

North Shields and Whitley Bay Methodist Circuit Newsletter

Welcome to our Circuit Newsletter—letting you know news from the Circuit, and Methodist churches at the coast—North Shields, Cullercoats Broadway, Fishermen's Mission, St John's, Seaton Sluice and Monkseaton.

A Message from Eva Walker

Autumn/Winter 2023

Waiting...

Dear friends,
I saw this image on social media today and it caused me to think a bit more about Advent.

For the picture is true, not only for ministers, but for all people in our Circuit. I have seen the preaching plan, I have seen all the extra special events that the churches are putting on for Advent and Christmas. And all those need preparation, sorting things out, planning, setting up, putting away. And therefore, we find ourselves quite busy in Advent. Is that a good or a bad thing? And, if Advent is all about waiting, as we believe it to be, than how can we wait and be busy?

How can we wait and be so busy? We ask this question because of the way we view waiting. For, many of us waiting is something passive, something that frustrates us, because it gets in the way of where we want to be, or need to be, or even on the way of what we would like. We are not good at waiting. In today's world, we are encouraged to get what we want now.

Maybe this is a time for us to re-reflect on the meaning of waiting, to understand fully what the waiting of Advent is all about.

You see, for us in the West the waiting is viewed as a pause in between doing life, but a friend tells me that when in the Gambia she learned that waiting is in itself a thing, rather



Christmas Services around the Circuit

North Shields 9th Dec Afternoon Tea 2-4pm
17th Dec Nativity, 10.00am
24th Dec Carol Service 10.00am
Christmas Day 10.00am

Monkseaton 10th Dec Toy Service 10.45am
St John's 10th Dec Toy Service 10.45am
17th Dec Candlelit Carols 6pm
24th Dec Christingle 4pm
Christmas Day 10.00am

Seaton Sluice 3rd Dec Toy Service 10.30am
Cullercoats 3rd Dec Present Service 10.15am
9th Dec Christmas Shindig 4pm
17th Dec Carol Service 6pm
24th Dec Holy Communion 6pm
Christmas Day 10.15am

Fishermen's Mission 24th Dec Carols 4pm
Sunday@thepub 17th Dec Beer and Carols,
Platform 2, Tynemouth Stn 7.30pm

than the pause between stuff that matters more—the waiting to them is an important activity. Maybe the best way to understand what waiting is all about, is to travel with the pregnant Mary. This is her first child, and she is journeying to the moment she will hold her baby in her arms (our Christmas!). Mary is waiting, but that waiting is not a passing of time. Mary does not want the waiting to end and the child to arrive early. Mary's waiting is not passive, her waiting is active (as is the waiting of all pregnant women out there). As she waits, she is transformed, her body and mind and soul are transformed. Her waiting is a profoundly creative act, involving a slow growth of new life. Whilst on the outside the waiting might seem passive, internally the waiting consists of never ending action. Her waiting is creative, life giving that leads to growth and new life. Her waiting knits together a new life.

And in her waiting, Mary is fully present in the present. She is not hankering for the good old days of the past, for what is now, her present, is much more important and precious than the past. Nor is she living in the future. People might have said to her, 'Mary, sleep as much as you can now, for when the baby comes, you will be sleep deprived.' I cannot imagine Mary going: 'Oh yes, let me sleep for the whole 9 months, for later I won't be able to sleep.' No, Mary lived in the present, cherished every kick in her belly, every change in her body, for she knew that with every change there was growth.

I wonder if today we are invited to see waiting, not as something for Advent only, but as a way of being—something that knits together new life, something that is an important part of our journeying, something that invites us to be present in the present and to find joy in it?

We shall continue to journey as a Circuit, in the hope and love of God, and in our journey there will be waiting, and I pray that our waiting is life giving, I pray that are waiting invites us to rejoice in the good news stories of the present, in the way God is calling us to mission in the present, in the way we are given opportunities. I pray we sense that in the waiting, there is life, and there is creativity and there is joy and that waiting is part of our life together. And as we view waiting in this way, we anticipate the birth of the new life that is growing in the waiting, and that new life will be greater and bigger than we can imagine.

For the baby Mary gave birth to changed human history forever, and invited us into a new way of living and being, the way of love.

So happy Advent and Christmas dear friends, and may we all be surprised by the joy of the presence of God, Emmanuel, in our waiting. (with all its busyness, and preparations, and plannings, and giving and receiving).

Love and God's blessings,
Eva

A Message from David Wynd

Let's Cancel Christmas!



At the start of November (because Christmas now starts on the 1st November), the outcry at someone trying to 'cancel Christmas' was already making its way across social media platforms and newspaper articles. M&S had put out their Christmas advert and it had not gone down well for various reasons. There isn't a year that goes by where someone, somewhere doesn't accuse a company, politician or complete stranger of trying to put a stop to people celebrating Christmas.

