

Wesley Memorial *magazine*

from Wesley Memorial Methodist Church, Oxford

WINTER 2024



.. And peace on earth

Dear Friends,

I write as we approach the season of Advent. A time of watching and waiting. A time of reflection and preparation. The theme of this letter is incarnation so let us begin with a few words from John's Gospel chapter 1 verses 1-5:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it."

We read in John's prologue of the Word becoming flesh, divinity and humanity in the person of Jesus. Throughout John's gospel there are examples where Jesus seems overwhelmingly divine – for example at his arrest in Gethsemane when his words 'I am he' cause the soldiers to fall to the ground. But at other times he is movingly human feeling exhaustion, pain, loss and thirst. John's prologue to the Gospel which we often read at Carol services, throughout Advent and even on Christmas Day, reminds us of the mystery of the incarnation of Jesus, Immanuel, both human and divine.

As we head into Advent, a favourite poem of mine is *Advent Calendar* by Rowan Williams.

He will come like last leaf's fall.
One night when the November wind
has flayed the trees to the bone, and earth
wakes choking on the mould,
the soft shroud's folding.
He will come like frost.
One morning when the shrinking earth
opens on mist, to find itself
arrested in the net
of alien, sword-set beauty.
He will come like dark.
One evening when the bursting red
December sun draws up the sheet
and penny-masks its eye to yield
the star-snowed fields of sky.
He will come, will come,
will come like crying in the night,
like blood, like breaking,
as the earth writhes to toss him free.
He will come like child.

Often our portrayals of the Incarnation are cosy and sanitised, the hang-ups of our Victorian Christmas carols with the baby who does not cry, a Lord Jesus looking down from the sky or a silent night after the birth of a baby. Rowan Williams reminds us of the pain of the in-breaking of the son of God into the broken and imperfect world.

Much is expressed in the lines of Williams' poem: He will come like last leaf's fall - Christ comes to his own who do not receive him; like the last of the autumn leaves. He will come like frost - Christ comes amongst us with the surprising beauty of a first frost, as on that one morning when the world found itself awash in the 'alien, sword-set beauty' of Christ's resurrection. He will come like dark - Christ comes on 'a day of darkness and gloom' as is written in the prophet Joel. His judgement unsettling our own, Christ comes, and God's justice shines forth like 'the star-snowed fields of sky.'

He will come like child. Christ comes as a babe in Bethlehem, and the whole creation groans for the new life of the world to come. Christ's incarnation comes like crying in the night, like blood, like breaking... He will come like child. He will come like child to shatter our illusions. He will come like child to inhabit the vulnerability of human skin; to weep with, to walk alongside, to care for, and to challenge humanity.

Christ comes to us as a child, but how do we receive him? What is our response to the 'Word becoming flesh', to Immanuel - God with us?

Recently, at the recommendation of a learned colleague, I've been reading some of the works of the German theologian and mystic, Meister Eckhart, writing in the 1300s. It's pretty hard going, but in the random way that inspiration often strikes, I found this quote of his: "What good is it to me that Mary gave birth to the son of God fourteen hundred years ago, and I do not also give birth to the Son of God in my time and in my culture? We are all meant to be mothers of God. God is always needing to be born." Eckhart speaks of the need for us all to be bearers of Christ especially in hard times. We as disciples are called to be bearers of Christ, bearers of good news, bearers of hope. God is always needing to be born. How might we be bearers of hope in this season, sharing the good news of the incarnate one born among us, not just through our words, but in our lives? For as John's gospel reminds us so beautifully and poetically:

"And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth "(John 1:14).

I'd like to conclude with a prayer written by the Revd Rachel Mann, entitled *Scandalous God*.

Scandalous God,
you choose the way of foolishness.
Come dwell with us in vulnerability;
help us to discover riches in your poverty
and poverty in our riches.
Disturb our complacency,
call us out into new life. Amen.

Rev Miriam Moul



Editorial



The prophet Isaiah pronounced these words:

“They shall beat their swords into ploughshares,
and their spears into pruning-hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more.” Isaiah 2.4

All our hopes and prayers for our present world are encapsulated in these words.

We hope you enjoy this Christmas edition of the magazine in all its variety, and we invite you all to join in praying for peace and reconciliation in every corner of the world.

The Editorial team.

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The Litany of Reconciliation from Coventry Cathedral

The Litany of Reconciliation was written by Canon Joseph Poole in 1958, and continues to be prayed in the Cathedral every weekday at noon, and throughout the world by partners in the Community of the Cross of Nails.

The phrase ‘Father, forgive’ was inscribed on the wall of the ruined Cathedral by Provost Dick Howard after the Blitz, in November 1940, and it can still be seen there today.

The words echo the prayer of Jesus as He hung dying on the cross: ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing’. This simple prayer ‘Father, forgive’, acknowledges our need to receive forgiveness from God for ourselves, as well as ask it for others.

You can read the Litany prayer here or join at midday every weekday, in the Chapel of Unity, as they recite the litany, praying for the peace of all God’s creation. The words *Father, forgive* are used as the response, and all are welcome to join in, regardless of faith or non-faith, as we pray to ‘build a kinder, Christ-child-like world’.

The Litany

All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

The hatred which divides nation from nation, race from race, class from class: *Father, forgive.*

The covetous desires of people and nations to possess what is not their own: *Father, forgive.*

The greed which exploits the work of human hands and lays waste the earth: *Father, forgive.*

Our envy of the welfare and happiness of others: *Father, forgive.*

Our indifference to the plight of the imprisoned, the homeless, the refugee: *Father, forgive.*

The lust which dishonours the bodies of men, women and children: *Father, forgive.*

The pride which leads us to trust in ourselves and not in God: *Father, forgive.*

Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.



