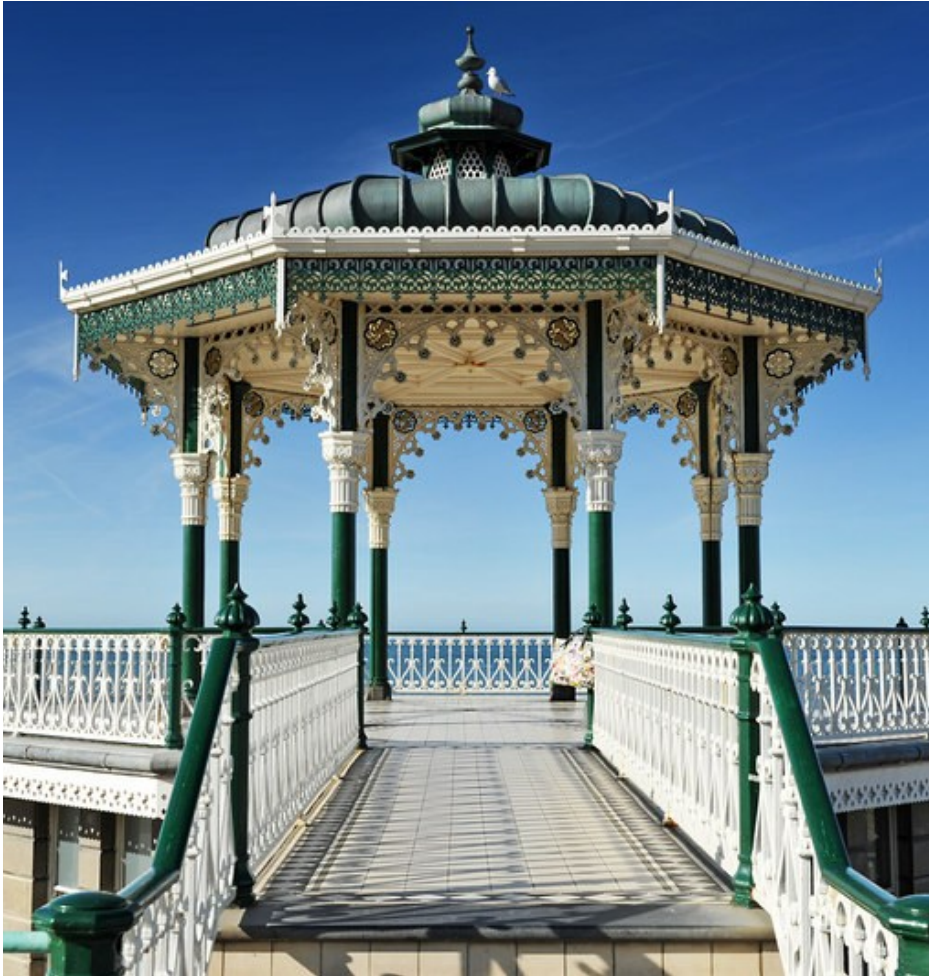


Focus



Summer 2026
Brighton & Hove Methodist Circuit





The Methodist Church

The President and Vice-President meet with the new Archbishop of Canterbury



The President, the Revd Richard Andrew, the Vice-President, Matthew Forsyth and the Revd Dr Jonathan Hustler, the Secretary of the Methodist Conference, were present at the Lambeth House gathering with the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dame Sarah Mullally, the Archbishop of York, Stephen Cottrell, and Mr William Nye, Secretary General of the General Synod, on 24 April, 2026.

The Revd Richard Andrew said: "It was a huge joy for Matt and I to meet with Archbishops Sarah and Stephen today.

"Our relationship with the Church of England both nationally and on the ground is of huge importance, especially in a fragmented world. It was good to affirm our life in covenant together and our continuing commitment to work towards closer unity."

The Revd Dr Jonathan Hustler said: "It was a privilege to be hosted by the new Archbishop in the refurbished Lambeth Palace.

"We had a full, open and productive conversation, and look forward to developing our 'life in covenant' with renewed energy, both at this year's Conference and in the next quinquennium of the General Synod."

Archbishop Sarah declared the meeting a "great joy".

The statement read: "It was a great joy to meet the Revd Richard

Andrew and Mr Matthew Forsyth, The President and Vice-President of the Methodist Conference, at Lambeth Palace. "The Archbishop of York and I have an annual meeting with the Methodist presidency. Our Churches are covenant partners, committed to greater visible unity. This was an opportunity to reflect on our shared pilgrimage and what we can learn from each other.

"As we look to the future, we pray that our friendship will be a blessing to others and a sign of hope for the world."

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<https://www.methodist.org.uk/about/sign-up-for-newsletters/>

Andy's Letter



Dear friends

This month sees us celebrate Pentecost, a time thought of as the birth of the church. The story in Acts tells us how the disciples are enabled to speak to people from many different nations about the story of Jesus and his life and death. They spoke of how they were feeling the ongoing presence of the Christ in with them.

It is for Christians part of our ongoing discipleship to witness to our faith but we must do that in a way that is understood by others and, I believe, in ways that are natural. Although there is no evidence to to conclusively support it it is said that St Francis of Assis said "Preach the Gospel at all times; use words if necessary"

Whoever said it spoke wisdom. The way we live our lives are the best indication of what we believe, actions speak louder than words is a truth we all know, and we all recognise hypocrisy when the actions we see are different to the words we hear.

But there are times when actions, good as they are, may not be enough. People seeing how we live might want to know why we live like that. What words might you use to help people understand? How might you talk about your faith?

For that reason we have a morning planned to help us think about the words we might use. On 16th May from 9-1 at the 'Food Partnership Clubhouse' BN1 8AX. All are welcome.

Also 2 warm invitations on Sunday 24th May at 8am to Ditchling Beacon and 3pm to Stanford Avenue Methodist Church as we celebrate Pentecost Sunday together as a Circuit.

May God's Spirit inspire and strengthen us as we work for God's kin-dom.

Andy

Focus: People

Congrats & Greetings

* **Sam Dyke**, Children & Families Worker at Dorset Gardens was the star on Red Nose Day in March. She featured in BBC local news segments who featured her work in the Community Kitchen as the headline local project for the Southeast.



In April Cllr Gary Wilkinson visited Dorset Gardens and paid tribute to the work of Sam saying: "They are doing incredible work to bring families together and connect them with the support they need." He went on to say: "Thank you to everyone at DGMC for such a warm welcome and for the important role you play in strengthening our local community. Kemptown's future is bright because of people and organisations like these."

* We heard from **Cynthia Tudor** in January who sends her love to all. She enjoys reading Focus and remarked: "Many congratulations to all for keeping the churches truly alive and kicking! Every blessing on all your work in the community and beyond."

* Congratulations to **Michael Hill** (see right) who celebrated his 90th birthday in March. He joins a growing group of our members thriving and enjoying life in their ninth decade.



