



As we begin prayer, meeting together in a new year various ways that together we with clean may discern the will and sheets in our purpose of God for our diaries let us denomination.

focus together on Thirdly, let us continue to what God is proclaim the good news of saying to us as a Connexion of Jesus' birth, a Saviour has been Churches.

Firstly, let us give praise to our God. As this month's verse reminds us we have been saved, not by our good works but by God's mercy. How amazing that God should choose to give His Son to die in our place that our sin may be dealt with and our relationship with God be restored for eternity. Such love causes us to praise our God unceasingly. Even in the most difficult of situations our praise continues because we know the hope of Jesus with us by His Spirit and He will keep us in His care as we trust in Him.

Secondly, let us come together in prayer to our God. Personal prayer is important and good but we also need corporate

Thirdly, let us continue to proclaim the good news of Jesus' birth, a Saviour has been born for all the world. It is so easy, as we pack away the Christmas decorations, to pack away the momentum of the season. Yet we realise that soon we will be celebrating the purpose for Jesus' birth – the final sacrifice that made the forgiveness of our sins possible – and the resurrection of Jesus when death was finally defeated so we can live eternally with God.

There have been three main strands that have been coming through the various readings, messages and events of recent weeks.

The first is the need to tell others about Jesus, the second is the need to be caring and kind in what we do and how we live and the third thing is making

HOPE

the difference where we are because of the first two. We are 'to devote (ourselves) to doing what is good.' (v8).

2024 holds many opportunities for sharing the Gospel, demonstrating God's love, making the difference in the lives of others. May God find us ready and willing to seek His guidance and to respond in obedience to His direction for our lives and our Connexion of Churches.

Father God, we thank you for the year ahead.

Help us to live according to your Word each day.

Grant us wisdom in our actions and conversations with others.

Grant us courage and strength to reach out a hand to help others who are struggling.

Grant us empathy and patience to simply listen, understand and show compassion.

The year ahead is empty, help us to fill it with good things that help others and worship you. Amen.

Dorothy Kendrick

'.....when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.'

TITUS 3:4-8 (NIV)



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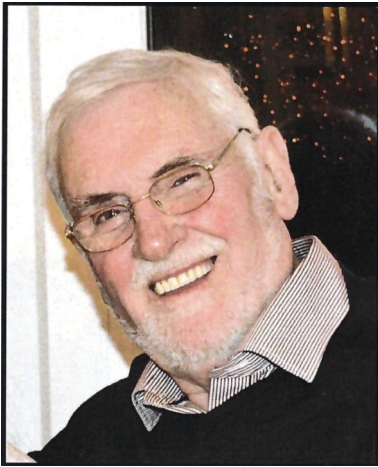
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In the Joy of the Lord

Geoff Ottley
On 25th October, 2023
Kirkhall Lane IM Church



The passing of Geoff Ottley, our friend and brother in Christ, leaves us with fond memories of a life spent in service of his friend and Lord. Always constant in prayer, steadfast in personal commitment and attention to detail, Geoff's witness to the grace of God will certainly be missed.

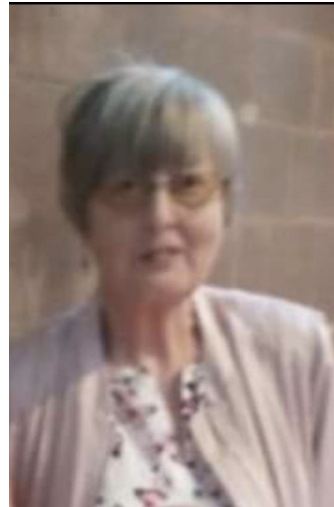
A former president of 'Men's Fellowship', Geoff often hosted groups of over fifty people at some of those meetings for prayer and worship. His warm smile met the faces of visiting preachers as he took them aside for prayer each Sunday and he also led a nurture group for asylum seekers.

Although Geoff was brought up an Anglican, he had a long history at Roe Green before coming to Kirkhall Lane. His marriage of 65 years to Brenda (herself a member at Roe Green) led him down an avenue of new things in his life of faith. Including a commitment to leading Youth Clubs at both churches. A time-served Cabinet Maker, he was often found, either making something new or, fixing something which had been broken.

Geoff's involvement with asylum seekers began when he turned up at football training events which were organised for the young men. Although, in his own words, all he did was 'serve the tea', that became a catalyst for folks turning up at church on Sundays. Notwithstanding, subsequent conversions! He wasn't comfortable at being the star of the show, he just served alongside or in the background. His funeral on Thursday November 9th wasn't just a time of mourning, it was a celebration of life in Christ. This life and in eternity.

Susan Stone—Kirkhall Lane

Janet Diggins
10th December 2023
Cornerstone Church, Nelson



17th February 1952-10th December 2023
It was with sadness that the fellowship learned of the sudden passing of Janet on 10th December, only ten months after the death of her husband, Kevin. Although she had not been well for a while, when she was admitted to hospital on 5th December no one foresaw this outcome.

Janet was brought up at Zion I.M. Church in Trawden and she and Kevin were married there on 27th July 1974. After their marriage, they both worshipped at Kevin's church (Bethel, Colne) until the early 2000s when they moved to what was then Nelson I.M. Church, now Cornerstone. Janet often led services as a teenager at Zion Church and for a while took services at the different churches in Colne & Nelson Circuit. Whilst at Bethel, she was also a Sunday School teacher for a short while and helped with "Launchpad" after school club.

During the 1990s she was the Connexion's Christian Responsibility Secretary and was largely responsible for the numerous aid trips to Romania, going on several of the trips herself. Here she was ably supported by Kevin and other family members as well as the church and Connexion.

Following a private family cremation service, a thanksgiving service for Janet's life was held at Cornerstone Church when family and friends were able to attest to her faith in Christ and her influence on their own lives.

Family was always very important to both Kevin and Janet and their main legacy is to leave behind two children and four grandchildren all with a strong Christian faith. She will be greatly missed by them and all who knew her but we can rejoice that she is now with the Saviour she knew and served.

Judith Diggins

Be Wise 5—Be An Encourager



Inspired by the London Institute of Contemporary Christianity Course, 'Be Wise', thoughts on Whole Life Christian Discipleship. A series of

articles of what it means to be a disciple of Christ in the 21st Century, 24/7.

