

To Boldly Go.... Faith Beyond Church

Stories from around Sheffield Methodist District

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



A Prayer for the District & the Spring Gathering 2025

Sir Francis Drake, the sixteenth century explorer, is remembered for being the first Englishman to circumnavigate the globe. History records many stories from his life and judge him and his impact in positive and not so positive ways. I mention him here because of a prayer attributed to him which I offer below for our use this Spring time.

I say attributed, because more recent historical research now identifies the author as Rev. Addison H. Groff, an Episcopalian priest from the USA, writing in 1945. Nevertheless, the prayer is a helpful one for us I believe, especially at a time of significant transition for us in our churches, circuits and district. It is a time when we need the same kind of faith, courage and hope that this prayer resonates with. I invite you to pray it with me...

*Disturb us, Lord, when
We are too well pleased with ourselves,
When our dreams have come true
Because we have dreamed too little,
When we arrived safely
Because we sailed too close to the shore.*

*Disturb us, Lord, when
With the abundance of things we possess
We have lost our thirst
For the waters of life;
Having fallen in love with life,
We have ceased to dream of eternity
And in our efforts to build a new earth,
We have allowed our vision
Of the new Heaven to dim.*

*Disturb us, Lord, to dare more boldly,
To venture on wider seas
Where storms will show your mastery;
Where losing sight of land,
We shall find the stars.
We ask You to push back
The horizons of our hopes;
And to push into the future
In strength, courage, hope, and love.*

Loving God, who calls us to be yours,
To be present day disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ,
In the communities in which we live and work here in the Sheffield District,
Grant us Your grace and the empowerment of Your Holy Spirit,
So that we might be signposts to your living presence
and ambassadors of the Kingdom of love, justice and peace. **Amen.**

Revd Sean Adair – District Synod Secretary



A METHODIST WAY OF LIFE



Twelve ways we can encounter God



We can have daily conversations with God.



We serve the people around us who need our help.



We worship God to praise him, give thanks and apologise for the times we mess up.



We notice God in the Bible and the world around us.



We share our faith.



We challenge injustice.



We are open hearted and minded and give and receive hospitality.



We learn more about our faith and grow and change to be more like Jesus.



We care for each other and ourselves.



We live in a way which draws people to Jesus.



We do what we can to help the natural world flourish.



We share our stories with others.



CHAIR'S MESSAGE

Welcome to this latest edition of the Sheffield District magazine – the last edition to which I will have the privilege of welcoming you in my role as Chair of this district! This magazine has been one of the exciting things that has been introduced during my time in the district. It's here to aid our communication both within, and beyond the district and tell the stories of the amazing things that God continues to do amongst us and the communities that we are called to serve.

The focus of our Spring Gathering/Synod is "To Boldly Go – Faith Beyond Church." As followers of Jesus, our calling is to live our lives in ways that help to bring about the transformation of the world. In some cases that will require us to speak up or speak out, but in many cases, it is the things that we do, the projects and initiatives that we get involved in and the choices that we make, that have a real impact on the lives of others.

In this magazine, you will find numerous examples of how people from across this district are making a difference to the lives of others in a huge variety of ways. You may read the stories and think you could never be brave enough to do what others do. But I hope that, like me, you will find these stories inspiring and be prompted to consider how you might live out your faith, beyond the church, in ways that really make a difference. None of us are called to do what others do, but simply to allow God to use who we are and what we have to offer in unique ways. We are called to live authentically.

You may have heard the famous quote, "Preach the gospel, and if necessary, use words!" It is often attributed to St Francis of Assisi, but there is no evidence to suggest that he ever said it or wrote it! Nevertheless, it is a helpful reminder to us all, of the truth that it is our calling to proclaim the gospel as we go about our daily lives and not just when we are gathered with others from our church family!

It is a joy to see through the stories contained here, just how many of you are already doing that, but if you are challenged as you read, it is my prayer that you will find the courage "to boldly go" and through your actions and possibly your words, make a difference to others in your workplace, college, neighbourhood or family.

And as I prepare to leave the district later this year, may I take this opportunity to thank you for all the ways in which you have prayerfully discerned, courageously responded and faithfully served as we have shared in God's mission together across this district.

Gill Newton, District Chair



Every Day Discipleship

By Neil Harland, a chartered accountant, rabbit owner, embarrassing football dad, and Mission Enabler for Sheffield Methodist District, amongst other things.

“I only became an accountant because I wanted to care about people” remarked my lecturer. He had started training as a surgeon but feared that, for him, the necessary detachment from patients whose lives would literally have been in his hands would have made him interested in the technical to the exclusion of the personal. As an accountant he was now sometimes the only person that small business owners would open up to about their fears about how to pay the bills, fears they even withheld from their spouses, the only person who might hear and understand their pain.

These words stuck with me throughout my career in finance, feeling strongly that I was there for a purpose, and one of very few Christians that my colleagues in multinational insurance or professional service firms met on a regular basis. Not that it was always easy. “What is truth?” a finance director finalising the books might sympathise with Pontius Pilate, with many livelihoods relying on continuing to bridge the chasm between investor expectations and economic reality.

“She’s the only one who understands guinea pigs are worth treating”, said the bearded Glaswegian in the veterinary waiting room, “everyone else just shrugs their shoulders”. “She was amazing when one of my cats had to be put down during lockdown” chipped in the lady in the wheelchair, wiping back a tear. She went on to describe pastoral support delivered down the telephone. Year after year Rebecca dispenses care for each of her patients and their owners with the combination of compassion and taking no nonsense usually reserved for primary school teachers.

Will is a goalkeeping obsessive. When he’s not straining his arthritic knees to run training sessions for young goalkeepers, he’ll be teaching teenagers to train kid goalkeepers. Or researching new training methods on YouTube. Or working out how to coach out the one mistake his protégés made in the game last weekend. Or WhatsApping parents to check the progress of those who picked up a scrape. If football was a religion we would speak of Will as a youth pastor and evangelist.

Over the coming months I hope to speak with many of our churches – large and small - about what support they need to help them become more inclusive, more effectively justice-seeking, to grow as a faith community. Important stuff, and stuff to which you likely already commit considerable time, energy and money. I look forward to hearing all about it.