Let us all be honest with each other. Christmas for most people in this world has very little to do with the story of Jesus' birth and the traditions that formed in the early church to prepare and

celebrate this. Christmas, like Easter and other traditionally Christian celebrations have become something else. There are lots of good things about Christmas and lots of traditions I want to hold onto but there is also loads of stuff that has nothing to do with Christmas at all.

It is in the glittering tapestry of all the Christmas festivities and the clamour to do everything bigger and better each year, that there lies a risk. That risk is that in our pursuit of seasonal splendour and the material abundance that comes with it, we might inadvertently cancel or at least blot out or obscure the very essence of Christmas and why it has been celebrated within the church for hundreds of years. Christmas, at its core, is a sacred narrative, a story that transcends time and cultures, and when we forget its purpose, we risk erasing its very soul.

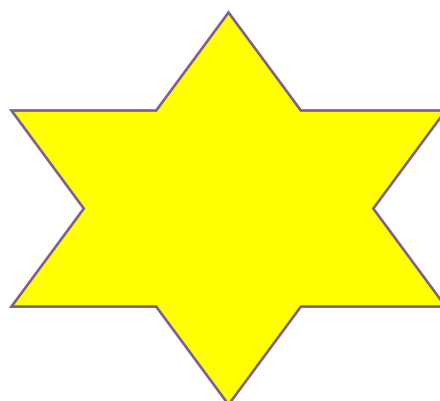
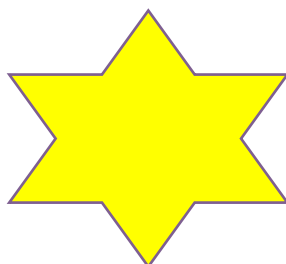
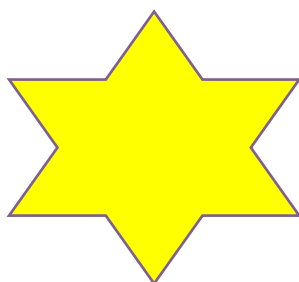
When the twinkling lights and glittering ornaments overshadow the guiding star that led shepherds and wise men to a humble manger, Christmas loses its compass. It becomes a mere spectacle, a superficial display of consumerism rather than a celebration of the profound spiritual significance it holds. The joy of giving transforms into the burden of material expectation, and the true essence of the season is cancelled by the noise of commercial pursuits.

Moreover, the cacophony of stress and anxiety often drowns out the good that Christmas can bring. In our haste to check off shopping lists and prepare extravagant feasts, we may inadvertently cancel the quiet moments of reflection and gratitude that should accompany the season. Christmas, at its core, is an invitation to pause, to appreciate the blessings of life, and to extend love and kindness to those around us. When this invitation is ignored, the genuine warmth of the season is cancelled by the cold rush of holiday hustle and seasonal stress.

The real danger lies not in the absence of decorations or the scarcity of gifts but in the forgetfulness of those we live and work alongside. We cancel Christmas when we demonise those fleeing war and violence because 'there isn't any room.' We cancel Christmas when we forget why we gather, sing carols, and exchange tokens of affection in the first place. We cancel Christmas when we get angry at people different to us appearing in Christmas adverts or someone saying *Happy Holidays* or using the word Xmas. We cancel Christmas when the narrative of a humble birth, the embodiment of hope and love, is pushed to the periphery, and we strip Christmas of its transformative power. Then it becomes a cancelled event, stripped of its potential to renew hearts, inspire generosity, and foster a sense of unity among diverse communities.

We cancel Christmas when we forget what Christmas is about. Let us endeavour to preserve the heart of Christmas, embracing the narrative that has endured through centuries—a story of love, humility, and the boundless possibilities of grace. Only then can the season truly be a celebration, a moment in time when the extraordinary meets the ordinary, and the essence of Christmas is preserved for generations to come.

David Wynd





BeachcomberFX

As I write this short article, we are about to hit our Christmas activities. We are going to be hosting what is now a favourite in our calendar, Beer and Carols. Once again we are going to be joined by the community singing group I am part of, 'Marriner and Marras'. Alongside this we are doing a weekly blog reflecting on the Methodist churches Out of the Ordinary themes, these blogs are written by some of the members of our community.

I am also aware that BFX is in a season of development as we begin to look at a few changes to the way we do life together. One of the continual challenges is finding the right venues to meet each week, and we have moved around a few places over the years and that seems to work for us. A few considerations for us, is that we need to be able to hear others talk and share, we also need to be accessible to and be able to rub shoulders with regulars.

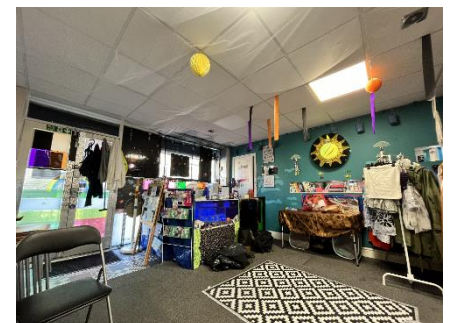


In the New Year we will host our weekend away and we have twenty folks who have signed up. We are also in the process of restarting our Worship Brunches and our Sunday programme will have a slight change by having a regular monthly relaxed evening to build relationships. We are excited for the year ahead.

