

Written on the back of the polaroid photograph I viewed were the words 'Ana Maria 09/02/86 Abandonat'. Hard to believe that the tiny child I had just seen, sharing a cot with two other emaciated children, was 5 years old and simply 'abandoned'. 'Please take it, there's another in the file.' I was told, 'It might help you to get support for these children – they need it.' Indeed they did.



I will forever remember my first visit to a Romanian orphanage. The sights, sounds and above all the smells remain with me.

Advent 1989 and, as we prepared to celebrate the birth of the Christ child, a revolution raged in Romania. Started by parishioners from a small church in Timisoara, protesting at the arrest of their pastor, and, by Christmas Day the 22 year reign of dictator, Nicolae Ceausescu, was over. Though not before over 1100 people had lost their lives, including 74 Timisoara children shot from the rooftops by 'securitate' snipers as they carried their candles for peace.

Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem was daunting but necessary. They had no choice. Compelled by Augustus Caesar, everyone had to return to their place of origin for a census to be taken. For Joseph, that meant travelling to Bethlehem with Mary his wife who was expecting her baby any day.

Why did I ever imagine this journey to be a solitary one? And I did. I pictured a man with his pregnant wife and a donkey, alone and afraid of what they may encounter on a perilous journey. But, in reality, it may not have been anything of the sort. Caesar's diktat would have meant busy roads, congested with people travelling to their home towns. Mary and Joseph would be far from alone.

Most people throughout history have lived without the 'I' so common in our culture. For most, it was always 'us' with personal identity giving way to a sense of

## How far is it to Bethlehem?

community – always our story not just mine. When they arrived in Bethlehem, they would be received with a welcome, after all they were coming home. God only rarely calls us to do things alone; He gives companions along the way, whether they be friends, family or even strangers.

At the onset of 1990, many, who had seen on TV and read the news from Romania, wanted to act and to do something together. When God shows us a situation and places it in our hearts, we feel compelled to act - we knew we had to go and do it. Within a few weeks, enough food, clothing and medical supplies had been donated to fill two lorries and a group of twenty two people, from the five churches in Lowton, their ages ranging from eight to eighty, set off to Romania.

Our journey took two days, but unlike that of Mary and Joseph, ours was 1500 miles of mainly motorway travel, in the luxury of a coach normally reserved for the Everton Football Team but loaned to us specially for the trip. For Lowton, the local area and beyond, it was the start of a community involvement that would include churches, schools, youth groups and the local council in a programme that has continued ever since and has seen almost 2000 people of all ages visit Romania. What has kept us going throughout these years has been the continuous experience of mutual respect, kindness and Christian love which has enriched our lives.

We set out to give from our abundance to those who had nothing and found that we received far more than we gave. We experienced for ourselves that the blessings from giving, were greater than those from receiving. We learned that giving was not only a sacrifice but a satisfaction, that it wasn't possible to help someone without helping ourselves. How have we kept going over these years? One step at a time, pushing doors and seeing which ones opened for us.

During the communist years, entering a country behind the 'iron curtain' could be quite scary, but in 1990, everyone, including border guards, welcomed us with open arms. Though our luxury transport caused a stir everywhere we went, people invited us into their homes

and shared their food with us. We met Petru Dogulescu a Baptist minister, who, as the revolution ended, led 100,000 people in 'The Lords' Prayer' in Timisoara's Opera Square. Until his death in 2008, Petru was one of our most enthusiastic supporters. I spoke in his church a few times, he came to Lowton and preached in ours. Hospitals, churches and schools were recipients of our aid, but it was visiting the orphanages that had a most profound effect on everyone in the group. The collapse of the regime in Romania had revealed to the world the plight of tens of thousands of children living in squalor in hundreds of orphanages throughout the country. We saw children five, six or even seven years old who had never been out of the cots they shared with others. They couldn't walk because they'd never had a chance to learn how, they couldn't speak because no one had spoken to them, they couldn't feed themselves because they hadn't been taught to. Many displayed both physical and learning disabilities and for most that did, it was a disability caused by neglect.

On that first Christmas, for Mary and Joseph, Bethlehem must have seemed such a long way away, but they had no choice, they were compelled to go. In 1990, Romania too seemed so far away, we did have a choice but chose to go and the satisfaction of knowing that we made a difference is immense. Making the right choice when God calls isn't always easy, but the rewards for doing so are beyond anything we could imagine.

And the tiny Ana Maria, now 35 years old, who has a smile that lights up the room, lives with three friends in a house our charity has provided. In her room, pride of place, there is her photograph, enlarged and framed, a testimony that with God, no one is 'Abandonat'.



Bill Hampson, Ecumenical Officer

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# CAMPERS ENJOY NORTHWOOD CENTRE

In August, the Northwood Christian Centre in Cheshire welcomed sixteen young people aged 11-16 years from the town of Morley in West Yorkshire for a week of camping.



The campers receive civic send off before departure for High Legh from Mayor of Morley

Campers spent five full days at High Legh enjoying the rolling Cheshire countryside.

They participated in sport, games, trips, social activities and sleeping under canvas. They spent time visiting two swimming pools, a trampoline park and a 'Go Ape' style high wire visitor attraction. A day trip was spent on the beach at Rhyl on the North Wales coast; youngsters enjoyed the day swimming in the sea and playing on the sand. They also ventured to South Cheshire for a visit to the Crocky Trail Pleasure Park. It was an action-packed week!

Fortunately, the weather was warm all week meaning no interruptions to planned activities. There was also an extensive social programme in the evenings. This included a 'Morley's Got Talent' session where youngsters had the opportunity to demonstrate a skill or talent to the rest of the campers.

The campers had opportunity to listen and understand the gospel message. Youth Worker, Carl Elliott, from Morley, led daily sessions with singing, audio visual clips, quizzes and Bible talks.



These followed themes centred on redemption through Bible stories such as the exodus, the last supper, the crucifixion and the coming of the Holy Spirit. Young people, absolutely ignorant of the basics of the Christian faith,

began to understand the significance of the death of Jesus on the cross for them. There were also simple daily Bible studies in small groups. Virtually 100% of the campers had no regular contact with any church and came from secular families.

The young people were so excited that after fifteen months of lockdowns and restricted social activities, they could camp in the countryside and have fun.

Camp coordinator, Andy Dalton, and members of Morley Community Church (Congregational) organised the week at Northwood. Twelve experienced volunteers helped him to provide the organisation and support to run the annual camp. They fulfilled roles as cooks, drivers, sport organisers, tent leaders and general assistants.