* There was much excitement when the **Revd Richard Coles** dropped into Hove Lunch club in April. He was joined by fellow members of the Brighton Festival Chorus singing for diners some of the chorales from the St John Passion. He was seen exchanging numbers with our own Revd Andy and rumour has it Revd Richard has agreed to preach at a future circuit service.

Update on & Invitation from Revd Sue Jacobs

To my folks back home,

As many of you may have already heard through the grapevine, the day I have been journeying toward for so long is finally appearing on the horizon. I am writing to officially share that I will be ordained on:

Sunday, 28th June, 4:00pm at Shrewsbury Abbey

To say I am bursting would be an understatement. I am filled with a nervous excitement, but beneath that is a profound sense of joy. This is a moment that my family and I have given our all for, and

as the day approaches, my sense of calling only grows stronger. I find myself constantly treasuring in my heart the many encounters and experiences that have brought me to this threshold. As I reflect, (and I am doing a lot of that at the moment) I am enormously grateful for the prayers and encouragement you have soaked me in over the years. You saw in me a call that I, at times, struggled to believe was actually mine. Each of you has played an indispensable role in my story, and for that, I am deeply thankful. But please don't stop praying just yet! I would love those of you who prayed with me in the beginning, to pray me over that ordination line which of course is not the end, but perhaps another beginning, of life as an ordained presbyter... I still can't believe it!!



I would love for you to join me in these final steps, whether in person or spirit:

*** Testimony Service:**

Date: Sunday, 17th May

Location: Davenport Road Methodist Church (West Oxfordshire) – 6pm or via Zoom.

*** Reception into Full Connexion:**

Date: Sunday, 28th June at 10:30 am

Location: The Methodist Conference, Telford

*** Ordination Service:**

Date: Sunday, 28th June at 4:00 pm

Location: Shrewsbury Abbey

Tickets for the June services are available via the Methodist Church website. For those unable to travel, there will also be a link provided to watch both services online.

If you would like the specific Zoom details for the Testimony Service or the links for the Ordination, please drop me an email and I will be happy to share them. (revsuejacobs@gmail.com)

Thank you for being my community, my support, and my friends throughout this journey.

With love and gratitude,

Revd Sue Jacobs xx

Spotlight On Paul & Rachel Richards: A Shared Story of Faith, Community & Life

Continuing our feature where in every edition we put the spotlight on one of our Circuit members and perhaps we will learn more about them. This edition we feature Paul & Rachel Richards from Hove MC.



Paul:

I grew up in Portslade - “back in the day it was all fields,” as they say and our house backed onto them. One of my earliest memories is looking out of my sister’s bedroom window at the fields being burned, watching soot-covered men stoking the flames. It felt strangely exciting at the time, though I may have imagined parts of it. I also remember being taken to see the flags at the Dome during Eurovision in 1974, the year ABBA won with Waterloo, and getting stung by a bee in Pavilion Gardens.

My working life has always been rooted in people and purpose. I’m currently a public engagement officer for the Methodist international development charity All We Can, covering London and the Southeast. I spend much of my time engaging churches and often preaching, which I love. Before that, I founded and ran a charity campaigning for active social lives for people with learning disabilities, and I worked in social care for 30 years. Social justice has always been central to me, living out my faith in practical ways. Now I’m preparing for another step: training for ordination as a presbyter in the Methodist Church.



Methodist relief and development

A big influence on me was Aileen Jones, CEO of the organisation where I had my first job in social care. A humanist, she recognised the dignity and worth in every person, regardless of their needs. She shaped my thinking profoundly and helped spark my passion for social justice. We’re still good friends today.



At home, we have Nobby, our Bedlington whippet, who gets us out walking on the downs most evenings.

His favourite treat is a pork pie.

Music has always been important to me. One album that holds special memories for us is Pale Green Ghosts by John Grant. There's a track called Glacier, featuring Sinéad O'Connor, about how life shapes us over time. We once tracked down the café on the album cover in Iceland and even stood in front of a glacier listening to that song - epic moments.

If I could start again, I'd probably train in something environmental or horticultural. I often see National Trust workers repairing fences or clearing land and think it looks like a wonderful way to spend a day. I'd also love to step back in time, maybe to the 1960s to see Jimi Hendrix, or the 1970s to watch Elvis live in Las Vegas.

I'm proud of many things, but founding the Gig Buddies project stands out. It began as a small initiative in Brighton and Hove, pairing volunteers with people with learning disabilities to go to gigs together. Thirteen years on, it has grown to 26 projects across eight countries, helping thousands of people enjoy active social lives. In 2022, it received the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service. That's something I'll always be proud of.

As for how I'd like to be remembered - probably "a bit punk." And the happiest days of my life? The births of our four children.

I believe Anne Frank was right, people are basically good. Through my work, I've seen countless friendships form and kindness flourish. I don't like to label people as "bad"; rather, I think there are people who have done bad things. Goodness is in all of us.

Rachel:

Some of my earliest memories are of family holidays at Humberston Fitties. It was only a 15-minute drive from home in our Hillman Minx, no seat belts, and on hot days your legs would stick to the seats! Mum would bake enough food to last the whole stay, and we'd spend our days on long sandy beaches, sheltering in the dunes from the North wind. Sandwiches packed in Tupperware always came with a bit of sand,



inevitable, really. I remember a yellow and white swimming costume Mum made for me that seemed to last forever.

I grew up in Grimsby, born in Nunsthorpe Hospital to Pat and Michael Hill, with three brothers. We lived in a semi-detached house, and I remember when my dad built an extension



bedroom just for me, complete with a fitted wardrobe and desk. Bread was delivered by van, and we'd fight over the end of the warm loaf. Fish came to the door too (it was a fishing town) and Fridays meant fish and homemade chips after shopping at Freeman Street Market.

We didn't have much money, but we had enough, and my parents were careful with what we had. We were free to play out and just come home when we were hungry. Church life was central, we were part of Weelsby Road Methodist Church, and weekends often meant watching Dad play cricket. My grandparents lived nearby and were always there to help. Looking back, I feel incredibly blessed to have been raised in such a loving, nurturing family. My parents are both turning 90 this year, and I'm so thankful for them.

I started working at Lloyds Bank when I was just 15. I was so nervous at first that Mum had to come with me on the bus and walk me to the door. Thankfully, I'm more confident now! I've worked there for 41 years, seen many changes, and made lifelong friends. What I've always loved most is engaging with customers and hearing their stories.



As our children grew older, I took on a new role as a community worker at HMC, having already been volunteering with Food & Friendship. I absolutely love it. It's a privilege to be part of such a diverse and vibrant community, witnessing what I see as God at work, small moments, and big miracles

alike. Fridays are my favourite, with our Chatty Café and toddler group; something always happens to warm your heart or make you laugh.