North Shields

Over the last year my role has been reviewed to now include some focused work in North Shields. My main focus is around North Shields area rather than Hawkeys Lane, although I will be around at times to be involved as needs arise. Part of this role will be to connect with other local churches through churches together, and also connecting with those who work in the town. As this progresses I hope to get a small team together to explore possibilities and see where we may get involved in things that are already taking place or to create something new.

I have already met with a few ministers in Churches Together and made contact with a local community hub in the centre, and I'm now attending a men's group, and one of the people I work with in BFX is now attending the women's group. I have the first gathering of a new small group meeting over advent to talk and share and to pray around the area. I'm excited to see what can be developed here. Please pray for us as we explore this.



Rob Wylie

Twitter - @RWileECoyote <https://www.beachcomberfx.com/>

Work with Older People



This year the seasonal message I am trying to circulate around the different friends in the community and church who I meet with as a circuit worker, focuses on imagining ourselves in the Nativity story. The family of Jesus travelled to Bethlehem in Judea a land then occupied by the Romans. They couldn't find shelter and had to make do with humble stable and manger. The family feared for their lives and fled to Egypt because of violent plans of the authorities. Where do we see ourselves, in the story of the baby born to save the world? Have you had a challenging fearful journey or are you feeling security and love. Who are the shepherds or wise men in your life's journey? Who are your Mary and Joseph? Have you had a guiding star and who has shown you kindness and compassion when the world seemed heartless and cruel? Where and how will you be gathering, travelling, meeting and with whom to share in Gods goodness and the joy of Jesus coming into the world? Where are you seeing God in your nativity story this year? Its certain Emmanuel our God is with us but where will you see Christ Jesus and true Peace and love in your Christmas this year?

John Morley Layworker amongst older people

Green Lifestyle—Circuit Green Market

In September Cullercoats Methodist hosted the Circuit Green Market where we joined with local people and the supporters of the organisations who had stalls. There were good conversations and networking opportunities. On the Circuit table there was interest shown in Eco Church and information taken away. There was also fresh homegrown produce in return for voluntary donations (particularly from Meadow Well Connected), and music in the lobby.

The photos show the range of stalls.





Do you know anyone who can help with Circuit Property?

With six church buildings and three manses to manage, there's quite a lot of property work to do in our circuit.

We've recently created a Circuit Wide Property Group which is really helping us to understand what work is needed and more importantly to share our experience, knowledge and good practice. We've begun to compile a trade directory, making it easier to find recommended professionals when we need them. Working together as a Circuit Team is definitely showing benefits.

But as a group we recognise that all those involved in managing our circuit property are under pressure. It's a reducing pool and it's often hard to find help. We are looking at ways to improve this, and we'll be bringing some thoughts to the January Circuit Meeting. But in the meantime, we'd like to start the ball rolling by trying to identify all those folk in our church family who have a heart or skill in property issues.

Just as we have produced a trade directory, it would be wonderful if we could produce a similar list of folks who are happy to do the odd job around the circuit. It might be you can only offer support to one particular building, or you might feel you are able to work more widely across the circuit. We really need to know who's out there and what you feel able to offer. This is just the start of the process. But if you have a practical skill, you feel you can offer, or just as importantly, if you would be happy to help with some administration, please can you let us know? For now, all we need to know is:

- Who you are
- Your contact details
- Skills you feel you can offer
- Whether you might be tied to one location or happy to work wider

Please send your information to Colin Raistrick, our Operations Manager at stjohnsmethodistoffice@gmail.com or call on 0191 251 2355

This won't be tying you to anything, but just starting the conversation. Please give this your prayerful thought. We need all the help we can get.
Many thanks, Martin Shaw, Senior Circuit Steward

Bethlehem, Christmas 2023.



I have some difficulty most years as I think of the Bethlehem, Palestine, of today, because it distresses me. This year that distress is very great. We have friends who live there and have shared their home with us, with exceptionally generous, typically Palestinian hospitality. They would give Enid a break when she had a little time off from her work as an Ecumenical Accompanier* in Bethlehem in 2008/9. We were invited to their daughter's wedding this year, but couldn't go. People are being killed in the West Bank as well as Gaza, and people are living under lock down.

We have hosted in our home, academics from the University of Gaza too, who came to do post-doctoral research at our local universities. One of them took German Citizenship whilst doing his doctorate at Hamburg University, so has been able to leave Gaza with his pregnant wife and two young daughters. The other family are just about surviving, having lost their home. They are fortunate ones.