One of the main aims of 'Be Wise' is to transform Christian Theology and principles into everyday behaviour that transforms the lives of Christians so that they can become a more effective witness for Christ. In a world where there is so much criticism and negativity there is a real opportunity for Christians to stand out in the crowd by being an encourager. Are you a critic or an encourager? Do you 'run others down' or do you support them? At the start of a New Year, the challenge is for all of us to turn from being critics to encouragers.

Having a positive impact
Abraham Lincoln had both a difficult life and presidency. Personally, he experienced depression and a nervous breakdown. As President of the United States, he guided the country through one of its most divisive chapters of its history during the American Civil War. When he was assassinated at Ford's Theatre in 1865, the inside pocket of his coat was found to be stuffed with newspaper clippings that praised him for his leadership and the positive impact he was having on the nation. Lincoln was able to provide the leadership that he did because he received encouragement to do so.

Do we encourage others enough today?

There is plenty of evidence to suggest that we do far more

discouraging than encouraging. The term 'gaslighting' has come into common usage during the past decade and it is used to describe a process that goes far back in human history where one person undermines the confidence and questions the ability of others in order to gain a psychological advantage over the other person. It happens in relationships, it happens in the workplace, it can happen anywhere, including sadly the church. I would imagine that we have all experienced or seen such actions at some time in our lives. Regrettably, we ourselves may have acted in such a way and undermined others. However, the Christian message and the way we should interact with fellow believers and those in the wider world is a message of encouragement.

Paul, Barnabas and Mark

In the Book of Acts, we read of how three individuals interacted with each other over several years. It is not an account that you can read from a continuous portion of Acts but a story that you must pick the threads of through the middle chapters of the book. The three were Paul, Barnabas, and John Mark also known as simply Mark, widely acknowledged as Mark the Evangelist and the author of Mark's Gospel.

Their relationship goes like this. After Peter was delivered from prison in Acts 12 and I use the word delivered and not escaped because it is an event in the history of the early church that I recommend you read and think deeply about because of the implication of what actually happened. After Peter was delivered, he literally found himself wandering in a daze in the streets of Jerusalem. When he came to his senses he headed to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where we are told many were gathered together praying.

We read earlier in Acts 12, about Herod's roundup of some of the members of the early church which resulted in the execution of James

the brother of John and the imprisonment of Peter. Those members of the early church still free, gathered to pray for their imprisoned brothers and sisters. Such a meeting held at the home of John Mark's mother would suggest that she was a significant member of the early followers of Jesus and that John Mark himself would have witnessed at first hand the traumatic events that were happening as the church came into being.

First Missionary Journey

As John Mark's home was a place of meeting for the early Christians it was not a surprise for him to meet Paul and Barnabas, who were visiting the church in Jerusalem; we read that Barnabas was Mark's cousin. On their return to Antioch, Paul and Barnabas would be accompanied by Mark. The two early missionaries, Paul and Barnabas were soon commissioned by the Church at Antioch to take the word of God to other cities in the Roman world. They were directed by the Holy Spirit to the island of Cyprus, a short journey by sea and Mark accompanied them as their helper.

We can only guess at what responsibilities Mark had as Paul and Barnabas's helper. Probably today we would describe him as an apprentice or intern, to learn from the two older men and to carry out tasks on their behalf. Their arrival on Cyprus would identify a pattern of how the two missionaries would share the gospel of Christ by first by visiting the local synagogue or other places where Jews and Jewish proselytes (those who had converted to Judaism) would meet.

Mark returns home

They travelled from one end of Cyprus to the other which was no small task and eventually arrived at the city of Paphos. Having completed their work at Paphos they were led to set sail for Perga on the coast of the Roman Province of Pamphylia, the Mediterranean coast of modern Turkey. Here for reasons not explained John Mark left the two

missionaries and returned to Jerusalem. There is speculation that John Mark simply left the pair without even consulting them, as if vanishing into the night but whatever the reason it was later to cause a rift between Paul and Barnabas and it took Paul a long time to forgive John Mark.

After several months of travelling through various towns of the Roman Province of Pamphylia the missionaries returned to Antioch where differences were emerging between the church there and the one at Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas were to play an important part in resolving these issues and then they spent some further time at Antioch preaching and teaching before Paul suggested that they should return to the new churches in Pamphylia. It was at this point that the question of John Mark arose, Paul being adamant that he would not be accompanying them. The text in the NIV states that they 'had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company'. Barnabas taking John Mark with him back to Cyprus whilst Paul was accompanied by Silas as he journeyed back towards Pamphylia overland, a journey that would later take him into Europe.

From failure to service

At this point we lose sight of both Barnabas and John Mark in the Book of Acts, and we have to rely on various early church historians. Unfortunately, there was more than one Mark mentioned in the writings of the early church. Whether John Mark was later known as Mark the Evangelist, the founder of the church in the very important city of Alexandria in North Africa and the author of Mark's Gospel or whether he was the Mark who continued to serve in Cyprus before moving to Ephesus we cannot be certain but what we do know is that Paul in his later letters acknowledges positively the work of Mark and describes him as a co-worker in Christ.

Mark the intern, the apprentice, who earlier Paul considered to be a failure was now honoured by being recognised as a co-worker in Christ, somebody on an equal footing. The irony is that Mark did

not achieve what he did due to any encouragement whatsoever from Paul but only through the encouragement of Barnabas. If it had been left to Paul, it is likely that we may never have heard of Mark again after his departure from Perga and the work that he was later to do for the early Christian church would have been lost for ever. Encouragement can change lives; it can produce success out of failure.

A life transformed.

A young girl, brought up in a prosperous part of south London with a well-connected family who at the age of seven developed a stutter. Her speech impediment was so bad that she had difficulty communicating with both her family and her peers at school. She would later describe it as being like trapped in your body and unable to express yourself.

