



The Methodist Church Swansea & Gower Circuit Magazine

CONNECT

Edition 3 - Christmas 2023



Welcome to Revd Louise Gough
UCS August 30th 2023

The calling of the Methodist Church is to respond to the gospel
of God's love in Christ and to live out its discipleship in
worship and mission

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**Having an event or have a great news story
that you want to share with the Circuit?**



Send your articles for our next issue to
swanseagowercircuitoffice@gmail.com

Letter from The Superintendent

There was once a boy who was given a project by his school to investigate his family tree. He came home and asked his mother, 'Mum, how did I get here?' She didn't want to go into the birds and the bees so she said to him, 'The stork brought you.'

The boy then went to his father and said, 'Dad, how did you get here?' And he didn't want to go into the details either so he also said, 'The stork brought me.'

His grandma was also in the room so he went and asked her, 'Grandma, how did you get here?' And grandma said, 'The stork.'

So the next day in school and began his project by writing, 'There hasn't been a normal birth in my family for three generations!'

Well as far as I know, my own birth was entirely normal and I'm confident that 2000 years from now that it will be remembered by no-one.

What is so special then about Jesus Christ, who was born 2000 years ago in Bethlehem, that his birth is about to be celebrated all over the world? And not only that, but 2.56 billion people would say that they follow him today. By 2050 this figure it is estimated will rise to 3.33billion.

Well, what those people would say is that Jesus' birth was unique; that no human father was involved; that through this birth God stepped into his creation as a human being.

Next year will see the launch of the Artemis II space mission when four astronauts will be heading back to the moon not to land on its surface but to test the technology and equipment for a future landing that will culminate in establishing a moon base. It will be the first time humans have been back to the moon in over 50 years.

We all know that the first man to set foot on the moon was Neil Armstrong in 1969. President Nixon said at the time that this was 'the greatest event in human history'

Hale Irwin, another astronaut disagreed with Nixon and said 'The greatest event in human history is not that man stood on the moon but rather that God in Christ stood on the earth'

That is the central claim of Christianity.

We read in the Gospel of Matthew that an angel of the Lord spoke to Joseph and said this "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had said through the prophet: (and this is a quote from a prophecy written 700 years before Jesus)

"The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" - which means, "God with us."

Reverend Howard Long
December 2023



Swansea & Gower Circuit

Ministers

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Log in details for Zoom and Live Streamed Services

Uniting Church Sketty – Live Streamed

Time: Every Sunday 10.30am

Meeting ID 897 0380 5889 Passcode: 334226

Telephone 0203 481 5240

Brunswick – Zoom

Time: Alternate Sundays 10.00a.m

Meeting ID 834 1537 4083 Passcode 355450

Telephone 0203 481 5237

Mumbles – Live Streamed

Time: Every Sunday 10.30am

Meeting ID 865 5689 9224 Passcode 430913

Telephone 0203 481 5240

Mumbles Wednesday – Zoom

Time: Monthly Wednesdays 12.00pm

as per plan

Log in Details are the same as Mumbles Sunday Worship

Gower Online

Time: see plan for times

Meeting ID 846 691 2796 Passcode: 181272

For Telephone – 0203 481 5240

Swansea & Gower Circuit

Churches & Service Times



Brunswick

Meet at St James' Church
Walter Road, Swansea, SA1 4QA
1st & 3rd Sunday (Zoom) 10am
2nd & 4th Sunday (St. James) 3pm
5th Sunday (St. James) 10.30am



Clydach

Heol-Y-Nant, Clydach, Swansea,
SA6 5HB
Sundays 3pm
In the Church Hall



Horton

Horton Methodist Chapel, Horton,
Swansea, SA3 1LB
Alternate Sundays at
10:30am



Morriston

Meet in Community Centre
Pentrepoeth School Road,
Morriston, Swansea, SA6 6HZ
Every Sunday 11am



Mumbles

Mumbles Road, Mumbles SA3 4EA
Sunday 10.30am
Wednesday (Zoom) 12.00pm



Murton

Manselfield Road,
Murton, Swansea, SA3 3AR
Sundays 10.30am & 5.30pm



Penlan

(Home of The Ogof Adullum Project)
Heol Gwrosydd, Penlan
Swansea, SA5 7BT
Services as announced



Pitton

Pitton, Rhossili, Swansea,
SA3 1PH
Alternate Sundays at
10:00am



Reynoldston

Reynoldston, Swansea,
SA3 1BR
Sunday 10.30am



Uniting Church Sketty

Dillwyn Road, Sketty, Swansea, SA2 9AH
Every Sunday 10.30am

Wesley

Eaton Road, Brynhyfyd,
Swansea, SA5 9JL
Every Sunday 10.30am

Asian Christian Fellowship

Every 1st & 3rd Sunday 3pm



Art in Worship

Rev. Linda Woollacott

On Saturday 30 September Uniting Church, Sketty was the venue for a most successful day's training run by the Vocations and Training Group of the Wales Synod Cymru. 36 people, mostly from across South Wales, came together to discover more about the techniques of Visio Divina, ways of looking deeply at devotional pictures and art work for both personal inspiration and for use in worship. Ably led by Deacon Jon Miller we studied both pictures he had painted and from other sources. Our reactions were interesting and varied.