It is 20 years since I first went to the land called holy, at the invitation of the then Bishop of Jerusalem Riah Abu-El Assal; we stayed at the Cathedral of St George in Jerusalem. I had first had concern for the people of Palestine in 1972, when I heard two young men speaking about their situation when I was at University. It was the year of the massacre Palestinians carried out at the Olympic Games. Palestinians' sense of injustice were so strong back then, that a faction committed such awful atrocities, before the creation of Hamas. Binyamin Netanyahu's brother was killed in the raid on Entebbe airport in 1976, another atrocity.

I have read a great deal about the troubles in Palestine. My interest has partly been in relation to the religious, particularly Christian, experience, and I have tried keep balanced in relation to both sides in the conflict.

Some years ago archived records became available which revealed some of the inner workings of the political Zionist movement during the British Mandate period (1920-1948) and its ending with the declaration of the State of Israel and the subsequent war. A number of Israeli historians have written about these, notably Ilan Pappé, who described the ethnic cleansing of Palestine in at that time in his 2006 book of that name, and the Iron Wall doctrine of the Zionist leaders developed under the influence of Ze'ev Jabotinsky, (MBE) which said any negotiations with the Arabs must be from a position of Military Strength. Zabolinski also advocated the 'transfer' of the native population. Another strategy of the Israelis, whose terrorists of the time became the Israeli Defence Force upon the legitimisation of the State of Israel, was to take advantage of opportunities to put 'facts on the ground' in relation to acquiring territory. Israel has never actually defined its borders. Ilan Pappé was ousted from his University Post and needed to live in exile. His academic freedom and that of one of his students, Teddy Katz, was silenced due to what was revealed in their researches.

One of the first books I read was the story of Archbishop Elias Chacour Blood Brothers. He described, like many others I've heard, how his family had to move out of their village in 1947/8 at the behest of Israeli armed forces on the promise they could return in a few weeks. They took their keys with them (many still have them). They were never allowed to return. When later the Israeli

court ruled in their favour, their village was blown up by the IDF. Just the Church remains. Others fled, having heard of the terrorising of the village of Deir Yassin.

These and other historical facts cause me to see the present turn of events as the extremist Israel government taking advantage of the horrible tragedy which was suffered on October 7th as an opportunity to realise the Zionist dream of 'a land with no people for a people with no land.' Maybe it is worth the cost of the lives of a few hostages, never mind the 'elimination' of tens of thousands of other people. In other words the genocide of Palestinians. Hence my distress. Hopefully by the time this article is published the hostages will be free, and the remaining Palestinians will have some hope renewed for a future they can determine for themselves.

Meanwhile, we need to hold Israelis and Palestinians together in our prayers for peace, and pray for the humanitarian work which continues against the personal and alleged national interests of the powers that be, especially at Christmas, when we remember the land called Holy.

If any readers are interested in background reading about the above. I am happy to lend books from my collection. I have quite a variety.

Roger Gordon, Mid-November 2023

**Ecumenical Accompaniment in Palestine and Israel EAPPI, now of necessity withdrawn was an initiative of the World Council of Churches where internationals live for 3 months amongst local people and work to monitor conflict situations acting as a moderating presence to reduce the tensions of the realities of occupation.*

Brand new multi-faith prayer room opens at Newcastle International Airport



Newcastle International Airport has unveiled a brand-new multi-faith prayer room and quiet space. The newly refurbished area which is located inside the terminal near security, offers a dedicated space for passengers and airport employees who want to engage in prayer, meditation or find a

quiet space. The multi-faith prayer room is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week and has comfortable seating, prayer mats, religious texts and other resources. Senior management from Newcastle International Airport, the Airport Chaplains and faith leaders from across the North East Region gathered to mark the official opening of the Chapel this week. Guests included:

- The Bishop of Newcastle, Rt Revd Dr Helen-Ann Hartley
- Rabbi Aaron Lipsey - Chair of Newcastle Council of Faiths
- Rev Canon Christine Brown - St Mary the Virgin, Ponteland
- Imam Mohammad Roziur Rahman
- Paul Southgate - Chair of Northumbrian Industrial Mission
- Andy Lie - Ecumenical and Inter-faith Officer URC
- Cllr Mehrban Sadiq
- Mrs Christine Armstrong, Mr Chris Horton and Mr Craig McManus - members of the Chaplaincy Management Support Group

Nick Jones, Chief Executive Officer at Newcastle International Airport, said: 'We are delighted to open our brand-new multi-faith prayer room and quiet space. We welcome and value our employees' and passengers' differences, and the newly refurbished space reflects our dedication to create an inclusive culture for all. The Airport Chaplaincy has provided passengers and employees with compassionate, independent and confidential listening for twenty six years, and we hope this space offers everyone a place of sanctuary and calm amidst the bustling airport atmosphere.'