But let us not “make God’s love too narrow”. The Mission of God *Missio Dei* is far broader than the Mission of the Church. As is the Mission of the People of God. Christ’s call to “as you go, make disciples of all nations” is as much, if not more, about the time we spend not doing church. At work, at leisure, at the retail park, the dentist or the kitchen sink. On social media, the phone, the sofa, or the bus.

Perhaps our priority for when we congregate on Sundays should be to describe and give thanks for the encounters since we last met, to reflect on where God was in these. In Rebecca’s surgery, Will’s training session, or your grocery basket. And to pray for each other’s week to come: that whatever we each do, whether in word or deed, we might do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus.



Barnsley Church Powers Up with Solar Panels

Emmanuel Church in Barnsley has made protecting the environment a top priority. They have achieved a silver Eco Church award, created a community Eco Festival and have installed solar panels.

Several years ago a small group of like-minded members of the congregation formed an ECOgroup who made a commitment to highlight the importance of sustainability and to re-affirm the Christian commitment to care for the planet. Jan Eldred, a member of the group said: “We are the enthusiasts, planners, drivers, conscience-prickers and organisers of all ECO matters.

“ECOFest was created in 2023 to engage our local community in conversation, learning and fun related to climate change” Jan explained “We recognised that the only way to help mitigate the potentially very difficult impact is for each one of us to change our attitudes, thinking and behaviour, but we cannot change unless we learn how and what to do and EcoFest gives us that opportunity.”

Each year more than 20 community groups and businesses gather together to offer presentations, share stories, take part in activities and hear school children and Brownies read poetry, all with the aim of being eco-friendlier. Visitors include the Mayor, Councillors and the MP for the area plus lots of families and local people. ECOFest 25 will take place on 27th September with the theme of Healthy Planet: Healthy You!

Thanks to ECOFest the church was able to strike up a relationship with the Sustainability Team at Barnsley MBC that made the ambition of the church to install solar panels a reality. Jan said: “After our first ECOFest, we were invited to join a Barnsley-wide network called the Positive Climate Partnership. This includes businesses, public services, voluntary groups and organisations as well as educational institutions such as Barnsley College and Northern College. Through this

network we were told about a grant from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, managed in Sheffield and devolved to each of the four South Yorkshire local authorities. Barnsley MBC also encouraged those seeking grants, to join a ‘live’ six session course, raising awareness of ways to capture carbon footprints and take steps to reduce the carbon impact on the climate and planet. I attended the course and received, not only information and insights into different aspects of sustainability, but also invaluable help in accessing a grant.

“The ECOChurch group had already identified that installing solar panels would be a cost-saving to the church; help to reduce our carbon footprint and encourage conversations about sustainable energy. Staff from the Barnsley Net Zero team spoke with us about our efforts, including encouraging us to continue to organise and promote the ECOFest; they visited Emmanuel Methodist Church to help us to assess the best way forward in using a possible grant.”

Working with Barnsley Net Zero a grant was obtained and Emmanuel raised the remaining funds required from a church family donor and the churches Grant-seeking Group applied to others funders for assistance.

Emmanuel Church now has 36 solar panels on its roof. The church can monitor the energy generated via an app and happily recorded that on the first day after completion, in February, the sun shone meeting 80% of their electricity requirements for the day, with 6kWh exported to the national grid for which they will be paid. It is estimated that they will save over 12kWh of energy; 2.46tons of CO2e and at least £3,000 per annum.

Jan added: “Collaboration between the Emmanuel ECOChurch and Grant-seeking groups, and Barnsley Net Zero is proving invaluable to the church and the community we seek to serve.”

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Senior Youth Clubs in Rotherham

By Revd. Andrew Fox

George Bernard Shaw declared that “youth is wasted on the young”. Whether or not we agree with that statement, some activities previously thought to be the preserve of the young, have been taken up by an older generation. Following the pandemic, Wickersley Methodist Church, in the Rotherham and Dearne Valley Circuit, set up a monthly Senior Youth Club, complete with table tennis, darts and other games. Also known as the Recycled Teenagers group, the sessions began with a few retired attendees and now regularly involve around thirty people from the local community. One recently retired man said he valued the opportunity to meet with other men, as he missed the company of other men since finishing his work. Whilst a variety of activities are on offer including crafts, some of the participants simply enjoy the chance to chat with others and make new friends.

Inspired by the Wickersley group, Broom Methodist Church began *Tuesday @ Broom* in April 2024 aiming to address loneliness in the

local community. Leafletting of local streets resulted in a small but encouraging initial take up. Some of these neighbours have become regular attendees, occasionally playing table tennis, always enjoying their conversations. In the autumn, contact with a local Care Home resulted in a small group of residents being brought along. They have shared in craft activities, table top quizzes and other games and some have started to attend Sunday worship with support from care staff and family members.

Both these groups have received some financial support from local parish councils in recognition of the contribution they are making to addressing issues of isolation and loneliness. Their distinctiveness reflects the difference between their local neighbourhoods. In each of these groups a team of church members enable the sessions without acting as leaders of the sessions. Together they are helping to make a difference to the lives of their neighbours.



Chop and Chatter

Gardening enthusiasts from Carterknowle Methodist Church in Sheffield are embracing their “green fingers” and have created an inviting garden at the front of the church.

The group called *Chop and Chatter* meet once a month to tend to the garden, reconnect with nature and catch up with friends.

The green space is fostering a sense of well-being and sustainability and it’s a great talking point for people who pass by. It is hoped that the garden can be extended into ground which is currently unusable and create a community garden for more people to enjoy and become a part of the group.

Helen, from the group said: “Once a month we grab our gardening tools and meet at the church to maintain the front garden. We called the group *Chop and Chatter* as sometimes we do more chattering than chopping, but it’s a great way to socialize and also create a welcoming space for people when they come to church. Gardening is a wonderful way to connect with others and nature. People often stop to speak to us and admire the

garden which is great and one day it would be wonderful if we could extend the garden and

create a community space for local people to enjoy.”



“I think that making art is something that everyone can and should do. It's more than just a fun way to spend a couple of spare hours, it's healing and affirming and restoring to the soul and I'm really happy that we have been able to make this available.”

