

## Christian Communities in Conversation (CCiC)



Christian Communities in Conversation (CCiC) is a project of the Plymouth & Exeter District of the Methodist Church, which is trying to change how people approach talking to each other about God.

Many people in church say they are apprehensive about having conversations on spiritual subjects. This may be because they have learned to think of evangelism as something for experts to do, because they see it as a special and burdensome task rather than a normal conversation in everyday life, because they find that evangelism courses use a lot of jargon and talk about special techniques with strange names which make it all seem complicated, because they think they don't know enough about their own faith to share it with others – or all of those things.

It's true that presenting sharing our Christian faith as telling others 'I know something you don't know, and you need to let me teach you all about it', leaves many people feeling excluded. And yet there are a lot of people who want to simply be able to share in the questions of life and living and encountering God.

The CCiC project is aimed making people enthusiastic about the idea of having spiritual conversations. Over the next few years, we want to see this project spread into all parts of the District. We want to help people recognise everyone has a God-given

potential to seek and explore spiritual things, recover the art of Spiritual Conversation, and explore the Gospel in fresh ways, which we hope will be empowering for people who have been discouraged by traditional approaches. We want to build on the idea that everyone has relevant observations and experiences to offer in conversations about life, death and the nature of God, and create spaces where we can all talk about these subjects with curiosity and respect.

CCiC is training facilitators – 20 so far – to be champions for this approach. We are now establishing workshops in as many places as we can, using those facilitators to support groups of people in conversation, hoping that we can create a culture where people talk enthusiastically about life, living and encountering God in their lives. We are also hoping that CCiC will help institutional churches understand learn how to share the gospel more effectively, and in ways that are appropriate to the diverse 21st Century society that we live in.

### *The Vision for CCiC*

*“To grow a new generation of people who are confident and excited about having spiritual conversations based on experiences of life, living and encountering God”.*

For more information, contact Jo Simpson (District Evangelism Enabler) via evangelism@pemd.org.uk or 07951 230521.

## When Christmas dinners are just a dream

Not being able to put food on the table is always a terrible situation to be in, but when everyone around you is planning special meals and indulgence for Christmas it can feel even more painful and isolating. Paignton Community Larder has launched an appeal for sponsorship and donations of food to enable 50 Christmas hampers to be sent out to families currently experiencing hardship. You can find out more about the special Christmas items they need at facebook.com/PaigntonCommunityLarder or by calling 07895 925872. And of course, they still need all their usual items too.



Since its launch a year ago, Paignton Community Larder has given out 874 food parcels – equating to 22,000 meals – to families and individuals in Paignton experiencing hardship. If you would like to donate food, there are donation points for the Community Larder at the Methodist Churches at Goodrington, Palace Avenue and Southfield. Paignton Community Larder has also been accepted as a Local Cause by the Co-Op, so if you shop there you can support the Community Larder through your membership card as well.

In Torquay, Central Church also has a foodbank donation point. The Torquay Community Larder, which is run by the Salvation Army, also has a number of other donation points across the town. The Torbay Salvation Army are also running a Christmas hamper and toy appeal in the run-up to Christmas, and you can find out more at facebook.com/torquaycommunitylarder/.

The Methodist Church in Fore Street, Brixham also has a donation point where food can be donated for the Brixham foodbank.



## Praying across the circuit



This quarter, please pray for our ministers, local preachers, circuit leadership team, and local churches at Goodrington and Southfield. Please also pray for: **Work with children:** LiNX (in secondary schools), Open the Book and Ice (in primary schools) and Youth Genesis; **Work in the community:** Street Pastors, Community Larders, Leonard Stocks Centre Torquay, winter night shelters. **Palace Avenue** will continue to meet on the third Monday of alternate months at 10.30am for prayer. **Southfield** continue to hold monthly Friday groups to pray for all the circuit churches and other concerns.

Please send good news stories of worship, fellowship, mission and evangelism to Torbay Methodist Circuit Office by no later than 7 February 2019 to be considered for inclusion in the next issue of *Connected*.

