



Beeston **Methodist** Church

Newsletter

LET

JUSTICE

ROLL

Easter Offering 2024

JUSTICE

March 2024



Let justice roll

Welcome to a new church newsletter. This year's early Easter occurs at the end of March, so this issue features the Methodist Church's Easter Offering *Let Justice Roll* – see pages 15-17 for more about this theme which was chosen by Methodist Women in Britain.

The President and Vice-President of the Methodist Conference have recently issued a statement on the situation in Gaza – please read it on page 8-9. On pages 12-14 Rabbi Irwin Keller calls for us to show empathy, to be able to listen to people on the other side, that there might be reconciliation and a way forward in that situation.

Wishing you all blessings through Lent to Holy Week and Easter.

Mark Ramsey – Editor

Beeston Methodist Church Newsletter – March 2024

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Any articles for inclusion in the April 2024 issue should be emailed by 16th Mar to newsletter@beestonmethodist.church. Articles may be edited for space.

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Cover picture from Methodist church website

Minister's message

When you look at the calendar, it seems that every day has something special attached to it. March is no exception. When you look down the list there is a whole range of different things which are marked on each day. Some of them will be familiar to us but others will be a little more obscure. There are a number of other days which relate to charities, the environment, culture and literature. Some of them we might wish to mark and others will pass by unnoticed.

The 14th March for example is Pi Day. It unfortunately only works if you use the American way of recording the date. I'm not sure how you would mark this day, maybe by walking round in circles?

At the other end of the month is Wear a Hat Day. On the surface, this might sound a little odd but it makes a bit more sense if I say that it is to remember those who have been affected by brain tumours and it is a fundraiser for Brain Tumour Trust. It doesn't sound much to do, wear a hat and give some money to charity and we might consider doing it because it is easy and for a good cause.

March also features several dates with religious significance. We have St David's and St Patrick's Days, the World Day of Prayer as well as Holy Week and Easter Sunday. How do we mark these days? I have come across people who don't come to anything in Holy Week and so go straight from the high of Palm Sunday to the events of Easter Sunday. It can be easy to just do the things and mark the events that are easy and to miss out those which are challenging but the events of Holy Week are part of the story. Just think, if it wasn't for Judas' betrayal, there wouldn't have been a crucifixion and without Jesus' death on the cross, there couldn't have been a resurrection so we need to mark Maundy Thursday and Good Friday as well as Easter Sunday because without them Jesus could not have fulfilled the work he had to.

So as we move through March let us remember the changing seasons as Spring begins, remember our mothers and the role of the church in our faith journey, remember the Earth and all that lives upon it as well as our role in caring for creation. Help us also to remember what Jesus did for us that first Holy Week and Easter Sunday.

God bless, *Andrew*

Lent: *Time for new beginnings*

Something to read

“Forty days and forty nights you were fasting in the wild;
forty days and forty nights tempted and yet undefiled.

“Saviour, may we hear your voice; keep us constant at your side;
and with you we shall rejoice at the eternal Eastertide.”

Singing the Faith 236 v1&6

Something to think about

In our country Spring is the time of the year when new growth and life appear after the long harsh months of winter. It is a time of hope, aspiration and expectation, and a promise of new life for all. Lent is also a time of new beginnings so for us they seem to go hand in hand.

New beginnings can start with repentance. This may be an active, positive attitude that can effect real and deep changes or recognize wrong which can be put right, or maybe just to decide we will live differently.

Ash Wednesday was the first day of Lent which lasts for forty days (not including Sundays) and will take us to Easter Sunday. These commemorate the forty days of fasting by Christ in the wilderness. So, Lent is an opportunity to reflect on our journey of faith. It can be a time of self-denial, almsgiving, prayer and fasting. It can also be a time of accepting that God’s goodness is greater than our badness and his forgiving love can set us free.

Something to pray

God of all majesty and power who spoke and the world was, who breathed and the world lived, who created us and gave us life, who sees our hearts and reads our thoughts, you are more gracious than we can imagine, more holy that we will ever grasp, and your presence humbles us.

As we contemplate the wonder and perfection of your being, we call to mind our imperfections and our weaknesses, our faults and our failings.

We let you down in so many ways, and we go on making the same mistakes.

Forgive us Lord, for the unkind words we have said, the thoughtless actions we have done, and the unworthy thoughts that deny our faith.

Open our hearts to your redeeming touch, and forgive us, cleanse us, renew and restore us, and help us to live in such a way that our words and actions are seen as one, and our faith is seen as real.

Amen

(Kathryn Newton)

Liz Chick, Methodist Women in Britain Area. Taken from www.mwib.org.uk/index.php/2024/02/17/prayer-for-the-week-17th-february-2024

Second anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine

Saturday 24 February was the second anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

To mark this, the below prayer has been written by a Ukrainian family who are being hosted by the Black Country Methodist Circuit.

Lord God of power,

You alone work miracles, so be kind to all and hear us.

Help us God, our Saviour, and deliver the people of Ukraine from persecution.

