

Rooted and Reimagined Church for Today's World

Stories from around Sheffield Methodist District

Barnsley, Derbyshire North East, Doncaster, Rotherham & Dearne Valley, Sheffield, Trinity and Peak Circuits



A Prayer for a New Church Year

As we begin a new church year, we welcome our new District Chair Vicky Atkins. This key leadership change in the life of Sheffield District, gives us a sense that this September really is a new beginning, the start of a fresh chapter in the life of our district and indeed the circuits and churches within it.

I invite you to join me in the following prayer:

"We'll praise Him for all that is past..."

Lord, as we launch into a new church year, we once again thank you for the ministry of Gill Newton as our Chair of District over the past eleven years, and we pray your blessing on her as she takes up her new role as Ministerial Co-ordinator for Oversight of Ordained Ministries in the Connexional Team.

We thank you for all involved in the leadership of Sheffield District, thinking of all the officers and staff who support the work of the circuits and churches across this part of the country. May they know your strength, your empowerment and your wisdom for this next chapter.

We thank you for all the work that our Mission Enabler, Neil Harland has engaged us in already in terms of reviewing and updating our District Mission Strategy and Growth Plan. We pray that as we all continue to work on discerning where our focus will be and how we will resource this plan in the days ahead, that you will continue to inspire and guide us, so that our will and energies may be aligned with yours.

"and trust you for all that's to come"

Lord, as we enter a new chapter in the life of our district, may your blessing be upon our new Chair of District, Vicky Atkins as she leads us in the work to which you have called us all.

*May your blessing and grace be also with new ministry staff, lay and ordained joining circuits and churches within the district. Thank you for sending them. Enable all who take up roles in local churches or circuits or missional projects, whether for the first time, or once again. Enable us all by the power of your Holy Spirit. **Amen.***

Revd Sean Adair – District Synod Secretary

WHAT IS THE DISTRICT GATHERING?

We hold two District Gatherings a year where everyone is invited to attend. We conduct the business of the Synod, explore a theme and offer learning opportunities as well as worshipping together, praying together and making any formal decisions required as a district.

WHAT IS A SYNOD?

The District Synod sets the policy for the District, serving as a link between the Conference and the Connexional Team on the one hand and the circuits and local churches on the other. It has oversight of all district affairs, formulating and promoting policies, through its various officers and committees to assist the mission of the Church, to give inspiration to the leaders in the circuits and to ensure the interrelation of all aspects of the Church's life throughout the district. The Synod may bring matters to the Conference.



CHAIR'S MESSAGE

Dear Friends,

Welcome to this autumn edition of our District Magazine! It is the first one I have the privilege of introducing as your new District Chair, and I cannot tell you how delighted I am. As I've read through the stories gathered here, I have found myself both inspired and encouraged. I hope that as you read, you too will sense the energy, creativity and faithfulness that run through the life of our district.

It can sometimes feel easy to believe the common narrative that the Church is becoming less relevant in our society. Of course, we know the reality is mixed: some congregations are struggling and some church buildings are closing. Yet the pages of this magazine remind us that the story does not end there. Across our district, God is at work in fresh ways and people are living out the gospel in ways that are both deeply rooted and courageously reimagined.

At Dinnington, faithful worship has blossomed into a community of communities. In Bolsover, dads and children gather each month to build connection and family life. In Edale, art and craft have brought new focus to a chapel at the heart of the village and in Barnsley, young people are discovering that church can happen anywhere, in a cinema, at a climbing wall, or in the midst of games and prayer together.

All of this connects beautifully with the theme of our District Gathering: "Rooted, Relevant and Reimagined -



Church for Today's World". At the gathering, we will reflect together on how we can remain faithful to our heritage while also open to the Spirit's leading into new forms of church and witness. Some stories remind us that endings, like at Whitwell, can be met with grace and open the door to fresh beginnings. Others, like Cantley's Eco Church journey, or the voices of our young people at Hesley Wood, remind us that reimagining is not about novelty, but about living faithfully, responsibly, and with courage in today's world. We are also blessed to welcome Trey Hall, who will help us explore what it means to be a reimagined church with adaptive leadership in today's ever-changing landscape.

Alongside worship and shared conversations, the gathering will offer workshops: practical, engaging spaces where together we can discover how to be more deeply rooted in Christ while reimagining the ways we live out our calling in this generation.

In a society marked by loneliness, injustice, and uncertainty, the witness of the Methodist people has never been more needed. Our calling is clear: to be a people of grace and welcome, rooted in Christ, and bold enough to reimagine how we share God's love in every town, village and community.

*In faith and friendship,
Vicky*



What's it like at The Methodist Conference?

The Methodist Conference is the governing body of the Methodist Church and meets annually to discuss matters affecting the life of the Church, the nation and the world. The business of the Conference is done, and decisions are made, by seeking the will of God through conferring together

A group of representatives attend from each district and help to make decisions on behalf of the district. Two new representatives joined the team this year and here's what they had to say...



LAY PASTOR SEAN WORSLEY FROM DONCASTER CIRCUIT

Why did you sign up to be a Conference Rep?

In all the years I have been in the Methodist Church, I have wanted to go to Conference at least once, and this year I had the privilege of being a district rep.

What was your favourite part of Conference?

The worship was amazing, powerful, and thought provoking with the addresses of both President and Vice President.

Name one thing you learnt at Conference?

Learning about the inner workings of Methodism and being a part of helping to make changes that will move our church forward.

How did attending Conference make you feel?

So often in my role as Lay Pastor, I don't often get to sit and be in a congregation. Conference was amazing for this and just being part of it helped me to grow. The President said in his address that we journey with Jesus at the speed of love, and that is what I found through Conference.

Name one essential item you need at Conference?

Coffee!!

What message would you give to anyone else considering being a Conference Rep?

Don't hesitate to offer to attend. It's a great experience!

YOUTH & FAMILIES WORKER GRACE PERKINS FROM ROTHERHAM AND DEARNE VALLEY CIRCUIT

Why did you sign up to be a Conference Rep?