When I was growing up, my Dad believed that it was his duty as our father to ensure that my brother and I received a robust and culturally rich education. That is to say, he made sure that we were brought up watching the Star Wars films. This meant that Luke Skywalker, Yoda and Jaja Binks were some of my childhood heroes. My brother and I could be found in our back garden engaged in fierce, intergalactic combat, sparring with toy light-sabres.

For many of us, the words “Star Wars” mean nostalgic films, centred around lovable characters on feel-good adventures. Films in which, against all the odds, our heroes reliably succeed in restoring the balance of good versus evil in the universe. Today however, star wars or drone wars are not just the stuff of movies, but are the new frontier of warfare, as a result of technological advancement and rising conflict between superpowers.

While in the UK we live in relative peace, the state of conflict globally is high. You can’t open a newspaper or any form of social media without seeing heart-breaking news of the wars in Gaza and Ukraine. While these are the conflicts that we are most aware of, the tragic reality is that these are not the only current wars. Indeed, according to analysis by the NGO Armed Conflict Location and Event Data, (ACLED), in July 2024 one in seven people in the world were exposed to conflict in 2024, and 50 countries are facing extreme, high or turbulent levels of conflict. This marks an increase in the level of conflict globally. It is not just that people around the world are facing more political and climate instability in addition to more armed conflict— we are seeing heightened tensions between the global superpowers of the US, Russia and China. This climate of fear and tension is driving countries around the world to increase military spending and arms production, and consensus around arms control and international law is being lost. In 2023 global military spending leapt up by 6.9% to \$2443 billion, at the same time as international development aid consistently failed to meet the increasing humanitarian need.

From a humanitarian perspective there is an overwhelming interest in working to end conflict, in redirecting spending on war to humanitarian issues, and rebuilding global political will around arms control and international law. However, there is very little desire from key international players to do this, particularly concerning as technology is pushing war into uncharted territories. War in space, conflict played out on the web and the use of killer robots are no longer the stuff of science-fiction. The technology already exists and in some cases is already being used in conflicts around the world. International law is lagging behind these advancements.

This means that, as people who care about working for global peace, tackling climate change, and reducing global poverty, we need to confront these new ethical questions, and challenges. With countries stocking up on weapons, we need people like you and me to speak up on these issues. Throughout history the church has consistently played an important role in advocating for peace, in speaking up for the sanctity of life, in promoting arms control, shaping human rights and international law. We believe that Christians and the church have a role to play again. We must be a part of the dialogue around these new and complex ethical questions, to look for peaceful solutions, and to support our politicians in ensuring that the UK works for a future where technology is used for the good of humanity.

This is why JPIT is launching the Future of Arms project. The project comprises a series of educational resources: briefings, blogs, podcasts, webinars and videos. You can learn about these important issues and find out how you and your church can be part of working towards a more peaceful future, where technology is used not to take life, but to improve and even save it. To borrow some of the wisdom from Yoda, “to be Jedi is to face the truth, and choose. Give off light, or darkness... Be a candle, or the night.” In a world where there are immense challenges, it is easy to feel powerless and to give in to fear, but let’s choose to be light, to work together to be lights in the darkness.

Join us as we seek to use our influence and our voices to create a more peaceful future.

Sienna Sexton, JPIT

See also:

<https://jpit.uk/issues/peacemaking/futureofarms>

A Pilgrimage to North Macedonia

In September I went on a pilgrimage to North Macedonia, organized by the Friends of Mount Athos. There were fourteen of us in the group, the majority being Orthodox believers, but also including a few Anglicans and one Methodist (me!). People had travelled from Australia, Canada, Greece, the UK, and the USA to take part.

North Macedonia is situated in south-eastern Europe, north of Greece and east of present-day Albania, with further borders to the east (Bulgaria), north-west (Kosovo) and north (Serbia).

The Republic of North Macedonia (the official name of the country since 2018 following a prolonged dispute between Macedonia and Greece) had gained its independence from Yugoslavia in 1991 by a simple vote of the Macedonian people, but the original constitution failed to satisfy the Muslim Albanians and other numerous minority groups living in Macedonia, so in 2001 the preamble of the Macedonian constitution was recast to name them as equal citizens with the Macedonians.

The history of Macedonia is complex and has given rise to many wars in the past, too complicated to attempt to describe here. The current situation regarding religion is that Orthodoxy is thriving, with Islam and Judaism being the main other groups. The unchallenged separation from Yugoslavia in 1991 and the settling of the dispute with Greece over the name in 2018 seem to have resulted in relative peace for the country.

Our pilgrimage began in the capital, Skopje, but after breakfast the next day we set off for the southernmost part of the country where Lake Ohrid is situated. On the way we visited the Monastery of John the Baptist, known as the Bigorski Monastery, in the mountainous Mavrovo National Park, where there was a beautiful church with a hand-carved wooden iconostasis, one of four originally made by a group of wood-carvers in the nineteenth century. We saw the icon of St John with three hands, which was covered in a silver riza donated by those who had been blessed by the

icon. Moving on, we also visited a women's monastery dedicated to St George, where we were able to attend vespers as well as a name-day celebration. Then we just managed to see a cave church in a third monastery, with frescoes dating from the fourteenth century, before making our way to our hotel in Ohrid.

