

Circuit Newsletter

Autumn 2025



Folk gather at Southlands to support York Pride

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Flourish: Woven Threads

a diverse all-age Methodist weekend

13-15 February 2026 | University of York

www.yorkshirenemethodist.org/flourish26/

Lead Sponsor: Methodist Insurance



The District “Flourish” event is taking place again in February and tickets are now available – a weekend where we can join with a 1,000 Methodists across Yorkshire for a weekend of worship, learning, fellowship, and inspiration. Many went in 2019 and 2023, and it’s a great opportunity to be part of something bigger. This time easily accessible at a new venue, the University of York campus, out of the city centre – and perfect for all ages, with a diversity of worship, workshops and sessions. Including prayer spaces, arts & crafts, expert speakers, music concerts, comedy, conversation and marketplace. It would be great to see many from our church and circuit there! More info on the District website www.yorkshirenemethodist.org/flourish26/

Rediscover how you can Flourish in your faith

A weekend of inspiration, celebration, worship & renewal. The largest all-age Methodist gathering in the UK. A diverse programme across a 3-day event, Friday evening to Sunday lunchtime, to help us grow as flourishing missional communities.

Some contributors include: Theologian & author Dr. Ruth Valerio; President & Vice President of the Methodist Conference, Richard Andrew & Matt Forsyth; Methodist Director of Evangelism and Growth, Trey Hall; Chair of District, Leslie Newton; and sessions by All We Can, The Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT), & The Kairos Movement.

The theme for 2026 is **WOVEN THREADS**

Rediscovering our place together in God’s big tapestry

With four session streams across the weekend

- Rediscovering curiosity at the heart of faith
- Rediscovering justice at the heart of life
- Rediscovering God’s call at the heart of you
- Rediscovering revolution at the heart of church

Tickets available at: bit.ly/Flourish26

Welcome

Welcome to our Autumn Circuit newsletter and the start of a new Connexional year. Like the calendar new year, we are ringing in the changes. We welcome Reverends Jill Pullan, Alex Middleton-Laing and Kate Paterson into Circuit. Jill will be minister for Acomb, Copmanthorpe, Acaster Malbis, Bishopthorpe and West Thorpe. Alex will be minister for Easingwold and Villages Together and will share responsibility for Haxby & Wigginton with Rory Dalglish. Kate will be deacon for the city centre and Central and Southlands Methodist Churches.

Our Children, Youth and Families team has been reshaped, and all the team will be working full-time in Circuit by the end of the Connexional year. Victoria Etherington is joining us full-time from District, taking over the role of University Chaplain alongside a wider CYF role in Circuit. Lorraine Jones' role is expanded to include CYF support for the churches in the north of the Circuit as well as supporting our net zero initiative. Amy Shepard will be working with Jill Pullan to expand CYF work with Jill's churches. The team will also continue with Circuit-wide initiatives.

This is all set in the context of the continuation of the Circuit consultation to realise the vision of churches merging their governing bodies, making best use of our buildings and creating a structure which encourages the development and use of the specialist gifts and passions of our staff, volunteers and congregations. Hard work which we embarked on and on which we will reflect at the Circuit Council in September.

Reverend Richard Andrew, who many of you will remember from his time in York, is now President of Conference and I recently watched his presidential address¹. It was time well spent as he reflected upon the changing nature of church and the challenges that creates. He took as his start point John 12:24:

'...truly I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains but a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.'

In his address, Richard reflects on the need for us to embrace death and resurrection as a positive, Spirit led model of church. Richard writes:

'If we read the Easter stories, we notice a combination of experiences which mirror our own: fear, anxiety, misunderstanding and doubt but also as the perceptions of the disciples begin to change after their bleakest and darkest moments, running, joy, abundance, feasting and a freedom for the future which bursts across the known world.'