Come to our aid and destroy the intentions and unrighteous boldness of those who go to war against our people.

Calm those who oppose your commandments.

Grant us all peace, salvation and joy in our hearts.

For you are protection and salvation for those who trust in you.

We give you glory, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and forever.

Amen

Taken from www.methodist.org.uk/our-faith/prayer/second-anniversary-of-russia-s-invasion-of-ukraine

Update from the Redevelopment Group

The Spire

The internal work on the spire has now recommenced and is expected to be completed by the end of February. There are some bright shiny new beams across the base of the spire internally with more to be fitted higher up. In addition, the windows in the spire are being repaired.

Heating in the church

Unfortunately, we have found that a new underfloor heating system in the church would not be powerful enough. It would only provide about 20% of the heat needed and be expensive to install. We have decided to proceed with fan-assisted radiators instead.

Lighting

We have chosen LED floodlights for the church, similar to the current ones but more modern. We are exploring the additional cost of making them dimmable. The current light levels in church are significantly lower than recommended – will not come as a surprise to most of you – the new fittings will give a much brighter light.

Floor finishes

We have also made some decisions on the types of flooring for the redeveloped areas. In the Sanctuary we have chosen carpet tiles that will also be used in the new store off the vestibule (currently the 'family room'), the dais, and staging and continue through into the current coffee bar area. The vestibule and the new entrance to the coffee bar will have wood patterned vinyl covering.

Services in the hall

The transition team have done a dummy run to understand what will need to be done when preparing the hall for services each Sunday during the building work. They estimate it will take 4-6 people each week to help put out the chairs,

staging etc. Do get in touch if you think you may be able to help with this – Steve Ames or any member of the Transition or Redevelopment Groups will be happy to explain more about what will be involved. Fortunately, the Korean church has asked if we can leave everything in place for them to use for their service in the afternoon and will then clear away afterwards.

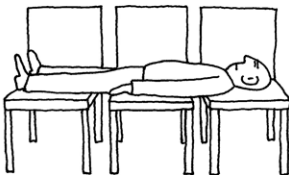
Next steps

The decisions we have made this month mean that the architects are still planning to get the tender drawn up by the end of March. At that point we will have a clearer idea of what we are able to afford.

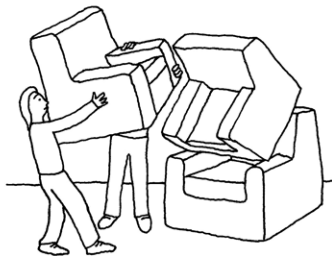
Chris Bridges and Connie Pullan, on behalf of the Redevelopment Group

CHURCH CHAIRS

QUESTIONS TO ASK WHEN CHOOSING NEW ONES



ARE THEY COMFORTABLE?



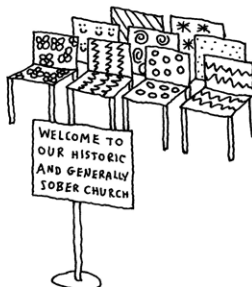
CAN THEY BE STACKED?



DO THEY SHOW THE DIRT?



CAN YOU HANG A KNEELER ON THEM?



DO THEY LOOK APPROPRIATE?



WILL THE CONGREGATION LIKE THEM?

This CartoonChurch.com cartoon by Dave Walker originally appeared in the Church Times

Statement on the situation in Gaza



The President and Vice-President

We are deeply disappointed that the headlines today are about a parliamentary process and not the horrors of what is happening in Gaza. Such a vote should be above party politics and we urge the UK government to denounce actions that epitomise a collective punishment of the population of Gaza.

The scale of the destruction and tragic loss of life in so short a space of time is incomparable to any other conflict in recent times. We grieve for all lives lost on 7 October and in the subsequent fighting. There is no justification for such widespread killing of tens of thousands of innocent people and we are gravely concerned for the entire population of the Gaza Strip.

One and a half million people currently shelter in crowded conditions with little food and water in the city of Rafah. The horrific strikes on southern Gaza have killed many in recent days and those injured are unable to get treatment because of Israel's attacks on hospitals.

We were alarmed to hear that the Nasser Hospital in Gaza has been shelled, killing patients, staff and others sheltering there. The protection of hospitals during a war is a basic and inescapable requirement in international law.

The International Court of Justice has called on Israel to ensure that its forces do not commit any of the acts covered by the Genocide Convention. Yet attacks on Gaza have continued with inadequate regard to the protection of civilians. For those crowded into Rafah there is nowhere left to go. It is disturbing to hear that some in the Israeli government are discussing the possibility of creating settlements across the Gaza Strip. Time will tell whether what we witness in Gaza today is an ethnic cleansing of the present population.

Meanwhile, for those sheltering without food and water the situation is critical. To meet the basic human needs of such a large population there is no alternative to an immediate ceasefire. We urge our Government to demand an immediate halt to the shelling for the preservation of innocent life and require that Israel abide by the provisional ruling of the International Court of Justice.

