



TOGETHER

NewarkandSouthwellMethodist.org.uk

Where is the vitality in the church?

Article by Prof Stan Chapman of Southwell Methodist Church

The Methodist conference season is on us again and, even allowing for Covid, the numbers reported are pretty discouraging. Membership is down to 170,000 in 4,110 local churches, an average of about 40 a church. The membership is sustained by annual connexional expenditure of £44.4 million, or around £260 per member. Good value for money you might claim. More depressing is the *Methodist Recorder* report (25th June) of the bankruptcy of Methodist Guild holidays and sale of, among other favourites, Willersley Castle in Derbyshire, after almost a century of hosting weekend and holiday retreats. (I have been going to functions there for 60 years!) Is the light at the end of the tunnel? What vitality can we discern through the gloom? Two recent developments impress me.

As *The Economist* puts it, “God has had a good lockdown. Attendance, like Jesus, is risen” (3rd April). When the Archbishop of Canterbury preached his Easter sermon earlier this year, Canterbury Cathedral was always empty, but his online reach was vast with a combined audience (television, radio and online) of more than 5 million people, around 2,500 times more than his usual Easter audience. Since lockdown began, the same secular source adds, churches have started to attract the sort of online numbers associated with rock stars. The Church of England’s national weekly broadcast had been seen 40 million times by Easter, and other denominations have not been slow to follow. New technology, most familiar to a new generation, opens up new channels to God.

Just as inspiring are developments outside the institutional churches. For this, we can best turn to the research of Theos, a Christian think tank I recommended a few months ago. I am now looking at the Theos’ little book *Doing Good: A Future For Christianity in the 21st Century* (2016), which opens with the proposition “Our age is the very far from setting into a comfortable unbelief “ (p30). Peoples religious aspirations are now more typically expressed in a search for social justice and social caring. This level of social action is vast, intense and growing impressively, as government data confirms. There were nearly 50,000 faith-based charities in the UK in 2016, an increase of 15,000 over the previous decade. The report concludes “the overall message is clear: the need for and opportunity to demonstrate Christian love and commitment through concrete social action is greater today than it has been for generations “ (pp47-8). Is this what we are committed to as a church?



HE IS THE ONE WHO WILL BUILD A HOUSE FOR MY NAME

Online Circuit Service Sermon | 2 Samuel 7:1-14a | Rev Peter Bates

King David had done a wonderful job uniting God's people. Things had settled down over the time that he had been king of Israel and Judah. No more wars and battles to fight, he even had time to have a palace built with the best materials available. David was settled, he was happy, he was contented. But one day David and had a stroll on the rooftop, and he looked to the tent which symbolised God's presence among the people. It suddenly dawned on David, he had spent so much time and energy getting his palace built and ruling his people, that he had not realised that God still dwelt in a tent. Surely God should have a building befitting his glory.

The desire of David's heart was to build a temple to God's glory. What is the desire of our hearts? How would you imagine church if we could start all over again? Not just with the buildings but with everything else as well. Dare we push the door, and see if it opens? Whether it is God's will or our own fanciful imaginations? Of course, we can be mistaken, or the timing might not be right, or we are thinking on the right lines, but we are the one to prepare the ground, and someone else will bring the vision to fruition.

God said to David, through Nathan, the prophet. "I have been moving from place to place with a tent as my dwelling." God is creative, he is flexible, he is not tied down to a tent or a building. It is us who try and contain God in a building. When the people of Israel left Egypt and journeyed towards the Promised Land, a tent signified God's presence with them. Moses went into the tent to meet with God. But when the people travelled to their next destination they dismantled the tent and carried it with them. God was not hampered by his dwelling in a tent, it did not diminish him in anyway. We need to remember this when we think of our buildings

God did not want the people of Israel to be burdened by a building when they were on the move. In a sense, as Christians we are always on the move, maybe not physically, but certainly spiritually. We cannot keep up with God's creativity, but it keeps us on our toes to at least try to catch up with what God is doing next. We have wonderful buildings which reflect the investment our forefathers made in wanting to glorify God. Times have changed since these buildings were erected, but our mission has not. Some of our buildings are adaptable but others are limiting in what can be done in them. The Barnbygate and Hawtonville congregations have a wonderful opportunity to try something new. Let us support them in this venture, as they seek God's vision for a new church – Hope Community Methodist Church.

1. Online Service

Join us from 10:30am on Sunday for our online Circuit Service which this week led by Rev Peter Bates.

Find it on the 'Newark and Southwell Methodist Circuit' YouTube Channel (<https://www.youtube.com/NewarkSouthwellMethodistCircuit>) why not invite a friend to watch it with you and share the link with them on your social media or by email!

2. Circuit 'Zoom' Coffee Time is changing!

More and more folk are attending face-to-face services but we're also committed to those who can't yet, so we changing our Zoom coffee time. From July 4th the coffee time will be run by Richard Miller and will not just involve Sunday's but also some midweek sessions. If you'd like more details and to join the distribution list please contact Richard by email: richardjmiller17@sky.com.

