

FIGHT FOR YOUR CHURCHES

A New Years message from our President

If there is one crucially important benefit for folks who are sick, surely it is a visit from someone who cares for their recovery. Even then there are certain protocols for the visitor to be mindful of when they arrive in support. There are do's and don'ts. By way of illustration, a first aider makes a visual assessment of the circumstances at the scene of an accident before going into action but, wouldn't dream of telling a patient they looked really ill.

Nor would a visitor to the home of someone who hadn't attended church for a while begin by exhorting them to an attitude of faith, before having understood their concerns. Notwithstanding, the way in is the way out. The loving concern in the approach should be reciprocated in the mood in which the departure is made. There is a language during any encounter which, if spoken, may be taken as negative. In contrast there is a language which is capable of leaving folks in a very positive frame of mind when their visitors leave. We may call that, the language of faith (Psalm.118:17).

May we extrapolate these principles for a moment and apply them to our faith and our churches? As we do it would be useful to take from an incident in Scripture where, God's people were cowering in the face of the enemy and left hopelessly unable to move on (1 Samuel.17:1-58).

The threat was, that they were faced with a seemingly impossible challenge (1 Samuel.17:4-11)

The response was, a sombre resignation to the conviction that they had neither the strength or, the resources to overcome when faced by this huge challenge (1 Samuel.17:24). By talking themselves to death, they became spiritually paralysed.

The answer came from the lips of a youth who simply took God at His word (1 Samuel.17:45-47).

The language which David was speaking was exciting, refreshing, hopeful, inspiring and a proclamation of God's faithfulness in every circumstance. This is a new, living language. It is the language of God's people whether, praising joyfully or, facing trials (James.1:2; 5:13). It continues to be the language we speak even if the building in which we meet needs refurbishment. It continues to be the language we speak even if we are down to just a few members. It continues to be the language we speak even if we are low on funds. It continues to be the language we speak when visiting frail churches. We should never speak death to ourselves or, voice a sentence that only succeeds in shutting things down (Numbers.14:1-38; Luke.9:13; 1 Corinthians.2:6).

So how do we fight for our churches? Certainly not with the weapons of the world! Our weapons are not carnal, they are spiritual (2 Corinthians.10:3-5). These are successful in the pulling down of strongholds and any pretentious argument. Truly, if we can't say anything good then perhaps, we should be silent. If our faith enables us to encourage then why be silent (James.4:17)? We can speak blessing over each other, our circumstances and our churches. Yet there is more.

Neither David nor Jesus Himself, arrived on a battle scene without being empowered through prayer first. To come in faith and the Holy Spirit isn't an option. Even then, the Church needs to rediscover its authority and the power of prayer. Your church is in need? Go into it and pray for the providence of Almighty God. Write down your needs and petitions, lay them up before the Lord and pray His will be done with them. Seal the entrances and exits, proclaiming His Word. Whatever is done, it should be the Lord to whom we turn for help. Our supply is in Christ alone and not from unbelievers (Isaiah.31:1; 3 John.1:7). We may be faced with giants but don't be fazed. Fight for your churches.

Roger Stone

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Statement of Faith

We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is God the Son. For our sake He became man, was truly human and truly divine, and lived a sinless human life.

We believe that He reveals the Father, that He died to atone for our sins, rose from the dead, ascended to heaven and was exalted. He is our Advocate, Mediator and Lord.

We believe that he will return personally in power and glory.

GOD
THE
SON (1)

There is a lot in this statement, and this article will only examine the first part of it. In the first of this series, we looked at Isaiah's well-known prophecy (Isaiah 9:6) - *For to us a child is born, to us a son is given ... and he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.* The child to be born would be God, become man, and this verse makes the statement that Jesus was at the same time human and divine. Human because he was born into the world, and divine because he would be called Mighty God and Everlasting Father. We have to accept this by faith because we can neither explain it or hope to fully understand it. Gabriel's message to Mary (Luke 1:26-38) reiterated the prophecy - *he will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High (v.32) - so the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God (v.35).*

Isaiah's other well-known prophecy - *the virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel [God with us] (Isaiah 7:14)* - has been misused over the years. The Roman Catholic doctrine was that God had taken away Mary's original sin at birth, which made her sinless and explains how she could give birth to the sinless Son of God. However, the New Testament includes two episodes which suggest otherwise. Matthew, Mark and Luke all record an occasion when Mary and Jesus' earthly brothers wanted to speak to him, and Mark 3:21 explains that they wanted to take charge of him because they said he was out of his mind. Surely the sinless Mary would have known better than to interfere with God's work - unless she wasn't sinless at all and, in this instance, was badly mistaken. The other instance was the wedding feast at Cana, when Mary's intervention could be seen as trying to twist Jesus' arm into doing something about the wine running out. Certainly, Jesus' response could be seen as a gentle rebuke, and sinless people don't need a rebuke - do they?

No, the explanation about Jesus' birth can be found in the two different genealogies, given in Matthew and Luke. Matthew 1 starts with Abraham and moves forward in time, Luke 3 starts with Joseph and works

backwards to Adam and then to God. It is once we get to David that the two accounts diverge. Matthew's account goes through the kingly line through Solomon, Rehoboam, the kings of Judah and their descendants after the exile. Luke, on the other hand, traces Jesus' ancestry through Nathan, one of David's other sons, and many others about whom we know little. Why the difference? The line through Solomon and the other kings shows Jesus' right to the throne of his father David (Luke 1:32). However,

there was a glitch, and this was the curse of Jehoiachin (Jeremiah 22:30) - *This is what the Lord says: record this man as if childless, a man who will not prosper in his lifetime, for none of his offspring will prosper, none will sit on the throne of David or rule any more in Judah.* So, Jesus could not inherit the throne via the line through Joseph, because in God's eyes he would have been an offspring of Jehoiachin. This is why Mary was so important, because she was in David's blood line but not via Jehoiachin, and it is her genealogy that is given in Luke (Jewish tradition would not have named a woman, which is why Joseph appears again, rather than Mary). It's nothing to do with sinless perfection. For that matter, the Jews themselves could have worked out Jesus' royal provenance. They kept detailed records of such things, as attested by Nehemiah 7, so they could have - and even might have - identified Jesus' earthly descent from David, especially since the Romans had helpfully arranged for a census at the time of Jesus' birth. Jesus did tell them, *"Yes, you know me, and you know where I am from"* (John 7:28), and if the Jewish authorities had done their homework, they should have recognised his kingly credentials. In which case, did they want to get rid of him because he didn't match up to their preconceived ideas?