Fiona Usher, Chaplain Team Leader at Newcastle International Airport, said: 'The Chaplaincy team at Newcastle International Airport are grateful to the Airport for its investment into the multi-faith prayer room and quiet space. This space has always been well received by passengers, with many leaving messages of gratitude. One passenger wrote: 'From a self-professed anxious traveller, the room was a calming and grounding influence. Without the Chaplaincy's gentle reassurance, the whole experience would have been much more difficult.'

'We believe this newly refurbished space will provide passengers and employees with a place to find peace, strength and recharge, and we hope to see many more faces embracing this sanctuary during their journey or working day.'



North East England has a rich history of diverse faiths and beliefs, with an average of 55% of the North East population identifying with a religion, according to data revealed by the 2021 Census. Airport Chaplains are members of the International Association of Civil Aviation Chaplains (IACAC), a professional organisation of Chaplains in the civil aviation industry. At more than a hundred airports around the world, Airport Chaplains support travellers and employees of all faiths and no faiths with spiritual care and guidance.

Newcastle International Airport has a team of three chaplains on site. Located near the security entrance, the multi-faith prayer room and quiet space is open to all. Find out more here: www.newcastleairport.com/preparing-for-travel/at-theairport/airport-facilities/

(Press Release by Kate Hall, Marketing and Communications Manager, Newcastle Airport)



The Methodist Church

Synod Digest

Synod was held on Saturday, 9th September at Westerhope Methodist Church. The following is a summary of the main items on the agenda Welcome to Kathy Bevan, the new District Evangelism and Justice Enabler. Kathy is excited to get to know folk across the District, to build relationships and connect folk with a heart for mission and justice. Get in touch to discuss your ideas: kathybevan@icloud.com

Nominations to Conference 2024

Conference will be held in Leeds next year. Deacon Maggie Patchett and Kathy Bevan will join Rev Eva Walker, David Brown and Christine Armstrong as representatives from the District. Mrs Carolyn Godfrey is to be Vice-President of the Conference in 2024. As Carolyn was present at Synod in her role as Regional Safeguarding Officer, she was warmly congratulated and Stephen, the Chair of District, prayed for her.

Community Engagement Enabler

Deacon Tracey Hume updated us on some of the amazing stories and developments from her work. Over 150 people with addiction issues have experienced Recovery Church and Tracey has been approached for advice, as it is hoped that a new NPNP project could be set up in Glasgow. She is working with Gateshead Council capturing eight anonymised stories of those who feel they have been treated unfairly in their interactions with, eg the Police and Social Services. Addiction is often a response to trauma, and these situations have often retraumatised individuals. Some have suffered a relapse because of their treatment. She will share these stories with representatives from different services so that they can work together to create more positive experiences in the future. Synod unanimously agreed that this role should continue and the reinvention process for Tracey is currently taking place. Rev Jona Sewell, Chair of Tracey's Oversight Group, spoke of the joy at what God is doing, the joy that the voiceless are being heard, but also the challenge of the work. It sometimes feels like being in a boat at sea, not knowing where the destination will be, but knowing that Christ is in the boat with us.

Celebrating 50 years of the ISC

The International Student Centre based at Brunswick Methodist Church has been working with overseas students for 50 years. The Coordinator, Stephen Richardson shared some of their stories with us. For more details and to enquire about volunteering opportunities, please contact Stephen: iscnewcastle@gmail.com.

Deliverance Ministry

Rev Dr Neil Cockling explained that he has been involved in this ministry for 35 years. Having paused this ministry three years ago, the Methodist Church has now brought out new guidelines. There is a new discernment process and there will be one cohort each year embarking on a connexional training programme. Both lay and ordained may feel called to this ministry but don't know what the next step should be. The new training programme, starting in May, will enable individuals to explore what this means and what is involved. In the first instance, anyone interested should inform the Chair of District, who will pass their name on to the connexional panel. There will be an hour-long conversation followed by a discernment day, training then follow-up. The panel will give authorisation and there will then be a supervisory relationship with regular gatherings in order to explore good practice. This means that anyone seeking this ministry can be put in touch with an appropriately trained person.

The Covenant Relationship between the Church and its Ministers: Commitments and Expectations

Rev Ann Varker gave us an introduction to this important piece of work. It is rooted in the biblical understanding of ministry, seeking to equip and enable the flourishing of those in ministry. It encourages a deeper commitment to God and to one another as we watch over one another in love. Members of Synod stood to make the first of nine commitments: 'As members of the Church we play our part in maintaining the Covenant Relationship as we exercise our particular responsibilities towards ministers in our various ways. As an expression of that commitment we resolve to receive the gifts and graces of particular presbyters and deacons (in circuit and other appointments) and to listen, consider, and, as appropriate, enable those ministers to develop their gifts and graces and flourish in a variety of expressions of ministry.' Ann encouraged us to read the full report, which can be found at: <https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/26036/conf-22-19-covenant-relationship-church-ministerscommitments-expectations.pdf>

Property Support Officer

Synod was informed that this new role will be advertised very shortly. It is hoped that it will alleviate some of the work involved at circuit level when churches and manses need to be sold.

