

## The Methodist Church

### “Many parts form one body” (1 Cor. 12:12)

**John Haley, our superintendent minister, writes:**

**If God were to speak to you personally – would you be ready to listen?**

Christians believe that God can speak to us in many ways, but that he speaks to us primarily through the Bible. As I look back over the last 40 years, I am pleased to share with you just a few ways in which I believe that God has spoken to me through the Bible.

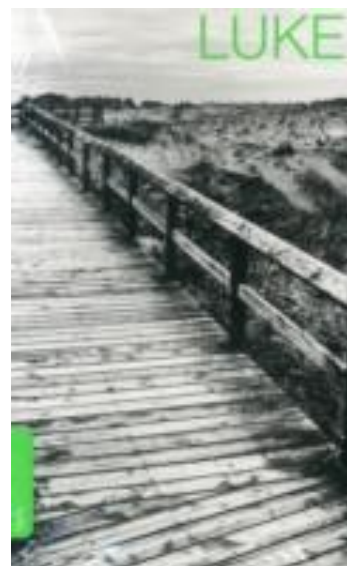
Like many 18 year olds, my life changed profoundly when I started college. I went to Leicester to study law, and the day before term started I was given a new Bible. Not only did I try to read it regularly, but I also took it to church services on Sundays and to the Bible study on Thursdays. Most of my friends at church did the same. Perhaps even more exciting was the opportunity to share my faith with other students: I was beginning to find my way around the Bible – especially the New Testament – with more confidence, and I encouraged my student friends to do the same. I always recommended that they start with John’s Gospel, for no better reason than that I was named after the Gospel-writer. I knew it would not be long before they reached a verse that was already vital for me: ‘For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life’ (John 3:16).

I first attended my new church in Leicester at the beginning of November 1976 and went to my last service there at the beginning of July 1979, so I only belonged there for two and a half years. During that time, six of my fellow students professed faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour, and part of the reason was that I invited them to read the Bible to find out more about Jesus and the Christian message of being right with God through personal faith in Him – not least His dying for us and His resurrection.

At the end of July 1979, I started my training as a Methodist Local Preacher and preached on the verse, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!’ (John 1:29). The following year I was commissioned as a Local Preacher and was given the verse, ‘Do the work of an evangelist’ (2 Timothy 4:5).

Christian ministry, like life in general, has ups and downs. The first seven years of my circuit ministry were greatly blessed, but the following ten years were very hard, and by the year 2000 I had probably reached my lowest point. At the Southport Methodist Holiness Convention I was given a verse: ‘I will restore to you the years that the locust has eaten’ (Joel 2:25). God spoke to me through that obscure Old Testament verse as I felt that even the difficult years were not wasted. Soon after that, I began ten good years at a big church in Plympton, although after nine of those I suffered an acute heart attack. As I prepared to return to preaching after three months off work, I was given the verse, ‘Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation?’ (Job 38:4). It’s a verse that reminds us that God sees the whole picture from beginning to end even when we still cannot see things clearly.

I wonder if you are ready to listen to God. I believe that he will speak if you are ready to listen. Can you really meet Jesus in the Gospels? Luke’s Gospel starts with the Christmas story (with angels and shepherds) and includes many of the parables and miracles of Jesus. All four Gospels give a detailed account of Jesus’ death and conclude with the amazing claim that he rose again! While the older translations still have their place, most people benefit from reading a more modern translation. If you would like to read Luke’s Gospel in a modern translation and do not have one, simply contact the Torbay Methodist Circuit office (details are on the back page) with your address and you will receive one without charge. Perhaps before you start reading you could offer a short prayer: ‘Lord, speak to me for I am ready to listen.’



### Light in the darkness

Following the Easter Offering dedication service, a total of £1,000.82 has been sent from the Torbay circuit to the Methodist Church World Mission Fund.

The Easter Offering continues a tradition begun in 1883 by Caroline Wiseman, secretary of a committee which worked to support Methodist women missionaries. Successive



Methodist women’s movement have continued to raise funds for overseas mission at Easter, and today’s Offerings are organised by Methodist Women in Britain.