Unlike his earthly parents, Jesus did live a sinless life. We do not have every detail of his 33 years on earth, but scripture does not record a single misdemeanour. Even the telling-off at Cana was done with gentleness and respect - *honour your father and your mother.* John 8:46 records one of Jesus' run-ins with the Jewish establishment, when Jesus asked them, *"Can any of you prove me guilty of sin?"* If anyone had been able to do so, that would have been the end of Jesus' ministry. If they could have pointed to an illicit liaison with Mary Magdalene, for instance, or even something relatively trivial like breaking his mother's favourite earthenware jar with a football, and blaming one of his friends, then his life would not have been sinless. However, none of them could prove him guilty of sin. Claiming to be the Son of God isn't blasphemy if you are the Son of God. How could Jesus be truly human and truly divine?

The author of Hebrews addresses both points in his letter. *The Son is the radiance of God's glory, and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word* (Hebrews 1:3) - this cannot have been written about a mere man. However, in the next chapter, we read *Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity ...* (Hebrews 2:14). The disciples could bear witness to Jesus' humanity, particularly after the resurrection when they could touch his body, and watch him eating a piece of fish. Yet Peter had already confessed him to be *the Christ, the Son of the living God* (Matthew 16:16), and Jesus had accepted worship from a leper, a demoniac, and a blind man who had been healed. In contrast to the angel in Revelation 22:8-9, whom we saw in the first study, Jesus did not rebuke the worshippers. It's OK to accept worship if you are indeed God. At the same time, Jesus had to become man, to identify with our weaknesses though not participating in them. Hebrews 4:15 - *we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet was without*

sin, and Hebrews 2:17-18 - he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest ... because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. Jesus understands our failures, because he has been through the same temptations himself, but because he did not succumb to temptation, he can act as our defence counsel before God the Father. No other man could do this, because he would be just as sinful as those he was representing. But Jesus, who was without sin, is the perfect mediator between God and man, fully God and fully man.

(all scriptures taken from the New International Version)

Brian Rowney

"I WAS A STRANGER AND YOU WELCOMED ME".
Matthew 25 verse 40.

It is often said that there are no coincidences in the Christian life. In the summer of 2024, Bethel I.M. Newtown met Grace from Hong Kong for the first time. She had started an extended holiday with local family members and, one Sunday, she explored the area, seeking an appropriate place to worship. Passing by our chapel, she engaged herself in conversation with our door steward for the day. No coincidence this, as a mutually spiritual blessing ensued. The stranger was welcomed and became a regular participant in all church activities during her stay.

Our Ladies' Fellowship Group arranged a Q and A interview with Grace.. They began by looking at our Whit Walks' Banner, prominent in the church. Jesus, a white Western figure, meets with white European children. A comparison was made with a delightful painting by Luke Ch'en (1906 1967). Jesus is Chinese as are his delighted young Oriental listeners. The artist, a non-believer at the time, was commissioned to illustrate children's Bible stories. Reading the scripture, he became a Christian. His paintings remind us all of the World Wide Church.

Grace was asked about her own faith journey. She spoke of her parents, who left mainland China for Hong Kong, to marry and of her other Christian influences, a teacher and a much-loved minister. Her current church has over a thousand members, there isn't a lot of humour in the services and some sermons can last for over an hour. When asked about the social changes since the handing over of Hong Kong to China, she noted that there were newcomers who had come from the mainland and that many professionals were leaving the former British Colony for Canada, Australia and the U.K. Members present were thrilled to hear of Grace's faith and work for Jesus.

It is hoped that Grace, on her return to Hong Kong, will take with her fond memories of Bethel, its services and fellowship. She certainly learned new things about English and Wigan culture, for example, "What IS a coffee morning?" and she was confused about lunch, dinner and tea. As for our accents, well we did try to speak in 'textbook' English.

David Moulson, Newtown



Church Support Page

We at Church Support invite all who are able to join us on Saturday 25th January 10am till 3pm for a time of Rest & Receiving at the Northwood Centre. Please bring your lunch but there will be refreshments for all. This is our Start the Year Right event – a day of prayer and fellowship as we commit ourselves, our ministry and our Churches to the work of the Lord in 2025. As is usual with Church



Come Alive in '25

Start the Year Right

Prayer, Meditation & Worship to:-

***Rest, Retreat, Receive**

Dedicate the year to God

Northwood Christian Centre

Saturday 25th January
10am - 3pm

Support, there will be a variety of prayer types and guidance as well as space for private and personal prayer. Let us be refreshed by the Lord and to be corny – Come Alive in '25. Already we have been given Ezekiel 27 and 2 Peter 1 for reflection.

Please do join us and let our Unity bring revelation.

