

HARVEST 2025

Focus

The Magazine of St John's Methodist Church

PUBLISHED QUARTERLY * EASTER * SUMMER * HARVEST * CHRISTMAS



ST JOHN'S
HARVEST
Festival & Meal

We gather to celebrate God's goodness.
We shall celebrate with a Family Parade Service for all
ages, followed by a time of sharing in food and
conversation. All are welcome.

28
September, 2025

 **PARADE SERVICE**
10.45 AM

 **MEAL**
12.00 PM

It is a free meal, but if you want to donate do it via
the office.



Scarecrows displayed at the
recent Earsdon Scarecrow
Festival

St. John's Mission Statement – Celebrate, Share, Love

Web site: <http://www.stjohnsmethodistchurchwhitleybay.co.uk>

Email: stjohnsmethodistoffice@gmail.com

Letter from Eva

The Good Soil

Dear friends,

On Thursday this week we gathered together as Messy Church to celebrate the God of the Harvest. We did this by thinking of the Parable of the Sower that Jesus told those who were following him. This story is found in Luke 8.

Jesus told the story of the farmer scattering seeds without limit, with generosity, on the earth around him, on the soil under his feet.

The ground on which the seeds fell was a path in places, full of rocks in other places, full of thorns further, and then just simple, good soil.

Jesus goes on to tell us that only the good soil produced fruit.

As we reflect on this parable, we remember that when God created all soil, all earth, God said: 'It is good!' The soil is good, all of it.'

The path in our parable was good soil once, until people and animals walked all over it, pressing it down until nothing could grow. Sometimes, that's our story too. Life walks all over us—disappointments, harsh words, rejection, anxiety—and we harden just to survive. The seeds of joy, hope, and peace can't take root because the soil has been packed down. Sometimes, our world feels like this. Harsh, inhospitable, trampled upon, broken.

Still, we do know that with care and love, even hard paths can become soft again. For the good soil is still there, just waiting.

The rocky ground in our parable is still good soil, but covered with rocks. I wonder how heavy these rocks are? I wonder what they are? I wonder if the rocks are the unfair systems of our world, I wonder if they are injustice, poverty, division, the exploitation of



the earth? These rocks stop roots from growing deep. They make it hard for anything to flourish. Some of them we carry personally; others are placed there by systems and structures in our world. But here's the good news: **rocks can be removed.** It may take effort, and it may take help, but underneath it all the soil remains good.

And then Jesus talks of soil with thorns. Thorns are not always ugly. Some thorns grow beautiful roses. But thorns take space. And that means that at times there is no room for other things to grow. Don't get me wrong, I love roses and roses have their place, but maybe we are reminded today that the good soil is not only for roses, but for tomatoes, lavenders, vines. For the earth needs diversity, the earth needs balance and space to breathe, just as we do. Even good things, if they crowd our lives too much, can prevent the Spirit from planting something new.

And then we have the productivity of the good soil. Good soil is the soil God made in the very beginning. Good soil is soil that has been cleared, soil that is free from greed, injustice, fear. And this soil produces a crop that multiplies. And this soil produces plants and plants give oxygen, literal life to our world, to us.

I wonder why Jesus told this story. I wonder if we can see hope in this story. Hope because the soil is good, always good, even when it is trampled and covered by rocks. Hope because no matter what the state of the soil, God will keep sowing. For God believes in the potential of every patch of earth, and every heart.

This harvest, therefore, let us give thanks for the good soil, for our planet, our home, and all it gives us and let us open our eyes to see the possibility of new life within it. Amen.

Love and God's blessings,

Eva



Vestry Notes



Steward's Summer Reflections

Our summer has been very relaxing—unless, of course, you're a gardener having to water regularly! Our beautiful coastline has truly been seen at its best in the sunshine. For those unable to get away, there has been ample opportunity to enjoy time in our gardens, parks, and on our beaches.

What is usually a quiet period at church over the summer turned out to be a hive of activity.

First and foremost, a big thank you to Patricia, who has done a fantastic job keeping the church and halls clean. The work by the heating engineers to replace our boilers created a considerable amount of dust and mess, not to mention the disruption caused by the Water Board replacing pipes in the car park. Your tireless efforts, Patricia, are very much appreciated.