Our third day was spent exploring Ohrid. The highlight for me was the Icon Gallery, where I saw famous ancient icons that I had previously only seen reproduced in books, dating from the eleventh to nineteenth centuries. According to legend, Ohrid boasts 365 churches, one for each day of the year, but we could only visit a few of them. The frescoes and icons there were breathtaking. We climbed up to the Citadel, from which there was a magnificent view of the town and lake, on which we were later taken by catamaran. My favourite Byzantine church was that of Saints Clement of Ohrid and Panteleimon, whose relics were buried there. St Sofia's Church, modelled on St Sophia in Constantinople, contains more ancient icons. Originally built in the tenth–eleventh centuries, this church was destroyed by an earthquake in the fifteenth century and was rebuilt by the Ottomans as a mosque. Nowadays it is used as a concert hall. In the evening we were treated to a show of traditional Macedonian circle-dancing.

Our next trip was to the southernmost part of the lake, where the St Naum Monastery is situated. We went by rowing-boat to the springs of the river Drim, one of the most peaceful parts of the day. The monastery itself features another carved iconostasis and several layers of fresco painting dating as far back as the fourteenth century.

The next day we went to Bitola, where we saw wonderful mosaics in the Roman remains of Heraclea Lyncestis (on the outskirts of the town) and visited what to me was the most peaceful and spiritual church of the whole pilgrimage: St Demetrius. There was a tall, gilded pulpit and a magnificent iconostasis. Then we drove to Kavadarci, where we visited a winery and had lunch before returning to Skopje.

It was the Feast of the Nativity of the Mother of God the next day and we were able to go to the new Cathedral in Skopje for the service. It was very full and there was beautiful singing; this was probably the highlight of the whole trip for many of us. We visited more churches and the House of Mother Teresa, and in the evening most people went to the opera.

In the last couple of days we visited more Byzantine churches and monasteries: St George's Church in Nagoričane was a venerable example with stunning frescoes and a tiny cave where Prochor Pčinski had lived. Both here and in the Lesnovo Monastery we were able to talk to the priests after the service and get an idea of what their life was like. The Skopje Church of the Holy Saviour (Sveti Spas) was beautiful, with another hand-carved iconostasis and rather modern icons lit from behind. At Matka Canyon we went on another boat trip and explored a cave high up on the mountainside. The Matka Monastery is home to women whose main work is intricate embroidery on church vestments. The little church there, dedicated to the Assumption, bears some symbols from the fifth century, while the frescoes are from the fifteenth. Our final visit was to Skopje's St Panteleimon Church, high up on the mountain, built in 1164, where we saw a fresco of the Lamentation showing Mary weeping over her dead son, painted two hundred years before the Italian Renaissance!



The pilgrims!



An iconostasis in Skopje

There were many peaceful moments and much to admire and marvel at, and I am very glad that I decided to join this pilgrimage.

Joanna Tulloch

Peace

How can one person
bring peace into the world?
We are each so small
and tainted by 'the flesh'
yet we are made whole
by the one whose love
is poured into our hearts
through the Spirit.

Each peaceful act, however small,
is a promise to follow
Jesus, and to fill
our hearts with that love.
So let us offer peace
to everyone we meet.

Joanna Tulloch

The flight into Egypt



"Rest on the flight into Egypt", Nicholas Mynheer, from the Methodist Modern Art Collection © TMCP, used with permission.

Here are Mary, Joseph and their baby, Jesus, having a rest as they flee their homeland, heading for Egypt. Here, in the midst of the stress, fear and tiring travel they have found a moment simply to be a family. For the parents to play with their baby, watch how it has grown, make it laugh and smile, take delight in the cuteness of a little infant.

The heat is clearly intense. Only dry arid desert all around, a cloudless sky from which the sun must be beating down. And yet, the tree has sprouted leaves and fruit. "Nature itself responds to God," the artist tells us. So nature brings its offering, its gift to this holy family, by way of shade and fruit, rest and restoration. How lucky and very blessed this family is.

I wonder what pictures of refugees you have seen recently. Over the years I have seen many: people of all colours, travelling in all weathers and landscapes, by car, by train, by boat, on foot. At the moment it includes people trying to get to Egypt, just like this little family. Some of them with little babies, too. But most are unsuccessful in their quest to get into Egypt, the border from Gaza remaining closed to all but a few. There doesn't seem to be much rest for these refugees. Food and water running out, buildings destroyed. Nature may be providing for this fleeing family here, but who is providing for the fleeing families in the real desert today?

I feel as though this painting should offer some sort of hope: that God will in some way provide for the fleeing

families today. And, of course, in the midst of the horror of their plight, there is still the love and care that parents continue to give their children, the sharing of what meagre food and drink family and friends can find, the care and expertise that local and visiting doctors try to give to the sick and wounded. God's love as expressed through fellow humans isn't absent, even in the midst of a violent siege. And yet... I can't help feeling jealous of this holy family: they are receiving a gift denied to so many others.

The artist goes on to say that "God is to be found in everything around; in the clouds, the mountains, the trees and animals, even the stones and dust." Perhaps nature doesn't only "respond to God". Perhaps nature is also a way for God to respond to and provide for us? But so many fleeing families are surrounded by shattered townscapes bombed to smithereens where nature doesn't get a look-in. And those that start in nature are fleeing droughts and floods that bring only death and disease. Have we humans destroyed nature, and in so doing, cut off one of the ways for us to encounter God and for God to provide for us?

I wonder if this harmonious picture of rest and respite hides a sad truth of what we have done to our world, and how we have made *Rest on the Flight to Egypt* much harder to find for today's fleeing families.