Circuit Diary Dates

- Circuit Welcome service 7th September, 10.30am, Huntington.
- Circuit Council 10th Sept, 7pm at Haxby & Wigginton
- Leaders of Worship & Preachers' Meeting, 7pm, Haxby & Wigginton
- Circuit Council 3rd Dec, 7pm TBC
- FLOURISH: Woven Threads, 13th-15th February 2026, University of York.
- Circuit Council 11th March, 7pm TBC

¹ Text and video at: www.methodist.org.uk/about/structure-and-governance/the-methodist-conference/conference-2025/presidency/president-and-vice-president-2025-26/the-presidents-address-to-the-conference-2025/

I offer you Richard's words as encouragement and the prayer I included in the Summer newsletter as our prayer for the year. I have amended it by the addition of the word 'joy' as a reminder of the joy that the early church found in the chaos of death and resurrection as it worked out God's plan.

Gracious God,
we, your pilgrim people
often come to the changing seasons of life
with trepidation and fear.
Help us to hear clearly your guiding voice,
calling us from the old and familiar
to the strange and new.
May we do this in the confidence and joy
of knowing that we are going to a place where you already are.
And when we tire and falter,
give us the resilience and strength to journey on.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Every blessing to you all,

John Hayward, Superintendent Minister

Pictures and Perceptions

Dear All,

As we anticipate our move from York, I want to take this opportunity to reiterate the thanks I expressed at the Circuit Farewell Service and to thank you also for the kind gift from the circuit. Fiona and I very much value the time we have spent among you all. Here, in written form, is the reflection I offered at the Farewell Service – an attempt to make some sense of where I am as we head up to Scotland.

This, then, is an invitation to come with me on a morning run. It is deliberately metaphorical and literal. It contains both pictures and perceptions. Why? Because that is part of who I am and how I connect with the world. If you get lost on the way, that's fine. Just take a moment to think about what it was that set you free to roam.

Not knowing. It all begins with not knowing. As the amble turns into a trot, and then the stride lengthens and the pace quickens I wait for the answer to the question: What is it going to feel like this morning? Will my body greet this movement with lethargy or buoyancy? There is no way of knowing in advance what the connection will be. Sometimes it is tough – a struggle and a slog. Sometimes there is no energy until the running begins and carries me forward.

Today is a good day. The rhythm of step after step, stride after stride, It all sets my mind free to roam – to recall, to question, to imagine, to make sense of this encounter and that, to value the gift of discovery, to go beyond, beyond, beyond. Always beyond!

I stumble, but just manage to stop myself falling – this time. (I have the scars!) And my roaming ceases momentarily to notice the cracks in the pavement, the uneven places which can trip and stall and distort the rhythm, which cry out “Pay attention. Don’t lose focus.”

There are moments for distraction, for the pulling away into the places beyond and the places deep down within – where stories are told and understanding is grasped, where truths surface in the conversations that go to the heart of the matter, where our sense of self-importance is interrupted and we are challenged to take ourselves less seriously, where compassion sets us free to be ourselves. But the distraction is also a refocusing - the seeing that elicits clarity and the intense looking that tells us who we are and where we are.

It’s time to look up again. There it is. The early morning light catching the Minster’s east façade, calling forth the beauty of glass and stone and the stories of history. And my mind veers off to those moments of wonder among the villages, the fields and the hedgerows beyond the city – the magnificence of the dandelions, the rhythm of milking and the bleating of sheep and the frustrations of waterlogging and the anxiety of drought. And from the plains of the vale I lift my eyes - to the Cairngorms!

Onwards to the city walls, to Bootham Bar and the extraordinary image of arrow slits directed both outwards to the enemy beyond and inwards to the city within. Why would you want to inflict damage on your own? A 19th century reconstruction, perhaps, but we do, don’t we. There is such overwhelming beauty in human being, such richness in human encounter, such potential in human enterprise. And yet my perennial frustration arises from deep within. Pharaoh, Caesar and the rest of them. Why do we let tyrants be tyrants?

I turn for home. The fatigue is beginning to set in now. I check how many miles I’ve done. 4.6. I could always stop now and walk the rest of the way. I could always justify it to myself with “I did the best part of 5 miles, or even the best part of 9”. But I can’t. I simply can’t. Perhaps it’s the way my childhood shaped me. Perhaps it’s those words of that famous university chancellor which ring loud and true for me time and time again. “Hold on. Hang on in there. Tenacity is the key.”