Following a wonderful lunch, provided by Dragonfruit Catering, small workshops were held, with the opportunity for everyone to engage in 2 of their choice. Jon Miller continued to explore ways of using Visio Divina in worship, focussing on 'The 5000' a painting by Euralia Clarke from the Methodist Art Collection. Delyth Wynn Davies also used the same picture in her workshop group. (If you have not seen this picture you can find it on the Internet, it is well worth a look.) .)



In the Hall there were 2 different 'hands on' art groups operating. You only have to look at Adella's face to see how much she was enjoying the experience. The eagle eyed among you may well notice Rev. John Hanson in the background. For those who wanted a quiet space to reflect the prayer room had a variety of prayer stations.

There was a short period for feedback from the whole group, surrounded by some of the art work that had been created. The day ended as it began with an act of worship.

The whole event was repeated in October based in North Colwyn, so that anyone who wished to had an opportunity to access such high quality training.

My thanks to all those from UCS who made the whole day run smoothly, to Les Want (Technology), to Chris Hartley, Linda Jones and Jan Chaplin (Hospitality), Janet Neilson (Photos). The comments about the welcome and the premises showed everyone's appreciation of a great day.



Hidden treasure Selina Taylor

'Hidden Treasure' is the theme for this year's Methodist Prayer Handbook and for this to coincide with a friend of mine discovering a lead pilgrim's ampulla whilst metal detecting on my land certainly wasn't lost on me.

He thinks it's medieval, guessing 13-15th century, but he's taken it to Swansea Museum so that they can record it and hopefully shed more light on its providence. What we do know is that people who made a pilgrimage to a holy place sometimes brought back holy water within an ampulla to either bury or sprinkle on their land, as a prayer asking for God's blessing to make it fruitful. We've been speculating as to where it might have originated but I'm hoping that it might have a connection with Llanilltud Fawr (Llantwit Major) or one of the other monasteries. Time will tell.



I suspect because of its condition that it will not have much monetary value, but to me that is irrelevant as the spiritual significance far outweighs any other value. The fact is that hundreds of years ago, someone who believed in Jesus and who was farming this land, made a pilgrimage and brought back holy water to bless it... and here I am, across the centuries, being blessed by the faith that they had and being part of the great succession of believers myself. There has to be a few sermon illustrations in there, surely?

Black Mountain Singers and Rhiannon

A fantastic concert was held at Mumbles on the afternoon of 2nd December with the Black Mountain Singers and Rhiannon. Both choirs also sang at Mumbles Carol Service where there was a collection in aid of the work of Action for Children



Welcome to our new Minister

Rev. Louise Gough

The new minister for Sketty and Clydach, Rev. Louise Gough, was officially inducted and welcomed to the Circuit with an evening service on 30th August at Uniting Church Sketty.

Whilst we were waiting for the service to start we were treated to an Organ recital by Dr Alan Sykes. The Induction itself was led by Rev Andrew Charlesworth Chair of Wales Synod Cymru and Rev Simon Walkling Moderator, United Reformed Church, National Synod of Wales and then local leaders from the area each took time to welcome Louise themselves on behalf of their organisations.

The Reverend Dr Jenny Hurd gave the sermon on the subject of kindness and also welcomed Rev Louise and Bluebell (her cat) to Swansea.

We wish Rev. Louise well for her ministry in the Circuit.



Rev. Louise Gough with Rev. Dr Jennifer Hurd, Rev. Andrew Charlesworth, Rev Howard Long and Rev. Simon Walkling

Getting to know you: Q&A with Rev. Louise

How are you settling into life in Swansea and what has been the best bit so far?

I'm so grateful for the big welcome I've received from UCS, Wesley Clydach and the whole circuit – everyone I've met in Swansea has been so friendly! I miss my previous churches and my 'old life', but I am thrilled to be part of the Swansea and Gower Circuit. When it comes to the 'best bit', so many things stand out in my mind – the super welcome service at the tail end of August, sharing communion at UCS and Clydach for the first time (and I've enjoyed all the services since), calling in on various church activities and chatting to people, getting to know new people and a new staff team, being part of the interfaith group of chaplains at the University, having new communities to explore, commutes across glorious Gower to preaching appointments (I never once encountered a cow in the road on my way to any church in Stockport – or found a sheep outside afterwards!), becoming increasingly at home in the lovely manse, spending time with friends, reconnecting with my hobbies in a new place, and being able to see the sea every day!

What made you decide to become a minister?

It all started pretty early when I became a Christian in my teens. Attending a Methodist Church at that point opened up my world and I loved being in a Christian community where I was accepted and nurtured. My grandpa was a local preacher and often took members of the church youth along to his preaching appointments, so we could lead various parts of the service. I loved this and soon wanted to be a local preacher – from there a sense of calling to presbyteral ministry grew. I wanted to be able to 'help people', but with a spiritual dimension. I hoped that people's experience of church would always be as positive as mine had been.

