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And are we yet alive

Revd Nathan Falla looks towards Methodist Conference

Methodist Conference is taking place in Telford at the end of June. It meets first in its Presbyteral Session from 23-24th June (deacons have their separate Convocation) and in its Representative Session from 25th-30th June. Both sessions begin with singing of Charles Wesley's hymn *And are we yet alive*, which reminds us that Methodists have gathered to confer together since 1744. The Conference is the governing body of the Methodist Church and meets annually to discuss matters affecting the life of the Church, the nation and the world. It makes decisions that impact the life of the Church at all levels.

Conference is a gathering of representatives from each Methodist district, along with some who have been elected by the Conference and some ex-officio members and representatives of the Youth Assembly. There are also associate ecumenical members and associate overseas members with people from the wider global Methodist family. Representatives are a mixture of lay people, ordained presbyters and deacons. The main business of Conference is to confer together about the work of God across the Methodist Church, we do this by discussing and debating the various reports that have been written, asking questions and voting on the resolutions. Some reports have lengthier discussion than others!

Everything that Conference does is in the context of worship and prayer. The Presbyteral Session allows time and space for presbyters to gather (presbyters can attend at their own expense if they are not a member) and to reflect on ministry. It begins with a Communion Service where we reaffirm our ordination vows and the pastoral address where the outgoing President Revd Sonia Hicks reflects on her year in office and the challenges and opportunities. A particularly poignant part of the Presbyteral Session is the Service of Thanksgiving where the presbyters who have died since the last Conference are remembered and their families are invited to attend.

This year it is my privilege to be the precentor (to lead the music) for the Presbyteral Session and to assist with the music in the Representative Session besides being a district rep.

Saturday 25th June is the opening of the Representative Session which sees the induction of the new President Revd Graham Thompson (who was a minister in this circuit from 1991-1999) and the Vice-President Anthony Boateng. Sunday is particularly a day of celebration as the presbyters and deacons who have completed their probation are Received into Full Connexion during the morning Conference Worship and Ordained later that day. Monday is when the conferring begins.

If you want to follow Conference the Representative Sessions are live streamed as is the Service of Thanksgiving, and a timetable for what is happening is available.

Can I encourage you to pray for the work of Conference, for the representatives, for those who work behind the scenes and especially for the presidency and the Conference secretariat. Conference always has significant work to do, but reading the agenda it feels that this year more than others there are some key decisions that will impact the future of The Methodist Church nationwide.



A place of welcome, healing and sanctuary

Online Circuit Service Sermon | Revd Nathan Falla
Reading: Psalm 16 & Luke 9:51-62

1. Online Service

Join us from 10:30am on Sunday for our online Circuit Service which this week is led by Revd Nathan Falla.

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. Zoom Opportunities

If you're feeling isolated, are not ready to be face to face yet, or can't, but are happy to meet on Zoom, there is 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.

There is also still a weekly Zoom fellowship called 'The Gathering' which is part of Southwell Methodist Church and run by Philip and Francine Holmes. You'd be most welcome, contact Philip to connect: philipholmes8100@gmail.com.

3. Radio Services

BBC Radio 4 (Also [online](#).)
08:10am – 26th June

Radical hospitality

Sunday Worship reflects on how the roots of Celtic spirituality can frame the context of a contemporary faith tradition. The service is led by Revd Emma Street, with reflections by Canon Edwin Counsell, and contributions from members of the St Illtud's Church community, all bearing witness to how the rich and ancient tradition of radical hospitality is as relevant now as ever in supporting service of one another.

Music includes hymns sung by members of the National Chorus of Wales, excerpts of Britten's Third and Bach's Fourth Cello Suites from local 'cellist Ben Tarlton, and a window into a Celtic mediaeval sound-world from the Welsh bardic musicians, 'Bragod'.

You only need to look at the news to see and hear the plight of refugees in our world. It is staggering that there are currently 84 million forcibly displaced people throughout the world. 20th June is World Refugee Day marking the beginning of Refugee Week and this year the theme is healing. The 1951 Refugee Convention defines a refugee as: "someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion." Refugees are protected in international law but this does not guarantee that they will be welcomed! As Christians we should ensure that at the very least the Church is a place of welcome, healing and security.

