

Withington Methodist News

February 2023



SUNDAY WORSHIP

5th Feb - At Levenshulme, Mr. John Worthington. **No service at Withington.**

12th Feb - Rev. Caroline Wickens, All Age Worship.

19th Feb – Rev. Kevin Johnson, HC

26th Feb - Nick Palfreyman

Dates for your diary -

Wednesday 1st Feb 7pm - Church Council

Tuesday 21st Feb - Pancake Party! Look out for more details to follow....

Wednesday 22nd Feb - 7.30pm, Ash Wednesday service, with Communion.

GREETINGS FROM CAROLINE

One of the current 'hot potatoes' is the government's Levelling Up process. Invitations were issued to apply for funds for deserving projects. Some applications were successful, some weren't. Perhaps inevitably, those who were unsuccessful have been making vocal complaints about the justice of the whole process. The cost of living crisis means that there are great needs at the moment, and it is hugely complex to respond to those needs.

The society Jesus lived in also had great need at many levels. People lived with poverty and hunger, poor housing and poor health. The response of many was a competitive approach to the available resources in what's sometimes called a 'limited good' approach: there is only so much 'good' to go around, and if you get more, I get less – whether that is food, money, the attention of a doctor or the chance of a better job.

Jesus' ministry pushed back hard against this competitive basis to life. When he fed the five thousand, there was enough food for everyone, not just those at the front of the queue. When he healed people, the life-changing power was available for all, not just those who shouted the loudest. And when he spoke about God's love, he talked about a God who is there for everyone, whatever their economic or social position.

It's a model of unlimited generosity that has shaped Christianity at its best. John and Charles Wesley, founders of Methodism, shared their understanding of a God who offers salvation to everyone, not just a favoured few – 'for all, for all, my Saviour died', wrote Charles (see Singing the Faith 358). Today's Methodist Church tries to reflect that by enabling the inclusion of all; we don't always get it right, but this is one of our central aims as Jesus' disciples.

How can we, the Withington Methodists, live in ways that are Christlike, inclusive and generous to all? Perhaps one response is to work out what we enjoy and find ways of sharing it. Maybe that's music or cooking or football or dancing. Maybe it's different ways of worshipping, or seeing the streets clean after helping with a litter-pick, or getting a warm smile when welcoming someone who's come to church for the first time. It's much easier to share the things we enjoy! So if you're wondering how to live more like Jesus did, perhaps the place to start is by asking yourself 'What do I really like doing?' and then finding ways to share that with others. It seems to me that this is what Jesus did – joyfully sharing all that he knew of God's limitless love with everyone he met.

May our generous God bless us in the month ahead!

Caroline

PRAYER LIST

We remember in our prayers:

Kirsty,

Mujib,

Ora and family,

Princetta and family,

Thandiwe,

Marguerite,

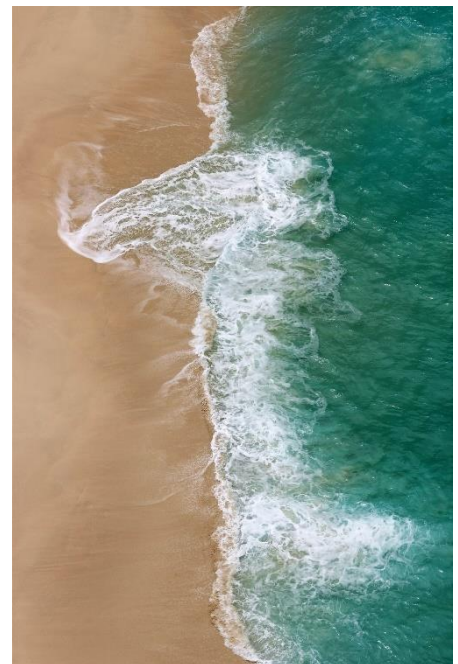
John,

Sarah,

our friends who are no longer worshipping with us,

all those friends still impacted by Covid-19,

those members presently in care homes and unable to be with us in person.



WORSHIP WITH US

Bread Church

A warm invitation is extended to everyone to the first Bread Church, a new initiative in conjunction with our friends at L'Arche Manchester, which will take place here at

Withington Methodist Church on Friday 17th February from 11.00am.

Come along and join us to bake and break bread together!



Sunday Morning In Person Worship

Our Sunday Morning services are held at 10:45 in the downstairs hall. Please enter the church via the back car park entrance. We have refreshments after the service and if you would like to help facilitate this, please let us know.

Reflections and written worship resources:

If you are not on email and would like to receive a printed copy of our weekly reflections or written worship resources for Sunday, please contact Caroline Wickens.

Wednesday Chat and Bible Study:

Now in person at Withington Methodist Church rather than on Zoom, we have a weekly Bible Study every Wednesday at 12:00 pm. All are welcome to join.