When I first found out about the Conference I knew immediately that I felt called to attend! I've always been someone who enjoyed attending District Synods and other district gatherings - Getting to know other people and furthering my knowledge of how the Methodist Church operates in different spaces has always been something that interests me.

What was your favourite part of Conference?

I thoroughly enjoyed the time spent going through business when attending the Conference. Reading the Agenda volumes and finally seeing the reports I'd read be spoken about was really insightful and informative. I find it really important to immerse myself in the ideas and perspectives of others, especially in regards to changes and amendments in Methodism brought to the Conference.

Name one thing you learnt at Conference?

One thing I learnt at the Conference was that my voice and story matters. This is something that has been echoed to me by many people in the district who have nurtured me on my faith journey - but to have this emphasised and seen in action at the Conference, really brought it home for me.

How did attending Conference make you feel?

I was very spiritually engaged throughout my time at the Conference! I was very pleased to find out that each day of business started with a Bible Study, which included reflections for the day. Having the focus of the day being brought back to scripture and worship is really important for me - sometimes we all get cooped up in the many meetings and conversations that happen, not just at the Conference but in our own contexts. Putting that to one side and spending time being still and spending time with God is so important.

Name one essential item you need at Conference?

The most important item for me was my travel cup for my many coffees and tea refills that occurred throughout the business days... staying hydrated and caffeinated is a must when attending the Conference!

What message would you give to anyone else considering being a Conference Rep?

Definitely reach out to someone who has previously been a Conference rep! I thoroughly enjoyed my time at the Conference but it can be very full on for those who have never attended before (myself included).

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Church Reimagined

By Trey Hall, Director of Evangelism and Growth, The Connexional Team

The Methodist Church stands at a crossroads—a moment rich with possibility, urgency, and Spirit-led invitation. Across our communities, people are longing for connection, meaning, and hope. They're searching for places where they can belong, be known, and encounter the enduring love of God. And we, the Church, are called to respond to that same enduring love of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—not with nostalgia or fear, but with boldness, creativity, and deep faith.

Growing existing churches and starting New Places for New People isn't a new strategy—it's a gospel imperative. It's about living into the resurrection promise that God is always doing a new thing. It's about being a Church that doesn't just survive, but flourishes. A Church that doesn't just remember its past but risks its future for the sake of others.

We long for our churches to grow not merely to fill pews, but to be open to God's transformation: of our own lives and those who journey alongside us. We work to start new Christian communities not to replicate what's always been, but to reimagine what could be. Whether it's a café conversation in a city centre, a new Christian community in a rural village, or a digital gathering that reaches across borders, each new place is a signpost of grace—a declaration that the Methodist Church is alive, listening, moving, and creating spaces where new people and committed people alike can know Jesus.

This is evangelism in its most beautiful form: not coercion, but invitation. Not pressure, but presence. It's about creating spaces where people can encounter Jesus in ways that make sense to them—where faith is accessible, inclusive, and real. It's about equipping leaders, lay and ordained, to dream big and act boldly. It's about investing in innovation, trusting the

Holy Spirit, and celebrating every step forward.

And yes, it's about growth. Not just numerical growth, but spiritual depth, relational richness, and missional impact. It's about churches becoming more outward-facing, more courageous, more willing to ask: "Who's not here yet?" and "What are we going to do about it?"

This movement is already happening. Across the Connexion, churches are rediscovering their purpose. New communities are springing up. People are coming to faith. Lives are being changed. And we are open to God and trusting God for the future: praying that more churches say "yes" to the call to grow and go.

So, let's be that Church. Let's be the Church that believes the gospel still changes lives. The Church that welcomes the stranger, empowers the seeker, and cherishes the doubter. The Church that doesn't wait for people to come in but goes out to meet them. The Church that plants seeds of hope in every corner of our society. Let's grow churches. Let's start new places. Let's be the Methodist Church—faithful, vibrant, and alive with the Holy Spirit.



Becoming a Growing, Inclusive, Evangelistic, Justice Seeking District... ...For such a time as this



For such a time as this – our district strategy for resourcing your mission – began taking shape before COVID. It was borne out of reflection on themes of exile. Even back then our present was often painfully different from our recent pasts. Lacking Christendom privileges, societal influence, financial resources, membership demographics and self-confidence, from a position of brokenness we felt called to risk all that we still had to learn, change and join in *for such a time as this*.

Over the last five years it has enabled more young people to attend 3Generate, launch of our ONE Programme internships, starting of new churches, mission plans for existing churches and circuits, more support for lay workers and with safeguarding, property and social media. And, of course, this magazine!

As befits the image of exile, we recognise that this has happened alongside significant turmoil, including a reduction in our numerical membership and ending of some of our congregations, and a lurking fear that our Methodist movement may be overwhelmed and inadequate.

REMAINING RELEVANT

Our missional posture is more important than any strategy document. We must keep alert, listening to the world around us, to each other, and to God. You don't need to be a news junkie to notice that we live in troubling, unsettled times. Social isolation is pervasive across all age groups. Poverty is widespread and deepening, employment is often insecure, our welfare system is fraying at the seams. Faith in democracy seems to be ebbing away, culture wars abound. In a region with both economic marginalisation and multi-ethnic neighbourhoods, the least privileged are scapegoated by

the powerful. New houses are springing up in many places, vitally needed, but adding to pressure on already stretched amenities.

Our credibility will rely on being alongside people and supporting them to meet practical needs. Feeling under pressure as an institution, we must not allow seeking the flourishing of our churches to be disassociated from working for the wellbeing of the places in which we live.

People in our churches are also subject to these experiences, which has implications for our expectations on wellbeing, availability and contributions. As are many of the charities, community groups and churches of other denominations that we seek to work in partnership with wherever possible. Many of our churches, along with other key components of our social fabric, are reliant on contributions of people significantly past retirement age for their day to day operation.

