

THE WAR OF A TRUSTEE

On the 16th November I went to a refresher seminar on the subject of Trusteeship, hosted by the beloved at Nelson. Among the things I heard about were Managing Trustees, Custodian Trustees, Articles of Association and the benefits of a C.I.O. All valuable information, though not new. Yet I did find myself wondering if many of our churches have an up to date list of their trustees and to what extent they are aware of the responsibility of the role?

Of course we know that advice for newbies can be sought direct from the Association Secretary but my thoughts quickly moved on to a Biblical example of good management of a trust. That is to say, where the primary objects of such a trust are for the kingdom of God and to promulgate His eternal purposes. Not surprisingly I was led to consider the Book of Nehemiah. Nehemiah himself was a vigilant trustee of all that the Lord had put into his heart.

He didn't complain about the things which were wrong. Instead he wept, fasted and prayed over them (Nehemiah.1:4). He refused to involve unsaved people in the objects of his mission (Nehemiah.2:20). He held key people to account for allowing themselves to be compromised by the practices of their unsaved neighbours (Nehemiah.5:6-8; 13:17). He made sure that those who could confirm their call to the priesthood were the ones given that trust (Nehemiah.7:64). Even so, Nehemiah would go further than these measures.

There was a mixed multitude. Clearly, a conscious distinction was needed so that any appointed work would only be conducted by the Lord's people (Nehemiah.13:3). Eliashib the priest should have been one of those people

but he was in the pocket of Tobiah (Nehemiah.13:4). After a period of time in Susa, Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem only to find that Eliashib had prepared a room for Tobiah in the courts of the house of God. So grieved was Nehemiah that this man was operating from the focal centre of worship, that he threw Tobiah's stuff out into the street. He also ordered that the rooms be spiritually cleansed (Nehemiah.13:5-9). Notwithstanding, when a grandson of Eliashib became son-in-law to Sanballat, Nehemiah drove the man away from him (Nehemiah.13:28).

When Nehemiah discovered people trying to find a cute way around his reforms, he put a stop to them right away (Nehemiah.13:21-22). He rebuked the priesthood and the nobles for defiling themselves with unbelievers and cleansed them of

everything pagan (Nehemiah.13:23-30). Now that's what I call a super Trustee. Moreover, I believe the Lord will hear the prayers of those who follow in his example of vigilance (Nehemiah.13:31b). I have no doubt that Nehemiah caused offence. Equally, I have no doubt that he upset the status quo. Neither should we ever offer an apology that our thoughts and actions correspond to those of a New Testament Church.

Mercifully, our churches are not full of Sanballats and Tobiahs. Yet when we resolutely commit to give glory to God in this way, we at one and the same time enter into a similar conflict. We are then fighting for our churches, giving to Caesar what belongs to him but being sure to put the Lord first without compromise.

Roger Stone



In this issue

Page 2 : Spiritual Direction

Page 6 : Statement of Faith

Page 8 : Church Corner

Page 10 : Shefali's Story

Page 12 : From the Connexion

Page 14 : Overseas Mission

Spiritual Direction

I have been on a course for the last 12 months learning about Spiritual Direction, and I have 2 more years to do. I became aware of it when I read a book called "Journey with Jesus" it was about getting closer to Jesus in my walk and about Ignatian spirituality. That is how I arrived here as always searching for something better.

Well, if you are hungry for Jesus and want to do something about it then I'd recommend this book and doing the exercises Larry Warner talks about.

Will it turn you into a Jesuit? No, it will not.

What is Spiritual Direction?

There are several definitions and as many books written by as many authors, but for me it means coming alongside someone walking with them and letting them see what God is doing in them already.

There is a lot of confusion and different thoughts about what spiritual direction is.

Like John the Baptist a Spiritual Director will always point to the One who is greater, i.e. Jesus. It is a supportive role. But it isn't about counselling, far from it, and yet it is linked to counselling but not as perhaps we see it.

I think that there are many who would benefit and welcome someone drawing them towards Christ away from the world and its pulling power.

The idea is to help dive deeper into prayer and draw closer to God

Discover God's care for you, do you know that God loves you?

Become aware of the sacred within ordinary events of life
Honestly share with God their feelings, doubts and questions

Become more like Christ and experience the fruits of the spirit

Move from a preoccupation with sin to grace full of love and service.

What did I notice?

Well to begin with I became more aware of God's creation especially birds I noticed them as I sat alone in the park and had the impression God put them there for my enjoyment my fascination grew from there. To trees to wind to all kinds of beauty that God has created.

I wondered a lot about it and I thought How great God is. The course itself is not academic, but I attend weekly 3 hour zoom sessions and beside that am expected to do 3-4 hours work in support of the course and write 3 essays one of which was my personal encounter with God and the people who influenced me on my journey.

Prayer is a very important part of the course.

Jesus and Spiritual Direction

Did Jesus come alongside people? Quite literally he did if you read the story of the disciples on the Road to Emmaus in Luke 14:13-32. He came alongside them they were discouraged and disappointed about recent events and were in grief, when Jesus came alongside them, he didn't straight away reveal His identity. He asked open ended questions in the context of companionship and confronted them about their lack of faith. He accepted their hospitality and when he left them after he revealed who he was they could reflect on their experience.

There are other examples such as Nicodemus and the rich young man. There are many examples of how Jesus came alongside people and helped them in their understanding.

What does Spiritual Direction look like

These conversations can take place anywhere, most of mine so far have taken place at home on Zoom, but some at work, in the park, in a café, the aim is the same to help them attend to God.

Margaret Guenther relates it to being like a midwife

- Staying beside the soul in labour
- Helping people recognise the signs of God at work.

When did you encounter God? How? what was it like?
Simon Brown a pastor from NZ likens it to a campfire sharing stories getting warm by the campfire, hopefully you get the picture.

Sometimes spiritual Direction takes place on a more formal basis like for me now in a tutorial group where perhaps I myself can share something that happened to me and a fellow student will ask questions, how did you feel?

Or I noticed you spoke joyfully about that and so on.

Sometimes the role is reversed, and I ask the questions of one of my peers. I'm reminded when I ask closed questions or when I ask just seeking for content instead of the heart of the matter.

So we learn in this way eventually how to ask the right questions and we wonder, we notice and observe.