There is also a weekly coffee time at 3pm on a Monday run by Charles Street but open to all, email Mel Watson for more details: mellwatson42@gmail.com.

3. Radio Services

BBC Radio 4 (Also online.)
08:10am - 18th July 2021

Rebirth and Renewal in Senghenydd

Bishop June Osborne preaches in a service from St Peter's Senghenydd exploring rebirth and renewal after trauma.

4. Radio Nottingham

Listen every Sunday, at 8am, to a live church service on BBC Radio Nottingham. (Online or on 95.1-103.8 MHz FM for free.)

If all this baffles you and you'd like to find new ways to engage with church in these times, please contact your minister.

God never intended our buildings to be a burden to us, and the Methodist Church has reiterated this in the phrase – Mission Not Maintenance. We have to be careful that our focus is not misplaced. Maintenance is important, but if it takes over our focus on mission then our church will begin to stagnate. As we focus on maintaining the building and not on God's vision for us.

God wants a place in our hearts, a lively, breathing vital, living relationship with him. From that point, God can build a community of people who want to serve and worship him. This is when we become a church, when we realise we need God and we need each other. When we show love, respect and acceptance to each other. When we have a sense of belonging, and we are valued for who we are.

God raised David up to unite the people of Israel and Judah. The people needed unity if they were going to journey with God. God promised David, and the promise is true for us today, that he will be with us. God said to David. "I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own." I believe that God wants to provide a spiritual home for each one of us. That spiritual home is a place where we can worship God and serve him.

Solomon fulfilled his father's desire and built the temple. At the dedication service Solomon acknowledged God's greatness. He said, "But will God really dwell on earth with men? The heavens, even the highest heavens cannot contain you. How much less this temple that I have built. O Lord my God. Hear the cry and the prayer that your servant is praying in your presence. May your eyes be open to this temple day and night, this place of which you said you would put your Name there."

Solomon acknowledged that God could not be contained in a building, not even one that was as magnificent as the temple he had built. But Solomon did ask that God's presence would remain in the temple. Our churches are no ordinary buildings, they are where God dwells, they are precious to us, and hold so much history and emotion, but they are also a vehicle for God's presence and mission. They are a place where we worship him. Where we are spiritually fed and share fellowship with our brothers and sisters in Christ. But they are also a place where we move out from to do God's work. We are God's representatives in the community around us.

Our buildings cannot mould our mission. Our mission must be moulded by God, and our building must be moulded by our present mission. We acknowledge that God is already at work in our communities, and so we need to see where God is at work and join him in that work. **Amen**

Prayer Space

Lord, as you revealed yourself to individuals in the Old and New Testament, we ask that you reveal yourself to us. We thank you that we can see your glory in nature, the splendour of your creation. We worship you and bow down to you in our hearts. As the angel's worship and praise you in heaven, we too want to join in that worship, we want to catch a glimpse of your glory as we gaze in adoration at you. We thank you for the way you reveal yourself to us in so many different ways.

We are sorry for the way we are selfish in the way we treat people. Help us to look honestly at ourselves to see how far we fall short of what you expect. But also help us to be aware of your love for us. We thank you that you are always willing to forgive when we acknowledge our waywardness. We pray that we will feel the joy of your presence in our lives as we serve you.

Amen

Lord, we pray for the 'Black Lives Matter' campaign. We ask that the injustices of the past will not carry on today or in the future. We pray for an end to institutional racism, by the unfair way that people are judged by the colour of their skin. We pray for a society where everyone is valued. We pray for people who suffer from domestic abuse. We pray that you will protect them, and lead them to a place of safety. We pray for the abusers that you will bring a change in their hearts so that they will be enabled to turn away from their destructive behaviour.

Lord, we pray about the economic situation. We ask that you will give our government wisdom and guidance to help them through the problems the country faces. We pray for businesses that are struggling, and individuals who are desperate for work, we ask that you will meet their needs. Help us all to keep safe, especially with the easing of lockdown restrictions. **Amen**

EMAIL PRAYER CHAIN

If you would like to join a prayer chain and receive prayer requests or to submit a prayer request (with permission of the recipient) please get in touch with Colin Beckett colin1244@gmail.com.

It is for those of any church or none!

Monday prayercourse.org

It's not too late to join the prayercourse.org Monday night study group. Next Monday will be third session but you can catch up on any of the sessions or study them independently on the prayercourse.org website.

Next week we continue through the Lord's prayer with a focus on 'Petition' from "Give us this day our daily bread." In this session we'll explore how we can enjoy God's presence in praise and worship. If you would like to join us contact peter.hibberts@methodist.org.uk for Zoom details.

Songs...

O Lord my God (StF 82) [LINK](#)

Immortal, invisible, God only wise (StF 55) [LINK](#)

Seek ye first the kingdom of God (StF 254) [LINK](#)

King of my heart (StF 351) [LINK](#)

Click 'LINK's to access YouTube clips of each song.

Bubble Church Questions



Would you like to be part of Covid-Safe face-to-face church? Join a bubble today by getting in touch with your minister.