What is your favourite hymn?

So many amazing hymns to choose from, and I appreciate the variety in Singing the Faith – it's a great resource for prayer. I love "When we are living we are in the Lord", and its gentle and faithful affirmation that we belong to God. I so often need to hear that!

What are you looking forward to during your ministry in Swansea?

In the midst of the usual activity of ministry, I'm trying to discern what it is I really need to do here.

What do you like doing in your spare time?

With apologies to the neighbours, I love playing my flute. I began when I was at school, and since 2009 I've been having a lesson every fortnight. Each July I attend a flute summer school near Abergavenny – it's the highlight of my year!

What is your favourite scripture passage and why?

Such riches to choose from – I love the Psalms as they represent real grappling with life and with God; they tell of human struggle and come from the heart, yet there is so much insight into God's closeness and God's gracious breaking-in to human experience. Many of the verses lend themselves to personal prayer and contemplation. I also love Ephesians 3:14-21 – it blows me away!

Do you have a favourite time of the church year?

Midnight communion service on Christmas Eve – there's a special kind of atmosphere as we finally pause to wait – and then there's joy as we welcome Jesus the Light into the world – so vulnerable, yet no darkness can ever overcome! Holy Week is another profound time, and I particularly value services on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. It's very powerful to engage with the narratives in the gospels. Good Friday is uncomfortably real as we confront the attitudes, behaviour and powers, still very much in evidence, that lead to the smothering of good and the terrible suffering in our world. When we hover in the liminal time, thinking it's all over, we hear Jesus calling our name.

and finally Verdis or Joes?

I'm just so grateful to God and Methodist stationing committee for sending me to a place where there is an abundance of readily available superior ice-cream! Verdi's or Joe's – I've blissfully tried both on more than one occasion, but think I need to do quite a lot more sampling before I can answer such a sensitive and important question...



Thank you Rev. Louise for your lovely answers and your time!

Louise Davies

Move over Larry there's a new cat on the block!

a sleepy Bluebell!

The Inclusive Methodist Church

The Methodist Church is committed to Justice, Dignity and Solidarity.

We believe that all people are uniquely made in the image of God, and we aim to live this out in the Church and in our communities.

Conference 2021 adopted the Strategy for Justice, Dignity and Solidarity. This is our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) work which means we aim:

- to celebrate the rich diversity of people within the Methodist Church
- to eradicate all discrimination, to treat all people justly and with dignity across the breadth of the Methodist Church
- for a profound change in the culture, practices and attitudes of the Methodist Church so that all Methodists are able to be full participants in the Church's life.

All Methodists are invited to be part of this work of God, as we develop our mission and ministry together.

www.methodist.org.uk October 2023

Accessible Churches for all

As a wheelchair user it is very important to have easy access, as there are usually many obstructions that have to be faced. It is good that the churches are looking at EDI (Equality, Diversity and Inclusion). Equality, Diversity and Inclusion training is currently being worked on by many in the Circuit and we hope that all that need to be will be fully trained soon.

What follows is a testimony by Nicky Shercliff, a member of Mumbles Methodist Church. At the time when the major work was about to be done on Mumbles Methodist Church, 20 years ago, Howard asked Nicki to attend a meeting to discuss what would be needed to help with easy access in the re-modelled church. Nicki has been remembering that time and has sent her own article:-

As a wheelchair user, going to church is very important to my independence and most churches are not accessible - however Mumbles Methodist is fully accessible and I have had great experience with accessing them.

This means that I can attend services independently and stay a fully inclusive member of the church.

They have a fully accessible ramp from the street to the church door, which is suitable for most wheelchairs. The door opens automatically. Church services are held on the first floor, and there is a lift I can use.

After the service I come down to Theo's café which is below the worship area.

I find the church fully inclusive meaning that I can take part in services without any outside support. Recently I took my first communion on my own. It took some time, but they were very patient with me.

Thank you to everyone involved.

Nicki

Sports Chaplaincy (UK) Rev. Betty McNiven

I have been in post as Chaplain for Swansea Storm for one week. This is a sports' chaplaincy for a Swansea Wheelchair Basketball team.

Sports chaplaincy UK, (SCUK), covers all the sports for elite to grass roots in the UK. Each UK country has its own branch and Disability sports are within that and the chaplaincy to Swansea Storm is in Disability Sports Wales.

The club meets on Tuesday evenings and some Saturdays at LC2 and they are a very diverse group of people, and ages. Chaplains serve everyone involved with their club from coaches and administrators to team members, families and supporters. Chaplains are there for anyone and everyone to help and support as best they can. Obviously for the chaplain, Jesus is at the centre of every conversation and every event and they will provide a totally confidential and non-judgmental ear to those who are looking for spiritual support and those who are not.