Faith in Kids Children's Ministry training – 28th January is Inspire for those who lead children's ministry in their church. This session is all about welcoming families with additional needs. From gospel principles to practical wisdom, you'll come away from this session more equipped to welcome everyone into your church. Find out more or book via faithinkids.org

Faith in Later Life are continuing their #LoveMyNeighbour campaign a short video is available to watch & share – visit on Facebook or their website www.faithinlaterlife.org

Please get in touch if your Church would like us to come and share with you the support and provision available, or we can come to listen and make a Road Map of how your Church can achieve what you feel God is leading you to do. We're available to chat or visit or find resources and training you're looking for - Joy & Lisa x

A Prayer For Our Neighbours

Dear Lord Jesus

Thank you for our older neighbours. Watch over them Lord and provide for their every need. Help them to know you or to know you more closely. For their glory, and yours.

Amen



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Mohsen's Story

For some months now Mohsen and his wife the Fereshteh have been worshipping with us at church (Bethel, Newtown) and attending mid-week meetings. Recently, I interviewed Mohsen at one of those meetings and he told us his story:

Jesus talked to me when I was three for the first time, but I wasn't aware of it. I will explain. When I was three, I could just say one word and it was 'Amani'. Three months before I was born my parents lost their 4th son, who was also named Mohsen. When I was born, they decided to give me his name. My birth coincided with the Islamic Revolution in Iran, and about a year later the Iran-Iraq war began. As a result, we became refugees and moved to a higher-altitude town. The place we lived in was a shrine, whose chambers had been converted into rooms, with each family occupying one room.

Until I was about three years old, I didn't speak a single word; everyone thought I was deaf and mute. Then one morning I picked up a bowl, went out of our room and wandered into other chambers. Showing the bowl to people I would say the word 'Amani'. Thinking I was asking for food they would put something in the bowl. Once it was full I would sit somewhere and eat. This went on for about two years. Gradually I began learning more words and forming sentences, but everyone continued to call me 'Amani'. Even as I grew older the name stuck and sometimes people still call me by that name.

As I grew up, I developed a keen interest in English. I started learning it by attending classes and reading English stories, gradually improving my skills. However, due to my mother's strictness as well as societal and school pressures, I became disillusioned with Islam. In university I first studied English teaching and later switched to translation, eventually graduating in English translation.

During my university years, while translating old texts, a friend and I accidentally came across some pages which we later discovered were from the Bible. After graduation, I began teaching at a school and later took on private students. When I was 34, I started a course to become an international tour guide besides my job as a teacher. I wanted to chat with tourists who travel to Iran, so I decided to invite them to our city and home. Among them, there was a French man who was a Catholic Christian. He stayed with us for three days. We talked about religion, and he introduced me to the Bible. After that, I became interested in the Bible, but I didn't have access to good references. It was only the second time I saw Bible texts.

Years later, among my students was an old friend from elementary school who wanted to learn English. Over time, we spent more time together, and this friend, knowing I had stopped practising Islam, shared



the gospel with me. I found out he had converted to Christianity. He spoke to me about the Bible and Jesus Christ. He asked if I wanted to join a house church. I found it remarkable that they trusted me enough to share their faith because in Iran, converting from Islam to another religion is prohibited.

40 years after I first uttered the word 'Amani' I was accepted into a master's programme in management at a university in Manchester. My family and I emigrated there and two weeks after our arrival, we were walking around our new neighbourhood. My wife pointed out a building that people were entering and suggested we go and talk to them. They were very kind and told us the building was a church, although it didn't look like a church. We were invited to the Sunday service and came back the next day. We became friends with a really nice man there who we invited to our flat. I told him about looking for a place to worship and about my life journey. He asked, "Did you know that the upper floor of the church you entered is a youth centre called 'Amani'?" I was stunned and asked, "Really?" He said yes and then asked if I'd ever looked into the meaning of the word 'Amani'. I replied, "No, I always thought it was a meaningless childish word." He replied that Amani is a Swahili word meaning peace and tranquillity. I couldn't hold my tears. It was then I realised Jesus had been speaking to me since I was three years old. He had brought me here to show me this miracle and reveal His power. I hope that Jesus continues to be the support of all people worldwide because He is the only Saviour of humanity.

Christine Ormerod

Overseas Missions Page

L. and P. are now settled back at home in North Africa. L. is continuing with her online counselling and coaching work and was also invited to be a speaker at a "Renew Your Vision" online event for Christian women, especially those in full-time ministry. Together with a friend Katie she has met up with some ladies interested in practising English. Pray for opportunities to share the Gospel. For P. this is a time of change. He is now concluding the work with the NGO he has worked with for 10 years. He will, however, continue to help a team mate where he can. As he now has 25 years of experience in North Africa, his sending mission in France would like him

to focus on equipping the new generation that the Lord is calling into mission there.

Liz Greenhalgh praises the Lord for progress in the various aspects of her ministry with the children and teenagers in the church. At the same time other doors have opened for her, some as a direct answer to prayer. Such good progress has been made with the children on the after-school programme that the director of the school has invited her to come into the school to work on the basics with children who need extra help. She is also hosting three children from one family over breakfast time each day, as their mother's work shift begins very early. A

third area of ministry involves visiting housebound women both from the church and those needing help from the food kitchen. Please pray for Liz, as she has a busy schedule!

Gail and Daniel Castro praise the Lord for the way they have seen Him at work in their lives in the past year. They have now settled permanently in their current home. In the summer they were able to travel to Colombia as a family for the first time in nine years. It was good to visit family, as well as the two churches they had worked with. Gail was particularly pleased to see the progress in the development of Hope House which now provides care for 18 needy children. Here at home she has been able to give some much needed support to OMS missionaries both on the field and on their return to the UK.

Anne Fambely



Christmas greetings from the Castros

Winter 2024

Dear Friends,

As we come to the end of another year, we take time to reflect on the many ways we have seen God at work in and through our lives. We thank God that as always, He has been faithful in sustaining, guiding and providing. We rejoice that God Almighty became flesh and blood and moved (as Eugene Peterson puts it) into our neighbourhood. We celebrate the wonderful and invigorating presence of Emanuel, God with us!