Unleashing Creativity in Doncaster

An art class at SMC – Sprotbrough Methodist Church - in Doncaster is encouraging everyone to get in touch with their artistic side.

Started in August 2024 by Helen Smyly, a member at the church, around twelve people meet once a month to take part in a guided activity or create their own art.

Designed not to be a master class for professional artists, it's a relaxed and welcoming space where creativity is celebrated, explains Helen, “There's a very diverse range of interest and ability and artistic expression within the group, which is great and everyone admires and encourages one another.”

The group invited professional artist Peter Woolley to lead a masterclass in January and twenty people came and were amazed

and entertained with his magical skill of transforming a blank sheet of paper into a beautiful painting in a very short time. The art work was put up in church for everyone to see.

Whether you are new to art or simply looking for a break from life's demands. Surrounded by friends and fellow beginners, participants are encouraged to let go, get messy, and have fun while exploring their artistic side in a laid-back and supportive environment.

Helen added: “I think that making art is something that everyone can and should do.

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The sessions are free but donations towards the materials, tea and biscuits are greatly appreciated.



The Grove Hosts Children's Pop Concert

The Grove Methodist Church in Retford has hosted two very special pop concerts during the last few months with local school children as the stars.

In October pupils from St Swithun's C of E Primary Academy, just over the road from the Methodist church, spent three days learning seven specially written pop songs devised by the charity Pop UK. The songs explored Christian values, with an emphasis on teamwork. On the third day the children recorded their own album and then put on two live performances at the church.

This was followed up in January with a “Transition” themed day for Year 6 pupils from St Swithun's, Bracken Lane and Thrumpton Academies. The children worked together during the day to learn and record three new songs which they then performed for family and friends.

Speaking of the event in October, Paul Charly, Head teacher at St Swithun's C of E Academy said: “The actual performance is something I will never forget. To see the children engaging confidently and with enthusiasm was a sight to

behold. Children smiling is a magical thing and throughout both performances it was clear to see that this event was something they were fully invested in.”

Pupil Miya aged 8 said: “I like singing because you get to let your voice out there!” Pupil Cassie, aged 9 said: “My favourite part of all is when we get to sing and dance together. I think all of us at school have had a lot of fun this week and the teachers have joined in the singing and have done some funny dancing too!”

Revd. Julie Coates from The Grove said: “Our relationship with the local schools is important to us, we enjoy hosting activities and seasonal celebration services for them. I have worked with Pop UK on several occasions in the past and know how brilliant their songs are, so I was thrilled when we received an Arts & Heritage grant from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund which enabled us to be able to put on these events with the schools. It was a terrific way in which to use the new performance space that we have created in the church premises. The church is meant to be full of song so it was

wonderful to hear the pupils singing songs that they so obviously enjoyed.”





We all know the Nativity story, don't we?

Revd. Mark Carrick and his wife Abi from Chesterfield have created a new children's story which brings a fresh and heart-warming perspective to the classic Nativity story featuring the animals who witnessed the miracle of Jesus' birth. 'The Saviours Parade' invites youngsters and those young at heart to see the beloved tale through the eyes of a donkey, a sheep, a camel and other creatures who play a special role in the story of advent.

Mark explains: "The challenge this last Christmas was to engage with several schools and uniformed organisations who were gathering outside of their usual context and may be encountering church and the Christmas story for the first time. The story of 'The Saviours Parade' came about largely as we were asked to introduce a local charity, the Pet Samaritans, with whom the uniformed groups had been working with and raising money for. So, I wanted to create a story that revolved around the animals that we read of or imagine within the nativity story. Animals like the donkey, who we imagine may have carried Mary, or the camels that may have been used by the wise men. We also have the sheep, of course, with the shepherds, and maybe there were others that we could introduce from that time and place.

"Christmas is a busy time, as you can imagine, for ministers and so I shared this idea with my wife, Abi, who said that she would be happy to write this story and produce some illustrations. Abi is a gifted and talented artist and so her pictures would add depth to the story beyond simply the words. However, the words she wrote were so

imaginative and clear. The Saviours Parade was read to a local Year 3 class before all the illustrations were complete. For the few moments that the story was being read, you could see the attention and interest from the 8-year-olds that were gathered! The second, and subsequent readings of the story, were accompanied by the illustrations which, as I say, added depth and interest to those who were listening. We received several comments about where they could find this story as a book and one school took it for their whole school assembly, such was the impact they felt it would have.

"We also heard from leaders, parents and carers who had accompanied the young people that this story had spoken to them, too. For some, who knew the story already, the retelling from the animals' point of view helped them to re-imagine the well-known nativity for themselves. We were delighted to see some of those who had been present return to church over Christmas. Whether it be for Carol services, Christingles, or indeed on Christmas morning, it was lovely to see them again."

Mark added: "I think the way Jesus used parables and how we use stories is a powerful and effective tool to offer an understanding of God, but also to encourage those listening to seek for themselves the relationship which the story describes. As disciples of Christ in an ever-changing world, it is important that we take our stories outside of our buildings; to make them relevant to the communities and the contexts in which we meet people so that we can continue that work of sharing our faith and encourage others to encounter God for themselves."

New Youth President

The Methodist Youth President for 2025/2026 will be Genesis Padgett, a member of Emmanuel Methodist Church near Barnsley and a District Intern in 2023/24.

Genesis, aged 19, was elected by the children and young people of the Methodist Church. The role is for one year and involves meeting and representing the young Methodist people to ensure that their voices are heard and to help them be involved in every aspect of Church life.

Genesis has always attended church, but feels they came to faith at around the age of twelve while attending Cliff Festival at Cliff College, the same college where Genesis is currently studying theology. After the festival, Genesis began volunteering at church, helping serve coffee, undertaking readings and becoming a worship leader. "The more I helped, the stronger I found my faith," says Genesis and so, at the age of 17, Genesis began training to become a Local Preacher.

"I applied for the Youth President role because I believe I can make a difference," says Genesis. "I want all the young people in the Methodist Church to be excited about God. I want everyone to know they are loved, to keep everyone interested and excited about God. To be willing to evangelise, to want to be Christian."

"I want to help encourage all young people to understand that God loves them. I want to encourage them all to be as excited about their faith as I am and to help them do more in their churches."