Charles and John, our faithful gardening team, had both the dry weather and relentless weeds to contend with. As always, it seems the most resilient plants are the ones we'd rather not have! The gardens and car park are looking wonderfully well-tended—thank you both for your hard work.

Our Wednesday afternoon dance group requested use of the hall on Wednesday mornings to host a summer beginners' class, which was very well attended—great to see this initiative flourish.

Friday Cuppa continued throughout the summer, offering warmth, conversation, and friendship. We were pleased to welcome visitors who saw our sign while on holiday

and popped in. We are also mindful of some of our regulars who have been facing health or personal challenges—please know you remain in our thoughts and prayers. Thank you to the wonderful team of volunteers.

Christine and Elaine have been getting to grips with their new Steward duties and are already fitting in seamlessly. Thank you both, and thank you to all our Stewards for the important work you do.

We had the joy of a summer wedding that had us 'all at sea'—quite literally! With the RNLI on hand throughout the day, two beautiful brides, Anna and Jane, celebrated their wedding here at St. John's, surrounded by family, friends, and colleagues. What a fantastic and memorable day it was.

We also welcomed Mike Carr to our team of musicians. I'm sure you've all enjoyed hearing him play the organ and piano alongside Charles and Susan as he settles in. Thank you, Mike, for sharing your wonderful talents with us.

A lovely surprise came by way of Margaret Rushton, who had a 'lightbulb moment' while ordering stationery for her grandson. She generously arranged a gift of commemorative pens as part of our centenary celebrations—a thoughtful gesture that was warmly received. Thank you, Margaret!

It's also a pleasure to see Colin back in the office following his surgery. We're glad to hear he's recovering well, and we're grateful to everyone who stepped in to help fill the gaps during his absence.

As always, it's been heart-warming to see our congregation welcome new faces over the summer. Thank you all for making St. John's a truly warm and inviting place for visitors.

Carol Baggaley
Senior Steward

Property Notes



Image by Mohamed Hassan-Pixabay

Over the summer there has been major work undertaken in the boiler room by Enright Environmental to replace the gas boilers, and to zone the heating system. This work has now been completed, and the new heating system is ready for the colder winter weather ahead. The work did cause some disruption and mess, with the disabled toilet out of use for a number of weeks whilst a hole was dug in the floor to allow access for the installation of the flue beneath the Minor Hall floor. Thank you for your patience and understanding during this disruptive period.

The hot water system for the toilets has also been upgraded, so that it now works on localised electrically powered water heaters, rather than via the central hot water cylinder which only provided hot water when the main heating system was working. Hot water is now available to wash hands 365 days of the year.

The central heating temperature can now be controlled with four separate zones, as the need arises-

Sanctuary & Vestry

Minor Hall, Crush Hall & Kitchen

Wesley Hall, Kitchen corridor, & Wesley Hall corridor

Youth Room & toilet block

The controls for the heating will be located in the church office, where zones and temperatures will be set according to room bookings. The zones can also be set remotely via a smart-phone app. I would ask for your patience and tolerance as we start to learn and get used to how the new system works. Please inform the office if you find that a room is too cold or too hot for your activity, so that adjustments can be made.



Any change to a room booking should also be communicated to the office so that the heating can be set as appropriate. The new heating system will be more responsive than the old system, and will be quicker to warm up. It will be more efficient, using less gas, thereby reducing energy costs, and lowering Co2 emissions.

Since my report in the Summer edition of Focus, the following maintenance and repairs have been undertaken:

Minor plaster repairs to internal corridor walls, particularly surrounding the external car park door area, and around the 3-in-1 door. These areas see intensive use, and this has resulted in damage to the plaster and paint.

- Wesley Hall floor given annual clean, scrub and polish
- New rubbers attached to chair legs, where old rubbers had worn away, and the metal end was causing damage to the floor.
- New floor inspection hatch installed in disabled toilet.

In August Northumbrian Water replaced the old lead water mains pipe that ran under the car park, with a new plastic pipe. They have

been eliminating lead pipes in the area to remove any small traces of lead from drinking water. The work was carried out on a quiet Saturday, so that there was no disruption to church activities. My thanks to Carol and Colin who volunteered to meet and unlock the church for the workmen at 8 o'clock on a Saturday morning. The work was undertaken at no cost to the church.