Yet at the same time we notice stirrings of a greater spiritual seeking and openness to exploring faith, particularly among younger generations, than we have seen in many years.

What nature of church are we called to be, what nature of disciples are we called to be, *for such a time as this*? A church that remembers most our scriptures were committed to paper by people in deeply strained circumstances: during invasion, exile or persecution? A church that preaches prevenient, justifying and sanctifying grace?

A church that is growing in spiritual depth, in missional outreach and – by the grace of God – numerically? A church that celebrates and embraces diversity? A church that is confident to name and proclaim the Good News? A church that exists to promote the wellbeing of its neighbourhood and planet? A church that recognises each of these mutually reinforcing characteristics in our DNA?

Within the healthy ecosystem that a connexional church can be, different churches have different opportunities and needs. Our renewed strategy for the coming years is to support:

GROWING, INCLUSIVE, EVANGELISTIC, JUSTICE-SEEKING **NEW CHURCHES**

Expecting at least eight fruitful pioneer-led new churches embedded across our circuits, half in economically marginalised communities.

New churches will need sustained support as they mature, and freedom to operate in re-imagined structures. In addition to being different spaces for new people to start journeys of Christian discipleship, they will bring creative learning and experimentation which will inform and enthuse the equally valued evolution of the churches we have inherited from previous generations, volunteer led “fresh expressions” and re-imagining places in which existing forms of church are ending well.

GROWING, INCLUSIVE, EVANGELISTIC, JUSTICE-SEEKING **FLOURISHING CHURCHES**

By 2030 we hope that at least 20 inherited (longstanding) churches which have grown significantly, and become even more inclusive, evangelistic and justice-seeking than they are now, at least half being Church at the economic Margins. Many will have been accredited as Silver Eco Churches.

These churches will be underpinned by healthy cultures of prayer, personal and small group discipleship and permissive environments that encourage supported innovation. They may not dare to label themselves as “flourishing” today, but are likely in a position where they can meaningfully think a few steps at a time, set medium term plans for growth, and be supported to invest in implementing these.

GROWING, INCLUSIVE, EVANGELISTIC, JUSTICE-SEEKING **REVITALISED CHURCHES**

When a church in its current form appears to be coming to an end - which many of our churches will - and the congregation feel called to experiment with being church in new contextually relevant ways, they will find the support they need to do so.

What is possible will be shaped by the gifts and fluctuating availability of unique individuals, so adaptive learning and giving things a try will be more important than rigid long term strategies. Small amounts of seed funding together with people with relevant skills and experiences to walk alongside can make a significant difference to these churches.

WHERE IT IS NECESSARY AND APPROPRIATE FOR WORK TO END, IT **ENDS WELL** AND ENABLES RE-CREATION

When a church in its current form appears to be coming to an end and the congregation discern that it is time to end well, this will be recognised as a natural part of our Connexional ecosystem.

All the congregations started by St Paul no longer meet. This does not make them failures – we are part of their enduring legacy. Being church *for such a time as this* includes starting, ending and reshaping the ways and places in which we gather.

Chapels which have previously been used by congregations which are Ending Well will always be thoroughly evaluated for their missional, community and financial potential.

INCLUSIVELY GROWING EVANGELISTIC AND JUSTICE-SEEKING **LEADERS**

Churches of any size are ultimately communities of disciples, growing in faith together. As a district, we will support people who will be better able to live out their vocation connected to expertise and experience beyond their local context. For example, learning from the impact of our ONE Programme youth internships, we will introduce equivalent support for people of all ages to grow as leaders, including access to high quality relevant teaching, individual coaching and commitment to participation in a mutually supportive cohort.

SUFFICIENT FINANCE AND RESOURCES FOR GROWING, INCLUSIVE, EVANGELISTIC, JUSTICE-SEEKING CHURCHES

Doing all of this will cost time and effort. Trusting God will equip us to once again become a growing movement means we need to prepare for a marathon, not just a sprint.

Balancing the books is increasingly difficult for our churches and circuits, as it is for many organisations, especially as we seek to be a justice seeking church which prioritises economically marginalised communities. We will explore and develop new sources of sustainable income to supplement the generous regular giving of our congregations.

We live in an increasingly regulated and complex world, with factors beyond our control increasing the paperwork we need to keep on top of. Whilst not easy, our ambition is that Methodist procedures remain sufficiently robust but become noticeably simpler than in other organisations.





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Stitching Faith and Community

By Kate Burnett, Trustee and Renovation Co-ordinator, Edale Methodist Chapel

This photo was taken by a friend, Joslin McKinney on a walk over Shatton Edge, Hope Valley. She didn't think of it as a religious image, but as soon as I saw it on her Facebook thread, I asked if I might use it as an Easter image at Edale Methodist Chapel.

As the chapel has been undergoing extensive renovations for the past five years we got used to putting images and poems up on the board and grounds outside, even holding our monthly services outdoors, or (safely) under scaffolding. By summer 2024 the chapel had new floors, ceiling, water, a toilet, heating and also a blank wall where the original two tier pulpit, and then an old harmonium, had provided a centrepiece. While we wanted clear walls for hanging exhibitions and projecting films, the chapel felt unfocused. Joslin's image seemed perfect if we could scale it up and maybe make the landscape more local to Edale.

We have very talented craftspeople in the village: weavers, felt and lace makers, embroiderers and a rope maker, so decided to interpret the image into a textile - with felted stones, applique landscape, embroidered sky with lace clouds and a coil of handmade cord

instead of the galvanised wire.

Over many Tuesday afternoons between October 2024 and June this year we washed local fleeces, teased out the 'fluff' and learned wet felt making. Once we had a wonderful variety of pieces, the wall and post were needle felted onto a thick black wool serge. The landscape was pinned and sewn from found fabrics, bits of knitting, and wool over stitching. The sky was separately embroidered with lace clouds worked in and we learned rope making with foraged stems, - nettles, daffodils and reeds.