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-

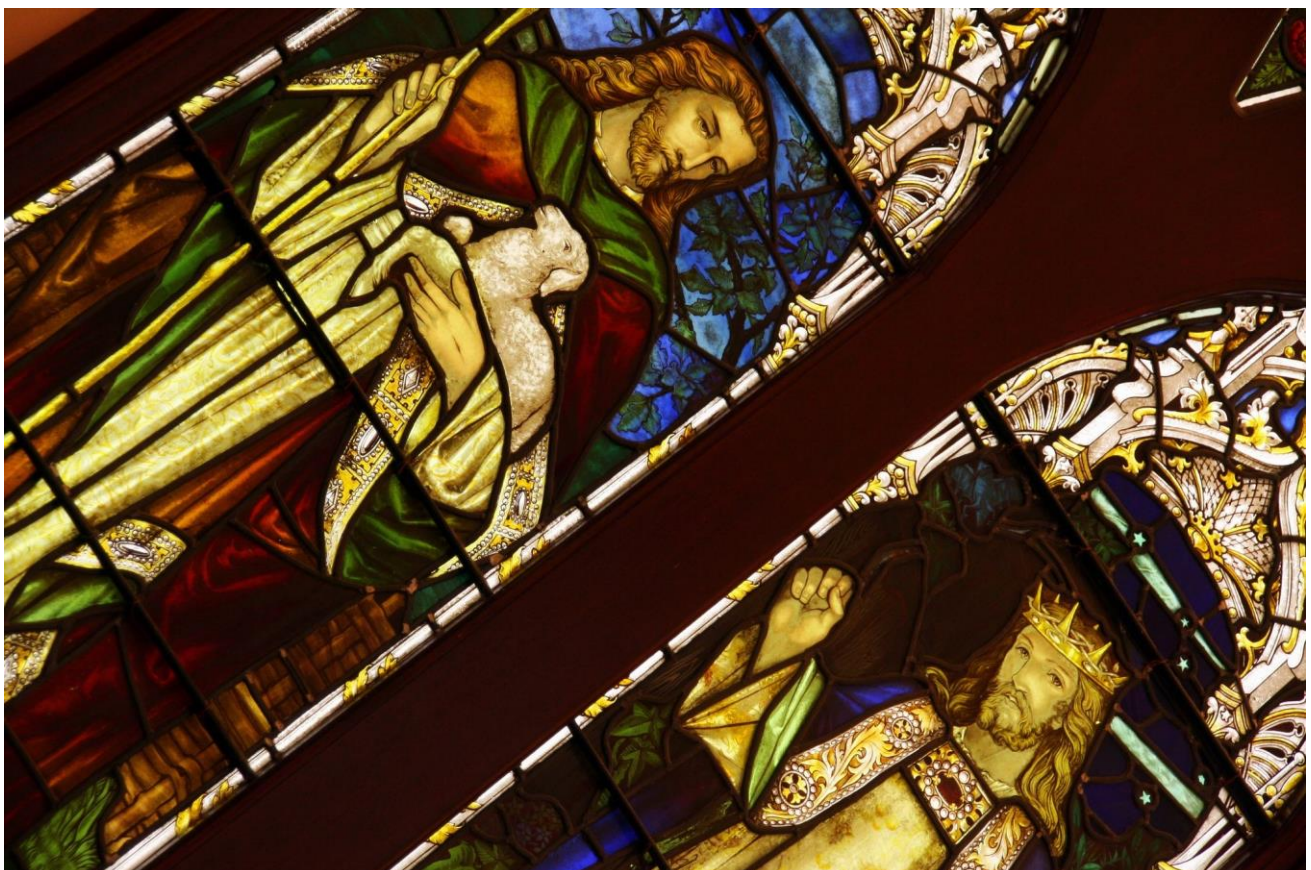
Join Zoom Meeting

<https://zoom.us/j/92204599032?pwd=Tzg0SU9xcVZEZFNQK0FnYnNKWjlUQT09>

Meeting ID: 922 0459 9032

Passcode: 1901

One tap mobile + 12532158782, 92204599032 #, 1901#



NEWS FROM THE CONNEXION

07 DECEMBER 2022

Methodist success in Eco Church Awards

More Methodist churches are signing up to be part of the Eco Church award scheme operated by A Rocha UK.

Participation in the Eco Church awards for the 12 months until June 2022 shows an increase of 70 percent for Methodist Churches over the previous year. In that period, 94 churches achieved a Bronze award, 28 churches achieved a Silver award and one, the Methodist / URC Emmanuel Church in Bungay in the East Anglia District, received a Gold award.

There are now more than 640 Methodist and LEP churches registered for Eco Church, with four churches having achieved Gold.

The Eco Church award scheme is a national community of churches from all denominations addressing the environmental crisis, using a common framework, an online toolkit of resources and the award survey, as well as learning and speaking up together.

Three award levels of Bronze, Silver and Gold encourage churches to engage more deeply with the environment within worship and teaching, buildings and land management, community and global engagement and lifestyle. The awards are not an end, but a means to help churches embed caring for creation across every area of church life.