Meet our Interns

The ONE Opportunity scheme is for anyone aged between 16-23-years-old and offers an opportunity to work for the District on a part-time basis to develop the mission and ministry of their Church. It's a salaried position of three hours per week to work on a year long project shaped around their gifts and passions.

Natasha

My aim is to bring new volunteers into the church to support the many groups that use Hillsborough Trinity, including toddler groups, senior lunches and the community cafe. I have been able to build on and develop the work already begun, by promoting the various groups to existing church members and external to the community, developing role descriptions, and speaking with potential volunteers who are looking to support local activities. Over the last six months I have enjoyed the creative freedom, developed new skills, volunteered myself and been fortunate to meet a wide variety of interesting people who I wouldn't usually cross paths with.



Jessie

My project is an art club for neurodivergent secondary school students. I am running different fun and creative activities every Tuesday for children who are neurodiverse to have fun playing with art and connect to like-minded people. I realized that there weren't many extra curricula activities for teenagers and I wanted to change that. My aim for the project is for kids that might be struggling in school to find support and friendship whilst also expressing their self through art. So far, I have had five regular students and have just enjoyed teaching my art skills to others. I hope to get a few more people attending in the future.



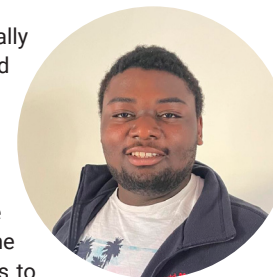
Millie

Hello, my name is Millie, and my ONE Programme project aims to aid independent living. My goal is to prepare children and young adults for living alone by giving them confidence in their abilities and the skills needed to feel prepared for their future. Primarily, I have been focusing on research (both secondary and primary) to determine which age group would benefit most from my project, what is most important to teach, and how that teaching can be accomplished. So far, I've appreciated how this project has allowed me to reflect on my own knowledge and understanding, and I'm excited to share these insights with others when running my courses! Additionally, it has helped me develop many vital skills such as communication, analytics, and research development, all of which will be beneficial for my future. I would love to hear any ideas or advice people have to support my project, and I would be grateful if you could share them with me at millie@broomhillmethodist.org



Giancarlo

My project is titled "Living Legally and Godfully at the same time" and hopes to eventually become a set of workshops where we can have a deep dive looking into how the law that we live our lives by may go against what we as Christians believe and how we navigate that. On top of questioning the law, I hope these workshops enable us to question whether we really do have the right idea of what God is telling us. Over the next year, I am hoping to be able to deliver these sessions to both young and older people in order to develop the project further but for now I am thoroughly enjoying planning how to put things together in order for the best experience!



Jane

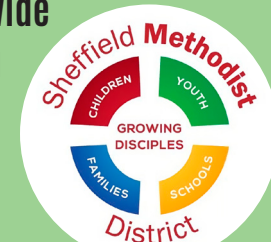
My project, the Ignite Youth Event is a day of workshops and activities for 8-18 year olds designed to allow them to explore in the Methodist Way of Life in more detail. My hope is that the young people can make connections with others within the district and to let them engage in their own faith journey in their own way. So far, the organisation in preparation of the day has been the most challenging but exciting part of the project, with everything slowly coming together for the first event coming soon.



If you are interested in finding out more about being an Intern email our Children and Youth Co-ordinator Vic Loveday cy@sheffieldmethodist.org or visit sheffieldmethodist.org/what-we-do/children-and-youth/one-opportunity-programme.html applications for 2025/26 will open soon.



“Over the last six months I have enjoyed the creative freedom, developed new skills, volunteered myself and been fortunate to meet a wide variety of interesting people who I wouldn't usually cross paths with.”





My Life in The Sheffield District



In January 1997, whilst training for ministry, my husband Leslie and I heard that we were to be sent, as probationer ministers, to Barnsley, in the Sheffield District. My Cornish family didn't have any idea where that was! They just knew it was "up north" as most things are from their perspective!

We spent nine happy years in the Barnsley Circuit, arriving as probationers and leaving having served four years as Co-Superintendents and during those four years I also served as the Synod Secretary in the District. Little did I imagine when we moved from Barnsley to Bramhall, Cheshire in 2006, that I would return to this district, whose people I had come to know and love, as District Chair in the future.

But amazingly, that's what happened! In March 2013, I arrived at St. Andrew's, Psalter Lane for an interview and was delighted to see some familiar faces on the interview panel! Later that day, I drove back to Bramhall, convinced that the role was going to be offered to one of the other excellent candidates, so I was genuinely surprised when I received a call, offering me the post!

So, at the end of August 2014, I was inducted as Chair of the Sheffield District at a Welcome Service held at Talbot Lane Methodist Church, in the Rotherham and Dearne Valley Circuit with Revd Dr Martyn Atkins as Conference representative and Mrs Margaret Parker, former Vice President of Conference, as preacher.

It was good to be back in a district with which I was familiar, at least to a certain extent, and to find many friendly faces I had known from the past. But in the years between 2006 and 2014, things had changed, and perhaps the pace of change has been even greater from 2014 to the present day!

When I arrived in September 2014, there were eight circuits, with approximately 6,700 members in 170+ churches. Those circuits were served by 52 Methodist ministers, eight authorised ministers and approximately 20 circuit lay employees. There were 61 supernumeraries residing in the circuits and eight ministers in the district who were serving in appointments outside the control of the church.

At that time the district team supporting the circuits and churches consisted of the District Chair, the District Administrator, the District Safeguarding Officer and a District Youth Co-ordinator (four hours per week).

As I prepare to leave the district in August 2025, we see a very different picture! We now have seven circuits, with less than 4,000 members in fewer than 130 churches. Those

circuits are now served by 27 Methodist ministers, seven authorised ministers and almost 40 circuit lay employees. There are 61 supernumeraries residing in the circuits and nine ministers who serve in appointments outside the control of the church.

Now, the district team supporting the circuits and churches consists of the District Chair, the Deputy Chair, an Administrator, a Safeguarding Officer, a Communications Officer, a Mission Enabler, a Missional Property Enabler, a Children's & Youth Co-ordinator, an HR Officer, a Persian Ministry Pastor and the Peak Park Rural Development Enabler, the latter three posts shared with other districts.