I was a chaplain to Rochdale Hornets when I was in ministry in Rochdale. I had many a good conversation sitting on the wall outside the local chipshop when the team had finished their training and went for chips!

Chaplains are uniquely placed to give support when dealing with loss.....or success. Loss involved anything from a bereavement to a broken leg. If your career depends on it, that is a frightening place to be!

Many clubs have juniors who often train on Sundays. When a young person hopes they will become the world's fastest runner at a future Olympics there is not much of a possibility that that young person will surrender their training to go to Sunday School. The chaplains who served Swansea's Ironman this last August arranged worship for the Saturday evening of the weekend.

Prospective chaplains are asked to choose their own sport. I opted for disability sports because my granddaughter Caitlin is a wheelchair athlete. she has competed for Great Britain in wheelchair dancing and she has won quite a trawl of gold medals too. I have learned from her how tough she has to be even to get ready in the morning. She trains with weights in the gym three times a week because her upper body has to be strong enough to get back into the wheelchair if she has tipped it over while in it. I admire hugely the toughness of athletes in general and athletes who are involved in wheelchair sports even more.

Prayer is central to the lives of all Christians and chaplains will pray for the people in their clubs and try to encourage prayer with people if they are open to it. With a club there is time to get to know people but there are also chaplains to events like the Gold Cup, or Cardiff Half Marathon, men and women who who try to be as Christ in many varied and sometimes challenging situations.

I feel hugely privileged and excited to be Swansea Storm's new chaplain. I only pray that I can fulfil the role faithfully, gracefully and joyfully.

Betty McNiven



Swansea Storm Wheelchair basketball team - Picture from www.swanseastormwbc.co.uk

Harvest Around the Circuit

All of our Churches in the circuit held Harvest services with donations given to their local foodbanks here are some photos and posts from their social media accounts. The mission our churches do to support outside agencies in their communities is so important and so is shouting about it on social media! Well done all



Wesley Methodist Church - Brynhyfryd, Swansea

8 October at 17:16 · 🌐

Thanks to all those who supported our Harvest Celebration this morning. All non perishable gifts are going to support the work of the Foodbank.



Wesley Church Clydach Swansea

27 September at 10:28 · 🌐

Harvest thanksgiving last Sunday resulted not only in this brilliant display of traditional, and a few less usual, items but also in a table overflowing with food items for the Foodbank at Ty Croeso. Thanks to all who donated items, and to Rev Louise for leading our service.

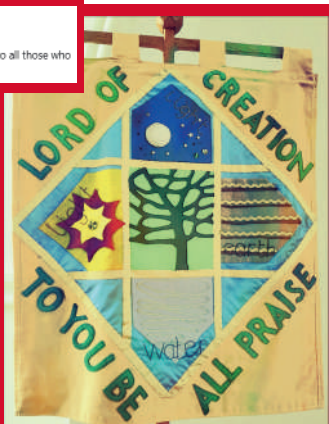


From Rev. Pam Cram Clydach and Morriston joined together and were lead by Rev. Louise Gough. Our the table display included the usual fruit and vegetables but also vases of herbs and lavender which are remind us of some harvests that we maybe forget about, but which are important – where would we be without herbs to flavour our meals and scents to enhance our lives! Louise brought some rather small seeds to reflect on, their smallness becoming a source of humour, and was symbolic in various ways during our reflection, prayers, and conversation. Donations from the congregation were for the Foodbank and the table was laden with tins and packages.

Mumbles Methodist Church

1 October at 13:18 · 🌐

Some photographs from our Harvest Service this morning. Thank you to all those who contributed gifts for the Foodbank.



Horton



Brunswick



Reynoldston



A Big **THANK YOU**

Pitton Methodist Church

for supporting Banc Bwyd Clydach Foodbank @ Tŷ Croeso.

Your donation of £227.50 will make a BIG difference to local people in crisis. *Diolch yn fawr iawn!!*

Clydach Foodbank is part of the Trussell Trust's UK wide foodbank network.

Registered Charity Number: 1000256 | Registered in England and Wales

Circuit Mission Sunday

Thanks to Rev. Andy Walker and everyone at Murton Methodist Church, for hosting the Circuit Mission and Harvest service led by Dr. Alan Cram, with news of the various projects he's involved with in Tanzania. The Church was beautifully decorated and the items that Alan and Pam have collected from their travels to Africa made for a colourful and interesting display.

We have covered The Heshima project in a previous connect magazine but it was really interesting to find out more about the amazing work of Mose's school and the other projects that Alan is involved in.

Hearing about the mothers being taught to make textiles to sell and being able to have their children schooled whilst they work was inspiring. As were the stories of the people the project has helped such as the girls saved from child marriage and FGM and the children that are being sponsored so they can continue their studies.

Such is the important work that Heshima do in Tanzania that the Circuit have chosen this as their Circuit Mission this year with our first retiring collection for Moses' school, raising an incredible £400.