Jude Levermore, Head of Mission at the Methodist Church, commented, “Living sustainably is an essential part of our calling, which we are living out in the context of a global climate emergency. The Methodist Conference has committed our Church to achieve net-zero emissions by 2030 and the increasing number of Gold and Silver Eco churches are leading the way. It is great to see how Eco Church is inspiring action in our churches and bringing people together. Eco Church will be an important part of the Methodist ‘Hope in Action’ agenda over the coming years.”

The Bristol District is the first district to have been awarded an Eco District

Bronze award. This has been achieved with various initiatives, including churches setting a baseline for their carbon footprints, using the land around buildings to benefit the environment and engaging with political action to protect and restore the planet. There has also been a dramatic reduction in district business mileage from 250,000 miles a year to around 70,000.

Jonathan Pye, Chair of Bristol District, commented, "We are delighted that the Bristol Methodist District, led by our Bristol Eco District Team, is the first Methodist district to gain a national bronze Eco District Award.

"The Bristol Methodist District is committed to living responsibly by ecological principles. We want to encourage individuals, churches and Circuits, and the District as a whole, to respond in appropriate ways to the ongoing climate emergency. We not only seek to achieve our own net-zero carbon targets, in line with the Methodist Conference but set an example to others in wider society to do so, too."

Helen Stephens, Church Relations Manager from A Rocha UK, commented; "Awareness of the deepening climate and biodiversity crises has been brought into searing focus by the summer heatwave, but together, the Methodist Church and A Rocha UK's Eco Church programme offer a hopeful way to respond to the environmental crisis.

"There is something each one of us can do to help change the course that we're on. And it needs every one of us to do something. If we want to grow future generations in our churches, then the environment is one of the biggest priorities on which they want to see action.

31 DECEMBER 2022

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI

The President and Vice-President of the Methodist Conference have made the following statement in response to the announcement of the death of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI.

'We share in the sadness of our Roman Catholic sisters and brothers, at the news of the death of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI. We give thanks for the

way in which Benedict responded to God's call on his life and served the Church as a theologian, pastor and leader. We continue to pray for the Catholic Church in England and Wales, and around the world. We hope that our common witness might lead all to know the love of God and that our shared mission may bring us closer together in unity, that the world might know reconciliation and peace.'



The Revd Matthew Laferty, Director of the Methodist Ecumenical Office in Rome and Co-Chair of the International Methodist and Roman Catholic Dialogue, said:

'Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI was a committed ecumenist who sought Christian unity through prayer and theological dialogue between Churches. He never shied away from candid conversation about serious church-dividing issues, while also encouraging further study and reflection between Methodists and Catholics in our joint pursuit for Christian unity.'

A Prayer from the President and Vice-President of the Methodist Conference

Almighty God,
we thank you that you continue to call disciples to represent you on earth. We recognise your call in the life, faith and ministry of Pope Emeritus Benedict and give thanks for his obedience in fulfilling all that you asked of him.

Thank you for receiving Benedict into the eternal home that you have been preparing for him.

We pray that all who mourn his loss will be comforted.

We hold before you the Roman Catholic Church and pray that we might continue to work together for the unity of your Church and for peace in your world.

We ask in the name of Jesus Christ,
Amen.

12 JANUARY 2023

Obituary for John A.Vickers

It is with great sadness that we announce the death of eminent Methodist historian, John A.Vickers, who passed away peacefully in hospital on Sunday 8 January, aged 95.

Prior to retirement, John was Head of the Department of Religious and Social Studies at Bognor Regis College. He was a member of the Methodist Archives & History Committee and became a valued supporter of the work of the Methodist Heritage Committee and Officer when they were established by the Conference in 2008. John was a member of the Wesley History Society Executive, and Archivist for the Southampton Methodist District.

John made significant contributions to Methodist scholarship through his work on the Revd Dr Thomas Coke. He was the editor of the Dictionary of Methodism of Britain and Ireland (The Epworth Press, 2000) - a comprehensive, but concise guide to Methodism. When the Dictionary moved online, hosted by the Wesley Historical Society DMBI: A Dictionary of Methodism in Britain and Ireland, John continued initially as editor of its ever-developing content.

16 JANUARY 2023

Methodists offer warm welcome

Methodist churches have responded to the cost-of-living crisis by opening their doors to ensure that communities are not left out in the cold. More 450 Methodist churches have now registered on the Warm Welcome website as being willing to offer somewhere for people to find heat, comfort and companionship. This makes the Methodists second only to the Church of England in uptake of the scheme.

Opening a church as a Warm Space can come with additional costs, not least that of heating. Some Methodist districts have made special grants available to those churches who are offering warm spaces including Isle of Man, Sheffield, Lincolnshire, Liverpool, Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury, Yorkshire North and East, and Bedfordshire, Essex and Hertfordshire. Different districts have different guidance on eligibility and how the grants can be used.