Two people who deeply influenced me were Dilys Croucher from Boys' Brigade and Evelyn Billingsley "Miss B" from Girls' Brigade. They showed such kindness, compassion, and dedication, and created safe spaces where we could talk and explore our faith. They helped shape me.

Like Paul, I'm incredibly proud of our four children. They've grown into kind, empathetic, and thoughtful adults, guided by strong values. Archie teaches English in Vietnam, Wesley works in graphic design in London, Lily is studying criminology at Liverpool, and Eric is studying film production in Manchester.



One unusual moment in my life was being held up at gunpoint while working as a cashier at the bank. Thankfully, customers intervened and the man was arrested. Those brave individuals were later honoured at an awards ceremony at the Savoy Hotel; we even ended up sharing a table with pop group Take That.

There have been so many happy days, but one that stands out is when Paul proposed to me at Bramber Castle. It was a beautiful sunny day, and I couldn't understand why he was sweating in a denim jacket until he got down on one knee and produced the ring. Of course, I said yes.

Like Paul, I believe Anne Frank was right. Through my work and volunteering, I see acts of kindness every day, small gestures that ripple through communities and sustain hope. We all have a role to play in keeping that hope alive.

Paul & Rachel: Our lives have been shaped by faith, community, family, and a belief in the goodness of people. Whether through work, friendships, or everyday encounters, we've seen how kindness and connection can transform lives and we're grateful to be part of that ongoing story.

Thanks to Rachel & Paul for sharing their story & photos and congratulations to Paul who has been accepted to train for the ordained Methodist Ministry as a Presbyterian and our best wishes as he commences training at Queen's in Birmingham this autumn.

Focus: Features



Hospitality and Welcome

In Jo Cox's maiden speech as an MP in the UK House of Commons on June 3, 2015 she emphasised, 'While we celebrate our diversity, what surprises me time and time again as I travel around my constituency is that we are far more united and have far more in common with each other than things that divide us'. Michael Palin said something similar in his recent Channel 5 travel series 'Into Iraq'.

If we focus for a moment on hospitality and welcome for example, we all have our own stories of hospitality and welcome we have received both in the UK and abroad from diverse communities. While the specifics of hospitality will differ vastly as regards cuisine, festive celebrations, traditions and faith or no faith, at the heart of all hospitality are fruits of the spirit such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness and goodness. So whether enjoying hospitality makes me feel warmth in the presence of Jesus or God or community or family or friendship, it is all of equal value to me. Eating together, being welcomed into someone's home, restaurant or a community event can have a lasting impact on you and how open you are as a person. I travelled around the world in my late teens and my twenties, volunteering, studying and working abroad for several years in various countries; Israel, USA, Japan and Türkiye. A whole range of families and community groups welcomed me in each country. Some were host families who welcomed me into their homes on a regular basis, for everyday home cooked meals and also for festive celebrations. I have been thoroughly welcomed into a Turkish Muslim family I married into in 1995. I lived in multi-cultural South London for 22 years. So I have been pleased to find on moving back to my childhood town of Hove in 2021 that it is more diverse and what's more, I also hear more languages, including Turkish, as I walk our city's streets these days. This diversity includes visitors, people staying temporarily, people applying to stay, recently settled Brits and British families of diverse heritage who have been here for generations or longer.

Everyone brings different gifts and contributions to our city. At a recent Circuit Meeting, we were asked to think about the 12 practices in A Methodist Way of Life that help us to encounter God and grow in faith. We were asked to choose which practice we already felt strongest at. I chose 'open': we practise hospitality and generosity, although actually it's often that I ENJOY hospitality or get involved in delivering hospitable and welcoming community events, rather than necessarily entertaining on a large scale myself! But one of my key strengths is definitely being open. I was

given a bright orange badge to wear with the word 'open' under a picture of a cuppa. I must say this badge gets noticed! Friends and strangers ask what my badge means and this starts interesting conversations about church, being open and hospitable and valuing the different gifts everyone brings to the table.



While we were enjoying delicious tea and cake at Brighton & Hove's Interfaith Contact Group's AGM this month, I chatted with a woman who said another IFCG group she belonged to always had amazing catering because it was located near the largest Sikh Gurdwara in the UK. She enjoyed at least 3 plates full of wonderful food every time that IFCG had an event! She was so pleased when I told her about the Chatri Memorial Service for the Hindu, Sikh and Muslim soldiers who fought and died for our country in World War 1, that takes place on the South Downs in Brighton each June. It is always very well attended, by locals, visitors from all over the South East, dignitaries and the military. Community food is shared at Patcham High School afterwards. She said she looked forward to seeing me there! I could also have mentioned to her about Jollof Cafe, the Network of International Women's Cooking evenings, Food & Friendship, The Real Junk Food Project Brighton and many other convivial local events. Since the 20th Century, we can all celebrate that the increasing diversity in British cuisine has only improved it.

The most in-depth hospitality I have received from another country and culture is Turkish. When people ask how good my Turkish is, I tend to say 'I am fluent in everything about food and the kitchen' because from the very first day I met her, my beautiful mother-in-law Hayriye welcomed me in and encouraged me to learn about, enjoy and endlessly sample Turkish cuisine. When staying with the family, I would clean my teeth early in the evening, so I could say to her, 'Sorry, I cleaned my teeth, I can't eat any more'. In England, when we have Turkish friends or family to stay, I tell them to make themselves at home, because in England if we offer something and they refuse, we accept their refusal! There won't be endless tea, fruit or cake placed in front of them or extra items dropped on their plate mid-meal. With Hayriye around, it was very hard to get my Turkish family off the topic of food at the table. We talked about how each dish was made, where the ingredients were bought, how well executed it was, what could be





improved, what are the health benefits of each ingredient and which Professor on TV could be quoted to back this up. We usually ate our meals on the balcony, surrounded by houseplants she was an expert at growing too. When we went on holidays to southern Türkiye with Ib's parents, of course we would go out and about and eat in restaurants. But we'd also have rest days at the villa. That is when,

as soon as breakfast was over they would start talking about and preparing lunch, as soon as lunch was over, it was time to think about dinner. These days, at home in Hove, I currently do most of the cooking, but I'm sure when Ibrahim retires he will take over, as he is such an enthusiastic & talented cook. For now, it is routine for us with bread or toast, to have dipping olive oil with sumac on the table for Ibrahim and butter for me. And it's a standing joke that whatever I put in front of him, he still goes to the herbs and spices drawer or the fridge for that little extra touch.