So, since 2014 we have undoubtedly seen a reduction in the number of circuits, churches, members and ministers, and you might want to ask what I've been doing to allow that to be the case! But those stark statistics don't give us the whole picture of what God has been doing in the Sheffield District during that period! There are other more encouraging stories to be told as I look back over eleven years amongst you!

During the interview process in 2013, I was invited to make a presentation about what it might mean for the Methodist Church to be "a discipleship movement shaped for mission." Part of my response to that question was to suggest that we needed to be a people who learn from each other, who are open to change and who are willing to join in with where the Spirit of God is at work. Those principles of "Learning, Changing and Joining In" formed the basis of our mission strategy for the first few years of my time in the district and still feature on our logo and lanyards today!

To be a disciple is to be a learner; to be shaped is to be open to the transforming power of the Holy Spirit and the mission in which we are involved is God's mission, so we are called to join in with where God is already at work. So that is the kind of culture I, along with others in leadership roles in the district, have sought to embed within our life together, enabling people to respond to their callings and giving permission for new things to be tried wherever possible.

We have journeyed through deeply challenging times together, not least the COVID pandemic, and in many senses, we are still working out what the impact of that has been upon us. But as I look at the life of this district now, we have uncovered treasures together, that weren't part of our experience eleven years ago for which I am thankful and for which so many of you should be given credit:

- Numerous properties have been transformed

to make them more fit for mission or they are being used in creative ways

- Our social media presence via Facebook and Instagram, our podcast series and our regular district magazines tell our stories and God's story to a wide audience
- The district's young people are nurtured in regular district wide youth gatherings, invited into an internship programme and large numbers of them are encouraged to participate in Connexional youth events
- The work of the Persian Ministry Pastor and the Peak Park Rural Development Enabler, alongside such initiatives as Metal Methodists, Christians at Pride, Justice Seekers and online worship, to name but a few, reveal our desire to be as inclusive as possible
- Our New Places for New People projects, Warm Space initiatives, and community focussed pieces of work are testament to our longing to proclaim the gospel in ways that are relevant for those alongside whom we live and work.

There is so much more that could be said – it's impossible to capture eleven years in these few words! I don't really know where those years have gone. I only know that I look and feel older now, but I hope that I might be just a little bit wiser because of all that we have shared together. I am so thankful to God for the privilege of serving here and incredibly grateful to you all for your prayerful support, care, challenge and helpful critique. It has been a joy to be amongst you all "for such a time as this" and I will look on with interest to see where God might take you all next!



"To be a disciple is to be a learner; to be shaped is to be open to the transforming power of the Holy Spirit and the mission in which we are involved is God's mission, so we are called to join in with where God is already at work."



Lighthouse Homes Offering Stability, Dignity, Friendship and Purpose

By Revd. Alistair Sharp, CEO of Lighthouse Homes

Founded by Rotherham Churches Together in 2005 as a simple night shelter in Rotherham town centre, Lighthouse Homes is today a faith-based Supported Housing Charity which provides a total of 116 beds, 365 days a year in four residential projects in South Yorkshire and North Derbyshire.

We now provide safe places to live which also offer support with the complexities of having been homeless. These homes create a stable place to rebuild a life from, for as long as it takes.

Our 40 staff and Trustees are predominantly, but not exclusively, Christian, and have come from many different walks of life and from a wide variety of Christian denominations. Approximately one third of our staff have come from a story of recovery from addiction and homelessness, to stability and gainful employment.

Our three sites for men are at Westgate Rotherham, (formerly the White Swan Pub), and on Main St, Shirebrook (formerly Midland

Hotel), and also at Chapel St, Brimington Chesterfield (formerly Brockhill Court Assisted living complex). Our site for Women is in Wath-upon-Deane (at a former residential activities centre)

Lighthouse Homes works closely with local authorities to provide high-quality support for both men and women with low or medium complexity of needs. We specialize in supporting those on a journey of recovery from a history of addictions. We are willing to take both professional and self-referrals, and also referrals from charity and faith organizations. We have rigorous assessments for every resident to identify suitability.

All of our homes are drug and alcohol free, and we closely monitor and enforce this 'dry' policy. We are faith based, with a clear and public Christian ethos, but involvement in any faith-based activity is entirely optional and without any pressure or requirement. Our projects have weekly Christian services and daily devotions and a number of our residents choose to be part of these activities. There is

no requirement or expectation of attendance at faith events held on our sites, but we do encourage a culture where residents feel free to talk about what they do and don't believe. Christ is at the heart of all we do.

We encourage all our residents to take part in at least 10 hours of community/voluntary work each week and we are supported in our work by various partners who offer courses and activities, sports and social events, both in-house and within our communities. We have good links with local church and community organisations, with many opportunities to get involved. We engage with several courses and programmes of self-development, including the 12 steps programmes in the communities we serve.

We engage in a careful process of assessment on both sides prior to admission, either by phone or face to face. We do not accommodate those with a history of, or current charges relating to sexual offending or arson with intent to endanger life. For a small number of residents, we will consider

long term residence, as a place of safety and protection.

Lighthouse Homes is a wonderful church of 40 staff and 116 residents and it's a privilege to lead it as Lighthouse Homes makes a difference.

You can hear more about Lighthouse Homes in our distict podcast - Faith, Hope and The Journey, visit sheffieldmethodist.org/podcast

CASE STUDY

Here is the story of one of our Managers and a former resident of Lighthouse Homes:

"I had a lot going for me in my younger years, especially regarding sports. I was a very confident, secure young lad. Back at home things were far from perfect, my mother and father had a broken marriage and my father was absent most of the time leaving my mother to try to bring my brother and me up on her own whilst going through her own struggles.

At the age of 13 I had distanced myself from the family home and took myself out of the family completely. I started to find myself trying to seek acceptance and a family as such anywhere I could find it. It just so happened I would find it in the culture of drugs and alcohol. I completely lost myself and all of my young innocent identity and found myself very lost in the world.

All of my sporting activities dropped away one by one as I started to experiment with alcohol, which led me on to other substances. After putting my mother and family through extreme hurt, stress and a lot of pain, the sort that would break any family, I was finally put into care. One year later I came out worse. I went on a downward spiral of multiple convictions, damaging a lot of lives and inevitably a lengthy jail sentence. I was a broken young man, I had lost everything, my family, my friends, my life and most importantly my identity.