At the time of writing, the painter who was supposed to be coming back to complete the small amount of external painting left over from last year has not undertaken any work. If he fails to complete the work by the end of the autumn (which hasn't been paid for) then the Property Team will seek an alternative contractor to finish the painting next spring.

The Fire Safety Policy has been reviewed and updated. A copy will be circulated to all building user groups. If you would like a copy please contact the church office. During a recent test of the fire alarm it was reported that the alarm bell was not loud enough in the Minor Hall. When the alarm system is serviced in October the addition of a repeater alarm fitted in the Crush Hall will be requested.

The long dry summer has been a testing time for the gardening team. They seem to have spent most of their time watering plants, and removing weeds. Their efforts have been rewarded by the splendid display produced for everyone to enjoy as they use the building, pass by, or live locally.

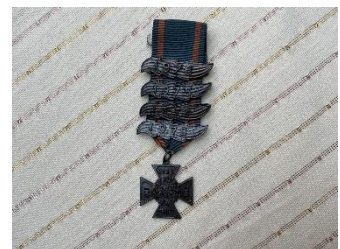
I would like to thank Peter Firth, Charles Hedley, and John Cuggy for their support in maintaining the property and gardens.

Andrew Lowe – Chair of Finance & Property Committee

JMA News

Thank you to all who have contributed to the JMA collection for the Methodist year from September 2024 through till August 2025. We have sent a contribution of £251.00 to the Methodist World Mission which will be used for projects in the UK and overseas.

I have had interesting conversations with some folk about their memories of being a JMA collector in their younger days. The photos show-Mike Carr with his medals (on red background), Carole Firth, Debbie Mathieson's medals (on white background)



Valerie Todhunter

Celebrations and Remembrances

Dorothy Huntley will be celebrating her 90th birthday on 23 October



And **Christine Fitz-Gerald** will also be celebrating a significant birthday, on 9th November when she will be 80. She hopes to celebrate her birthday in London, at The Festival of Remembrance, after a Cenotaph Lunch.



After the summer holidays, we will continue to meet on the **2nd Thursday** of the month, unless it's a school holiday.

Upcoming Messy Churches -
11th Sept, **9th Oct**, 13th Nov,
11th Dec, 8th Jan, **12th Feb**,
12th Mar, **14th May**, 11th June,
9th July

See you there!



2025–26 Film Season:

19th Sept, 17th Oct, 21st Nov,
19th Dec, 16th Jan, 20th Feb,
20th Mar, 15th May, 19th June

Films to be confirmed nearer the
time – always open to
suggestions!

I want to say a quick thank you to the Messy Church team for all their hard work this year. Who can believe another year has gone by?! To see the children grow-both in stature and in faith has been such a privilege, and I know that you feel that too. It's also been wonderful to deepen our relationships with the adults and answer some of their amazing questions! Thank you

Thank you too to Samuel Walker. When he was on Work Experience with me a couple of weeks ago, among other things he made a grid for all the Messy Churches in the Circuit (St John's, Monkseaton and North Shields) displaying a list of themes, topics and dates.



I'd also like to thank the many people who popped in on a Friday morning over the holidays to scrub and clean the toddler toys and mats. We've had the first Messy Church of the autumn, on the theme of harvest, and you can see the craft work from this displayed in the church.

Looking ahead, please see the dates and themes of all the Messy Churches for the next academic year, and also the Family Film nights, **on the left**.

Karen Morley, Church Family Worker

Christmas Charities' Market
Saturday, 1st November 2025
10a.m–12noon

Our annual Christmas Charities' Market provides an opportunity both to show our support to a variety of local and national charities- among them RNLI, Cancer Research, Save the Children, Great North East Air Ambulance – and also to enjoy quality refreshments, stock up on Christmas cards and gifts, and enjoy being part of the community.

Please make a note of the date for this year's Market – Saturday, November 1st – and look out for more publicity and ways to get involved over the coming weeks.

St. John's values its place in the local community, and this is one of the ways in which we are able to express our support. The commitment of so many people to such good causes is always a cause for celebration!