Because of the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, the organising committee wondered if it was even possible to run a camp this year at Northwood. However, parents began telephoning to enquire if the camp would be operating this year. They took this as a sign that they should go ahead and come to Northwood. With very little publicity, they were able to recruit sixteen campers.

During the week, they took all sensible precautions and followed Covid-19 government guidelines. The Lord gave Andy a promise from Scripture before the camp left for Cheshire – Psalm 91:10 where it reads, 'There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling.' During the week, there were no accidents, no infections and no episodes.

This was the twenty seventh camp run since 1999 – twenty-one have been hosted at the Northwood Centre. Starting in 1999, they have returned most years with parties of youngsters.



Andy Dalton is well known throughout the IM Connexion. He has often preached in IM chapels in West Yorkshire and also coordinates the annual Living Word Gospel Calendar project for churches throughout the Connexion.

He concluded, 'We thought that we would not be coming to the Northwood Centre this year due to the impact of the pandemic – but the Lord had other plans. We are so grateful for the support of the Connexion in making this year's camp possible at short notice. We hope to be back again next year!'

Andy Dalton

# NEV'S BAPTISM

From the 16<sup>th</sup> of August, a group of 35 from Lowton spent five days in fellowship at Beechwood Court Christian Holiday Centre in Conwy.

The highlight of the week was the baptism of 13 year old (Nev) Nevimbo Chitungo by Bill Hampson and Bob Hill.



The baptism took place in the sea at West Beach in Llandudno and was witnessed by the Lowton group and members of the public.

Alan Nixon,  
Lowton

# CHAIRS

Roman Road, Failsworth have twenty grey plastic chairs which are free to a good home. They will need to be collected.

Please contact, Elizabeth Barron, the Church Secretary if interested.

0161 6884129  
elizabethbarron@msn.com

# Dedicated to God

Sunday the 5<sup>th</sup> of September was the occasion at Grappenhall Church of the Minister's Recognition Service for Frank Pemberton. Rob Brooks, on behalf of the church, welcomed Dorothy Kendrick, the previous President of the Connexion, and a member of the Ministry Committee. Dorothy led the service and provided the main address.

Also welcomed were Shaun Newton, the Connexion's Education Organiser, and Hilda Rolfe, both members of the Ministry Committee. Shaun and Hilda had started out early from Sunderland to be present for a 10:30am start! A welcome was also extended to Circuit President Ken Irwin and members of other Circuit Churches who had joined with the congregation and Frank's family and friends.

Rob Brooks, in his statement of support from Grappenhall Church, reminded Frank of the words of Paul, 'I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.' (2 Timothy 4:7). As he enters the ministry of this denomination, he too would require that determination, dedication, and the ability to overcome setbacks, as he seeks to be a faithful minister of Christ's Church.

Ken Irwin then offered Frank the support of the Warrington Circuit Churches. Ken recalled the catchphrase of an old comedian, Tommy Trinder, 'You lucky people'. He told Frank that he was a lucky man, a fortunate man, a blessed man, because he had been called to preach the 'Good News' of God's Kingdom and to preach nothing less than the love of the Lord Jesus Christ. Ken reminded Frank, that he should never be afraid of preaching that message. Ken then recalled to everyone present that the denomination was built on the hard work and faithful service of humble people, and he asked Frank to continue with that tradition.

Frank began his testimony by stating that God knows your name; He

knows where you are, and He knows your circumstances. When the time is right, God calls you. He recalled how his parents had been married eleven years and had given up hope of having children when he arrived. His mother was so overjoyed and thankful to God that she dedicated him to God and God's service.

Today, sixty-six years later, Frank stated that this occasion felt like a recognition and culmination of that dedication.

Recalling how he had been raised as an Anglican and later worshipped as a Methodist, Frank admitted that he had been essentially just a Sunday morning Christian. Recalling Holman Hunt's painting, 'The Light of the World', Frank admitted that Christ had been on the outside of his life and had knocked many times before he had opened the door and welcomed Christ in. Frank stated that, as in the painting, a new day had dawned in his life and that it was never too late to serve Christ.

In her main address, Dorothy Kendrick spoke about the responsibility of nurturing others, and in that role, we should see ourselves as workmen of God. Our workmanship should be characterised by three essential elements: teaching, character, and relationships.

On teaching, Dorothy reminded the congregation that it was essential we handle the Word of God correctly, we are to know its meaning and how to apply it to certain situations and to understand what the Word of God does not say. Within God's word, there are passages and verses that mean something special to us as individuals. Words that give us assurance and comfort, words to which we frequently turn. However, there are times when we misuse God's word by using it to support our own point of view. That is wrong; our thinking has to be in line with God's Word, not the other way round.



From left to right: Rob Brooks, Roy Findlay, Dorothy Kendrick, Frank Pemberton, Hilda Rolfe, Ken Irwin and Shaun Newton.

Dorothy then turned her thoughts to the character of a Christian and how we are to remember that ninety-nine percent of our words will not be remembered by those we seek to bring to Christ, what will be important and remembered are our actions and the way we conduct ourselves. We should live lives characterised by love and peace and not by quarrels.

Finally, Dorothy focused on the relationships between individuals, but also relationships between churches and that these should be characterised by love. We need to be dependent and interdependent on one another. Dorothy stressed the value of Circuits, and how churches belonging to a Circuit can help and support one another. Dorothy reminded Frank that his calling was not only to serve his church, but also the churches of the Circuit and Independent Methodism as a whole.

The service then moved on to the 'Charge of Ministry' which was led by Dorothy and to which, both Frank and the congregation responded before various leaders and officials prayed over Frank for his future ministry. Before the final hymn was sung, Frank was presented with his Minister's Certificate by Shaun Newton and from the Grappenhall Church, a large print NIV Bible including Concordance.

Following the service, friends stayed for a drink and light refreshments in what was under the circumstances a rather packed Church Hall.

*Rob Brooks, Grappenhall*



Music is an important part of Christian worship; it brings joy and connection to people of all ages, from all over the world. The musicians that offer their talents and time for church services often have to personally source sheet music from books and printed resources.

PraiseCharts make it easier to access quality Christian church sheet music anytime, anywhere, with their online library. They even have a number of free resources available to worship directors and musicians. PraiseCharts features a large, online sheet music catalog of popular praise and worship songs offering lyrics, chords, vocal chart arrangements and orchestrations. With a full suite of resources to support churches and teams to sound good, feel confident, and acquire greater competence and skill. Along with top-quality resources for songs that help worship ministries stay relevant, current and 'in-tune' with trends, along with older songs and hymns that are tried and true. Check out [www.praisecharts.com](http://www.praisecharts.com) for more details!