I complete the 5 miles, with all its ponderings and interruptions, with all its ideas and perceptions of reality, all its new perspectives and angles of approach – all the sorting out. And the moment of tenacity turns into the moment of letting go. In the end all holding on arrives at a moment of letting go. But the letting go is also in a sense a holding on, a tenacious opening up to the vulnerability of what is to come.

So, thank you. Thank you to all of you and to many more besides – for all the holding on and all the letting go, whatever that has meant for you.

What next – for you, for me, for us? We’ll see. I guess a lot more holding on and a lot more letting go. Put differently: “Expect the Unexpected”

With my very best wishes to you all.

David Bidnell.

Eco Task Force Newsletter Autumn 2025

The end of a Methodist Year before the start of another is always a good time to take stock. The Eco Task force started informally a few years ago and has become a regular fixture in our Circuit's life. We want to engage and encourage individuals and Churches on their Eco church journey but recognise that we are all busy with other eco activities or with simply keeping the show on the road within our churches. There are also many other 'Eco' events happening which we don't necessarily want to compete with. At the same time, there is great value in meeting with like-minded folk and encouraging each other and to share ideas. So there will be fewer official meet ups, but with lots of opportunities to meet outside of those times in other events and meetings.



At the March Church Council I talked about a Pathway to Net Zero. If the District are focused on getting to Net Zero by 2040, what is it we need to be doing now to make sure we will reach that as a Circuit..? Our meetings will be orientated towards that goal; through looking at our buildings, our teaching and learning, our community actions and global engagement, as well as our lifestyle and culture. How can living well within Gods creation simply become 'just what we do' and as natural as breathing?

The Circuit takes its responsibility to the climate and nature crisis seriously. As such, they have given me a few hours per week to work on the Pathway to Net Zero, with support from many people. And all of you too; it's something we have to do together. My role is in making that as easy as possible for everyone. Signposting, encouraging and co-ordinating. So watch this space for dates of meetings and activities that will be coming up!

Bless to us the ground that is beneath us. Bless to us the sky that is above us. Bless to us the friends that are around us. And bless to us the love of the three, deep within us and encircling us. Amen.

Lorraine Jones, Eco Task Force.

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Resources for Climate and Nature Services

Season of Creation begins on the 1st September and ends on 4th October, the feast day of St Francis of Assisi. You can find resources here: <https://seasonofcreation.org/>



Online Methodist Connexion Eco Community Dates:

I have found these super helpful – an excellent mix of being informative and encouraging. 17th September, 21st January, 22nd April, 8th July - you will need to register for each of these dates. <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/methodist-church-eco-community-network-tickets-1113977198789?aff=oddtcreator>

What's been happening around the Circuit?

Poppleton have set up a clothing swap for under 5s as part of their Eco Church Journey. Tagging on to their Stay and Play sessions, parents are given a token for each good quality item they bring in. They can spend that token on a different item. Great idea Poppleton! Simple to do and ticks their Eco box as well as tackling the cost of living crisis.

Poppleton Parish Council have also set up a Biodiversity Group. Marian and John from Poppleton have joined in with that. A great lesson in partnering with others, instead of not having to run everything ourselves. There will be information and events from the group that can be shared with the Methodist Church congregation, ticking their Eco Church box too. Win-win.

Huntington produced a simple handout for their congregation as part of their recent Eco Church Service. Let me know if you would like a copy for ideas, I'm sure they would be happy to share it!

Podcast to listen to: *Solving for climate*

Data Scientist Dr Hannah Ritchie and sustainability nerd Rob Stewart are climate optimists. They join forces to unpack solutions to the climate crisis, and the innovators, entrepreneurs and scientists behind them.

Books to check out: *Not the end of the world* by Dr Hannah Ritchie

Surprising facts, dangerous myths and hopeful solutions for our future and our planet. *Good Nature; improve your health and happiness with nature – one simple step at a time.* Prof Kathy Willis

This is the science behind what we already know – that nature is good for us. This book helps to understand exactly how. Nature uses the exact same neural pathways that artificial drugs do. The benefits are very real – from promoting healing and recovery to the anti-cancer benefits. This research provides the hard facts needed to encourage policy makers and funding providers to invest in nature-based health solutions.