The Bible reminds us that God shows particular care for those who are foreigners in strange lands, those seeking refuge, and those with no permanent home. The psalmist in our first reading cries out to God for protection, because in God they know that they can find safety and protection, God will be their refuge. This is not a purely spiritual concept for the Israelites because multiple generations were well acquainted with displacement – both through wandering in the desert after escaping Egypt and through successive exiles.

The Israelite's attitude towards other displaced people is informed by their own experience. Exodus 23:9 says "Do not oppress a foreigner; you yourselves know how it feels to be foreigners, because you were foreigners in Egypt." Many laws in the Torah relate to safeguarding the wellbeing of "strangers" in Israel.

We may not know what it feels like to be displaced or unwelcome but we are aware of Jesus and what he calls us to do. When God enters the world in human form in the person of Jesus, Jesus is a refugee as he and his family fled to Egypt to escape Herod. Our Gospel reading reminds us that even during Jesus' ministry he would arrive in a new place with few contacts and resources, reliant on the kindness of strangers taking him in. "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."

Jesus is uniquely placed to understand the plight of refugees. If as a child Jesus takes the form of a refugee, and as an adult shows up in unfamiliar places reliant on the hospitality of others, what does that say about what our attitude to people in a similar position should be? Jesus tells us in Matthew 25, v.40 "whatever you did for one of the least of these, you did for me." Welcome, being a place of healing and providing sanctuary should be part of what it means to be church. It should take very little of our imagination to see the face of Jesus in the faces of refugees and asylum seekers. If we are willing to listen, might refugees be in a unique position to teach us something about God?

Psalm 16 reminds us we have a God in whom we take refuge. Protection and safety are at the heart of what God wants for us. It should be at the heart of what we strive to extend to others.

Our Gospel reading offers a stark contrast between the suspicion with which Jesus is treated by the Samaritan village in Luke 9, and the humility the Psalmist displays in saying “the boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places” (verse 6). As people who live in relative security, do we hold our privilege lightly, or grasp it tightly? Are we suspicious of those different from ourselves, or are we willing to embrace difference and diversity. As a Methodist Church we seek to be an inclusive, evangelistic, justice-seeking church. As a country and as individuals, do we want to be the kind of people who would turn Jesus away? Or like the Israelites, do we recognise that security is fragile – anyone can lose it, and it should therefore be extended, not withheld, whenever possible?

What will our response be? Will we commit to making a difference and working to bring about long-lasting change? Will we live as Jesus would have us live? Ultimately, Luke 9 passage is not about refugees, it is about the cost of following Jesus, which has profound implications for how we approach our ministry to refugees.

Three people tell Jesus they are ready and willing to follow him, and three times Jesus offers them a challenge, emphasising how hard journeying with him will be. Implicitly he asks the question “are you really ready to do what it takes?” If we say “Lord, we want to help refugees” we have to be prepared for the response “are you prepared for the effort that is going to take?”

Jesus is reminding these would-be followers that initial enthusiasm must be backed up with long-term journeying. Following Jesus requires commitment and perseverance, being a place of welcome, healing and sanctuary requires commitment and perseverance, praying and working for God’s kingdom of justice, love peace and hope requires commitment and perseverance

Our commitment as a church to refugees can’t be half-hearted because the crises we see at the moment are not a spike, they are a trend. Things are going to get worse before they get better. Many of the conflicts producing refugees have no clear hope of resolution, and some estimates suggest over a billion people globally could be displaced by the consequences of climate change by 2050.

What will do you do, what will the church do to show God’s love in action? To reach out to the marginalised with the Saviour’s love.

God of all, save and protect refugees, asylum seekers and displaced people around the world. God who made each of us unique and precious in your image, take these broken situations and bring transformation. May those who have fled war be able to return home, those who have been torn from their families be reunited, those who are seeking a new home find welcome. Be with those who find themselves uprooted, grant them patience, peace, and security. Amen.

Prayer Space

Prayers for others

Father God,
We recognise and celebrate your particular care for refugees and displaced people. Help us to see your face in each and every person who has been forced to leave their place of safety.

