



Disciples in a Digital World

My dad died over thirty years ago, and I often find myself wondering what he would make

of today's world if he could come back and spend some time in it. He was fascinated by gadgets, but I doubt if he would even believe that the slightly robotic female voice telling me to 'turn left here' or 'at the next roundabout take the second exit' really could accurately pinpoint my car's position and safely direct me to my destination of choice. Would he simply dismiss it as some elaborate hoax that I'd set up, or would he be amazed that such contraptions now pretty much come as standard on your average car? And what would he make of that small rectangular screen that I assure him really is a phone, even though it looks nothing like one, before I go on to explain that it doubles up as a portable television, personal banking tool, is my first point of call for a Bible reading, as well as performing just about any other function I desire, once I've downloaded the relevant app?

And, while we can plot huge technological change in those decades since he passed into glory, there are many other changes that have taken place in society too. Some, of course, have been made possible by the emerging technologies that have now become so available to us, but all present new challenges and opportunities as we seek to fulfil our commission to make the message of Jesus known.

The connection between new technologies and our Gospel commission might not have become so relevant, had it not been for our experience of the last few years, when a worldwide pandemic, and consequent lockdown, so disrupted our routines of church life. This in turn exposed us to them in ways that might otherwise have taken much longer. At the time, we were largely in 'reactive' mode; we had to think quickly and had little choice but to learn how to

use Zoom, WhatsApp and a host of other platforms if we were to remain in active contact with one another.

But times have moved on, which has brought its own challenges too. Some see the passing of the pandemic as the opportunity to return everything back to the way it was as quickly as possible, while others, inspired by the possibilities that events have revealed, are keen to consolidate and capitalise on the new approaches we have adopted. The experience for church leaders is often to become something of a 'piggy in the middle' as each of these camps strives for ascendancy, or to become utterly bamboozled by trying to do both at the same time!

It was this that led me to begin to consider how local churches might develop a 'digital strategy' for this brave new world, which, in turn, yielded some surprising conclusions. This was largely influenced by two personal events, which at first sight might not appear to be particularly related.

The first occurred on one of those mornings when I really needed to simply buckle-down and get on with a couple of tasks that were too long outstanding. So, I switched off my email feed, closed down my social media and left my phone in another room, determined that I should not become distracted by incoming mail and messages. All went well until I was suddenly disturbed by what has now become something of a rare sound in our household – our landline telephone was ringing. This in itself was surprising, but, even more so, because I knew that my wife and daughter had gone to visit the only relative who ever rings us on the landline.

It was when it rang for the third time in a matter of minutes, that I decided I'd better answer and quickly learned from my daughter, relieved that she'd finally contacted me, that something of a household emergency had arisen. Picking up my mobile phone, I immediately saw that the screen was littered with missed calls, texts, WhatsApp alerts, Facebook Messenger posts and a few other

streams of contact – even some from my older children in Leeds and Wolverhampton who had been recruited into the process of trying to solicit my attention. The irony was not lost on me that, in this age of such diverse and plentiful digital media, it was a means of communication that is now seen as somewhat dated and obsolete that finally did the trick. But what was really impressed on me, through this otherwise unremarkable personal experience, was that if a message is important enough, we will try every means possible of getting it across and won't stop until we have. What finally accomplished success that day, was not so much digital savvy as sheer determination.

A couple of weeks later, as our nation reeled from the death of our late monarch, I was persuaded by my younger daughter that we should visit London for her funeral.

As we took the Tube to our planned viewing destination, like my dad so many years before me, I couldn't help but be impressed by the high-tech digital recorder that the guy opposite me was carrying. But it was when I opened my mouth that he and his colleague surprisingly showed an interest in us. 'Your accent', she quickly said, 'You're from Liverpool – yes?'. I confirmed her assumption and she explained that they were BBC reporters and were particularly seeking someone from the North West to follow through the day's events.

So, that evening, I found myself on our North West Tonight News programme, speaking of the experience of the Queen's funeral, through no real effort of my own. And it seems to have attracted a surprising amount of reaction since; even the staff at our local health centre announced that, 'We saw you on the telly,'

when I turned up for my flu jab!

Like many during lockdown, I'd had to



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go on a steep learning curve. From the gracious feedback we received to our online broadcasts, I sense that that our efforts bore fruit. But the few hundred subscribers and viewers that we attracted, pale into insignificance compared to the numbers who watched that evening's local TV news bulletin – something that is even more sobering when I consider the hours and hours of content that we created during that season of lockdown.

So, what's my point? The simple truth that these two stories reveal is that effective communication does not so much depend on amassing all kinds of equipment and technical savvy, as recognising the importance of our message and being able to share it with clarity when the opportunity arises. That is not to say that we should ignore new technologies, or despise the efforts of those who are seeking to break new ground as part of our mission and witness in this changing world, but at the end of the day, it is our message, not our media, that truly matter.

We might also recognise that this

technology is now in the hands of everyone. Even if we don't realise it, if we own a smartphone we have the means of creating content that could potentially be viewed by anyone in the world - simply by pressing the right buttons and pointing it in the right direction. The average congregation is likely to have at least a couple of dozen such devices in their collective pockets every time we come together; these in turn contain a cumulative contact network that is likely to run into the thousands.

So, for those of us who speak and lead, our impact might depend as much on whether we say or do something worth posting on their feeds and Facebook pages as whether or not we've got the latest livestream equipment installed for our services.

And, as we recognise that, we are returned to that simple reality – if people consider the message to be important enough, they will share it. We now live in an age of almost limitless opportunity, and confronted by a bewildering array of channels,

platforms and media, people are far more likely to see something unexpected because a friend posted it, than because an organisation put it on their website. That's why big companies are so interested in soliciting the attention and affirmation of 'Influencers'.

So, my search for a digital strategy led me to conclude that the greatest thing we need to do, in this age of new technologies and instant communication, is convince ourselves afresh that the message of the Gospel and the hope that is ours in Christ, is a message that is worth sharing above anything and everything else. In this digital world, perhaps our key strategy is to reinspire one another with the power of our message, and the significance of our commission to make it known. And for all its great technologies, our world right now is one of uncertainty, anxiety and despair. There has never been a greater need for a message of hope, nor greater opportunity for the people of God to share it.

Phil Jump, NWBA Regional Minister

CAN Corner CHRISTIAN AID NEWS

In early 2022, the Ladies Fellowship of my home church – Bethel, Newtown, Wigan – invited me to give a talk at one of the regular Tuesday meetings on some aspect of the work currently in progress with the Christian Aid organisation. The eventual date turned out to be the 13th of September. The attendance was decimated by - sshhh... you know who, no not Schweppes - Covid, but there were still seven present.

I had decided to use the opportunity to reinforce a theme which I had originally addressed in passing in the very first CAN Corner article, namely, why should we as a denomination have what I have come to describe as a 'stakeholder engagement' with Christian Aid.

The basis of the talk was a PowerPoint presentation incorporating a Christian Aid video, which led on to a lively, interesting and ultimately productive discussion.

One subject, which is becoming a regular theme in various discussions I am having within the denomination, was the point that most churches are already heavily involved in different charitable activities and the question becomes 'is it the idea that we should prioritise Christian Aid over and above other very worthy charities?'. The answer to that is a very clear 'NO', and one slide of the presentation deals with the subject.