The Revd Jade Bath is the District Grants Officer for Lincolnshire, where five churches have applied for grants of up to £1,000. Jade commented, "These grants are from the District Advance Fund and Mission in Britain Fund and are offered to help churches offset the additional costs of new initiatives that are operating as a warm space. Our grants cover up to a third of the cost of the schemes for six months and help pay for additional heating, food and refreshments, promotional expenses and activities such as newspapers and magazines. Emergency welfare grants have also been used to help provide for other essentials where people may be struggling, such as sanitary products or school shoes."

"Public transport can be difficult in districts such as ours with rural communities. We are pleased that two of the churches who are participating are in villages where there is limited access to public spaces."

In the Liverpool District, Grant's Officer Revd Helen Jobling processed 26 applications for grants to support Warm Spaces in November last year, with applications from all circuits. She said, "We were aware that the need was urgent if we were to ensure that our churches were ready for the coming winter. We encouraged our churches to work ecumenically, expand existing outreach projects or start something new."

One of those churches in the Liverpool District to receive a grant was St Luke's Methodist Church, Hoylake, where Cate Warbrick is the Church and Community Lay Development Worker who is coordinating the initiative. She commented, "We have been very busy with people coming in for conversation as well as comfort so we have been providing spiritual as well as practical warmth. There are many who come to us who are on the edge financially and emotionally. Projects like Warm Spaces can help people feel less fearful about the immediate future. Knowing that they can get food and warmth tomorrow relieves, in some measure, the anxiety of today.



"Our Warm Space is helping the community come together to fight the cost-of-living crisis. Working with recipients of Council funding and other churches we have had a donation

of electric blankets, flasks, gloves and hot water bottles and will soon be receiving a batch of slow cookers to give away. People will be invited to join community groups on how to use them and will be able to access packs of ingredients from a community fridge at the church.

"I do worry if the worst of the financial crisis is yet to come."

The Beds, Essex and Herts Grants Committee offered churches 1000 if they were able to open up their premises as a Warm Space for at least four hours each week.

So far grants for 32 churches have been awarded in the district, including Bishop's Stortford Methodist Church where Revd Gill Hulme is superintendent. Here, the church has expanded the welcome of some of its existing outreach projects and room-hires to ensure that the church is open for as many days as possible across the week.

Gill commented, "The synergy of working with charities has allowed us to open up our Oasis lounge to more people as a warm space and to offer a range of support for people involving organisations such as the Bishop Stortford Foodbank and Citizens Advice Bureau who also use our space. The organisations and charities we partner with have been very accommodating, opening themselves up to new people. We are fortunate that the layout means you can rest and relax in one part of the lounge whilst

activities, like our Tuesday craft mornings go on, and so families, men from our local night shelter and of course the ladies who are knitting all have the space to be included in the activities or simply have soup and a roll.

“Spaces have to be warm, safe and welcoming. Having things like jigsaws and newspapers around means that people can feel involved without having to hold conversations with strangers. However, I do go in there with my collar on and talk to those who want to chat, but I don’t ask why they are here.

“One woman who came to us is now a volunteer. She said to me, ‘This is what church should be, this place has been a lifesaver.’”

19 JANUARY 2023

Honorary Doctorate awarded to the Revd Sonia Hicks

The Revd Sonia Hicks, past President of the Methodist Conference, is to be awarded an honorary doctorate from Oxford Brookes University in recognition of her achievements in the Methodist Church, particularly around the development of the Church’s EDI strategy for racial equality and its acceptance of same sex marriage.



Sonia will accept The Honorary Doctorate of the Letters during a ceremony to take place at the university’s Headington Campus on Saturday, 27 May where she will also give a brief speech to the students who are graduating that day.

Sonia commented, “I have to say that I was stunned - I even phoned up the Chancellor's office to make sure that it was intended for me!

“I am delighted that I was selected but I see this as an award for the whole Methodist Connexion in Britain and the steps it is taking towards inclusivity. I pray that as we rollout the JDS Strategy we will continue to share God's table with people who have not always been welcomed consistently.”

25 JANUARY 2023

The Revd Dr Leslie Griffiths to receive an honorary doctorate from the University of Roehampton

The Revd Dr Leslie Griffiths, Lord Griffiths of Burry Port, is to receive an honorary doctorate from the University of Roehampton. He will receive the award at the graduation ceremony taking place at the Royal Festival Hall, London on the 27 January. Lord Griffiths is a past President of the Methodist Conference and will receive the honorary doctorate for his work as a former Chair of the governing body of Southlands College and a senior member of the Roehampton Institute of Education's governing body.



Leslie became Chair in 1997, shortly after Southlands moved to its present site on Roehampton Lane, and at a time when Roehampton was changing. Leslie's hard work has enabled Roehampton to thrive since being granted independent university status in 2004. The University of Roehampton is formed of four colleges, of which Southlands is one, with Southlands having a Methodist foundation that continues the college's relationship with the Church.

Leslie commented, "To have been involved in the creation of a new university must surely rate as a great privilege. When that new university turns out to be an outstanding example of what ecumenism should be all about, it reaches even higher. And all that in London on a campus that's the envy of all. What a blessing!"