I spent several years in a rehabilitation centre in South Africa, and discovered God for the first time in my life. Returning to the UK, things seemed to have changed. However, my life took a turn for the worse after my partner and I had a daughter, who we tragically lost at three months of age due to having a hole in her heart. Again, I lost everything and I eventually ended up on the streets with a severe heroin and crack cocaine addiction.

On death's doorstep I was scraped off the floor and went to try and change my life. I truly found God on my knees, and a much deeper understanding of Christianity, and he completely transformed my life.

From the moment of entering Lighthouse I have been shown nothing but care and love and have been constantly blown away by the success and privilege of watching lives be

completely transformed. Instilling Christ into everything they do, this community represents a true reflection of the care, love and support that people so desperately need. From the activities, to the church, to just sitting around the table having dinner together like a real family...Lighthouse is nothing but a blessing."

Now a Manager and a very valued member of the team, he has a great rapport with the other residents as there's a mutual respect as he understands their situations. We had faith in him and he has thrived on it.

You can find out more about Lighthouse Homes by visiting lighthousehomes.co.uk

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“Lighthouse Homes is a wonderful church of 40 staff and 116 residents and it's a privilege to lead it as Lighthouse Homes makes a difference.”

Every Story Matters

Photo by Chris Montgomery on Unsplash

Seven districts from Yorkshire up to Scotland joined together to create an online Safeguarding event to explore what it means to be a justice seeking church from a safeguarding perspective. The conference arranged by Sheffield District, Yorkshire North and East, Yorkshire West, Newcastle District, Darlington District, Scotland District and Shetland District gathered speakers and stories from around the Methodist Connexion and shared them in interactive sessions looking at the past, the present and the future of the church.

STORIES OF JOURNEYS

(Led by Revd. Helen Cameron, President of the Methodist Conference)

This session looked at where we have come from as a church, who the pioneers have been and what lessons have been learnt from where it went wrong.

Revd. Cameron explained that justice seeking isn't new for the Church; Isaiah 1:17 says "Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed." This is the quote for the Presidential theme this year.

We have been on a justice seeking journey since Methodism emerged in the 18th century. A lot of social change was happening and John Wesley said: "Do all the good you can. By all the means you can. In all the ways you can. In all the places you can. To all the people you can. As long as ever you can." which is an invitation to action.

The Tolpuddle Martyrs is a prime example of justice seeking. In the 1830s, life for farm workers was hard and they could not bear more cuts to their pay. In 1834, farm workers in west Dorset formed a trade union. Unions were lawful and growing fast but six leaders of the union were arrested and sentenced to seven years' transportation for taking an oath of secrecy. They were deported to Australia and Tasmania but they were brave enough to stand up for what was right.

There is a cost of being brave and seeking justice, some churches are doing a brilliant job at listening and calling out things which are wrong, but others are wanting church to be a quiet place. Praise and Protest, how can we do both?

Questions - Can you pick four heroes in the church for their justice seeking? Where are we as a church now? Do you trust everyone will be welcomed? In the current world, how can we be brave? What have we learned from where we got it wrong?

STORIES OF JUSTICE

(Led by Laura, Vic & Victoria - Safeguarding and Children & Youth workers from Yorkshire West, Yorkshire North and East and Sheffield District.)

In this session the voices of young people were shared from the 3Generate report to the Methodist Conference. When asked **What does justice mean to you?** they talked about discrimination against race, gender, the climate crisis, climate justice and the need to provide safe spaces for people including refugees.

The young people said "Justice is stepping out for something that is right." "Justice is giving what you need not what everyone else has, it's not equality." **What injustice have you seen around you?** "Injustice is racism in schools, violence in communities, people not having access to food, warm housing and not being able to access God."

When asked **What can/does the church do to challenge injustice?** they said, the Church could be a more welcoming environment to all as we believe in a God of compassion and He loves everyone as they are. The Church should work with the vulnerable. The Church isn't doing enough, no one is doing enough to tackle the climate crisis - our country should help others. The Church should help more with refugees and work alongside charities to have a bigger impact. The Church can teach people discrimination is wrong and make everyone welcome and teach the stories of The Good Samaritan and Love Thy Neighbour.

Questions - Methodism was created through being non-conformist, do not accept the status quo. How would you answer these questions?

STORIES OF DIGNITY

(Led by Pauline Jackson, District Safeguarding Officer for Bedford and Hertfordshire)

This session explored the lived reality of inclusion in the church. Pauline shared the stories of her Mother, herself and the welcomes they received when attending church.

Dulcie Campbell arrived in the UK in 1963 from Jamaica as part of the Windrush generation. She had always been a Christian and attended an Anglican church in the Caribbean so once in London she found a local Anglican church to attend. She enjoyed the services but no one spoke to her or would sit near her and she was the only person of colour there. On her sixth visit she responded to a notice for new choir members. The vicar approached her after she put her name down and he suggested she find another church as her presence had upset his congregation.

Thankfully her faith remained strong, but she didn't return to that church. She attended a Pentecostal church for about 25 years but found her true spiritual home with the Church of Jesus Christ of the Later Day Saints. She found this to be an intergenerational and inclusive faith community where she was an active member until she passed away in 2020.

Pauline grew up in the Baptist Church and enjoyed her time there, but when she moved she didn't feel that welcome and connection from a new Baptist Church so she moved away from the Church until she received an invitation to the local Methodist Church. A leaflet delivered by a neighbour about Easter services. Pauline visited the church and was greeted warmly and was welcomed into the Church family.

Questions - What do you do at your church to offer a good welcome? What could you do better?

STORIES OF SOLIDARITY

(Led by Revd. Dr Mark Rowland, Free Church Chaplain at the University of Warwick)

In this session we heard two stories highlighting the importance of finding a safe space and demonstrating solidarity.