Other elements of the discussion can be summarised by three questions/answers:

Charity Gifts Does Christian Aid still produce a 'paper version' catalogue which people can obtain and browse through to identify gifts they may wish to purchase? The answer? Yes and I have obtained a few copies. If you would like one, please contact me via telephone or email. Otherwise, the catalogue can be seen in digital format via the following link <https://charity-gifts.christianaid.org.uk>

Daily Bible Reading Does Christian Aid produce a daily Bible reading resource? Answer? Yes, but this resource is only available digitally. It can be accessed at <https://www.christianaid.org.uk/pray/daily-bible-readings> The structure is systematic and is laid out in the following pattern - something to read, something to think about, something to do, something to pray.

Prayer I commented during the discussion that one of the Christian Aid leadership with whom I had contact at the AGM last year made the following comment. '*...fundraising, though important, is not the only way of supporting, and that weaving a Christian Aid strand through the ongoing worship and prayer activities of the denomination is just as, if not more, important.*' The response from one forthright attendee was very 'pointed', but very well focused and pragmatic, '*...pray about what?*'. Well, here's the answer ... Christian Aid provides themes for prayer in two forms (again, unfortunately only in a digital version). First, a pre-planned monthly Prayer Diary with a prayer for each day. The link is <https://www.christianaid.org.uk/pray/prayer-diary> Secondly, event focused prayers responding to worldwide issues as they occur <https://www.christianaid.org.uk/pray/prayer-library>

An updated version of the PowerPoint presentation, along with the Christian Aid video, can be accessed via the IMC website. Click on the Christian Aid symbol/logo displayed on the website or visit <https://imchurches.org.uk/christian-aid-presentation-january-2023/>

If you're not comfortable with websites, links, etc. just contact me by email or telephone and we'll work out other methods of getting the information to you, which could, if you prefer, be simply by sending a paper version of the presentation through the post.

Lastly, if any church groups (or other groups you might belong to) would be interested in holding a meeting on this or other Christian Aid related topics, I would be more than happy to attend and give a talk or lead a discussion.

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

Tel: 07568 589569

Email: christianaid.representative@imchurches.org.uk

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



THE MIRACULOUS PROJECT PEARL

BY BILL HAMPSON, ECUMENICAL OFFICER

Many within our churches often pray for our brothers and sisters around the world, suffering persecution and violence because of their faith. Approximately two hundred million Christians are facing high levels of persecution worldwide according to an 'Open Doors' report.

Surveillance in China is among the most oppressive and sophisticated - church attendance is rigorously monitored, and many churches are being closed. It is illegal for under-18s to attend church so parents can't take their children and the 'government keeps tabs on church attenders, making sure that Jesus doesn't ever conflict with the wishes of the state' says the report.

My long-time friend, Bob Fu of China Aid, says, *'Digital authoritarianism is a growing challenge. The Chinese Communist Party has hundreds of millions of face-recognition cameras all over China. They keep watch over every street corner, from the four walls of church buildings and even from pulpits.'* Churches have been ordered to tear down crosses from their rooftops, display the Communist Party flag and pastors are required to pledge in writing their absolute loyalty to the Party and the ideology of President Xi Jinping.

However, despite all this, it is now estimated that there are approximately 100 million Christians in China, over 7% of the population and growing, amidst many stories of God's miraculous provision. None more so than 'Project Pearl'.

'Project Pearl' as it was known, wasn't a clandestine operation from the Second World War, but, nevertheless, had all the ingredients of a blockbuster film: a secret plan of a very real event. Indeed, Project Pearl's importance in the history of Christianity in China is hard to overstate.

On the night of the 18th of June 1981, a giant barge, constructed especially for the project, landed on Pearl Beach, on the northwest coast of China. Within two hours, the crew of twenty, working for Open Doors, had unloaded one million Bibles, weighing 139 tons, to a waiting army of local Christian volunteers. If the authorities had caught wind of it, both crew and volunteers faced imprisonment. It was a clandestine operation that shaped the future of Christianity in China.

The Church was growing after being violently suppressed during Chairman Mao's bloody Cultural Revolution, which ended with his death in 1976.

Bibles were in short supply and owning one was an offence, but China's Christian population were hungry for them. The most anyone had was a few verses written down longhand which many committed to memory.

The plea for Bibles originally came from a remarkable Chinese woman called Ma Kwang. After her husband was imprisoned for his faith, she persuaded Open Doors to

smuggle 30,000 New Testaments into China carried in suitcases. However, it soon became clear that these were nowhere near enough; *'We need one million, and we want full Bibles!'* Ma Kwang told them.

The logistics of Project Pearl were staggering. First thing was funds. Easier said than done - how do you raise millions of dollars if you can't say what you want it for? But they did. The Bibles were printed in San Francisco and exported to Hong Kong for the operation. A giant barge was specially designed to sink below the water line so watertight one-ton packages of Bibles could be hauled into the sea and floated onto the beach.

Two tugboats, which were needed to tow the barge, seemed almost impossible to find and with the big day fast approaching, became a critical need. What happened next was truly miraculous. One of the planners of Project Pearl had a phone call with a friend in New Zealand. Aware of the problem, he said God had showed him a vision of a grain elevator with painted stripes, close to a beach where there was a tugboat. *'Great where is it?'* was the question. *'Unfortunately, that's the only thing He didn't tell me!'* was the reply.

The next day, with time ticking away, the plane to Hong Kong was forced to make an unscheduled stop in Singapore. The organisers got off the plane and took a taxi to the city. On the way, they noticed a tall building that looked like a grain elevator with painted stripes on it, and there, down below and up on blocks, were two tugboats. The boats had originally been commissioned by a firm in Indonesia that had gone bankrupt and were for sale.

It was a welcome reminder of God's provision, but, even so, the gravity of what they were about to do sank in. They could be imprisoned, die or be lost at sea. At one point, everyone was given a chance to back out, but none did, all in no doubt that they were supposed to be there. They planned to drop the Bibles on the beach in just one hour.

A sizeable Christian population from the locality appeared in order to haul the Bibles to dry land and spirit them away. A crew member said, *'There were hundreds, possibly even thousands waiting on the beach, they would come into the water, some right up to their neck, and pull the packages onto the beach, cut them open and pass on the individual boxes, daisy-chain style.'*

Despite taking twice as long as planned, and making plenty of noise, the operation was practically complete before the authorities discovered it. The lookout tower guards remained oblivious, having fallen asleep after a drinking session. Around 4am, someone awoke and discovered the operation, but it was too late by then, almost all had left and those remaining ran away. *'God saved us!'* said one volunteer, who didn't know what he was unloading until much later: *'Eventually, I learned those boxes were full of Bibles. A Bible was a miracle to us!'*

The authorities managed to burn a handful of Bibles. A few went astray, showing up in unlikely places including a fish market, where Christians discovered fish wrapped in pages of scripture.

Over the months and years to come, those Bibles made their way across China, passed on from church to church, fuelling a revival.



BROTHER ANDREW

Brother Andrew, who spent his life smuggling Bibles into closed Communist and was the founder of 'Open Doors', died last September at the age of 94.

Andrew became famous as 'God's Smuggler' when his accounts of slipping past border guards with Bibles hidden in his blue Volkswagen Beetle was published in 1967. The book drew the church's attention to the plight of believers in countries where Christian belief and practice were illegal; it sold more than 10 million copies and was translated into

35 languages.

