

The Gift of Presence: A Reflection for Christmas

As the Christmas season approaches, it's easy to get caught up in the hustle and bustle—shopping, decorating, meal planning, and gift wrapping. We race from one task to the next, striving to make everything perfect for the holiday. Yet, amid the flurry of activity, we often overlook the most valuable gift we can give, not only to others but to ourselves: the gift of presence.

Emmanuel: God With Us

At the heart of Christmas is the incarnation of Jesus Christ, the ultimate expression of God's presence with us. Emmanuel, which means "God with us," reminds us that the Creator of the universe did not remain distant but entered into our world, taking on human form to live among us. Jesus' birth, in a humble stable, is a profound demonstration of God's desire to be present in our lives, not just from afar but in the intimate details of our humanity.

God's presence at Christmas is not about grand gestures or material gifts; it's about being fully available, about meeting us where we are—whether in joy, struggle, or uncertainty. The Christmas story reveals a God who is near, attentive, and deeply engaged in our lives. It is a story of relationship, of love, and of presence.

The Challenge of Presence

In today's world, being truly present is a challenge. With constant distractions—phones buzzing, endless to-do lists, and the pressure to curate a picture-perfect holiday—it can feel almost impossible to be fully present in the moment. We may be physically present with loved ones, but our minds are elsewhere, thinking about the next task or scrolling through social media. This disconnect leaves us feeling more isolated and less fulfilled, even in

celebration.

However, the Christmas season offers us an opportunity to slow down and refocus. As we reflect on the birth of Christ, we are reminded that true presence requires more than just showing up. It requires our full attention, our hearts open, and our minds engaged. Presence means offering ourselves fully to others, just as God offers Himself fully to us.

Emmanuel—God is with us. And in Him, we find the true meaning of Christmas.

Presence in Our Relationships

This Christmas, what would it look like to give the gift of presence to those around us? Instead of focusing on finding the perfect gift, we can focus on being present for the people we love. Perhaps that means setting aside our phones during family gatherings, listening without interruption, or simply spending quality time with someone who needs our attention.

For parents, this might mean giving our children the undivided attention they long for, rather than rushing through holiday preparations. For spouses or friends, it could mean taking time to engage in meaningful conversation, showing that we value the relationship more than the things we are busy with. Even for those who may be feeling lonely or disconnected this season, offering the gift of our presence—through a visit, a phone call, or a heartfelt letter—can make a world of difference.

Just as Jesus came to be with us, we are called to be with one another,

embodying love, grace, and compassion in our presence.

Presence in Our Faith

Christmas is also an invitation to be present with God. Amid the celebrations and activities, we can often overlook the quiet moments of prayer, reflection, and worship that help us draw nearer to Him. The story of Christ's birth calls us to pause, to reflect on the mystery of God becoming flesh, and to invite His presence into our hearts once again. During this holy season, let us make time to be still before God. Whether through reading Scripture, spending time in prayer, or meditating on the wonder of the incarnation, we can cultivate an awareness of God's presence in our lives. Just as Mary treasured and pondered the events of Jesus' birth in her heart, we too can take time to ponder the miracle of Christmas and respond with gratitude and awe.

The True Gift of Christmas

At its core, Christmas is about presence—God's presence with us through Jesus Christ, and our presence with one another. This year let's give more than material gifts; let's offer the gift of ourselves. Let us be fully present with our loved ones, our community, and with God.

As we celebrate the birth of Christ, let us remember that the greatest gift we can give is not something that can be wrapped in paper and ribbon, but the gift of our time, attention, and love. This Christmas, may we all experience the joy and peace that comes from being fully present, both with God and with each other. After all, the essence of Christmas is not found in the things we give, but in the love and presence we share.

In this issue

Page 2 : Overseas Missions

Page 4 : Statement of Faith

Page 6 : Celebration Corner

Page 8 : Church Support

Page 9 : Mount Zion Meeting

Page 11 : Pen Portrait





NEWS FROM OUR MISSIONARIES

Liz Greenhalgh praises the Lord for the way he is working in the lives of the young people of the church. In August 16 of them went to serve for a



day in a Roma village. This involved practical help with construction work for some and helping out with children's activities for others. Liz also



reports on two new avenues of service she has embarked on. She has opened her home at breakfast time on school days to three young girls whose mother has to drop them off very early in order to get to work. This has led to a good opportunity for befriending and sharing God's love. She has also begun weekly visits to a house-bound member of the church who is recovering from surgery and who is alone in her flat. They are able to read Scripture together and she now has some links to a Christian radio station too. Liz also expresses concern for several women who attend the food



kitchen who seem to have very little financial support.

L. and P. have now been back in North Africa for a month at the time of writing, so are beginning to settle back into their normal life there and renew their contact with local believers that they support or work with. L. is continuing with her online ministry which involves helping and sharing with others serving the Lord overseas, as well as some nearby. P. and other members of their team need to draw up plans to begin a new village-based project to submit to their NGO in order to get the required financial backing. So things tend to move rather slowly. Keep on praying about this!