*Devan Sylvester, PraiseCharts*

# From the Connexion

## OCTOBER CONNEXIONAL COMMITTEE ROUND-UP

By Alison Tipping, Medlock Valley Circuit Representative

### Administration Group

- No further progress on Robert Street Church.
- The sale of Greatham Church is still delayed due to the covenant held by the Methodist Church.
- The weekly prayer bulletin finished in July. Production of the magazine continues under interim arrangements, with good initial feedback (reviewed on a monthly basis).
- Kathy is still mainly working from home and there are moves to reopen the Resource Centre when possible.

### Church Support Group

- Support has been given to numerous churches in different ways. The group are often a sounding board for churches with new ideas, trying to find a way forward.
- Lisa Green's hours have increased to cover the North West post of Church Support Worker. An advert has been placed for a similar worker in the North East.
- As no current Safeguarding Officer, it was agreed that this become part of Church Support Group. Graham Edmundson is to be a member of Church Support.

### Communications Officers Report

- Magazines continue to be produced and distributed.
- The new website is frequently updated as necessary.
- Investigations for a 'conferencing hub' based at the Resource Centre. It was agreed that the Connexion meet the initial outlay costs for this and for two officers' laptops be replaced.

### Ecumenical Officer

- All Churches Together in England and Free Churches Group meetings continue to be held on Zoom. Bill has joined in the CTE group on Racial Justice.
- CTE Forum, held every 3 years will now take place on the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup> of March 2022 at Swanwick.

### Education Organiser

- Pauline Smith from Bethel Newtown be added to the List of Accredited Ministers. Her commissioning service is due to take place on November 13<sup>th</sup>.
- Frank Pemberton's commissioning service was held on 5<sup>th</sup> September and a service is planned for Geoff Chapman's commissioning as a Preacher.
- The Study Weekend took place on 1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> October with Andrew Stobart as the speaker, with the next to be held 25<sup>th</sup>-27<sup>th</sup> February 2022.

### Enabling Group

- A restructuring review is considered necessary. A group are to meet for a workshop facilitated by John Claydon - a report of this workshop be brought to Connexion Committee for wider discussion.
- The workings of Connexion/Association have been a continual issue. We received notice of concerns from some members of the Finance Group. Dorothy Kendrick agreed to be responsible for requesting that Connexion Committee arrange to meet with the Finance Subcommittee at a separate special meeting, set up to hear and discuss more fully the aspects raised. Since then, other papers have been received from other members of the Connexion regarding the subject. It was therefore recommended/agreed, that a small group be set up initially, to consider the concerns and to feedback a detailed report to February Connexion Committee.

### Finance Committee

- Grants were agreed for several churches.
- A Grants Policy Document has been produced and brought for consideration. This will be discussed at the next meeting in February to give time for the new Financial Administrator to have some input.

### General Secretary

- Annual Meeting proceeded as well as could be expected, although complaints that no visitors were permitted. Due to a limit on numbers, only a few visitors would have

been possible, so it was better to have none on this occasion.

- All voting results have been communicated to churches.
- At a very late stage, Fred Kearsley withdrew his nomination for Financial Administrator and, because many churches had voted, the election was declared null and void. A fresh election has taken place - Alan Britton is now the new Financial Administrator.
- Westwood Church has decided to close, and it was confirmed that Chorley Church has also closed.
- Several circuits have not nominated representatives, which has a knock-on effect with the Association, who are required to have at least 20 trustees and, with several officer vacancies, the situation is becoming marginal. A paper has been produced, suggesting an alternative method of representation - it's been circulated to Admin, and now Connexion Committee for consideration.

### Ministry

- A reminder to Ministers to check the date of expiration of their safeguarding certification and photo-ID.
- Since the last Ministry Committee Meeting, Harold Porter (Noble Street) has passed away.
- Recommended/agreed that Frank Pemberton be co-opted as a member of the Ministry Committee, as the nomination was not received in time for Annual Meeting.

### Northwood Christian Centre

- The Management Group currently comprises of only Kathy Pringle and David Okell (Site Manager). A Management Group meeting was held in September.
- Urgent need to update the Terms of Reference. It is suggested that roles are drawn up to encourage more people to join the Group as it is impossible for the Centre to be run effectively with only two people.
- Deborah Snape was employed in September to take on the Housekeeping responsibilities.
- Improvements agreed at the last Connexion Committee meeting are now underway.
- A replacement storage unit to be purchased, as the current garage used for storage has become dangerous.
- Following a request that a memorial tree be planted on the grounds, after discussion, it was agreed that no trees should be planted on the premises.

### Overseas Missions

- L&P have commenced their Home Assignment with a debrief in the South of France.
- Gail and Daniel Castro are now back serving the Camarma Church, where they are involved in much pastoral work, helping people become confident to meet again, after the pandemic.
- Liz Greenhalgh spent a few weeks 'back home' in Warrington. She continues her ministry in Romania.
- The Overseas Missions Summer Appeal raised £3408.00, with donations coming from 8 churches/individuals. The Spring Appeal will resume again in 2022, and the Committee pray for a greater response next year.

### Presentation from Shaun Newton

- A proposal, on behalf of the churches in the North East, is that the Connexion purchase two church properties to open as church plants with several different organisations giving help and support to running the project. A great deal of time, prayer and preparation has gone into these ideas, and it was agreed that they are given permission to pursue the idea, and enter into further discussion as to how they now proceed.

### Safeguarding

- An email distributed regarding Safeguarding Sunday.
- Joy Elkins, who processes DBS checks for the NE Connexion Ministers, will process all the online applications for the Connexion. These are temporary measures until a Safeguarding Officer is appointed.

# Celebrating 50 Years of Service



From left to right: Pauline Smith, Chris Ormerod and Cathy Speed.

Fifty years ago, a special service took place at Bethel Church, Newtown, Wigan. This was the induction of a new Minister - Sister Christine Johnson. That was on Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> October 1971 and we couldn't let the occasion pass without recognising what a wonderful achievement this is for Chris, as she reaches 50 years as a Minister of the Independent Methodist Connexion.

The following extract is from an article which was in the Wigan Circuit Magazine back in October 1971. It details all the various people who took part in the service and then goes on to say:

*"All the above spoke very well indeed, their varied contributions blending splendidly to give us a wonderful service which was enhanced by the beautiful rendering of the consecration hymn by Sister A. McFadden and the singing of the choir conducted by Bro. Raymond Gill with Bro. Garth Rigby at the organ. The high spiritual tone of the whole service will live long in the minds of those present."*

And we are sure it did – it sounded like a wonderful service!

Chris was a Minister at Bethel for the next four years until she moved to be a Minister at Platt Bridge IM Church in 1975, returning to Bethel when Platt Bridge closed in 1999 - she's been at Bethel ever since, for the last 22 years.