No one knows how many Bibles Brother Andrew took into Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, East Germany, Bulgaria, and other Soviet-bloc countries in the decade before the success of 'God's Smuggler' led him to found 'Open Doors'.

For more information about Open Doors UK, visit <https://www.opendoorsuk.org/>



MISSION HELPING HANDS - A HELPING HAND IS NEEDED MORE THAN EVER

Mission Helping Hands is a charity that was founded in 2008 by Sheila Cochrane following a trip to South West Uganda.

Over the years, Mission Helping Hands has established:

- A Mothers Union (MU) Vocational Centre, teaching girls Sewing, Knitting, Craft and Hairdressing Skills which is now Accredited by Department of Education Uganda.
- A hostel for the students with solar panels, beds, mosquito nets, washrooms and a water tank.
- An Internet café at the centre.
- Ongoing support providing equipment, repairs and paying wages for MU staff.
- A sponsorship programme for educating orphans.
- Links with Primary schools in the UK to schools in Uganda.
- Various building projects in schools.
- Discipleship groups & bible teaching.

Like for many, the Covid pandemic has hit Ugandans hard. Long lockdown periods have left many families and those who are already the poorest both destitute and starving. So many have lost their jobs, businesses have fallen and many have not been paid. The cost of living has increased greatly and necessities have doubled in price. Schools have been closed for nearly two years with students missing out on essential education, especially as they do not have internet and computers to

If anyone feels led to help to support our staff at Mothers Union Vocational Centre, and the sponsorship of our children and young people, please partner with us by offering any amount of a regular donation each month (small or large) as this would help us to continue to support our workers or children who work so hard.

For more details, please contact Sheila Cochrane
T: 07532 240439

E: contact@missionhelpinghands.org.uk or sheilacochrane55@gmail.com

access at home.

Mission Helping Hands, who now partner with the Diocese of Kinkiizi, have been able to provide essentials and extra help and support over the lockdown periods by continuing to pay the wages of staff so they were able to feed their own families. They have also provided for the needs of the children that Mission Helping Hands sponsor and their families.

A pig project was started to provide food for families, piglets for sale and to share with other poor families.



Mission Helping Hands have also sent funds for essentials such as rice to be supplied to the very poorest in the Diocese and for laptops so three sponsored University students have been able to continue their studies.



Laptop for Sadat University student

In January of this year, children and young people finally went back to their schools, colleges, universities and

vocational schools. They have a lot of catching up to do, but are loving being back. There are however still many parents who cannot afford to send their children back to school.



Children at Kagambira Foundation School, which links with Leigh St Mary's Primary School



Kinkiizi High School: Girl's Class

Mission Helping Hands (MHH) SW Uganda
Charity number: 1129956
www.missionhelpinghands.org.uk and on Facebook



Staff with Sheila Cochrane and Pat Anders

Mazur / abcw.org.uk



BE-LONGING: PRAYING FOR UNITY AMIDST INJUSTICE

Do good, seek justice (Isaiah 1:17) is the theme of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity which is to be held from the 18th to the 25th of January 2023. Guided by the churches of Minneapolis, and in the year that marks the 30th anniversary of the murder of Stephen Lawrence, the week seeks to explore how the work of Christian unity can contribute to the promotion of racial justice across all levels of society.

Speaking of the week, Dr Nicola Brady, General Secretary of CTBI, says: *'As we join with other Christians around the world, we pray that our hearts will be open to see and hear the many ways in which racism continues to destroy lives, and discern the steps to take as individuals and communities to heal the hurts and build a better future for everyone.'*

In 2020, Connexional President Dorothy Kendrick, published a very strong statement against racism on behalf of our churches. For further information, and to download prayer packs, go to www.cte.org.uk or visit the Christian Aid website which has provided 'Go and Do' action points for each of the reflections also.

Bill Hampson, Ecumenical Officer

From the Connexion

OCTOBER CONNEXIONAL COMMITTEE ROUND-UP

By Alison Tipping, Medlock Valley Circuit Representative

This was our second hybrid Connexional Committee meeting, and this time, the meeting was held at West Street IM Church (Thatto Heath). Several members of the committee joined via Zoom, including Shaun Newton, Education Organiser, who was able to join us from Nazareth. Dorothy Kendrick chaired the meeting as Connexional President.

In the **General Secretary's Report**, it stated that Annual Meeting 2022, despite being a one-day non-residential event, has attracted mainly positive comments, although there were some sound issues for those on Zoom. A questionnaire about future Annual Meetings had been sent out to all the churches. Churches are advised that we need a nomination for a President-Elect, who will serve for one year (2023-2024) with a view to becoming President in 2024. Nominations are to be received by the first Connexional Committee meeting next year (4th February). Also, if churches wish to submit a Notice of Motion for Annual Meeting 2023, it needs to reach the General Secretary three weeks before the first Connexional Committee meeting of the year (14th January 2023). Letters regarding representation at Connexional Committee were sent to churches that: are in circuits that are not currently functioning; are not presently in a circuit; or are the circuit but do not attend Connexional Committee. The letter makes suggestions about alternative ways of being represented. Brian attended the AGM of CLAS (Churches' Legislation Advisory Service) on 28th September; CLAS monitor developments in Parliament and with Government on behalf of the churches, lobby these bodies on matters of common interest to the churches. Blackpool Church has advised that it will be closing shortly, due to the age and dwindling numbers of the congregation.

From the **Administration Group**, Kathy Pringle is expecting a baby in January and will be taking a period of maternity leave from 16th December. A replacement is needed for Kathy's role while she is on leave, and letters and job description have been sent to churches as it would be desirable for the successful candidate to be familiar with the denomination. Arrangements have been made for laying out/printing the magazine, which is expected to continue as a bi-monthly publication. There was a poor response to the questionnaire about future Annual Meetings, with only 28 responses from 66 churches. Following discussion, it was decided that Annual Meeting 2023 would be a church-based event on a Saturday with an optional Friday night event, with a view to the 2024 AGM being a two-day event. Quotes for this option for 2024 will be sought. Annual Meeting 2023 will be held at New Silksworth IM Church who had invited the Connexion for this meeting. The 'Renewing our Calling' Bible study notes have been sent to churches. Unfortunately, it did not prove possible to produce the studies on DVD, but they are available on YouTube and a link has

been sent out. Following problems earlier this year at one of our churches, it is intended to make available a re-print of the 'Ripe for a Takeover?' articles from the 1996-7 Connexion, about Grubb Street, a fictional IM church in the equally fictional Ramsdale Circuit. It should act as a reminder of how churches should maintain their governance arrangements, as well as demonstrating the value of coming together in circuits to help fellowships that are struggling.

The **Church Support Group** continue to support several of our churches who they have been helping in the last few months. Further visits to other churches are planned. There was some discussion about the provision of Warm Spaces. Guidelines and information are available for churches who are looking into doing this, as there are various legalities which should be considered if opening on this basis.

The **Ecumenical Officer** informed that the CTE Forum was held at The Hayes, Swanwick on the 6th and 7th of October, which Bill Hampson was unable to attend - any relevant information will be passed on in a future report from the Forum report. A statement, signed by the Archbishop of Canterbury, was issued on behalf of all CTE member churches, expressing sincere condolences on the death of HM Queen Elizabeth II. Follow up information regarding the Epiphany Trust Appeal for Ukraine, so well supported by our churches, raised £22100. The family we have sponsored have received their visas and arrived in Wigan three weeks ago. The parents are now able to access support for their disabled daughter and are settling in very well. The charity are still giving support to around fifty people, including thirty children, who are still living as refugees in Romania.