Torbay Methodist Circuit Office, Goodrington Methodist Church, Grange Road, Paignton TQ4 7JT

01803 846020

tmcoffice@torbaymethodistcircuit.onmicrosoft.com

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The Methodist Church

# CONNECTED

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

## What's it all about?



Like many hairdressers, mine likes a bit of a chat and, on discovering what I do for work, asked, 'what's Easter all about?' I did my best to answer. 'Well, what's Christmas all about?' If you try asking family and friends that one yourself you'll no doubt get a variety of answers. A poster in the window of the pet shop near where I live in Paignton is wishing us all, Happy Advent. What's Advent all about?

Not so long ago, a congregation in Watford, a town about 15 miles from Central London, did a brave thing. They enjoyed the church's music and so many things about church – but something was going wrong. When they got together, what really mattered to them was whether they had a good time, whether they enjoyed it. Worship had become about them, not about God. Could we say the same about Christmas, Easter and Advent?

Matt Redman was a gifted member of that congregation – a songwriter. He wrote a song that he thought was not very good but he showed it to his minister, Mike Pilavachi, who tweaked it a bit, and Matt recorded it. Matt was writing about church services, but he could have been writing about Christmas (tinsel, trees, turkey and all the rest), Easter (eggs, bunnies, chocolate and all the rest), or Advent (candles, shopping and all that Christmas-come-early stuff).

*When the music fades  
All is stripped away  
And I simply come  
Longing just to bring  
Something that's of worth  
That will bless Your heart*

*I'll bring You more than a song  
For a song in itself  
Is not what You have required  
You search much deeper within  
Through the way things appear  
You're looking into my heart*

*I'm coming back to the heart of worship  
And it's all about You,  
It's all about You, Jesus  
I'm sorry, Lord, for the thing I've made it  
When it's all about You,  
It's all about You, Jesus.*

What's Christmas all about? Well, it's all about Jesus – the baby, the Son of God, the Saviour who is Christ the Lord. It's about God in Jesus Christ being born into the world on a saving mission.

What's Easter all about? Well, it's all about Jesus – the man, the Son of God, the Saviour who is Christ the Lord. It's about God in Jesus Christ dying upon a cross in Jerusalem to secure our forgiveness and

rising again bringing hope of new life.

What's Advent all about? Well, it's all about Jesus – the man, the Son of God, the Saviour who is Christ the Lord, who was born and lived and died and rose again – who returned to heaven but promised to come again. The Advent theme is not only preparing to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ (Christmas) but to expect that his promise to come again will be fulfilled.

Life is busy – but find the time to sit or kneel quietly and focus on Jesus. Christmas can be about so many things, as can Easter or Advent – or other Christian festival throughout the year. Or just the Sunday or weekly routine. But we are missing the point if we do not realise that they should all really be all about Jesus. There is a second verse to that song – I'll share it here:

*King of endless worth,  
No one could express  
How much You deserve.  
Though I'm weak and poor,  
All I have is Yours,  
Every single breath.*

You can hear the whole song performed by Matt Redman at youtube.com/watch?v=OD4tB1o6YLw

Whether it's Christmas, Easter, Advent, a Sunday service, life itself it has to be all about Jesus.

God bless

*Revd John Haley  
Superintendent Minister*

Song lyrics © 1997, Matt Redman, Thankyou Music  
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## The orb and cross



The orb and cross is more than just a logo: it was designed to represent Methodism's deepest beliefs. The orb represents the world; red, the colour of Pentecost, symbolises that all may be saved. The cross is white, the colour of Easter and resurrection; it is radiant, celebrating the glory of God; and it has no boundary, just like the grace of God.

## Your gifts for Zimbabwe



You may find it difficult to believe but this mural (top left) appears on the wall of a toilet block serving a community of destitute people outside Zimbabwe's second city, Bulawayo. That settlement of shack dwellers live on the site of an old gold mine (Ngozi Mine) that now serves as a rubbish tip for the city. These desperate people live among huge piles of rubbish and eke out a pretty miserable existence bagging plastic waste to sell for a few coins for recycling.