Hayriye was truly the vibrant beating heart of our family, loved by her friends and neighbours too. She was even more talkative than Ibrahim, and for those of you who know Ibrahim, that really is saying something! Yet she was such a clear communicator that I could understand most of what she was saying in Turkish, even if she wasn't talking directly to me. At school Hayriye also learned how to read and recite prayers and the Quran in Arabic. Arabic is used in prayer and worship and most Turkish people have not learned Arabic. So Hayriye would often lead prayers for us after we ate a main meal. Of course this would remind me of my own father usually being the one to say Grace back in the UK. Hayriye also prayed and read the Quran for the women in her community, gathering in their homes to celebrate engagements, births or other rites of life. Her neighbours and community always looked out for her in return. Wherever she lived, she was always very close to her neighbours, in and out of each other's houses. Hayriye took to WhatsApp really well. Since she died last year, we really miss sharing photos of the food we are eating with her, phoning her up for advice on how to cook or grow something, or when we have family or friends gathered, passing the phone round so she could say hello to everyone. When my brother sent condolences, he said 'She had such a warm heart and I loved how she joined family gatherings via video and happily chatted away to us in Turkish and we were able to have a conversation without knowing each other's language. I also remember when she visited the UK, one of the first times I met her and she grabbed a fistful of nettles and started

swatting my legs with them (I was wearing shorts), saying the stinging was good for arthritis, circulation of blood or something. We all miss her.'

So I first got involved in our Circuit Refugee Project in 2021 because seeing news coverage of the Syrian war and the chaos of the US withdrawal from Afghanistan distressed me so



much. I knew there would be displacement trauma for people without their families, neighbours, communities and the safety of a warm and hospitable hearth and home. As dual nationality Turkish and British, we hear about the impact taking in over 3 million refugees is having in Türkiye. Of course it is difficult for every country to put what is needed in place to welcome and support people fleeing war and persecution, to help them rebuild their lives so they can contribute back to the society that welcomes them. I cannot fathom why creating a hostile environment should be the UK policy rather than organising safe routes to claim asylum. I want to support the UK to play its small part too, without adding to people's displacement trauma.

As Stella reminded us in her sermon about the Road to Emmaus at Hove Methodist Church this month, Jesus was big on hospitality. Hospitality and welcoming the stranger has brought people together throughout human history, as well as in our contemporary world. As Stella put it:

'Luke is less interested in optics than in recognition. The question is not how they failed to see Jesus physically. The question is: under what conditions does Christ become visible at all? Because what is striking is that recognition does not happen during the theological conversation on the road, though Jesus himself is interpreting scripture for them. They hear the right teaching. Their hearts, as they later say, are already "burning within them." Yet even that is not enough. Jesus becomes recognisable only when they perform an act of hospitality. They urge the stranger to stay. They invite him to the table. They make room for him in the ordinary vulnerability of shared bread. And there—in welcome, generosity, and kindness to one who appears to be merely a traveller—their eyes are opened. Luke's sequence matters. Christ is not recognised through argument, doctrine, or ideological certainty, but through practices that Paul would later call the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, gentleness. Recognition comes when the disciples inhabit those virtues. They do not truly see Jesus until they begin acting like him.'

Ruth Samur

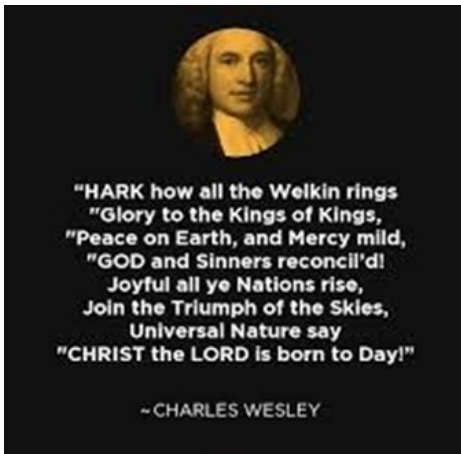
Faith, Fellowship, Ancient & Modern

'I will sing to the Lord all my life...' Psalm 104:33

Hymns are a form of worship and prayer. They lift us out of our selves, connect us with God on a personal level and help us process our deep emotions; of joy, sorrow, adoration, thankfulness or gratitude. To sing them is to find strength in our faith. Hymns have a universal appeal and have a wonderful power to bring people together, so Christians of most denominations will gather to sing them.

Although they are usually written by theologians and the clergy it is the laity who sing them. Many have been revised over the years, some significantly from the original version and some words changed their pronunciation so altering the rhyme.

However many have remained in the language of previous eras and traditional ones continue to be popular with the congregations.



In the past the usual method of singing in church was by 'lining out'; having a leader say one line, and the congregation repeat it. This was done because many people could not read. Hymn books had only words until the 11thC when a system of notation was introduced. Although they contain hundreds of hymns many churches use only about a hundred in the course of a year. The singing of hymns was not officially approved in the Church of England until 1820.

Some well known hymn writers include Isaac Watts (about 750 hymns), Philip Doddridge (over 400), Graham Kendrick (over 450), Timothy Dudley-Smith (around 400) and, Charles Wesley (8989), reportedly writing an average of 10 lines of verse every day for 50 years!

And so to: 'Hark, how all the welkin rings...'

Patricia Hodson

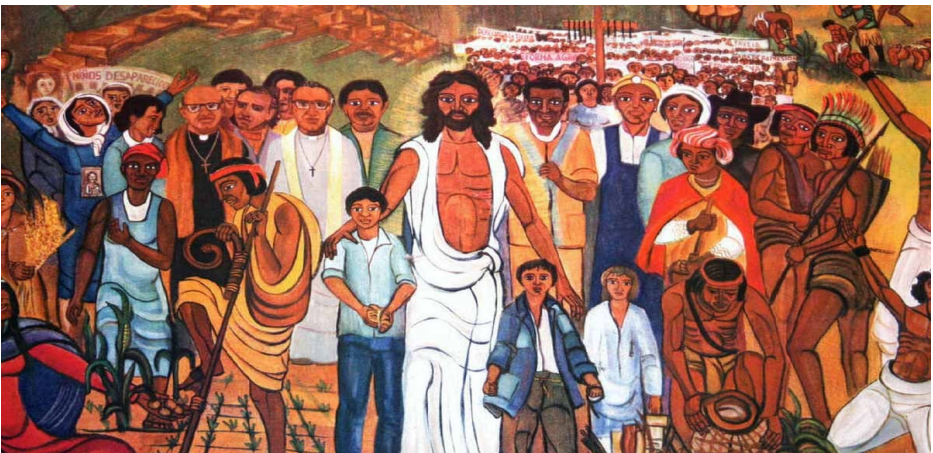
From Hastings, Bexhill & Rye Circuit

What is your favourite hymn and why? Please email steve.preston@brightonhovemethodistcircuit.org.uk by 17th July and he'll publish your replies in the Autumn edition.

Has Liberation Theology Really Had Its Day?