We call on Hamas to immediately release the remaining hostages and urge all governments to work with Israeli and Palestinian parties to achieve an agreement that ensures protection, support and a viable future for innocent victims of this conflict and security for all in the region.

In prayer we stand alongside all those in the region whose heart breaks with ours as we witness the unfathomable suffering. With the psalmist we pray:

*You are my help and my deliverer;
you are my God, do not delay. (Psalm 40:17)*

22 February 2024. Taken from www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/news/latest-news/all-news/a-statement-from-the-president-and-vice-president-on-the-situation-in-gaza

The Methodist Church in Britain has launched an appeal to support partners of the Methodist Liaison Office who are working in Gaza. Find out more and donate at www.methodist.org.uk/our-faith/prayer/israel-palestine/gaza-appeal

Suffer the little children...

A child who lives with criticism learns to condemn.

A child who lives with hostility learns to fight.

A child who lives with ridicule learns to be shy.

A child who lives with shame learns to feel guilty.

but

A child who lives with tolerance learns to be patient.

A child who lives with encouragement learns to have confidence.

A child who lives with praise learns to appreciate.

A child who lives with fairness learns to show justice.

A child who lives with security learns to have faith.

A child who lives with approval learns to like himself.

A child who lives with acceptance and friendship learns to find love in the world.

Found in Winsley Methodist Church Newsletter

Rwanda, We the People... disagree



With growing frustration at the Prime Minister referring to plans to remove asylum seekers to Rwanda as being “The Will of the People”; Hurst Methodist Church in Kingsley, Cheshire has decided to challenge the government’s rhetoric.

Hurst Methodist has been raising money to help the migrants being supported at the nearby Halton Trinity Chapel in Runcorn. “Some of us felt a deep sense of unease about the policy towards refugees. We were also concerned by the phrase used by the Prime Minister that they were pursuing *The Will of the People*,” says John Leach, Treasurer at Hurst Methodist. “Following discussions with others, it turns out that there were many who shared the view that the way migrants are discussed is unchristian and uncharitable.

“We put a proposal forward to our church council that we should write to the Prime Minister expressing our concerns about the policy and the language, and everyone supported it. Everybody.” continued John.

“The letter went through a couple of drafts before we sent it off to the Prime Minister, copying in Mike Amesbury, the MP for Weaver Vale, Tom Pursglove MP, Minister for Legal Immigration, and Michael Tomlinson MP, Minister for Illegal Immigration.”

The text of the letter -

We “The People” who are members of the Hurst Methodist Church, Kingsley, Cheshire object to your assertion that in enacting the ‘Rwanda Bill’ you are pursuing “The will of the people”. In respect of ourselves it is untrue. Today at our Church Council we have adopted, unanimously, the following memorandum of which we trust you will take note.

“We, members of the Hurst Methodist Church in Kingsley, Cheshire are dismayed that the many and frequent statements from our Christian leaders demanding a change of direction in respect of immigration policy have been ignored.

It is our opinion that current policies are callous and cruel. They betray all Christian principles that form our country's traditional values and of which we have been justly proud.

In a world of war and climate change it is necessary to cooperate internationally to find solutions that are compassionate and just. Disregarding human rights and denying agreed international conventions that we have signed up to, disgraces this government and shames us, in whose name they act."

The Church Council

Hurst Methodist Church, Kingsley, Cheshire

"I very much hope other churches consider a similar letter if they too feel moved by the way our politicians talk about migrants," continues John. "It is time that 'The People' in our churches find a voice and express their opposition and support of what so many Christian leaders have already said."

When the Rwanda policy was announced, the President and Vice-President of the Methodist Conference commented that "People are not a problem to be dealt with, but are individuals with inherent value and dignity made in the image of God. Sending some of the most vulnerable people in the world thousands of miles away to be imprisoned does not respect this dignity."

The Methodist Church recently added its support to a statement calling on parliamentarians to reject the current Safety of Rwanda Bill, on the grounds that it threatens the universality of human rights and is likely in breach of international law.

As part of the Methodist Church's recent reaffirmation of its commitment to be a justice-seeking Church, seeking justice for refugees has been identified as one of five priorities for the Church. You can find resources on campaigning and contacting your MP on the website of the Joint Public Issues Team at www.jpit.uk.

12 February 2024. Taken from www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/news/latest-news/all-news/rwanda-we-the-people-disagree

Come-to-Pharaoh moment

Rabbi Irwin Keller

Usually I try to offer some words that are interesting and observational and lyrical. Today I might be less lyrical because I've been sitting with the war that's going on, which is not pretty. And while I do mean the war in Israel and Gaza, I'm also feeling something bubbling up about a kind of war we're experiencing here in our responses to the war there. The war here is being carried out not with guns, but words and demands and guilt and sometimes retribution.

For starters, we are all, I suspect, activated and traumatized by the events of October 7th in Israel and by the months of war in Gaza that have followed. We are activated for all sorts of honest and deep reasons. And I fear we are not always at our best when we are activated.