Speech therapy sessions to resolve the stutter were tried but failed. When she was aged twelve, a teacher at the girl's school suggested that she should audition for a part in the school play and that this might help to overcome her stutter. Although the girl's mother had been an actor, she herself had never considered that she would follow that route due to her impediment and at first was horrified at the thought of exposing her disability on a stage. The teacher persisted with her encouragement and suggested that the girl try to produce different accents to overcome her stutter. Eventually all that encouragement succeeded, and the girl overcame her stutter. That girl was Emily Blunt, who is now one of Hollywood's most sought after and successful actors.

Like John Mark, Emily Blunt's life was transformed by the persistent encouragement of one individual. You may have experienced somebody like that in your life, somebody whose persistent encouragement has made you the person you are today. Most likely however, you may have experienced encouragement by several people at different stages of your life, perhaps in your career or in your growth and service as a

Christian; I certainly can.

Sally's story

Ste Murphy, the Director of Warrington Youth for Christ, recently shared his story of Sally. Twenty-two years ago, Ste had been speaking at a local church and was seeking volunteers to help with the work of Youth for Christ in the town. At the end of the service, he was approached by Sally, a lady in her late sixties who was offering her services but asked, "Wasn't she too old?" Ste responded by stating that age was not an issue, he was looking for people who loved Jesus and the young people that He seeks to reach. Her response, "count me in".

Sally, thanks to the encouragement of Ste, warmed to the young people of her community and the young people warmed to her. She was to work for the remaining years of her life with the young people on her tough estate and always delivered the Christian message with a huge smile. Ste Murphy was able to share Sally's story of encouragement at her recent funeral service.

Personally, I can testify to the encouragement of Jim Faulkner, Minister at Spennymoor and later Hetton-le-Hole, enthusiastic Home Mission's Secretary and Connexional President. When I served as Editor of the Connexion, Jim would often ring 'out of the blue' to have a talk and encourage me about the magazine.

As Christians, we are called to be encouragers. Although he had failed to encourage Mark, Paul was later to write to the church at Thessalonica (1Thes 5:14), "encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone" and then he added "always strive to do what is good for each other and everyone else".

Rob Brooks

Next Time – Wisdom

From the Connexion

OCTOBER CONNEXIONAL COMMITTEE ROUND-UP

By Alison Tipping, Medlock Valley Circuit Representative

The meeting was chaired by Dorothy Kendrick as President, and we were joined by one member of the committee on zoom.

General Secretary's Report

Shortly after Annual Meeting, Grapenhall church wrote to suggest to Connexional Committee that a one day special conference be held during the Spring of 2024 to consider the future of Independent Methodism, whether it has one, the way it is governed, the relationship between the churches and the Connexion, how churches are represented fairly, and how to bring the Connexion and Association together as one body. Following some discussion, it was agreed that we arrange three meetings, one in the North East, one in the North West and one in Bristol in April for this purpose, with the agreement of Grapenhall Church which would be sought first.

Administration Group

Annual Meeting 2024 will take place at the Mercure Hotel, Haydock. Following comments received from a number of people, this will be an in-person meeting only, without a Zoom option, and all voting will take place on the day. Churches will be contacted earlier than usual, to ascertain whether they will be sending a delegate and any visitors, so that we can give an indication to the Hotel. We will also be asking how many people will need overnight accommodation, either on the Saturday only or Friday and Saturday. There will be no geographical restriction on who can book overnight accommodation, but it should be noted that Friday night is not part of Annual Meeting and everyone wanting to stay over will have to pay for accommodation on the Friday. It was agreed that we have a franking machine for use at the Resource Centre, on either a purchase or lease option, to streamline the mailing process. This will enable us to cut costs and also save time on the physical mailings from the Resource Centre. Bingley Church has now been sold,

and the sale of Blackpool church is in process.

Church Support Group

The group had their annual away day in July at the Northwood Christian Centre. Lisa continues to work with the Review Group re the Connexional bible studies and the evaluation process. A new church support worker, Joy Higham started work on 2nd October and will be based at the Resource Centre, who along with Lisa will continue working with the wider connexion. Joy had been working for Bryn IM Church as a support worker and is also a member of the church. Following a presentation, it was agreed that we hire Chris Elsdon for one year to help churches with technology or websites. Chris has already designed a website for one of our churches and is currently designing and working with charities and other churches on their websites. He will also look at refreshing the denomination website - introducing online booking, funding applications, resources available for downloading etc, and a separate website for Northwood advertising and booking and streamlining administration methods.

Education Organisers Report

Student numbers are down by one, as one student has now completed their studies. The study weekend took place on 6th-8th October 2023, when the speaker was Gerard Charles from OMF. There has still been no meeting with Cliff College as their principal, Ashley Cooper is currently on sabbatical. The 2024 conference will be held on 19th & 20th April 2024, speaker Paul Baxendale. The last meeting of the Wesleyan Evangelicals Academy took place recently, with Education leads from the various denominations sharing their current positions. The WRU alongside us were keen to explore closer working relationships and Richard Saunders-Hindley is progressing this. £300.00 was given from the Tetlow Fund, as a contribution towards the cost of training totalling £1500.

Ministry Committee

Tony Southwick has completed his studies, and is to be recognised as an accredited IM minister. The Ministry Committee we recently notified that Pat Hayhurst has been received into the Lord's immediate care. Pat has faithfully served as a connexional minister since she was commissioned 2013, despite increasingly poor health. We hold all who were especially close to her in our thoughts and prayers.

Enabling Group

The group were asked to seek legal advice to see whether the Model Deed or the Land Registry takes precedence, and this is now being dealt with by Muckle solicitors. Churches are now being informed of Trustee training as it becomes available, and a record matrix of training events will be maintained at the Resource Centre. A letter is to be sent advising all churches of the need to ensure their list of Trustees is up to date. All churches are responsible for training their own Trustees and will be asked to provide assurance to Association through the annual return that there is at least someone who understands what is required. Following a recent policy review, these recommendations were agreed: To rename the Trustee Application Form to Trustee Declaration Form and add date of birth (for bank purposes) plus amalgamate the VODA (Voluntary Organisations Development Agency) detailed expectations of a trustee.

That the group reword the Complaints policy as to who is to be approached if there is a complaint against the General Secretary at a time that we do not have a President. It was agreed that this will now be any officer not involved in the complaint. The wording is to be brought back to the February Connexional Committee meeting to be agreed.