I have a spiritual director myself which is a requirement of the course and I meet her on Zoom usually fortnightly but sometimes monthly and we spend an hour chatting and talking about issues that may come up. Sometimes we have talked about making a decision about something, discernment is something learnt on the course. Does it lead you towards God or away from him? What are your feelings ?

I would say I have benefitted from this and it has helped in many ways to walk closer to God and to notice what is going on.

Skills Learnt

Listening to people what are they really saying what do you sense or notice in the conversation?

Scripture reminds us of those who have listened to God and responded obediently. For example Samuel responded with fear when asked to find the Lord's anointed but listened as God revealed to which of Jesse's sons would be king. 1 Samuel 16.

Jesus called his disciples from their livelihoods and homes; their response started the Christian church but for many at cost of their lives.

Listening is a skill. We spent some time listening to fellow students talking, sometimes for 10 minutes, sometimes for 20 minutes and then asking them open ended questions. Some spoke about very serious issues in their lives. You learn to understand and unpick what is going on behind the descriptions they give and ask perhaps "well how do you see God in this"?

Reflection is another skill, writing down what happened today and simply reflecting on it good or bad. Was God there? Where was He? How did He show up?

I've found reflection a great skill to learn but it has taken time and I'm still developing it as a useful tool. I first learnt about it in my nursing career when something went wrong, put simply so you analysed exactly why it went wrong, what did you do and how can you improve the outcome.

Contemplation

Some might think of contemplation and meditation as being New Age, but on the course, I have learnt how close they are to prayer and how they have been practised since early Christian beliefs and practices.

I like to find a spot to sit in and just be still and ask God to be present and show me whatever he wishes. Its not me telling Him I want you to do this or that, its a time when God can have his say.

I sometimes use Lectio Divina reading which is basically to me reading a small passage of scripture. I have some favourites, Like John 1v1, or Psalm 139:23-24 and re-reading perhaps several times just a few words from the Bible and sensing what God is telling me, chewing over the words carefully.

I find it interesting to find out more I'd encourage you to do the course.

All I can say is that it has helped me in my walk with God and there have been uncomfortable moments when God has put his finger right on the spot.

Sometimes memory has been revived to recall an event sometimes painful sometimes very happy.

Conclusion

So far, I have been impressed with the depth of the course. I have learnt something about spiritual direction and followed how Jesus himself used these skills. Put simply, it is one Christian coming alongside another, leading them nearer to Christ. It has improved my prayer life, and I believe my preaching.

There were 3 essays on spiritual direction, peer groups for learning how to listen and tutorials. There were reflections and prayers and poetry and use of images, probably my favourite being "Jesus on the bench".

I realise it's not everyone's cup of tea but it has helped me.

We have all been mentored by different people in our journey as mine started with my parents and pastor and eventually many more people who I observed and learnt something from, there is still a long way to go and I hope I will be a blessing to others as a result.

This next year is about exploring the self and continuing to develop skills in Spiritual Direction. Looking at the Psychospiritual journey, more on contemplative listening, images of self, stages of faith, emotionally healthy spirituality, working with the imagination, hurt and forgiveness, grief, loss and mourning, just for starters.

It starts off in London at St Katherines Foundation on the 5th October. There will be 3 in person days and then 3 hourly weekly zoom meetings and 3 more essays and of course more reflection.

I have found silence particularly helpful, be still and know that I am God Isaiah says.

I hope something will resonate with you from my very brief description. God bless you

Paul Lambert, Roman Road

**INDEPENDENT METHODIST CHURCHES
RESOURCE CENTRE**

Easter Resources

A3 POSTER - 40P
A5 LEAFLET - 12P
A4 POSTER - 20P
A6 POSTCARD - 8P
A5 CARDS - 22P EACH

**TO ORDER, PLEASE CONTACT
THE RESOURCE CENTRE.**

EMAIL:
resource.centre@imchurches.org.uk

PHONE: 01942 223526

**GIVE YOUR NAME, CHURCH AND
FULL DETAILS OF YOUR ORDER.**

- DESIGN REQUIRED
- ITEM TYPE AND QUANTITY
- ANY ADDITIONAL DETAILS (E.G DATES,
SERVICE DETAILS IF APPLICABLE)
- ADDRESS FOR POSTAGE



To all the Churches and Secretaries,

Further to a resolution which was passed at Annual Meeting 2024 agreeing in principle to the merger of the IMC and the IMAi, and the approval of a team to investigate possible ways and means to that end, a merger group has been meeting regularly since that time and have subsequently arrived at their recommendations.

As it is intended that a Notice of Motion will eventually be presented to Annual Meeting 2025, there is a need to provide as much information as possible to the churches prior to the submission of the Notice of Motion. We are therefore holding three roadshows to which, all the churches in each of three geographical areas are invited to attend. These will take place:

- In the North West on 22nd March at Stockton Heath, Warrington
- In the South West on 24th March at Warmley, Bristol
- In the North East on 5th April at New Silksworth, Sunderland


Each roadshow will give time for opening worship and prayer followed by a slide presentation. A break for refreshments will give opportunity for reflection and to prepare questions and comment. An outline description of the next steps will follow before time is given to pray and close the meeting.

In order that folks may come prepared, a Resource Pack is provided. Including:

- A copy of the letter, Terms of Reference and Discussion Paper originally sent to churches in 2024.
- A copy of the letter sent from Brian Rowney, General Secretary, regarding the Notices of Motion for Annual Meeting 2025
- Draft Articles
- Draft Rules
- Draft Notice of Motion

We as a denomination are living in exciting times in which, change is taking place all around us. May I encourage everyone who can to attend and participate at these roadshows. As folks will know, our Investigative Merger Team have been working hard to provide a model for the merger of the IMC and the IMAi. Our intention is to consider that model at these roadshows so that we come together well prepared at Annual Meeting. Please come prayerfully both, to the roadshows and before the roadshows.

In Christ and for His Glory



Roger Stone
Connexional President

Overseas Missions 2025

Spring

Appeal

Spring speaks of NEW LIFE and a NEW START.

Our Missionaries work in a variety of ways, but their aim is the same, to share the GOOD NEWS of NEW Life through faith in Jesus.

This Easter, as you thank Jesus for dying on the cross for you, will you join in GIVING for the support of our missionaries, through the Overseas Missions Spring Appeal.