Revd. Jason McMahon-Riley is a presbyter in the Nottingham North East Circuit. He is a gay man called to ordained ministry and he shared how solidarity forms part of his story. Solidarity isn't just about standing beside someone it's about giving a safe space for a person's voice to be heard. When called to presbyteral ministry Jason had a fear about whether his identity would be a barrier to people seeing him for who he is and his God given gifts. However, through every stage of training and now leading congregations he's found people who embody the Gospel values of dignity and inclusion. The God in Love Unites Us report sparked lots of conversations and Jason spoke about members of his congregation talking about a fear of being openly supportive of the statement that God's love is for everyone, there is a worry about what people would think. This reminds us that fear, not malice keeps us from truly embodying solidarity. This was a turning point in this particular church and solidarity began to grow through intentional actions. God offers a radical welcome and we are encouraged to do the same.

Ermine Mitchell is a Lay Pastor working in the Birmingham Circuit. She highlighted two times in her life when she either stood in solidarity with others or when people have stood with her. Ermine attended a George Floyd march in her local area, which is predominately a white area, so she was scared due to the negativity. However a colleague said she wanted to join in the march too. Ermine felt a real sense of togetherness that day, people standing in solidarity for a cause they believed in.

Following the march, she was invited to attend her District's Synod to tell her story and when her time to speak was up according to the timetable for the day, the Chair of District allowed her to speak for as long as she needed to fully share her story to allow people to hear and learn from her.

Ermine said: "Standing in solidarity means support me, my cause, my struggle, it shows you share my values or concerns and you are willing to stand by me emotionally, morally or even through direct action."

As Christians we have been called to stand in solidarity with one another and as Disciples of Christ we are called to love one another."

Questions - What does Solidarity mean to you? When have you stood in solidarity with someone or has someone done this for you?



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“There is a cost of being brave and seeking justice, some churches are doing a brilliant job at listening and calling out things which are wrong, but others are wanting church to be a quiet place. Praise and Protest, how can we do both?”

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“As Christians we have been called to stand in solidarity with one another and as Disciples of Christ we are called to love one another.”

You can re-watch each session on our website: sheffieldmethodist.org/what-we-do/safeguarding/2025-safeguarding-conference.html or scan this QR code.





Presidential Visit to the District

The President and Vice President of the Methodist Conference shone a spotlight on heritage, chaplaincy, social justice and inclusivity in our district during their latest visit to our area.

Revd. Helen Cameron, President, spent time in the Peak Circuit where she visited Hathersage Methodist Church to discuss their silver Eco Church award and Messy Church sessions, then onto the Hub at Hope. The Peak Circuit is passionate about supporting the environment and has been on a journey for several years to improve the church buildings whilst keeping the history alive, create community worship outdoors and a pilgrimage along the Peak Wesley Way.

Following this she visited Litton Chapel to celebrate their past, present and future plans. The picturesque village of Litton has been home to Christians for hundreds of years. In the 1600's William Bradshaw preached from a room above a barn opposite to where the

chapel is today and the barn still stands and is now a family home. In 1834 13.5 acres of land was bought for the purposes of building a Methodist Chapel and with the remaining land for use by the church. During the celebration service stories were shared of the history of the chapel, people's memories of births and marriages, and how it's always been at the true heart of the community.

On Sunday Revd. Cameron arrived in Chesterfield where she preached at Brimington Methodist Church. This was followed by a visit to the Urban Theology Unit at Victoria Hall in Sheffield, then a celebration service in the evening and she presented Victoria Hall with a Church of Sanctuary certificate.

In 2005 Sheffield became the first City of Sanctuary, thanks to lots of agencies and local organisations working together with a common vision for Sheffield to be a place of safety and welcome for people seeking sanctuary. During the celebration people shared many examples

of where they had entered the UK and found a spiritual home and support at Victoria Hall. It's become a vibrant and safe place for people from all walks of life to worship Jesus. The Church of Sanctuary award is recognition of how the church is working hard to make sure people seeking sanctuary have protective hospitality in communities, congregations and cultures of welcome and safety.

Helen said: "My heart sings when I get to travel back to Yorkshire where I lived for many years. It's been a wonderful visit with lots to celebrate. It's a privilege to travel around the Methodist Connexion and it's important for everyone to know that when we are visiting places we are bringing the whole Methodist Church with us. When we see, hear and celebrate the work of our churches, circuits and districts, we bring that learning with us and we say you are seen and you are appreciated."

Carolyn Godfrey, Vice President, visited young people on retreat at Wydale Hall in Scarborough. More than 30 young people and leaders gathered for the weekend to look at how disciples of Jesus can be imperfect and still be perfectly loved by God. Activities included looking at positive and negative influences in our lives, what gifts do we have and discussing what they like about church, what they don't like and what would they change.

On Sunday Carolyn led worship at South Anston in the Trinity Circuit, then spent the afternoon with chaplains from around the district and beyond at Central Methodist Church, Aston in the Rotherham and Dearne Valley Circuit. They discussed their work, the highs, the lows and the challenges and offered support to one another.

Carolyn said, "The young people were so enthusiastic at Wydale and it was great to hear about the work of the ONE Programme Interns in the district. Chaplaincy has been a focus on many of our visits so far this year, it's a much-needed ministry."