Vicky Davies

Traherne 350 in Oxford

A week of events has just taken place in Oxford in celebration of the poet and spiritual writer Thomas Traherne, who died 350 years ago last month.

Traherne is chiefly known today through the dramatic discoveries made during the twentieth century, and still continuing, of his unpublished manuscript writings, which have disclosed him as a writer of great originality and spiritual beauty. He was born in Hereford in about 1637, the son of a master shoemaker, and his writings vividly re-create his childhood experiences. He was admitted at Brasenose College, Oxford, in 1653, and in 1657 was presented to the tiny rural living of Credenhill in Herefordshire. Credenhill was the setting for the composition of almost all his extant works, and Traherne remained there until early 1674, when he moved to Teddington, Middlesex, to become a domestic chaplain to Sir Orlando Bridgeman, former Lord Keeper of the Great Seal. He died a few months later, and was buried in Teddington on 10 October 1674.

Traherne's writing is characterized by his intense and radiant vision of felicity, a desire to reconcile opposites, and a belief in the unlimited human potential to reflect the image of God. The Traherne 350 events in Oxford, organized by the Oxford Traherne edition in collaboration with Traherne's college of Brasenose, were intended to reflect something of his eclectic spirit and wide-ranging interests. They included a traditional choral evensong, with settings of Traherne's words, at both Brasenose and Magdalen College; a letterpress workshop at the Bodleian, where participants set and printed a Traherne poem; a creative translation workshop where we translated one of Traherne's poems into a variety of languages; and a celebratory event with mini-talks, readings from Traherne's works, music, and an exhibition. Earlier in the year, students at Brasenose participated in an art workshop led by Oxford artist Roger Wagner, at which they created three large, colourful collages inspired by Traherne's writing, and these were on display throughout the week. The last event concluded with a social gathering, which would perhaps particularly have delighted the heart of Traherne, who described himself as "A lover of company; a delighter in equals".

Perhaps the event which created the most enthusiasm has been the creative translation workshop. This was led by Dr Charlotte Ryland of The Queen's College Translation



'Detail of Traherne 'Walking' collage, created by students at Brasenose College, Oxford

Exchange, with contributions by Gwyneth Lewis, former National Poet of Wales, and Professor Ana Elena González-Treviño, who is translating Traherne's *Centuries of Meditations* into Spanish. Having reflected with their help on some of the issues raised by translating a seventeenth-century poem, we worked collaboratively in groups on the first four stanzas of Traherne's *Walking*, which we translated into eight languages, ranging from Bengali to Welsh. It was inspiring to see so many people of different linguistic backgrounds and skills working together in this way, but the afterlife of the workshop has been even more inspiring. In ways which we did not anticipate, participants have continued to work on translations after the workshop and to share them with us, and a Traherne colleague in North America has mirrored the event in the very different context of Northern Virginia Community College. Bilingual students there have also contributed their translations, in Arabic, Spanish, Farsi, and Pashto, and they too have had the enthusiasm to work on them after the event.

In a depressingly insular period in British history, the workshop in its own way affirmed the value of international collaboration, and the power of literature to facilitate this. It also affirmed Traherne's belief that "The Variety of Languages is a Marvellous Ornament and Beauty to the World", and even more importantly that we "must be able to interpret Languages, before we can know the Wisdom and the Beauty of other Nations".

Julia J. Smith

General editor of The Oxford Traherne

[Note: a booklet containing all the Traherne translations will shortly be available for free download from the Oxford Traherne website (<https://oxfordtraherne.web.ox.ac.uk/>),

3Generate 2024

3Generate Youth Assembly is a space for children and young people to tune into God, the world, and each other, to hear what God is saying to them and to discern what action they need to take by themselves, with their local church and the wider Methodist Church

A report on our trip by Mel, Alice and Lizzie

Mary drove the packed Phab minibus to Birmingham! “It was a long journey, but thanks to the large supply of snacks, we survived.” Mary, Miriam and Frank led our group and looked after our young people wonderfully. When we eventually arrived, we were “very” pleased to have a not very good dinner. (Actually NOT!!!) However we enjoyed the first day immensely.

Our activities on that first day:

“We started things off with dinner and then we all enjoyed a fantastic silent disco (a disco with just headphones). Most of us knew all the songs so it was amazing. We also had the choice between two playlists so we swapped between both of them.”

Activities on the next morning included riding a smoothie bike (a pedal-powered smoothie maker) and arts and crafts. We all did different things but we saw each other a lot in the park, and played lots of truth or dare, also lots of manhunt and hide and seek.

Our Saturday evening started off with an enjoyable Bladon production, a sample of the musical “Newsies”. We then had a very eventful session of barn dancing in the arena. It was very enjoyable but, for Lizzie, one of the best parts was when James arrived.

On Sunday morning we had a nice breakfast and then went to watch the dodgeball tournament. We got through the first round but then lost out on the second. Still, many thanks to Jasper, Jim, James, Daniel, Tomas, Kwadwo and Phoebe for taking part.

After the tournament, we got a packed lunch and then went to the final worship service.

On the way home in the minibus, we discussed what our favourite parts of 3Generate were. Nana enjoyed exploring the inflatable chapel and its prayer stations. The silent disco was very popular and the barn dance was the favourite activity of Jasper and James, although James was a bit too busy for some of the others! Miriam enjoyed hanging out with the youth and experiencing a “worshipping in nature” session she attended. For Alice, one of the highlights was the free slushie drinks from the Hope and Anchor Cafe. (see photo). Rachel loved the slushies & the tuck shop. We all agreed that the food was better than last year. Kwadwo, Daniel and Jim’s favourite activity was the caving whilst Phoebe loved watching Bladon who everyone agreed were fabulous! Tomas really enjoyed the dodgeball tournament and Aaron loved getting arty in the clay workshop. Frank enjoyed trying out Virtual Reality goggles which made him feel like he was walking the plank! He was interested to see if he could ignore what his eyes could see – but he couldn’t!