This has been an exciting year, charged with many encouraging things and some challenges along the way.

Home:

Very providentially and with the help of some wonderful friends we were able to get a mortgage for the house we now call home! As late starters in home ownership, we are trusting God to sustain us and to give us the energy to be able to fulfil our obligation to the end.

Member Care:

As member care providers for OMS UK missionaries, we have been able to walk alongside some of our colleagues going through testing times. It has been both a privilege and a challenge that has made us even more acutely aware of the strains of missionary service abroad and the insidious works of the enemy. Pray for God's wisdom and sensitivity.

Colombia:

During the summer, we had the incredible opportunity of visiting Colombia. Gail, Melissa and Ruth had not been there for nine years, so it was a time for reconnecting with lots of family and friends. We had two lovely family gatherings on both sides of the family in which we saw around 60 family members! We spent the last couple of days in Bogotá, visiting dear friends from the two churches we worked with. It was such an encouragement to see God doing wonderful things in the lives of so many. Please pray for the church leadership handling some great opportunities, but also facing various challenges.

The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighbourhood. We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory, like Father, like Son, generous inside and out, true from start to finish.

John 1:14 (The Message)



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Our New Admin Secretary

SHAUN NEWTON

Shaun came to faith aged 11 years old in a Sunday Evening Service in our Hetton-le-Hole church and became a Junior Member as soon as he was able and then a Senior member once he reached 18 and has been a church member all his adult life. Within his own church of Hetton-le-Hole Shaun has served as Church Secretary for 16 years and the last 11 years as Church President. He is active in many aspects of church life which also includes driving a minibus that the church hires for transporting its young people to and from the activities they take part in. Shaun was commissioned as an Independent Methodist Minister in 2001 and regularly preaches in his home church, in the circuit and also beyond in the Connexion.

Outside of Hetton-le-Hole, Shaun has served his Circuit, the former Northern Counties Confederation and also the Connexion.



Shaun served as Young People's Secretary for the former Northern Counties Confederation (NCC) for over 20 years until its dissolution in 2013. The last 5 years of the NCC also saw Shaun serve as its President and so was part of a small team that saw the coming together of the NCC, Newcastle Circuit, Spennymoor Circuit and Sunderland Circuit into one, new organisation, namely the North East Circuit. Shaun continues to play an active part in Circuit life and has served as Circuit President going in the pandemic of 2020 and currently serves as Circuit Secretary.

In Connexional life Shaun was first elected to the role of Education Organiser in 2005 and continued to serve in that capacity until 2024 when he was elected as Administrative Secretary.

Outside of church life Shaun serves as the Chief Exec of a charity which is a Community Anchor Hub in Easington Lane and is active in the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector within the City of Sunderland and due to his interest in local history he also serves as Chair of Trustees for a local Heritage charity.

FINISHING THE TASK

At a recent meeting of the Free Churches Group those attending received a presentation on 'Finishing the task' and were urged to encourage our churches to join in with the programme.

So what is it? Well, it's a coming together of churches, denominations and organisations to fulfil the 'great commission'. It's a call to mobilize the church, in all its diversity, to do as Jesus instructed, with all people, in all places, all for God's glory by 2033 – the 2000th anniversary of the church.

Jesus said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you to the very end of the age.' (Matthew 28 v 18-20)

'Finishing the task' has four specific goals:

Bibles: To provide every person in the world with the gospel in their own language.

Believers: To equip every believer, all 2.6 billion worldwide, to share their faith personally. If every believer shared the Good News of Jesus with just two people who had never heard it, the whole world would hear the gospel.

Body of Christ: To sponsor or plant a church where there isn't one.

Breakthrough Prayer: For everyone who knows Jesus to pray for someone who doesn't – billions of believers praying for billions of non-believers.

That's 'finishing the task' and everyone is encouraged to get involved in one or more of the four specific goals. And even though it's an on-line programme it's easy to get involved. Just go to www.finishingthetask.com click on 'join the movement' fill in your name and email address and you'll receive an immediate welcome updates on the programme later.

All information, resources, devotionals, prayer guides are available on the 'finishing the task' website.

Please let me know if your church registers with @finishing the task' as there will be opportunities in the future for churches to do things together. Some of our north-east churches have registered and are planning a missions meeting. If you need further information contact ecumenism.officer@imchurches.org.uk or ring me on 07968 741626

Bill Hampson

Church Corner

Church Anniversary from Bethel, Newtown

November is the month of remembrance and us at Bethel the weekend of November 9th and 10th with such a poignant time for remembering.

On the evening of Saturday 9th November, we held a 'Songs of Praise' service. It had been arranged and was led by our organist and choirmaster, Kevan Booth, who was ably assisted by Vera, his wife.

Members of the congregation had submitted their favourite hymns for us to sing. Some were chosen to remember loved ones no longer with us, some to remember events in our lives and some to simply enjoy the beauty and meaning of the words and music.

Music evokes such emotion and how blessed we were on that evening. There may have been tears along with the joy, but on hearing certain hymns, we could hear the unforgettable voices of some of those no longer with us, joining in with our praise and stirring our hearts.

At the close of this evening of fellowship, refreshments were served. Cakes were provided by Maureen



and Eric Waters to mark Eric's 91st birthday that weekend.

At the morning service on Sunday 19th November, we marked Remembrance Sunday and Bethel's 144th Church Anniversary.

Lester Atherton, our minister for that day, led us in prayer before the two minutes silence at 11 o'clock, a time to pause and remember all who served in two World Wars and other conflicts, perhaps recalling those from our own families and our church family, who served, in whatever capacity during war.

The choir sang the piece, 'Christ is The King of All Kings'.

The bible reading from Romans 12 1-8 was read by Mohsen. He read the passage in English, then repeated the verse in Persian which was so moving.