In the **Communications Officers Report**, the web site has been updated as necessary, and magazine has been produced as per the Admin Committee report. A replacement PC has been ordered for the Connexional Services Manager (CSM) as the current one developed a fault with its screen that rendered it unusable in the office. However, since the current PC can still use its HDMI output, it has been re-purposed as the PC for the Communications Hub and is now in place. A full set of instructions has been produced for how to use the Communications Hub at the Resource Centre for 'Hybrid' meetings. The Communications Hub is now complete and did not use the full £2,500 budget that was allocated. The current Communications Officer, Alan Harrison,

will be standing down at Annual Meeting 2023. Details of the job will be distributed to make churches aware of what the job entails - this is an important role that needs to be filled. Churches have commented that the weekly prayer sheet that was sent out to churches during the pandemic has been greatly missed. It was agreed for this to be reintroduced, sent out on a monthly basis.

Education Organiser Report stated that student numbers remain the same, with one potential student starting this current year and a further student has enquired as a provisional start for September 2023. Since the last Connexional Committee meeting, Rob Brooks has resigned as the Independent Methodist History Assessor. We acknowledge and thank Rob for his diligent service in this role, which will now be taken on by the Ministry Committee. The future Study Weekend dates are 24th-26th February 2023 and 6th-8th October 2023. The next Ministry & Leaders conference will be Friday 28th and Saturday 29th April 2023, with the speaker Ashley Cooper, Principal of Cliff College. Shaun Newton continues to try and arrange a meeting with Cliff College.

Within the **Enabling Group**, talks have been continuing with regards to the future use of Northwood and it was agreed that the group led by Roger Stone hold a Prayer Service at Northwood on 27th November to which, everyone from across the Connexion is welcome to attend. The purpose of this is to assess the actual interest that there is in the area for a Fellowship group to be started. All churches have been issued with a paper and electronic copy of the Bible Studies produced by the group led by John Claydon. All churches are requested to feed back their responses by 31st January 2023, and a proposed timetable was agreed for the Review Process to continue into 2023. Barry Hart has now joined the group. Following discussions on the future production of the magazine, it was agreed that this could be discussed further at an Association meeting.

Northwood Christian Centre Report stated that following discussions at the May Connexional Committee Meeting, it was agreed conduct a feasibility study with regard to any new work, both in interest in the area and with volunteers for the work. The matter is currently being dealt with by the Enabling Group, who were charged by the Association to complete the study. In connection with this, a Prayer Service will be held at Northwood on 27th November at 4pm. For 2022, as it stands (September 2022), the Hall/Fields have been booked

for 30 days and the Cottage for 60 days. The predicted income is £4295.00 for 2022. No further bookings have been taken from the end of 2022, however the meeting agreed that bookings will be taken for the period up to July 2023 (provisional bookings after that period).

The **Finance Committee** are now meeting on a monthly basis on Zoom and are completing a rolling review of the Finances, and Alan Britton gave an in-depth verbal report on this. Actual costs versus budget costs are looked at on a monthly basis now, and a new budget schedule will be done in November for 2023. All current grant applications have been fulfilled. With the current energy cost crisis, any church can apply for help with fuel costs, and a new simplified form has been produced for this purpose. Alan will attend the Resource Centre once a week during Kathy's maternity leave, in order to deal with any financial matters that would usually be dealt with by Kathy.

An enquiry was received to the **Ministry**

Committee from someone from the United Methodist Church regarding our beliefs concerning the virgin birth of Jesus. An appropriate response has been returned. George Eales has been received into the Lord's immediate care, and letters of condolence have been sent on behalf of the Ministry Committee to both the next-of-kin and the fellowship at Spennymoor Jubilee IM Church. The Ministry Organiser was invited to contribute to the funeral service, and this provided an opportunity for George himself to give his Christian Testimony (recorded at a North East Circuit event in 2019). If anyone would like to hear this on YouTube, please contact the Ministry Organiser for the links. A memorial service for George was to be held on 29th October at Spennymoor Church.

In the **Overseas Missions Report**, Liz Greenhalgh has had to find new accommodation in Romania, and has requested an increase in what she currently receives from the Connexion to help her meet her costs. This was

discussed and agreed, both by Connexional Committee and then the Association, that we increase her funding to £4000.00, and this will be reviewed again next year. Personal donations can be made for Liz (and any of our missionaries) via the Overseas Missions Committee, and it was felt that this needs further promotion. Churches are reminded to only refer to L and P by their initials in any documents and to never to use their full names. 'Arab World Ministries' can also be used instead of names where necessary.

For the **Safeguarding Report**, Marilyn Riding continues in this role and has been dealing with emails from DDC (Due Diligence Checking) who inform her of emails sent to our churches regarding DBS checks, helped by Joy Elkins and Graham Edmondson. There is the potential for some training to be given in Bristol and Wigan. Advice has been given to West Camel with regard to safeguarding duties.



LAUNCH EVENT

Derek Barron, Roman Road, Failsworth

So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognise what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.'
Romans 12: 1-2 (MSG Bible)

I'd booked my tickets for the launch event. My hotel was reserved for my overnight stay, as well as my train tickets booked for both the outward and return journeys. I was really looking forward to this event as Roman Road IM Church had used both the *Life on the Frontline* and *Fruitfulness on the Frontline* resources in the past and found them both to be life changing as we let God use our everyday lives for him.

Then, came a train strike! A new plan was devised, which involved a coach journey down to London... I was determined to get to this event! And, was it worth it? Absolutely!

Do you wish you could be more like Jesus in everyday life? The originators of *Growing on the Frontline*, Charles and Mary Hipsley, did and this resource has been a while in the making as they sought to look at not just the fruits on the tree that is our lives, but the roots that support a life dedicated to God.

An evening followed where they led us through how the materials could be used including teaching DVD, discussion questions, prayer tools and Bible studies. A forty-day prayer journey, sermon outlines and advertising material are also available.

The sessions are as follows:

1. Growing wherever you are
2. Our choices affect our fruitfulness
3. Our desires influence our choices
4. Our emotions reveal our desires
5. Maturing in every season
6. Going deeper into God in tough times
7. Turning inner growth into fruitful action
8. Sustaining growth on the frontline

The challenge was to imagine if every Christian, you and I, lived their life as Jesus would. This resource is designed to

give your church the vision and the tools to do just that to take your God into work, college, the home, the pub and the shops.

It was a wonderful evening full of challenge and hope. During the event, they shared one prayer which I would like to share with you all, *The Examen Prayer*.

In the quiet, find a comfortable spot where you won't be disturbed for 10 minutes then:

Prepare – Take some slow breaths to give God thanks and ask Him to highlight the things that He wants you to notice as you pray and listen.

Review – Step through your day and focus on the things that seem most important. How did you feel? Closer or further from God?

Celebrate – Celebrate when you felt God's presence. Were there times when you responded to others in love?

Repent – Recognise that some things got in the way and ask God's forgiveness for how you acted. Bow your head and receive God's mercy.

Look Ahead – Imagine what you are going to do tomorrow and ask God for help with any tasks, people or choices that might be difficult and draw you away from Him.