Some people believe that the underlying principles of Liberation Theology (LT) will become more relevant than ever for Christians in 2026. Internet search engines identify LT as originating in the 1960s and 1970s, the response of radical Latin American Catholic theologians like Gustavo Gutierrez and Oscar Romero to the institutional injustice, poverty and political oppression they faced in their daily lives. In seeking to apply Christian principles to the struggle for social and economic justice they championed the rights of the poor and marginalised in society. By combining elements of Christian doctrine with trenchantly critical social analysis, they denounced socio-economic structures as sinful when they serve only to perpetuate inequality and suffering. LT's early advocates had to face not just criticism but outright opposition from entrenched conservative elements within the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. Pope John Paul II deliberately appointed conservative bishops throughout Latin America to try to counteract LT's growing influence on both clergy and laity. Despite such conscious opposition, however, many of its principles have subsequently been integrated into mainstream Catholic teaching, especially under Pope Francis.

LT has subsequently inspired social movements far beyond the boundaries of Latin America including feminist, black and gay theology, each of which applies similar principles of social justice and liberation to their respective contexts. Archbishop Desmond Tutu's writings show how deeply LT influenced anti-apartheid activism by emphasising themes of reconciliation, justice and the moral imperative to dismantle systemic racism. It has also influenced a host of political and social justice initiatives across the world by advocating the rights of marginalised communities.



For me, therefore, it represents a significant theological imperative which seeks to address social injustice through an overtly Christian lens, emulating Jesus by prioritising the need to speak out on behalf of the poor and oppressed in society.

Although Britain today bears little or no resemblance to mid-20th century Latin America, it should come as no surprise when racist and far-right wing demagogues like Tommy Robinson and Nigel Farage scapegoat minority groups for all the ills of society. Non-white immigrant communities, refugees, asylum seekers, Muslims and Jews find themselves the subject of vicious and hate-filled propaganda campaigns reminiscent of Nazism in the early 1930s.

Perhaps we need to remember the words of the Lutheran theologian, Martin Niemöller, who initially supported the Nazis before becoming a vocal opponent:

"First, they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out because I was not a socialist. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out because I was not a trade unionist. Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me, and there was no one left to speak for me."

The Christian imperative must be to speak out. Verse four of STF 409 clearly proclaims that:

"Here the outcast and the stranger bear the image of God's face; let us bring an end to fear and danger, all are welcome in this place."

As members of a Circuit of Sanctuary, let us not be found wanting at this critical time!

Dr Tony Leonard

Dorset Gardens Methodist Church

The Apocryphal New Testament

Continuing our look at some early Christian writings that are not in the New Testament

7. The Acts - I - The Acts of Paul

The NT Acts of the Apostles says almost nothing about most of the Apostles. The Apocryphal Acts were written to fill that gap. There were five main collections. The generally accepted order of composition is:

1. The Acts of Paul (or 2)
2. The Acts of Peter (or 1)
3. The Acts of John
4. The Acts of Andrew
5. The Acts of Thomas.

This literature was part of popular Christian piety of the second and third centuries. Because a rival religion to Christianity, Manicheanism (3rd century), used these five in place of the NT Acts, the Apocryphal Acts were regarded with increasing suspicion. Here we shall look at three texts which make up the Acts of Paul (**AP**). **AP** dates to the end of the second century and was probably composed in Asia Minor where Paul had spent much time.



Please do **NOT** think that any of what follows is what Paul said, wrote, did, or looked like!

1. The Acts of Paul and Thecla (APT)

This popular story survives in many manuscripts: Greek (over 40), Latin, Syriac, Armenian, and Slavonic. The cult of St. Thecla was widespread and reached a peak in the fifth century. Although part of **AP** this story often circulated separately.

APT is unlikely to be historical but includes some interesting ideas. The story starts in Iconium after Paul had fled from Antioch, and gives a physical description of Paul: 'small in size, bald-headed, bandy-legged, of noble mien, with eyebrows meeting, rather hooked-nosed, full of grace. Sometimes he seemed like a man, and sometimes he had the face of an angel'.

At Iconium the church met in the house of Onesiphorus (see II Tim 1 v 16, and 4 v 19). A beautiful young Greek girl called Thecla was outside and overheard Paul speaking. Paul's main message was about chastity, a common theme in the early Church. Thecla was converted by Paul's teaching and broke off her engagement to the man she was to marry, Thamyris, who was '*the chief man of the city*'. Thamyris was very angry about this and found he was not alone, that Paul has 'mised' men's wives. In scenes reminiscent of Acts 16 vv 16-40 and 19 vv 23-41, Paul was charged before the Roman governor, imprisoned, then released and expelled. Thecla was condemned to be burned to death but escaped miraculously and went to find Paul. During this search her beauty meant that: people kept falling in love with her: she rejecting their advances: condemned to death for this rejection: and saved miraculously. When she finally caught up with Paul she told him what happened and that she was going back to Iconium, and Paul said:

'Go, and teach the word of God.'

Thecla did this, teaching in the house where she had first heard Paul teach. She taught elsewhere, finally dying aged ninety.

Some in the early Church like Origen (died c. 253) and Eusebius (died 339) did not equate **APT** with the canonical Acts but otherwise had few problems with the story. Tertullian (died c. 220), a renowned rigorist, disliked it, apparently because it claimed that Paul had given Thecla the right to preach and to baptize (which is not in **APT**).

2. The Letter to the Corinthians (LC)

In I Corinthians Paul refers to a letter he had already written (I Cor 5 v 9, 7 v 1). **LC** was written to supply this lost letter and for a while both the Syriac and Armenian churches regarded **LC** as canonical. However, **LC** has differences with the Pauline letters, for example it does not discuss common Pauline themes like the death of Jesus, and Jewish Law, and includes an odd reference to the bones of Elisha.

3. The Martyrdom of Paul (MP)

Acts (28 vv 30-31) concludes with Paul teaching, 'with all boldness and without hindrance'. However, the Church believed that Paul had been martyred (N.B. there is no reason to doubt this). **MP** was produced to tell the story of Paul's death at Nero's command. The account is full of wonders, including milk instead of blood being produced when Paul was beheaded, and Paul (presumably with his head back on) appearing again before Nero!

4. Influence

Neither **LC** nor **MP** had much influence, they survived as popular legends. **APT** is different, partly because of the cult of St. Thecla, but also because it gives a very unusual insight into two areas. The physical description of Paul is hardly flattering and may contain a valid memory. Of more importance is the idea that a woman had been given authority to teach and, according to Tertullian, to baptize. Because almost all, if not all, the writers in the early Church were men writing in a highly patriarchal society, the role of women was downplayed or ignored. We are only just beginning to realise the problems with this view and **APT** is an important part of a helpful corrective.

Mick Hickman

Hope

At our House group meeting for March one of our conversations was about how we find hope. The castaway on a recent edition of Desert Island Discs was Dwayne Fields, explorer and Chief Scout. He told Lauren Lavern that he had a difficult relationship with both his mother and his father. It was his discovery of Matthew Henson



the first black man to make the journey to the North Pole which gave him hope when trying to raise the sponsorship for his own trek to the North Pole. But it was when he discovered he was going to be a father for the first time he that needed hope the most. He said "I didn't know what a good father did, but I did know what a bad father did, so I will be there and share the baby duties."