Mary said she enjoyed being with our wonderful group of young people, who all behaved really well, listened and were kind to one another; and I loved hearing about all the fun everyone had had, and sharing late-night communion with friends. It was a great weekend and we are looking forward to taking part in the Influencer day in late November as plans start to be made for 3Generate 2025.

Mel McCulloch

The WM gang



Slushies

A splendid day!

Saturday 14th September was a significant moment in the life of Wesley Memorial, with the highest ever recorded visitor numbers for Oxford Open Doors/Historic Churches' Ride and Stride Day: 631 people crossed the threshold in just six-and-a-half hours! Whilst it is very important that we all become more comfortable about sharing our faith with others, it is comforting to know that our building can talk of God for us, in a unique way. We experienced several examples of this as the day unfolded.

We were blessed with organ and piano interludes from Keith Lambert in the morning and then a little later, John Cammack and Liz Spain performing their piano–flute duets. Music draws visitors across the threshold and encourages people to sit, listen, relax and look around. This was certainly the case on that day. The atmosphere that the music provided was wonderful and palpable to all present.

In particular, a lady with early-onset dementia was thrilled to be able to listen to the flute, an instrument which she had once played. Her companion, noting that the visit to Wesley Memorial followed a frustrating time trying to find a suitable venue to visit, later wrote: "For more than half an hour we listened to a pianist and a flautist playing delightful music. [My friend] so enjoyed the music that sometimes she cried, other times she whistled in tune, other times she conducted. She was transformed into a happy and relaxed young woman." Her companion was reassured to learn that the church sanctuary offers a space for rest and relaxation during the week.

Between musical interludes we were able to chat to lots of our visitors, some of them friends from the Oxford Methodist Circuit and other churches taking part in the Historic Churches' Trust Ride and Stride; and many more who acknowledged that they had walked past the church for decades and this was the first time they had stepped inside. We handed out our specially prepared leaflet to as many as would take it– hoping that some would read it when they got home. Others sat down in the church, read their way through it, and made sure they looked at all the features we had highlighted.



Welcome!



The duo

Offering refreshments in the church was much appreciated and encouraged many to stay longer and also to visit the Atrium, with its displays. A display about Westminster College led to at least one former student chatting with Mary Lines and finding unexpected and welcome connections. Mel McCulloch had prepared some attractive stained-glass colouring and Play-doh decorating sheets, which proved popular with children and adults alike. Finding the *imp carvings* within the church sanctuary was a little trickier, but stimulated conversation and fuller exploration of the building.

It wasn't just about letting the building speak for us though. For me, the best thing about Oxford Open Doors Day is that visitors are in a relaxed yet enquiring state of mind. Questions about architecture can evolve into musing together on how a building can make us feel. Conversations about our history seem to lead naturally to talking about the concerns and priorities of our church community today. Perhaps in the peak visitor time, this was a little more difficult, but you can't have it both ways! Our minister Miriam's presence for much of the day proved very helpful and she had several very interesting conversations. The day was an outstanding success, and we look forward to next year's Oxford Open Doors' Saturday, in the knowledge that it is an opportunity for mission, and a time to enjoy our historic building and our life in the centre of Oxford.

Alison Butler

Talking of God together

When I retired, I made myself a firm promise. No more meetings. Well, as few as humanly possible. Keeping that promise has been liberating indeed. So why on earth did I ask to join a series of five evening meetings, and online at that?

The answer is *Talking of God Together*. This Methodist Church course aims to ‘encourage and equip Methodist people to talk together about our faith, initially amongst ourselves, but then developing the confidence to talk more widely with those of other faiths and none’. It sounded like a rare and important opportunity – and so it is proving. Speaking personally, I find it can be surprisingly difficult to share my experiences of faith, doubt, struggles with the profound questions of human living, and encounters with God. I don’t think I am alone in that. Yet these experiences are our soul journey, and at the core of who we are, as individuals and as a community seeking to walk in the steps of Jesus. Why is it so hard to talk about them? Perhaps just because they are such a deep part of us. By offering them, we make ourselves vulnerable. Time, space and trust are all needed. Even within churches, space for these conversations can get crowded out by the many practical ways we try to show love and concern for each other, and the wider world. Like the hidden part of the iceberg, our inner life in the presence of God underlies everything else, but we don’t often reveal what we find there.

The *Talking of God Together* sessions are carefully designed to help people share their own faith experiences in conversations that feel natural and supportive. Several Wesley Memorial groups have been meeting to follow the course. Our on-line group is still under way at the time of writing, so impressions here are a “work in progress”. We’ve been lucky to have Paul Spray’s thoughtful and encouraging facilitation, and Mary Lines’ expertise getting us in and out of ‘break-out’ groups online. Each session focusses on a different aspect of our relationship with God: *A Present God; A Listening God; A Caring God; A Speaking God; Jesus as Our Teacher and Model*. The accompanying handbook offers lots of ideas to prompt reflection on each theme. I like the way that each session begins with lively ice-breakers to help us get to know one another better, and



then a time to become aware of God’s presence. There are powerful prayers, case studies and Bible passages, plus some searching questions asked by people of faith through the ages: How do I experience the presence of God? Why is my prayer not answered? Does God really care? When there are different views on a moral or political issue, how do I discern God’s voice? What is my own experience of God through my life?