Will you also PRAY that, through their work, many people will experience NEW LIFE IN JESUS.

You can donate individually, or as a Church by:

Bank Transfer

Sort Code 20-83-69
Account Number 70141852
Account Name Independent Methodist Association Inc
Please use the reference OSM SA..... (followed by your name)

Cheque

Cheques should be made payable to 'Independent Methodist Association Inc'
and sent to Independent Methodist Churches, The Resource Centre, Fleet Street Pemberton, Wigan WN5 0DS
Please indicate that the donation is for the Overseas Missions Spring Appeal.

Thank you!

Statement of Faith

GOD THE SON - *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 (2)**

Romans, Paul told them that *Christ died for the ungodly ... while we were still sinners, Christ died for us* (Romans 5:6-8). The writer to the Hebrews - not Paul, by the way: the style of writing is totally unlike Paul's - wrote about Jesus *tasting death for everyone* (2:9), *sharing in [God's children's] humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death* [2:14], and *doing away with sin by the sacrifice of himself ... sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people* [9:26-8]. However, although

Last time, we considered the IM Statement of Faith regarding Jesus, which I felt was so extensive that it needed more than one session to cover adequately. Last time, we looked at the first part. This time, I want to start examining the second section: *We believe that He reveals the Father, that He died to atone for our sins, (and) rose from the dead.*

We saw, when we considered the Trinity, that God had told Moses that 'no one may see me and live', yet scripture also pointed to instances where people did see God and lived to tell the tale. The explanation for these occurrences is that people actually saw Jesus, starting from Genesis, where the Lord God was walking through the Garden of Eden in the cool of the day and where he made Adam and Eve garments of animal skin to replace their inadequate fig leaves. The clue is that, where the titles 'The Lord', 'The Lord God' or the 'Angel of the Lord' is used in the context of a physical appearance, this is usually an Old Testament appearance of Jesus.

John 1:18 affirms that *No one has ever seen God [the Father], but the only begotten Son, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.* In his earthly ministry, Jesus regularly reminded his listeners that he had been sent by the Father and the things that he said and did came directly from the Father. In John's gospel again (8:19) he said *You do not know me or my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also.* A couple of chapters later, *I and the Father are one* (10:30) ... *the Father is in me, and I in the Father* (10:38). At the Last Supper, Jesus told a questioning Philip, *Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father ... at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves* (14:9-11). And Paul, writing to the Colossians, declares that *He is the image of the invisible God* (1:15). These scriptures, and many others, show us that, if we want to know what God the Father is like, we should look at Jesus as described in the four Gospels. The character of the Father is revealed in the words and actions of the Son.

He died to atone for our sins - on several occasions, Jesus referred to being 'lifted up', for instance John 10:32-3 - *But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself. He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die* - forced onto his back, then nailed to a cross which would be raised from the horizontal to the vertical and dropped into a prepared hole in the ground. Writing to the

John the Baptist described Jesus as *the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world* [John 1:29], this does not mean that all men will be saved. As we have seen earlier (John 3:16), there is a condition: *whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.* The one sin that Jesus did not, and could not die for, is the sin of unbelief. If you reject Jesus, there is no Plan B. "*There was no other good enough to pay the price of sin ...*" as the hymn writer put it. And that includes everyone that is trusting in their own efforts or their innate goodness to get into heaven. There is no other good enough.

Jesus' resurrection is attested to in all four gospels. The version in Mark 16 appears to have been truncated - possibly a critical part of the manuscript was lost - and v 9-20 seem to have been a later addition to try and bring the story to a proper conclusion. Some scholars argue that the last word in Mark 16:8 is grammatically incorrect (in Greek, it would read 'they were afraid because ...'), and sceptics have cast doubt on the resurrection because of it. However, the doctrine of the resurrection does not rest solely on Mark's gospel with its uncertain ending. Matthew, Luke and John all give accounts that attest to the resurrection, while Paul (in 1 Corinthians 15) gives a powerful argument for the fact of the resurrection - and this from someone that had persecuted the early church. Over the years, many have tried to disprove the resurrection - and failed. Perhaps the most well-known is *Who moved the stone?* by Frank Morison, who started with a desire to prove that the resurrection was a myth and ended up writing the book after becoming convinced that the resurrection did take place. There are, of course, many similar books.

This is such an important topic that we need to look at the statement 'we believe that he ... rose from the dead' in greater detail. At Christmas, in particular, people get sloppy and sentimental about the birth of a child but, as Graham Kendrick put it in his carol 'The Christmas Child', "if we keep him in the manger, then there is no danger from the Christmas child". However, Christmas is nothing without Easter. The prophet Simeon (Luke 2) recognised what Jesus had been born for, and his words to Mary, that a sword would pierce her own soul, foretold that she would see the agony of his crucifixion with her own eyes. Much later, Paul would write that Jesus' death, burial and resurrection was 'of first importance' (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). We need to recognise that Jesus' death and resurrection

are a stumbling-block to many. You may well, in your Christian life, be challenged by others over these issues, and it is essential to know what we believe, and especially why.

Some people will write Easter off as nothing more than a fairy story, a myth. However, Jesus' life and death are historical facts. The Jewish historian Josephus records Jesus, albeit briefly, in his book 'The Antiquities of the Jews', written around AD 93. The Roman historian Suetonius also refers to the crucifixion of Jesus, both of these being sources not necessarily sympathetic to Christianity. In the New Testament, Peter affirmed that 'we did not follow cleverly-invented stories ... but we were eye-witnesses of his majesty' (2 Peter 1:16), and John also claimed to have seen and touched Jesus (1 John 1: 1). It is significant that many surviving copies of the New Testament date from the second century AD and, because they are close in time to the events being described, impartial historians would regard them as authentic. In contrast, the oldest surviving fragments of Julius Caesar's account of his Gallic wars (*De Bello Gallico*) date from the ninth century AD, yet no one seriously questions that Caesar landed in Britain around 55 BC. Should we not give equal credence to the New Testament?