We, at Roman Road IM Church, are going to take the challenge of *Growing on the Frontline*. I would like to challenge you to do the same and trust that God will use it to bring about His will for you all.

Resources are available at <https://licc.org.uk/ourresources/growing-on-the-frontline/>

In the Joy of the Lord

Geoff Lomas

16th July 1942 - 10th September 2022

Geoff was born into Independent Methodism. His parents worshipped at Mill Street Church, Bradford, in East Manchester, and it was there that he met Irene, and they married there in 1964. After the church closed, they became members at Ashton-under-Lyne, where they served both the church and the Manchester Circuit for many years. When Ashton closed, they transferred their membership to Roman Road IM Church, Failsworth.

Professionally, Geoff worked for ICI, which subsequently became Zeneca, and then AstraZeneca, starting with work in computing, and ending with a senior management role in Telecoms, from which he retired in 1997.

As well as his work in Manchester Circuit, Geoff was involved in many aspects of Connexional life. He was

Young People's Chairman in the late 70's and early 80's and organised a Young People's Teaching weekend at Quinta, in Shropshire, which ran for several years. He was elected as Connexional President on three occasions, serving in 1985-6, 1994-5, and for a two-year term in 2003-5, the last-named culminating in the 200th Anniversary Celebrations at Horsforth. As Ecumenical Officer, Geoff was heavily involved in talks with the Baptist Union, which led to the signing of a five-year Covenant Partnership agreement in 2004. Geoff was equally involved in the implementation phase, and it was a source of regret that the partnership ended in 2009 with both denominations largely going their separate ways.

Geoff's work for the Lord, however, extended well beyond the Independent Methodist Connexion. Locally, he was part of the Evangelical Churches Manchester Alliance

(ECMA, nowadays known as Network), latterly becoming their chairman, where he helped to organise the first March for Jesus in Manchester, as well as ensuring that there was a prominent Christian element at the 2002 Commonwealth Games in the city. He also worked with Christian Endeavour Holiday Centres, serving as Centre Director for Brockley Hall, and then for St Winifreds, Rhos-on-Sea. On the wider ecumenical scene, he became the Convenor of the Free Churches Group and a trustee of Churches Together in England.

A service of celebration, held at Roman Road IM Church on the 30th of September, was attended by many from within the Connexion and the wider ecumenical circle. We send our condolences to Irene and to their two children, Alison and Andrew, and give thanks to God for Geoff's many years of faithful service. *Brian Rowney*



Evangelism, spreading the Christian gospel, is something we often shy away from or feel afraid of! We live in a hostile world, a hostile society, a place where people do not want to hear of their sin – even though we have good news about Jesus who can cleanse them from their sin! But even though this mission is so important, it's so hard, and we sometimes don't know where to start or how to do it. We're just ordinary people, we're not a Peter or Paul – we're not qualified to do this work!

Well, to encourage us, let me share the story of Edward Kimball – you've probably never heard of him, an ordinary Christian who taught children in his church Sunday school. What could he do? He was no Peter or Paul but read on and see what a difference an ordinary Christian can make.

Because one day he decided that one of the teenagers in his class wasn't listening to his teaching, so he decided to visit the young man, who was working in a local shoe store, to speak to him. Edward was a shy man, and at first, he wouldn't go into the store, but he eventually plucked up the courage, went in and spoke to the young man, who was putting boxes of shoes on the shelves. Edward didn't think that he had made

ORDINARY BELIEVERS CAN MAKE EXTRAORDINARY DIFFERENCES!

any impact and he left feeling that he was unsuccessful in persuading the man to follow Jesus.

But he did lead him to Christ and that young man, Dwight Moody (who I'm sure you have heard of) went on to become one of the greatest evangelists – preaching the gospel to over one million people and the story didn't stop there.

Later, in England, Moody was preaching, and he led a man named F.B. Meyer to Christ. He was deeply stirred and went on to establish a nationwide preaching ministry. Later, while Meyer was preaching, a young man named Wilbur Chapman accepted Christ. Chapman later felt the call to evangelism.

As he proclaimed the gospel in various places, he decided he needed some help. He knew a young former baseball player named Billy Sunday, who was looking for a job, and Chapman took him on. Billy asked if he could preach every now and then and he ultimately emerged as the greatest preacher of the early 1900's.

One day, Billy Sunday was preaching in Charlotte, North Carolina, where a great move of God was taking place. Many people believed, and these new believers then invited a relatively unknown preacher, Mordecai Ham, to set up his tent in Charlotte and keep preaching.

It was at this time that a tall, lanky farm boy walked down the aisle and gave his life to Jesus. His name was William Franklin Graham Junior, but

we know him better as Billy Graham - and he has personally delivered the gospel message to more people than any other man in history!

So, consider that! Because an ordinary Christian like Edward Kimball was willing to share the gospel, millions more people have heard the gospel message.

It is worth noting that no person in the New Testament came to faith without the agency of a human being. That was (and still is) God's chosen method of evangelism. The message was always personally communicated. It wasn't done using tracts, Christian TV, or radio, people had to personally share the message. God in His wisdom has chosen people to communicate His message and, although God could get the job done without us, we could never get the job done without Him.

Read through the book of Acts and you will see ordinary people making the most of every opportunity to spread the good news of Jesus their Saviour - we see evangelism in Acts, chapter by chapter! Today, if we ask, God will give us opportunities to witness – because that is what he wants us to do for Him.

Just remember: *'The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead, he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.'* (2 Peter 3:9) and take the opportunity to reach others for Him.

Encountering Jesus

THE LONG ROAD TO HOME DAPHNE HALL, HETTON-LE-HOLE

I was born in Richmond, Yorkshire in 1940. My mother loved Jesus very deeply - she read Bible stories to me and took myself and Dad with her to the Parish Church each Sunday. Her faith never wavered, and she was always an excellent example for me. On Sunday evenings, there was often a family gathering round the harmonium at my grandfather's home to praise God through hymn singing. Also, as a child, I had the enriching experience of attending the local convent school. When I was eleven, we moved to York. There were many exciting opportunities there, but some things were lost. We attended church less often, I missed the Sunday nights at my Grandad's home and I also missed the colourful worship in the convent chapel. I should have listened more to my Mum's advice at that time. However, I enjoyed the grammar school and the hymns which we sang every morning kept me in touch with God, not only then, but throughout my subsequent teaching career. During my second year at university, I returned home for Easter to learn that Dad had taken his own life. Somehow, God helped us through this terrible time and He brought Mum and me very close together in mutual support. At Mum's insistence, I went straight back to university to finish my degree and then began to teach Physics in the Midlands, travelling home to York every weekend. Once more, the hymns we sang in morning assembly at my school were a golden thread which linked me to God. Whilst living in the Midlands, I married David, a mature student and a talented folk singer. Our happiness was ended suddenly when he was killed in a road accident. God once again blessed me with my mother's friendship at this bad time. I moved to a school in the North and, after a few years married Jim, a