The trends I've been noticing started right away, in the first days of the war. People raced to their corners and took refuge there. Supporters of Israel over here and Supporters of Palestine over here. (And for clarity's sake, not all the Supporters of Israel are Jewish and many of the Supporters of Palestine are.)

People took to the corners they knew, the corners that matched their experiences and values. People demanded that their friends and families and institutions join them there. From those corners they turned east to witness. And I get the sense that what they saw didn't change a lot of minds. Instead, what they saw unfolding proved what they already believed. That Palestinians are terrorists. That Israel is a genocidal power. Beliefs about colonialism, about invisibility, about anti-semitism. Whatever beliefs and fears they – we – already had were now proven.

The sad part is that there is substantial truth in all of it.

And there is complete truth in none of it.

But back in those corners, Supporters of Israel and Supporters of Palestine tend only to see the truths that they already held. And to use the jargon of their own camp, which makes it near impossible to win over the hearts of people in another camp.

I have been waiting for months to hear conversations that go deeper. But nuance is not in season.

But I would like to see better of us. Of us here. I make no demands on the soul-searching of Israelis and Palestinians, either there or here. They are in the first throes of grief and in continuing peril. I cannot speak to their process of healing, certainly not until the bombs stop and the guns are silent.

But I can speak to who we are and want to be in this country, as Supporters of Israel and Supporters of Palestine. I would like to believe that we have hearts that care, or that are capable of caring. I would like to believe that all our hearts are capable of caring about what Israelis, particularly Israeli women, experienced on October 7th. I would like to believe that all our hearts are capable of caring about civilians, especially children, dying in inconceivable numbers in Gaza.

Our hearts are capable. So where is our empathy? Is empathy a value we hold only in peacetime? Where are the heartfelt words of sympathy that Supporters of Israel and Supporters of Palestine are exchanging with each other?

Empathy means listening to uncomfortable truths. Empathy means hearing how the Holocaust still lives in us, in our bones, in our reflexes, and how it was reactivated on October 7. Empathy means hearing how the Naqba was not an isolated catastrophe of 1948 for the Palestinian people, but how it is still happening – enduring and ferocious.

I think we can be capacious enough to hear and hold it all. It will break our hearts; and maybe that's why we don't want to do it. But our hearts are heavy anyway. If they shatter, maybe we can put them back together differently.

This week's Torah portion speaks to the question of empathy. It is the portion of the Book of Exodus that concludes the story of the plagues sent down on Egypt. It opens famously with these words of God to Moses: "Come to Pharaoh. Come to Pharaoh for I have made his heart heavy."

It is a strange phrase in Torah. "Come to Pharaoh." Because you would expect God, talking to Moses, to say, "Go to Pharaoh." But instead: "Come to Pharaoh." The words "come" and "go" are like the words "left" and "right." They are not absolutes. Their meaning is related to your perspective, your point of reference.

What is left for you is right for me. “Go to Pharaoh” reflects Moses’ perspective. “Come to Pharaoh” reflects Pharaoh’s.

There is something being asked of Moses here in his fierce advocacy for the Hebrew slaves. He is being asked to come an extra mile and consider Pharaoh’s experience. To empathize. To empathize with Pharaoh’s heart, not “hardened,” as we usually translate it, but “heavy.” Moses is asked to consider not only the oppressor’s unjust deeds, but also his heart and, perhaps by extension, whatever the terrible was that put his heart in that condition.

Empathy is hard. Blame is easy. Righteousness is easy. Empathy is hard. But we are in a “Come to Pharaoh” moment. If Moses can be asked to empathize with our biggest mythic villain, then we can make the small effort to hear each other, who are not, in fact, villains.

If we could empathize with each other, maybe it wouldn’t feel so much like we are Supporters of Israel or Supporters of Palestine. Maybe we’d all be supporters of peace and partnership. Maybe our city ceasefire resolutions would not be battlegrounds, but rather a chance for all caring people to come together and say, “For the sake of all our broken hearts and battered souls, let the fighting end.”

Let us model reconciliation and mutual care. Let us model how to re-humanize each other. If we can’t do this locally, and at the distance we have, what chance is there for it to happen in the land we all love?

I want this war to end. I do. I want a different future for Israel and for Palestine. I don’t know what it will be. But it starts with empathy. It starts with reconciliation. It starts with swallowing pride and letting go of resistance and coming to Pharaoh. And we might find, as we listen generously, that Pharaoh is not who we thought.

Rabbi Irwin Keller, 20 January 2024. Taken from www.irwinkeller.com/itzikswell/2024/1/20/come-to-pharaoh-moment

Easter Offering 2024

Let Justice Roll



“But let justice roll on like a river,
righteousness like a never-failing stream!”
(Amos 5:24, NIV)

Methodist Women in Britain, as a justice-seeking charity, has chosen the theme **Let Justice Roll** for this year’s Easter Offering Service.

This **Easter Offering 2024** service tells stories of people standing for justice, persisting in the face of setbacks and taking up the challenge anew as circumstances change. Some stories show how people now have hope because justice has ‘rolled’ into their lives.