Lester's message focused on Charismata- City of Grace. His final challenge was to ask ourselves, 'What is my gift?', 'What is my ministry?', 'Am I available for God to use me?'.

This was certainly a weekend to remember.

Ann Rigby, Newtown

Believers Baptism at Kirkhall Lane

It is now several months since we had a request from one of our folks for believers' baptism. Historically we would arrange to visit friends at a local Baptist fellowship for the use of their pool. Though they have kindly provided us with their facility we have, for some time, harboured the ambition of holding such an event inside the church at Kirkhall Lane.



After finding a large inflatable pool so useful at Northwood, we realised the potential and decided to proceed with such an event for the folks back at Kirkhall Lane. The thing was, we only had one candidate at the time. As happens so often, when one person is led by the Lord, others follow through behind. In fact, it turned out to be a much bigger event than we hoped for.

Folks who also join us at both Northwood and the Wigan House Group brought the pool and we soon had it inflated. After drawing back partitions to open our worship area the pool was then placed on mats, filled with water and ready to go the day before our service. On the 10th November, the place was almost full and with a lovely family atmosphere the worship led toward the baptism ceremony following.



Altogether seven folks were baptised. Four who had never taken such a step before, including a young lady of seventeen, the man who had originally requested a baptism, and one man recently saved, having only been with us for several weeks. The fourth being my own son, for whom we have been praying for over twenty years! Three people came forward for re-commitment to saving faith, including a young lady from the House Group who was with us for the first time. It's a mighty good job we had brought spare clothes and towels. The service and baptism were followed by a fellowship faith lunch. Everyone so enjoyed it, no one wanted to go home.



There is always a cost to anything worthwhile and we have learned a few lessons for the future. For one thing, more foam floor mats are required when we do this again. We also need to remember a jubilee clip to hold the pipe in place when the water is pumped out to a drain later. Especially as I was one of those who were sprayed when the pipe momentarily came off!

Yes, it was work and needed commitment but, God is blessing us and we give Him the glory. Plus, the range of contacts and new friends that the Lord has brought into the equation is generating the love of God's people. Apart from the cost of hard work, the pool was only £35 from Home and Bargain. Bless the Lord.

Roger Stone, Kirkhall Lane

New Members at Grappenhall

Katherine Daniels and Helen Foster were welcomed into members of the church prior to the Sacramental Service on Sunday 3rd November. Katherine had been a former Sunday School scholar and Church Rose Queen who had returned to fellowship after a gap of some years and is now an enthusiastic member of the Bible Study Group. Helen, formerly a long-term resident of Grappenhall had spent a few years in another part of the town before returning and cementing her return by seeking membership of the church.

Rob Brooks, Grappenhall

Shoebox Savioours

Joan Newton has been involved in sending aid at home and abroad since she was Home Mission and Overseas Mission Secretary at Warmley Tower Methodist Church, arranging collections of food, toiletries, handmade blankets, knitted teddies, etc. on those special service days and then with her husband, delivered all the items to hostels for the homeless in Bristol and to a charity sending aid to Romania.

When Warmley Tower Methodist Church closed in 2004, she came to Mill Lane IMC with her Brownie Pack and also became a church member.

Her shoebox wrapping and packing started in the 1990s, her first boxes going to 'Children in Distress' and then in the 2000s to a charity called 'Aid Ukraine', founded by Winifred and Tony Fry. Goods would be delivered to them and then they would go to Joan for sorting and packing. While working in Broadmead shopping centre in Bristol, Joan would often pop into 'Wilko's', to pick up a bargain, like colouring books and pencils, especially at sale time! In 2006, she met Diane Williams, through Win and Tony, and became good friends. Their shoebox partnership began.

After the last Aid Ukraine lorry departed in 2011, Joan and Diane continued supporting the Christmas Shoebox appeal via Blythswood Care in Scotland charity. Diane estimates that around 5,000 boxes have been sent, but Joan has lost count. Diane's Mum Valerie and friend Mabel both aged 97 and living in West Wales, knit scarves and hats for them. Valerie has made over a thousand scarves since she first started in 2016, when she lost her husband. She says her knitting keeps her sane. Her local postman found

out about her activities and now throughout the year collects elastic bands for them, which are used to secure each box before they all start on their journey.

The owner of Instep shoe shop in Clifton, Bristol, keeps empty shoe boxes for them, which Diane's husband collects weekly. Diane says, 'Where would we be without him?' They are really blessed with so many people contributing to the shoeboxes in many ways, such as the wonderful knitters, making hats, gloves and scarves—each box has a set of these, and cardigans and jumpers, all beautifully made and will be much appreciated in the Eastern European winters. Then there are the sewers, making lovely bags for children and adults, as well as pencil cases and drawstring bags to keep the little toys in. Much of the material has been donated to them.

Every girl's box up to the age of 13 years has a doll, beautifully dressed in hand-knitted outfits, usually two sets, with hair washed and brushed. They have many others who donate toiletries, stationery, toys, etc., around 70 individuals and several groups of people. Often Joan arrives home to find shoe boxes and goods left at the front door and there are always cars coming or going with things, and Joan carries bags of goods home from Church.



A few years ago, Beryl Shaw, at Mill Lane Church, arranged through her granddaughter who worked at the shop 'Poundland', for them to donate their unwanted goods to Joan for the boxes and what a lot it was! It filled the shed and summer house! It was amazing and most welcome; they are still using the wrapping paper to this day.

Goods have come over the years from various places, West Wales, Malmesbury, Somerset, Hampshire and locally in and around Bristol. As the word spreads about what they are doing, so more friends and friends of friends, who they don't even know, decide to get involved. The support network grows regularly. It is often said 'Christmas comes but once a year', not so in Joan's and Diane's house, it's all year round, with boxes under beds, in cupboards and sheds.