Tony Farrar

A Look back at the Centenary Celebrations

No one could accuse St John's of ignoring the centenary of the church. Beginning in January, the stewards plus Rev Eva and many helpers organised a gathering with food every month. There were cups of Chapel Broth, warming casseroles, a great variety of cakes and pastries, hors d'oeuvres, mocktails and...well, more cakes! Every event was free, and everyone welcome, regardless of whether they had a St John's connection or not

The celebrations began in January with a Ceilidh, which co-incidentally took place on Burns Night. We were very grateful to the Scouts for paying the hire cost of the band, and I'm sure many people had sore feet the next day after the vigorous dancing! Valentine's Day the following month was a quieter event, and many families attended, enjoying the variety of warm casseroles on offer, and the games afterwards, organised by Carol Baggaley. Some of the teenagers attending took it upon themselves to clear up afterwards, so the hall was very quickly back to its usual layout. While this was happening, the younger children lay on the floor, and were impressively quiet!



Young and old—babies to Octogenarians—came along to the Mad Hatter's Afternoon Tea. Some wore hats, and rabbit ears for the occasion. Carol Baggaley gamely attempted to play The Hat Game but it was clear that although the children knew how to play, the adults were a lost cause! Easter services and events then took priority over the centenary events for a while but then, perhaps the most ambitious event happened in May. People were encouraged to don costumes for the Roaring 20s event, and St John's began to resemble a scene from the Great Gatsby. Sal the dance teacher had the fittest people on their feet to dance the Charleston. The mocktails and fruit punch afterwards were very welcome-and necessary! No effort was spared for the posh nibbles (hors d'oeuvres) which could be eaten in one bite. The tiny cucumber sandwiches could have been served at the Ritz!



Then it was on to the Community Weekend in June (featured in the Summer Focus). This was a real catalyst for bringing everyone involved with St John's together.



Speaking personally, I enjoyed all the events hugely. Probably the Roaring 20s evening was my favourite, but throughout the six months of celebration, the welcome stayed the same.

Noreen Rees

A Church for the Community?



Back in June, as part of this special Centenary year, St. John's celebrated a Community Weekend, drawing together the very varied groups and activities that are part of the weekly life that takes place in the building. And it felt good. We learned a great deal about the different groups and activities, met fascinating people, and discovered much more about each other. And the whole weekend encouraged us to

think more about what it means to be part of community.

So where do we go from here?

As we learned about the different groups and activities, it felt that we were about so much more than just helping the church to keep going through the rental finances. There felt to be a commonality—a concern for people, sharing, learning, discovering, relaxing. Is that saying something about how we understand the purpose of the church?

The weekend helped me, for one, to reflect on the marks of a Christian community. Always inclusive, never exclusive. Concerned for the well-being of others, not just for itself. Working with others, ecumenically and across society, for the benefit of our community as a whole. So how can we best develop the links we already have? How might we more fully use our premises for the benefit of the wider community?

Our motivation for this is that our purpose, our calling, is to live and share the good news of the gospel, witnessing through the use of the premises as well as in our own lives to the inclusive love that is God.

And I wonder if that means we need to listen much more – to those who are involved in caring for our communities, who have the decisions to make which affect how our wider community lives. And then to seek to work together to enable people towards that wholeness of life that we celebrate in our Christian faith.

As we continue to work on these things, the Faith and Life group, which initiated the idea of the Community Weekend, is planning a service on Sunday, November 23rd, which we hope will enable us to share these things in the context of worship. More about that later.

Tony Farrar

(on behalf of the Faith and Life Group)

From the Focus archives.

Harvest 2005

Revd. Paul discussed 'being Church' in forms other than the traditional Sunday worship gathering.

Brief biographies of the President and Vice-President of Conference, Revd. Tom Stuckey and John Bell followed.

A more detailed welcome biography of Revd. Jeff Thomas as he arrived to take pastoral oversight at North Shields.

Pam Pearson shared her family's experiences at a 'Flog It' TV session being filmed for potential broadcast in the region hoping for a personal appearance and a boost for project funds.

One member with failing eyesight appreciated a Church friend reading selected passages from Focus to her.

Several members recalled the life of the late Henry Davy (1912-2005), his early home life, profession and particularly his skills in design with many contributions to the Church and to Focus.

One writer had visited and described the Tall Ships gathered along the Quayside near his workplace.

Revd. Paul discussed the Mission Priorities of the Church.

The Eco-Congregation correspondent pressed the benefits of shopping locally.