Justice for people marginalised by disability

Across the world, people with disabilities are often treated unfairly and can find it hard to challenge the injustice they face. In some societies, disability is taboo: people who are disabled find themselves pushed to the edge of their communities, and even of their families. In Tanzania, Mariam and Pascal have been marginalised due to their disabilities, but the Methodist Church in Tanzania has given them support and help. As the Church brings change to the lives of people like them, justice ripples out for more people with disabilities across the wider community. People who were living on the edge, are now self-sufficient. They have a new sense of dignity. Attitudes change, people are accepted, opportunities created and community extended.

Working for justice in an unjust world – a story from Methodist history

Six farm labourers from Dorset who came together to protest against the third reduction in their wages in as many years. What they were doing was not at all illegal, but the angry landowners and magistrates found an obscure law about swearing oaths under which to prosecute them. They were sentenced to seven years transportation to Australia in March 1834. Over 800,000 people from all over the country signed petitions to Parliament to overturn this great injustice. The petition was successful and, after a number of delays, the ‘Tolpuddle

Martyrs' were eventually returned. Does it matter that several of the Martyrs were Methodist and two were Local Preachers?

Historians think so. The courts were taken aback at how well their leaders spoke: they had expected the case to be a

pushover, yet these mere agricultural labourers could read, write and command an audience at a time when there were no schools for the poor. Their oracy and literacy had been mastered in circuit preaching and their Methodist Sunday School. Their courageous example became a famous milestone for justice in Britain, on the road that rolled on to eventual electoral, educational and labour reform.



Working for justice in a moving picture – the fair trade story

Let justice roll... down to growers, producers and artisans in the Global South so that they may receive a fair price for the goods they produce. In 1979 Richard Adams founded Traidcraft, an organisation that prompted us to see producers more as partners and spoke out against the growing power of multinational corporations that look to their own profits rather than the welfare of their suppliers. Fair trade was embraced by faith communities and those of no faith, and the movement grew with the founding of the Fairtrade Foundation. A shared passion for justice drew people into campaigning as well as shopping for fair trade. The impact of the fair trade movement is seen in communities across the world. Where people achieve a just price for their products they are able to invest in better lives for themselves and their children. Sadly, the Traidcraft business became unviable and went into administration in January 2023. However, its legacy endures in the many businesses, large and small, that import goods on fair trade terms and who reach into all parts of the community. Never doubt that when we choose to buy a fair trade product as part of our weekly shopping, we create a drop that flows into the mighty stream of God's justice.

The battle for justice continues – a story from Colombia

Close to 2.5 million Venezuelans are living in Colombia, having fled due to their home country's political crisis and economic collapse. Jamiey, the National Coordinator for Migration for the Methodist Church in Colombia, works among Venezuelan migrant families in the coastal town of Santa Marta to help support the women and educate children. The children gather in a Chinese restaurant,

owned by a community leader, where they are taught by a Venezuelan teacher. The owner provides the furniture, storage, and also feeds the children. The women are also taught courses in technological and communication skills, as well as jewellery-making and beauty. Because of the intervention of the Colombian Methodist Church, migrant women and their children now have a hope for their future.

Prayer

Loving God,

We hold before you the people in the stories we have just heard. With hope, we reimagine this world as a better world where justice and love reign. We pray for a fairer world, a world where peace and justice abound.

Let justice roll, and may your kingdom come.

We pray for people who seek your will here on earth: those who strive for peace, campaign for justice, fight for the oppressed, the exploited, the under-privileged; those who seek to eliminate hunger and poverty.

Let justice roll, and may your kingdom come.

We pray for people who have experienced a miscarriage of justice: people who have been discriminated against unjustly, people who have been falsely accused, people who have been wrongfully imprisoned or unfairly punished.

Let justice roll, and may your kingdom come.

As we experience the results of climate change, we pray for people on whom it is having a devastating impact and for people who have been displaced. We give thanks for those people who have welcomed and offered hospitality, for those campaigning for climate justice.

Let justice roll, and may your kingdom come.

As a justice-seeking Church, give us wisdom, integrity and dedication so that we may recognise where there are injustices. Help us to act upon them, always seeking your guidance. Let justice roll, and may your kingdom come. **Amen.**

The full Easter Offering 2023 service and justice stories can be found at www.methodist.org.uk/our-faith/worship/lent-and-easter/easter-offering

Praying for the Earth



8: Do Not Romanticise Reality

Father of Creation,
God of Compassion,
Help us not to romanticise reality,
But look it straight in the eye,
So that we may behold the climate chaos that many now endure
And many more will endure.

Father of Creation,
God of Compassion,
Help us not to retreat into denialism,
Living in our panelled houses
Whilst the temple of your world is in ruins.

Help us to see that
Climate breakdown acts as a threat multiplier.

As Conflicts Increase, food supplies fail,
Climate grief increases, locusts swarm,
Icebergs melt, seas acidify,
Extinctions multiply, children go hungry,
Floods and Fires wreck the land and
Humanity faces an existential threat.

This is not the way it was meant to be,
Lord have mercy.