A review log is to be held at the Resource Centre and to detail

when the policy is reviewed and by whom. The Association will be requested to confirm the review – reviewing policies would become a standing Association Agenda item

Finance Committee

Barry Hart from Pemberton Church has now joined the Finance Committee. At the September meeting an emergency grant for Hetton le Hole was agreed, and also a grant for Sutton Village. The funds from the sale of Bingley have been received. A number of churches have now been paid the £4K gift that was previously agreed. This is taking some time, because most of the churches have to be set up on the banking system as they were previously paid by cheque.

Northwood Centre

A meeting was held at the Resource Centre on Saturday, 9th September of members of Connexional Committee, members and prospective members of the Management Group and members of the group who have been worshipping at the centre. There was a presentation by the group, explaining their reasons for wanting to have more use of the building. As well as meeting every second Sun-

day, they have a large youth contingent wanting to start using Northwood as a place to meet. They also had a vision of it being a house of prayer. There was then a question-and-answer session, checking out the expectations of the group and concerns as to how everything would fit in. After the group had left, and following further discussion, there was overwhelming agreement that the Northwood group should be encouraged and supported in what they felt the Lord was calling them to do. At Connexional Committee it was agreed that the group can use Northwood every Sunday, but taking current bookings into consideration. Two members of the group will be able to attend Management Group meetings. A progress report is to be given at each Connexional Committee meeting.

Safeguarding Report

The training session for churches in the Wigan/Leigh area will be taking place in November. Two issues are currently being looked at by Safeguarding. A copy of the updated guidance for safeguarding in out of school's settings by the Department of Education has been received and will be discussed at the

next Church Support meeting and with Graham Edmondson. Churches will be informed of any changes.

Ecumenical Officer Report

There have been no meetings of Churches Together in England or the Free Churches Group since the last report. Bill is unable to attend the forthcoming FCG meeting in London, but will receive minutes and include any significant information either in a mailing or his next report. He will be attending the November CTE meeting.

Overseas Missions

Daniel and Gail Castro are now home in the UK and have been offered a permanent position with OMF in the UK providing member support. They are members at Spennymoor IM Church, but are attending Elmwood church in Manchester, and are also giving support to and attending midweek meetings at a couple of IM churches in the Leigh area. It was agreed that the Connexion continue to support them with the level of contributions they are currently receiving.

Alison Tipping

Dear Fellow Independent Methodists

The time to reflect about the Connexion's future.

In 2021 I wrote an article in the Connexion magazine, entitled 'A Disconnected Connexion'. In it I attempted to identify what I saw as serious flaws and failures in how the Connexion communicates and responds to its member churches. Derek Yates, sometime later partly responded in a counter article and I'm told that my perceived criticism triggered a discussion that led to the Bible study series, 'Renewing our Calling.'

Two years on and with no perceptible change I find myself writing again on the same subject. This was initially triggered by reports of unhappiness about the way the

2023 Annual Meeting was conducted. Annual Meetings were once an occasion where lifelong relationships were formed between Independent Methodists from throughout the country. Since the pandemic they have become little more than token events.

Prompted by the news of discontent and having discussed with my fellow leaders at Grappenhall, I wrote to the General Secretary requesting that Connexional Committee arrange a special meeting in the Spring of 2024 of all IM Churches to discuss the future. Feedback that I have received has suggested that there is an amount of scepticism amongst some Connexional Committee

members who believe that such a meeting would have little support from the churches! If this is the case, then the alarm bells should be sounding and the question should be asked, "What is the point of the Connexion?"

Without sounding too negative, I believe that the Connexion is in dire straights. I pay tribute to the shrinking handful of dedicated volunteers, each of whom are covering more than one role who are keeping the Connexion going but I must ask, "For how much longer?". We have church members who by and large have no interest in the Connexion and who see their affiliation only to their local church. Added to this equation we have the 'disconnection'

factor of poor communication between Connexional Committee and the churches. Here I must pay tribute to the former Resource Centre Manager, Andrew Rigby. Andrew assisted by Norman Prescott did a tremendous job in keeping the Connexion together. Always there at the end of the phone to talk with, and a font of knowledge about the denomination.

I have no wish to see the demise of the Independent Methodist Connexion but believe that if nothing else we

need a stronger administration and support organisation which communicates with and stays in contact with every church in the denomination in an age when churches must abide by ever more compliances. If the Connexion cannot provide this support, then other solutions will have to be sought.

It is the responsibility of every church to consider the wellbeing of the Independent Methodist Connexion. This is not the time to be passive about the denomination's future and leave it to the dwindling band of

committed volunteers to muddle on or one day the likelihood is that as an organisation it will simply collapse. I understand that the General Secretary will be writing to all churches to ascertain their support for a special meeting to consider the denominations future. I would see it as our collective responsibility to participate in such discussions.

Rob Brooks
Grappenhall IM Church
November 2023

A Story from Armenia

Recently I received an email from a friend who is a trustee of 'Care for Children', an international Christian foster care charity, currently working in Armenia. Over the last three months another war, news of which has been lost amongst the Israel/Hamas and Ukraine conflicts, has been fought and lost by Armenia over the disputed territory of Nagorno Karabakh. A war resulting in the eviction of 120,000 Christians, from their homes in Nagorno Karabakh by Muslim Azerbaijan, who claim the land. They are now refugees in Armenia, a tiny country that is 98% Orthodox Christian and now finds itself on the front line against Turkey and Iran who have claims on its territory.

Against this sad backdrop, my friend was sent this story. It's from a refugee and amongst the daily persecution of Believers around the world speaks so powerfully.

Bill Hampson

A story from Armenia

"Since the day I became a Christian, I have believed that one day the Lord Jesus will come and we will all join him, leaving behind our old bodies and the world. However, even living in Nagorno-Karabakh, which has always been a source of strife for foreign

powers, I never imagined that the day would come when we would have to leave the thousand-year-old land of our grandfathers.

Unfortunately, that day came and came very unexpectedly and painfully, we had to leave in order to save our lives and our children's, our right to live and be happy. It is difficult to describe the pain, anxiety, and disappointment that engulfed my heart and mind. We didn't know what to leave, what to take, what to fit in our small car, whether we would return again, or whether we were going irrevocably and leaving behind our world and ourselves.