Gail and Daniel continue in their various areas of ministry. Daniel's role as assistant pastor involves preaching, leading Bible studies and music. His work for OMS concerns developing ways of discipling new believers, especially those from overseas and those converting from another faith. Gail's ministry with Safe Families is continuing as before, as she supports three needy families. Her work with OMS concerns member care both for those serving overseas and those returning to the UK. They remain willing to visit IM churches either to lead a meeting or to offer support.

Anne Fambely

The Story of The Bell

143 Years and The Story of The Bell

We held our Church Anniversary service (Sunday 1st September) when we celebrated 143 years as a Church here in Easington Lane. The service was led by our President Jean Merton and in her sermon, she touched on the church Leaders and Ministers from the past, and present and also looked ahead to the future. Jean spoke about Minister Mr Edwards who in 1881 with the use of a bell was instrumental in getting the church moving again so we can all still worship now and hopefully for years to come. The Bell has been displayed in the Church since the early 1900s for everyone to see.

The Story of The Bell

The Church at Easington Lane had long been established when things started to go wrong, and it sank to a low ebb so much that Church Mem-



bers decided to close down the Church. The steward wrote to the planned minister for October 23rd Mr Fred Edwards of Sunderland telling him not to come as the Church was closed. He however wrote back saying "Hold on I will be coming". He went out and bought a handbell and travelled to Easington Lane very early that Sunday

morning. He walked around every street in the village ringing the handbell and when folks came to their doors shouting at the top of his voice "Come to the Lay Chapel tonight to hear the Ship Wrecked Sailor". To use his own words "The place was packed, and they have never looked back since that night".

The Bell was inscribed with these words.

"MANY SOULS AND THIS CHURCH WERE SAVED BY THE USE OF THIS BELL IN THE YEAR 1881"

He himself in the 1920s made this cabinet in which he mounted the bell and presented it to the church. May we all take the attitude of Fred and keep spreading the Gospel News in our towns and villages.

Ian Grey

PRAYING IN THE COMMUNITY

Towards the end of 2023, the phrase I felt the Lord was laying on my heart was 'Praying **in** the Community' rather than **for** the community. As a church we committed to praying regularly for different streets around our church and on the second Saturday of each month some of the fellowship have been walking around the streets of our community praying as we go. We are praying that there will be a sense of the Lord's presence as we go around Tyldesley and that the Holy Spirit would brood over the area.

During January to May we went round 10 different streets each month, praying for the people who currently live there and prayed that Christians would come into the houses that were for sale or rent. A list of streets for that month was put on the back of our monthly card as a reminder to pray. As a visual reminder, everything we have done regarding praying in the community has been displayed on our noticeboard at the front of chapel PRAYER IS A POWERFUL WEAPON!



My granddaughter, Chloe, had the idea of putting stones in each street with the words 'We're praying for you' on and 'TIMC' with a picture. So in June and July we went round the streets putting decorative stones that had been painted by some of our fellowship. Some of the stones were moved, but we prayed



that they would 'cry out' to the people. [Luke 19:40]

One of the ladies, who used to bring her granddaughters to our Messy Church for quite a few years, saw one in front of her house and put it in her back garden. Also a man who came to our chapel quite a few years ago saw one and was encouraged by it and he has been to chapel a few times since. While we were going round, a little girl in a street came and asked what we were doing. We told her we were from the church in Primrose Street North and putting the stones down to let people know we were praying for them. She took a stone and her brother came and had one too.

We also met a man, who one of our members has known for a long time, he 'didn't want to be bothered', but spent 10 minutes with us talking! We are praying the Lord will 'bother' him!

In August and September, we started our 'Joshua-ish' walks. We went round the periphery of our area praying quietly all the way round. In October and November, we plan to go round again, this time praying out loud.

The bible verses we had were Ezekiel 11:19: 'I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them, I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh.' and Matthew 7:7 'Ask and it will be given to you...' We are praying that as we ask the Lord for the people in our area to be saved, the Lord will answer our prayers. In December we are walking round the periphery once again, stopping off at certain points to sing Christmas Carols.

In January 2025, we will be going round again singing songs that we have used to help us to pray and in February (for the seventh of our 'Joshua-ish' walks) we will be going round again praying and putting leaf-

lets through the doors of the houses we have covered telling people about our church.

Throughout the duration of praying in the community, several songs have spoken to us. 'I Speak Jesus' [by Dustin Smith] has become a *theme song* - we have found that it covers everything we have been praying for. Individual needs 'every dark addiction', over fear, anxiety and depression and for family and fellowship. We are praying that 'Strongholds will come tumbling down' and that we will see 'Jesus lifted high' in Tyldesley. ('We want to see Jesus lifted high' by Doug Horley) 'He will give the ground we claim' ['Rejoice, Rejoice' by Graham Kendrick] and 'I[He] will break their hearts of stone, Give them hearts for love alone' ['I, the Lord of Sea and Sky by Daniel L. Schutte]. We are praying that the Lord will work through the words of these songs and they will come to pass in our area of Tyldesley.



Over 40 years ago, at a meeting, a word and vision was given - 'Tyldesley is a hard place'. The vision was 'water dripping on a stone'. We are praying that now is the time for the stone to crack, that it will break open and that the Holy Spirit will flow out over our area of Tyldesley. That hearts will be softened and people will come to know Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. We are praying **in** our Community **for** our Community and pray that God would bless us, hear our prayer and there would be a harvest.