So, did Jesus really die? Definitely. Mark records Pilate's surprise that Jesus had died after just six hours on the cross (Mark 15:44) and asked the centurion to confirm it. The centurion would have been present at many such executions and would have been able to verify Jesus' death. We also have John's account of a soldier thrusting a spear into Jesus' side (John 19:34-5), resulting in a flow of blood and water. Two comments - first, if Jesus had been alive, would this not have caused a shriek of pain? And secondly, what probably happened was that the blood in his body had begun to separate out. The spear thrust released coagulated blood and much thinner, clear liquid which looked like water and has allowed Christians to spiritualise what was seen ever since. However, this combination of liquids would be affirmed by the medical profession as very strong evidence that death had occurred - and John, in the first century AD, could not possibly have known that.

So, Jesus definitely died, and all the gospels record that he was given a decent burial. So, what of the resurrection, and specifically the empty tomb? Frank Morison considered a number of explanations, all of which have problems:

(1) The women and the disciples went to the wrong tomb. This is unlikely, because the women had followed Joseph of Arimathea on the Friday (Luke 23:55). Even so, Joseph could have pointed out the right tomb once the rumours began - and so could others.

(2) The Jews or the Romans moved the body. Why should they have done that? They had no reason to do so and, when people started preaching the resurrection, they could have produced it to disprove the rumours. They did not, and could not do so.

(3) The disciples stole the body. According to Matthew, this explanation was given by the soldiers guarding the tomb. They had witnessed the angel's arrival (Matthew 28:4), but the chief priests had bribed them to say that the

disciples stole the body while they were asleep. Apart from the minor detail of how they knew what was happening while they were sleeping, the penalty for falling asleep while on guard duty was death. Pilate was already unhappy at being involved in their scheme to do away with Jesus, and it would have been difficult for the priests to persuade him not to execute the guards for dereliction of duty if they really had dropped off. Even if the disciples had stolen the body, is it possible that none of them ever admitted to doing such a thing? Apart from John, all of the Eleven died violent and excruciating deaths - and John apparently survived an attempt to boil him in oil. If the disciples knew that Jesus was dead and they had hidden the body, would not at least one of them have confessed in order to save his life?

(4) Jesus wasn't dead but had fainted, but then woke up in the coldness of the tomb. We are expected to believe that someone with wounds to his hands and feet, not to mention a spear-thrust in his side with consequential major loss of blood, could move a large stone on his own, scare the living daylights out of the guards, and convince his followers that he was the Lord of Life when he would have needed serious medical attention. Furthermore, the blood and the water, and the centurion's testimony to Pilate, contradict this argument.

(5) Those who saw Jesus were hallucinating. Mary Magdalene might have been, but hallucinations generally don't happen to several people at once. The chances of a dozen or so disciples (Luke 24: 33-4) having the same hallucination at the same time are minimal - not to mention the 500 quoted by Paul (1 Corinthians 15: 6 - *After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some had fallen asleep*). The first-century sceptic could have asked Paul, "OK, give me half a dozen names of those who you claim saw Jesus after his death". If they then went and asked those people, "Did you really see Jesus after his death", and they said they hadn't, Christianity would have died out there and then. But it didn't.

So, when all other possibilities are excluded, what we are left with, however unlikely, must be accepted as the truth. Jesus is alive. Hallelujah!

(all scriptures taken from the New International Version)

Brian Rowney



Church Corner

December at Thatto Heath

What a wonderful time we had at Thatto Heath in December – both Spiritually and Socially! Various members of our Fellowship led all our Services.

Gift Service – Sunday 1 December

The Service was led by Dot Williams.

Once again the fellowship brought gifts for Children in Care in St Helens, of which there are over 450. Councillor Nova Charlton joined with us to accept the gifts and tell us about the Children in the town who are in care and will benefit from our gifts.



Church Adult Get-Together – Saturday 7 December

Around 50 of us joined together for an evening of fun and laughter – quizzes, games, party dances, buffet and we closed the evening singing Christmas Carols/Songs. A brilliant evening!

An Afternoon at the Movies - Sunday 8 December

Instead of our usual Cafe Church service, we switched the time of the event and held a 'Movie Afternoon' where we dimmed the lights and showed the 2023 musical 'Journey To Bethlehem', serving interval refreshments of popcorn and ice cream to complete the experience!! The event was a complete success and enjoyed by young and old alike. We were also very pleased to welcome friends from our Roman Road church to this first, in what looks likely to be a regular event.

Luncheon Club Christmas Lunch – Wednesday 11 December

44 people from our Church and Community sat down to a 3 course Roast Dinner, followed by Cheese and Biscuits then Coffee and Mints. The afternoon closed with Christmas Carols and Songs and a Christmas themed quiz. A good time was enjoyed by all including the Luncheon Club staff.



Morning Worship – Sunday 15 December

Our own Dennis Roughley led this Service with the theme of 'God's Perfect Timing', Dennis covered various events throughout the Bible, which showed that God had everything timed to perfection. Once again, the service was well attended.

Carol Service – Sunday 22 December

Fay Williams and Jan Houghton led this Service with members of our church family providing readings. The service was well attended, and it was great to see ex Sunday School scholars who joined with us at this Service.

Christmas Day

This Service was led by Denise Helsby who spoke about footprints and how they can be used to guide people in the right path to choose, using the carol of Good King Wenceslas as an example. Again, the service was well attended.



Cafe Church – Sunday 29 December

This Service was led by Denise Helsby and Hilda Jackson, the theme being A Christmas Fairytale and how, in this fairytale goodness triumphs over evil. The Service included carols and a 'craft class' for the younger element of the congregation. Another well attended and much enjoyed service.

Golden Wedding Celebration

On Sunday 9th February, the fellowship at Kirkhall Lane, put on a surprise lunch for Roger and Susan Stone to celebrate their 50th Wedding anniversary on 11th February. They were also presented with a beautiful flower arrangement. Roger and Susan were married at Moorside in 1975 by Harold Bevan.

God has blessed them with four children, a son-in-law, a daughter-in-law and two granddaughters. On Tuesday 11th February, the family got together for a celebration meal in their favourite Chester restaurant, before having a mini break in the Lakes. Roger and Susan praise God for His love and faithfulness to them throughout the last fifty years.

Roger and Susan would like to thank the fellowship for making their 50th Wedding Anniversary such a special time of love and celebration.



Greetings to everyone from our fellowship at South Hylton...

After a good time of blessing and celebration at Advent and Christmas, we began 2025 with a Festive Tea on January 4th, with music from the Sunderland Male Voice Choir.