During Covid, they continued with the boxes but before they were collected, the boxes had to be isolated for forty-eight hours, so off they went into the shed and were locked in, no one was allowed to go in until the collection had been made and then the collector was the only one able to handle them.

Apart from the shoeboxes, there is also preparation for the coffee mornings and sales to help with the cost of transporting the boxes to Eastern Europe. As each box costs £3 to transport to Eastern Europe, Mill Lane IMC holds coffee mornings to raise the money to do this. In addition, handmade items are sold all year round to help with the fundraising, which amounted to £2000 this year. Diane makes preserves during the year when the fruit is in season and various marmalades. They are always in great demand and all monies go into the 'shoebox fund.' Quite often, items are donated that can be sold on, so the 'shoebox fund' grows through the year. It really has become a 'cottage industry'.

Joan and Diane love packing shoe boxes and this year they have packed 730, which have been sent to Eastern Europe from the friends of Mill Lane Church. Joan and Diane carefully ensure that each box is packed with the appropriate items for the complete range of ages 0 -100 and both male and female. They also give boxes to the Seaman's Mission at Portbury and Avonmouth docks for the sailors who are in dock over the Christmas period, many thousands of miles



from their homeland and families. The boxes are filled with sweets, toiletries and toilet bags, hats, socks, pens and notebooks, the boxes are given to them to let them know that someone is thinking of them at Christmas time. Steve Loader is the Chaplain for the Docks and a local preacher who often takes a service at Mill Lane Church and a few weeks ago he was presented with an early Christmas present of thirty boxes. As well as warm jumpers, and jigsaw puzzles to keep the seamen occupied.

We pray that the people who receive the boxes will come to know of God's love at Christmas.



From the Connexion

OCTOBER CONNEXIONAL COMMITTEE ROUND-UP

By Alison Tipping, Medlock Valley Circuit Representative

The meeting was chaired for the first time by Roger Stone, as President, and we were welcomed to Hetton-le-Hole Church by Gill Tweddle.

General Secretary's Report

Two new members of Connexional Committee were welcomed. Pauline Smith, who has been our minutes secretary for some time, was elected as the Education Organiser at Annual Meeting. As Dave Hughes is now the Assistant General Secretary/ Association Secretary, Leigh Circuit nominated Chris Woodall (Roe Green) as one of their representatives. After the vote at Annual Meeting, agreeing in principle to merging the Connexion and the Association, Connexional Committee agreed Terms of Reference for the Merger Team (as it has been named). It was agreed that as well as a small group of officers, the team will include three members nominated by the churches. 2 nominations were received, and they were accepted to join the group. A training session for IMA trustees will take place on November 16th at Nelson church and will be open to trustees from our churches. It is hoped that the session will be repeated in the North East.

Administration Group

There were several recommendations from the Admin group report that were agreed at Connexional Committee:

1. Admin Group membership be amended by: i. Removing Communications Officer. ii. Adding Assistant General Secretary. iii. Adding Finance Officer. iv. Adding Association Manager.
2. New Role Description be drawn up for the role of Assistant General Secretary.
3. Dispense with the role of Communications Officer and: i. re-allocate the role of 'Data Controller' to the Association Manager. ii. and all other duties and responsibilities (IT equipment; website; software; magazine; archives etc) to Admin Secretary under the guidance and direction of the Admin Group.

Approval was given to Medlock Valley and Pendle Circuits, who are seeking to merge into one circuit, to enable mutual encouragement and support and not necessarily for business.

Other recommendations related to future Annual Meetings, and changes that have been made following feedback from this year's AGM. Annual Meeting 2025 is to be held Friday 25th & Saturday 26th July 2025 in the North West and Annual Meeting

2026 to be held Friday 26th and Saturday 27th June 2026 in the North East. Venues for both meetings will be dealt with at future Connexional Committee meetings. Sales of Croxton and Buckley Street churches are ongoing. Stubshaw Cross are seeking permission to leave the IMC, take their premises with them and merge with Beacon Church.

The 2024-25 Directory will soon be ready and issued accordingly, and an updated Connexional Information Handbook is in the early stages of compilation and once agreed will be available electronically as well as hard copy. A directory of online Sunday Services and midweek meetings is also proposed.

Ecumenical Officer Report

Bill Hampson has attended the latest Free Churches Group on September 23rd and the CLAS AGM and several meetings of Churches Together in England. At the Free Churches Group last June, a presentation was given on Finishing the Task - a coalition of churches, denominations, and organisations coming together to take part in the Great Commission of Matthew 28: 18-20.

If your church is interested in joining the network, please go to <https://finishingthetask.com> and register with them.

Education Organisers Report

We have 4 current students, and another potential student. At the IM Association AGM, held after Annual Meeting in July, it was proposed and agreed that we become a member of the Association of Wesleyan Evangelicals (AWE). It was recommended and approved that we become a founding partner of the AWE Academy under a three-year agreement, reviewed annually to monitor progress. The cost will be in the region of £9,000 per year, and the interim director will be Dr Richard Saunders-Hindley, who continues to provide assessment and tutoring services to our current students.

The study weekend in October was a successful weekend and a great time of learning. The invitation list for future study weekends is to be revised before the next weekend. Next year's Fellowship and Bible Conference is to be held on Friday 25th April 2025 at Garstang Golf and Country Club, with the speaker Rev Dr David Hull, Chair of MET and Lead Pastor of Freedom Church, Bristol.

Church Support Group

Following on from the Connexional meetings in April, a North West meeting was held on September 7th at Mount Zion Church Pemberton, and an article has been written for the Nov/Dec issue of the Connexion magazine with further details of what was discussed.

Chris Elsdon has continued meeting with churches to set up websites, as well as continuing with the Connexional Website, which has now gone Live. It was agreed that we continue to hire Chris to carry on with this work. Joy and Lisa have been working through requests for support from 10 churches, which have come in since Annual meeting.

