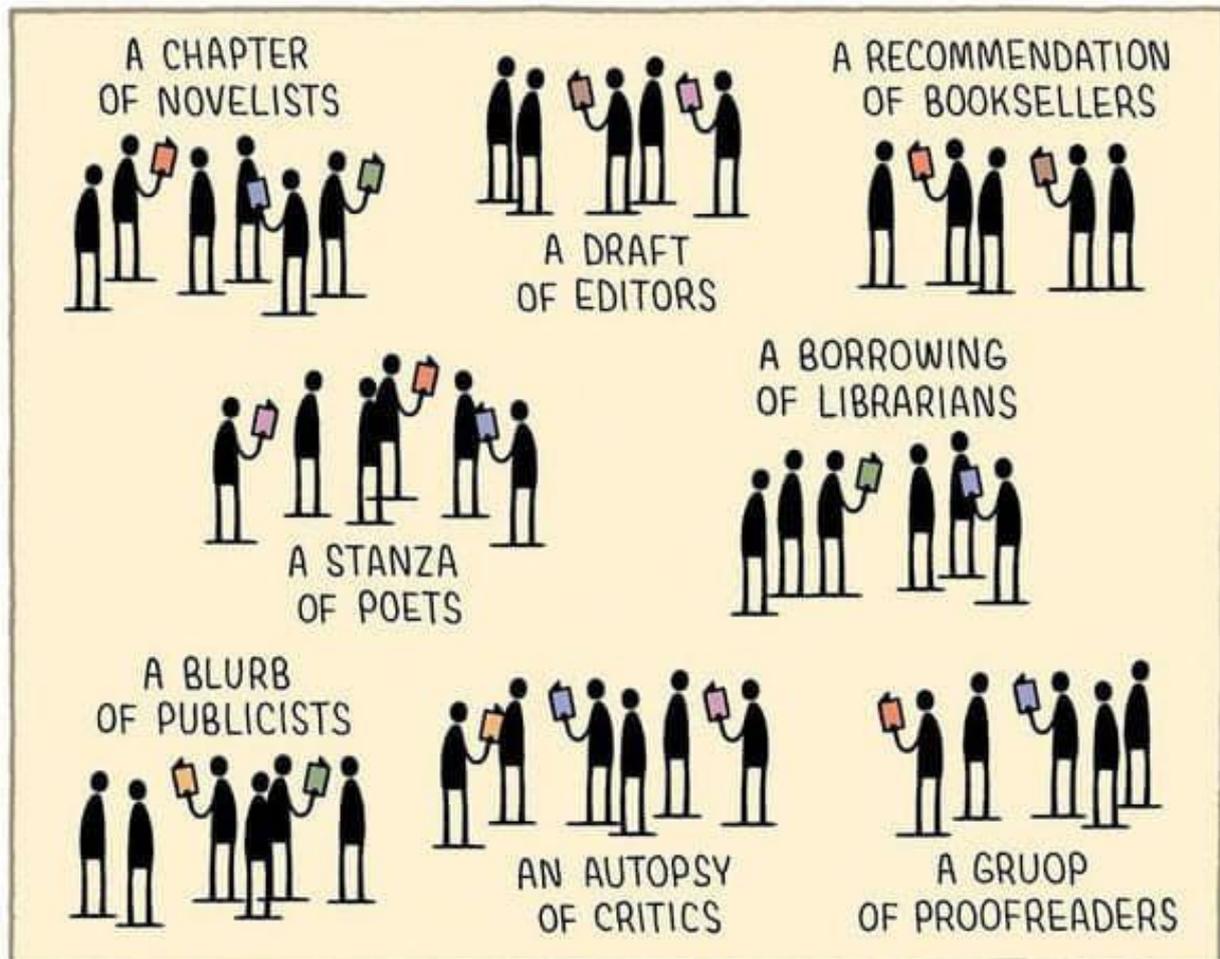
Thank you to John Shuttleworth and Heather Steward for sending some photos of the new display in the church porch to celebrate Lent. It's great that we can still have a presence in the Withington Highstreet community.





THANK YOU FOR READING!

SOME LITERARY COLLECTIVE NOUNS



The next magazine will be out on the 4th April.

Weekly newsletters will be out every Sunday on the Withington Methodist Church Facebook Group and via email.

If you have anything you would like to contribute to next month's magazine, or the weekly newsletters please pass it on to Caroline Fielding - withingtonmethodistnews@gmail.com

If you would like to receive a emailed copy of the magazine or newsletter please email - withingtonmethodistnews@gmail.com

Withington Methodist Church

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Sunday Services

Morning Worship* : 10:45 am
*booking required

Regular Activities

Monday	Monday Monkeys – 10:00am - 11:30am
Tuesday	Tuesday Tots – 10:00am - 12 noon Tuesday morning coffee fellowship see <i>inside cover</i>
Wednesday	Rainbows – 5.30 - 6.30pm Brownies – 6:30 - 8:00pm
Thursday	Needles & Yarns craft group – 2-4pm
Friday	Men's Club – 2:00 - 4:30pm
Saturday	Contact Centre – 2:30 - 4:30pm

About Withington Methodist Church

We are a community of people who meet to worship God every Sunday morning and evening (see inside cover for details). Our services are open to all. At our morning service, we have both a crèche and Junior Church available for children ('All Age Worship' will only have the crèche as older children are welcomed into the main service).

During the week we have various other activities & organisations meeting at our premises. We have two toddler groups a week and are open weekday mornings for anyone to have a coffee and a chat. Our craft group meets on Thursday afternoons for anyone who wants to bring a craft or learn a new one. We have various rooms available for hire for anything from a once off hourly basis to a long term let, please speak to the Church Office for details, or email withingtonmethodistnews@gmail.com.