When we'd put everyone in the car, (we have six children) put our things in the boot, I instinctively turned to cast one last look at my beloved house, garden, tree, and flowers. At that moment it was as if the ground moved from under my feet, as if the mountains moved, and a feeling of bitter disappointment and emptiness came over me. One thought began to absorb my consciousness, "What is next?" "

At that moment of confusion and emptiness, I clearly heard a voice, so close and so far, so dear and convincing. A voice that I will distinguish from thousands of other voices, just as a lost lamb will hear the voice of its shepherd from

behind the valleys and hills. The Lord said, "I am your inheritance, I am your world, I am your security". And suddenly in that very moment, everything changed for me, my heart and mind were filled with joy and faith. I was the safest and happiest person on this planet.

When I returned to the car, my husband didn't seem to recognize me, he was looking at my face with amazement, he didn't understand the reason for my joy, he couldn't really. Perhaps it seemed to him that I lost my mind due to the pressure of the situation. I only whispered to him, "The Lord is with us, he spoke to me."

These words changed everything around us, everything became different and different from what was appearing to our sights. Nothing matters anymore except the presence of Jesus, nothing is worth worrying about anymore except the absence of Christ.

At this moment, the challenges of our lives are great, but so is our comfort in our Lord Jesus. I have left a note for those coming to water my plants and feed my cats. Indeed, we have nothing to lose and do not need to gain anything, neither in this world nor in the world to come, except the Lord Jesus himself.

Amen, Lilit

News from our Churches

Spring View

On 22nd October Hindley Church hosted a joint Presidents visit with Spring View Church. There was a lovely number in the congregation and everyone enjoyed the day. Andrew Rigby started the proceedings by welcoming Dorothy.

Dorothy (Kendrick) and Philip (her chauffeur) made themselves at home right from the start and even helped us with the chores of clearing up etc.



We also invited some past members from our IMTAKS days. It was lovely to get together once more and talk about the good old days. Some of us still wore our scarves and badges. Ann Cheers (one of our leaders) talked about the days when we were a youth club together and remembered her husband Jim who sadly is no longer with us. It was Jim who initiated starting an IMTAKS group in our church and it was a huge success.

Everyone was enjoying the day until just before the sermon the electrics blew and everything went off including all the sockets and the organ. Poor Dorothy delivered her sermon valiantly with people going to and fro trying to get to the fuse box. Thank you Dorothy for putting up with us.

Nothing helped the situation. Luckily we had plenty of sandwiches and cakes etc. to enjoy after the service except for 40 frozen pasties which were supposedly cooking in the oven. In the end we had to give up. We couldn't even make a cup of tea so everyone enjoyed a cup



of Ribena instead. It certainly was different but everyone enjoyed the fun of it and joined in the spirit. Everyone went home after receiving a blessing and a frozen pasty wrapped up to take home,

Jean Barlow—Hindley

Choir and Fellowship Evening at KHL

Saturday evening of October 14th found the fellowship of Kirkhall Lane and their guests, enjoying the music and singing of Hindley Churches Together Choir. The programme included poetry and wit, while folks listened to a presentation of the Gospel being sung over them by a very well prepared group of people.

Guests and friends from across the North West showed their appreciation by singing along where they could, followed by refreshments and a rich time of fellowship afterwards. Not content that we were all done, folks gathered around the piano and continued singing after the choir had finished. Not a few people were inspired to join in, including members of the choir. The atmosphere was so enriched from beginning to end that, I'm sure the effects will be long lasting.

Intended as a dual purpose event, both for refreshing and for outreach, we do know there were a couple of people who were ministered to by the grace of God. One is the window cleaner of one of our members. I only noticed him twice, once when under conviction and the second time whilst he was scoffing some of the nice cake and a lovely brew. Nothing wrong with that!

Without doubt, we will be seeing some of these folks again, including the choir.

Roger Stone—Kirkhall Lane

Fellowship, Food and Fireworks

November the 5th and all that? With one mind and one spirit we decided High Legh Christian Fellowship were doing an outreach. First the leaflets, posters and door knocking. Praise God for those called to foot slogging, it's no good if we don't invite people and call the neighbours in too. On the day, we met in faith to do something that would attract people. People like good music, they love food, talking and fireworks. The site at Northwood provided an excellent atmosphere for our gathering and the Lord provided a clear, dry evening for our enjoyment.

The place was full for a short service of worship for about three quarters of an hour to get us going.



Those of us standing in the foyer remained in an attitude of prayer whilst a Gospel testimony was given afterwards. At the invitation to respond, seven people put their hands up! I confess to some surprise each time I am witness to the power of God in the foolishness of what is preached (1 Corinthians.1:23-24). Follow up, no doubt, will be interesting as folks came from different locations for this event. Though one man who responded is a neighbour who lives just across the fields from Northwood. He had already been coming to our worship services for a couple of weeks. Then came the food! Hot Pot, Chilli Con Carne, Hot Dogs and all sorts of lovely home baking etc. The



event was really hard work but we were already rejoicing for the outcome so far. The finale came with half an hour of spectacular fireworks which lit up the night sky with patterns of light. One nice touch to the evening was that folks didn't just rush off afterwards. There was tea and coffee and lots of interesting conversations to chill out the remainder of the event. Non-stop activity for all of us, starting off at 5.30pm we had to be kitted up and ready to go but we were amazed when, the last of us were leaving the site at 9.10 pm! A late bedtime for the toddlers who came with their mums and dads but early showers as a reward for the church. Bless the Lord for His faithfulness to ordinary folks whose concern is for the kingdom of God. Next stop, a Candlelit Carol Service.

Roger Stone—On Behalf of High Legh Christian Fellowship

Stockton Heath

The weekend of 18th and 19th November saw Stockton Heath Christian Fellowship hold their Church weekend. The morning began with a time of worship and then we were blessed with teaching from Neil Stanton from Northwich followed by free time in the afternoon before we met again in the evening to enjoy a meal together followed by the Tearfund quiz which was a time of fun and lots of laughter (the winners were Alan Britton's team !). Sunday morning was again a great time of fellowship with more teaching from Neil. A truly blessed weekend which was enjoyed by all who attended.