I am finding that “the more you put in, the more you get out”. Reading through the session materials in advance, and reflecting honestly on the questions really helps. So does listening with full attention to what others share about their own life of faith. I have learned from other people, and found it so encouraging to have that opportunity. (Talking of God Together has also got me thinking about how to support my friends and family – especially the ones who say they “aren’t religious” – to talk about their own deepest questions and experiences. We are all spiritual beings and so often what someone describes feels to me like an encounter with God.)

In the relatively short time we have together, it’s not possible to do more than touch on each theme, and how it plays out in people’s lives. What the sessions do very effectively is help start these conversations. I hope and pray that they will continue, and be used by God in many unexpected and beautiful ways.

Sally Meachim

An inspiring event

The closing service for the Oxford Institute for Methodist Theological Studies Conference 2024, on Sunday August 11th, was a heartwarming event with a packed church, on a day when our own congregation is usually rather depleted by summer holidays. The singing raised the roof, especially with the concluding hymn, "Love divine, all loves excelling". We enjoyed being led by the Revd Janet Unsworth (Director of the Ministries team, the Methodist Church in Ireland), happily back in Oxford, remembering her JWS days more than thirty years ago.

We were treated to a thoughtful sermon from Bishop Ken Carter, Bishop of the Western North Carolina Conference of the Methodist Church, entitled "Loving God, loving our neighbours, loving our country".

It was Chris's swan song as Communion Steward after thirty years' service and he had been told there could be 150 members of the Institute present. In fact, some of them had gone home on the Saturday night, but, with our own congregation, there were 153 communicants.

A couple of days later Chris went for a walk in Cutteslowe Park with Don Manley and told him about the service and the 153 communicants.

Don immediately said "John 21, verse 11" :

So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn.



Duccio's depiction of John 21.11

We have since discovered that 153 is an important number both biblically and mathematically.....

Glenda Lane

A Prayer for Peace

Creator God

Today in a fractured world we pray for peace and justice,
Your peace, not built on our broken promises and failing courage,
But your deep peace, through your creative power and embodied in the
service and sacrifice of Jesus.

May we follow Christ, seeking your justice, acting in solidarity and hope,
Even when the way seems unclear and the powers of our world don't
reflect your Kingdom,

Your Peace, Your Justice, Your Kingdom, Your world,

In Jesus name

Amen

<https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/>

What's that sofa doing in church?



Where did it come from?

The sofa was given to us by the Methodist Church's Evangelism and Growth team. They had bought it for use at the Circuit Superintendent's conference. Once that had finished, they were looking for a good home for it and they offered it to us at Wesley Memorial.

Why is the sofa here in church?

We have been thinking about where the best place might be. The point of the sofa is that it should be used to help encourage conversations and the sharing of stories, so hiding it away is not helpful. We thought we would trial having it in the Church Sanctuary, as this is a space which is big enough to house it and is often open to the public.

Why is it covered in graffiti? What do all these things mean?

At the Superintendent's conference the sofa was used as a meeting point to have conversations about where the Superintendents had felt/feel God's presence strongly. They then wrote or drew their responses onto the sofa.

Is it just for the children?

The sofa is definitely not just for the children, although it is appreciated by them, on Sunday and in the week.. It is lovely to see Rainbow House families sitting in the church playing with the crèche toys together! The sofa helps conversations to open up as it is comfortable and relaxing. This fits in well with our Open Church and mission policy.

Where did the blanket come from?

The beautiful knitted blanket was made and given to us by the Circuit knitting group who meet at Wesley Memorial on a Tuesday morning. We really love its colourful and welcoming appearance!

Do you have any other plans for the sofa?

We are still thinking about other ways to use the sofa for ministry but at the moment we'd like to see how things evolve where it is. I am keen to develop that creche area into a family-friendly space with little story-bags and simple crafts, to be available throughout the week. At some point we may want to add our own graffiti. The sofa could also be moved outside the church for specific outreach events (in fine weather!)

Is it a permanent fixture?

For me the sofa is a reminder and a challenge: it is a reminder that we need to seek to be outward-looking and confident about sharing our faith, and a challenge to be prepared to hear other people's stories. The sofa might not always be with us, but the challenge will remain.

Mel McCulloch

A message from Worzel

This is my new house. The big creatures keep putting me into it. It's a bit bare inside, but it's dry – and warmer than sleeping on the ground, so I decided, after some thought, to hibernate in here.

See you in the Spring!



A live link with Bethlehem

Over the years I have spent many happy hours at the annual **Greenbelt Festival**. It's a Christian event that features challenging and inspiring speakers on a range of peace and justice issues, as well as music, dance and much more.

This year I was unable to attend in person, but on the Sunday morning I joined the livestream of the festival communion service. I found it very moving. They had a live link-up with the 'Tent of Nations', a farm near Bethlehem that is trying to peacefully defend itself from five surrounding illegal Israeli settlements that want to take its land. Daoud Nassar, whose family have owned the farm for generations, was supposed to come to Greenbelt but couldn't make it due to the ongoing security risks. Instead he spoke via the link-up, explaining that the 'Tent of Nations' follow a series of principles of refusing to define themselves as victims or to hate, and working for justice, welcoming international volunteers. The farm residents behind him waved to the Greenbelt crowd who waved back. Isn't it wonderful what technology can do?