This year’s dedication service highlighted the work of those in mission appointments around the world, serving in their home countries but funded by the World Mission Fund, including the Revd Maria do Carmo Moreira Lima who works with young offenders in Brazil, Joanna Akyeampong, who works with school dropouts and female street kids in Ghana, and the peace-building inter-faith work of Jennifer Jag Jivan in Pakistan.

## Food for body and soul

For six Sundays from 23rd July until 27th August, successive preachers at Palace Avenue Methodist Church will each be preaching on a specific parable of Jesus.

Beginning with the lamp under a bowl, they will look at the parables of the weeds among the wheat; the lost sheep, the widow and the unjust judge; the Pharisee and the tax collector; and finally the ten bridesmaids. During this period, the windows in the Church will be decorated to depict each parable, and there will be two prayer stations for people to use if they wish.

On Thursday afternoons from 20th July to 24th August between 2.00 and 4.00pm, cream teas will be served in the church foyer, and there will be plenty of opportunity to view the decorated windows and have a quiet prayer time using the prayer stations. The windows can also be viewed

every Monday and Tuesday morning between 10.00am and noon from 24th July until 22nd August, when the Church is open for tea and coffee as usual. All are welcome to come along!

*Kath Lister*

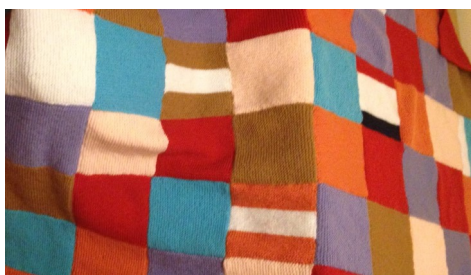
*Kath Lister is Senior Steward at Palace Avenue Methodist Church.*



## If you can knit, you can help...

Cabbage Patch Crafters, the Palace Avenue craft group – members of Palace Avenue and our friends – are busy with our needles knitting squares to be made into blankets for the homeless. All the blankets are being given to the Leonard Stocks Centre for distribution to rough sleepers: 12 blankets have been made so far this year, with squares for 6 more being sewn up as I write!

Can you help us by knitting or crocheting squares, or donating yarn? Instructions are below. All squares and yarn donations can be left at Palace Avenue on a Monday or Tuesday morning between 10.00am and Noon, or at the Circuit Office on Tuesday to Friday mornings.



*Susan Gibb*

*Susan Gibb is a member of Palace Avenue Methodist Church*

*Instructions for knitted squares:*

*Using 4mm (size 8) needles and DK yarn, cast on 33 stitches. Knit every row until you have a square; this will be approximately 56 rows (28 ridges on one side). Cast off. Please leave 15" of yarn at the beginning and end, which will be used for sewing the squares together.*

*If you prefer to crochet, 6"x6" granny squares are perfect.*

## I felt God's hand upon my shoulder

You cannot ignore the call for social justice in the Bible – the instruction to relieve the poverty and distress of others. Jesus challenges our preoccupation with our own comfort while others go without.

It's not surprising, then, that Christians in Torbay – including our Methodist churches – have been at the forefront of relieving homelessness for many years.

I've had the privilege of involvement with the homeless hostel in Factory Row. In 1991 when it was set up by churches in response to a visible crisis on the streets, it was a simple dormitory in a disused warehouse – but the root was planted for the modern hostel which stands on the site. It's called the Leonard Stocks Centre, it houses 30 vulnerable men and women, and it does an amazing job.

The story of how the faithfulness of Christians in actions and donations brought that project to fruition would fill chapters. Its future has been threatened many times but I've had the strongest sense that God wills its success – and that we are needed to be His 'hands on earth'.

One of our challenges as Christians is how we serve God during our time on earth. What are we to do with the time, talent and money that we have? We are called in many directions. I worked as a journalist in Torbay for many years. It was fulfilling and my faith guided my conduct and what I wrote about. We need Christians in the media. But when I started volunteering at the hostel (having at first covered it as a journalist) I began to sense that God was calling me in a new direction. Sometimes changing careers is a difficult decision to make, but my decision to retrain as a social worker was easy: I felt God's hand upon my shoulder.

That was 15 years ago but I didn't stop volunteering. We formed the Friends of Factory Row which through



sheer persistence of purpose has done amazing things. Christians and non-Christians have come together to make real the gospel message to the destitute and hopeless.