Carrie O’Nions and Marilyn met with Daniel and Gail Castro, at the end of August and we had an informative and productive meeting.

Enabling Group

Reallocation of Officer roles, as mentioned in the Admin group report and filling or removing vacant positions has been an ongoing task as we seek to move towards a Team Leadership model where Officers are changed more frequently than in past years. The Enabling Group remains an important part of our Communication network within Connexion as it is a place where information may be shared by Officers from the various Connexional Committees so that all Officers are updated on our present position.

It was agreed that we send a gift of £500 to Rev Dr John Claydon in recognition of his work with the original Review Group.

Finance Committee

A grant application for Grappenhall church was approved, for improvements to their audio system. The committee are currently producing a monthly review of the accounts and this will in turn enable the decisions on departmental budgets for year 2025.

It was recommended and agreed that churches will be able to apply for a grant to pay eligible members the equivalent Winter Fuel Allowance. Each church would discuss this with their members, to find out who was eligible – pensioners not receiving Pension credits who would face hardship without this payment. Details of this have been sent out to the churches.

Safeguarding Report

The Safeguarding Team have continued to support the churches during the past three months and are also attempting to set up our own database for Ministers and churches with regard to DBS Applications. Graham Edmundson will be resuming the role of Safeguarding Officer, as agreed at Connexional Committee.

Northwood Centre

High Legh Christian Fellowship has changed its name to Ebenezer Christian Fellowship and continue to meet every Sunday and Wednesday. There has been no further movement on the Rental Agreement, although now the group has changed this agreement will need to be reviewed. A gardener has been hired to clean the outside areas and some urgent repair work has been done to a burst pipe in the cottage. The Business Plan was submitted to Connexional Committee for approval, but after some discussion further work is needed on this. This will be resubmitted following changes at a later date

Overseas Missions Report

The Overseas Missions Event, held at our Northwood Centre on the 3rd of August, was attended by Liz Greenhalgh, and Daniel and Gail Castro, who came and gave an update on their work.

Liz continues with her youth work and outreach amongst the Roma people in Romania. She explained how the Roma children cannot go to the mainstream schools there, or, if they do, they struggle to keep up. Liz and her team support these children in their education to ensure that they have bright futures. She also told us more about her work in the canteen. This is attended by both Romania and Roma women, many of whom struggle to access health care and state support. It was suggested that as a Connexional fundraising idea, churches could hold a coffee morning to raise money for some of the Roma women that Liz works with, and this will be shared with the churches giving more details for those wishing to take part.

Daniel continues as a part time pastor as well as his work with One Mission. He has been given a leadership role in UK based missionary work. Gail continues with her member care work, supporting missionaries here and abroad. She also continues to support local families whose children have disabilities and other issues. Both Daniel and Gail attended weekly prayer meetings at Roe Green Church. They have also offered to come to any of our churches to speak or to offer any support you might need and will be sending regular updates about their current work.

Ministry Committee Report

Sydney Hall from Moorside Church has been received into the Lord’s immediate care and a letter of condolence was sent to his nephew. There have been some revisions made to long service certificates for those ministers who have given between 40 and 49 years’ service, which affects 9 of our ministers. They have been contacted regarding this and certificates will be awarded retrospectively recording the actual number of years of service as accredited ministers.

Alison Tipping, Medlock Valley Circuit Rep.

In the Joy of the Lord

Ron Banks, Grappenhall, 14th October 2024 – Aged 99

Ron was our oldest member having been welcomed into fellowship in 1990 although he had attended worship much earlier with his late wife Vera. Ron was a faithful and regular attender at Morning Worship as well as at the mid-week Christian Fellowship meeting. It was only a few years ago that he gave a fascinating talk to the fellowship about his time in the Royal Navy.

Ron served in the Far East as an anti-aircraft gunner on the Aircraft Carrier HMS Glory and witnessed the signing of surrender documents by Japanese Officers commanding troops in Papua New Guinea. The main Japanese surrender had taken place aboard the USS Missouri four days earlier. HMS Glory had been en-route to Australia when diverted to Papua New Guinea and when it arrived there was converted to accommodate the repatriation of Australian and British prisoners of war held by the Japanese.

His time in the navy inspired a love of travel and he could claim to have visited many countries but regretted he had never made it to Russia. He returned to Japan many years later and was amazed by how the country had been rebuilt.

During recent years with the onset of dementia, Ron had been unable to attend church but was visited by church members who regularly took care of his shopping. During the latter stages of his illness, he moved to Preston to be cared for by his niece. The funeral took place on Friday 8th November at Preston Crematorium, but the service was streamed which allowed members at Grappenhall to pay their final respects.

Jennifer Alice Wareing-Barnoldswick aged 85 years

On 30th September 2024, God called home our sister Jennifer Wareing. At her funeral, conducted by Judith Diggins, the church was packed for a fitting tribute to her faithful service to the Lord.

Jennifer became a member of our Church in 1965. She diligently served in many roles, the longest as Church Secretary from 1966, working so hard, striving for perfection for her Lord. The role expanded and changed markedly over the next 58 years as she took on any task to ensure witness at Barnoldswick continued. The work of the Church being woven into the routine of her life, ensuring services, meetings and events always took place and timely visits, cards, letters, e-mails and phone calls of support in difficult times were made. Jennifer was always there and made sure things were done. She never made excuses. She did give a year's notice to resign 5 years ago but as no one filled the role she continued, supported by family and friends. As Plan Secretary she was supported by many faithful ministers even into their advancing years and had a gift for finding and encourag-

ing additional preachers. Jennifer found people to make solutions. We are thankful that she continued to the best of her ability until illness overtook her in the past year.