The textile was finally hung in the chapel this June on a specially made shepherd's crook and the coils of rope pinned into place. We were amazed to see how the untrimmed rope looked like a crown of thorns and its circle did exactly the same as the wire in the original photograph, it made the broken wooden post and two paler stones behind it read like a cross. So Edale Chapel has a central image again, - one we can roll up and put away when necessary, but is otherwise there to invite engagement and contemplation, to affirm our place, the lives lived in it, and the mission that drives it.



Dinnington: A Community of Communities

In February 2024, Dinnington Methodist Church faced a crisis. A group of faithful members wanted to continue meeting and worshipping but knew they needed to change to sustain the building.

A Vision Group, including representatives from four Methodist churches, was formed to explore the way forward. They engaged with community groups, churches, and local agencies to discern God's call and experiment with new initiatives. After six months, they concluded that there was a clear need for more local activities, as limited public transport and the area's former pit-village character can make it harder for people to access opportunities elsewhere.

The chapel has now passed into circuit trusteeship, and the existing congregation has become a class of North Anston Methodist Church. They continue traditional Sunday worship, but the priority is to grow new forms of Christian community through outreach activities.

At Dinnington you now find Dinna Tots, a thriving toddler group, the kids club - The Shell Club is a small but tight knit group of young

people who enjoy and feel safe in their time together and a Pioneer Worker Pete Farmer has been appointed. The aim is to create a 'community of communities' that helps people grow as disciples and explore faith deeply.

LET'S SAY HELLO TO PETE

"I have been involved in Pioneer Mission and planting new forms of church with teams in various places across Britain for a number of years.

"I love pioneering new projects and communities, forming missional teams and making disciples of those far-from-church-life, that's what attracted me to the role of Pioneer Worker in Dinnington as the role involves starting new communities with new people in new places.

"So far, we have started with prayer walks and we're just in the process of forming a House of Prayer for Dinnington that focuses on listening to Jesus, discerning His plans for the town together with ministers from churches in the area.

"The next step has been to strengthen the

children's and youth work -first by forming a team, bringing faith-based elements into the existing 'Shell' kids club and planning a new 'Youth Club' for those in secondary school this autumn.

"So, in a nutshell, we're beginning with strategic prophetic and missional prayer where we aim to listen to Jesus and do what He says, whilst also working with families in the area to see new expressions spring up from the harvest over time."



Who let the Dads Out

"Who Let the Dads Out" is part of Care For The Family, the Christian initiative to strengthen family life, offer support and welcome everyone. There are hundreds of "Who Let the Dads Out" all over the country including at The Bolsover Methodist Church.

"Bolsover Who Let the Dads Out" started in February 2022 and ran for a year. Following a short break, it relaunched in September 2023 with a new leader - Victoria and was set up as a place for Dad's, Grandad's and male carers to bring children to play, socialise together and support each other strengthening both families and communities.

The group has gradually grown over the years and now regularly attracts around 50-60 adults and children who enjoy playing in a relaxed 'stay and play' environment with a variety of toys and music.

The group's sessions run once a month on a Saturday, and its themes are related to key events throughout the year. At Christmas Santa visited the group and offered presents kindly gifted from local supermarkets. During Easter, the Easter bunny called by and dropped off chocolate Easter eggs and provided a great photo opportunity. The group also celebrated

Mother's Day, and each child was given a bunch of daffodils to give to their mum along with a special homemade card. Father's Day is always a particularly special session, and this year was celebrated by taking a Polaroid picture of the dads and children for them to keep, along with a little keepsake keyring calling dads superheroes.

The group also likes to make each session unique. For this year's July session the children were able to serve up an ice cream with lots of sprinkles and sauces, and our August session invited a local dance business to come and let the children play, dance and have fun. They have also previously invited a local face painter to come and paint the children's faces which also proved to be a hit with some of the dads having their face painted too.

The group continues to thrive and attracts dads and children both locally and from other areas outside

the community. One regular dad called Gary has visited with his little girl Susie since the group first began and says he "finds the group easy going and informal with plenty of toy and craft options which keeps Susie (now three-years-old) entertained the whole time....No need to worry about snacks as Susie loves the snack table with fruit, toast and biscuits part way through the session. We hear all about the updates and next session details on Facebook, so we can be sure to fit it in as regular family/dad time".





Hello Sheffield Methodist District - It's So Good to Be Here

Let me begin with a very warm hello! My name is Vicky Atkins and I am delighted to introduce myself as your new District Chair. It is a joy and privilege to have stepped into this role, and I am really looking forward to the journey we are beginning together.

My husband Andrew and I have recently moved into the Barnsley Circuit, where he will be serving as a presbyter. We are settling into a part of Yorkshire that is new to us, and yet feels strangely familiar, a place with deep stories, hard-working people, and a resilient, generous spirit.

I was brought up on the northeast coast, not far from the colliery villages of County Durham. Those formative years instilled in me a deep respect for working-class communities, places that understand the power of solidarity, the sacredness of neighbourliness, and the importance of looking out for one another. That sense of interdependence and shared purpose is something I carry with me into ministry, a belief that the Church, at its best, is a community that knows how to do life together, to serve, to celebrate, to grieve, to laugh, to love.

Andrew and I have four adult children, who in turn are beginning adventures of their own, and we are now grandparents to two beautiful

grandchildren. Family life, in all its messiness and joy, keeps me grounded and grateful. It is a constant reminder of the faithfulness of God across generations.

My journey with the Methodist Church has taken me through a rich variety of roles and contexts. Most recently, I've served as Superintendent of the Calderdale Circuit, a place of hills, heritage, and heart. But my ministry began as a Methodist deacon, working in diverse communities, often on the margins, always in the thick of life. Those early years as a deacon taught me to listen well, to love unconditionally, and to keep my eyes open to where God is already at work, and has shaped the presbyter I am today. I have a heart for service, a love for people, and a deep conviction that whatever our calling looks like, we are all called to model the radical, inclusive love of Jesus. The kind of love that reaches across boundaries, that welcomes without condition and embodies grace in action.