25 JANUARY 2023

Tribute to past Vice-President Leon Murray JP MBE – by the Revd Derrick R. Lander

In September 1961, a young man from Jamaica, travelling alone, arrived in London hoping to meet up with an old school friend in Wellington, Shropshire. With kind help from a London Taxi driver and a helpful porter at Euston Station who ensured he had the right ticket and travel directions, Leon safely arrived in Wellington. He met and married Barbara, made their home in Wellington and had two daughters Christine and Rachel, the family he loved dearly.

As a young man he had been brought up in a Methodist family. His parents were committed to the programme for 'Working alongside the Poor' and saw local politics as being part and parcel of serving the community. On his first Sunday in Wellington he made his way to the Methodist church in New Street where he was warmly welcomed, and in the following months and years he became a member of the youth club, became a church officer and local preacher, and in time attended the district Synod and Methodist Conference.

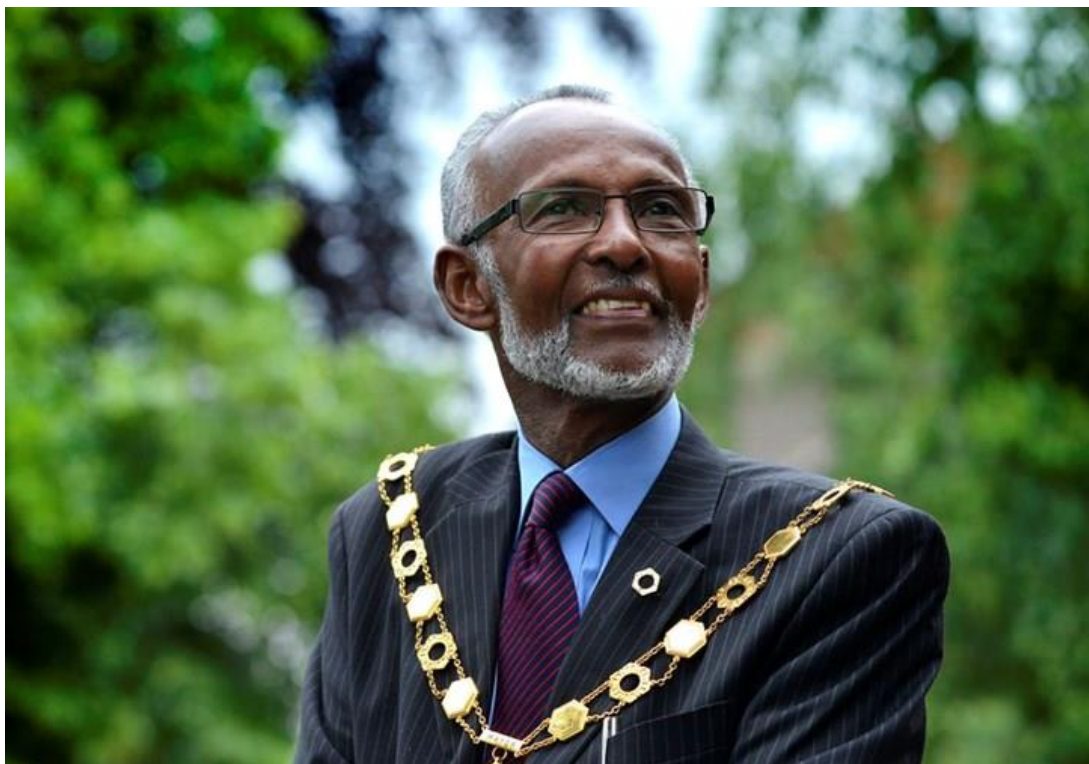
During the same period, Leon found various employment, eventually finding employment in industry working for the engineering company GKN Sankey Ltd. Leon became highly regarded as a conscientious worker, and on the shop floor was seen to be a loyal colleague able to make radical but fair assessment of industrial relations. With such a reputation Leon became a trusted Shop Steward, and in the community his involvement spanned the legal system, the church, charities and politics. He served on the Telford Youth Bench; he became a local Councillor respected for his integrity and his willingness to help everyone and especially the most needy regardless of race, faith or no-faith. Leon was twice Mayor of Telford and Wrekin, he became a Deputy Lieutenant of Shropshire, a post he regarded as a great privilege, and was awarded an MBE for work in community relations and development.

Such is the story of this remarkable man who was to become the first Black person to be elected to one of the most senior offices of the Methodist

Conference. At the Birmingham Conference In 1985, Leon became Vice-President, partnering with the President Revd Christopher Hughes Smith with whom a deep and lasting friendship was formed. During the year, working together, the President and Vice-President challenged the church to honour and cherish the contribution of all members both black and white, offering themselves as a living example of how blessed the church is when our fellowship has no barriers of language, race or culture. His term as Vice-President is remembered as that of a quiet, sincere gentleman of Christian faith, whose great gift was the ability to affirm and include all people as children of God regardless of race or background.