On winter nights the glow from the windows and open door has been like a beacon of God's love. Two Christian charities run the hostel (Shekinah and Langley House Trust) and they are doing new things to respond to the growing crisis.

Through the work of the hostel and other initiatives, the churches of Torbay continue to be at the forefront of helping homeless people. If you want to know more about the Friends you can contact <http://www.friendsoffactoryrow.org/> or get in touch with me by leaving a message through the circuit office.

*Nick Pannell*

*Nick Pannell is a member of Palace Avenue Methodist Church, and Chair of Friends of Factory Row.*

## **"Thank you, Lord!"**

This year, Revd Val Price celebrates the 25th anniversary of her ordination as a Methodist presbyter, at Central Church Torquay in September 1992. Does that 25 years of ministry seem like a long time?

Val says, sometimes it does – and sometimes it doesn't. 'Time is a very strange business, really. On the one hand it seems as if it was only a few years ago, but when you translate that into a quarter of a century you think, "Oh, my, that's quite a long time actually!" But, no, it's just *there*. It's been a good 25 years.'

Already long-established in her teaching career when she began feeling called to do more in church, Val began exploring her call to ministry in the mid-1980s, and started on the South West Ministerial Training Course – a course run by the Church of England but also training ministers of other traditions – in 1989. 'It was an ecumenical course, which is where my inclination has always been.'

This ecumenical leaning has shaped Val's spirituality and ministry: 'Your spirituality is such an enormous thing that I don't think it can be confined to one part of Christianity. There's a rich Christian spirituality that we draw upon, everything from Christ himself, and the Desert Fathers, through Celtic spirituality and monasticism to the Wesleys, and we all draw all of that in, and that's *right*. You shouldn't cut yourself off from a branch of spirituality because it's not your particular church, but rather see where God is speaking to you. The threads all come together, like a piece of knitting, and you hope they won't unravel! I don't think they will!'



After ordination, and still teaching, Val spent eight years as part of the ministry team at her home church, Central, before switching in 2000 to serve other parts of the circuit. 'At no point did I ever feel that God was calling me to stipendiary ministry. I think we need clergy who are embedded in the world of work as well as those who are in the church full-time, and for the two to work in tandem.'

In fact, the first decade of Val's ordained ministry was also the last decade of her 38-year teaching career – although she doesn't see the two as separate roles. 'It was a complete package, it wasn't two separate worlds. And that was wonderful, the way it all melded into one. ... Everybody I came across in the world of work knew I was an ordained minister, and that affected relationships with the children, staff, and parents.' There were lots of requests for prayer. 'I think this is why I wasn't called into the stipendiary ministry – because of continuing that ministry in the workplace.'

So did this package make Val feel that she lost a dimension of her ministry when she retired from teaching in 2002?

'No! I think as human beings we've got to have the sense to know that nothing lasts for ever. A stipendiary minister knows there will come a point where they move on to a new circuit; I felt like that about teaching. I loved teaching

until the very minute I stopped, but I had no regrets about stopping: I had done that part of my work, and it was time to move on and do other things. God is constant through life, and with him we can have the confidence to say, "Right, that work is finished," and leave it, and move on. And if there's a vacuum left then God will fill it.'

Val continued putting her teaching skills to use, tutoring new preachers, and now leading the circuit Bible study. 'The teaching and studying side I still find very important – for me, as well as for everybody else – and Bible studies are so important because you can't ask the questions in a morning service. If something comes up in the sermon you can't put your hand up and say 'excuse me, can you explain that?', but in Bible study people get a chance to ask the questions, and that's important.'

So after 25 years does anything in ministry still surprise her?

'Yes – the Lord! Constantly. On a daily basis. I'm always saying, "Thank you Lord, I didn't expect that one!" In some ways I'm doing less in ministry than I was ten years ago, but

the sense of being with God is constantly deepening, extending, widening. It's exciting stuff. I hope the excitement of my relationship with God translates into relationships with people. And I hope people see that kind of excitement for God within ministers – that feeling of being in his hands all the time, the certainty of his underpinning love and strength and guidance. I think if we as clergy and as preachers have that sense of certainty in our relationship with God, then hopefully this will give other people confidence in God as well.'