Lynda Hunter - Tyldesley

Statement of Faith

We believe that God the Father Almighty, in holy love, gave his Son for the salvation of mankind.

Some people have problems with the concept of God as Father. Our relationships with our earthly fathers can colour our view of God as Heavenly Father. If our earthly fathers were strict disciplinarians, we may see God in similar vein, and seek out scriptures which support that view. Some people may, for a variety of reasons, have had little or no relationship with their earthly father - and not necessarily due to anyone's fault. During World War 2, many fathers would have been away in the armed forces, and some would never return. When my wife, Sue, was a child of around three, her mother was extremely ill and for several months she was sent to stay with her grandparents in Blackpool. Her father had a responsible job with UMIST and there was no one locally that could look after a young child but, in those formative years, it inevitably affected Sue's relationship with her father. Experiences like this can shape your perception of fathers, and by extension of God as Father.

Whatever the influences that have shaped us, God the Father is the perfect Father, the one that sets the standards for fatherhood. This doesn't mean that God is an indulgent parent who gives us a life wrapped in cotton wool and provides everything we want. However, everything that God does is for our good. Hebrews 12 talks about discipline, and contrasts earthly fathers, who disciplined us as they thought best - which might have had mixed motives - with God who disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness (v. 10). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told his hearers not to worry about food and clothing, because their heavenly Father knew that they needed them - but first seek his kingdom and his righteousness.

Perhaps the most famous verse in the Bible is John 3:16 - *For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life*, and this verse, above all others, justifies this part of the Statement of Faith. God's love is celebrated in the Psalms, for instance Psalm 145 - *The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love* (v. 8) - *The Lord is faithful to all his promises, and loving towards all he has made* (v. 13b) - *The Lord is righteous in all his*

ways, and loving towards all he has made (v. 17) - pictures of perfect fatherhood.

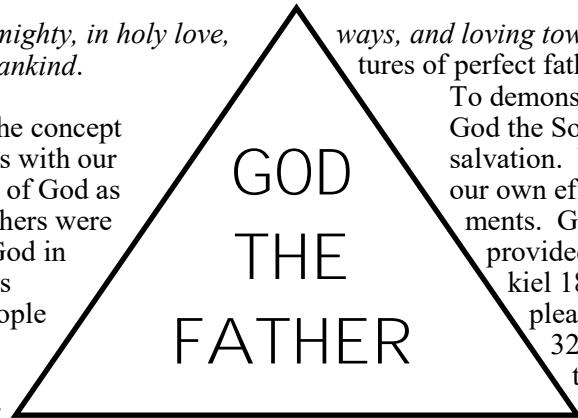
To demonstrate that love, God the Father sent God the Son - Jesus - to die on the cross for our salvation. We have all sinned, and cannot of our own efforts match up to God's requirements. God knew that, and in his love for us provided a way of salvation. Twice in Ezekiel 18, God declares that he takes no pleasure in the death of a sinner (v. 23, 32), and calls on them to turn from their wicked ways and live. Because of his love for mankind, he chose

to give mankind a way back. John the Baptist announced Jesus as *the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world* (John 1:29) - the sin of the world being mankind's rebellion against God, initially in the Garden of Eden and multiplied countless times thereafter. There is, however, a catch, expressed in the second part of John 3:16 - *that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life*. God's salvation is available to everyone, but not everyone will accept it. For those who choose not to believe in Jesus, based on whatever evidence God gives them (see Romans 1:18-20), there is no Plan B. God will not save those who refuse to be saved, or who try to be saved by their own efforts. His desire is for everyone to be saved, but because he has given us free will, he will not over-ride that free will and give eternal life to those that refuse to believe on the Lord Jesus.

How can we square this with the concept of a loving, heavenly Father? A song by Mad at the World, an American Christian rock group from the late 1980s, may give an insight. Their second album, *Flowers in the Rain*, features a song called "In my dream", about someone facing his personal final judgement. It contains the words '... and he opened a book he called 'Life', to the place where my name should have been; then he closed it and he started to cry, he said he never knew me'. We cannot appreciate God's sorrow when someone chooses to reject him, but we know from scripture that he does not delight in the consequences. Let us be thankful for the Father's love in sending Jesus, and pray that those we love will accept his offer of salvation for themselves.

(all scriptures taken from the New International Version)

Brian Rowney



Connexion

The magazine of the family of Independent Methodist Churches

Please could all articles be sent either directly to the Resource Centre via post, or by email to magazine@imchurches.org.uk (please note the new email address).

Just a quick reminder that ideally all photographs need to be digital. Do ensure that safeguarding principles are followed by asking permission for the publication of any

photographs and for the articles where people are named and/or can be identified.

Thank you for all the articles - please keep them coming!

Our New Association Secretary

DAVE HUGHES

Those of you who have long memories may remember me when I last held this position over 10 years ago now. I have been an Independent Methodist all my life and was brought up originally at Tyldesley IM Church on Primrose St. In fact, my grandfather William Watkiss was one of its founder Members and a couple of my cousins are still connected there. I am currently on the Connexional Finance Committee.