marine electrical engineer, living in Hetton le Hole. We were fortunate to have thirty-nine happy years together and fortunate also to have our mothers living close by, both alert and active. Jim was a Christian, proud to have been confirmed in Hetton but never keen to talk about his faith. At his suggestion, we went to church occasionally at Eppleton. Around this time, I became very interested in Jesus but read a lot of foolish imaginative fiction relating to his life. Jim had a stroke not long after he retired but, thank God, his mind and speech were unaffected, so our comradeship continued until he died in 2016. His funeral was at Hetton Independent Methodist Church (by chance, I thought.) As I look back, it seems that this was the time that God started to take action in my life. Several unusual things happened to me. First, I found myself in Fenwick's gift department just before Christmas. I looked at the shelves piled high with expensive shiny items and was suddenly filled with rage that I could see no sign of Jesus being celebrated. I felt I had to take action, so the next Sunday evening I arrived at our I.M. Church in Hetton hoping to enter unnoticed at the back. However, I got a big surprise. I was given the warmest and most wonderful welcome I had ever known. I think Gill Tweddle (one of the Ministers) was a little surprised when I announced that I had come to 'stick up' for Jesus. I found the service rather strange, and I couldn't join in with the hymns but, after such a welcome, I knew that I had to return the next Sunday. I continued to attend the evening service on a slightly irregular basis, listening to the readings, to the words of the hymns and to some inspiring sermons. As I listened, God opened my ears to hear the complete story of Jesus. In addition, as I talked with

people in the church, I found it wonderful that they could talk openly and with such sincerity about their faith. As time went by, I realised that that there was something here that I badly wanted to have for myself. The second unusual occurrence was when I was sitting outside the Grand Hotel at Scarborough waiting for the departure of our coach after a holiday weekend. I chatted to a young man who described how he had been sleeping rough for several months and remarked that he had come to Scarborough to look for some of the happiness he had found there with his mother when he was a boy. As I was about to leave, he shouted after me, 'And what are you looking for?' to which I found myself replying, without any forethought, 'I'm looking for Jesus!' After this, God led my reading and my listening, until I realised that for much of my life, I had lived in a self-motivated, rather conceited way, from which the living Jesus had been missing. He gave me the faith I needed to be ready to repent and declare my acceptance of Jesus as my Lord and Saviour. I cherish the words of Keith on that day, 'Welcome to our Church Family!' As I came into the church at this time, I still had many questions and problems to sort out; Gill and Shaun Newton helped me often, but it was good to know that anyone I asked would try to help me. I was baptised, aged 79, on 30th November 2019; it was a joyful occasion with all my friends around. Since then, I am constantly aware that I have so much more to learn, so I'm trying to learn by doing, as I join in as many church activities as possible. I just thank God that he has brought me home to Jesus in this our church family.



Connexion

The magazine of the family of Independent Methodist Churches

The last day for articles to be submitted for the March / April issue of the Connexion magazine is Monday the 6th of February. The theme for this issue will be 'Encouragement'.

Please could all articles be sent either directly to the Resource Centre via post, or by email to magazine@imchurches.org.uk (please note the new email address).

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!

SHARING THE WORK OF RURAL MINISTRIES

The Church Support Group has followed the Rural Ministries (RM) organisation for a few years now as some of our churches are rural or semi-rural. David Okell has been the representative for the group, attending conferences and gathering information.

During lockdown, RM began to produce weekly reflections which many of us have felt are speaking to our churches. Due to this, I attended the Rural Ministries Zoom conference in March which focussed on the passage in Luke 5:1-11. In this, Jesus tells Simon Peter to take the boat into the deep after a fruitless night of fishing. Jesus tells him how to fish, to go out of his comfort zone, away from the shallows where they have always fished. They do as He says, and it works - God shows up with a miraculous catch, so miraculous that they need to call for another boat and for others to help with the catch.

RM feel the church has been called to a new path, to explore spiritual new depths, to work outside the church. Jesus was on the beach talking to the people, where the disciples were fishing, mending their nets, working; He was out in the world, not in the church with the converted.

RM feel that we should move from where we've fished for years but caught nothing, and that maybe God wants the church to DO things differently, in different ways and in different places. They ask why churches are focussing on mission in the same old way they always have. Rather than ecumenical work, showing the world how the kingdom of heaven will look like. Rather than isolated events on our own, we should be working together in one accord, 'building bridges and longer tables'.

Where is your beach? Jesus cared about people; He liked people. He wanted to get to know them – do we?

Here are some interesting quotes from the conference, from both the sessions and group chats:

'Rural Ministries are a collection of churches, small unimportant churches that are left to their own devices and as such often have the best experiences because that is where God shows up.'

'No longer going solo doing things the way of the world but expecting God to show up and do it His way.'

'The obedience of following God's call to the deep leads to God showing up.'

'Unity is not conformity, we don't have to be the same.'

'We must fall to our knees in worship, reverence and awe rather than congratulate ourselves on our fabulous sermon, tech savvy music etc.'

As part of our commitment to searching for fellow Christians and support for our churches, we at the Church Support Group have asked permission for the articles from Rural Ministries to appear in our Connexion magazine. This article which follows is one such weekly reflection which we hope you will find challenging, as well as an encouragement and hope.

Lisa Green, Church Support Worker (NW)



ALL THE GEAR, NO IDEA

Alistair Birkett, RM Director: Scotland & Northern England

My wife, Ruth, and I recently returned from a few days holiday in the Lake District. The weather was good to us, our accommodation was superb, and along with our always enthusiastic springer spaniel, we were able to get out on to the fells most days. It was so good to discover new walks and enjoy the stunning spring scenery.

One of the things I most enjoy on holiday after a long walk, is indulging in a nice latte or a pint of the local bitter, and simply watching the world go by. Most people in Keswick appear to be holiday makers, many of whom have decided to thoroughly embrace the outdoor lifestyle look. It's all about the latest Gore-tex jackets, walking boots, base layers and who's sporting the biggest North Face logo (other brands are available).

This is all well and good until we actually take to the fells. I always feel a tad inferior as I lace up my old boots and chuck my 20yr old rucksack on my back; that is until we actually hit the inclines and begin to climb. Now please don't misunderstand me, my wife and I are no mountain goats, but before long we often find ourselves pulling well ahead of other walkers,

who are often well clad in the best outdoor gear and sporting all the extras. Then further along when there's a fork in the path you may well witness couples arguing over which way to go - nice trousers, but he's forgotten the map! Now, I know this might sound a little harsh, but on these occasions I sometimes find myself inclined to glance back and think to myself... "all the gear, no idea!"

Whilst not on the fells this week, I've been spending some time reflecting on the Old Testament book of Amos, and I've been struck again by the forthright nature of his prophecy. Amos lived simply amongst a group of shepherds in Tekoa, a small rural town south of Jerusalem. He didn't come from a family of prophets, and indeed he said of himself "I'm not a professional prophet, and was never trained to be one. I'm just a shepherd, and I take care of sycamore fig trees" (Amos 7:14).

I wonder, could Amos' connection with a simpler life serve as a reminder to the church of today? Indeed, might we be guilty like some Lake District rambblers of having 'all the gear and

no idea?' Maybe it's just me (and forgive the rant), but I get a little frustrated

with denominations launching endless new top-down initiatives, social media feeds full of adverts for the latest course, conference or off the shelf quick fix resources, or indeed churches spending what appears a disproportionate amount of money on tech kit. It appears so easy to busy ourselves simply shifting the deckchairs around on the deck of the Titanic so to speak, as we watch a church turning in on itself and entering survival mode, whilst becoming more and more distanced from the very people we're called to love and minister amongst. Please understand me, I'm not at all against attending courses and conferences, neither do I decry investing in our church buildings, or indeed seeking to ensure that our AV kit is up to speed, but perhaps there's another way.