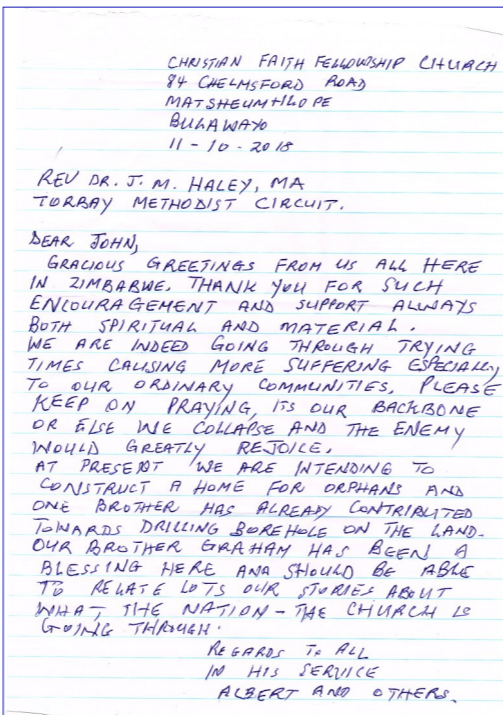
Yet in their extreme poverty they have experienced the love of God through an amazing Pastor, Mitchell Lawrence. Pastor Mitchell appears in the second image (bottom left) in front of a church which he inspired the people to build using scrap building materials. How fitting then is the nativity scene painted on the wall of the toilet block ! Truly God dwelling among the poorest of the poor.

This is just one of many stories to inspire that I bring back from my recent visit to the suffering people of Zimbabwe.

My heartfelt thanks to you all for your prayers supporting me through that visit and for your wonderful generosity in donating no less than 2,482 USD (£1,980) to bless the related relief feeding ministry carried out by *Zimbabwe Victims' Support Fund*.

I would be more than happy to speak in churches and to groups to share some more of the stories with you.

*Revd Graham Shaw*



## Autumn at Central

Central Church Torquay has had a busy few months. While Revd Jon Doble has been on Sabbatical, our Tuesday morning worship has been led by some of our members, except when we welcomed Revd Jerry Cook and Revd Val Price to lead communion services. Church members also led our Faith Matters group, our contemporary *Rise & Shine* worship, and Café Church, where we have welcomed speakers from LiNX, Torbay Street Pastors, and the Torbay Community Larder. We have also had two baptisms and a wedding!

The number of people coming to our Community Lunches on the first Sunday of each month is going up, and our team of cooks continue to give us a wonderful roast dinners. Our Tea Dances are also popular: on five Saturday afternoons a year, up to 80 friends join a few church members for dancing, and also sandwiches and cake. The dances were started twenty years ago by John and Sheila Lawrence; John passed away last year, and Sheila is retiring (and the church community

thanks them wholeheartedly for their work) but the dances will continue with the help of a team of volunteers.

Finally, we are pleased to have had some students from Korea, Hong Kong and China worshipping regularly with us since the beginning of the academic year – we've set up a Badminton morning for them, together with some Christian input.

We are looking forward to Jon's return from sabbatical, but we thank God for continuing to be with us and helping us in Jon's absence.

*Margaret Newman, Central Church, Torquay.*

*Rise & Shine contemporary family worship happens on two Sundays each month at 9.15am. Café Church takes place on the third Sunday evening of each month. More information about both is available at [www.centralchurchtorquay.org](http://www.centralchurchtorquay.org)*



## Brixham Concerts

Each June, Brixham Methodist Church hosts a series of free concerts, with refreshments and collections for charity. The 2018 concert season saw local folk group Acoustic Collective, The Big Chorus, violinist Sharon Hubbocks and singers the Forget-me-Nots each perform to audiences averaging over 50 people, and raising £1000 for their nominated charities: a charity supporting Syrian refugees, Read Easy Torbay, the Torbay Special Needs Playscheme and Youth Genesis respectively. The concerts will be back again in June 2019, but in the meantime there will be lunchtime carol event on 19 December. Contact Brixham Methodist Church for more details!