I am married to Barbara who was brought up at Atherton IM church where I moved to after we were married there.

I had a long career in IT working for large companies and software companies being responsible for installing computer systems covering both accounts and property management systems.



I have been a founder member of Atherton & Leigh Foodbank and currently am Chair of Trustees but will be retiring at the end of March 2025 and recently retired after 10 years as Trustee of The Bridge at Leigh, which is a large social supermarket with Café, housing association and community hub linked with it.

I was previously Church President and although not currently part of the leadership team I have always been involved in the Church, the Circuit and Connexion.

The Next Two Years

This is an exciting time of renewal for Independent Methodism. We are looking forward to God's leading us to a single organisation which will really help in the understanding for all our churches of Independent Methodism. We look forward to restoring the link with all our churches which suffered both during Covid and post Covid.

To assist me as Association Secretary over these next two years I may be enquiring into some legal documents related to the churches and also recommending some legal processes that Churches may have to go through.

I have recently spoken to the Charity Commission, and they have informed me that all trusts should be registered there is an exemption for any trust with less than £5,000 income. Therefore, any of our churches with over £5,000 income should now be registered with the Charity Commission.

Secondly, I will be checking up to ensure that all our churches holding property also have land registration details.

Looking forward to speaking to many of you over the next two years.

Dave Hughes

In the Joy of the Lord

Cheryl Patton

23rd October 1946 - 3rd August 2024

We give thanks for the life of Cheryl.

Friars Green church was overflowing as we held a service of celebration of Cheryl's life. Cheryl was brought up attending Friars Green. The service was led by Mr. Ken Mc Dermott from Friars Green.

We shared memories of Cheryl's busy life, in which she was a blessing to so many people. To us she was our church organist for 13 years and very involved in every aspect of our church life. We shall miss her more than words can say.

We were asked before the service for a word or short sentence to describe Cheryl which would be used in the service some of these were; Irreplaceable, Humorous, Wonderful, Loving, Formidable, Encouraging, Unique, Special, A Nutter (In a good way), a breath of fresh air.

Two of Cheryl's favorite sayings were, when you asked how she was...Her reply was "Absolutely average!". When you were leaving it was always "Tarra Luvvie!"

At the age of 20 Cheryl said "I look on every day to be lost if I don't help someone"

What a witness to her walk with the lord

Our condolences are with her husband Phil, sons Mark and David, their families and sister Glenys.

Tarra Luvvie and thanks for everything

Ken Irwin—Lymm



Celebration Corner

June and Les Howarth were married at Friars Green on the 6th September 1958

Brian and Betty Yates were married at Friars Green on the 26th August 1954

At Friars Green we gave thanks to God for the marriages of the two couples who were married at Friars Green. A celebration of the love of two people who committed to themselves all those years ago. It is such a joy to be able to see in this day and age marriages survive till death do they part and without God in their lives they both acknowledge that perhaps relationships may not have survived. It is such a joy to have both couples as part of our family at Friars Green and we all thank God for their witness over the years.

Gill Jacks – Friars Green



On Friday the 6th of September, we held our first Praise and worship night with 'Task Jesus'. Treflyn and Ann Jones organised the evening. Friends from other Warrington circuit churches joined with us, on guitar, drums and in voice. A lovely time of fellowship was had by those who joined us, followed by refreshments and a chance to catch up and chat.



Sunday the 8th of September saw our first believer's baptism at Cherry Lane. Our Minister for the day was James Gleave who preached on Daniel. After the service, we had a believer's baptism. Jimmy was baptised, Colin Pownall took the service, and Colin and Phil carried out the baptism. Colin reminded us that baptism is a public declaration of faith. A way to publicly show your faith in Jesus. Treflyn, who had led Jimmy to the Lord a few weeks earlier, prayed for Jimmy. Ken presented Jimmy with a certificate and a Bible as a gift from the church. We shared a buffet lunch after the service.

Lymm



WEST CAMEL IM CHURCH "DEEP SEA DIVERS" HOLIDAY CLUB

Numbers were down at this year's children's Holiday Club, mainly due to some of the usual children now being too old to come. However, those who did come had a "whale of a time." learning about life in the sea, singing songs, and enjoying games, quizzes and crafts,

including making Lego models of the resurrection. We also "dived" into the Bible to learn all about Jesus. Two Mum's later told us that their children "absolutely loved it!"



Geoff Chapman



On Saturday 14 September, our own Denise Helsby conducted the Wedding of Alice Guest and Tom Sumner – this was the first wedding in our new Church centre. The Church centre was full to overflowing as Alice and Tom pronounced their wedding vows before God and the congregation of family and friends. Looking back in our church records, Alice's sister Victoria, was the last person to be married in our old Church. We pray that God will bless both Alice and Tom as they begin their life together.

Fay Williams

Praise at Kirkhall Lane

To see and hear other folks, clearly and powerfully describe their journey of faith, rarely fails to inspire other people to step out in faith themselves. Add to that an opportunity to sing the praise of Jesus Christ and it becomes an event. Inspiration came by way of a call to put these things before as many people as we can. The event itself took place at Kirkhall Lane on the 14th September.