Forest Church Training

Quite a few of the Eco Church team were to be found at the Forest Church Training held at Haxby & Wigginton Methodist Church and the local Community Garden on July 5th. We were joined by many friends from around the District as well as friends old and new from the Diocese. We had such a beautiful day—learnt all about what Forest Church is (and isn't!), went outside for devotions and listened to nature, had a lunch, and did some 'session planning' in the community garden. Those who wanted to could finish up the day at Chaloner Pond for a swim or to just soak up the atmosphere. Bliss!



So what is it?!

It's an opportunity for people to explore their own faith, or spirituality, or notion of God, outdoors, away from the rules and regulations of traditional church. There isn't somebody 'leading' worship, it's 'guidance' or 'facilitating' the space. With a few simple prompts for reflection, it is a person-led experience. It's roots are loosely Celtic, when the Christian faith was tightly bound to the landscape. It's ok to align with less familiar saints, festivals and stories or traditions. The beautiful thing is that it can be suitable for those with faith and those with none, so a wonderful opportunity to build relationships with those who are 'pre-Christian' or experience spirituality in a different way.

What it isn't.

It's not simply a church service held outside. There isn't a leader telling people what to think, but instead it allows the spirit to move. It's certainly not 'un-Christian' or pagan, or as our trainer said 'a bit woo-woo'.

It might not be for everyone, and that's ok. We all meet with God in different ways. I can tell you, though, that I am pretty sure that everyone there had a beautiful moment and sensed God in nature. Ever had a 'wow' moment seeing a mountain or a beautiful landscape or a butterfly..? Then maybe you would appreciate Forest Church.

Try Tree Listening!

Ok, so this really blew my mind. One of the Forest Church Attendees was encouraged to go and 'listen' to a tree. Off she went, sceptically she admitted, (and feeling a bit of a banana no doubt). At first, nothing happened and she started to feel even more eye rolling coming on. Then it happened; she heard the water moving—like a rushing noise and even a sudden click. She seemed very impressed and said it was really quite loud.

So, I decided to give it a go myself the next day. And you do have to be patient, but suddenly you do hear it! Apparently, it's the water moving through the trees vascular system. The 'popping' is the water passing through the xylem, the trees water-conducting system. You may also hear the general rumbling sounds of the trees overall movement. The experience was both joyful and humbling. It felt such a privilege. It got me to wondering- how have we simply lost this knowledge? How did I get to the age of 52 without knowing you could hear trees?! I hope you are all going to try this now...





Some of you may remember me talking about the Zero Hour campaign back in the Autumn; it's a cross party campaign, called the Climate and Nature Bill and brought to Parliament in January by Roz Savage MP. It's also supported by MP Rachael Maskell and Mayor David Skaith. We are also supporting it as a Circuit. The action that was requested by the Zero Hour team was for us to sign an open letter to the PM – one of 650 (one from each constituency) – calling for action from the Government. Maybe you were one of the signatories? Well, they heard the message and the Energy Secretary Ed Miliband (with the Environment Secretary Steve Reed) delivered the first of an annual Climate and Nature Statement in Parliament. It talks about clean energy generation, nature restoration, bringing down bills and creating jobs, flood defence and adaptation to climate change.

The secretaries of state agreed with the sponsors of the Bill to:

- Deliver an annual statement on the State of Climate and Nature.
- Nature Recovery – by the end of the year the government will introduce a Bill to enable ratification of the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction Agreement. This is about international nature protection, but all combined authorities are to lead *local* nature recovery strategies.
- Consumption emissions and carbon leakage – this is about encouraging a circular economy and reducing waste and emissions. They are also launching a 'Production and Consumption Transformation Centre' between the universities of Leeds, Lancaster and Sussex.
- Public engagement and participation – there will be a net zero public participation strategy published later in the year which will lay out objectives for dealing with the public.
- Improved join-up between the Nature Conservation Committee and the Climate Change Commission – in recognition that this is a joint crisis.

The Zero Hour Team are pleased with the results so far but are keen to take further action so it doesn't just become all 'Words and Statements'.

You can go to the Zero Hour YouTube Channel to find the full statement by Ed Miliband MP I loved these words Roz Savage MP, in response to the first Climate and Nature Statement "Despair is not a strategy and action is not optional."