It is particularly poignant that this special date coincided with Bethel Ladies' Fellowship Sunday, and that Chris's daughter, Cath, took the service – and also importantly – we had a lovely Wigan hotpot ready for lunch!

We thank Chris for her years of service, especially for us at Bethel, but also in the wider Circuit and Connexion, and we pray the Lord's continued blessing on her for many, many more years ahead.

Brian Mills, Bethel Newtown



The fellowship using their new, multi-functional church hall

*Please do pray for our Connexion*

FOR OUR CHURCHES  
FOR THE CONNEXIONAL OFFICERS  
FOR CIRCUIT REPRESENTATIVES  
AND FOR ALL DEPARTMENTAL GROUPS AND COMMITTEES

## DATES FOR THE NEW YEAR

Despite the massive restrictions COVID-19 brought the UK over the last twelve months, Independent Methodist Churches were able to reach out with evangelism literature to their friends and communities. The lockdowns and pandemic restrictions resulted in many churches simply being closed over the Christmas and new year seasons last year. However, thirteen IM Churches still managed to distribute 1600 evangelistic 'Living Word' calendars in their neighbourhoods throughout the UK.

The attractive, helpful publications offering gospel hope and a future, were passed on using local networks and personal friendships or posted through letterboxes by IM participating churches. They found using the **Living Word** gospel to be an effective way of raising their church profile in their neighbourhoods.

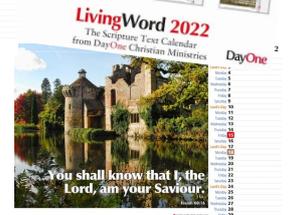
**Living Word** gospel calendars and diaries are published by Day One Publications. The calendars have beautiful photographs, large print dates and a bold Bible verse about salvation for every month of the year. The diaries are a week-to-a-page and can easily slip into a handbag or pocket. Day One Publications is an arm of the Lord's Day Observance Society. As the Autumn turns to winter, some IM churches are already planning to visit their immediate neighbourhoods delivering calendars to homes through their letterboxes. Others are challenging their church members to target non-Christian friends, relatives and neighbours to present the calendars as Christmas and new year gifts.

The range of calendars ordered last year ranged from about 50 calendars for half of the IM churches

participating with others placing larger orders as they considered the opportunities they had for distribution locally. Many churches stamped the empty panel on the back page with details about their church activities. This helped to raise the profile of their church in their neighbourhoods locally.



February 2022



**This year, the calendars are 40p each (reduced to 33p each if order is for 100 or more copies – 45% discount). Heavily discounted diaries are also being offered for just £1 each (43% discount). Calendars are A4 size and diaries A6 size.**

IM Church secretaries have already received an order form and electronic sample copies of both calendar and diaries via e-mail. The deadline for orders is the 11<sup>th</sup> of December.

Andy Dalton from West Yorkshire has coordinated this project every year for the last 17 years. The calendars are offered at virtually cost price if used in outreach by local churches. The project is being repeated again this Christmas throughout the Connexion.

He concluded, *"It is a very simple task to pass on a Living Word calendar or Diary - and anyone can do it. They are excellent value and both have very colourful photographs and sensitive salvation scripture texts. Members of IM churches will find they are enthusiastically received."*

Andy Dalton 51 Zoar Street, Morley, Yorkshire / 0113 252 7557

## George Street Revisited A Personal Reflection

George Street IM Church in Oldham had the distinction of being the first church to use the title Independent Methodist.

In the early 1800's, a group of men and women broke away from the local Anglican Church, St Peter's, and hired a room in a house belonging to George Hardman.



Whitehead Square

Eventually, this room became too small and a room in a disused mill at Whitehead Square was rented. This group of dissidents became known as George Hardman's folk. At some time between May and July 1806, this group met for the first time with groups from Warrington, Stockport, Macclesfield, Manchester and Leeds. In April 1815, the foundation stones of a new chapel were laid in George Street. The church was built by the members working early in the morning before going to work in the mill or hat factories, or late at night after work. The church opened in 1816.

In 1832, school premises were built on the opposite side of the street. The Oldham Independent Methodists ran seven schools, totalling over 1000 scholars between 1824 and 1836. In 1856, George Street Sunday School had 228 boys and 299 girls and upwards of fifty teachers. The scholars were taught not only the gospel, but how to read and write. Their degree of enterprise demonstrates the level of ability and commitment found in George Street founders who were primarily tradesman and factory workers.

Displaying financial shrewdness, cellar dwellings were built under the chapel which were rented out until 1912 when they were declared unfit for habitation. Originally eight single

room dwellings, these were soon changed to four, two-room dwellings. It is understood that these were quite sought after as the church were caring landlords and the dwellings were solidly built and warm by the standards of other homes in the town.

Just before the outbreak of the First World War, a Boys Brigade was started which went on to become very successful. At one time, the church even employed the local town crier Old Blind Joe – Joseph Howarth - to announce special events!

In the early days, two-hour sermons were frequent and beer for the preacher and choir singers were standard provision. John Nield, who, as a lad of fifteen years old had helped to build the chapel, became a minister in 1833 and later Connexional President in 1859.

As a preacher, he was forcible and convincing, but was an advocate of temperance and, because others at George Street rejected teetotalism, in 1854, he and others (including his son) were removed as teachers and Superintendents in the Sunday School, being requested to return any books and cash they held.

From this time, George Street was out of the mainstream Independent Methodism, which may have been over the issue of total abstinence, a cause dear to many IM churches but not one observed at George Street, where accounts show regular beer bought for workmen and preachers. However, by 1874, the chapel applied for re-admittance into the Connexion and this was accepted. John Nield went on to lead a fellowship at Bank Top which later became King Street IM Church.



George Street Church

George Street held its final service on 19<sup>th</sup> August 1990 as its town centre location had led to a dwindling congregation. Matters had come to a head with the demolition of St Peter's Precinct across the street from the chapel – ironically on the site of the church which the original Independent Methodist deserted – and the construction of the new Spindles Shopping Centre. The blasting and digging had caused damage to the back wall and the estimate for the repairs was beyond the church's means.

The building was sold to a developer, who took out all the pews in the middle of the church, painted the woodwork in church black and demolished walls in the cellar dwellings, but did little else to preserve the building which had a preservation order put on it 1983.

The building was eventually bought in 2004 by Age UK Oldham who set about restoring it with a £1million grant from English Heritage and £100,000 from The Andrew Lloyd Webber Trust Fund to restore the organ. It took ten years for grant applications to be accepted and the building to be restored, but in 2014 the building was opened.