Open House is held on Tuesdays between 11.00 a.m and 2.00 p.m and provides a warm space, lunch and friendship for people in the surrounding area. On Tuesday 12th December we held our



Christmas party where we enjoyed tucking into some lovely food, singing carols and playing pass the parcel. Everyone received a bag of Christmas treats to take home. A time of love and friendship was shared by all who attended.

The following day Chapel tots mums and toddler group held their party, again a lovely time with the children and carers who came along. The highlight of the morning was a visit from Santa.

On Saturday 16th we held a



Christmas Activity morning for local children. There were crafts and games, dressing up and a game of guess the birthday of the puppy. The morning concluded with lunch where we all enjoyed hotdogs followed by cake or fruit. Everyone voted the morning a great success with more contacts made in the community.

Barbara Hodgkinson—Stockton Heath

Carol Service at High Legh

The homely atmosphere of High Legh Christian Fellowship saw a full house enjoying Christmas Carols, fellowship and food together on the evening of 17th December. The songs and the message resulted in a few enquirers after the service. Several folks kept the interesting conversation open without anyone rushing off home.

The diligent door to door and leaflet distribution brought 8 or so neighbours in from the houses among the lanes nearby. One couple came from nearby Arley. We were particularly rewarded when a local lady and her son arrived who had previously questioned our legitimacy by contacting the Resource Centre. Having enjoyed the evening so much, they announced their intention to come again.

Whilst this occasion has not, so far as we know yet, brought direct conversions we are encouraged to press on, having now formed firm contact with the local populace. We have plans for another service of Believer's baptism in the new year. Anyone waiting to be baptised is welcome to join us, providing they can testify to saving faith. Just give us a ring and we will give details as soon as we have a fixed date.

Blessings to all who love and support us. Please keep us in your prayers as the work of the Gospel is not without its adversaries and obstacles.

Roger Stone—On behalf of High Legh Christian Fellowship

Christmas at Roman Road

As well as the usual children's parties and carol services, Roman Road were involved in 2 new activities in the run-up to Christmas.

Our Rainbow, Brownie and Guide Carol service took place on Wednesday 13th December. This is the second year we have conducted a carol service for the uniformed organisations, and it was good to welcome the girls and



their parents. This year as part of the service the children made shepherds and sheep out of pipe cleaners and cotton wool balls to



add to a nativity display. To end the service, we made stars out of silver foil.

Our local parish church in Failsworth, St John's this year held their first Christmas Tree Festival. Our Pramtime children drew round their hands, and we made angels out of the cut out hands. Every child who attends Pramtime was represented by an angel, so our tree was full of angels. Messy Church made stars out of clay and decorate with sequins.

Our uniformed groups also provide a tree so we were well represented amongst over 20 trees on display. The church was open for 2 days to view the trees on 15th and 16th December ending with carols round



the trees. Saturday 16th December was a busy day – we delivered 60 bags of hope containing tracts, Christmas card, hot chocolate, biscuits, and chocolates to our neighbours in the morning and in the late afternoon, as part of the Shine Your Light initiative we light up a tree in our church garden and sang carols in a beautiful sunset. Hot chocolate was very welcome after singing outside!

On Thursday 21st December we held our Christmas Afternoon Tea. Those attending enjoyed seasonal sandwiches, sausage rolls, scones,



Christmas cake and mince pies. We finished the afternoon with Christmas quizzes.

Elizabeth Barron—Roman Road

Thank you from Easington Lane IMs

A thank you to everyone who attended our Christmas services in the week leading up to Christmas day



Everyone left richly blest after attending our Singalong in the School room Thanks to the Carol singers who went around the village spreading the message in song And finally on Christmas eve thanks to all who attended our Candlelight Carol service led by our Minister Jean Merton All three events were very well supported by people from our local community and long may this continue From the Church we hope you all have a Healthy and Peaceful 2024

Ian Grey - Easington Lane

December at Thatto Heath

What a wonderful month December was at Thatto Heath – both Spiritually and Socially! Various members of our Fellowship led all our Services.

Advent Bible Study

Ran every Monday with around 16 attending – each week was led by a different member of the group.

Church Adult Get-Together – Saturday 2 December

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

Gift Service – Sunday 3 December

The Service was led by John Williams, who spoke about those people who are part of the

Christmas story but we always choose to leave out of our nativity scene.

Once again the fellowship brought gifts for Children in Care in St Helens, of which there are over 400. Members of St Helens Council joined with us to accept the gifts and tell us about the Children in the town who are in care.



Sunday 10 December

Members of the church Business Group along with a few extras, led this Service. They presented a play 'Search for a Superhero.' All enjoyed the service, although a few of the cast did suffer from a little touch of stage fright before the 'curtain went up!!'



Mums n Tots Christmas Party – Tuesday 12 December

The Mums n Tots had a lovely time at their Christmas Party. Sadly, due to low numbers the Group has now closed. The Mums n Tots has been running for over 30 years.



Luncheon Club Christmas Lunch – Wednesday 13 December

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



Carol Service – Sunday 17 December

Dot Williams led this Service the theme being 'Mary' the mother of Jesus. The service was well attended and it was great to have people join with us who we have not seen for quite some time, in particular ex Sunday School scholars.

Cafe Church – Sunday 24 December

This Service was led by Denise Helsby and Hilda Jackson and included carols, a short message and a 'craft class' for the younger element of the congregation. Another well attended and much enjoyed service.



Christmas Day

John Williams led this family service about Gods special gift which he gave 'For all people.' At the end of the service, we learned that Father Christmas had visited sometime during the night and had left gifts the children in our church congregation.

Fay Williams—Thatto Heath

Art at Lamberhead Green

Anne Jones a member of Lamberhead Green IM Church is also a member of the U3A Upholland group and runs a watercolour class as a volunteer. At the moment the workshops are over six weeks and are at the beginning and end of the year. Anne has just started using the hall of the church and everyone has found the room very homely and comfortable. The church members have also enjoyed seeing



the paintings created by the group. Annes next class will start on 11 January 2024 and everyone is looking forward to it.

Anne Jones—Lamberhead Green

Christmas at Spring View



The friends of Spring View IM celebrating Christmas and Advent together.