To meet the needs of the growing Sandfields community, a Wesleyan Mission was established at 122 Rodney Street, in the home of Mr and Mrs Thomas Davies. The rooms downstairs were converted into one, and a small pulpit placed at one end. A Sunday School and Band of Hope were started, and Sunday evening services were held, with preachers being appointed on the Circuit Plan. But as the accommodation was strictly limited a decision was made to build a Mission Chapel and Brunswick Chapel was opened for Public Worship on Thursday, August 28th 1873. The Opening Day started with a prayer meeting at 7:00am was attended by 50 people. The first sermons at the opening services, morning and evening that day, were preached by the then President of the Conference (Rev George Perks), and in between there was a celebratory lunch. The collection from the opening services amounted to over £25!

Much of the early success of Brunswick's Sunday School must be attributed to the devotion of the first Superintendent, Mr Quick, who helmed the Sunday School for the first thirty years. He was remembered for forming a special committee to sample the buns and cakes submitted for the annual Whitsun 'treat.' By the end of his time as Superintendent, the average Sunday School attendance was exceeding 300.

Throughout its history, Brunswick always enjoyed the reputation of providing a first-class musical accompaniment to its services - both choir and organ - but at first the only instrument was a tuning fork, wielded by the aforementioned Mr Quick! The first organist and choirmaster was Mr Joseph Thomas. The last organist, of course, was Mr Howard Cooke, who had the longest tenure, from 1965 until the present day - still serving as our pianist at our new home at St James Church.

Brunswick has always been a missionary-minded and socially-minded Church. In its early days it fostered the Temperance Movement within the Circuit. It was a hub of activity for many of the youth of Sandfields: Boys' Brigade, Cubs and Scouts, as well as its Sunday School. For most of its history there was an active Wesley Guild based at Brunswick. It supported overseas missions generously and prayerfully, and for many years was the Circuit church most associated with our Chaplaincy at Swansea University. In more recent years, members of Brunswick supported activities such as Swansea Prison Fellowship, the Swansea Refugee & Asylum-Seekers Support Group and, of course, Ogof Adullam: which continues its excellent work now from its new base at Pelan.

Sadly, as we all know, the challenge of caring for and maintaining the fabric of such a large building was an ever-increasing one for a congregation that entered the 21st century in declining numbers. In 2020 - in common with the whole Church - we faced the additional challenge of ministering in a nation and a world changed by COVID. The difficult and painful decision was taken to sell the church building - but we were overjoyed that it was purchased by another Christian fellowship, and we take great heart in the knowledge that this church - the last of a number that once graced St Helen's Road - continues to serve as a hub for Christian worship and mission here in Sandfields. We wish John and all at Spring Church every blessing in their ongoing endeavours here - of which we will learn more later in this service.

Meanwhile, as a continuing congregation ourselves, we have rejoiced in a new partnership with our Anglican friends at St James Church - and I want to pay a particular tribute to my colleague and friend Rev Ian Folks, for the generosity of spirit that he and the congregation of St James have shown in welcoming us into their church. We've also discovered that the internet gives us so many wonderful new opportunities to share together - for worship, for prayer, for bible study and for fellowship - connecting us with members who live in other places - even across the border into England, perish the thought!

'Where God is leading we do not know. Nor do we ask to know. Our prayer is simply, that in our day He will keep us as truly dedicated to Him as were our fathers before us. In our turn may we too be a people of faith and prayer, our one purpose to seek and share His kingdom of love. May we too offer to the same Eternal Saviour and Lord all that we are for the fulfilling of His changeless purpose, to whom be the glory and the praise for ever.'

Rev John Gray, minister of Brunswick in 1973 - on the occasion of the church's 100th anniversary.

Brunswick's 150th Anniversary Service

by Louise Davies

On 18th November Spring Church invited the past congregation of Brunswick Church and members of the circuit back to Brunswick Church now know as The Brunswick Christian Centre for a service to celebrate it's anniversary.

The Brunswick choir (with a few former members) opened the service with an introit. Former members of Bruswick's youth group 'The SAS' (Sunday's at Seven Thirty) reunited to perform a few choruses and we were treated to Worship songs performed by members of Spring Church. Afterwards there was a chance to catch up over a buffet and the opportunity to have a look around the building and see the wonderful work that is being undertaken there.

It truly was a wonderful afternoon and there are already suggestions that this is made a annual event to share fellowship, worship and thanksgiving together.



Macmillan Magic Rev Pam Cram



Dewi Myrddin Hughes, former leader of Capel y Nant; Austin Bradley, Clydach's oldest member; Alan Cram; and Rev. Louise.



Delicious cakes for sale and with Guild Secretary, Marilyn Harry, seated with family members busy around her.



Once again Marilyn's 'money tree' has worked wonders. Despite a lower than usual attendance, the Guild 'team' still raised over £500 for Macmillan last Saturday. Looking back over the past 20 years of running this event, this is one of the higher amounts raised. Thanks to everyone who supported on the day or through donations of cakes or cash. Though numbers were low there was a positive 'buzz' in the room and we saw a few friends who hadn't been around for a while as well as greeting new ones.