We hoped for special services on January 5th, but were "snowed out", so had to postpone the Covenant Service until the 19th. This is always a special time of commitment and dedication.

We enjoyed our Family Service on 2nd February led by Lucy Pearson and had a good evening service led by John and Diane Smith from the Salvation Army.

In March we look forward to a Sharing Service on the 16th, and an outreach on the 22nd based on baptisms held here over the years leading up to Mother's Day services on the 30th.



Good Times at Stockton Heath



During the February half term holiday Stockton Heath church welcomed 33 children and their parents/carers to an Activity Morning. The event started with lots of craft activities to do where the children made pencil pots, decorated biscuits, made sunglasses and bracelets as well as lots of colouring and Lego to build. There were toys for the younger children to play with. The theme for this morning was "love" as it was close to Valentine's Day and as we gathered the children together a short Christian video about Jesus's love for them was shown. We then all sat down together to enjoy hotdogs and crisps followed by cakes. A great morning was enjoyed by children, parents and helpers alike with many positive comments. We will be holding another Activity morning in the Easter holidays as we build links with the local community and schools.

On Saturday 1st March we held our quarterly Ladies brunch and as it was also St. David's day we took the opportunity to celebrate all things Welsh with Welsh cakes to eat, as well as warm croissants with butter and jam, home made cakes and fruit. All washed down with lots of tea and coffee. We enjoyed a fun quiz of Welsh facts and then made bouquets of daffodils and greenery either to keep or give away. The morning ended with a time of sharing together good things that had happened, happy memories or concerns and worries for prayer. A lovely morning of fun, fellowship, laughter and friendship and lots of chatter.

Not to be outdone with the ladies, the men of the fellowship went out to enjoy breakfast and again a morning to share friendship and fellowship together.



Shefali' Story - Working and Living in South Korea

My name is Shefali Misal, I was born in India in 1997 and moved to the UK in 2002. I have been attending Grappenhall Independent Methodist church from a very young age, along with my parents (Satish and Sharlee Misal) and my sister (Sonali) and now my brother in law (Karming). I appreciate the church community which we have been able to encounter since moving to Warrington, and the church has seen me grow from being 5 years old to 27 years old. Being British Asian I have a sound understanding of both Asian and Western cultures. Unfortunately, I can never truly fit one culture more than the other, but that's what makes me unique and makes me, me. I graduated in Sport Rehabilitation in 2019, and I knew after graduating I didn't want to pursue Sport Rehabilitation immediately, but that is ok, life is meant to be explored and discovered by rerouting.



Following the completion of my course, I have been keen to explore new cultures and lifestyles, I have always been an individual who loves to immerse into a new country and see a side of life that is different to my every day. Moreover, due to my interest in international exchange, I pursued to teach English in China, having already lived and interned there before. I chose China initially as I wanted to gain experience, and then go to South Korea. After Covid-19 had settled around the world and borders gradually opened I landed a job to teach in China, however due to the pandemic restrictions I was unable to take up this opportunity. Things always work out for the better and with faith I decided to pursue working in South Korea. You are probably curious about my choice of country. I chose South Korea because I've been intrigued by this country for years by its intricate K-dramas and the music, and later into my Korean journey I became a fan of BTS, (the biggest music artists and boyband in the world – quite literally), Korean alphabet (Hangul), Korean skincare and of course Korean cuisine.

How and where did I land this opportunity?

I moved to South Korea in the summer of 2023 in late July. I landed an opportunity through a company called CIEE which is an American non-profit organisation which

helps university students to young professionals gain international and cultural experiences abroad, from studying, teaching and to internships.

Embarking on such a long journey and such a big move halfway across the world was indeed exciting but nerve-wracking at the same time. Looking beyond all the negatives, I proceeded with my choice to move to South Korea and left the UK on 27 July, arriving in Korea on 28 July 2023. I made a friend the same evening I landed there, and this helped me greatly. My temporary home city was Cheongna, it is a new city which was established around 2017. Cheongna city is in Incheon, which is about 30 minutes away from Seoul, Incheon International airport. It is a family-oriented and wealthy city.

Cheongna is a nice and quiet place, most places can be accessed by walking and this suited me as I lived centrally and work was within walking distance, eliminating long commutes and transport.

Before I explain about my work in Korea it is important to know there are two different opportunities to teach. As a TEFL teacher (Teaching English as a Foreign language) you can apply for a position at Public and Private schools. These are known as Hagwons. A Hagwon is a private academy, which provides extra classes for students after their normal school hours and / or run as a kindergarten during the day for 5 – 7 year olds. There are multiple night-time hagwons, they usually run from 1pm till 10pm / 11pm, students attend these and go to sleep often at midnight and repeat each day, this of course differs from person to person. This may sound alarming but is a norm in Korean society.

I worked at a daytime kindergarten academy between the hours of 9am to 2:40pm. I worked at a renowned educational organisation called Poly, with academies across Korea and is considered to be an elite school, the parent culture about education here is very unique to say the least. The academy runs classes for elementary students once kindergarten hours are over. The teaching of English is broken down into reading and vocabulary, grammar, and writing. Additionally, other classes are all taught in English where no Korean is spoken during class time.

Poly is considered to be a good organisation but is also a



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 Monday the 6th of February. The theme for this issue will be 'Encouragement'.

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!

very demanding one with rigorous workloads that leave many foreign teachers exhausted with little rest periods. Korean education as a whole is very rewarding but also very exhausting and is far too stressful on students, leading to serious sleep deprivation and mental health issues. If you do not fit the top tier levels you are classed as a failure, contrasting to Western society where we have multiple ways to study, gain work experience and find a job. This narrow perspective and workload create a huge stress on students, it is a one size fits all mentality which is similar to the clothing in the country.

My regular hours of teaching were from 09:40 – 17:55, including one late class, working till 18:40. When I began working, I taught 5-year-olds and after renewing for a second year, I began teaching 7-year-olds in the new academic year, both coming with different challenges and opportunities to grow; and most certainly building patience. I truly enjoyed teaching both age groups and received an abundance of love and warmth from students, some of whom I miss from time to time. There is a lot a grown up can learn from a child, one being to live without concerning yourself of what others think of you. I experienced warmth, happiness, and joyful moments from my students and that truly outweighs the stress and rigorous workload.