Andrew Rigby—Spring View

Mill Lane Bristol

On Sunday 19th November, Steve Loader, Chaplain to Portbury and Avonmouth docks took our service. He told us about his work amongst the sailors who arrived at the docks on ships from all over the



world.

One of our members , Joan Newton, presented him with 20 shoe boxes full of gifts for the seaman's mission.

These will be given to sailors who arrive at the docks over Christmas. Joan has also packed 536 shoe boxes for the people of Eastern Europe. She has a group of people who make, knit, and donate items and also those who sponsor the boxes to pay for transportation. We thank Joan and her team for the work they do throughout the year.

We pray that the people will enjoy the gifts and know that people care for them.

Hazel Chapple—Mill Lane

Noble St Independent Methodist Church in Bolton

The children of our fellowship Ashley, Arthur and Jacob all took part in making items for Remembrance service on 12.11.2023.

Some were painted and some were built using plastic bottles, used egg



cartons and even cupcake cases all decorated and painted .

So not only remembering the fallen and those who served and fought for our country, we were recycling items to help the planet too. So, a nod to the past and to the future.

Lesley Warburton—Noble Street

Mill Lane Celebrates

On Sunday 8th October Amy and Jonathan Gallachan brought their daughter Isabella Grace

to Mill Lane Church, Bristol to be dedicated to the Lord.

Although some of their family couldn't be there, due to illness, it was a lovely service taken by Tony Argent.

Isabella is always happy joining in with the singing on Sunday



mornings as she watches her father play his Clarinet for the hymns.

The service was followed by fellowship, enjoying a piece of cake and a cup of tea.

The members pray that the Lord will bless this family always.

Hazel Chapple—Mill Lane

Thank You!

FOR ALL YOUR HARDWORK AND COMMITMENT THROUGHOUT 2023

The Connexion only works if we all work together and we are thankful for each one of our churches, members, congregation, officers, and employees.

As we are thankful to God, through His love, our work shines brightest.

We wish all our churches a prosperous 2024

December Update on Romania

After School

We have 14 children enrolled, with 6 of them being new and it is nice to see that all of the children are coming to the sessions more often compared to the last 2 years, when there was always one or two miss-



we see that some of these children that are from the same neighbourhood don't talk nicely to one another. There are 2 boys in particular, who don't get on, but in general, it is the norm that the majority of the boys throw words back and to, to try and upset and pull each other down.

We focused on the verse in Proverbs 18:21; *Death and life lies in the power of the tongue*. We talked about the power of words and how we can either bless or curse each other with them. I gave examples of how sometimes teachers can speak negative words over us, (this happens a lot with the older teachers in Romania) and a couple of the children gave examples of where their teacher had told them that they are stupid and good for nothing! We prayed and asked Jesus to break the power of these words from over their lives. Praise God that He has a future for these children and that the precious name of Jesus can set them free from everything that the enemy has stolen from them so far. They have so much going against them when you look at the reality of their lives, but they have a God who is fighting for them and with Jesus, they can overcome anything and walk in freedom and the secure knowledge of eternal life with Him. We know how important it is to be a demonstration of God's love and to continue to love them even when we have more challenging days with some of them. We see it as important to correct them and continue to tell them and show that they are loved and accepted, a message which is rarely heard in their lives.

ing. It was initially a challenge, because they have a 12 week summer holiday, so they are out of a routine and they don't have a routine at home ever and it took some work to get them to settle down and conform to the standards that we set at the After-school, but after 4 weeks, of encouragement and reminding them of the standard, they started to settle down into the programme properly and are much more focused on their lessons. We have a 10 minute 'faith time,' after the prayer time and before starting the education part. Here, we continue to speak small snippets of biblical truth into their lives. I love this part, because I see how the majority are taking it in and thinking about what is being said. The seeds continue to be sown in their hearts.

Recently we have been speaking about the power of words. Often



were spoken to them. We have talked also about their immense value, using Psalm 139: 13-14. That their value comes from just being them and not from anything that they can do. Please pray that they will grow not just in knowledge about Jesus, but more importantly that they will really experience Him and know Him and grow in their relationship with Him.



I am also excited to see how the team is developing, with other missionary people that were involved in different areas last year and struggle a bit with the language, are able to take the lead with the younger ones and teach them the letters and numbers. This was a huge encouragement and a sign that the team is growing stronger.

On the second day of this topic, we had all the children and leaders pull a name out of a hat and they had to go one-by-one to that person and speak something positive over them. It was such a powerful time and really changed the atmosphere and it was a powerful demonstration of the verse as the children spoke about how joyful they felt when they heard the words that



abundant life that Jesus talks about in John 10:10.

After the talk we had a time of prayer and I was able to pray with one lady, who really recognised that heavy burden of sin and shame in her own life and in tears, she confessed her sins before allowing me to pray with her. Praise God for the way that He moved that morning and touched the hearts of those there.



School

I am slowly building up relationship with a couple of the teachers at the school where these children go to. I have been able to visit one of them at home recently and I was able to share more about Jesus with her. I have mentioned her in other reports that I prayed with her and she seems quite open to prayer. Please pray that she comes to accept Jesus as her Saviour. I am praying for strategy in how to move forward with the school.

Canteen

We invite all of our beneficiaries once a month, to come together, where we have a time to build relationship with them, share a short message and pray for those who want prayer. At the last meeting I did a talk on freedom, since this is the word that the Lord gave me when I asked Him about what to talk about.

It was a great opportunity to not just remind people of what Jesus has done for us on the cross, but also that his heart is to heal us and set us free from those things that still hold us captive; dependency issues, the bondage of secrets sins, shame, guilt, feeling unworthy and unloved, all these and other burdens that stop us from living the

Prison

I started back at the prison, a couple of weeks back. It is a different format to how we used to do things. Many ladies come for a 12 week course, which runs in Spring and Autumn. We will do a Christmas programme this Friday and next Tuesday. I was able to share testimony each time that I went, which was related to the topic. Around 20 ladies attend the meetings for the entire course. I am thankful that the Lord opened the door again to this ministry.

Ellel

The branch of what was Ellel here in Romania has now come out and is operating under the name of *Elpis; the place of hope*. This is an exciting new season for the work here and the Lord has been leading and blessing it. I attended the first course last weekend in Bucharest. I am excited to see what the Lord will do in the future with Elpis.