Thank you to Diana Oanea-Cram for the photos

Christmas Gifts at Sketty

UCS Sketty have been busy hand making and filling Christmas gift bags which will be given to Asylum seekers and Refugees in the Swansea area. This is an important part of their outreach work in the community. They were blessed during their worship on Sunday 10th December.

Well done to all involved!



Mercy Ships

David Boakes and Caroline Buckler

Mercy Ships is a faith-based international development organisation that deploys hospital ships to some of the poorest countries in the world, delivering vital, free healthcare to people in desperate need. It was founded in 1978 by Don and Deyon Stephens, following a meeting Don had with Mother Teresa, who asked him what his purpose in life was and encouraged him to follow his dream of building a floating hospital. Mercy Ships follows the model of Jesus by “bringing hope and healing to the forgotten poor”, helping people of all faiths and none.

Worldwide, 5 billion people lack access to safe, affordable, timely surgery. Many of them live in developing countries where healthcare infrastructure is limited or non-existent, or where there's a shortage of trained healthcare providers. Conditions requiring surgical treatment kill more people in low-income countries than HIV/Aids, TB and malaria combined.

Fortunately, more than 44% of the world's population lives within 100 miles of a coast — which is why Mercy Ships uses modern hospital ships to bring world-class volunteer medical professionals directly to the places they're needed most. Their ships are the most efficient way to bring a state-of-the-art hospital to regions where clean water, electricity, medical facilities and personnel are limited or non-existent. Instead of trying to build the facilities we need to bring life-changing surgeries to ports around the world, they provide a safe, stable, fully outfitted hospital ship to help change the odds for thousands of people in need. They also train local healthcare providers and improve medical infrastructure. And they even stock our ships with a supply of vehicles so we can reach remote areas!

Since 1978, Mercy Ships has had one to three ships in service. Currently, Mercy Ships operates two hospital ships, the Africa Mercy and the Global Mercy. The Global Mercy is the largest charity-run, purpose-built hospital ship in the world. It contains six operating rooms and houses over 600 volunteers from around the globe representing many disciplines including surgeons, maritime crew, cooks, teachers, electricians, plumbers the host staff and more. The Global Mercy came into service for the first time in February this year {2023} in Senegal. She is currently docked in Sierra Leone, which is the sixth time a Mercy Ship has been in Sierra Leone since 1992. This time, the Global Mercy will focus on bringing hope and healing through the following surgical specialties: Maxillofacial, General, Paediatric Specialized General, Orthopaedic, Reconstructive Plastics, and Ophthalmology.

The Global Mercy is not just a hospital but also a floating training centre, that will facilitate hundreds of hours of training in the coming ten months whilst docked in Freetown. Volunteer professionals onboard, in collaboration with in-country partners, plan to train more than 200 healthcare professionals from Sierra Leone in a range of surgical education courses.

Funding for Mercy Ships is provided mainly through private donations, foundations and socially responsible corporations. Volunteers serving on the ships contribute not just their time and skills but also monthly fees to cover their costs. This enables Mercy Ships to deliver medical and development services for a fraction of the usual cost.

Since it was founded, Mercy Ships has provided over 105,500 life-saving or life-changing surgical procedures, performed 488,000 dental procedures and trained more than 49,000 local medical professionals in their area of expertise.

You can read more about Mercy ships by visiting www.mercyships.org.uk

Please share this with the office holders and members of your Church and Circuit. This can be read online and downloaded from methodist.org.uk/conference

Conference Business Digest

A report for local churches about the business of the 2023 Methodist Conference

The 2023 Methodist Conference, held at the Hilton Birmingham Metropole: Presbyteral Session 22-23 June; Representative Session 24-29 June. methodist.org.uk/conference

The Conference is the governing body of the Methodist Church and meets annually to discuss matters affecting the life of the Church, the nation and the world.

Induction of the President and Vice-President for 2023/2024

On Saturday 24 June, the Revd Gill Newton was elected and inducted as President of the Conference, and Deacon Kerry Scarlett as Vice-President. They shared their theme of 'Hidden Treasures' in their addresses to the Conference.

You can read both addresses in full here: methodist.org.uk/presidential-addresses-2023

Reception into Full Connexion and Ordination Services

New presbyters and deacons were ordained on Sunday 25 June 2023.

During the Sunday Worship, thirteen presbyters and four deacons were received into Full Connexion with the Conference, along with ten presbyters by transfer, and one presbyter by reinstatement and transfer when they were presented to the members of the Methodist Conference and to its President and Vice-President.

Having been received into Full Connexion on Sunday morning, presbyters and deacons travelled to nearby

Coventry with their families and friends for the afternoon where the diaconal ordinations took place at Coventry Central Hall and the presbyteral ordinations were held at Coventry Cathedral.