It was reported how the choir was overcoming the challenges of leadership and organist vacancies and the beginning of the volunteer organist team.

The Mercy Ships Project reported a final basic total of £6408 and the forthcoming Air

Ambulance Project announced its programme of events for the year.

Harvest 2015

The front cover of Focus was graced by a painting by Noel Huntley of a heavy horse pulling farm equipment inspired by the farming style of Sillywrea in Allendale.

Revd. Carla reflected on change. The chairmanship of the District had changed after a retirement and there had been changes in the Pastoral oversights of the circuit ministers.



A reflection on the ongoing refugee crisis considered the situation compared with similar Biblical examples. The work of Parish Nurses was highlighted in detail.

The Church family had lost loyal member in Joyce Cummings and the Eulogy from her thanksgiving service was published in full, with references to a testing childhood (polio and evacuation), a love of walking and dancing, high cleaning standards, work at Village Homes, caring both within and beyond the Church, and a marriage of 63 years.

Readers were brought up to date with discussions and plans for the development of the Church buildings and the agenda that the working party had set itself for the following months.

In a change of policy the annual charity fundraising would in future benefit St. John's itself in alternate years with a particular focus, that being re-flooring the corridors, in the next year.

A detailed personal report on the World Scout Jamboree in Japan explained the experiences of 10 local members of the International Service Team.

Full copies of any of the articles mentioned can be had on request to Peter Firth

Buckets, Boulders and the Stories They Tell

Sometimes a walk is about the view, sometimes about the company, and sometimes about the stories collected along the way.

Recent rambles took me from a flat expanse of reclaimed land where the ghost of an enormous mining machine still lingers — to a lonely moor where two ancient rocks stand accused of a scandal.

Neither tale is entirely straightforward, but both are worth the telling.

Big Geordie's Bucket – and Beyond

Mining has formed a large part of the North East's culture and history over the last two to three hundred years. The landscape has also been shaped, particularly in more recent times, by opencast



The 'Big Geordie' bucket—from its successor, the Ace of Spades—stands on the Stobswood site. Weighing around 20 tons, it was intended as a memorial to a long-serving worker, but never reached its planned resting place.

mining. That era has now passed, and some of the deepest man-made holes in Europe have been restored to something resembling their former appearance. I say "resembling" because the flat, even nature of the reclaimed ground bestows a somewhat unnatural impression on the walker.

Near the village of Ulgham (pronounced 'Uffam') lies the restored land of the former Stobswood mining site. It's now open to the public, with marked footpaths well used by

dog walkers and ramblers. The centrepiece is the resting place of a gigantic mining bucket — not just any bucket, but that of a 'walking dragline excavator'.

The machine it came from was colossal, weighing nearly three thousand tons, with its bucket capable of moving one hundred tons of material in one scoop. The first of these giants on site, 'Big Geordie', began work in 1969 and was replaced in 1993 by an even bigger machine called the 'Ace of Spades.' Mining ceased around 2003. The bucket you see today belonged to the 'Ace of Spades' — but somehow 'Big Geordie' sounds more romantic.

Following the end of its working life, UK Coal transformed the 580-hectare site into agricultural land, woodland, meadows and water bodies, creating a variety of wildlife habitats.

We began our walk from Ulgham, threading our way through a rather well-appointed farmyard full of fences that complicated navigation. The farmer, noting our confusion, came over to help. When we said our first stop was 'coffee at the bucket,' he smiled knowingly. 'Ah—

you do know the story about that?' We didn't, so he told us.

Dust from site roads was once kept down by a mobile water spraying machine. One man, long employed on this job, suffered a fatal heart attack while working. The location of his death was known, and after reclamation it was intended that the bucket would be placed there as a memorial to his service.

The bucket is thought to weigh about 20 tons, so moving it required serious lifting gear. But on the day of the move, heavy

rain turned the reclaimed land into a quagmire. The attempt was abandoned, with the bucket left 300 yards short of its intended site—and there it remains.

Later that morning, we met another walker who, unprompted, told us the same story. So, I suppose, it must be true.

We paused at the bucket for coffee, thinking of the man who died. In its own way, the memorial still works. And if I pass that way again, I will remember.