Prayer Requests

- Praise and thanks for the way the After-school project team has developed.
- Prayer for Andrea; a new member to the team this year, for her to be healed from her anxiety.
- the words of truth that we share with the children will go deep into their hearts to share fruit
- For one particular boy, Ionut, to develop his reading skills and to be healed from the rejection that he has faced from the teacher at school.
- For relationships at the school to be developed. I am declaring the word 'transformation' over the school.
- For the one particular teacher that I have got to know better that she will come to know the Lord
- For the development of the youth programme and wisdom and ideas in how to proceed
- For the canteen beneficiaries to really walk in true relationship with God.

Liz Greenhalgh



NEWS FROM OUR MISSIONARIES

L. and P. were really blessed by their visits to churches in France over the summer months. They are now hoping to visit churches in the UK in 2024. Meanwhile they have settled back in North Africa. They pray that the violence in the Middle East might not cause disruption in their country. They also ask for prayer concerning the cost of living and shortages of some essential

items where they are. P. and another partner have recently made visits to four villages over one weekend and are training women there in poultry raising. Pray that this might be profitable for them, as the price of animal feed is rising. At present L. is very much occupied with her online work.

Gail and Daniel Castro have had their support confirmed at the last Connexional Committee meeting in October. Gail is continuing her ministry with the charity "Safer Homes" and Daniel is occupied with his role as an assistant pastor. They have also become involved with some weeknight activities in our Tyldesley and Roe Green churches. At present they are looking for another house to rent, as the one

they are in now has been sold.

Liz Greenhalgh praised the Lord for answers to prayer concerning the after-school club. They now have two new helpers to replace those who had moved away. Liz's work with children and teenagers is very rewarding and has led to several giving their lives to the Lord. Liz also makes it a priority to disciple these young people in Christian living. The hoped-for renewed access to the women's prisons now seems possible. Meanwhile Liz is maintaining her correspondence with one young woman in the prison who is very open to the gospel.

Anne Fambely

UKRAINE APPEAL

Mount Zion Church, Pemberton are supporting the people of the Ukraine who are desperately in need of the following items:

Walking Aids - e.g. Folding wheelchairs, Zimmer Frames, Crutches, Walking Sticks, and Plastic Boot-like Splints

Medical Items - e.g. Dressing Packs, Dressing Pads, Bed Pads, Bandages, Plasters, Un-opened ointments and creams, Catheters, Catheter Bags, Stoma Products.

If you are able to supply any such items, they would be gratefully received at the Resource Centre, Fleet Street, for forwarding.

If you are unsure about suitability of items you are intending to donate, don't hesitate to contact the Resource Centre.



Connexion

The magazine of the family of Independent Methodist Churches

The last day for articles to be submitted for the March / April issue of the Connexion magazine is Friday 16th of February. The theme for this issue will be 'Integrity'.

Please could all articles be sent either directly to the Resource Centre via post, or by email to magazine@imchurches.org.uk (please note the new email address).

Just a quick reminder that ideally all photographs need to be digital. Do ensure that safeguarding principles are followed by asking permission for the publication of any photographs and for the articles where people are named and/or can be identified.

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

Connexion **CAN Corner** **CHRISTIAN AID NEWS**

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All articles for the magazine
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This year's Christian Aid AGM took place on 28 November 2023. It was different from the two previous AGMs as it was a throwback to Covid times, being entirely on-line.

The change didn't affect the 'business' elements of the meeting but, in my view, something was lost because of not being able to meet, chat and share experiences with other sponsoring church representatives during the break and afterwards. I remember fondly singing a verse from 'Lord Of The Dance' with a small group including the Rt Rev John Sentamu in the queue for lunch at last year's AGM. A further change was that the Churches Consultation Exercise, which last year took place in the afternoon following the AGM, was this year organised as a separate event, and it had been previously agreed with IMC leadership that it did not

make sense to make a trip to London 'just' for that.

There was nothing controversial in the meeting itself with reports being received and approved from the CEO Patrick Watt and the COO Martin Birch. The still open point after the resignation of Rt Rev John Sentamu is the appointment of a new Chair of The Board Of Trustees. This position is filled on an interim basis by long term Christian Aid supporter Maggie Swinson.

The full annual report can be accessed via the following link:-
<https://www.christianaid.org.uk/our-work/what-we-do/annual-report-and-financial-statements>

The 'home' webpage of Christian Aid can be accessed via the following link:-
<https://www.christianaid.org.uk/>

But if you don't want to do that, here is the headline information regarding Christian Aid's activities during the 2022-2023 year

**Christian Aid exists to create a world where everyone
can live a full life, free from poverty.**

The year in numbers 2022-2023

3.3m

people benefited from our interventions

275

projects were implemented globally

£90.6m

was raised throughout this year

As usual, if you want any more information, please do not hesitate to contact
Geoffrey S Matthews
IMC Christian Aid Representative

Tel : 07568 589569

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christianaid.representative@imchurches.org.uk



Christian Aid has teamed up with partner organisations across the UK to help churches gain a deeper understanding of poverty and empower Christians to act in the run up to the next UK general election.

It all starts with our 'Act on Poverty' Lent course.

We've produced this series of six resource packs for small groups to help guide your church through Lent 2024.

We're working with the [Baptist Union](#), [Methodist Church](#), [United Reformed Church](#), [Church Action on Poverty](#), [The](#)

[Trussell Trust](#), and others. Together we'll enable churches and individuals UK-wide to gain a deeper understanding of experiences of poverty, local and global. We'll be sharing stories of faith and activism that challenge the status quo. And we'll be offering inspiration for actions big and small that we can all take to tackle poverty together.

Each pack contains:

- Guidance for a short Bible study
- Access to audio recordings of conversations featuring anti-poverty practitioners and activists, many with lived experience of poverty in the UK and worldwide
- Questions and prompts for small group discussion
- Inspiring videos from churches taking practical action on poverty
- A guide to simple steps your church can take to advocate for change

You can also use each pack as a standalone session to explore the issues most relevant for you.

All information is available at the Resource Centre, if required.