It is now used by Age UK Oldham for heritage tours, school tours and as a venue which can be hired for meeting, conferences or weddings.

A band of volunteers (of which I am one) dress in Victorian costume to re-enact the stories and history of the people who lived in the dwellings or worshipped at the chapel. While I am now mostly involved in school tours, I did do the occasional adult tour as Mrs Ann Nield, John Nield's wife and wife of a former Connexional President! I don't know if it was type casting!

Due the pandemic, tours obviously had to stop but now, after two years, school tours are resuming again. Age UK provide tours to junior age

children who are studying the Victorians as part of the curriculum. Each tour starts with a class of children arriving at the chapel and being dressed appropriately in waistcoat, muffler and cap for the boys and apron, shawl and mop cap for the girls. We also encourage the teachers to dress up too!

The class is then split into two groups with one group going downstairs to the restored cellar dwellings to learn about life in Victorian Oldham from Mrs Hall, do some washing with Mrs Hirst before going into the Victorian school room for a lesson from Miss Hopwood.

The other group stay upstairs in the chapel and do activities such as a giant jigsaw of the chapel, have a try at writing with pen and ink, go on a treasure hunt or make peg dolls.

I can usually be found on a school tour dressed in a long black skirt, apron and Victorian blouse, sat in a box pew making peg dolls with small groups of children as the other volunteers don't like making peg dolls! After lunch, the groups swap over so they all get a chance to enjoy the full experience.

It is lovely to be involved in some small way with the ongoing work of George Street Chapel.



Image from [www.georgestreetchapel.com](http://www.georgestreetchapel.com)

*Elizabeth Barron, Roman Road*

## Three Celebrations at Long Lane

You know how it is... you wait for one wedding to come along, then two come together. Add a Golden Wedding celebration, and we have much to be thankful for at Long Lane IMC.

It was a joy to have Samantha Reeve and Ian Hegarty married on 29<sup>th</sup> August (top image).

Howard and Florence were married on the 9<sup>th</sup> of October. The new Mr & Mrs Robinson invited the church congregation, family and friends to their wedding breakfast in the schoolroom, which was provided by the ladies of the church (middle image).

Sandra and Graham O'Nions celebrated their 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary on the 18<sup>th</sup> of September. Following our Harvest Festival Service on the 19<sup>th</sup>, which was taken by our friend Ken McDermott, a buffet lunch was provided, and all were invited (bottom image).

Three special occasions and a time for the fellowship to get together after such a long time of uncertainty. We thank God for His gracious love and mercy toward our church family.

*Carrie O'Nions, Long Lane*



**Gail and Daniel Castro** are now settled back in Spain. They report an encouraging summer of activities at the Rock of Horeb camp. Despite some remaining Covid restrictions,

they were able to accommodate over 100 children for one event. Please continue to pray for a full programme to be developed. At the end of September, the Camarma Church held a church retreat, hoping to instil new vision and energy. Pray that many people in the church would be encouraged and affirmed in their faith, as the church opens up its activities again.

**L. & P.** are pleased that their debriefing in France in September was so very helpful. As a consequence, they were able to return to their ministry in North Africa in early October after further meetings with leaders of their mission, AWM, and also the NGO they also work with. Before returning, P. was able to spend some quality time with his mother and other close relatives and also with his church. Do pray for them as they settle back again in their home in North Africa and also renew their work and ministry. Pray also for their preparation for their virtual visits to the UK: a circuit meeting in the Northeast on Thursday, November 18<sup>th</sup> and various possibilities in the Northwest between November 21<sup>st</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>.

**Liz Greenhalgh** was able to have a short visit home in September and praises the Lord for this opportunity to rest, refocus and see family and friends. Her ministry in Romania is now very full again. She, together with colleagues, has begun a much-needed afterschool reading project for some Roma children. Meanwhile, her ministry with the children and young people at the church is growing; many of the teenagers come with a lot of problems and often need one-to-one support. Please pray that Liz may be able both to pray with them and also offer practical help. The team are visiting some of those that benefit from the food kitchen and in some cases finding openings for spiritual conversations. Pray for more connections of this nature and that people will be open to hearing the Gospel.

*Anne Fambely, OSM Committee*



**HARVEST FESTIVAL AT NELSON**  
September saw their Harvest

Festival take place, and once again they donated packet and tinned food to the Food Bank. The following photo was provided by Joan Metcalfe, showing their young people along with the collective food offerings.

*Nelson Signpost, October 2021*

**Why the heightened interest in Christian Aid?**

Through many years, Independent Methodist people have been contributing to the work of Christian Aid via the annual distribution and collection of envelopes during Christian Aid Week. What has perhaps not been so actively pursued is an engagement with the decision making processes of Christian Aid concerning policy, strategy, management and administration.

The Independent Methodist Connexion was one of the founding denominations of Christian Aid in 1945, and as such, maybe the time has come for a heightened interest in our 'stakeholder responsibilities'.

**Where is Christian Aid working today?**

The work is multifaceted, but this article will focus on the aspects for which Christian Aid is best known. Just three examples:



Isabel Catinac Xum from women's farming cooperative in Guatemala

**Guatemala**

Despite being considered a middle-income country, many people in Guatemala live in extreme poverty. It is a country of contrasts: flooding and drought, wealth and poverty, agricultural exports and food shortages.

Half of all children under five are malnourished, which permanently affects physical and mental development. Also, the legal minimum wage does not even cover the basic food basket, and a high percentage of the working population does not even earn minimum wage (about 70% of workers are in the informal economy, where there is no regulation).

Christian Aid works with partner organisations to address Guatemala's economic inequality (through focusing on democratic governance and economic justice), help communities prepare for natural disasters and promote non-violent alternatives to conflict, and tackle gender-based violence.

The web link for more info is <https://www.christianaid.org.uk/our-work/where-we-work/guatemala>

**Kenya**

Christian Aid is currently working with over 30 partners across 20 counties, mainly in arid and semi-arid lands.

The work focuses on four key areas:

- Health and nutrition
- Climate change and energy
- Inclusive markets
- Humanitarian and resilience

The web link for more info is <https://www.christianaid.org.uk/our-work/where-we-work/kenya>

**Syria**

The aims of the Christian Aid work in Syria are as follows:

- To ensure the protection of all civilians, including humanitarian workers and civil society organisations inside Syria
- To ensure access to humanitarian support – including food, shelter, education, and medical support.
- To ensure a just peace is negotiated.
- To ensure the safe and voluntary return to homes of those displaced.
- To ensure that all parties involved in the conflict are held accountable to international laws and standards.