So much of what we learn about the world starts, as the government keeps saying, during our childhood. Yet we are still being consulted about whether we think it is good thing that we allow social media to deprive young children of the ups and downs of physical interpersonal relationships which are responsible for much of this learning. But even while this is going on we are living through a profound social change and no one is talking about it. In 1970 62% of men were married by the age of 25. By 2021 this figure had dropped to 2%. Over approximately the same period the number of marriages has almost halved. (400,000 > 224,402)

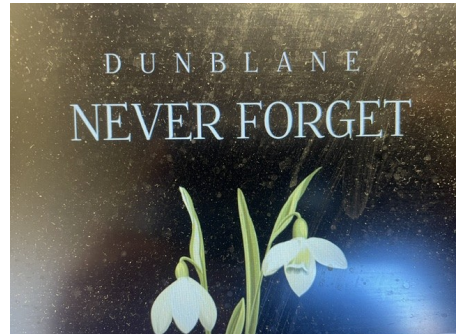
During the same time period all sorts of changes have taken place in society, mostly but not all for the better. The birth rate has gone down from a 'baby boomer' high of 2.93 children per couple in 1964 to 1.41 in 2024. Interestingly, survey results show a difference between what women say they want and what they say they would prefer for their family life, as we have moved from a one wage earner family to a two wage earner family, within what is still generally regarded as a patriarchal society.

As society has moved from the norm of marriage to co-habitation, what is acceptable for the two co-habitees has also changed. At the same time what is acceptable for an individual has also changed. We now have a vicious medical, legal, philosophical argument raging across all forms of media questioning whether gender is absolute and whether gender treatments which for many can only be regarded as child abuse are battled over for younger and younger children.

Similar debates have spilled over into the church. Dame Sarah Mullally was nominated by the King as the first female Archbishop of Canterbury and she was installed on Wednesday 25th March. Yet sadly on 5th March the Global Anglican Future Conference

(GAFCON) voted to appoint the Archbishop of Rwanda, Laurent Mbanda as their leader. Fortunately, they decided to only call him their leader rather than making an open challenge to the Archbishop of Canterbury. Their claimed reason for this 'partial revolution' is that the Bible says only a man can be the head of the church, irrespective of there being no Jew or Greek, no male or female. They deny that they are misogynistic and yet they would find it difficult to deny that the majority of their membership is from countries where paternalism still holds sway.

But amongst all the murder and mayhem I have come across one item of news that did lead me to find some hope. On the 13th of March 1996 Thomas Hamilton walked into a school in Dunblane carrying four hand guns and over 700 rounds of ammunition. Fortunately he was too late for his original suggested target, the school assembly. He fired 105



bullets and murdered 16 children and their teacher and injured another 15 before killing himself. This assault directly changed, possibly, thousands of lives. Yet it was the resulting societal change which gives me hope. Three residents of Dunblane began the Snowdrop Petition and in a pre-social media age collected 705,000 signatures. As a result, against the establishment view that "it is people who kill people, not guns", in November 1997 the UK government legislated to end private legal handguns. Every time there is another shooting in a school across the world, I register gratitude for the Snowdrop Campaign because it was their perseverance which means such atrocities are less likely to happen in the UK. It also gives me hope that in the end our government can be persuaded against all of the lobbying to do the right thing and ban social media for under 16s.

But what did we decide at our house group. That Christian hope allows us to accept what has gone before, knowing that God forgives us and allows us to move on to something newer and better. As President Obama said of the Rev J Jackson, "He inspires us to take the harder path. His voice calls on each of us to be heralds of change, to be messengers of hope. Wherever we have a chance to make an impact, whether it is in school, or our workplaces or our neighbourhoods, or our cities, not for fame, nor for glory, or because success is guaranteed, but because it gives life purpose, because it aligns with what our faith tells us God demands, and because if we don't step up, no one else will."

Peter Farley

What is a 'Nesher'?

There have been some articles recently in the *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* that have highlighted a particular difficulty in translating biblical Hebrew. I like bird-watching and seeing a Buzzard flying over the South Downs near where I live is always good. When the first English settlers arrived in the Americas they named birds and mammals after what they knew. Therefore in the USA the word 'buzzard' is often used for birds such as the Turkey Vulture which is a completely different species. This naming problem also occurs in biblical translation.

Our classification of animal families and species stems from the 18th century. We also distinguish between zoological and mythological categories of animal. Neither of these ideas would have occurred to biblical writers.

The greatest medieval Jewish scholar, Rashi (1040-1105), wrote the authoritative commentary on the Bible. However, he lived in northern Europe far from the biblical context. For example, for Isa 13 v 21, he wrote, 'I do not know what kind of animal they are.' Some Hebrew words for animals are translated in a bewildering variety of ways. In the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) the first line of Isa 34 v 11,

'But the hawk and the hedgehog shall possess it;

As with any good translation there are footnotes for the words, 'hawk', and 'hedgehog' stating 'identification uncertain'. For these words:

Latin Vulgate (late 4th cent.)	'bittern' (a type of heron) and 'hedgehog'
King James Version (1611)	'cormorant' and 'bittern',
Revised Standard Version (1952)	'hawk' and 'porcupine'.
New Jerusalem Bible (1985)	'pelican' and 'hedgehog'
New International Version (1990)	'desert owl' and 'screech owl'
Jewish Study Bible (1999)	'jackdaws' and 'owls'.

Quite simply at times no one knows which animals are meant! From now on NRSV is cited.

Apart from the sacrificial dove (32 times) the most commonly cited bird in the OT is the 'nesher' (28 times). Mic 1 v 16b translates 'nesher' as eagle: 'make yourself as bald as the eagle'. But eagles are not bald whereas many vultures appear to be because the feathers on their heads and necks are very short to enable the bird to thrust its head inside a carcass. In Job 39 v 30 the 'eagle' is, 'where the slain are'. When this verse is quoted in Matt 24 v 28, it is the 'vultures' not 'eagles' who gather there. Probably the most well-known passage is Isa 40 v 31, 'they shall mount up with wings like eagles'.

If eagles are the correct translation for 'nesher' the question arises: which species of eagle is referred to? The nesting habits of the



'nesher' are described in Dt 32 v 11. This in itself is a problem if the 'eagle' is referred to as not only does the description more closely fit the Griffon Vulture but the most common eagle in area is the Short-toed Snake Eagle. This bird nests in



trees, not cliffs where the 'nesher' nests (Jer.

49 v 16), does not fly high, and eats snakes. Many other eagle species pass through on migration routes and would therefore not conform to the biblical descriptions. The Imperial Eagle is a bird of low-lying wetlands, as in the Nile delta, not the rocky crags of the 'nesher' (Job 39 v 28).