The Boulders' tale

The following week, the terrain was very different: steep hills and a vast, heather-clad wilderness. Hill climbs are par for the course, but 'heather trotting' is not for the faint-hearted — indeed, it should be avoided where possible.

A Pair Set in Stone



Traversing mature heather heathland is exhausting—worse than peat hags. Falls are inevitable (though the landings are soft), but just try getting back on your feet. You can't see the ground, which is usually unstable, so you will fall more than once before regaining your footing.

On mixed terrain, I average 2.5 to 3 miles per hour; in mature heather, one mile in an hour is good going.

Our goal was a rocky outcrop known as the 'Priest and Clerk'. The most practical route starts with a climb up Cartington Hill via a good, well-used path. Then the heather trotting begins: a mile with no tracks, though

at least downhill. Tempting green patches appear now and then, but they are waterlogged channels best avoided unless you enjoy being immersed up to the waist in cold soggy peat.

Then, miraculously, within 200 yards of our destination, a path appeared from nowhere, leading straight to the rocks. Two hundred yards beyond, it vanished just as abruptly.

We reached the outcrops at lunchtime and sat in their shade. You can judge the size of the 'Priest' from the small red shape at its base — my day sack.

My companion had looked up the supposed myth explaining the rocks' origin. It claimed a disreputable local priest, and his equally immoral clerk, were caught in a storm and turned to stone by a divine lightning bolt.

It's tosh on two counts. First, crossing this moor is punishment enough for any sins. Lightning bolts are not necessary. Second, it's not even a proper myth—it was invented by an embarrassed artificial intelligence programme that couldn't find any genuine folklore.

How do I know? Let's just say my source is well connected in the 'information mining' business. Be careful what you choose to believe in our brave new world of technology.

Howard Scott

St John's Methodist Church, Whitley Bay
City of Newcastle Male Voice Choir with (Guest soloist Sarah Bell)
Singing a range of popular music including secular, shows and regional songs
Tickets are £10
Tickets available in advance from stjohnsmethodistoffice@gmail.com
Telephone 0191 251 2355
or pay on the door by card or cash
Friday 26th September, 2025
commencing 7pm (doors open 6.30pm)
All proceeds in aid of St John's Methodist Church - Boiler Upgrade Fund (Registered Charity 1184805) Presently upgrading the boilers at a cost of £60,000
Tea / Coffee and Soft drinks will be served during the Interval • Raffle
See the Choir on Facebook
St John's Methodist Church, Whitley Bay
NE26 3ND



Ilfracombe Gardens
Whitley Bay, NE26 3ND
Registered Charity
1184805

Minister: Rev Eva Walker
Telephone: Home 280 8060
E-mail:
revevawalker@gmail.com

Church Office
Opening Hours:
Monday to Friday
9.00 am-12 Noon
telephone: **0191 2512355**
email is-
stjohnsmethodistoffice@gmail.com

Sunday Services
10.45 am Morning Worship

There are also regular
Bible study and Fellowship
groups—Monday morning,
and Thursday morning and
evening via Zoom

Meetings on the
premises include-
Coast History Group
Willow Club
Whitley Bay Flower Club
Wado Ryu Karate Club
Age UK Fitness classes
Whitley Bay Tea Dance
Glow NE Ladies Fitness
Sewing Group
Local councillor Surgery
Handbell Group
Fab Club (Term Time)

Regular Meetings

Sunday
6.30 pm SYJ
(St John's Youth)

Monday
6.15 pm Beavers
6.30 pm Cubs
8.00 pm Scouts
(8th Whitley Bay)

Tuesday
9.30 am &
11.00am Wiggles

Wednesday
9.30 am Toddlers
2.15 pm Afternoon
Club
(fortnightly
With Knit and
Natter
1.30pm)
Choir Practice

Thursday
7.30pm Guides

Friday
9.30 am Toddlers
9am to 1pm Friday
Morning
Cuppa
Badminton
(Ladies)
Brownies

Please contact the church
office or the minister (when
office closed) for further
details.

Also for all
children's
activities,
please contact the
Church Family Worker
churchfamilyworker@gmail.com



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**Deadline for the Christmas
issue of Focus *24th
November 2025***



**Messy Church 2nd
Thursday of the month at
3.30pm (term time)**

Web site: <http://www.stjohnsmethodistchurchwhitleybay.co.uk>

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