Father of Creation,
God of Compassion,
Let us not look away
But help us to lament
And grieve
And know that the kingdom of your Son is Calling.

Father of Creation,
God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
Help us not to romanticise reality
But to look it in the eye,
That we would be those committed
To justice and peace.

Father of Creation,
God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
Help us, like your Son,
To speak truth to those corrupted by power.
Help us, like your Son,
To stand up for the oppressed.

Father of Creation,
God of Compassion,
Help us not to romanticise reality.
We ask that, as our hearts break,
We may rest in your extravagant love
And Holy embrace.
We thank you that whatever befalls
We can bathe in your kindness
And receive your healing.

Father of Creation,
God of Compassion,
Help us not to romanticise reality.
But let us also know that hope is on the way,
For your son will transform reality.
There is not a hurt he will not heal.

Maranatha, Come, Lord Jesus!

Amen

Rev Jon Swales, April 2021. Taken from <https://atyourservice.arochoa.org/en/26-prayers-for-the-climate-and-ecological-emergency> Creative Commons License

Same-sex marriage, a pilgrimage of faith



Rev Jason McMahon-Riley reflects on the journey of the Church and himself regarding same-sex marriage.

The Methodist Church has been on a journey over the last three decades. The dawn of Same-Sex marriage within the Methodist Church was a decision that was reached after a ‘pilgrimage of faith’ over many years of consultations, conversations, and Conferences stemming back to at least the resolutions of the Conference in 1993 which, amongst other things, declared that ...

Conference recognises, affirms and celebrates the participation and ministry of lesbians and gay men in the church. Conference calls on the Methodist people to begin a pilgrimage of faith to combat repression and discrimination, to work for justice and human rights and to give dignity and worth to people whatever their sexuality.

Whilst Same-Sex marriage is a reality in many Methodist Churches and Chapels across the Connexion, it is by no means a universal reality. In this regard, I feel there is still a long way to go...

As an individual, I have been on quite some journey too. I am now serving as a probationer presbyter (minister) in the Nottingham North East Circuit. I have been on my own ‘pilgrimage of faith’ as I have wrestled with my own sexuality and the teaching of the Church. I also have experienced the many conversations and debates that the Church has had – throughout my life. But now I am happy to be married to my husband, Ben, after we waited thirteen years to be married in a Methodist Church. Now, approaching our 2nd wedding anniversary I am in a position to be able to reflect not only on my own transformation, but that of the wider Church.

As part of my theological study at The Queen’s Foundation, and in conjunction with Probationer Studies as required by the Methodist Church, this year I am completing my MA in Theology, Ministry and Mission. As part of that, I am tasked with writing a dissertation. What better opportunity to seize the moment and to

write about the pilgrimage of faith that has led to where we are now as a Church seeking to be justice-seeking and inclusive. My focus is on the journey from those 1993 resolutions of the Methodist Conference which affirmed the ministry of lesbians and gay men, and particularly those who felt called to ordained ministry. Whilst in the process of that, I have been tracing that journey, with thanks to help from Dignity & Worth and share it now as a reminder of where we are, and where we have come from.

The 1993 resolutions did not appear from nowhere. They were in response to a much longer conversation. It was the Methodist Conference of 1979 that produced its first report on Marriage and Sexuality with a reference, for the first time, to same-sex couples. In 1992, the Conference agreed “A Methodist Statement on a Christian understanding of Family Life, the Single Person and Marriage.” 1993 saw the Conference debate on the inclusion of LGBTQ+ people in the Church and passed resolutions on human sexuality including the one that I shared earlier.

The journey continued including a 1998 report “Preparing for Marriage” which included ‘recognising marriage as mutual between equals.’ In addition, the Methodist Church produces a report called “A Lamp to my Feet and Light to my Path: The Nature of Authority and the place of the Bible in the Methodist Church” which was prompted by the 1993 debate. This began a conversation around biblical interpretation.

A group was set up by the Conference 10 years after the 1993 resolutions to assess the Church’s progress on the pilgrimage of faith it set out upon. This report came to the Conference of 2005 and concluded that the pilgrimage was in fact yet to begin in some areas of the Connexion, but that the 1993 resolutions should not be revisited.

2006 saw a report on what it meant to live with ‘contradictory convictions’ which was an attempt to outline the disagreements in the Church surrounding human sexuality and to offer ways in which we could seek to live together with those tensions. In the same year, there was an additional report on the ‘pilgrimage of faith’ which focused on civil partnerships. The Conference agreed that members and ministers of the Methodist Church could enter civil partnerships but services

of blessing on Methodist premises would not be permitted. In a similar vein, the report also stated that civil partnerships were not to be conducted in Methodist churches.



Then came a report in 2014 in response to the change in the law to permit Same-Sex marriage. The Conference report of the Working Party on Marriage and Civil Partnerships agreed that nothing prevented Methodists from entering same-sex marriages but would not 'opt in' to conduct them on Methodist premises: much in the same way to the conversation around civil partnerships. However, at this stage the Church offered guidelines on prayers and services for couples after same-sex marriages and civil partnerships, now allowing them to be held on Methodist premises. This was a major step forward.