People sometimes ask me what kind of leader I hope to be as Chair of this District. I usually smile and say, "Ask me again in a year!" The honest answer is I don't know yet. I've only just arrived, and I've not had the privilege of sitting down with many of you. How can I know what the plan is without first hearing your



stories, your fears, your joys and your hopes? I believe the best kind of leadership is rooted in relationship, in listening carefully, walking slowly, and discerning together where the Spirit is moving.

So, my commitment in these first months is to be visible and present. I want to come and be with you, to listen, to learn, to laugh, to share in worship and witness. As part of that journey,

I recently walked the Peak Wesley Way with Andrew and our two youngest children, Joel and Eve. We traced the paths through the Peak Circuit, staying in churches, meeting faithful folk, and drinking in the beauty of the landscape. It was an inspiring introduction, filled with generous hospitality, warm encouragement, and a glimpse of the diversity that defines this District.

And what a district it is! Sheffield Methodist District is rich in its diversity, urban and rural, traditional and pioneering, long-established and newly-emerging. I am energised by the many ways in which this District is already responding to the real and complex needs around us: poverty, loneliness, marginalisation, isolation, injustice. These challenges can feel overwhelming, but I firmly believe the Church is uniquely placed to respond. As Methodists, we have always been a people of movement, shaped by a desire to serve, to speak truth to power, to stand alongside those who are suffering. We are called to be salt and light, not in abstract, but in the very real places where people live, work, and struggle.

So if I do have a plan, perhaps it's this, to discover together what the "best formula" looks like in each of our contexts. What does it mean to be church here, in this town, this village, this housing estate, this edge-of-the-city street? How do we show people what the love of Jesus looks like in ways that are tangible, contextual, and accessible?

I also want to model something that's deeply important to me, which is a healthy work-leisure balance. I like to think I'm fairly good at it (though my diary might sometimes disagree!). I believe we are called to be Sabbath people, to live lives that weave together work, rest, and play. It's a holy rhythm we've inherited, and I want to encourage it across our district. Time with God isn't separate from the rest of life, it's found in the ordinary, the still and the playful.

When I'm not working, you'll often find me outdoors, walking, hiking, foraging, and breathing in creation. Andrew and I have a camper van we love to take camping in wild places; it's one of our favourite ways to connect with God, nature, and with each other. I also love to craft; painting, ceramics, felt work, it's all part of the creative joy that helps me rest and recharge. Meditation is another cornerstone of my life, I am a qualified mindfulness teacher, and silence plays a big part in my prayer life. It's where I often meet God most clearly.



"How can I know what the plan is without first hearing your stories, your fears, your joys and your hopes?"



So here we are, a new chapter, full of possibility. I'm so looking forward to what we'll discover together. May we be a district that listens well, loves generously, and lives hopefully, rooted in Christ, open to the Spirit and shaped by grace.

I can't wait to meet you.
Vicky

Vicky was a guest on our podcast Faith, Hope and The Journey, you can listen here:





Alpha Course Offers Fresh Look at Faith in Rotherham

By Revd. Andrew Fox, Superintendent of the Rotherham and Dearne Valley Circuit

For over thirty years, churches of many denominations have been using the Alpha course as a way of introducing people to the Christian faith in a welcoming and engaging way.

Earlier this year we ran Alpha in the Rotherham and Dearne Valley Circuit in two five-week blocks, either side of Easter at Wath upon Dearne, where there is currently a very small local congregation.

On the first evening we were unsure who might come along and were delighted to welcome 28 people including local residents and others from churches in the circuit.

Most of those who attended on the first week, continued throughout the course and others joined part way through. Following the course we started weekly Bible study as requested by participants, a hopeful sign for renewal of our mission in Wath. We are looking forward to our next Alpha Course in 2026, elsewhere in the Circuit.

Here are some comments from participants: "I started the Alpha course before but

never completed it. This time I got to finish the course and I'm really glad I did! It covers the main topics of what it means to follow Christ and breaks it down simply; therefore, it is easy to understand. I have studied the Bible before, but because of the way Alpha is run, you have an opportunity to discuss and learn from each other and understand different perspectives rather than just your own. It had a community feel, I looked forward to meeting with other like-minded people each week. I would do the course again and recommend it to others."

"Alpha turned out to be the best, most inspirational event I've taken part in since I was a teenager. The course was welcoming and I felt comfortable enough from the start to discuss my thoughts and ask questions. I'm confident that Alpha has encouraged me towards a deeper understanding of my faith. A few months on and I still feel a deeper connection to God and everyone. I made some lasting Christian friendships and that fellowship will always stay with me."

Cantley Church Champions Creation Care

In a time when the planet's future can feel uncertain, churches in the district are rediscovering their responsibility to care for creation. The Eco Church project isn't just about recycling paper or switching to LED lights, it's a new way of life, and an ongoing journey to protect the environment.

Cantley Methodist Church in Doncaster is just one congregation who are transforming their worship, their building and lifestyles and becoming a living testament of hope, and sustainability.

In 2024 the congregation agreed that caring for the environment should be their top priority, so they began their Eco Church journey and were surprised that their building and other worship practices already fulfilled the requirements for a silver award. They are still working through the five key areas of Eco Church before applying for an award but have found it very rewarding and a positive challenge so far.

Mary and Mike Scott have been the main drivers for the project, they said: "We've been wanting to be part of the Eco Church movement for a long time, so it was wonderful to hear that the rest of the congregation were as

passionate about caring for the environment as us. We are still in the early stages of our journey, but we have introduced prayers for creation into our services. We are encouraging recycling, re-using and donating unwanted items rather than sending them to landfill.

"We've created a wild garden, and as the church is situated on a traffic island, members of the public come along and chat to us whilst we tend to the plants. We are also delighted to have received some planters and a bird table to add to the garden all thanks to a grant for the MHA group who hold lunches at the church which was arranged by Cantley Ward councillors and students from Doncaster College. The students used the left-over timber to create the bird table.