South Korea

South Korea is a beautiful country, with an abundance of recreational activities and not to mention how safe it is, there is an abundance of stores for jewellery and fashion on every corner, often overwhelming and making it difficult to choose what to buy. This tiny nation offers scenic landscapes, captivating skylines and is distinctly beautiful in all four seasons. The summers being as hot as 35° and in winters down to minus 17°, springtime being a beautiful pink painting, as blossoms cover and bloom across South Korea. One of my favourites aspects of Korea is the unmatched café culture, aesthetic cafes, with unique themes and not to mention they are in abundance; it is certainly difficult to choose. I visited LeeDorim café, located at the birthplace of former King Sejong, and includes an artificial mountain inside, and rooftop seats and views of the Inwangsan mountain in Seoul; located near the Gyeongbokgung Palace where I wore an hanbok on three different occasions (traditional Korean dress). The Korean transportation systems are efficient, very organised, and clean, the metro is cheap, fast, and convenient. However, Cheongna does not have a metro yet, it is currently being built, therefore I would get a bus to the train station and the airport rail to Seoul. Being close to Seoul, I would travel there nearly every weekend, and one of the most memorable moments was visiting the HYBE building, BTS'



building to which I could not contain my excitement, as fans across the globe visit simply to see BTS' company building.

I have attended 'Noraebangs', literal translation is song room; *norae* – *song* – *bang* – *room*, or otherwise known as karaoke, I understand why people go here as it is great fun and a good way to destress, I would recommend it if you like music and no it does not matter if you can sing or not it is just for having a fun time. As an avid fan of K-pop, this was certainly one of my favourite pass time activities.

I visited Suwon city, this is on the outskirts of Seoul; Seoul has a very extensive metropolitan area. Here, I visited the Hwaseong fortress, holding breath-taking views of the city and intricate details along the fortress walls. Along with this, I visited a house from a famous K-drama, Suwon seems very beautiful and a place I certainly want to visit again with more time. I visited the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) and it was very intriguing and insightful; I walked through the 3rd tunnel, and I was about 178m – 265m from North Korea, however the walk back out of the tunnel is steep and I wouldn't recommend it to anyone with severe health issues.

South Korea is a beautiful country, rich in culture and history and a forward thinking nation from their metro and unrivalled skincare, skin, and hair clinics; South Korea really is captivating from Cheonggyecheon stream to outdoor held libraries, fortress walls and serene coastlines. As captivating as it is, it can be isolating and can be tough to build a community, especially a church community. This mindset occurs due to the cult culture in Korea, luring people to churches which are often scams and this has led to a widespread unbelieving society. I did however attend a church once which was very good, however a very time consuming commute. As a follower of Christ, I think community is very important, but this was often lacking for me in Korea, however I was able to participate in Bible study with my friends in our free time.

I have been very lucky with my job placement and co-workers as I was able to meet good people. I look forward in the near future to explore Busan and Jeju Island, both in South Korea. There is much more to learn and explore in this small nation which continues to surprise us and rise higher on the global scale.

Personally, I am still exploring and hope to truly understand my careers or interests I would like to fulfil. I am currently trying to grow more in my faith by reading the Bible while at the same time looking for opportunities for employment here in the UK.

Shefali Misal



From the Connexion

FEBRUARY CONNEXIONAL COMMITTEE ROUND-UP

By Alison Tipping, Medlock Valley Circuit Representative

Connexional Committee 1st February 2025 – Thatto Heath

The meeting was chaired by Roger Stone, as President, and we were welcomed to Thatto Heath.

General Secretary's Report

A Trustee Training session took place at Cornerstone Church, Nelson on November the 16th. For anyone who was unable to attend, a recording has been made available so the training can be completed. It was agreed at a Connexional Committee zoom meeting in December, that we now engage Chris Elsdon for two days a week. He will continue to work 1 day a week on the Connexional Website, managed by the Admin Group, and the other day on church websites, managed by Church Support. There were discussions on engaging him as a Youth Worker, but this decision has been deferred.

Administration Group

An asset register has been brought up to date and will continue to be kept up to date. The sale of Croxton church is still ongoing, and the Buckley Street church sale is now complete. There is now an online meeting policy, which has been approved by Connexional Committee. The email migration over to Microsoft was started in December and should be finished soon. There have been some email issues due to this work, but on completion it will reduce costs and enable better use of the Microsoft applications. The new Connexional Website went live in December but was not fully up to date, and also meant that we had 2 websites in use at the same time. A meeting has been held with Chris Elsdon outlining the development we want to see with the Connexional website, and a project plan will be produced to facilitate this. Chris will be using Mondays to work on the Connexional website to fit in with Kathy & Laura. Investigations are continuing into the possibility of digitising the archives beginning with magazines and Year Books. A search facility will be an additional cost on top of the digitising.

Merger Team

The team have been meeting once a fortnight, looking into the various options available. The best way forward will be to retain the IMAi and transfer any assets and property from the Connexion to the IMAi. The dissolution of the Connexion will then be done in accordance with the IMC Constitution. Work has also been completed on re-drafting the Articles of Association in order for them to be reviewed by way of legal advice. Alongside this a condensed set of rules that will accompany the Articles is currently being produced, which are an amalgamation of the IMC constitution, IMC rules and the IMAi rules. These will also be sent for full legal advice. It is hoped that this part of the work will be completed in time for the Spring Roadshows during March and April – one meeting will be held in the NW, one in the Bristol area one in the NE.

The following time line was agreed:

- January 2025 Completion of Articles of Association and Rules
- February 2025 Legal advice received on Articles and Rules
- Feb/March 2025 Articles and Rules distributed to churches
- March/April 2025 Spring Roadshows
- April/May 2025 Feedback to Merger Team who will confirm the Notice of Motion
- AGM/EGM Notice of Motion considered and agreed and merger becomes effective
- Autumn 2025 Further considerations given as to Connexional Re-organisation and the conversion to a CIO

It was also recommended and agreed that the merge be only the first step in Connexional Re-organisation.