God blessed us and as the place began to fill up we were encouraged to see folks whose fellowship is valuable indeed. Our guest worship band from Bolton South Salvation Army were only known to us through a suggestion by a friend of our church. Until the morning of the event, I had never met them. How our trust was rewarded! Discerning correctly a musical style for the evening, the band led the worshippers into the blessing. There were many touched by the presence of the Lord.



Our speaker, Mark Curtis (Passion for Jesus) found himself upon a firm foundation, following on with a powerful message. In which, he related his adventures in countries where the Church is enjoying significant growth. At times in the face of severe opposition, these churches have given themselves to prayer and fasting over a period of time whereupon, they have witnessed truly amazing grace as a result.

I will summarize some of the feedback from the event as follows: "Praying for our towns and praying for our people is something we can really do." "Standing on every word of God written down is something we can really do." "To praise the Lord is so enjoyable, when are we doing this again?" Further, as people were taking refreshments there were some folks coming quietly for prayer. All good signs.

We are so grateful to God for the way in which the whole event turned out. Notwithstanding, for the blessing which those who came received. I have no doubt that the outcome will be multi-faceted in the days to come. Glory to God!

Roger Stone – Kirkhall Lane

Quiz Nite at Thatto Heath

On Friday 27 September, we held our Annual Quiz Nite. 65 attended – some from our fellowship, some old Sunday school scholars and some from the community. We had an excellent evening which also included a half-time interval of 'food for the brain'.....Hot-Pot and cream cakes!!



Rounds included 'True or False' 'Dingbats' 'Music' 'Celebrity Hairstyles' with the evening concluding with the final round, 'Quiz Fortunes' (based on the lines of the TV show Family Fortunes). After much head-scratching and plenty of team deliberating, this year's winning team was announced, and it was our own church member Pauline Robinson and her family who took home the much sought after trophy. The Quiz Nite is always a popular event and so we look forward to holding it again in 2025.

Fay Williams

Harvest Thanksgiving Service at Thatto Heath

Our harvest table at the front of the church was full to overflowing thanks to the generous donations of tinned and packet food by our congregation. This year's service fell on a Café church Sunday, so the theme was aimed at the children and young people in our fellowship but was also enjoyed by the 'older children' in our fellowship too!! The speaker was Marian Cleworth from the local



United Reformed church who spoke about 'Four Little Seeds'. The message involved plenty of audience participation which was greatly enjoyed by all. Sally Britch representing St Helens Foodbank, thanked the fellowship for the generosity shown and accepted the gifts on behalf of the volunteers who, week in and week out, put together food packages for those less fortunate people/families in our community.

Thanks be to God for all the many gifts which he bestows upon us.

Church Support

Church Support – Hi, welcome to a new feature from the Church Support Group. This will replace the resources bulletin that Lisa used to send out. And as we're talking about welcoming, we have restocked a popular resource of Church Support Welcome Bags!! - for those who did not make it to Annual Meeting this year, we have some more Welcome Bags for your churches, these can be filled with resources for toddlers, children or young people to keep them busy during the service – useful even if you have Sunday School. Also if you do not have a Sunday School it is a great 'just in case' for if a family turns up one Sunday. Please contact Lisa or Joy for more information or to order some.

Youthscape Youthscape Essentials is an innovative course for volunteers and paid youth leaders that increases your skills and understanding about working alongside young people today. Whether you're running a community project, a church youth group, or occasionally helping out on a Sunday morning, the course is designed with you in mind! It's not about the number of young people attending, it's about putting God at the centre of your youth ministry. We are proposing to purchase a 2 year license to use it in all our churches. Some may feel they can take the resources and run with it themselves, some may want Joy and Lisa to come and do the training with volunteers, whilst others may just want an introduction course to help their churches prepare for future engagement. Please get in touch for more information.



On Sunday 17th November join thousands of churches from diverse backgrounds and traditions across the UK to shout about safeguarding and help protect vulnerable people. Regis-

ter for a pack by visiting safeguardingsunday.org. Thirty-one: eight want churches to: strengthen the safeguards that are already in place, better protect victims and survivors of abuse and create safer environments for all. There is a link on our new website but until it is approved for going public, please check out their website. Remember you can always chat with Graham Edmundson, Joy Elkins, Joy Higham, Linda Hart or Marilyn Riding if you have any questions or concerns.



Warm Welcome - the launch for this year is here and our churches can get involved again in keeping their communities warm and less isolated. From a simple opening of a room with tea and biscuits to providing soup and a roll and dominoes, you can help those who are lonely and in poverty this winter stay warm. Many of our Churches already provide coffee mornings etc. but for those who don't please contact us for information on the campaign, food hygiene and safeguarding that may be relevant depending on your activity.



Following the great success of the campaign by the National Day of Prayer & Worship, Shine Your Light is back for 2024! Contact them directly or the Resource Centre for their programmes etc. Whilst we've mentioned Christmas, have you ordered your Hope magazines, Good Newspapers, Bible Society or Hope books, Real Advent Calendars etc?

Lastly, Church Support are organising a Start the Year Right – Day of Prayer & Worship in January '25 – more details to follow!

Please get in touch if you need anything!