"We would encourage all congregations to look at the Eco Church criteria and assess where you are now. We discovered that over the years whilst improvements were being made to the church building to improve efficiency and reduce costs, we were already helping the environment. You can work through each section at your own pace and it's not as daunting as you would imagine."

A Faithful Goodbye: The Story of a Church's Final Chapter

By Revd. Julie Coates, Superintendent of the Trinity Circuit

After 123 years of faithful service, Whitwell Methodist Church closed its doors in 2024.

Why? A range of different circumstances led to the decision to close - changes in society, an inaccessible building with many steps and limited parking, the impact of COVID (regular coffee mornings never resumed after the pandemic), pressure on the preaching plan, the need to undertake costly maintenance work and financial concerns to name just a few.

But on reflection the former members can see the practical reality that there just were not enough people who were physically able to sustain the life and work of the church. The strain on those who tried to keep everything going was unreasonable.

The decision to close was not made lightly. For a time, the congregation held on with hope, sharing worship twice a month. But when it became clear that continuing was no longer viable, the members met the moment with grace and honesty.

Once the reality of closing was named

aloud, the small congregation came together with purpose and love to bring their shared chapter to a close in a way that honoured its legacy. The final service was deeply moving. Memories were shared, prayers were offered, and hymns were sung with heartfelt emotion. At the end of the service, each person was invited to take home a hymn book—a simple but powerful symbol of the faith they shared.

Trinity Circuit's Operations Manager is working with a management group to oversee the next steps for the building. Furniture, resources and artefacts from the church have found new homes. The church's war memorial has been carefully repositioned in the local community centre, ensuring that the names and sacrifices are remembered and they remain at the heart of village life.

Though the church building is no longer open, the relationships forged in faith continue. The community keeps in touch through a monthly Zoom service, a WhatsApp group and occasional meals out together. The minister offers home communion. These links provide mutual support, prayer, and an ongoing

sense of belonging. Some members now worship with local Anglican congregations, while others are in the process of transferring their membership to Barlborough Methodist Church in the neighbouring Derbyshire North East Circuit - a community that has been strengthened by the arrival of new members. To be honest, it was quite a relief for former members from Whitwell to slip into a congregation that felt like 'home', without being expected to manage a building.

Though the building is closed, the church lives on - in the memories and witness of the past and in new connections and shared stories of faith. The closing service ended with these words:

"We have gathered here to celebrate all that has gone before, and now we turn towards all that is to come. Let us go from here blessed by the gifts this building has given us over these many years and let us take forwards all the good we have gained from our shared experience to whatever is to come. Amen."

Introducing Our New Youth Workers in the Barnsley Circuit

Barnsley Circuit has two new Youth Workers who are sharing their passion for Jesus and re-imagining what church looks like for the youth of today.

Hello! We are Josie and Libby, and we're delighted to introduce ourselves as part of the Barnsley Circuit team. We both began our roles at the start of 2025 and, although we didn't know each other beforehand, we quickly became friends—brought together by a shared passion for Jesus and for children's and youth ministry. Josie serves as the Children and Families Worker, and Libby as the Youth Worker.

Josie coordinates Messy Church events, supports the Hemsworth Play Centre, and supervises toddler groups across the circuit. Libby leads the circuit-wide youth group and is also involved in outreach clubs, Brownies, and Girls' Brigade.

Together, we deliver monthly assemblies in local primary schools - a real highlight of our work. It's a joy to watch children enthusiastically act out Bible stories

and engage in creative workshops. Volunteers have been especially encouraged by the way students remember and retell the stories.

A key part of our youth work has been drawing young people from across the circuit together through shared experiences and reimagining what church can be in today's world. One such example was a trip to Barnsley cinema, where 25 young people gathered to watch The King of Kings, an animated retelling of the gospel. One young person said, "I loved going to watch King of Kings; it helped me learn about Jesus." Opportunities like this are helping us make faith accessible, relevant, and engaging.

Another recent highlight was co-planning the One Youth Event in partnership with The Exodus Project, which brought together 130 children and young people from churches across the town. It was a day full of adventurous activities, food, crafts, worship and prayer. The atmosphere was buzzing, and it was incredibly moving

to see so many young people worshipping, praying, and forming friendships.

Our shared vision is to support volunteers across the circuit in sharing the gospel with children and young people—both those new to faith and those already being disciplined. We're seeing the beginnings of real transformation: confidence growing, relationships strengthening, and a renewed sense of purpose among our young people and those who support them.

The theme of this edition of the magazine deeply resonates with our ministry. We want to root young people in God's love, the stories of Scripture, and the life of the Church—while also reimagining what that looks like for this generation. Whether that's through worship in a cinema, games in a community hall, praise in the park or prayer on a climbing wall, we're discovering that church can happen wherever God's people gather with open hearts.

Please do keep us—and the children and young people of Barnsley—in your prayers. We're excited for what lies ahead.

With blessings,
Josie and Libby



“A few months on and I still feel a deeper connection to God and everyone. I made some lasting Christian friendships and that fellowship will always stay with me.”





Mini Broomhill

Broomhill Methodist centre is undergoing some amazing changes, all thanks to several grant funders. The new project, which launches this Autumn will see new expressions of church through a state-of-the-art climbing wall and creative play town installed within the building.

'Mini Broomhill' which is the creative play town, has been trialling for 18 months, and the resounding feedback from the local community was that they were crying out for an open, accessible space where families can come and spend quality time together. It was from this feedback – knowing that there was a social need within the surrounding area, made it imperative that the vision was pursued.

Weekly faith-based groups have been running for some time now, a place where parents and carers come together.

Rose Durrant, Building and Community Manager at Broomhill Methodist Centre said: "Our dream is that we are a space where all are welcome, there is no judgment and that deeper conversations can flow, and we have seen this happen already. One of

our regular visitors described coming to Mini Broomhill as their sanctuary and that the weekly meeting had been a lifeline for her and her daughter during her maternity leave.