Jennifer attended many services, events and meetings in the local community and I.M Connexion. She hosted a prayer group in her home up to her last year. She enjoyed the friendship of those she met and was grateful for the support of so many in facilitating her work for the Church. She took a keen interest in Connexional matters and served on Connexional Committee and indeed even enjoyed meetings by Zoom! Jennifer particularly looked forward to annual Conferences, services at local primary schools, and many memorable visits to Appleton in Warrington including joining their 'Weekends Away.'

Jennifer will be sadly missed by the Church, her family and all who had come to know and love her. We thank God for her life and service and have comfort that she is now at peace with her Lord. Jennifer will hear those words, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant".

Her daughter Jill, son-in-law David and family wish to pass on their grateful thanks for prayers, tributes, cards and letters of condolence and donations in memory of Jennifer. Also to Judith Diggins for conducting the funeral with understanding and in such a fitting manner. These have been a comfort during this sad and difficult time.

Jan Holland – Astley Christian Fellowship

The fellowship first met Jan when she came with us to Anfield during the Billy Graham crusade of 1984. The Lord touched her life, and she became increasingly involved in the life of this fellowship and a stalwart for the church's prayer life. She spent many hours with the Wayfinders youth group at the church and, although her Christian experience was quite new at this time, she chatted about her new faith and touched the lives of many of the youngsters.

She was the eldest of 5 siblings but sadly they were all separated at a really young age and put into separate care homes. Even though they experienced a tough life, they were determined to keep in touch. They reconnected as adults and remained close for the rest of their lives. They moved forward, getting married and having children, but there was always something missing.... Their sister Noreen had been taken away at 6 weeks old and they had spent many years trying to find her.

Then 13 years ago by some miracle, their prayer was answered. Noreen's daughter and Jan's brother had both contacted the same lady to ask for her help in locating the other. After 63 years apart they were reunited with their sister, and they were overjoyed. Jan was so excited to finally have a sister after being the

only girl for so many years.

Jan made a trip over to Uganda as part of the Mission Helping Hands team and has supported the charity ever since. She loved elephants - and one of her greatest memories was experiencing them, in their natural habitat, on that Ugandan trip.

Jan's prayer life became the central pillar of her witness. For some years she was less able to get around, but she never complained and was always ready with a smile, to lend an ear, not just for show, but she really listened, and to have a chat. Whenever

you went to see Jan, to cheer her up a bit as you would, you came away cheered up. She had a wonderful spirit of encouragement and love towards all her visitors. She loved her faith – when anyone asked for prayer, Jan was there. She was a formidable God botherer. During her daily chat with Him, she unloaded everyone's needs and problems onto Him during her prayer times, and she expected God to answer.

We thank God for Jan's life and witness, now she rejoices in the Lord's presence.

THE POWER OF FORGIVENESS

In November we remembered and gave thanks for all who gave their lives in two World Wars, and other conflicts. War may sometimes be unavoidable, but it is always tragic. Innocent people suffer, as is the case in the Middle East and Ukraine. Most wars stem from hatred and desire for revenge. Sometimes, however, wonderful stories of forgiveness and reconciliation emerge.

During World War II in Holland, the Ten Booms, a Christian family, hid Jews from the Nazis. Eventually, they were betrayed and sent to Ravensbrück concentration camp. Miraculously, one of the daughters named Corrie survived and later travelled the world preaching a message of forgiveness. At one meeting she came face to face with a former guard at Ravensbrück, who had become a Christian. He held out his hand, not knowing who she was. Corrie struggled at first but then grasped his hand. They are now a brother and sister in faith. The hate had disappeared.

In 1941, just after the Pearl Harbour attack, American pilot Jacob DeShazer took part in a bombing raid. Full of hate, he wanted to kill as many Japanese as possible. The crews had to ditch their planes and were captured, and three were executed by firing squad. Jacob was severely beaten and spent 36 months in solitary confinement.

Although raised in a Christian home, Jacob was an atheist. One man he would love to have taken revenge on was Mitsuo Fuchida, the commander of the Pearl Harbour attack. During his time in prison, Jacob

remembered some friends who had told him about their faith in Jesus. He persuaded the guards to get him a Bible, which he read, and in 1944 he committed his life to Jesus Christ.

"I prayed to God to forgive the guards who beat me," he wrote and vowed to find a way to tell the Japanese people about Jesus. After returning to the USA he went to a Bible College and wrote a leaflet about his experience. In 1949, Mitsuo Fuchida was walking through Tokyo where he met a man handing out copies of Jacob's testimony. He obtained a Japanese Bible and became a Christian. To cut a long story short, the two met. Once sworn enemies, they embraced as brothers in Jesus Christ, and travelled to Japan together, preaching the Gospel.

The greatest act of forgiveness was that of Jesus. Dying on the cross, he prayed for those driving in the nails: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." (Luke 23: 34). We all need the forgiveness He died to bring us, and when we accept this, we receive the power to forgive others. Our forgiveness depends on it. "If you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins." (Matthew 6:15). If Jesus could forgive, and Corrie Ten Boom and Jacob DeShazer could forgive, so can we. Our hurting world needs less hate and more forgiveness. Faith in Jesus makes that possible.

Who do you need to forgive?

Geoff Chapman, West Camel



Connexion
The magazine of the family of Independent Methodist Churches

The last day for articles to be submitted for the March / April issue of the Connexion magazine is Friday 21st February.

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).

We want to hear about your events, your activities, your churches!

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

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

CARDS FOR Mothering Sunday

30th March 2025

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Connexion Magazine
 ISSN 0141 - 4372

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- 28th January – The Crux of Salvation
- 4th February – The Place of Peace
- 11th February – The Ridge of Freedom
- 18th February – The Summit Hope
- 25th February – The Cloud of Mystery
- 4th March – The Descent of Devotion
- 11th March – The Return to Community
- 18th March – The Onward Mission

An invitation to those who worship in nearby churches to join us.

For further Info - email grappenhallimc@outlook.com