We pray particularly for the situation in Syria. For the war that continues to create new refugees 11 years after it began. For those who still reside in refugee camps and have not yet found a new home. Though there is no clear end in sight to the conflict, we know that you are a God who breaks down barriers, who can make a way where none seems available.

We pray into the situation in Myanmar and Bangladesh. For the Rohingya Muslims who have fled horrific persecution in their home country and have little prospect of a safe return. For the refugees, we pray peace and resolve, for all those working in the world’s largest refugee camp we pray for energy and compassion, for the leaders of Myanmar we pray conviction and repentance.

We pray for Ukraine. For those fleeing, those fighting, and those leading. In this Refugee Week, we particularly think of those who have left their homes. May they find a warm welcome in the countries that have taken them in, and may we be the ones to offer that welcome if we are able.

As the climate crisis threatens to create millions more displaced people, help us to approach this as a permanent calling, ministering in these situations with resolve, not defeatism. We pray that we may be ready and able to serve refugees at home and abroad in all the ways we can, in all the places we can, as long as we ever can.

Holy God, you are our refuge and shelter, you take sanctuary in us. Strengthen our resolve to be people of sanctuary, to build cultures of welcome and hospitality, and to act with protective care for all who need sanctuary. We pray for a world without war in which all can live safely and without fear in their own homes. In the Name of Christ. Amen.

Written by Revd Inderjit Bhogal for *All we can Refugee Week Service*

Hymns and worship songs

Songs chosen for inclusion in the YouTube service:

Great is thy faithfulness – StF 51, SOF, H&P 66

You're calling us – StF 37, SOF 2686

You give rest to the weary – StF 657, SOF 2171

Let us build a house – StF 409

Community of Christ – StF 681

Please click on the song title to access YouTube clip of each song.

Discussion Questions

Church is best done together but we know that this isn't always possible - particularly if you're housebound, isolated or even shielding. But why not contact a friend and arrange to watch the church service online or read the newsletter simultaneously and get in touch by telephone afterwards to talk about it. Below are some questions that might help you to reflect together!

1. Does the 84 million displaced people surprise you?
2. What do you learn from the example of Jesus?
3. Have you gained new insight about God from an unexpected source? What did you learn?
4. Do you have an example of trying something for a short time and then giving up?
5. How do you think the church can be a place of welcome, healing and sanctuary?
6. How will you respond to what you have read and reflected on in your daily living?

In person worship across the Circuit during the next four weeks...

June-August 2022		19th June Sanctuary Sunday	26th June Conference Sunday	3rd July	10th July Action for Children
Balderton	10.30am	N Falla HC	Dalby	Hart	Morley HC
	Other			LA 4pm	
Charles Street	10.30am	Winnington	Mathews	N Falla HC	LA
	6pm	N Falla HC	West	Hart	N Falla HC
Collingham	10.45am	Dalby T	Hall HC	L Blatherwick	LA
Elston	10.45am		Hibberts CA / HC		Breakfast at Hope Hawtonville 9am
Hope Community	10.30am	Ward at B'gate	LA at H'ville	Beech at B'gate	N Falla Breakfast / at H'ville / 9am
Long Bennington	10.30am	LA	Morley HC	Ward T	A Trowbridge
North End	6pm	Mathews	Morley	Hardy	Beech
North Muskham	10.30am		Pearce		Dalby
	2pm	N Falla Café		Hibberts Café / HC	
Southwell	10am	Hibberts HC	L Blatherwick	Hibberts	Pearce
	Other	Hucknall 4pm	Hibberts Fringe	N Falla 4pm	
Sutton-on-Trent	10.30am	Hibberts at Old England 4pm	United Service at Parish Church HC / 10am	Hibberts SoP / 6.30pm	LA Breakfast / 9am



Come and spend an evening at Charles Street with *Release International* partner Dr Susanna who will be speaking about the persecution of Christians in the West African country of Burkina Faso and how people are learning to lean on God in violent and terrifying circumstances.

Do join us for what will be an inspiring evening of worship, learning and prayer.

Thurs 30 June 2022 / 7.30pm
Charles Street Methodist Church
1 Charles St, Newark NG24 1RN