"The downstairs of the building looks very different, and we have been working with the directors of Climbing Works to bring a new business venture from Broomhill Methodist Centre. Climbing Works will be leasing the space, and running the climbing wall, but we will have access to the wall and can run our own events from here.

"We are proud to say we have made a New Place for New People, and excited to see who will be walking through the doors so that we can share the hospitality and love that Jesus taught us so well.

"We want to say a heartfelt thanks to all of those who have made this possible, through the grant support of Benefact Trust, TMCP, Sheffield Methodist District, Veolia, Connexional Priority Fund and Sports England. Without the valuable support of these organisations, we would not have been able to launch the project."



"We are proud to say we have made a New Place for New People, and excited to see who will be walking through the doors so that we can share the hospitality and love that Jesus taught us so well."

Youth Day

Eighty young people and their leaders came together for our district Youth Day at Hesley Wood Scout Activity Centre in Chapeltown, Sheffield. The annual event is for children and youth aged between 8-18 years old and it's a great way for our young people to learn, make new friends and explore what it means to be a Christian.

This year's theme was exploring how to be a justice seeking church and the young people shared in worship together, took part in workshops, crafting, team building activities and had lots of fun.

The workshops encouraged conversations about what injustices we see in local communities, schools, churches and the rest of the world, then what changes can be made and what our young people can do to make their surroundings fairer and more just.

The on-site activities this year included the zipline, crate stacking, archery, axe throwing, climbing tower, a 3D Cube maze, nerf gun target range and a basketball shootout.

The Youth President Bea Hume also joined the event and was able to capture lots of views from the young people which she will take back to the Methodist Conference.

Vic Loveday, District Children and Youth Coordinator, who organised the day said: "It's so important young people get together at events like these so they know they are part of a larger Christian family, and not just their church. It's an excellent way to introduce young people to worship and to explore serious and meaningful topics such as how to be a justice seeker in a safe and welcoming environment. It's also lots of fun, especially with the on-site activities and it allows people to make new friends and be supportive of each other.

"I have been really inspired by some of the conversations the young people were having about the injustices they see in the world around them and what they could do to change that, it is my hope that they can be real agents of change.

"Thank you to all the leaders and volunteers who made the day possible."

Watch a highlights video here:



Eco Church

Why and how to get started and keep journeying with the Eco Church framework

Workshop led by Dr Hamish Leese who is the Connexional Action for Hope Implementation Officer, supporting Methodism on a path to becoming a net zero church

In 2021 the Methodist Conference wholeheartedly agreed and affirmed that the global climate emergency is a crisis for God's creation and a fundamental injustice. In response to this, the Conference agreed on an aspirational target to become a net zero Church by 2030.

As we work to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions, Eco Church helps us to engage with God's creation and think about how our actions, both as a gathered church and dispersed community, impact on our local communities as well as global crises.

Eco Church encourages us to consider five key areas of church life: worship and teaching; buildings and energy; land and nature; community and global engagement, and lifestyle, and measure progress by receiving a bronze,

silver or gold award.

This session will explore why and how to get started with Eco Church, as well as exploring some further steps we can take on the journey. The sessions will be interactive, with a chance for sharing stories, joys and challenges, as well as asking questions of each other.

Whether you are able to attend the District Gathering or not, I would encourage you to visit ecochurch.arocha.org.uk/ to find out more and consider who within your church might be a good starting point for conversation about becoming an Eco Church. If you are already an Eco Church, perhaps you might consider what the challenges are in reaching the next award, and who might be a good team to address those challenges.



Nurturing Contextual Faith Communities

Exploring how new people, pioneers, churches and circuits all gain from supporting and listening to the pioneers in our midst

Workshop led by Dr Heather J Major who is a Cliff College Research Fellow in New Places for New People, Evangelism and Growth

We live in a world and society that is changing, becoming increasingly polarised and highlighting tensions and conflicts between people rather than looking for ways of nurturing healthy relationships. Many churches and circuits are caught up in the struggle to maintain familiar forms, structures and traditions, losing touch with the communities of people that live alongside them. It can be tempting to look for new, exciting and 'relevant' ways of responding to the challenges, introducing new programmes, activities and events while overlooking the deeply relational and contextual learning emerging from pioneering people across districts and the wider Connexion. In this workshop, we will be exploring some of the themes emerging from my research with NPNPs and reflecting on how we all gain from supporting and

listening to the pioneers in our midst.

Take some time to reflect on the following questions:

1. What are your assumptions about pioneers and new ways of being church? Why?
2. Who are the pioneers you know and what are they doing?

Challenge – Identify one or more pioneers that you know and take time for a coffee with them and ask the following questions:

- a. What are their joys and struggles?
- b. How can you actively support them?
- c. How would they evaluate your church / circuit? Do they have any recommendations from their experience and perspective?



Adaptive Leadership

Growing resilient teams for an era of uncertain change

Workshop led by Trey Hall, Director of Evangelism and Growth

Imagine church leadership as a journey like Race Across the World—no map, no luxury, just faith, courage, and the people beside you. In today's shifting spiritual landscape, lay and ordained leaders together must navigate unfamiliar terrain, make bold decisions, and adapt on the move. That's where adaptive leadership comes in.

Inspired by Ronald Heifetz, adaptive leadership equips church leaders to face challenges that don't have ready-made solutions. Like contestants in the race, leaders must distinguish technical fixes from adaptive challenges—knowing when to rely on tradition and when to embrace innovation.

Just as teams in the show must regulate distress to stay focused under pressure, church leaders must create space for honest reflection and spiritual resilience. Change can be unsettling, but it's also sacred ground.

And most importantly, adaptive leaders give the work back to the people. In Race Across the World, success depends on shared responsibility, trust, and collaboration. The same is true in the Church. Leadership isn't about having all the answers—it's about empowering others to journey faithfully together.