Church Support Contacts

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During the summer months, we have visited events at several of our churches, starting with a Praise Even-

ing at Tyldesley in May, which was well attended.

In June we attended Moorside's, coffee morning and Culcheth's musical evening with Bryn Haworth, culminating with a lovely afternoon tea at Lymm, when there wasn't a spare seat anywhere. Unfortunately, Ken Irwin

wasn't able to attend as he was in hospital, but his fellow members "made him proud".



In July, we attended Astley's Uganda Appeal in the morning and Melvin, and I visited Thatto Heath for their

community fun day in the afternoon. It was great seeing David Hill, with his apron on serving burgers. At the end of July was the Annual Meeting, when we had Paul and Fiona Hendley for the Friday evening, which was well attended and everyone thoroughly enjoyed it. On a sadder note, I attended the funeral of Doreen Hopkinson In Heckmondwike and afterwards caught up with old friends, Denise and Derek Barnes and Nolene Hobson. It was great to see them, especially Nolene, who will by now have moved to be nearer to her son, as she had to give up driving and her membership of Dewsbury Church but has been able to find a lovely church near her new home.

They all sent their love to everyone. It was also a pleasure to spend a little more time with Nolene, as I drove her home. The day after I attended with Melvin, John Dawson's funeral in Bolton, which was very inspiring and met up with John's son David and many other friends, not seen for a while.



In August it was Sausage Sizzle time at Mount Zion, Pemberton and it was good to again meet up with old friends especially Brian Lancaster, past secre-

tary, who has been quite poorly.

September saw us back at Tyldesley for Time for Tea in the afternoon, which was an informal time with many people from the local community, who enjoyed Linda giving a short message and Hako trying to sing without music, but everyone helped him out. Saturday, 7th was the Northwest Meeting at Pemberton, when 20+ people from about a third of the NW churches attended to look at moving forward, as in April, we had only managed to discuss the situation, whether we wanted to stay together or close. On the 14th we attended a great praise night with the Salvation Army from Bolton and Mark Curtis from Passion for Jesus at Kirkhall Lane, when all the seats were taken from many in Leigh Circuit and local churches attended. The day after we had planned to go to Barnoldswick for their Songs of Praise Event, but had



to cancel because of the weather, but I've been told they had a wonderful time of worship in an amazing church building. It was really lovely visiting and meeting old and new friends around the Connexion, where we could.

Marilyn Riding

North West Mount Zion Meeting

Earlier in the year all our churches were invited to meet in area meetings (Bristol, North East, North West) to discuss how we see the future of the Independent Methodist Organisation. The North West churches met at Stockton Heath, and a good discussion was had. However, we didn't get much further than agreeing that we felt that there was a future, but that the structure needed changes.

One of the things that was raised after this meeting by a number of people was our need and desire to seek God's will together through prayer and His Word. As Church Support we organised a day that Mount Zion graciously hosted for us. We met together on Saturday 7th September, spending the first hour in small groups praying for each other and asking God to reveal his will to us. I was thrilled and blessed to spend this time together with members of other North West churches and God's presence was very tangible amongst us.

Some may say that being in God's word and spending time in prayer is 'a given' for us as an organisation, and yet though it should be, for me there has been very little evidence of this since I've worked here. That's not to say churches or individuals aren't praying but just that there hasn't been opportunities to meet together to pray. I have recently been encouraged by hearing that some circuits are now also

using their time together for prayer and mutual support, rather than just conducting business. I believe we must put God at the head of all, and he will then guide us forward.

During the afternoon we then spent time in small groups looking at a number of questions to help guide our thoughts and what we believe we need to consider when looking forward. Some of the questions we considered were: -

- How do we move forward?
- How should I.M. be governed?
- How can our churches be fairly represented?
- What works well?
- What would we like to keep?
- What do our churches value from Connexion/Association?

What was thrilling to hear was the consensus that whatever changes are made, we need to be seeking God and relying on the Spirit. Therefore we need to be people and churches of:-

- Prayer and Praise and being based in The Word.
- Repentance, Obedience, Unity, and loving each other

We should show each other respect and support, and encourage and listen to each other.

Within this, we also need to act legally and morally.

There is a heart for the Connexion to be a vehicle for helping churches, and also for ownership of the Connexion by our churches, so that the two work well together and bless and help each other. We recognised that both Independence and Interdependence are required to move forward together.

Throughout the day a few Bible verses were shared with us from different people. These were:-

- 2 Chronicles 7 v 14
- Ecclesiastes ch 3
- Jeremiah 29 v 11
- Ephesians 4 v17

It was also a blessing to hear from the churches represented as to what they feel works well and helps them. Some of the responses were as follows: -

- When churches/people / Connexion organise events and others support them
- Annual Meeting Weekends
- Our flexibility and freedom
- Sharing fellowship together
- Our respect of people's gifts and ministry
- The support offered for our churches
- Having our statement of faith and practice
- Friendship, Love, fellowship
- Freedom to govern our own individual churches
- Legal Support
- Connexional Magazine
- Safeguarding Support and

- Training
- Grants
- Sharing of Preachers

There were a number of suggestions as to how practically we could move forward and all the minutes from the meeting are being shared with Connexional committee for them to look at and consider.