The Greenbelt crowd was, as usual, huge and settled in groups across the grass in front of the stage. But in solidarity with the Gaza population, they were suddenly asked to stand up, pick up their possessions, and 'migrate' at least a few metres. Anyone who has ever tried to get a church congregation to move, perhaps to fill empty pews at the front, will know what a challenge that was – at



Greenbelt many church groups will have bagged their patch of grass long before the service! They were instructed to take special care of the children and anyone with any mobility issues.

Afterwards I heard from a friend who was present: 'Yes, the Sunday service was certainly moving, emotionally and literally. It was very powerful having to get up and move to a different place. We were with a group with several little children and you certainly got a glimpse into the stress and challenges of having to move in a mass migration. Although ironically, we ended up with a better view afterwards!'

The service is still available to view online: <https://www.greenbelt.org.uk/communion/dreaming-of-home/>

And tickets for Greenbelt 2025 are already on sale here: <https://www.greenbelt.org.uk/>

Diana Musgrave

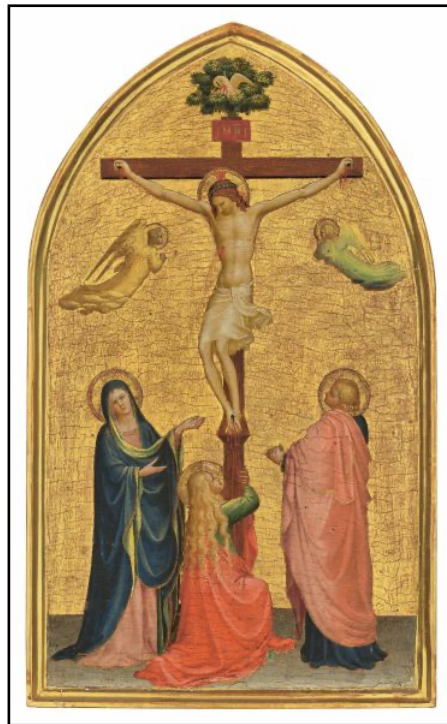
GREENBELT FESTIVAL 2025

Thursday 21 - Sunday 24 August
Boughton House nr Kettering NN14 1BJ



Another glimpse of the fun at 3Generate

Saving Fra Angelico's 'Crucifixion'



It may seem the wrong season to be writing about the Crucifixion, but this famous and beautiful painting, which has been in the UK for two centuries, had been acquired by an overseas buyer, and was about to leave the country.

However, the Ashmolean museum successfully raised £4.48 million to secure the acquisition of Fra Angelico's exquisite *Crucifixion* for the public. The Museum has announced that the masterpiece will go on public display from December this year.

Fra Angelico (active 1417; died 1455), was both a Dominican friar and one of the most celebrated artists of the Italian Renaissance, and is best known in Italy today as Beato Angelico or 'Blessed Angelic One'. Painted in the 1420s, *The Crucifixion with the Virgin, Saint John the Evangelist and the Magdalen* is one of Fra Angelico's earliest works and exemplifies the power, beauty, and sensitivity for which he would later become known. Most of Fra Angelico's paintings are large-scale frescoes or monumental altarpieces that remain in situ in the Dominican churches and convents in his native city of Florence and its surroundings, and in the Vatican. This painting, in contrast, is one of the few

surviving small-scale works on panel by the artist. It offers extraordinary insight into both Fra Angelico's innovative painter's style, and the development of European painting more broadly.

There are very few paintings by Fra Angelico in British public collections. Outside of London, only the Ashmolean is fortunate enough to preserve a work by the master and his studio in its collection. This work, a hinged triptych that depicts the Virgin and Child with angels and a Dominican saint, flanked by Saints Peter and Paul, is currently on display in the Museum's gallery (room 42). *The Crucifixion* will soon hang alongside the later work, in the Ashmolean's important collection of Italian Renaissance artworks that includes paintings by Paolo Uccello and Titian, and major drawings by Raphael and Michelangelo. The acquisition of *The Crucifixion* underscores the Ashmolean's role as an important centre for the study of Italian Renaissance art.

Watch then for the announcement in December that *The Crucifixion* is on display for visitors to the Ashmolean Museum, so close to home! www.ashmolean.org

Colin Robert Saunders 1932-1924



Colin was born in Cardiff and the family moved to London when he was four years old. His family attended Bloomsbury Baptist Church where his grandfather had been the minister. When he was 16, Colin was challenged to think about his faith at a summer holiday camp run by the Children's Special Service Mission. About 18 months later Colin was baptised at Bloomsbury Church. This resulted in him becoming a member of the church and a deacon at age 21, and then church secretary for about 5 years.

Colin was reading law at King's College, London. He was a member of the Baptist student society and would visit local churches to help in student missions, to help lead services, visit people and give his testimony. He felt he could help people as a solicitor, and this started to become his vocation while he was still studying. After National Service and three years' articles, he became a qualified solicitor in 1965. Colin's first job was at Clifford's Inn, in the Chancery Lane district. He worked for other London firms too, but decided he wanted to be outside London.

Colin moved to Oxford as a senior partner in a legal firm, with his wife Audrey and two children. They started to attend New Road Baptist Church, where he became a

deacon and church secretary (again!) He worked closely with Regent's College, as a member of its governing body for 40 years, and of its council for a further 15 years. His brother Peter had been at Regent's as a ministerial student in the 1950s. Colin also supported the Oxford Mencap group for 50 years and remained an active member of Rotary.

It was while working in Finchley that Colin had first encountered Christian Aid and joined their local ecumenical committee in the late 1950s. This was as 'Christian Aid Week' was just beginning. Colin was committed to the charity from then on, being involved across Oxford city and with the annual Wesley Memorial Christian Aid Street Market.