3Generate

David Brown, the District 3Gen Ambassador, explained that this is the largest event in British Methodism aimed at young people. It will be held at the NEC in Birmingham and while the District doesn't pay for places, it does help with transport costs. As it has grown, the biggest challenge is getting sufficient volunteers. There are so many roles that need to be filled, which make a huge difference to those attending. Synod was also asked to pray for the event and all involved and also to make space for our young people to share their stories when they get back. If you feel called to volunteer please contact David: d.r.brown@icloud.com

The Mother House

Rev Elaine Lindridge, Minister for the Mother House, gave us an update on how pioneers are being supported through The Mother House. A lot of time during the first year has been spent on governance issues. We are committed to keeping people safe, but NPNP work can be a risky business. The projects, which are focused on forming new Christian communities at the edge of normal church life and beyond, are also very diverse. In Phase 2, Elaine is seeking to encourage NPNP work across circuits. There is a limited amount of funding available, but it is much more about getting alongside people and looking for what God is doing. Some projects are a little vulnerable and the main reason is a lack of volunteers to support the work. She is hoping to highlight this at our April Synod by initiating a type of volunteer scheme. Elaine also asked Synod members for their help in looking out for those at the edges who may have drifted away from church life. If you know anyone like that, then please give them Elaine's contact details so that they can get in touch.

EDI and Environmental Policies

Synod was reminded that these will be reviewed at our April Synod. It would be great if we could hear stories of how elements of the policies are being implemented in local churches and circuits. For additional information about the topics covered, please contact any of your Circuit Synod Representatives.

Edinburgh Fringe-From Rob Wylie's Blogpost



Over August I went to the Edinburgh Fringe, where I was working with the Methodist Church Evangelism and Growth team and the City of Edinburgh Methodist Church to explore what 'mission' might look like. We attended the fringe in 2022 to have a bit of a mooch around, see a few shows, chat to a few people and try to get a feel for the festival and to think about potential needs in the midst of festival season. Our aim was to go back this year and 'do' something!

Some of the things you become aware of as you walk around Edinburgh during this season is the sensory overload—posters everywhere trying to grab your attention and pull you into theatre, comedy, music. There are Street performers, acrobats, escapologists, mime artists and even kazoo playing statues! Music is a big part of the festival with multiple buskers trying to get their music heard. There are people giving out fliers at every corner, often shouting and 'performing' to get their voices heard in the midst of the noise. Noise is a key phrase.

It's been a few years since I have been involved in a 'mission' trip such as this. We were only a small team led by Holly Adams from the Evangelism and Growth. We were convinced that we wanted to provide a place for stories to be shared, that enabled conversations to flow mutually between people. I too, can learn from others about life and spirituality. Our theme for the week was *Lost in Wonder*. Late mornings we could be found on the Royal Mile with a sofa and then in the late afternoon and evenings, we could be found at Nicholson Square Gardens.

On the Royal Mile we asked passers-by to tell us a time when they were lost in wonder. We invited people to sit on a sofa and a conversation took place. Of course not everyone wanted to sit on the sofa and so many of the wonderful conversations I had were on the edge of the space we inhabited as I gave out fliers and invited people to sit for a while. While stories were told, one of the team would paint a small watercolour postcard for people to take away. There were often profound moments of connection. Emotions both on the sofa and in the crowd were expressed through laughter and tears. At the end of their sofa visit we asked people to write on the sofa something that struck them about the conversation.

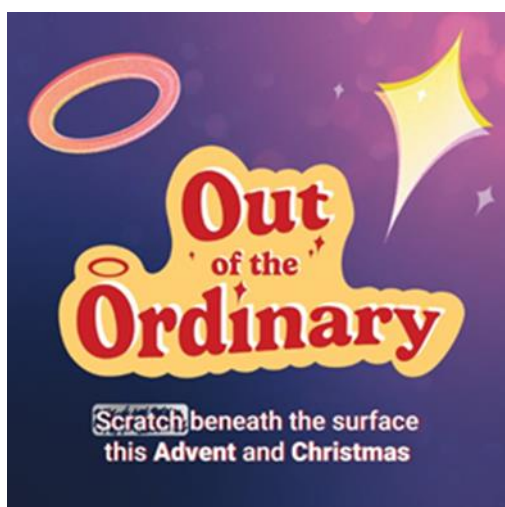
In Nicholson Square we provided what we called an 'immersive experience.' Again we used the sofa for conversation. We also had other installations that people could engage with. We used a pagoda. We had some angel wings to stand in front of so people could take a photo in front of them. We offered an audio video installation that people could go into and watch a series of media clips to ponder on. We also gave out micro Sabbaths. These were little bags with food for the journey and a few other things. We based this on the Methodist 'Love Feast.' The whole concept was to provide a space for folks to take a breath and pause. People tended to stay longer in this space, for conversation and reflection. It also gave us the opportunity to interact with local people that weren't there for the fringe, we encountered a few of the more vulnerable folks in the square and it spoke powerfully about the complexity of life in the city and how disengaged people can be from the fringe and all that it offers.