In 2016 the Marriage and Relationships Task Group recommended to the Conference that the 1992 statement should be updated and a group be set up to assess whether the definition of marriage should be reviewed. This led to a process which consulted the whole church on whether the definition of marriage should be updated. In 2018 the Marriage and Relationships Task Group offered the Church some possibilities and potential decisions it could make. It set out a timeline for 2019 up to the Conference of 2020.

In 2019 the report 'God in Love Unites Us' was published and so the Connexion had a chance to confer about its recommendations. District synods voted on its resolutions to report back to the Conference of 2020. Sadly, Covid intervened and that was postponed to the Conference of 2021 when finally, after such a long and sometimes painful journey, the Church voted to revisit its definition of marriage, making provision for two understandings.

On a personal level, this journey has been a deeply significant one for my husband, Ben, and me who have been directly affected by it. But finally, after much pain, uncertainty and anxiety, the time came for Methodist Conference 2021. We watched from home on the live stream and our hearts leapt for joy when the decision was made to permit same-sex marriage in Methodist buildings. Awestruck, we looked at the television and then to each other and cried. After a journey of thirteen years together as committed partners, and for me twelve years as a committed church attender who would have described

himself as a Methodist, of which the latter 6 of those were as a member of the Methodist Church, we were finally able to look ahead to plan a wedding. I think it was at this moment that I finally realised that I could serve Christ and the Methodist Church as authentically me. I had come out some time before this, and it seemed to me in that moment, that now the Church was doing the same.

This pilgrimage of faith has been a prayerful one at each and every stage. But this LGBT history month we need to be reminded that the journey was long and the impact on LGBTQ+ lives a huge one. May we remember that we are still on that pilgrimage of faith, and we still need to work to be a fully justice-seeking and inclusive church for all.

LGBT history month is celebrated in February. Taken from www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/the-methodist-church/the-inclusive-methodist-church/lgbtplus/lgbtplus-history-month-2024/same-sex-marriage-a-pilgrimage-of-faith

A statement of support for King Charles after the announcement of his cancer diagnosis

The President of the Methodist Conference, the Rev Gill Newton, and the Vice President, Deacon Kerry Scarlett, share their support for King Charles after the announcement of his cancer diagnosis:

“On behalf of the Methodist Church in Britain, we offer our thoughts and prayers for King Charles and his family after he was diagnosed with cancer. We appreciate his openness and willingness to share news of his health and hope that it will encourage more people to attend routine screening and health checks when invited by their GP surgery.

“As we have just marked World Cancer Day, we are also praying for everyone who has just been diagnosed or is suffering from a life-changing illness, their families and everyone working for the NHS who helps and cares for patients.”

6 February 2024. Taken from www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/news/latest-news/all-news/a-statement-of-support-for-king-charles-after-the-announcement-of-his-cancer-diagnosis

Embrace the Middle East

Prayer Diary



3 March

This week we celebrate International Women's Day (8 March) by praying for all of our partners who work to improve women's educational opportunities and participation in society. In Egypt, Think and Do runs a scheme called Life School, which teaches literacy and numeracy skills, fostering self-worth and enabling women to assert their rights.

10 March Our partners in northern Iraq, CAPNI, live by the motto 'to keep hope alive.' Please pray for them as they seek to help disadvantaged Christian communities rebuild the homes and businesses that they lost after the devastation and displacement caused by ISIS from 2014-2017.

17 March This week we pray with gratitude for all those who give their time, energy and skills in support of Embrace. Our volunteer church speakers spread the word about our partners' work, while others organise events or take part in sponsored challenges. We and all our partners in the Middle East are thankful for their dedicated compassion.

24 March Even before the devastating violence that began in October 2023, healthcare in the Gaza Strip was under extreme pressure, and for many years there have been gaps in the quality of pre-conception, antenatal and newborn care. Our partner, the Near East Council of Churches, offers primary healthcare services to support these vulnerable babies and their mothers.

31 March Christ is risen! On Easter Sunday, we rejoice in the message of the Resurrection and give thanks for those continuing Jesus' ministry in the Middle East today. We ask for Christ's blessings on every member of our partners' staff, and trust that He will renew their hope and resilience as they meet the challenges ahead.

Taken from [www.embraceme.org/s/Embrace Prayer Diary Feb24-July24 Web.pdf](http://www.embraceme.org/s/Embrace_Prayer_Diary_Feb24-July24_Web.pdf)

BMC Mission Possible



Events continue to be organised for BMC Mission Possible. Glenda would like to thank all those who donated their unwanted Christmas presents – a total of £61.10 was raised for BMC Mission Possible at the January coffee morning. As there are still many items left, there will be another gift stall on the last Saturday in February at the coffee morning – so you can bring any further unwanted Christmas gifts or items you no longer use to the church office to sell for BMC Mission Possible.

If anyone would like to offer to run an event or suggest ideas for more fundraising, please let *Andy or Glenda Taylor* know.