What a blessing and encouraging day this was for me personally.

Quote from a participant at the Mount Zion day:

“Appreciated the Saturday Prayer and Discussion day very much. Can we find an excuse to have another! It was a very encouraging meeting, sitting, praying and even eating lunch with people we don’t see very often.”

Lisa Green also shared with us by reading the following article, which I thought would be good to share with you all.

Joy Higham – Church Support Worker

The King is in the Field in Elul

We have made it through Av...known as the ‘narrowest’ month of the year. We have not shrunk back in unbelief. We decided to believe the good report of the Lord and have moved forward. We now find ourselves in a great expanse in this sixth month of the Biblical year called Elul. We have reached both the mid-point of the spiritual year and the last month of the civil year. It’s a wide-open field. But wait.. do you see what I see? There is someone in this field. Behold! The King is in the field!

What does this mean? A king in a field? That doesn’t seem to go together. What is a person of royalty doing in an ordinary field? Shouldn’t he be in his palace... sitting on his throne... surrounded by guards and ruling over important issues of his kingdom? Yes, this is the usual “modus operandi” of a king. However, historically, in Jewish tradition, there is one month of the year when the king leaves his palace and goes into the working fields of his kingdom to meet with his people. Normally, one would be summoned to

his palace and go through check points to approach his throne room. But in Elul, the king comes to his people. He sets his royal tent in the fields of his people and they have access to to meet him face to face.

Is this starting to sound familiar? This is another type and shadow of what Jesus did. The King of all Kings left His heavenly throne and dwelt among us. “And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14) He came down to earth because of His great love for the world. As the Bible tells us, “In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” (1 John 4:10) In His great love for us, Jesus gave His life willingly so we could be reconciled back to the Father and have access to Him again. He wants to be King of the field of our hearts! When we receive Him in our hearts, He establishes His tent pegs permanently and we become His dwelling place forever. In Him, we have a much better covenant than just access one month a year. We have access 27/7, 365 days a year. He places His Spirit in us and seals us forever! (John 14:16-17, Ephesians 1:13-14). He invites us to a special time of intimacy in Elul. All we need to do is receive Him and His great love for us. In fact, the acronym for “Elul” itself is ...”I am my Beloved’s and my Beloved is mine.” (Song of Solomon 6:1)

Elul is often referred to as a ‘haven in time’. Psalm 27 is often read in Elul for this very reason. “For in the day of trouble He will conceal me in His tabernacle. In the secret place of His tent He will hide me. He will lift me up on a rock. And now my head will be lifted up above my enemies around me and I will offer in His tent sacrifices with shouts of joy. I will sing, yes, I will sing praises to the Lord”. (Psalm 27:5-6) As we open our hearts in His tent, the Master Gardener gives us wisdom on navigating those fields that concern us the most .. the fields of our family, our marriage, our work and our ministry. He will personally instruct and walk with us in our fields of influence, our field of dreams and yes, even our battlefields. He knows exactly

how to make our personal and unique fields fruitful. He is delighted to walk the fields with us, His beloved, just as we read in Song of Solomon 7:11.. “Come, my beloved, let us go out into the fields.”

As we walk with our King, He reveals His grace and truth over each allotted parcel He has given us. Perhaps we’ve allowed weeds to grow or overworked a field without letting it rest. Maybe we’ve been working a field for our own gain or perhaps have been sitting on the throne of our own ‘kingdom’. As He reveals His loving kindness over these areas, our eyes turn from self onto His Spirit within us. As we turn from our kingdom to His, our fields fall into proper order and begin to flourish, like His word says... “Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will be added to you”. (Matt 6:33) The Hebrew letter “Yod” underscores this point. It’s the smallest letter in the alphabet, yet it carries great significance. Its curved shape depicts a humble position of repentance and mercy from the hand of God. His kindness leads to repentance. Repentance leads to mercy and fruitfulness. This is truly a gift from His hand. (Romans 2:4)

Lastly, as we hear the Lord’s instruction over our portions, it’s important we respond with obedience. Our left hand is highlighted this month, calling us to action, to fix what’s broken. Let’s put our hands to the plow, for He directs us to be doers of His word, and not merely hearers. (Luke 9:62, James 1:22-25)

How are your fields growing? Do you need help tending to them? Behold! The King is in your field! Run into His tent! Be refreshed and renewed knowing you are His beloved. He has many gifts to give you ... wisdom, kindness, joy, mercy and love. Receive all His gifts, respond and take action! May you feel His smile upon you as you do! “Draw me after You and let us run together! The King has brought me into His chambers.” (Song of Solomon 1:4)

(Taken from His Appointed Times by Christine Vales ISBN 9798399386973 (christinevales.com))

Tell us what you think...

We are always looking for feedback. If you have new fresh ideas or would like to see us improve please get in touch at magazine@imchurches.org.uk
We look forward to hearing from you!

Our New Education Organiser

PAULINE SMITH



Being brought up in a Christian home with a father who was a Local Preacher and Minister of my home church (Bethel, Newton, Wigan), I became a Christian at the age of 11. With many ups and downs along the way, I thank God for his faithfulness, particularly through the difficult times. I am married with four adult children and three gorgeous grandchildren.