Finance Committee

The year end accounts are almost finalised and due to go to the Independent Examiner by the end of February. There are plans to bring the accounts 'in house' which will save time and money. It is proposed to use and test a copy of the Sage package, the current system in use, over the next few months. Salaries will remain outsourced. A request was received from Martin Bolt on behalf of Bethel Ministries for the possible purchase of a local building to extend their work in the community as their current building is not large enough. The church have been planning and praying about this for a couple of years. Members of the committee met Martin to discuss this further and it was agreed at Connexional Committee that we support this project. It was proposed and agreed that the Connexional Dues be increased to £40 per member from 2026. This is the first rise since 2005, and this will be brought to Annual meeting.

Overseas Missions Report

L and P are entering into a season of giving things up and letting go - of dreams, of what is known and familiar. They can't yet identify all of their losses because they don't know where or how God wants them to serve Him after they leave their current NGO (non-governmental organisation). They may be staying where they are or moving to a new city or a new country. They have just come back from their last conference with their NGO. After the conference, the International Board met to discern what God is saying about the future and L and P expect to hear soon how they were led.

Liz Greenhalgh also feels that she is in a time of change, although as yet, she does not know what this change will look like. In the meantime, she is continuing in her work. Thanks to all the churches who have donated to help the

two ladies Liz brought to us. Thanks also to churches who are planning events in the future.

Daniel and Gail, with the help of some friends, have managed to get a mortgage for their house. They trust God will enable them to meet the financial payments, both now and in the future. As member care providers, they have been able to work alongside colleagues going through difficult times. This has been both a privilege and a challenge, making them more acutely aware of the strains of missionary work and the work of the enemy. They pray for God's wisdom. Daniel hopes to lead a short-term mission trip to Kenya in 2025, which is still in the planning stages. Pray for God's protection and direction and for the provision of funds needed.

Education Organisers Report

Of our four current students, one is completing the first year, two about to finish the second year and one beginning the final year of study. A new student is almost ready to begin and there are a couple of other people enquiring. Please pray for our students as they continue with or start to embark on their studies alongside many other commitments – jobs, home, church etc. At an extra Connexional Committee zoom meeting, it was agreed the AWE Director, Richard Saunders-Hindley, could be paid through our payroll services until the Wesleyan Reform Union have set up the finance system required, starting date to be agreed once the contract is in place. The February Study Weekend will be led by Matt and Rachel Wright on the subject of 'Church Renewal through Missional Discipleship.' Following the February weekend, and developments with the Academy, the invitation list will be prayerfully revised. Future dates are 3rd – 5th October 2025 and 20th – 22nd February 2026, both at Thornleigh, Grange over Sands. This year's Fellowship and Bible Conference will be held on 25th-26th April and the speaker booked is the Rev. Dr. David Hull, Chair of MET and Lead Pastor of Freedom Church, Bristol. The venue will be the Garstang Golf & Country Club Hotel.

Church Support Group

The group continues to support our churches in numerous ways. We have met with a church at their coffee morning to look at ways of supporting the church after losing their minister including putting on a praise evening with the support of local I.M. Churches. Another church has been helped to look at how they move forward, and others have been contacted to arrange meetings for the new year.

Plans for 2025 include working with Crosby to facilitate an Alpha course, a Start the Year Right Prayer Day at Northwood (held in January), focusing on helping our churches develop rhythms and strategies for growth that are right for their location and circumstances, a Spring Women's Gathering, promotion of Church Support Roadshows and raising awareness of how children's ministry and youth work are essential to our survival.

Safeguarding Report

No Safeguarding issues have recently been reported. A number of churches have been asking for Safeguarding training, and a number of sessions will be starting after

February. There are concerns about the number of Ministers without a current DBS check, however there are a couple of systems holding this information, so this will be checked with the Ministry committee to get the correct information updated.

Enabling Group

Much of the work previously given to the EG by Connexional Committee has now been completed or passed on to other Committees, so there is not a need, currently, to meet as frequently as in the past. Nevertheless, the regular updating and information sharing is a continuing necessity, hence the 5 meetings that are planned. The purpose of sharing the information is simply to help the process of communication and seeking to work collaboratively, rather than individual sub-committees working independently. One responsibility of the EG is to be a support to the General Secretary so there may be times when extra meetings are required to deal with individual matters that may arise. Our Ecumenical Officer (Bill Hampson) gave an update on the 'Finishing the Task' project. An article appeared in the Jan/Feb Magazine where all churches were encouraged to register with the project as a means of us working together as a Connexion. We can help and support each other to achieve some of them perhaps as circuits or regional areas. The suggestion was made that we could have a churches together event on Zoom sometime and we could reintroduce the 'Go and Tell' booklet to churches again. Churches are encouraged to share their thoughts on this.

Northwood Centre

The Business Plan is still undergoing review and further research is being done in preparation for resubmission in May 2025. New outside lighting is to be installed in the coming weeks for Health and Safety reasons. A new fridge has been purchased, and a new freezer will also be purchased. A new agreement has been sent to Ebenezer Group, we are waiting for a response. A new church, Authentic City Church, are now booking the hall every Saturday on a month-by-month basis, working around other bookings. They have also been sent an agreement

Ecumenical Officer Report

Rev Dr Callan Slipper has been elected as the new Chair of the Churches Together in England Trustees. He will also become the convenor of the CTE Enabling Group. CTE Forum is taking place from the 17th of March 2025, at The Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick, Bill and Marilyn Riding will be attending on the 18th March. Churches are still encouraged to sign up for Finishing the Task. If your church is interested in joining the network, please go to <https://finishingthetask.com> and register with them. Following the reports, the President suggested that all departments submit their meeting minutes to Kathy for sending out to other Connexional Committee members, and this was agreed. It is hoped that this will increase communication and help with preparation for future meetings.