The web link for more info is <https://www.christianaid.org.uk/our-work/where-we-work/syria>



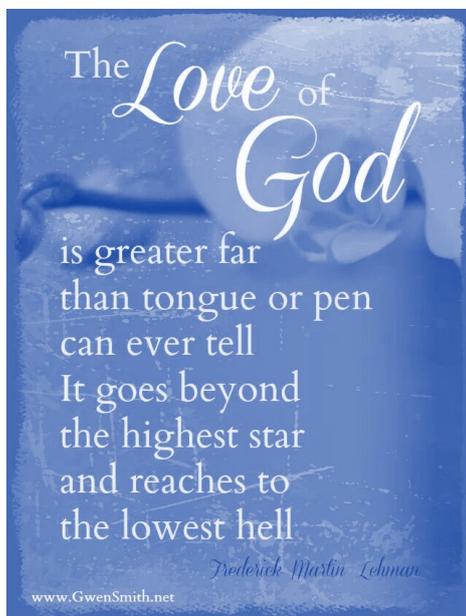
Bisan, 17, studies at the Dama centre in North West Syria. The centre is run by a Christian Aid partnership.

**What are the next steps?**

I will be attending the Christian Aid AGM on 23 November in London. We have already had an (albeit minor) impact. After discussion between Brian Rowney and myself, we proposed some modifications to the draft of a new set of Articles Of Association to be adopted at the upcoming AGM. One of our modifications has been incorporated. After the AGM, I will have a much better 'feel' for the operational environment and will make some proposals about how we can move forward as a denomination in both influencing and supporting the work of Christian Aid.

If there are any questions, comments or ideas, please do get in touch.  
*Geoffrey S Matthews*

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Christian Aid Website: <https://www.christianaid.org.uk/>



# President's Jottings by Derek Barron

Genesis 22:2. The Bible verse states, 'Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, whom you love - Isaac - and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you."'

By obeying God's command to sacrifice his son, Abraham demonstrated that He was willing to put God before everything He desired.

It's interesting that love is first mentioned in the sacrifice of Abraham's son in the Old Testament. This is a direct parallel to God sacrificing his only son Jesus Christ in the New Testament.

True biblical love means you don't disappear at the sight of a person's imperfections. Unconditional love is a choice, not a feeling. Love is caring tenderly about another the way you would care for yourself. Love is seeking to protect someone's heart and see the gold even when it's hard.

Sometimes we will have those beautiful feelings in a relationship, but other times we must decide that the person we love is worth standing

beside – through thick and thin.

Love is a decision to give that person good and not repay them with evil - no revenge, pettiness, passive - aggressive remarks.

God is love scriptures show us that as we learn to receive God's love, we are able to love others deeply too.

*'We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in his love. God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them.'* (1 John 4:16)

*'Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God. But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love.'* (1 John 4:7-8)

*'This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are My friends if you do what I command you.'* (John 15:12)

A quick quiz for you all. How many times is love mentioned in the NIV Bible and how many times is love mentioned in the Beatles song 'All You Need is Love'? Go on sing the song and try and work it out before you look at the answer.

Bible - NIV  
- 551 times.

All You Need is Love - The Beatles -  
35 times.

The word love is first mentioned in

A Prayer on Love

*Father God, in the middle of the chaos we call life, may we be still enough to recognise the love you have for your creation. May we trust in Your unfailing and unconditional love. As You have loved us, may we love one another.*

*Forgive us for the times when we have forgotten the cost of Your love, the life of Your Son, Jesus. I pray that we will live confidently today, knowing that we are Your children who You have chosen with a plan and purpose in mind. Help us live for You. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

## AFGHANISTAN - CAN YOU HELP?

The Christian church in Afghanistan is a small one, possibly 7000 people throughout a country with a population of 40 million. It always has been an 'underground' church but is now even more so as Christians leave the cities to live in more rural areas. Fifteen years ago, P & B, educationalists from Bristol, went out as missionaries to Afghanistan. Last month, they faced an enormous decision, to take the advice of family and friends and leave the country or stay and continue their work. Feeling a leading from the Lord, they chose the latter.

The new Taliban government has told P & B that the school can remain open for years 1 to 6 and their early learning centre and, for the moment, their women teachers can teach. They told friends, 'We have lost teachers in this terrible sequence of events and parents, brave enough to risk bringing their children to school, are greatly reduced in number. Many have lost jobs and are unable to pay any school fees. So, we are opening and offering the places for free and teachers have agreed to work for no pay, or for whatever we are able to pay them. We would love to have some sort of fund set up to help.'

Please pray for them at this most difficult time and if you can help by making a donation, please make your cheque payable to Epiphany Trust and send it to: Epiphany Trust, St David's, Park Road South, Newton-le-Willows, WA12 8EY or pay by bank transfer. Sort Code: 08-90-86 / Account: 65006735.

For further information, ring Bill Hampson on 07968 741626.



## CONCERT AT LOWTON

with Paul Jones and Fiona Hendley  
on Sunday 5th December

**A reminder about the concert, with songs and testimony featuring Paul Jones and Fiona Hendley, which will take place at Lowton Church on Sunday 5th December at 3pm.**

Paul and Fiona have been at the heart of the music and entertainment industry for many years and their testimonies tell of how each found true happiness and real faith.

Come and hear them share their faith in testimony and song - it would be great to see you there!

Bill Hampson, Lowton

Church Address: Lowton Independent Methodist Church, Newton Road, Lowton, WA3 1EB

# In the Joy of the Lord



**Harry Melling (101 years)**  
**Bethel IM, Newtown, Wigan**

From an early age, Harry spent most of his Church life at St Marks CofE, Newtown, where he served as

Vicar's Warden for a number of years. He was a member of the PCC, a Sunday School Teacher, Choir Member, a Home Sacrament Steward, House-group Leader, a member of the Men's Society and carried out endless maintenance work on the Church premises.

Around the age of 80, Harry and his wife Gladys, started attending evening services at Bethel. Latterly, when the 9.15am service at St Marks became unmanageable, it was Bethel morning and evening for Harry. During this time, he was a supporter of Bethel's Luncheon Club, and the Last Night of the Proms together with the Easter and Christmas Cantatas

In 2017, Harry was attacked in his own home. Social media resulted in the Submarine Service making contact and they organised a trip to London for Harry where, as the oldest Submariner in the country, he was introduced to Prince William.

Harry was admitted to a care home in 2019 where his health rapidly deteriorated, especially with the restrictions of Covid. Despite this, he was able to respond to hymns and the reciting of The Lord's Prayer, once visits were allowed.