Amos spoke simply and profoundly to



this issue in his day as he prophesied “my people have forgotten how to do it right” (3:10), and again “I hate all your show and pretenses” (5:21), indeed one commentator says of God’s people in Amos’ day that they were “Drunk on their own economic success and intent on strengthening their financial position, the people had

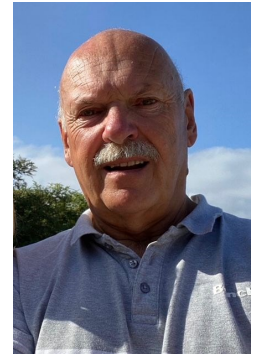
lost the concept of caring for one another; Amos rebuked them because he saw in that lifestyle evidence that Israel had forgotten God.”

Now, just like Amos, I’m no prophet, but could God be calling us to a new, simpler way of being His people in the rural church? Might we have ‘forgotten how to do it right?’ (3:10).

I’m not sure, I don’t have many answers, but I tend to think God would find it a lot easier to work with us, mould us and shape us, if we came to Him open handed; maybe ‘no gear and no idea’ is where we should be starting!

We do thank Rural Ministries for the kind permission to re-print this article.

An Interview With... **PAUL GUILLE, CROSBY**



Can you introduce yourself?

Greetings in Jesus’ name. My name is Paul Guile and I am currently the Pastor at Bethel New Life Centre I.M. Church in Crosby, Liverpool. I retired from the police force in 2002, after thirty years of service mainly in the CID (Coppers in Disguise as my offspring would say).

Can you give a little information about your background and how you were introduced to Jesus?

I enjoyed the great blessing of being born to Christian parents, Arthur and Grace Guile, who attended Hill O’Zion I.M. Church, Cochrane Street, in the Everton district of Liverpool, as did a number of my extended family, both Guile’s and Adams’s. It was here that I was introduced to the Gospel and, at the age of thirteen, I gave my life to the Lord Jesus following an evening service led by a Mr George Austin. I remember it well!

Bethel New Life Centre in Crosby has been in existence since 1913 and sits in a cul-de-sac amid a private housing neighbourhood. Presently, the fellowship comprises of a small group of ‘mature’ folks, though we recently held a dedication service for our newest recruit, Bonnie, who is aged just 7 months. Members are faithful and prayerful.

What are some of the significant events on your Christian journey?

Following the death of my father in 1988, I had a profound experience of being baptised in the Holy Spirit. At this time, though I was adrift from the Lord, Jesus brought me back with a wonderful revelation of Himself and the power of His word.

I began to be challenged that I should be baptised (full immersion). Not knowing this, my sister invited me to a baptism service being held at her church. I was convinced this was my opportunity so I approached the minister, Rev Peter Partington, who was delighted and asked if I could share some testimony. I turned up on the evening and met with Peter who asked if I had brought with me a change of clothes. Well, being a novice to such events, I had simply worn a pair of swimming trunks under my suit. Undaunted, Peter advised he would save me to the end after the other candidates had gone through the waters. There was quite a stir in the congregation when I, in front of the church, began to undress down to my swimwear! It may surprise you to learn the date was the 1st of April (All Fools Day)!

What does evangelism mean to you and can you describe an experience which particularly stands out to you?

‘Preach the word, be instant in season, out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long suffering and doctrine.’ 2 Timothy 4:2

While serving in the police, one day, I was in the custody

suite when a young man, who I recognised, called me over and asked to speak to me. It transpired he had been arrested having only been released from prison a couple of weeks earlier. I took him through to an interview room whereupon he placed his head in his hands and said words to the effect, *‘I swore I’d never end up here again!’*

At this point, I sensed the Lord say to me, *‘Well, tell him,’* so I began to remonstrate with Jesus pointing out I was in an interview room in the police station. The Lord insisted so I relented, sharing with this young man how by accepting Jesus as his Lord and Saviour in his life, He would give him a fresh start. I wasn’t prepared for his response when he replied with, *‘I’ve been told this so many times in prison.’* Again, that still small voice prompted me, *‘Go on, pray with him!’* Again, I procrastinated but eventually asked the lad, *‘Would you accept the Lord Jesus as your Lord and Saviour?’*

‘Yes!’ he responded! After praying with him, I got him a New Testament Bible and wrote in the front the verse from Romans: 8:1.

This is where things took a turn. The young man later confessed to his solicitor what had occurred in the interview room. Sadly, the solicitor didn’t see things quite like I had. He promptly went to see the head of the CID department and asked to know what this new tactic was being employed by his CID Officers to elicit confessions! Apparently, my innocent dealing with the man in custody went viral and I was advised I was for the ‘high jump’. To this day, I’m still waiting and have never been questioned on the genuineness of my faith.

Which Bible verses and songs have a real meaning/importance to you?

‘All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness...’ 2 Timothy 3:16

‘Fear not; for I am with you, be not dismayed; for I am your God: I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you; yes, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.’ Isaiah 41:10

My favourite traditional hymn is *Great is Thy faithfulness.*

My favourite contemporary song is *In Christ Alone* by Keith Getty and Stuart Townend.

In which ways do you see God leading you at the moment?

As I grow older, I’m conscious my outer man is ageing but my inner man is being renewed daily - praise the Lord! Pray that I may remain faithful to that which the Lord has called me.

My Faith & My Job

LIZ GREENHALGH

I have a memory, from when I was around seven years old, where I was tearing pieces of material from the pieces of cardboard that they were attached to. I remember at the time, that it was to help a missionary and I concluded from this experience that I would never want to be a missionary, since missionary life appeared to be very dull!

Fast-forward twenty something years to Romania, where I have been serving for the last thirteen years and serving as a missionary since 2016. My conclusion could not have been further from the truth; missionary life is definitely not dull! It is a walk of faith, trusting God for the things that you need and for the outcome of your serving and input into the lives of people.

I always consider it a great privilege that the Lord has chosen me to serve the wonderful people of Romania and share the love of Jesus with them. I have seen endless times the goodness and faithfulness of the Lord. My faith and trust in Him have definitely grown stronger over the years.

I grew up in the church, but it wasn't until the age of eighteen that God really impacted my life, through someone praying for me. Life carried on and I was training as a dietician, but I had it on my heart to do some short-term mission work. I would often pray, *'Lord, I want to live my life for you, lead me in the way that you want me to go.'* He opened the door after eleven years for me to come to Romania.

The work that I did in a pre-school, whilst looking for a job in dietetics, gave me exactly what I needed for my first years in Romania; I saw how the Lord had prepared me unknowingly for

Having fun at Youth Camp - Group Photograph.



this moment. I had been asked to help on the education project for the children that lived in severe poverty and, a couple of weeks before leaving the UK, I had a message from the organisation's leader to say that the educator had gone on long-term sick leave, and he asked if I could put together an education programme with another lady from Australia. We made a great team - she had management experience and could speak Romanian, but no childcare experience, and I had three years of childcare experience and, together, we were able to put together a programme that worked well.