Over the years I have been involved with many missional opportunities, from my days with Youth for Christ, Cliff College, Share Jesus International, and more local mission opportunities. Much of these experiences were based on some kind of presentation of the gospel story. It was much more about 'you have something missing and we are here to tell you the answer.' The experience in Edinburgh felt much more natural as conversations touched on numerous themes from death,

illness, work fragility, a sense of being lost and a whole lot more! In total we had meaningful conversations with two hundred and thirty nine people, and at least a half of those conversations dealt with complex situations.

Another observation I found interesting is that many of the people I spoke to talked about how the pandemic had left them struggling. Some talked about the loss of connection with other human beings. The space we provided gave people a chance to open up and share. It seemed to me that spirituality sat very close to the surface in conversations we had. I believe Jesus was very much alive in all these conversations. Since being back and after a few weeks to think about it, I would say it was one of the most profound weeks I have experienced in a long while.

Rob Wylie



AROUND THE CHURCHES

The **Methodist Church** 

ST JOHN'S

Rev Eva has been posting on St John's Facebook page about 'A Week in the Life of St John's.' Included in the list of activities happening there are Wiggles (for babies and toddlers) Guides, Beavers, Cubs and Scouts, the youth group, Messy Church, Flower Club, the Zoom bible group (which includes people from across Europe), Friday Morning Cuppa, the badminton group, as well as Worship on a Sunday. 'If you ever thought Church is what happens on a Sunday Morning, now you know that Church is a community living together every day of the week—welcoming, caring, encouraging, supportive,.' To quote Eva.

<https://www.facebook.com/StJohnsMethodistChurchWhitleyBay>



At the end of October around eighty people gathered together to celebrate Harvest with a meal organised and prepared by the stewards. There were games and dancing. Some people didn't want to go home!

On November 4th sixteen local charities literally set out their stalls for the annual Christmas market. It was a very successful event, raising over £2,250 collectively for the various charities. St John's has now attained Bronze in the Eco Church awards, and we're now working towards Silver.



We're looking forward to Christmas services and events at St John's, beginning with the well-established Choir Coffee and Carols on Saturday 9th December, 10am to Noon. The 'stable' outside the church has had a new coat of blue paint, and the star painted. So, we await the coming of the Holy Family, and maybe a few visitors!

Noreen

At St John's we have been very busy. The 'Friday Cuppa' supported by North Tyneside Council's "Warm Welcome" has continued throughout the year. We are very grateful to all our volunteers those who are Church members and those who want to come along to offer help and support. The community group has grown in numbers with well over twenty attending weekly and then going on to join in other activities offered by the Church. We have been lucky to have Emily, a local musician pop in with her guitar to give a peak preview of her recently released album. We wish her luck in her career.

The Bay Foodbank featured in our Harvest celebrations with our congregation and uniform sections donating tin and dried foods. These are very much needed by The Bay Foodbank in order that they can continue with their contribution of food parcels to those in need in our local areas. A collection point to make donations is available at St. John's, to use at any time the buildings are open. These donations are delivered on a weekly basis to The Bay Foodbank.

I am in my second year as Steward and I am enjoying the experience of being a member of a team that work extremely well together. We support each other and care for one another and continue to grow in our work with Rev Eva.

St. John's have been challenged to be more 'green' and we have looked at the many ways we can go forward. Simple things, like changing our bags use from plastic to paper and looking to buy local are just a couple of examples. We have a notice board in our crush hall where advice is given on what can be done as individuals. We are looking to offer more opportunities to recycle via our collection point those items we cannot recycle via our normal route (watch for more information in our notices at St John's). These will be collected and sorted. The circuit has a very committed and enthusiastic team to help us to do the best we can in achieving our greener credentials.

I must admit I get excited during Advent with the preparations and atmosphere of anticipation. The joy of worship, music, hymns and the story leading up to the birth of Jesus. Our community groups have various activities they are planning and there is a buzz around the building of anticipation for the season ahead of us. We have a beautiful card designed by one of our younger church members, Sam, which I look forward to delivering to our local residents with the dates and times of all our services.

I know much more has been happening and hope all those volunteers who turn up week in and week out to help with all the activities that are on offer realise how much they are appreciated for all their hard work and enthusiasm. I hope the various groups can give the editor of the newsletter an account of what they provide throughout the year. We need to share the good news that is being experienced on a weekly/fortnightly/monthly basis.