And how would she sum her ministry up?

'I'd say "Thank you, Lord!" I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for God: ministry wasn't a career move for me, and I'm incredibly grateful to God for doing this with my life, because it took me off in a completely different direction. Just going to church was enough until this happened out of the blue. God's placing me here, and the people he put me amongst – that's all been his decision and his timing, and I'm just thoroughly grateful for it.'

'The churches of this circuit have been wonderful. It's been a delight to be in this circuit for all those years, and I'm incredibly thankful that I stayed here. I'm thankful for the way in which the churches I've preached and ministered at have been so endlessly supportive and wonderfully uplifting. It's a joy to go out on a Sunday and preach.'

'So yes, I'm hugely thankful to the circuit for the way in which *they* have nurtured *me*, and encouraged me. We need encouragement as preachers: it's not an easy task, it's got a big responsibility attached to it, and the support of churches and congregations is crucial. It's a partnership, and the level of support within this circuit – and the Teignbridge circuit, because it's lovely working with them too – has been incredibly important. Sometimes churches don't realise just how important they are in underpinning and encouraging a preaching ministry.'



## Brixham summer concert series

2017 marks the fifth year of this popular series of Wednesday lunchtime concerts, held each week through July in Brixham Methodist Church.

The series opens on Wednesday 5th July at 12.30pm with a return visit by the talented harpist Sonia Misterly. We have once again arranged an interesting programme of local performers and more details will be available nearer the time. We hope that as many Circuit members as possible will support these events as well as encouraging all your friends to come.

Concerts are free, and include light refreshments served from mid-day. Retiring collections will go to charities chosen by the performers. There will also be a low-cost light lunch after the concert, when you will be able to meet the performers.

The concerts are becoming increasingly popular, so come early to ensure you get a good seat!

*Kathryn Trotman and David Taylor*

*Kathryn Trotman and David Taylor are members of Brixham Methodist Church*



## Rediscovering the warmed heart

Torbay Methodist Circuit joined with Central Paignton Churches (which includes Winner Street Baptist Church, Paignton Parish Church and the Paignton Salvation Army as well as the Methodist churches at Palace Avenue and Southfield) on 24th May to celebrate Wesley Day. The service was held at Paignton Parish Church with the kind agreement of Revd Prebendary Roger Carlton and the PCC, and Revd Paul Smith – who until 2013 was Superintendent Minister of Plymouth's Central Hall – preached.

In his sermon, Paul remarked that to talk of Wesley's 'conversion' is unusual. The term 'conversion' is often used to represent a change of religion (for example from Hindu to Christian), and Wesley's conversion wasn't that. Conversion can also be used to indicate a change in lifestyle, and Wesley's conversion wasn't that either: Wesley was a 'Methodist' living according to a strict method, both before and after his conversion experience at Aldersgate Street. Thirdly, conversion can be used to represent a change from unbelief to belief – but what Wesley actually believed *before* the day was not significantly different from what he believed *after*. So what made the day so significant? John Wesley wrote in his Journal: 'I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.' The significant difference – the conversion – was that the gospel message touched his life in a new personal way.



This is what some of those attending said about the service:

*I came away challenged. You can't teach warming of the heart!*

*We need to rediscover what the warmed heart means in our own lives.*

*I need to think about the role of the Holy Spirit both inside and outside the church.*

*It was significant to hold the service in the Parish Church.*

*It brought John Wesley to life in a way I hadn't previously considered.*

*I hadn't really considered John Wesley's passion.*

*It reminded me of celebrations I used to attend when I was much younger with powerful speakers and strong messages.*

*A very memorable occasion and an opportunity to celebrate the life of our church's founder.*

The next joint service for Central Paignton Churches will be *Celebrating our Community* on Sunday 2nd July at 3.00pm. This is an occasion to recognise, celebrate and express thanks for the enormous contribution that statutory and voluntary services make to the community, as well as informally to help build closer links between different groups and support one another.

Please send good news stories of worship, fellowship, mission and evangelism to Torbay Methodist Circuit Office by no later than 11th August to be considered for inclusion in the next issue of *Connected*.

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