1. Where do you find God dwelling, in your life at the moment? Is God the focus of your attention or are you getting on with life whilst God dwells in a tent?
2. What is the desire of our hearts? How would you imagine church if we could start all over again? (Not just with the buildings but with everything else as well.)
3. How much of our time, as a church do you think we spend on maintenance and how much on mission?
4. How do you feel about your church building? Is it a place for God's dwelling and springboard for mission or somewhere that we try to contain God that may limit our mission? How can we get the balance right?
5. How can we let God mould our mission and in doing so, mould our buildings to serve our mission?
6. Please pray for all our churches in these difficult times.

For more information checkout the Bubble Church guide with risk assessment on the Circuit Website: <https://www.newarkandsouthwellmethodist.org.uk/newsroom/bubble-church.html>

Global Hunger Appeal

More than 41 million people in 43 countries are teetering on the brink of famine. Without immediate action, women, men and children will lose their lives.

This is a global hunger emergency. The Covid-19 pandemic, violent conflict and the climate crisis have all increased global hunger. Now, people in countries including South Sudan, Ethiopia, Afghanistan and Burkina Faso are facing the very real threat of starvation.

Families desperately need food and clean water to survive. If we act now, we can prevent unnecessary deaths.

[CLICK HERE TO TAKE ACTION](#) or visit ChristianAid.org.uk

14-7-21

Next face-to-face opportunities across the circuit...

See below for the next face-to-face opportunities in your local church or churches around the circuit - this week's service are shown in red.

Balderton: July 18th, 10:30am - Mrs Rachel Dalby

Barnbygate: July 18th, 11am - Rev David Gibson (Holy Communion)

Charles Street: July 18th, 10:30am - Local Arrangement

Collingham: July 18th, 10:45am - Ted Gascoyne

Elston: July 25th, 10:45am - Rev Kevin Hart (Holy Communion)

Hawtonville: July 18th, 11am - Joint service at Barnbygate

Long Bennington: July 25th, 10:30am - Rev Barrie Morley

North End: July 25th, 6pm - Mrs Jenny Hardy

North Muskham: July 25th, 10:30am - Rev Peter Bates

Southwell: July 18th, 10am - Rev Peter Hibberts

Southwell: July 18th, 4pm - Rev Peter Hibberts (Bubble Church)

Sutton on Trent: July 25th, 10:30am - Mrs Melanie Ward

If you would like to attend any of these services, you will be made most welcome but may need to book in advance. If you are unsure, please contact the minister:

Rev Peter Hibberts (peter.hibberts@methodist.org.uk) for: Barnbygate, Elston, Hawtonville, North Muskham, Southwell and Sutton on Trent

Rev Peter Bates (peter.bates857@yahoo.com) for: Balderton, Charles Street, Collingham, Long Bennington, North End

	July - August 2021	4th July	11th July Action for Children	18th July	25th July	1st August	8th August	15th August	22nd August	29th August
Balderton	10:30 am	LA	Melior HC	Hardy	LA	Bates	Castle HC	Hart HC	Bates	Dalby
Barnbygate	11:00 am	Woodgrove	Gibson HC			LA		Joint Service at Hawtonville Barn		
Charles Street	10:30 am	Hardy	L Blatherwick LA	C Mansbery HC	LA		LA Casson HC	LA	Falla HC	
	6:00 pm		Matheson HC				Jahs HC			
Collingham	10:45 am	LA	Hudnall T HC	Gascoyne	Wirington	LA	Ward HC	Bates HC	West	Bates
Elston	10:45 am		Gascoyne	Hart HC			Hull	Hardy		
Hawtonville	11:00 am	Joint Service at Barnbygate		Joint Service at Barnbygate		Joint Service at Barnbygate		Falla HC	Joint Service at Barnbygate	
Long Bennington	10:30 am		Bates HC		Marley		Bates HC			Gascoyne
North End	6:00 pm	Beech	Bates HC	Hardy	LA	Bates	Hart HC	Bates HC	LA	Falla
North Muskham	10:30 am		C Mansbery HC		Bates		Hawtonville T HC			Wirington
Southwell	10:00 am		Hibberts HC				Hibberts HC			
	4:00 pm		Ward HC		Bates		Hibberts HC		Hart HC	
Sutton-on-Trent	10:30 am		Hart HC		Ward HC		Bubbin HC	Hardy		Bubbin Morley HC

Full service details up to and including August can be found on the circuit website: newarkandsouthwellmethodist.org.uk

The future of TOGETHER...

As we move forward to a new normal, we are taking some time to reflect on what that new normal will look like and listening to the views of folk from around the circuit.

As part of this, we are evaluating the TOGETHER newsletter from September onwards. If you have a view on the future of the newsletter, please do get in touch (email Rev Peter at peter.hibberts@methodist.org.uk).

If it is to continue, we need to find a way for it to be sustainable. This may well include having a circuit editorial team who can put the newsletter together. Without this, it may not be possible to continue. If you can volunteer, please do get in touch.