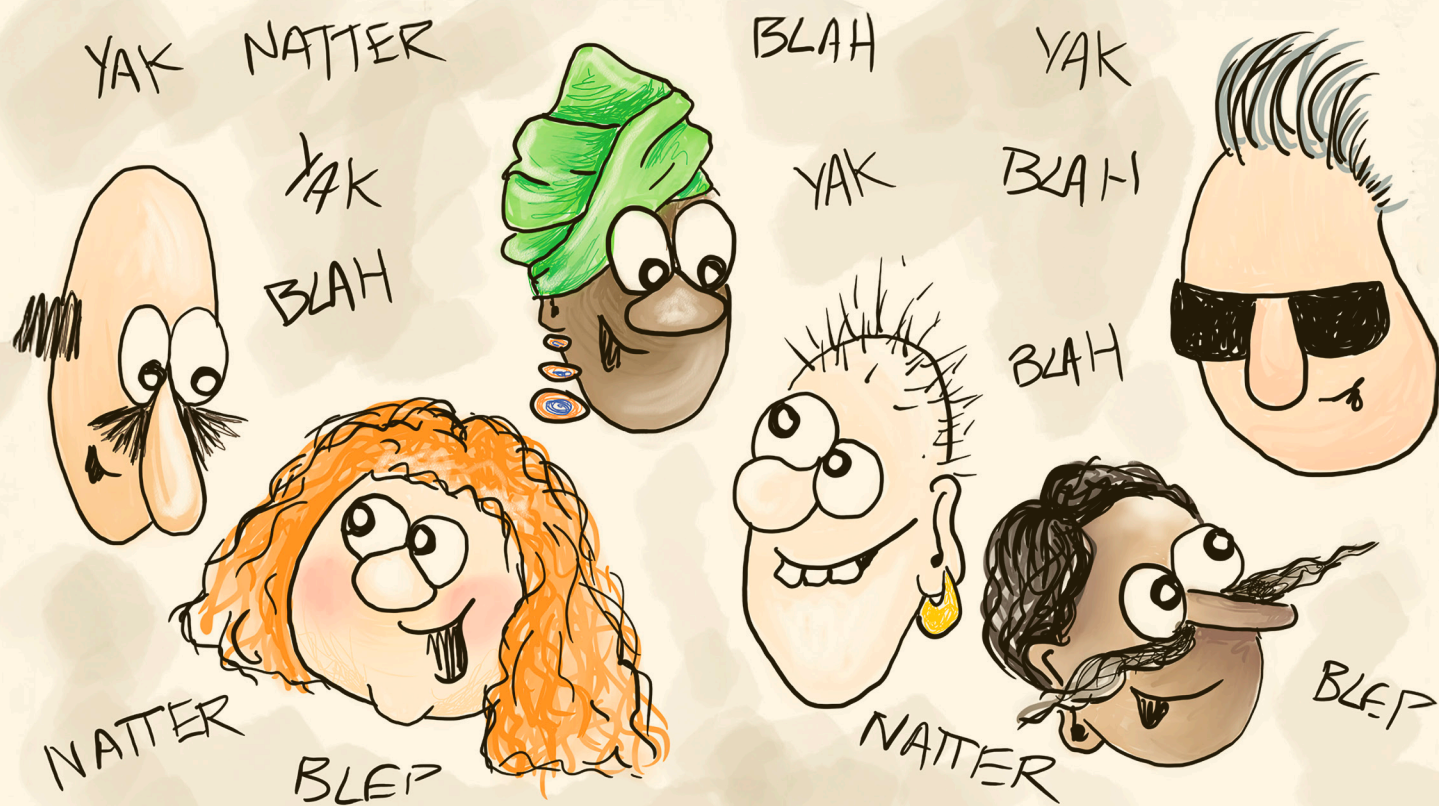
Helen and Carolyn both added a big thank you to everyone who hosted them, offered homemade food, warm hospitality and for sharing stories and celebrating the work of the Sheffield District.

Gill Newton, Chair of the Sheffield District said: "It was a pleasure to welcome the President and Vice President. We were able to share much of the work which makes our district what it is and I appreciate the support and hospitality offered by our circuits and churches to make the visit possible."



"It's a privilege to travel around the Methodist Connexion and it's important for everyone to know that when we are visiting places we are bringing the whole Methodist Church with us."





Storytelling in the digital age

by Siggy Parratt-Halbert, Learning Network Officer

It's through stories that we humans make sense of the world. We are storytellers. So when we want to share with others the joy of being loved by a caring hands-on God, it is not through sermons, quoting cherry picked bits of the Bible or telling them 'You're gonna die, you need to get your house in order'...Yeah, don't miss the fire and brimstone types I must confess!

We also need to be able to tell our stories in a language others can access. I'm sorry to spring this on you people, 32 years after the world wide web became a thing, it is the internet many people go to, to find things out. They are not as likely to come to your scary, weird, church full of scary, weird people anymore; they are more likely to check out kindly ole Rev. Google.

Here's the thing; just because your church has a website, doesn't mean you are being all evangelist-ey. Most church websites present like visual notices, and folk aren't likely to make them their first port of call. But Facebook, Insta, BlueSky....that's a

different thing, and they're all designed for storytelling. In using your church accounts though, you are talking to other Christians. You need to go where the non-Christians are. So use your own internet accounts. You're not going to bring people to Christ if you only ever hang out with other faith-full people. There's lots of helpful info on how you could share testimony with others here: methodist.org.uk/for-churches/evangelism-growth/practise-evangelism/evangelism-in-a-digital-world/

Read Bill Hybels' 'Just Walk Across the Room' and 'Becoming a Contagious Christian'. They're not set in the digital world, but his ideas will easily transfer onto the tinterweb. Also check out Nona Jones: [youtube.com/watch?v=6lDeXqkAU_A](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6lDeXqkAU_A) exponent of Digital Churches, who has some great tips on what might draw people (and keep them!) to a digital church. I know some of you out there still meet for worship online, she has lots to say about how you might bring in newbies. Tip: it's not doing an exact replica of an ordinary service online. So have fun, and tell your stories!



Thank You

Keynote Speaker

Revd. Jonathan Brook, Pioneer Minister based at The Hub of Hope in the Peak Circuit

Worship Leaders

We Who Worship - facebook.com/WeWhoWorship/

Market Place

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

Urban Theology Union - utusheffield.org.uk/

Woollen Blessings - woollenblessings.etsy.com

CrochetbyLauraGrace - etsy.com/shop/LauraGraceCrochet

Good Taste - goodtaste.org.uk/

Shelter - shelter.org.uk

Hosts

Sheffield Circuit and Wesley Hall Methodist Church

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

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



crochet by laura grace

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Celebration Events: All Welcome

CHAIR'S FAREWELL

After eleven years District Chair Gill Newton is moving away from the district into a connexional role.

You are invited to attend her Farewell Service at **Greenhill Methodist Church, School Lane, Sheffield, S8 7RL** at **3pm on Sunday 20th July 2025**. The Preacher will be Deacon Kerry Scarlett, ex Vice President of the Methodist Conference.



CHAIR'S WELCOME

We are holding a welcome service for our new District Chair Vicky Atkins.

You are invited to attend the celebration service at **Central Methodist Church, Saltergate, Chesterfield** at **3pm on Sunday 31st August 2025**. The preacher will be Revd. Barry Lotz.



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