Since 2016, my role has involved working with people from many walks of life, including continued work with the Roma gypsies, Romanians who also live in poverty and require help under our social canteen, female prisoners, whom I visited before the pandemic and now write to one lady regularly, ladies coming out of a life of prostitution, or breaking free from drug addiction, Ukrainians fleeing the war, adolescents and children who come from tough backgrounds and are desperate to feel loved as well as children and teenagers who come from good homes, but also need spiritual input and discipleship. Every one of these people have their own story and often many have gone through a lot of abuse in childhood, whether from their drunk father, or from having grown up in an orphanage, where they suffered sexual, physical and emotional abuse. The scars run deep and many are crying out to be loved and to be healed.

Whilst the type of people that I work with varies greatly, the goal remains the same for each and every one of them; I am to be the hands and feet of Jesus, sharing the gospel and showing them the love of Jesus. This could be through words, actions and meeting their needs (including housing, clothing, food, education, a hug and a listening ear, a prayer, discipleship, counselling) whilst always pointing them back towards the One who truly understands them and knows what they are going through and who can truly provide for their every need and bring true healing and freedom. There are so many opportunities to speak and pray into people's brokenness.

A teenage girl that I have worked closely with over the last two years



Liz praying with one of the young people.

really needed a lot of love. Her home life of abandonment and abuse brought her to a place of her believing she had no value. Recently, she got baptised and knows that God is her Father. Love always wins!

Being a missionary requires the sacrifice of leaving loved ones behind in the home country, as well as the sacrifice of time, energy, finances, using our material possessions given by the Lord, to serve people. It requires flexibility, humility, creativity, wisdom and discernment and a lot of prayer and a heart to serve and love others. It is important for Jesus to be seen and that He is given the glory.

The Lord never fails to provide, whether this has been financial provision or things needed for the ministry to function.

Two years ago, for example, during the pandemic, I met with two brothers, one a ten-year-old and the other aged eleven - they were both struggling at school and the older one knew just half of the alphabet. Within six months, they were reading independently, and, from this, a small after-school project started in September 2021, helping six children in the same situation. I had a little help with this, but would sometimes have to do it on my own.

My desire was to grow the project this September, but I needed more volunteers, as well as another driver to pick up more children. Plus, I wanted to expand the curriculum beyond just reading and writing. A lot of prayer went into this and, when the project restarted this September, there were five volunteers in total, three drivers and the curriculum has expanded to also provide math, English and mime, which will help with the children's self-esteem and confidence.

Life as a missionary is not always easy and there are many struggles, but my confidence is in the One who holds all things.

Please pray for the work, that the Lord will speak to the hearts of the people that we work with and for protection and provision, especially for the after-school project and for me personally.

KAR AND SONALI'S BIG DAY

Connexional Addresses

Connexional President
Dorothy Kendrick
 37 Holts Lane, Pitsies,
 Oldham, OL4 5NJ
 0161 624 7503
 president@imchurches.org.uk

General Secretary
Brian Rowney
 17 Humber Road, Astley,
 Manchester M29 7HL
 01942 879642
 general.secretary@imchurches.org.uk

Financial Administrator
Alan Britton
 32 Massey Brook Lane,
 Lymm, Cheshire WA13 0PN
 07764 923705
 financial.officer@imchurches.org.uk

Safeguarding Acting Safeguarding Officer
Marilyn Riding
 114 Wigan Road, Ashton in
 Makerfield, Wigan WN4 9SU
 01942 722562
 safeguarding.officer@imchurches.org.uk

Business Department

Registered Office and Resource Centre
 Fleet Street, Pemberton,
 Wigan WN5 0DS
 01942 223526
 resource.centre@imchurches.org.uk

Connexional Services Manager
 01942 223526
 resource.centre@imchurches.org.uk

All Officers' Addresses
 can be found in the Directory which is obtainable from the Resource Centre.

All articles for the magazine should be sent to the Resource Centre postal address or via email to magazine@imchurches.org.uk

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During the week leading up to Friday the 28th of October, and the marriage of two Grappenhall church members, Kar Ming Lei and Sonali Misal, there was much activity within the church hall.

Sonali has attended Grappenhall since she was about five, when her family, Christians from India, first moved to the United Kingdom. The customs of preparations for Indian weddings normally take place over several days prior to the day itself and, whilst not as extensive as back in India, the events at Grappenhall were certainly an experience for members of the fellowship who attended.

Early in the week, Satish and Sharlee, Sonali's parents, assisted by family and friends from the fellowship, prepared the hall for a Haldi, a pre-marriage cleansing and purification ceremony which was to be held on the Wednesday prior to the wedding. The church hall

was decked with red and yellow garlands, the traditional colours for such an event. On the day of the Haldi, the hall was packed with family and friends from a wide range of ethnic roots, Indian, Chinese and British; Kar Ming being of Chinese birth.

The day started at 11am with a Christian service of blessing led by the Reverent Sachin Awale, the bride's uncle and an Anglican minister at St. James' Church, Moss Side, Manchester. This was followed by the traditional anointing of the bride, groom and the guests with a turmeric yellow paste on their faces, arms and legs! Then, followed a sumptuous banquet of various curries and other Indian delicacies.

In the afternoon that followed, the bride and groom first received gifts of fruits from family and friends and then there was the traditional Henna Ceremony. This involved the bride and

many of the ladies' present having henna designs painted on their hands and arms. The afternoon continued in a spirit of celebration for several hours.

On the day of the wedding, the church was filled with family, friends and well-wishers for a traditional service with the exception that there was no best man but a 'best friend', a young Muslim lady who had introduced the couple at university. After which, there was a 'wedding breakfast' held at a local hotel followed in the evening by a Chinese banquet of thirteen courses hosted by the groom's father at a restaurant in Manchester; not everyone had the stamina or appetite for this final act of celebration!

Sonali works in HR for an international company whilst Kar is employed by a global shipping company. The couple have bought a house locally.

Rob Brooks, Grappenhall



Africa in the Autumn. Some of their contacts have begun to take more interest in the Gospel and have attended a local church. They have learnt that a fellow-worker, at present in the capital city, has decided to move to their town and will work in the villages with P. Their team has therefore started to build up again. L.'s online training and counselling project is being used by others in different parts of Africa and by members of their own organisation. Both L. and P. have paid short visits to France; L. for a short medical procedure and P. for a conference. Each returned refreshed and encouraged and felt it was a turning point for them after their bereavements earlier in the year.

Liz Greenhalgh is continuing her ministry with the children and teenagers of the church, as well as building up the numbers of other children in the community who are attending the after-school club, in order to get help with reading, writing and basic arithmetic. She has also been able to keep in contact with a lady in

L. and P. have been encouraged in several ways since their return to North

the women's prison who is very open to the Gospel. A big change in Liz's situation at this time has been caused by the fact that the other workers she was sharing a house with have now moved out, as the local school where they work has found other accommodation for them. Liz feels that the Lord provided that place for her and she is intending to remain and use her home for Bible studies and other activities for the teenagers. Please pray about this development.

Gail and Daniel Castro have been spending most of their time since they returned to Spain, supervising the Rock of Horeb camp, which is now making good headway. As this is situated about an hour's car journey from Camarma, where their work involved church ministry and outreach, this has not been easy, but they assumed it was merely temporary. However, they have now learnt that their mission OMS now wants to focus all its work in Spain on camp ministry. As this is not the ministry they have been called to, they decided to leave Spain in December and spend some three months in the UK while they consider and pray about what God is calling them to do. Please join your prayers with theirs about this.

Anne Fambely, OSM Committee