That 'nesher' is the Griffon Vulture and not an eagle was accepted by the Anglican clergyman and naturalist, H. B. Tristram (1822-1906), who has at least six species of birds named after him. Arabic is related to Hebrew. In 1865 Tristram pointed out that the Arabic word for a Vulture is 'nisser' and stated that the 'nesher' of the Bible is 'unquestionably ... the Griffon-Vulture'.

Translators need to use words known to their readers. Except as rare vagrants vultures do not occur in northern Europe so, after the Reformation, those translating into English, French, German etc. chose 'eagle' as the best approximate as people knew what an eagle looked like, but not a vulture. As a result we sing hymns about soaring like eagles e.g. Singing the Faith 471, when it ought to be vultures which soar higher than eagles.

The continuance of eagles rather than vultures probably reveals an unconscious bias in our culture. In many nature programmes phrases like, '*will not stoop to scavenge if necessary*' are common. This implies that killing an animal to eat it is in some way 'better' than eating the carcase of an animal that another animal has killed: a very human judgement! There are many documentaries on predators, rarely on scavengers.

However, in the biblical period scavengers like vultures were valued because they ate corpses quickly thus preventing the spread of disease. For ancient Egyptians the vulture represented maternity and protection: vulture parents shield their young from the blazing sun with outstretched wings. Vultures with outstretched wings were painted on the ceilings of temples and appeared in the headdresses of Queens. Mummified vultures have been found at Thebes. I am not advocating a re-writing of our hymn-book but do ask that we look more carefully at the biblical context and at what biblical writers over 2,000 years ago were trying to convey.

Mick Hickman



JAZZ AT WOODINGDEAN METHODIST CHURCH

Saturday June 6th

MUSIC STARTS 3pm

Imogen Ryall Voice
Roderick Hart Piano

Suggested Donation £6

Tickets available from 01273 887618
or 01273 304812

All Proceeds Go To The Church

woodingdeanmethodistchurch.co.uk



Focus: Spring 2026

A pictorial look back at recent events:



Spring & Craft Fair at Stanford Avenue



Cheer Up Mollys Concert at Hove



Lent Hymn singing



Revd Sue visiting Hove



Revd Deborah visiting DG



Good Friday Walk of Witness

Good Friday Walk of Witness

After a break of 12 years, a Good Friday gathering brought together members of churches from across Brighton. Participants took part in a Walk of Witness from India Gate to the Chapel Royal for a short reflection, before continuing on to the Parish Church of St Nicholas for an ecumenical service. Despite the rain and wind, 200 people joined in, including the Mayor of Brighton & Hove and a small but enthusiastic group from Dorset Gardens. Overall, it was a moving occasion, and it is hoped that it will now return as an annual event.

Focus: Mission

Circuit Refugee Project Update:

The Circuit Project representatives met on 1st April; perhaps we could have chosen a more suitable date? But there were no jokes played and we had a good meeting over cups of tea and delicious cake at Honey's in Patcham.

We worked together on the early stages of our reappraisal to renew our Circuit of Sanctuary status. We're delighted we can submit one application as Brighton & Hove Methodist Circuit rather than having to complete one for each church. Terry is standing down as the rep for Woodingdean and we want to thank him for all he's done over the years. I know he's searching for someone to take his place and we look forward to welcoming them; another excuse for a tea party? As well as planning, we also looked back over the things the project has done over the past few months:

In addition to the ongoing foodbank contributions for Voices in Exile from Patcham MC, in January and February we made a lovely lot of donations. We sent £51.50 to the National Care4Calais appeal to support Sanctuary Seekers in Calais living on camp sites and facing eviction. £50 bought one full eviction response pack: tent, blanket, sleeping bag. We also made a £100 donation to Brighton Table Tennis Club. They do a lot of direct work, both table tennis and Park Run, with sanctuary seekers housed in a hotel in our city. Two bags of new materials/velvet donated by Efro Draper, were dropped off to the Network of International Women (NIW) Sewing Collective. We also took £84 worth of baby goods, gloves, socks & cakes to All Saints Sanctuary afternoon run by NIW to welcome in the New Year. Along with a number of as-new blankets donated by Sheila Hinton, hand-crocheted blankets donated by Hannah (Hove) and two bags of crocheted hats & a blanket from Mark's Scarves (DG).



Also in February we updated our Circuit information for the Revd Hazel Forecast's Methodist South East District 'Sustaining Hope' database of what's happening in each Circuit to support refugees, asylum-seekers and other migrants who have arrived in the UK in recent times in difficult circumstances.

Our busy month continued with the Ukulele Band concert at Woodingdean MC. A huge thank you to the Ukulele Band, compere Terry Hammond, the Woodingdean Methodist Church team and the enthusiastic audience. Pretty tablecloths and flowers, cakes and a cuppa made it a relaxing cafe-style event. After a small donation for the Ukulele Band, this heart-warming, mellow singalong concert raised a splendid £440 for the Circuit Refugee Project, from ticket sales and the hampers raffle.



Then in March, Stanford Avenue MC held its Spring & Craft Fair, where the Circuit Refugee Project's free table sold good quality second hand books & had 'Guess the Number of Sweets in the Jar' and 'Guess the Name of the Rabbit' games. It was a wonderful event with good community engagement and we raised £35, donating £30 of it to pay for the NIW Sewing Collective's two tables. We donated chocolate bars, nuts and tinned goods to Voices in Exile's Foodbank to celebrate Easter and Eid.

We donated £50 to We Are The Tree (WATT) following their appeal for donations in the Brighton & Hove Faith in Action Newsletter. They organised a small Ramadan Iftar meal for 25 women who left the hotel for sanctuary seekers and are now living in the community. Ruth & Sue were invited to attend a subsequent Iftar meal at the home of Dr Manal Ahmed, Managing Director of WATT, a local charity committed to dignity, inclusion & empowerment of refugees and migrant diaspora. A range of locals and community workers (e.g. Newhaven Stand up to Racism) enjoyed a very convivial evening together. It was so interesting to hear her speak about the importance of Ramadan and prayer to her, in such a relaxed environment where

questions were welcomed.

On Saturday 11th April, Ruth and Ibrahim went to the Peacehaven Meridian Centre, Family Fun Day which was a WATT Community Engagement Event. Our Circuit Refugee Project donated £70 to this event, for gifts for refugee children, and Ruth donated a bag of gifts too. On 23rd we attended the meeting of the Brighton & Hove Refugee & Migrant Forum at Brighton Town Hall.