Oversight and Trusteeship

Following consultation with the District Synods, the Conference confirmed changes to the Deed of Union which it agreed in 2022, to establish a Connexional Council from 1 September 2024. The Connexional Council will be the trustee body for the Church, and will undertake many of the functions of the present Methodist Council and Strategy and Resources Committee.

Further to the decisions of the 2022 Conference in respect of reducing the size of the Conference from 2024, the Council brought a proposed allocation of seats in order to achieve that reduction. Among other changes, proposals were agreed to abolish the category of Conference-elected representatives and replace it with members of the Connexional Council.

The Conference agreed to the establishment of a new District incorporating the present Cumbria, Lancashire, Liverpool and Bolton and Rochdale Districts, with a continuing consultation taking place in the Manchester and Stockport District concerning this proposal. The new District will come into being on 1 September 2024 and will be called the North West England District.

There is Room – Triennial Membership Returns 2019-2022

Every three years a report is presented to the Conference on the membership returns of the Church. For the years 2020 and 2021 attendances were not recorded due to the lockdown with many societies meeting online for that time. The attendance figures for 2022 (as for 2019) do not include those who shared in online services.

The numbers indicate a 3,000 reduction between 2021 and 2022, more typical of pre-pandemic trends. The extrapolation implies a loss of 10,000 members during the pandemic, representing 15% of our membership, matching the narrative around the Connexion.

The decline in membership and attendance is not unexpected nor unique to Methodism. The faithfulness of God and God's people in the current reality is seen in pockets of growth in churches and circuits and in experimentation with Methodist people and churches taking missional risks.

Online Church

The Conference recognised the close relation of the questions of online celebrations of Holy Communion and predominantly online churches and, subject to the outcome of the connexional period of discernment in respect of online communion, affirmed in principle the possibility of predominantly online churches.

Action for Children

A report from the charity Action for Children, part of the Methodist family, thanked the Methodist people for their on-going support. Particular mention was made of their involvement in the online action to challenge the gap between the benefit uplift and inflation. In the year 2021/2022, Methodists raised £644,000 for Action for Children.

Budget

Planned reductions in the District Assessment mean there will be less funding for the Connexional Team and therefore a reduction in the work that the Team can undertake. Transitional funding was agreed to support the Connexional Team whilst a transformation plan is developed. The impact of inflation will continue to be passed through to the District Assessment.

Pension Schemes

This report updated the Conference on pension issues including the estimated funding position and a report from the task group established by the Council to look at the future of the Methodist Ministers' Pension Scheme. The improvement in the funding position has arisen due to the unprecedented and unexpected economic turmoil of the last year.

A justice-seeking Church: the report of the Walking with Micah project

Walking with Micah has been a two-year project helping the Methodist Church to explore what it means to be a justice-seeking Church. It draws on Methodist history, theology, current concerns and practice, and recommends a framework of principles for justice which underpin our understanding of God's justice and what it means to seek justice. The report recognised how much is being done in churches to tackle injustice and recommends a two-year programme to embed these principles, priorities and practices in order to support and encourage this work. The Conference commended the report for prayerful study and action throughout the Connexion. You can read the 'report in three minutes' at methodist.org.uk/our-work/our-work-in-britain/social-justice/walking-with-micah/a-justice-seeking-methodist-church-the-report-in-three-minutes

3Generate 2022 – Methodist Children and Youth Assembly

This report highlighted the success of last year's 3Generate event that was bigger than ever before with 1200 children and young people, 456 group leaders, and 252 volunteers joining together. The Conference received the report, which called upon all Methodists actively to engage in conversation with children and young people about faith and life.

Reconciliation and Mediation Team and Positive Working Together

The Conference agreed to roll out a scheme to help resolve disputes in church communities across the Church following a successful pilot project. The Conference adopted the recommendation for the five-year programme, in partnership with *Place for Hope*, to offer an integrated approach in support of Positive Working Together and extending the Reconciliation and Mediation Team as a Connexion-wide programme.

A Methodist Way of Life

The Conference approved A Methodist Way of Life (methodist.org.uk/our-faith/a-methodist-way-of-life) and in workshops engaged with experiences and ideas of how this model of structured discipleship can help people to grow in faith and confidence.

Memorials

Memorials are messages from Circuit Meetings and District Synods to the Conference. They play a vital part in enabling the Conference to hear and to respond to concerns from across the Connexion. This year, the Conference considered and replied to 23 memorials on topics including district probationers' committees and probationers' retreats, email provision for ministers, Israel Palestine, the Annual Affirmations, EDI training, annual returns and statistics, locally resident members, funding of a stipend during a minister's long term absence.

President and Vice-President designated for 2024/2025

The Conference designated the Revd Helen D Cameron to be President and Mrs Carolyn Godfrey to be Vice-President of the Conference 2024/2025.

Appointments

The Conference made a number of appointments and reappointments, including:

Dudley Coates as Chair of the Conference Business Committee for the Conferences of 2024, 2025 and 2026.

Anne Bolton as Connexional Treasurer for the connexional year 2023/2024.