News from the Children, Youth & Families team

Summer is a time of change for young people and their families. The youngest may be moving from nursery into school, whilst older children may be moving to secondary school. In the older group, there will be exams and choices that will impact their future, such as which A levels to take, or university to attend, not to mention the stress of results!

This year we are also seeing lots of changes in the circuit children, youth and family team. Lorraine and Victoria will be fulltime in the circuit from September. Lorraine will be focussing on children and families alongside the eco church work she has been doing over the last few years. Victoria will become university and young adult chaplain, working primarily with students and young adults, but still doing some work with the One X age group. Amy will be part time until Easter, from when she will also have a fulltime role, working with secondary age young people.

Change is both exciting and terrifying all at once! We will be thinking about and praying for our families, children and young people during this unsettled period of life and would be grateful for your prayers as we move into our new roles.

Contact the team

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Enough of the future! Here is what the team have been up to over the last few months.

SYNOD

The young people joined in with the District Synod again this year. First of all they went off to 'Agility' which is just opposite Manor School where the Synod was held. They had a grand time on the obstacle course and then had some games on the grass outside Manor school. It's great for them to hook up like this, because then so many of them knew each other already at the residential in July.



UNIFORM BANK

Haxby and Wigginton Methodist have just had their 5th Uniform Bank. It was a great success and managed to raise over £250 for Refugee Action York, who also have some of their leftover uniform. Why not have a think about running one in your own church, or in partnership with your school? Lorraine has lots of the necessary equipment – mainly hanging rails and coat hangers! It's a well-oiled machine now we have done it for 5 years, so she would go through the organising with you, including posters and social media posts. It has been very well received in our community and the families appreciate what we are trying to do. We save people a few pennies as well as ticking our Eco Church boxes! We're also getting more people involved from the local community, which is what we want – doing these things 'with' people not 'for' them. It's a great way to build up relationships too.



YORK PRIDE

The team were at Southlands Methodist again this year, showing our support for the Pride March. As always, it was a lovely, celebratory atmosphere and we handed out over 1500 crocheted rainbows, each with a message saying 'you are loved'. They were so well received.



FOREST CHURCH TRAINING

The team had a brilliant day joining in with the Forest Church training. (see the longer article for more details). Some of our schools have Forest School and are very interested in nature based education. Given that many of our young people are concerned about the Climate and Nature emergency and are becoming increasingly anxious about it (as well as many other anxieties), we were interested in this as a gentle way of encouraging young people and families to explore spirituality and connect with God through nature. Forest Church is something the team will be exploring as a way of connecting to those who, as yet,

have no faith but are nonetheless curious. At the same time, Forest Church promotes good mental health. Do talk to Lorraine if you want to explore this further.

VENTURE YOUTH RESIDENTIAL

We were at the Venture District Youth Weekend at Carlton Lodge near Thirsk on that very hot weekend in July. We didn't have a group ourselves so were able to sit and chat with the young people and help in the general smooth running of the weekend. The young people were absolute stars and got stuck into canoeing, climbing high ropes and trees, did craft and played board games. They made new friends and there were even one or two budding romances! We had to be the sensible ones, reminding everyone to stay hydrated and to get their suncream on!



JOINED UP CONFERENCE

If you are involved in children, youth or schools work in any way, you will get a lot out of the Joined Up conference on Saturday 18th October Haxby and Wigginton Methodist Church. Come along to be resourced, inspired and refreshed with lots of workshops and a keynote speaker. Lorraine will be hosting a workshop entitled: Children's work and Eco church: a 'joined up' response to the Climate and Nature Emergency.

Circuit Council Report June 2025

- Clifton Methodist Church requested and received permission to cease worship after April 2026, due to lack of people able to help in sustaining work there.
- The following were appointed as circuit stewards for the next year: Ann Smallwood, Sally Gall, Sue Gill, Janet Bowling, Nick Dawson, Gail Lazenby. Nick Dawson will continue as Circuit Treasurer for the present. Vic Paylor was thanked for his work as property circuit steward over the last few years.
- It was noted that looking ahead to stationing, Rev Rory Dalgliesh will be leaving the Circuit in August 2026, and discussions will take place about future staffing.