Most of my working life was spent as a Social Worker with adults over 18, particularly those with dementia and mental health issues, sadly with far too many safeguarding cases too.

In 2014, after ignoring several calls from the Lord, I finally realised and accepted He was calling me into the Ministry and embarked on the Education Scheme. During the pandemic, being a somewhat 'burned out social worker', I took early retirement and used the time to complete my studies. Then in 2021 my Commissioning Service was held at Bethel - a time of great blessing.

Don't ever think that God has finished with you though! I never imagined at that time that 10 years after my studies began, I would be called to serve as Education Organiser, a role that Shaun Newton has filled for 19 years, and to whom I am extremely grateful for prayerful support and encouragement.

This is an exciting time for the Connexion as we move forward under the Lord's direction, including some positive future education plans, not just for Ministers but for all who have a calling from God, whatever area that may be in.

Watch this space as we start to open up development and training opportunities in other areas, particularly around discipleship in the local church. We believe that God is growing and renewing His church, and we want to be part of that. Any questions or ideas? Just get in touch with me on education.officer@imchurches.org.uk

Incidentally, for the last two and a half years, my Ministry has included working part-time as a Chaplain for Wigan, Wrightington and Leigh Hospitals, so if you become aware of anyone being admitted who would appreciate a visit, just let me know.

Pauline Smith

People Connecting with People

As a boy I attended a school which was partly funded by the state and partly by the Church. The school building was on the opposite side of the road to the church but they were not connected. Although I heard of Jesus and sometimes was required to attend special services there, I never heard the Gospel. Just as the two buildings had no physical connection, neither did I knowingly connect with God.

Interestingly, the first time I heard the Lord speak was in an old chapel where the preacher insisted that it wasn't possible to run away from God. His message was based upon the reluctance of the prophet Jonah. The conviction came upon me that I had been running away from God whereupon, I began to see that He was connecting with me.

Colleagues, friends and family members soon began to enquire about my new found faith in Christ. As I recall, I wasn't always tactful or, sensitive enough. When I received a word from the Lord, I would often blurt it out, expecting folks in church to understand it was inspired. Other people would sometimes just stare. The trouble was in my case that, whilst I was empowered with faith I wasn't very experienced. How could I effectually connect other people with the Gospel?

Opening our Bible at Exodus.4:1-5 we encounter another reluctant soul, Moses. Prior to this time he had, in his own strength, tried to reach out to his kinsmen and failed. He was a known killer. Yet now after a forty year experience in the wilderness, God was connecting with him. With good reason, Moses was afraid of rejection. He had lived in a palace during his time in Egypt. He had never been a slave, unlike his kinsmen. He had never made bricks with, or without, straw as they did. He was schooled with the best education money could buy. The fact that he was a Hebrew person did not mean he had anything in common with Hebrew people.

Then Moses said, "What if they will not believe me or listen to what I say? For they may say, 'The Lord has not appeared to you.'" (Exodus.4:1 NASB). His concern was, I think, quite understandable. Indeed how was he going to connect with the folks to whom God was sending him? The solution as always, was provided by the grace of God. Moses had some experience but needed to know that God was with him now.

When Moses obeyed God's command to throw his staff upon the ground, the staff became a serpent and Moses ran from it. I do not believe for a moment that Moses was scared of snakes. Respectful, yes. Fearful, no. In Egypt it would have been difficult indeed to be unfamiliar with snakes. Surely also, during his time shepherding sheep in the wilderness, he would have to be mindful of snakes and other predators. He was eloquent despite his denial. He was very able bodied too. He did single-handedly kill an Egyptian who was beating a Hebrew man. He did single-handedly deal with the shepherds when they bullied Jethro's daughters. No, it was not the serpent he ran from.

Moses was running from God's call and from the level of authority which God invested in him. Yet how else was he going to connect with his own kinsmen? When he eventually went to present the love of God to them, there was a difference. Moses was empowered and the people saw and believed (Exodus.4:31). It's the same now. Though we may not all be empowered with signs, we can all be equipped.

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Independent Methodist Churches

www.imchurches.org.uk

Firstly, we must have confidence in God's power to save. As we stand firm in Christ we carry His name instead of a staff. He is our rod and staff. Having seen that for ourselves, unsaved people can see our conviction and perceive the reality of our faith. Initially that connects us on the one hand with God and on the other hand with other folks at the same time. If the connection drops we pray and move on. If the connection is fastened, we invest time and pray them in. The important thing is to connect. There will never be a good reason to run away, stop or, to give up.

Roger Stone
President



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Taking himself by surprise, at the Keswick convention in 1965 David Robinson stood to respond to a call to missionary service. A new Christian, David couldn't imagine that this simple yet significant step would be the beginning of 50 years of missionary service in Central Thailand, Cambodia and the UK.

Mud, Bullets and Open Roads is the story of an ordinary life lived in obedience to God with extraordinary consequences. Through testing and opposition, hardship and bereavement, the joy of conversions and the ups and downs of church planting, God is faithful. This insight into missionary life and God's extraordinary power will inspire young and old alike as we see that when following the Lord the best is yet to come.