Then on 25 April there is the Sustaining Hope

Gathering, SE District run by the Revd Hazel Forecast. The Revd Nigel Cowgill, now at the Global Relations Office, told us about partner churches around the world who are involved in supporting refugees and displaced persons in their communities. Mary Barrett told us about the work of the Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group, now in existence for over 30 years. Also on that day was DG's coffee morning and table-top sale where the project had a table. There was also a tombola, bric-a-brac, books, cakes, games, cards, Indian ready meals, refreshments & more! During the sale Tearaway Tots was open with free hands-on cooking demos by Bald Chef Nick and free bags of groceries to take home (supported by Morrisons). See more on page 32. Looking further ahead 15 - 21 June is Refugee Week and the theme is 'Courage'. On 21st June, which is Refugee Sunday, Dr Manal Ahmed, MD of WATT, is booked to speak at Hove MC's Sunday Service.

Other events are being planned ... watch this space and look out for posters and information.

Thank you so much to everyone for all the support and generosity which has enabled us to support, make donations and connections across our city.

Sue Harrington and Ruth Samur
Circuit Refugee Project Co-leads

Worship this Summer

Explore Philippians Together during July



This July, Bible Month invites churches to dive into one of the most joyful and encouraging letters in the New Testament: Philippians. Written by Paul from prison, this short epistle overflows with warmth, hope, and practical wisdom for living a Christ-shaped life.

Across four weeks, we'll discover:

- Sunday 5th July: **Joy that endures** – Paul's call to rejoice, even in hardship, rooted in confidence in God's goodness.
- Sunday 12th July: **Christ-like humility** – the famous "Christ hymn" in chapter 2, showing Jesus' self-giving love as our model.
- Sunday 19th July: **Pressing on in faith** – discipleship as a lifelong journey of growth and perseverance.
- Sunday 26th July: **Grace and Peace** learning contentment and generosity in every circumstance

Why Bible Month?

Noticing God in Scripture is one part of A Methodist Way of Life. Bible Month is a core element of our strategy to equip and enable everyone in our churches to do just that.

Biblical Literacy—The Methodist Church believes that the revelation of God is recorded in all of Scripture, and so we want to help people read as widely as possible. Sometimes we deliberately select books of the Bible that are less familiar. We use these lesser-known parts of the Bible as a case study for honing our reading skills, learning how to approach and appreciate different texts, all in the interest of growing our faith, understanding and biblical literacy. We like to think of it as a chance to widen and refine our *theological palates*.

For Everyone... We believe that the Bible is God's gift to all, and so we want to help the whole Church feel equipped to read it with confidence and the expectation of finding God within. We anticipate that local preachers, worship leaders and lay and ordained workers will most likely take responsibility for making Bible Month happen in any given part of the Connexion. As such, the Methodist Church provides an annual menu of resources to assist and more info here:

<https://www.methodist.org.uk/faith/the-bible/bible-month/>

However, we want to make sure Bible Month equips and encourages everyone in our churches to engage with the text and hope that those facilitating Bible Month on the ground do so in a way that invites people to discover, explore and reflect on the text for themselves. The Bible is meant to be shared together, and so the Bible Month resources offered each year are an invitation for everyone to enjoy a place at that table.

Every day... We believe that the Bible isn't just for Sunday, or just for four weeks of the year – it is there for us every day. The annual Bible Month campaign is a concentrated season for us to all come to the table, feast on the Bible together and refine our theological palates, with the view that what we celebrate, practice, discover and enjoy over those four weeks will continue to shape, form and encourage our faith and understanding throughout the rest of the year.

For the first time, every church will have a **Local Arrangement** (LA) designated service within the next quarter. Some churches are already well established in doing these and LAs are likely to become a permanent feature of our plan going forward,

Local Arrangement services are a healthy thing for most churches, as they offer a chance for the wider membership or groups within the life of the church to lead worship. In this, new vocations for worship leading, local preaching, and ordained ministry may be developed and discerned.

In more subtle ways, occasional Local Arrangement services may also help to foster a culture of worship owned and actively engaged in by the congregation. Strategically used and supported, they make real the statement "Worship is the work of the whole people of God: a congregation is not an audience or a group of spectators." (Methodist Worship Book (MWB), Preface, p. vii)

John Wesley's principles in the 18th century...

A Political Manifesto for Today?

- ~ Reduce the gap between rich and poor
- ~ Seek to ensure full employment
- ~ Introduce measures to help the poorest, including a living wage
- ~ Offer the best possible education
- ~ Empower individuals to feel they can make a difference
- ~ Promote tolerance
- ~ Promote equal treatment for women
- ~ Create a society based on values and not on profits and consumerism
- ~ End all forms of enslavement
- ~ Avoid engaging in wars
- ~ Avoid narrow self-interest and promote a world view
- ~ Care for the animals with whom we share our planet

Circuit Services

Sunday 24th May	8am	Pentecost Communion at Ditchling Beacon
Sunday 24th May	12.30pm	An hour of Open Prayer at Stanford Avenue. All welcome to join & bring a packed lunch & stay before
	3pm	Pentecost Circuit Together Service at Stanford Avenue.
Sunday 30th August	10.30am	Circuit Together Service at Dorset Gardens.

Healing Services

Sunday 28th June	6.30pm	All at Dorset Gardens.
Sunday 26th July		
Sunday 23rd August		

Come As You Are We're starting a new kind of evening service. Simple. Relaxed. No pressure. There'll be a short Bible reading, some music, space for quiet, and a chance to reflect, chat, or ask questions if you want to. You can join in or just sit and be - whatever feels right for you. This is a space for everyone - whether you've been part of church for years or are just curious. No expectations, no "right way" to do it. We're keeping things open as it begins, and we'll see where it grows. Come as you are. (And stay for tea and biscuits afterwards). Led by Rev Andy and Paul Richards.

Sunday 17th May 6.30pm Hove Methodist Church

Did you know? *Sussex Day*, celebrated on June 16th, is dedicated to honouring the culture, heritage, and history of our historic county. Coinciding with the feast day of St. Richard of Chichester, the county's patron saint, it promotes local identity, traditions, and landmarks. Founded in 2006/2007 to celebrate the county's 1,500-year history.



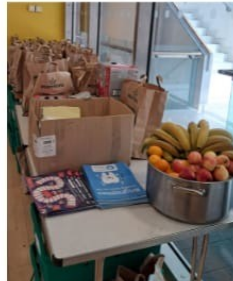
Celebrations include the raising of the Sussex Flag, performances by Morris dancers, reading of the Sussex Charter, and community gatherings. "*Sussex Won't Be Druv*": is the county motto, which means "Sussex will not be driven" or coerced.

Saturday 25th April 2026

TEARAWAY TOTS TAKEOVER

- *We had over 80 families attend
- * every family had a grocery bag, free fruit, free toothbrushes and toothpaste
- * everyone made and ate lovely fresh flat breads with a choice of delicious fillings and had Knickerboker Glories for pudding!

This event helped local families living in high poverty areas (most live within the UKs lowest 6% listed areas of deprivation)



AT DORSET GARDENS METHODIST CHURCH, BN2 1RL

Thank you to Marilyn Richardson for proof reading again and for all contributors. Please submit your articles & photos to Steve Preston for our Autumn Edition by **17th July 2026**

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