Contextually Revitalising Small Churches

Reclaiming local lay leadership to reimagine mission

Workshop led by Erica Dunmow who is Chair of Trustees of Urban Theology Union, District EDI Officer and a member of Churches Together in England's Urban Mission Network

Erica Dunmow has worshipped in and led small church contexts and led urban mission since the 1980s. Based on that experience she is a member of Churches Together in England's Urban Mission Network. From 2020 to 2022 she co-led with Delroy Hall, a project exploring how to encourage lay leadership in local churches in order to revitalise them. She helped re-grow a Methodist congregation from eight people post-COVID to over 30, the majority being new members. Read 'Replanting in the same pot' a Research Report: Reclaiming Local Lay Ministry for Mission - The Susanna Wesley Foundation susannawesleyfoundation.org/dunmow-reclaiming-local-lay-ministry/

Although the congregation didn't sign up to a particular theology (indeed one of the key things they identified at the outset was the need to be a place where people could disagree well) Erica is coming from a model of contextual, inclusive, faith sharing through doing, called 'Kindom-based Evangelism' which she had earlier

developed with an ecumenical group (visit utusheffield.org.uk/kingdombasedevangelism/).

Erica's research found that the key thing leading to growth is an intentional willingness to do things differently and a belief that like Sarai and Abram... you are never too old to venture out in faith. This needs to be backed up by: midweek meetings for pastoral oversight and prayer for insights and that people will respond; knowing your local community and its issues; unconditional welcome and (safeguarded) involvement of whomever walks in in whatever state of being; and a style of worship in which everyone is expected to take part in leading and sharing as much as they can.

The challenge for the Methodist plan system is establishing a small team of ministers/local preachers equipped to work in this way, who can give consistent input within this model, every Sunday for at least a year, and for the local pattern of worship to be maintained thereafter.



The Environment, Mission and Being a Justice Seeking Church

By Siggy Parratt-Halbert from The Learning Network

As churches we are encouraged to engage in so many things that we wonder just how we can fulfil what's required of us? And how can we prioritise when those things are all priorities? Well, here's the thing: there are three big pieces of work that can be knitted together very easily. Indeed, I would argue that they can't be anything other than woven together. I'm talking about care of our environment; justice seeking church; and mission. First, the environment and being a justice seeking church just can't be separated. Justice means justice for all. That means not just humans. We are NOT the be-all-and-end-all on this planet, and we have become far too used to putting our own desires over the needs of other living beings. This is far removed from what God asks of us, in both Testaments. Note the language here – our desires, and others' needs. If we are to be a justice seeking church, we must consider other beings – their welfare, their homes, their requirements for living, all on an equal footing with humans. Many don't want to hear this, and many will still adhere to the outmoded and unfair notion of dominion. That smacks to me of using Noah's rejection of his son Ham to support slavery of Black people, something we now think of as the unthinkable.

Let's assume for a moment that everyone is comfortable with the idea of equality for all. If your church considers its impact on other living things, you are by default living as a justice seeking church.

And living as a justice seeking church in this way will help you and your Connexion get nearer to reaching Net Zero Carbon by 2030. Two wins with one vision. And if you are still yet to buy into the notion of treating all beings more fairly, and you're reading this thinking justice is more about refugees and their welfare, then think on this...many refugees are made homeless because of climate change. It's not just war that brings people to a place of hopelessness and despair. If people can't grow their sugarcane because it's too wet, if their mangrove swamps have dried out, if the water has gone from their lakes and rivers, if their fishing is ruined because their seas are full of plastics and chemicals, the only way to survive is to leave for other shores – usually of the countries that caused all of this. O the irony. So ponder for a moment on justice for the people whose lands have been ruined by our poor environmental practices. Does this convince you?

And Mission? Where does that come into all this? Glad you asked! Working to care for creation – as God asks us to do – by default takes you outdoors, or at least outside your church building. It makes your church visible to others. For example, becoming an Eco Church means working with your community. If you don't have the resources for your church to be a bit greener there will be community groups out there who do, and would love to work with you. Whether you have land at your church or not, there is much you can do outdoors: worship in the local park; join

in with the Friends group of a nearby park; seedbomb derelict places; take over neglected Council planters; join the local Wildlife Trust and volunteer or support its programmes. All of these move you into the public eye. So many people's lives revolve around the church; rarely do they spend time with people who are not churchgoers. You can't bring people to Christ if you never socialise with secular groups. So why not be a part of environmental groups near you? Show them what it is like to be loved by Christ (yes, I know, Jesus doesn't differentiate, He loves everyone!) instead of telling them. And do your bit for God's earth at the same time.

So, Mission then, is also tightly braided through Creation Care. And Creation Care is in turn woven through Justice Seeking Church. Three big wins just by doing things a bit differently. Why not come to one of the quarterly webinars run by the Eco Community Network and learn a bit more about that interweaving? You can learn more here:

Understanding why creation care is a requirement, not a choice and why it is about justice: methodist.org.uk/action/climate

Understanding how mission and the environment go together: methodist.org.uk/for-churches/evangelism-growth/lead-churches-into-growth/planning-for-growth/net-zero/

Be a part of the conversation, and learn from one another, with the Eco Community Network: facebook.com/groups/1752803048802867/

Thank You

Keynote Speaker

Trey Hall, Director of Evangelism and Growth, The Connexional Team

Worship Leaders

Aaron Shah - worshiponthestreets.co.uk/

Market Place

Cornerstone Bookshop - dnemethodists.org.uk/worship-reflect-learn/cornerstone-bookshop.html

Urban Theology Union - utusheffield.org.uk/

Good Taste - goodtaste.org.uk/

MHA - mha.org.uk/

Cliff College - cliffcollege.ac.uk/

Who Is Your Neighbour? - whoisyourneighbour.org.uk/

Hosts

Barnsley Circuit and Staincross Methodist Church

And finally, thank you to everyone who shared stories from their own lives, to those who contributed stories for the magazine, and all who made the Autumn District Gathering possible.

Please pass this magazine onto someone else to read, you can also find digital version by visiting sheffieldmethodist.org

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