Looking forward to a happy Christmas and wishing you the same,

Carol Baggaley

CULLERCOATS BROADWAY

September is past and November has almost disappeared. We have a Christmas Tree up for the Festive Coffee Morning on Saturday! There is talk about decorating windows, getting out the Advent wreath and the very, very, secret hush-hush rehearsals for the annual Nativity Play on Christmas Eve morning have begun!

Looking back at the last few months and forward to Advent and Christmas we have so much to thank God for. We see more contacts with our local communities and new people coming to join us at worship and in Church groups.

On Sunday 24th September we had a special Church Family occasion for the Baptism of Ellie Rose aged 5. Her Mum, Donna, Dad, Dave and family shared in the service. Ellie and her older brother James are much loved by everyone in Young Church who enjoyed taking part in the service.

In a different way, we came together to grieve the death of Rev Leo Osborn. He meant so much to those whom he had pastored at Cullercoats and Fishermen's Mission. Many of us went to his Thanksgiving service at Newcastle Cathedral on Friday 10th November where Charlotte came and spoke to us.

In October we held our Harvest Festival and used materials from ALL WE CAN which shared the thoughts and faith of Christians in Chikawawa in Malawi. Graham and Sue Tipple enhanced our experience and understanding by sharing their knowledge and artifacts. Gifts were brought for the Bay Food Bank. We were also encouraged to make a gift online to ALL WE CAN. A cash offering raised £156. North Shields Methodist Church gave us their Harvest sheaf to add to our display.

November is the month of Remembrance. This year our Solace service was shared with North Shields Methodist Church. Together we lit candles and remembered those we love. Outside we offered lanterns to light to passers-by.



Our Preaching theme in November was 'Big Issues.' The topics came from members and were Politics, Work, Evil and Money!

3,700 printed Christmas Cards listing all the Advent and Christmas events and worship are all bundled up by street and ready to be delivered. We look forward to meeting the people who will come. We are hosting a "Christmas Shindig" with music, food, Christingle and Messy crafts, a Christmas Singalong, and Traditional Carol service. On the four Sundays of Advent, we will follow the 'Out of

the Ordinary,' the Methodist Church's 2023 seasonal theme.

How could Christmas be anything but out of the ordinary, but who knows what wonders it will bring?

Visit to Lourdes

Skye Brunton, one of our teenagers, is part of a group of thirty six students from St Thomas Moor 6th form, who will visit Lourdes at Easter 2024 with Hosanna House Children Pilgrimage Trust. Skye will be hosting a coffee/brunch on 20th January 2024 from 11.00am at CMC to raise funds for her trip with the charity. While away they will spend the week supporting young disabled and disadvantaged children on their pilgrimage.

Sue

FISHERMEN'S MISSION AND COAST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

We continue to enjoy joint worship with our Methodist friends and with a variety of preachers. We welcome visitors, some during holiday time, and a new attendant Jean has joined us from Coble House. Some of us are volunteers with Street Pastors, Prayer Pastors and SWEP. We look forward to an Advent Study Group in December and a Carol Service on Christmas Eve at 4pm.

Jean

NORTH SHIELDS

Tea will be served at the Church Tearoom with carols and Christmas music on-
Saturday 9th December
From 2 pm-4 pm

Everyone welcome. Donations to ALL WE CAN

Jean

MONKSEATON

As most of you know the planned merge with St. John's did not go ahead. The reason was quite bitter sweet, the closure of Earsdon. We were very delighted that in the Sundays following this sad event members of the Earsdon Fellowship started to join with us for worship. The numbers grew over the weeks and our church was full of love and warmth. Maybe, just maybe there was a message for us in all of this. We met with Rev Eva and the church members and after much discussion the decision was made that we would move forward as one church and see where God led us.

On Sunday 3rd September we celebrated our Covenant Service and welcomed three people into membership and four who transferred their membership. It was a very special morning. We enjoyed cake and Schloer. The theme of the cake was New Beginnings. The worship area in church is laid out Café Style every week and everyone enjoys chatting after the service, we are just ONE family now.

We held our Remembrance Service outside on 11th Nov. and were joined by people from churches in the area, then back to church for refreshments.

Toy Service will be on Sunday 10th Dec. All toys and small gifts for the Mums will go to The Women's Refuge as usual. There is an Outdoor Carol Service on Saturday 23rd at 4.00pm. Refreshments are at church—Tea/Coffee/Mulled Wine and Mince Pies. The Carol Service is on 24th Dec 11.45pm followed by refreshments.

All our groups continue to meet, and Sami the pharmacist is once again delivering a great outreach service to the community through all the many vaccines he offers everyone. I pray everyone has a joyful Christmas and the World finds Peace in the New Year.

**God Bless,
Margaret.**

Do you have a story/article for the next circuit newsletter? Please email it to noreenrees@hotmail.com or send a hard copy to Noreen C/O St John's Methodist Church, Ilfracombe Gds, Whitley Bay NE26 3ND

Published by—
 North Shields and Whitley
 Bay Methodist Circuit
 Reg Charity No 1132438