Following his year as Vice-President, Leon continued to serve the wider Methodist Connexion through a generous commitment of time and experience, serving on a variety of connexional committees and being especially helpful in offering leadership or guidance to the church on committees dealing with matters relating to lay or ministerial employment, discipline, and equality. This he continued while still supporting his local church.

Leon Murray died on the 14 January surrounded by his family who we continue to hold in our prayers. In Leon the Methodist Church has been blessed by someone who has provided the Church and the Connexion with inspirational and faithful leadership, and for that we give thanks to God.



THERE IS ROOM

As energy costs soar, churches in Gateshead are now 'warm spaces', welcoming in the community, writes Deacon Tracey Hume.

In the spring issue of the connexion ('Doing Justice') I described the work of the Gateshead Poverty Truth Commission (PTC). People living with poverty are being heard and real change is taking place.

Now I can share a recent experience of working together to respond to the cost of living crisis. In early summer, Alison Dunn, Chief Executive of Citizens Advice Gateshead, approached the PTC about setting up 'warm spaces'.

These are public buildings such as libraries, community centres and churches that open their doors so people have somewhere warm to go in the daytime. Alison said they were considering establishing these across the borough to respond to anticipated need this winter due to energy bill hikes.

Alison was one of our civic commissioners on the PTC. She wanted to run the idea of warm spaces by the community commissioners (people with lived experience of poverty who help shape the work of the PTC) and get their input. They gave valuable insights into what they felt the warm spaces should look and feel like and some of the underlying values that needed to be present. Gateshead Council produced a Warm Spaces Charter that each warm space signs up to and there is mandatory training that includes a contribution from one of our community commissioners.

We were very keen the scheme should not be a couple of people in an office designing something for people in poverty, but it should be designed with them.

Together we're stronger

About a fifth of the 52 warm spaces across Gateshead are churches. I asked Alison why it was important to involve the PTC and faith organisations in the scheme.

Alison said: "It would be easy for me to sit in my ivory tower deciding my next good idea, but what do I know? Nothing. When I work with the Poverty Truth Commission I know I am working with people with real experience of the issues I'm trying to tackle.

They know what it feels like to need a warm space, what would encourage them to walk across the threshold, and, importantly, what would stop them going. It brings realism to the project, it puts local people at its heart and it helps us to get it right first time.

And of course Gateshead has a long history of working with the faith community; relationships are strong and there's great enthusiasm for collaboration and mutual support. As we started to develop this idea, talking to our faith partners was an obvious choice.

It provides us with community reach, great buildings and committed volunteers right where we want to be."

A warm space for all

The Revd Matt Sheard is a minister in the Bede Circuit in Gateshead. He explains why his church wanted to become a warm space. "After hearing about the Warm Space scheme, God moved among a few of our church people. In their hearts they felt the need to increase what we were doing to help those who live in Kibblesworth.

It is a former mining village in the North East of England and surrounding the church we have hidden poverty. The local school responds to the needs of low-income families in their care and we got to hear of people who had previously been financially stable and in employment who were now struggling to pay their bills due to the cost of living crisis.

"As the Spirit of God moved among us, we felt moved to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, lift up and support those who are struggling, and to ask God to set the captives free. In Kibblesworth our church will provide a warm space, food, a listening ear and a charging station for phones and technology. It will be a place of love and welcome and our arms will be held open wide for all. It could be said our response is simplistic and yet what we have heard is that it will make such a big difference.

"When the Spirit invites us to participate in the work of God, it is an immense privilege, but it can also be scary. We cannot however let our fears get in the way of that invitation. As we see levels of poverty rise and inequality in our country increase, the Church needs to respond and reach out in love. It is the spirit of God that calls us on and equips us to share the love of God and be the good news of Jesus."

METHODIST WOMEN IN BRITAIN

News from Manchester and Stockport District

President's Letter

I know this may reach you a little late but a very Happy New Year to you all and I hope 2023 gives you good health with new opportunities in your Faith Journey. As Jeremiah writes in Chapter 29 verse 11 'For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.'

MWiB District Spring Gathering

As I am writing this, myself and the other MWiB District Officers are planning our next Gathering and looking back on our Autumn Gathering on October 1st 2022. It was well attended and we all felt the new format of the day worked well. So for our Spring Gathering at Hope Methodist Church in Failsworth with the Speaker Rev Dave Warnock on the subject of Christians Against Poverty (all the details are on the poster with this letter) we are going to continue to sit around tables in small groups with a short Business Meeting but much more about the Speaker's chosen subject. This will allow us time to chat and share in our groups and possibly ask questions of Dave.

These Gatherings are a social event where all are welcome. If you haven't been before either just come along and join a table or why not invite a group of friends and sit together to share your views, you may be surprised at what you learn!

We chose Hope Methodist as it is easy to get to by tram, bus or car. If you need more transport information please contact me.

I hope to see many old friends and new in March at Hope. Go on give us a try!