Alethea Siow as Chair of the Resourcing Committee from 1 September 2023.

Jenny Jackson as Chair of the Stationing Committee from 1 September 2023.

Future dates of the Conference

The Methodist Conference will meet in Leeds from 27 June-3 July 2024


The Methodist Church

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Theo's

Enjoy delicious coffee and homemade food in the beautiful surroundings of one of Mumbles' oldest buildings.



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Mumbles, Swansea SA3 4DH | Tel. 01792 363 803**

Mumbles Gifts for Action for Children

After reading an article written by Bethany, one of the Action for Children team at Swansea Skills Plus, Western Bay about the difficulties experienced by young care leavers at Christmas I decided to make an appeal to members of Mumbles church. We had one week to raise some money, buy the food and gifts and then present 15 bags to Action for Children for distribution to the young people in time for Christmas. We raised £1000 in 4 days which not only provided for the Christmas bags but also provided enough for a day out and a meal for the group before Christmas.



Bethany wrote these words

The young people we support often do not celebrate Christmas in the same way most of us would. A number of them find Christmas to be a difficult and triggering season due to numerous reasons. They may have experienced family breakdown and trauma; they often do not have any contact with family and have lost the supportive network a family provides. Some are likely to be spending the day alone, or in supported accommodation rather than with family or friends. We have had discussions with a number of our young people surrounding the topic of Christmas; they have disclosed that due to their personal situations, they are unable to afford to buy those who are close to them any gifts, or purchase the 'essentials' for a Christmas dinner, and they are also unlikely to receive any gifts themselves.

Although our young people struggle financially all year-round, Christmas can be a far more difficult time due to the usual festivities being inaccessible for them. Decorations, gifts, food, activities etc obviously cost a significant amount of money, which is generally not considered when they can struggle to pay rent, bills and buy food.

The staff and young people of Skills Plus would like to say thank you so much for your continued support.

Rev. Howard Long



In the picture Gill Worrall - Action for Children rep for the Methodist Church in Swansea and Rev Howard Long present the bags to members of the Action for Children team Bethany and Nia.



The return of Stable trail Louise Davies

Reynoldston joined with other local churches on 9th December for the return of their Stable trail. This has been a wonderfully popular and festive event which has always been well supported and enjoyed by all who have visited.

This year was no exception with lots of families coming along to Reynoldston village to experience the joy of the Christmas story (complete with a real baby at the end!).

We've been to the trail a few times since my eldest was born in 2012 so we knew it would be a lovely afternoon and were very excited to get going.

We timed it all wrong and arrived right in the middle of lunch but it was perfect as the boys got stuck in making their trail bags and decorations for our Christmas tree. I had a go at making angel and although it was a decent effort it was no match for the example left on the table.

At 1.30pm promptly we were called to start our trail and were joined by a few other families. Our guides were lovely and all the way around encouraged the children (and us adults) to consider the clues we were being given by the players.

The boys loved it all; the hustle and bustle of the Message room run by Angels, getting out of the cold to visit the Magi in the Church, having a go at drumming with the shepherds and seeing Mary, Joseph at the end... but they haven't stopped talking about 'that meany King Herod' who looked very familiar!

At every stage we were given a little token to take away, which was put into a bauble to hang on our tree to remind us of our journey.

We had a lovely afternoon and warm welcome from all of the volunteers involved. Thank you so much Stable Trailers, we hope that you have encouraged all who visited you to let the spirit of Christmas in this year and for many more to follow.





Visiting the Magi



Drumming with The shepherds



No Room at the Bethlehem Bunkhouse



The one star inn



Mary, Joseph and Jesus



The Davies boys with their trip baubles

CHRISTMAS WEEK SERVICES 2023

The **Methodist Church**
Swamsea and Gower Circuit



Christmas Eve

Sketty

10.30am Rev. Louise Gough

Clydach (with Morriston)

3pm Rev. Louise Gough

Brunswick

3pm Rev. Andrew Pearce
at St. James, Uplands

8pm Rev. Andrew Pearce (online)

Mumbles

10.30am Rev. Andrew Pearce

12.15pm Carol singing on the steps

Wesley

10.30am Rev. Howard Long

Reynoldston

10.30am Heather Coleman

Murton

3pm Nativity Rev. Andy Walker

4.30pm Murton Farm Carols

11.30pm Rev. Andy Walker

Pitton (with Horton)

10.30am Rev. Andy Walker

Christmas Day

Sketty

10am Rev. Louise Gough

Brunswick

10.30am at St James, Uplands

Rev. Andrew Pearce
and Rev. Ian Folks

Mumbles

10am Rev. Howard Long

Wesley

10am at Christwell URC

Reynoldston

10am Quentin and Win Hawkins

Murton

10am Rev. Andy Walker

Pitton (with Horton)

10.30am Selina Taylor

**And she gave birth to her firstborn son
and wrapped him in swaddling clothes
and laid him in a manger,
because there was no place for them in the inn**

Luke 2 v 7

www.swanseamethodist.org.uk

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