Covid restrictions put a damper on the planned events for Harry's 100<sup>th</sup> Birthday on the 18th April 2020. However, through the power of social media, he received over 600 birthday cards, together with his special card from the Queen.

We remember Harry with love and affection and thank God for his faith which encouraged and inspired so many people over the years. Harry's love and friendship, together with his great sense of humour, crossed over the generations.

The funeral service was held on the 15<sup>th</sup> October, when members from the Clergy of St Marks and Bethel, together with the Submarine Service and the family, acknowledged a life lived to the full in the Service of his Master.

*Eileen Melling*

**Harold Porter (85 years)**  
**Noble Street, Bolton**

Harold passed away peacefully at home, following a gradual deterioration in health and mobility.

Harold joined Noble Street as a young teenager when his parents became the caretakers. All the Porter family became very involved in the leadership.

Harold was encouraged to study for the Ministry and was recognised as a Connexional Minister in 1960. He also had the honour of being elected as Connexional President in 1993 at the Annual Meeting held at Lancaster University.

Harold met Brenda, his future wife, at grammar school when she attended Chalfont Street IM Church. They married in 1956 and they both held several positions in the church and Sunday School.

When Harold left school, he trained as an electrician at British Aerospace and he used his skills to lead a team of church members to re-wire the large worship area. He later retrained as a teacher, specialising in Maths and Religious Studies.

Harold had a fine tenor voice and was the soloist in Bolton Male Voice Praise Choir for many years. Sadly, Harold was forced to retire as Minister and President last year due to lack of mobility.

He will be greatly missed by the whole fellowship and our prayers go out to his three children, Ruth, Lydia and Mark. John Dawson



**Eileen Ware (ne Mills) (87 years)**  
**Mill Lane, Bristol**

Eileen passed peacefully away in hospital with her family by her side after a battle with cancer. She is now with her Lord.

Eileen's grandmother and her parents were the church caretakers in the past and they brought her to church from birth. She became a very active member of the church and attended all of her life; the last time was two weeks before she passed away.

She attended Sunday School and later became a teacher and introduced her daughter Jenny and her grandchildren to her Christian family at Mill Lane. She joined the Youth Club and served on the Young People's committee for the church and the Circuit. She also stepped in to become the Girls' Brigade leader when one was needed, a role she filled until the group was amalgamated with another group in the 1980's.

Eileen was a valued member of the Concert Party, entertaining the community with sketches, poems and songs. She would, from time to time, read poems at our church services and helped out ministers by reading the lessons at morning services

She was our church authorised person for well over 30 years and she enjoyed being part of someone's big day. Eileen was always ready and very willing to help in any way she could serving the church as a Trustee and helping at coffee mornings, fund raising sales and dinners. She will be greatly missed by all of the members.

We ask the Lord to be with her family, daughter Jenny and husband Phil, grand children Ellen, Lilly and Carter at this time.

On a personal note, I will always be grateful to Eileen for taking me with her to Sunday School at an early age and for encouraging me to become a part of the Christian family. Hazel Chapple

*In Heavenly Love Abiding*

**Connexion**  
The magazine of the family of Independent Methodist Churches

The last day for articles to be submitted for the January / February issue of the Connexion magazine is Monday the 6<sup>th</sup> of December.

The theme for this issue will be 'HOPE'. Please could all articles be sent either directly to the Resource Centre via post, or by email to [editor@imchurches.org.uk](mailto:editor@imchurches.org.uk)

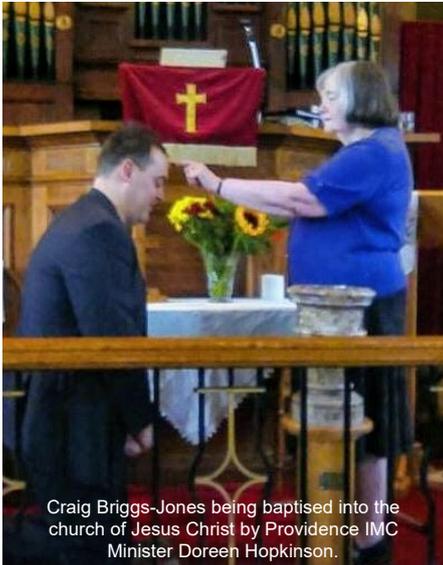
Just a quick reminder that ideally all photographs need to be digital. Do ensure that safeguarding principles are followed by asking permission for the publication of any photographs and for the articles where people are named and/or can be identified.

*Thank you for all the articles - please keep them coming!*

## BAPTISM AT PROVIDENCE IMC, DEWSBURY

As Easter approached in 2020, the Fellowship at Providence Independent Methodist Church were eagerly anticipating the Baptism of Craig Briggs-Jones and his acceptance into membership of the Church of Jesus Christ. There was to be a celebration tea after the Service and everyone was looking forward to the day.

However, the Covid Pandemic intervened and the Baptism could not take place due to restrictions imposed to keep us safe from the virus. As Craig had originally expressed a wish to be baptised on Easter Sunday, the event was postponed until Easter 2021. It soon became apparent that this would not be possible either as Covid continued to spread.



Craig Briggs-Jones being baptised into the church of Jesus Christ by Providence IMC Minister Doreen Hopkinson.

Thankfully, a few months later, the restrictions were removed and on Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> August, Craig was finally baptised. It had been a long time coming, but God had brought us to the day and it was a truly joyous occasion. To commemorate his Baptism, Craig was presented with a Bible from the Church Fellowship.

After a wonderful rendering of 'And Can it Be', we enjoyed a party in the Schoolroom, as we had much to celebrate. It was not only the joy of seeing Craig give his life to Jesus, but also an appreciation that in his faithfulness, God is leading his people through this pandemic and on to better times. Thank you, Lord God for a great day and we pray that Craig will find peace and contentment in loving and serving his Saviour.

Doreen Hopkinson, Providence



## Five Minute Message

### God's Christmas Love

In 1994, two Christian missionaries answered an invitation from the Russian Department of Education to teach morals and ethics in a large orphanage. About 100 children, who had been abandoned, abused, and left in the care of a government-run program, were in the orphanage. It was nearing Christmas and they decided to tell them the story of Christmas. It would be the first time these children had heard the story of the birth of Christ.

They told them about Mary and Joseph arriving in Bethlehem. Finding no room in the inn, the couple went to a stable, where the baby Jesus was born and placed in a manger. Throughout the story, the children and orphanage staff sat in amazement as they listened. Some sat on the edges of their stools, trying to grasp every word. When the story was finished, they gave the children three small pieces of cardboard to make a crude manger. Each child was given a small paper square, cut from yellow napkins that they had brought with them since no coloured paper was available in the city. Following instructions, the children tore the paper and carefully laid strips in the manger for straw. Small squares of flannel, cut from a worn-out nightgown an American lady was throwing away as she left Russia, were used for the baby's blanket. A doll-like baby was cut from tan felt which the missionaries had also brought with them.