- Kiera Snaith will be stepping back from her role as Project Manager at Carecent, and permission was given for a new person to be employed to lead on the work there.
- Changes to the Children's, Youth and Families team: Victoria Etherington is leaving her District role to work for the circuit, partly continuing to work with young people but also taking on the role of University and Young Adults Chaplain, working with York's Universities and other young adults. This will be partly funded by the District (as the university chaplaincy has traditionally been). Lorraine Jones will be working full time for the Circuit mainly in the northern area as well as focusing on EcoChurch, and Amy Shephard will increase her ours to focus on working in the south and west area of the circuit.
- It was noted that we still need a new leader for the Circuit Safeguarding Team.

Property update

- The original buyer for Stamford Bridge Methodist Church unfortunately decided to drop out. We have had another offer which is being considered.
- We finally received planning permission for Stillington at the end of July and the property is now going on the market.
- Legal work is taking place to resolve outstanding issues regarding the boundary at the former Dunnington church building before this can go on the market.

Circuit prayer rota

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| 7th Sept | This Sunday marks the start of the new Methodist year. As we gather to welcome our new ministers- Jill, Kate and Alex- we pray for them and the churches they will be working with that good working relationships may quickly be formed along with ways to show God's love in those communities. |
| 14th Sept | The church on the Circuit prayer rota for this Sunday is Lidgett. Give thanks and pray for the work of God in that place. This Sunday is Education Sunday. Pray for those who work in education that they may be strengthened and encouraged as they work with students of all ages. |
| 21st Sept | The church on the Circuit prayer rota for this Sunday is Poppleton. Give thanks and pray for the work of God in that place. This Sunday is Peace Sunday. Think of places where there is war and unrest around the world, and pray for those in positions of leadership that they may be open to making peace. |
| 28th Sept | The church on the Circuit prayer rota for this Sunday is Sheriff Hutton. Give thanks and pray for the work of God in that place. Pray for churches in rural areas as they respond to the particular needs of the community around them, such as a lack of public transport or reliable internet access. Pray for them to be able to respond to show God's love to their communities. |
| 5th Oct | The church on the Circuit prayer rota for this Sunday is Southlands. Give thanks and pray for the work of God in that place. |

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| | Pray for churches in urban areas as they respond to the particular needs of the community around them, such as homelessness or high levels of foodbank use. Pray for them to be able to respond to show God's love to their communities. |
| 12th Oct | The church on the Circuit prayer rota for this Sunday is Strensall. Give thanks and pray for the work of God in that place. This Sunday is Homeless Sunday. Pray for those who have no settled home, and for those who work with them. Consider whether you could support Carecent, the York Circuit's breakfast centre, either as a volunteer or with a financial gift; or another charity working with people who are homeless. |
| 19th Oct | The church on the Circuit prayer rota for this Sunday is Villages Together. Give thanks and pray for the work of God in that place. This Sunday is Freedom Sunday, coming at the end of Prisons week. Pray for all those involved in the criminal justice system, that justice will indeed be done, that those who need to be protected will be safe, and that prisons will be safe for those confined or who work there. |
| 26th Oct | The church on the Circuit prayer rota for this Sunday is West Thorpe. Give thanks and pray for the work of God in that place. This Sunday is often marked as Bible Sunday. How often do you read the Bible? Do you find it easy or hard to understand? Pray for a deeper understanding and wisdom about how to apply what you read. |
| 2nd Nov | The church on the Circuit prayer rota for this Sunday is Thornton-le-Clay. Give thanks and pray for the work of God in that place. As we approach the colder months, pray for those who struggle to heat their homes, or have to choose between adequate heat and food or rent bills. Does your church run a warm space, free coffee morning or other events that you could advertise to those in need? |
| 9th Nov | This week we pray for the folk at Rufforth, where the Methodist church closed in August 2025. Pray for the people there who are continuing to meet together for worship and fellowship in other buildings and with other congregations. This Sunday is Remembrance Sunday. Pray for those in our armed forces, and for those in political and military leadership who make decisions about how they are deployed. Pray for all victims of war and that peace and justice may prevail. |
| 16th Nov | This week we pray for the folk at Stillingfleet, where the Methodist church closed a few years ago. Pray for the people there who are continuing to meet together for worship and fellowship in each others' homes. This Sunday marks the end of Interfaith week. How much do you know about other faiths? Maybe try to find out something about another faith, and see what we have in common, then pray for peace between those of different faiths and an end to faith-based persecution around the world. |
| 23rd Nov | This week we pray for the folk at New Earswick, where the Methodist church closed a few years ago. Pray for the people there who are continuing to meet together for worship and fellowship in community buildings. As we approach Advent, we think about the coming of God into the world, not as a powerful ruler but as a helpless child. How do you find that God sometimes subverts your expectations? |
| 30th Nov | This Sunday is Advent Sunday. As we enter the season of Advent how could you remind yourself to focus on Christ amid the business of Christmas? How can we remind ourselves of the true joy of Christ's coming? |