Chris Gregory

Email chrisg7684@gmail.com

Tel 07975 503019

FALLOWFIELD & WITHINGTON FOODBANK

2022 End of Year Update

2022 has been our busiest year on record. Throughout this year our sessions have been consistently well attended, but as winter has approached and the Cost of Living crisis has only deepened, the number of referrals to our service has increased dramatically.



Thank you to our volunteers, whose tireless work, stellar cups of tea, and unending kindness and positivity make the foodbank the welcoming and supportive space that it is!

Thank you to our donors for supplying us with an incredible 37,285 meals! As we've said above your support keeps our packs full of nutritious food and our shelves ready to support anyone in need.

Thank you to our wider community for your support, your time, your advice and suggestions. Knowing we are surrounded by people so spontaneously caring and generous is an immense reserve of strength for everyone at the foodbank.

**2820
PEOPLE FED**

**15,660 KG
IN DONATIONS
RECEIVED = 37,285
MEALS**

Fighting poverty means going further than food

Our foodbank was formed in 2014. Since then the nature and scale of poverty we see in our community has grown significantly. However, we know that emergency food only addresses the symptoms of poverty, and that understanding and treating the causes of crisis is the only sustainable way to make change in our community.

We are working to be much more than a foodbank. Across the Trussell Trust foodbanks are organising under the strategy called Together For Change. (You can read more about it [here](#)). One of the projects we run each year is with our local primary schools. We provide pre-packaged food parcels called 'Holiday Packs' to families in each school in need. We have also provided grants for schools to support their families with school trips, uniform, after-school activities and stationary.

In the new year we'll have a qualified Citizens Advice worker at each of our sessions supporting people to maximise welfare income they're entitled to and access health and employment support. We are also networking with local community centres from churches, mosques, libraries, community grocers and Sure Start centres to discuss what issues are prevalent in our neighbourhoods and what we can do about them.

We know that if we work together as a community we can strengthen our collective support networks to make wider change and prevent people facing difficulty falling into crisis.

While we know many solutions to our problems are held in Westminster there is so much potential in Fallowfield & Withington to help build pressure on politicians, local and national, to do better.

By providing an example here of how our communities can come together we can build a movement for change across the city and beyond.

CHURCH NEWS

WMC Pancake Party is Back!

Following the enforced postponement over the past couple of years our Pancake Party will resume on Shrove Tuesday - 21st February. Doors open at 6pm and cooking will continue until around 7.30.

There is no charge but there will be a box for donating to L'Arche Community here in Withington.

To give an approximate guidance for catering there will be free tickets available from Heather (tel.07773 015 882) or collect on the door.

We look forward to seeing you there.

WMC Contact Centre Celebrates its 30th Anniversary

The very first Contact Centre was opened in 1985 in Nottingham, in the hall of a United Reform Church.

In July 1992 Doreen Newton had a proposal passed at WMC Church Council for the church to support the running of a Child Contact Centre. 30 years later, with only a few changes in place, it is still running.



Doreen said that the idea came to her as a result of her work as a Manchester magistrate, dealing specifically with family cases. 'After separation, divorce or breakdown of relationships, it is important for children to see both their parents, if they wish to do so. But often the parent with whom the child lives does not want the absent partner to see the child in their home. A friendly neutral meeting place is the answer to this problem and an alternative to endless visits to McDonald's'.

Initially Doreen envisaged this would be an informal drop off Centre, where anyone would be welcomed. It very quickly became apparent that it needed a more formal structure, so contact was made with local solicitors and the

Courts. Attendance sheets and minimal information regarding who was to be involved in the contact were issued at each session and safeguarding guidelines and confidentiality policies were drawn up.

A national organisation (NACCC) to support the increasing numbers of centres being opened was set up around 1990 and one of its main aims was to encourage a common set of standards. An increasing number of families attending centres had serious problems and there was general concern about how centres should interact and manage such families in order to ensure the safety of both the children and adults. This led to the introduction of an accreditation scheme in 2006 which WMC joined a year later.

We are now inspected by a member of NACCC every 3 years.

Who can attend the Centre?

Supported contact such as ours is suitable for families when no risk to the child/ren or those around the child/ren, has been identified through the referral process.

If there have been allegations of domestic violence, substance misuse, alcohol misuse or mental illness, then these are taken into consideration before allowing a family to attend.

Since the huge reduction in legal aid provision, more families are referring themselves to us.

Although the majority come for the indoor session, we do allow those who mutually agree to use us as a venue for picking up children for outside contact and then returning them after 2 hours to be collected by their resident carer.

Both parents/carers attend a pre-visit meeting where they learn about the centre, explain their particular situations and agree to our rules. They are interviewed separately so we can follow our own risk assessment procedures.

The frequency of their visits can be anything from attending every session to once per month. In the past, one pair of children met their grandparents - and the caged budgie - every 3 months for a good number of years. However we do regard the contact sessions as a stepping stone to build up trust and relationships and advise families we might review their situations after a certain period of time. In reality we seldom ask families to move on unless we are fully

booked up. We have from 1 to 12 families attending our sessions. We accept children of any age but most commonly they are babies to young teenagers.