It was all going smoothly until one of the missionaries sat down at a table to help a 6-year-old boy named Misha. He had finished his manger, but when the missionary looked at the little boy's manger, she was surprised to see not one, but two babies in the manger. Quickly, she called for the translator to ask Misha why there were two babies in the manger.

Looking at his completed manger scene, Misha began to repeat the story very seriously. For such a young boy, who had only heard the Christmas story once, he related the happenings accurately until he came to the part where Mary put the baby Jesus in the manger.

Then Misha started to ad-lib. He made up his own ending and said,

*"And when Mary laid the baby in the manger, Jesus looked at me and asked me if I had a place to stay. I told him I have no mum or dad, so I don't have a place to stay. Then Jesus told me I could stay with him, but I told him I couldn't, because I didn't have a gift to give him like everybody else did. But I wanted to stay with Jesus so much, so I thought about what I had that maybe I could use for a gift. I thought maybe if I kept him warm, that would be a good gift. So, I asked Jesus, 'If I keep you warm, will that be a good enough gift?' and he told me, 'If you keep me warm, that will be the best gift anybody ever gave me.' So, I got into the manger, and then Jesus looked at me and he told me I could stay with him - for always."*

As Misha finished his story, his eyes brimmed full of tears that ran down his cheeks. Putting his hand over his face, his head dropped to the table and his shoulders shook as he sobbed. The little orphan had found someone who loved him. Someone would never abandon nor abuse him, someone who would stay with him - FOR ALWAYS.

Do you have a hard time believing that God loves you? The Bible says in Romans 5:8, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Also, in Ephesians 3:17 & 18, Paul says, *"...And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ..."*

It isn't by our good works or the things that we do that God loves us; it isn't because we use our gifts so well that he loves us. We can't bring anything valuable to pay God because Jesus has paid it all. We are the thing that is valuable!

Yes, we must do good; we must use our gifts; we can (as Jesus says) store up treasure in heaven - but we need to understand, that all of those are just expressions of our love for him. We don't need them to make him love us because HE ALREADY LOVES US - we do them only out of love for him.

This Christmas, may we truly realise how great God's love is for each one of us!

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Without the first 11 chapters of Genesis, Christmas would be unexplainable. They provide a graphic account of the world as it actually is today and why human nature is as it is today – not a pretty sight!

We all know how Adam and Eve were tempted to eat the forbidden fruit from the tree of knowledge – nowhere does it tell you it was an apple. The questions pose themselves: **Why did God place temptation in their way – He didn't have to create a tree of knowledge; He didn't have to create human beings with the inclination to disobey? Why didn't He just programme human beings so that they would always do what they were told – when they were told?**

There is a simple answer – it's all about love. God wasn't interested in having command of a set of robots who would always do what was needed to keep on the right side of him. It's about relationship. You can't have any sort of meaningful relationship where there is no choice or free-will. A loving relationship has to be entered into willingly and we hope enthusiastically by both parties. That's the sort of relationship God wants with every single one of us. He is willing – am I? – are you? So where does the apple come in? Well, it's in the book of the Bible that's all about love. The apple is a reminder that Christmas is all about God's love for us. It's at the very core of his plan for the world!

#### It's all about love!

1<sup>st</sup> December Song of Songs 2:3-4

#### New Growth, New Life

2<sup>nd</sup> December Isaiah 11:1-10  
3<sup>rd</sup> December Romans 15:12-13

#### It's never too bad...

4<sup>th</sup> December Genesis 8: 21 - 9:3  
5<sup>th</sup> December Genesis 9: 6-13

#### Follow that star!

6<sup>th</sup> December Genesis 15:1-13  
7<sup>th</sup> December Genesis 21:1-8  
8<sup>th</sup> December Numbers 24:15-19

#### The Gateway –

9<sup>th</sup> December **Heaven & Earth Come Together**  
10<sup>th</sup> December Genesis 28:10-17  
John 10:7-9

#### Sent to Save:

11<sup>th</sup> December Genesis 45:1-8  
12<sup>th</sup> December Genesis 50:15-21

#### Freedom and the 'Promised Land'

13<sup>th</sup> December Exodus 3:1-12  
14<sup>th</sup> December Deuteronomy 26: 5-11

#### Bethlehem?

15<sup>th</sup> December 1 Samuel:16  
16<sup>th</sup> December Micah 5: 2-5  
17<sup>th</sup> December John 10:14-18

#### Losing the Plot!

18<sup>th</sup> December 2 Chronicles 34:1-21  
19<sup>th</sup> December Jeremiah 32:1-5  
20<sup>th</sup> December Jeremiah 33:1-15

#### Total failure?

21<sup>st</sup> December Ezekiel 37:1-14

#### When a plan comes together...

22<sup>nd</sup> December Daniel 6  
23<sup>rd</sup> December Daniel 7:13-14

Daniel was given a much better reward for his faithfulness than being saved from the lions – he was shown the full extent of God's great plan, extending well beyond the first Christmas to the end of time itself when, through Jesus, everything wrong in the world would ultimately be put right.

It's important to remember that the plan doesn't end with Christmas. The big Christmas Party will come when time, as we know it, will come to an end. All along, God has been giving us clues to his character. In Jesus, it's no longer a clue – it's in your face! And He wants everyone to see Jesus in you. He wants the people at His Christmas Party not just to be good – but beautiful as well! That's why there is one more sign.

#### The White Rose

December 24<sup>th</sup> Isaiah 35:1-10

Isaiah catches a lovely glimpse of what it's all going to be like when the plan is completed:

*'The arid desert shall be glad, the wilderness shall rejoice and burst into flower with fields of white roses. It shall rejoice and shout for joy. Brace the arms that are limp, steady the tottering knees. Say to the anxious of heart "Be strong and fear not, your God comes to save you. He himself is coming to give you triumph." Then the eyes of the blind will be opened and the ears of the deaf will be unstopped. The lame will leap like deer and dumb shout shout aloud. And a causeway will appear there and it shall be called the way of Holiness. No-one unclean shall pass along it and no fool will trespass on it. No lion will come there, no savage beast shall set foot on it. But by it the redeemed shall return and the Lord's people, set free, will come back and enter Zion with shouts of triumph crowned with everlasting joy. Gladness and joy will come among them while suffering and weariness flee away.'*



*Are you up for some everlasting joy, no more suffering or weariness?  
See you at God's Christmas party then?*