In 1988, Colin moved to Wesley Memorial. His second wife Helen was already a member, and he said it was 'a natural thing to do'. He took on many roles within the church and the wider Oxford Methodist Circuit, including being both a church and circuit steward. He was active in Churches Together in Central Oxford. Perhaps his own ecumenical background gave him a deeper understanding of its work. Colin was also involved in the Open Doors building project at Wesley Memorial, both actively for many years and later as a great encourager for those still involved.

Above all Colin was a kind, gentle and encouraging friend. He took an interest in and provided hospitality for people of all ages and nationalities. Colin and Helen together were pastoral visitors for many within the church community and helped numerous ministers. As the many moving tributes at his thanksgiving service illustrated, this care extended far beyond the church.

I had the privilege of interviewing Colin for Wesley Memorial's Oral History project. Extracts of Colin's story can be heard at wesleyoxford.org.uk (click on People).

John Cammack

A Christmas cracker



Are you looking for a seasonal present for your music-loving friend or family member? Then look no further than this very recent publication by Andrew Gant. (Yes, Lib-Dem County Councillor Gant – but ignore that!) You may recall that I reviewed his book on hymns, “O sing unto the Lord”.

Dr Gant takes 27 Christmas hymns or carols, from the Annunciation to Epiphany, and gives us variously fascinating and scholarly backgrounds on words and music, and how the two came together. This means surprises in some cases, familiarity in others, and the debunking of some cherished myths. All very readable, amusing and lively, and easy to dip into, as each chapter runs to six to eight pages, neatly finished with the printed music.

John Rutter’s verdict is: “And I thought I knew all about Christmas carols.” (He doesn’t get a mention, of course. Modern compositions do not figure among the 27: they are only mentioned in passing.) Gyles Brandreth calls it “A musical Christmas cracker – fascinating and full of interesting surprises”; and Anne-Marie Minhall of *Classic fm* warns us: “You’ll never sing these carols in the same way again.” Let’s hope that is a positive message!

Kate Dobson

A prayer for peace

Please stay awhile ...

May the peace of this place bring you an inner peace. Bring to this place any anxieties, burdens or troubled thoughts and sit quietly in the knowledge that in God’s sight you are special and God cares about you very much. “Lord, help me to trust your love, to accept your strength, and to stay close to you in the days ahead”. Amen.

Found in St Agnes’ Church, Freshwater Bay IOW



Remembrance Sunday worship 2024

On Remembrance Sunday, 10 November, our worship at Wesley Memorial was led by the only two profoundly deaf local preachers using British Sign Language in the UK Methodist Connexion, Anna Herriman and Dr Nick Palfreyman. This was history in the making! Anna is a member of Wesley Memorial and a local preacher in the Oxford Circuit; and Nick is a local preacher in the Manchester Circuit. It was very special having them

working together, supported by BSL interpreters. The service was led in a mixture of spoken English and BSL. The central theme was how essential communication is to bringing peace and reconciliation and how we must be peacemakers ourselves. I was very struck by one part of Nick’s conclusion: *Let us remind ourselves that peace is a treasure of great cost: hard-won and easily lost.*

Janet Forsaith



Swords into ploughshares

This quirky bird, which many of you will have seen adorning the atrium window in recent weeks, started its life more than 20 years ago in Mozambique, where a long civil war had left the country dangerously awash with illegal arms. Determined to start rebuilding a culture of peace, the Christian Council of Mozambique set up a project which encouraged people to hand in their old weapons in exchange for new tools – farm equipment, bicycles, sewing machines, building materials. The weapons were then broken up and passed to local artists who transformed them from instruments of death into extraordinary life-affirming

works of art. Their sculptures of birds and animals, dancers and musicians were exhibited and sold around the world; ours was bought at an auction in London, sponsored by Christian Aid. Another is displayed in the British Museum.

Sadly, Mozambique is once again caught in a downward spiral of conflict and violence. We hope that Wesley Memorial's quirky bird will remind us all to keep praying for a restoration of peace with justice in this suffering country –and to keep believing that transformation is possible.

Clare Matthews

Open to God, Open to all, Open to you

I am so glad to belong to a church which takes seriously its commitment to being inclusive. I'm glad that we advertise this on our website, our signs and our publicity materials. I'm glad that on the back of our Sunday service sheets we now have a weekly reminder that 'God makes no distinction on the basis of sexual orientation or race or class or gender or past history, and neither do we.'

But the best declaration of inclusiveness which I have seen comes from the website of a church in Little Rock, Arkansas, as quoted recently in the Methodist Recorder:

At Quapaw Quarter United Methodist Church, we are young, old, male, female, white, black, biracial,

multiracial, straight, gay, bisexual, single, dating, married, divorced, widowed, with children, without children, artistic, musical, witty, sober, seeking sobriety, rich, poor, mentally at peace, coping with mental illness, grieving, happy, healthy, sick and injured.

When we walk through the doors of the sanctuary, we know we are home, loved and treasured in spite of and because of who we are.

Hurray and Amen to that!

Clare Matthews



Wesley Memorial Church



New Inn Hall Street, Oxford OX1 2DH

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Children's, families' & outreach worker:

Mel McCulloch

Student outreach worker: Kirsty Smith

Church manager: Nikos Paplomatas

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Wednesday prayers: 12.30 pm

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Contributions, letters, questions, pictures, book reviews and any other suitable items for publication are always welcome. Please email them to the editorial team, stating if you are also willing for them to appear on the church website, www.wesleymem.org.uk

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