What is the charge?

Unlike the majority of the current declining number of centres WMC does not charge the families for their sessions. We receive no money from NACCC (we have to pay them an annual subscription) and only a small grant from Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS). This is part of the church's mission and outreach and the church underwrites the cost of room usage and potential loss of rental income.

Who are the volunteers?

When Doreen set it up, the vast majority of volunteers were from WMC and people known to them. Now only about 1/4 of the volunteers are connected to this church. They are of all ages and come from all different backgrounds. We ask them to supply a couple of references and are required to be issued with a DBS certificate through the church and also to undergo Foundation Safeguarding Training provided by the Methodist Church and also by NACCC. In general, for many reasons, volunteers are rather transient. In a report I submitted in 2010 I estimated we had had around 75 volunteers; since then that number has possibly increased to well over 100.

Volunteers are expected to be impartial, available only for practical assistance, and do not monitor or evaluate situations. No written records are kept aside from attendance dates and times and no report will be made to a referrer, CAFCASS, a party's solicitor or court. The exception to this is if a safeguarding concern should arise, which would then be passed on in writing to both Circuit and NACCC. Volunteers are also required to participate in training modules, to be refreshed every 3 years.

From the outset our Contact Centre has been run by volunteers who put out, in the upstairs hall, toys, games, table tennis and a screen for electronic games, and provide light refreshments from the adjacent kitchen. Again, in Doreen's words, 'volunteers will be around to put the kettle on and make sure all runs smoothly so that the parent and children can have a rewarding 'contact time'. We are not social workers and this is not a supervised centre. We are simply offering a facility for those in need'.

When are we open?

Until 2020 we were open almost every Saturday afternoon for 2 hours. However, owing to the declining numbers of volunteers prepared to return post Covid, we now run the session fortnightly from 10am - 12 am on Saturdays. It is a testament to the commitment of a core of volunteers that over the 30 years we have only had 4 different co-ordinators, who liaise with families, solicitors, organise the volunteers' rota and many other of the demanding tasks. Three volunteers from WMC have been in office for the whole 30 years! We are closed only on Christmas and New Year's Days.

Perhaps the most rewarding part of our work is when parents write to say they no longer need us - we have had a few such notifications since we reopened last year. One such communication read... 'I would like to express my deep appreciation for everything you and the contact centre team have done to support me and my family through a very difficult period. I can't say in words how much it has touched me the work you do. Thank you very much. I pray your work continues to help many others'.

WITHINGTON BOOK CLUB

The next Book Club Meeting will be Monday 27th February at 7.30pm

We will be discussing "The Man Who Was Thursday" by G K Chesterton

New members welcome!

FAMILY NEWS

A message from Ora:

Ora and family would like to say thank you for all the beautiful messages of sympathy, prayers and support at the loss of her beloved husband, Stasis.

They have been a great comfort to us.

Ora, Chrystella, and Suzy.

G. K. CHESTERTON



Withington Methodist Church
WARMLY INVITE YOU TO THEIR
ANNUAL PANCAKE PARTY



SHROVE TUESDAY

**21st February
6-8pm**

ENTRY FREE

AS ALWAYS, ALL ARE WELCOME TO JOIN. THERE IS
NO CHARGE FOR ATTENDING OUR PARTY BUT DONATIONS
WILL BE GRATEFULLY RECEIVED IN AID OF L'ARCHE
COMMUNITY, WITHINGTON.

THANK YOU FOR READING!

ONLINE SERVICES THINGS THAT CAN GO TERRIBLY WRONG



PROBLEMS WITH THE SOUND



ACCIDENTAL SCREEN-SHARING OF PASTORALLY-SENSITIVE INFORMATION



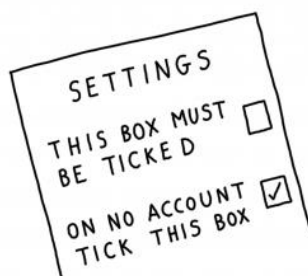
INTERNET BREAKS AT CRUCIAL MOMENT



FAILING TO MUTE THE CONGREGATION



ANIMALS RUNNING AMOK



THE APP HASN'T BEEN CONFIGURED



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INVASION BY ROWDY GROUP OF METHODISTS

CartoonChurch.com

The next magazine will be out a bit later than normal on the 10th March due to Caroline getting married at the end of February. As usual it can be found on the Withington Methodist Church Facebook Group and via email.

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

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

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Sunday Services

Morning Worship : 10:45 am taking place in the ground floor hall. Holy Communion once a month.

Regular Activities

Monday Monkeys (Mondays 10:00 - 11:30am)
Kundalini Yoga (7:00 - 8:30pm)
Brownies (Wednesdays from Oct. 6:45 - 8:15pm)
Snooker Group (Fridays 1:00 - 3:00pm)