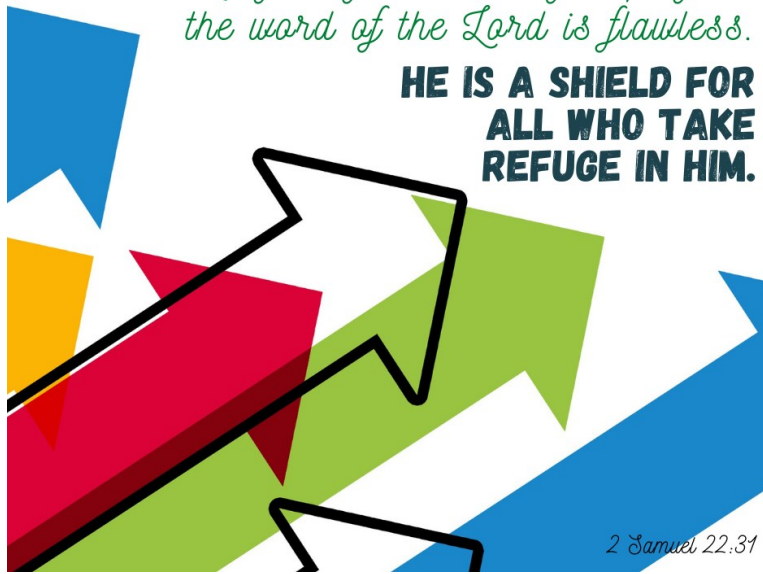
Alison Tipping, Medlock Valley Circuit Rep.

Overseas Missions Page

*As for God, his way is perfect;
the word of the Lord is flawless.*

**HE IS A SHIELD FOR
ALL WHO TAKE
REFUGE IN HIM.**

2 Samuel 22:31



continuing to serve with Ellel ministries (now known as Elpis locally) in Bucharest and hopes to help them with some healing retreats in Bulgaria this year.

Gail and Daniel Castro are continuing to serve in their various ministries in the Northwest. They have also been attending weekly prayer meetings at Roe Green Church and are willing to visit other IM churches if requested. In the previous magazine we reported that they were able to make a family visit to Colombia last summer and we would now like to show you the

L. and P. praise the Lord for the blessing they enjoyed over the Christmas season when they were able to share their joy in the season with small groups of local believers.. L. is continuing with her mentoring and training work, mainly online and has been the lead speaker at a conference for Christian women. Together with their friend Katie she also attended a play performed by students at the local school for the deaf and they are continuing their acquaintance with various ladies they meet on their walks around the oasis. They pray that sharing English conversation might bring openings for more spiritual matters. In April both P. and their other team member end the outreach to the villages and P. seeks the Lord's leading for his future service.

photographs which got missed out then.

Anne Fambely—OSM Committee



Liz Greenhalgh has been encouraged by the opportunities opened up to her in the school where she is helping some children with special needs. There are two 9-year-olds who can't yet read and a boy of 6 who struggles to write his letters, so extra help is very welcome. There are new pupils at the after-school programme too, while others have made so much progress that they no longer need the additional support. Another answer to prayer is that other volunteers from the church have offered their assistance. Liz is still



BETHEL INDEPENDENT METHODIST CHURCH
NEWTOWN, WIGAN

Worthy is the Lamb

AUGUMENTED CHOIR EASTER CANTATA

GOOD FRIDAY

18th April at 7pm



A VERY WARM WELCOME TO EVERYONE

FREEWILL OFFERING IN AID OF THE STOREHOUSE FOODBANK
REFRESHMENTS SERVED

Connexional Addresses

Connexional President Dorothy Kendrick

president
@imchurches.org.uk

General Secretary Brian Rowney

general.secretary
@imchurches.org.uk

Financial Administrator Alan Britton

financial.officer
@imchurches.org.uk

Acting Safeguarding Officer

Marilyn Riding
cs.organiser
@imchurches.org.uk

Business Department

Registered Office and Resource Centre

Fleet Street, Pemberton,
Wigan WN5 0DS
01942 223526
resource.centre
@imchurches.org.uk

Connexional Services Manager

Kathy Pringle
01942 223526
resource.centre
@imchurches.org.uk

Association Manager

Laura Pendlebury
01942 223526
association.manager
@imchurches.org.uk

All Officers' Addresses

can be found in the Directory which is obtainable from the Resource Centre.

All articles for the magazine should be sent to the Resource Centre postal address or via email to magazine@imchurches.org.uk

Connexion Magazine

ISSN 0141 - 4372

Independent Methodist Churches

www.imchurches.org.uk

Olive Mills.

Isaiah 25 verse 8: "He will swallow up death forever: and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces".

The morning service, at Bethel, Newtown, Wigan, on Sunday, 2nd February, was so difficult for us all. The deep sadness at the loss of Olive was palpable, like a thick fog of grief. Olive was such a worker and such a good friend: no one talked and many sought comfort from prayer and the relief at her release from pain on the previous Thursday. Brian, her husband, and Vera, her twin sister, were prayerfully hugged.

Olive was born, to Gladys and Tom Melling, on the 20th October, 1946. Her faithful parents took her, and her twin Vera, to evening services at Bethel, both invariably finishing on Gladys' knee in the choir stall; an early introduction to the choral tradition! This is hardly surprising, because both inseparable twins followed in family footsteps with Grandpa, Uncle and Brother, all choirmasters, in turn, at Bethel. Aged eleven, she sang duets with Vera, as a soprano to her sister's alto. She was still a member of our choir at the Carol Service in December last.

Some of the Wigan I.M. circuit members will remember Olive's contributions to Youth Club activities. Her starring role in the Bethel Table Tennis Team is noteworthy.

Following her marriage to Brian, she moved to Leigh but this distance did not restrict their combined industry and total commitment to the fellowship.

Olive helped to run a weekly Luncheon Club where an average of over thirty people were served a three course meal. She helped at a toddlers' play group where an average of twenty little ones and their young Mums enjoyed sharing time together. Regular New Year celebratory meals meant her constant presence, a 'Martha' who combined organisational skills with the warmth and kindness of a 'Mary'. Church weekends away saw Olive's extroverted side with her dressing up a treat for all.

We are missing Olive so much. A lasting memory of her will be of her neat and thoughtful preparation of the Lord's Table for 'breaking bread'. It is our comfort and joy to know that she is sitting at the heavenly table with her Lord.



Northwood Christian Centre & Cottage

Northwood Lane, Knutsford, WA16 0QX

The centre is available for hire by church groups for a wide range of activities including worship, retreats, teaching, alpha groups, fun days, youth camps, and more.

Stay at the cottage in the beautiful Cheshire countryside, rest and relax.

Ideal location to explore the local area or further afield.

It feels like you're miles away!

Easter Sale - 15%

for all stays in April 2025 when quoting code EASTER15

For more information or to book please contact us by email
northwood.cc@imchurches.org.uk