The Big Plastic Count



Nearly 100 billion pieces of plastic packaging are thrown away by UK households every year, and just 12% is recycled in the UK. It's time the government got serious about tackling the plastic crisis. You can help by taking part in The Big Plastic Count!

Count your plastic for one week – 11-17 March 2024.

In 2022, The Big Plastic Count was the biggest ever investigation into UK household plastic waste. In 2024, governments will be negotiating a Global Plastics Treaty that could finally phase out plastic production for good. So, we're doing The Big Plastic Count again – this time we'll be using the results to convince UK ministers to lead the way and push for a really strong treaty.

Register at www.thebigplasticcount.com to get your free counting pack (digital or via post) which includes everything you need to take part.

Mark Ramsey

Watercolour Art Class

at Beeston Methodist Church, Wednesdays 7-9pm in the Guild Room

For details, contact Caroline 0115 9443411 artcarolinemcf@aol.co.uk

Easter services at BMC

- 17 March **Passion Sunday evening service** at 6.30pm – ‘Last words of love’
choral reflection on Christ’s Passion
- 24 March **Palm Sunday morning service** at 10.30am, led by Colin Firbank
- 28 March **Maundy Thursday – Holy Communion** at 7.30pm led by Rev Susan Holmes
- 29 March **Good Friday service** at 7.30pm – reflective readings and music for Good Friday
- 31 March **Easter Sunday Circuit Sunrise Service** at Attenborough Nature Reserve 6.30am, led by Rev Andrew Checkley
- 31 March **Easter Sunday Communion service** at 10.30am, led by Rev Joseph Kil and Richard Collins
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BMC Church Charities 2023-24



The total raised by February 6th was £4577.49

eBay	£1724.32	Money jars	£64.62
Other items	£348.67	Recycled books and CDs	£199.57
Coffee mornings	£508.92	Coffee bar	£529.33
Events	£127.08	Event refreshments	£139.45
Coins	£551.53	Donations	£384.00

Thanks to everyone who continues to support the Church Charity and it is good to see the way in which people become involved. Recent contributions include £450 from eBay sales, £249 from NHCT Ride & Stride, £154 from the January Coffee Morning and £49 from recycled books, DVDs and CDs

Colin Firbank

Dates for your Diary

March 2024

- Mon 4th **Knit, Natter and Craft** at BMC 2pm
- Tue 5th **BMC Warm Space** at BMC 2-4pm
- Sat 9th **Coffee morning** at BMC 10am-12 noon
- Sat 9th **Table Top Time** – family board games at BMC 3-5pm
- Mon 18th **Knit, Natter and Craft** at BMC 2pm
- Tue 19th **BMC Warm Space** at BMC 2-4pm
- Sat 30th **Coffee morning** at BMC 10-11.30am

April 2024

- Sat 13th **Coffee morning** at BMC 10am-12 noon
- Sat 13th **Table Top Time** – family board games at BMC 3-5pm
- Mon 15th **Knit, Natter and Craft** at BMC 2pm
- Thu 25th **District Celebration – An Evening with Chris Bowater** at Balderton Methodist Church 7pm.
- Sat 27th **Coffee morning** at BMC 10-11.30am
- Mon 29th **Knit, Natter and Craft** at BMC 2pm

Weekly events

- Sunday* **Morning Worship** at BMC 10.30am
 Evening Service 6.30pm (on 1st, 3rd and 5th Sunday of the month)
- Monday* **Little Acorns Parent and Toddler Group** at BMC 9.30-11.15am
- Tuesday* **Little Acorns Parent and Toddler Group** at BMC 9.30-11.15am
 Open Space refreshments and fellowship at BMC 11.15am-12.15pm
 (lunch at 12.15pm every second Tuesday of the month)
- Wednesday* **Wholly Ground Café** at BMC 11am-1pm (including a short act of worship at 11.15am on the first Wednesday of the month)
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Beeston Methodist Church

Here for You: God is calling us to

- Offer **spiritual nourishment** and **growth** to all
- **Welcome** and **nurture** everyone
- **Serve** those in our local community
- Be a strong voice for **Justice**.

Beeston Methodist Church is an Eco Church

From meditation to insulation, from location to invocation, loving God and His creation should impact everything in our church lives. **Eco Church** is a scheme to help churches demonstrate that they care for God's earth, to help them 'go green' in all areas of church life.



Beeston Methodist Church gained the Eco Church Bronze Award in March 2021 and is now working towards the Silver Award.

ecochurch.arocha.org.uk



Beeston Methodist Church is an Inclusive Church

We believe in **inclusive church** – a church which **celebrates and affirms every person** and does not discriminate.

We will continue to challenge the church where it continues to discriminate against people on grounds of **disability, economic power, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, learning disability, mental health, neurodiversity, or sexuality**.

We believe in a Church which **welcomes and serves all people** in the name of Jesus Christ; which is scripturally faithful; which seeks to proclaim the Gospel afresh for each generation; and which, in the power of the Holy Spirit, allows all people to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Jesus Christ.

www.inclusive-church.org