Reflections

Based on the resource: *God Welcomes All* (available to download here: <https://www.methodist.org.uk/safeguarding/the-theology-of-safeguarding>)

All are Welcome

“Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Occasions for stumbling are bound to come, but woe to anyone by whom they come! It would be better for you if a millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea than for you to cause one of these little ones to stumble.’” Luke 17 v1-2

Jesus (probably exaggerating to make his words more memorable!) reminds his followers that we should be careful to help others, not to hinder them. How do we make sure our churches are welcoming?

Not everyone will appreciate a hug or even a handshake- do we ask before we touch? Do we feel offended if people reject a hug? What boundaries or policies do we have in place to make sure people know they are safe and we are trustworthy? For example, displaying our safeguarding policies and details to contact if anyone has concerns.



Language, listening and hearing

“O Lord, you have searched me and known me.”
Psalm 139 v1

How does it feel to be completely known and understood by God?

Reflect on the language we use and the signal it might send- for example, if someone has been abused by a parent they may struggle with calling God ‘Father.’

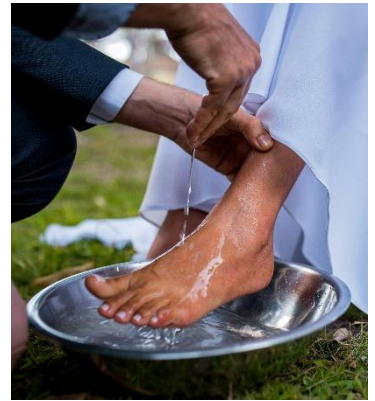
How do we listen to others? Do we really hear and take in what people are saying, or are we already thinking about how we’re going to respond? Do we take on board others’ feelings? Do we seem so busy that people struggle to talk to us, or we fail to hear what is behind the words people are saying? How can you make time to listen more?



Power

“Here is my servant, whom I uphold, [...] he will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not grow faint or be crushed until he has established justice in the earth.” Isaiah 42 v1-4

Where do you have power, and how do you use it? It might be as simple as where you choose to spend your money- which shops you use, what you buy, what charities you choose to give to. It might be who you choose to talk to or ignore, what information you hear or pass on.



If you have a role at church- particular those who lead worship or teach people about God, but others too- you have some power over others (even if it's only the power to give them the biggest slice of cake!) How can you use it wisely to help others?

Unfortunately there are plenty of examples of misuse of power in the church. When you interact with others, make an effort to recognise who has power in that particular situation, and what the consequences might be if it was misused. Jesus shared power with others and acted as a servant- how might we do the same?

Symbols and liturgy in worship



“My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,

He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.” Luke 1 v46-55

The Gospels tell us that God cares deeply for those the world sees as of low worth- children, the poor, the hurting. Do our churches put less-privileged people first?

This might mean recognising that special events like Mothering Sunday can be hard for those who have recently lost parents, or who are unable to become parents, and making sure we give warning when these topics will be covered and not blaming people for avoiding them, or giving extra support. It might mean using a variety of different versions of the liturgy so that people can find a way of relating to God that suits them.

What in your regular worship might be difficult for someone who has experienced abuse? What changes might you suggest to help others feel able to be involved in worship?

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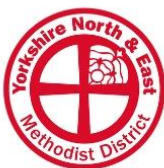
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