## Open Schools Worldwide

In 1998, while working with Tearfund, I was visiting a partner organisation helping street children in Calcutta, India. I had spent a number of mornings playing with some of the children in the security of the organisation's compound. At that time, Emmanuel Ministries were bringing around 200 children off the streets each day, feeding, washing, clothing and playing educational games with them. Then the children returned to the streets. I was walking back to my hotel through monsoon rain when I stepped past a little girl who was settling down for the night on the pavement preparing to sleep on a piece of soggy cardboard under a torn black plastic bin bag. She looked up and greeted me with "Hello Uncle Alan". She was one of the children I had played with that morning! Uncle is a common greeting in India but those words bit into my heart as I agonised over the thought of my own niece or daughter having to sleep on the streets. Somehow the 200 children with the label 'street child' didn't affect me so much as this one little girl who knew my name and called me 'uncle'.

I was not new to the plight of children living in poverty. Before joining Tearfund I had worked in Nepal for 11 years as a mission partner with what was then the Methodist Church Overseas Division. Initially, I was on loan to the local university teaching mathematics and training maths teachers. Visiting my students, I was distressed to find them trying to teach large numbers of children packed into tiny classrooms. In one school, my student was crushed against the blackboard by the 140 children crammed into his small dirty classroom. Even more disturbing was seeing the many children hanging around; denied access because of their extreme poverty.

These and a number of other experiences, dominated my thinking for some years as I put together a vision and strategy in an attempt to reach out to these marginalised children. In 2001, I shared these ideas with a friend in the USA only to discover that he had written the same vision in the document he attached in his reply email. When God speaks like this into your life, you can't just say that was an interesting coincidence! I left Tearfund, my friend Phil created an unpaid position for me: Director for Children at Risk in his organisation, the Association of Christian Schools International. We had no funding but the Methodist Church in Ireland agreed to support me as a mission partner.

Today, 16 years later, *Open Schools Worldwide* is an independent Christian charity. We have lost count of the exact number of children we have helped but believe it is around 50,000 in South Africa, Swaziland, Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Kenya. God has faithfully provided and we are trusting Him as we try to respond to invitations to work in Uganda, Ethiopia, and Greece (refugee children). Basically, we train and resource local Christian volunteers from churches and partner organisations to teach the children in



their own locality who are unable to go to school because of extreme poverty or other circumstances beyond their control. The volunteers are all motivated by God's love to care for these children; this is particularly important as many of our children have experienced trauma through death of their parents, abandonment, abuse or rape.

Let me give you an example of our work. Ngozi Mine is an informal settlement beside the municipal dump on the outskirts of Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. There are about 300 households (about 1500 people) living in shacks built out of material collected from the dump. The majority of the dwellers survive by scavenging; collecting plastic, asbestos, metal and rubber and selling to recycling companies. Extreme poverty forced the scavengers to the dump and keeps them

trapped there.

Our Director in Zimbabwe visited the dump and was invited by the dwellers to start both a church and an informal school there. We trained a team of volunteers to use our material and the 'school' soon grew to help over 150 children ranging from 5 to 20 years of age. The children come to class each day for about two hours. Some assist their parents by scavenging on the dump, others are effectively child labourers. Early childhood marriage is common among the girls and there are major problems caused by dysfunctional or abusive family situations.

Eva is one of the volunteers. Widowed when her husband committed suicide, she was an alcoholic surviving on the dump by distilling a type of spirit which she sold at an illegal drinking place. She came to the church on the dump after she had a dream. Committing herself to the Lord she destroyed all her supplies of alcohol and distilling equipment. She described herself as once being a harsh woman who was always fighting. Now she is joyful and committed to serving the children on the dump. She has 13 of the oldest children in her class. When I visited last year I was thrilled to hear her children able to recite

Bible passages, take part in a drama and demonstrate their great progress with reading, writing and number work.

Eva and the other volunteers have gained a new sense of self-worth and dignity as they serve their own community. The children have gained hope and are being shown God's love through life changing learning. According to UNICEF about 263 million children and youth worldwide are out of school. The world labels them 'Street Children', 'Aids Orphans', 'Scavengers, and 'Refugees' but God knows each one by name and offers them a place in His Kingdom.

*Alan McIlhenny*

*Dr Alan McIlhenny attends Goodrington Methodist Church, and is a director and co-founder of Open Schools Worldwide*

