



South West Connections

South West Cumbria United Area

Charity Registration Number 1141404

Methodist and United Reformed Churches Working Together

ISSUE 8 September 2023

The people of South West Cumbria United Area are committed to proclaiming in word and action that we have a 'God for All' and to giving everyone we have contact with the opportunity to discover more of God and God's purpose in their lives.

From the United Area Mission and Discipleship Policy

MINISTER'S LETTER

Hello!

I'm writing to you from my home in Barrow in Furness after two years of living away studying Theology, Ministry and Mission at The Queen's Foundation in Birmingham. It's great to be back in Cumbria and lovely to be able to live with my husband, Simon, full time again. I'm excited to be joining the South West Cumbria United Area staff team as a Minister from 1st September 2023. I'm looking forward to serving God in a new way and to walking alongside you all as we continue to deepen and strengthen our faith and serve our community. My full-time ministry role is split between the United Area and the South Lakes Methodist Circuit so I'll work half of the week in the United Area and half of the week in the South Lakes Circuit. This means that I will normally only be on the preaching plan in the United Area every other week as I will also preach in the South Lakes Circuit.

Not only is September a new start for me as I start a new role in the church but it's also the start of a new year in the Methodist Church. At the annual Methodist Conference held in June 2023 the incoming President, Rev'd Gill Newton, and Vice President, Deacon Kerry Scarlett, introduced the theme for the 2023/2024 year as Hidden Treasures. The aim of this theme is to encourage us to look for and find the treasures of God in unexpected places, unexpected people and in difficult times. Finding these hidden treasures may help us to discern God's desire for the Church and to identify the potential in each of us and in our churches to grow and work for God. The annual Methodist Prayer Handbook for 2023/2024 aims to help us to explore this theme individually and collectively throughout the year. If you haven't tried following the prayer handbook for your daily devotions yet, I'd encourage you to give it a try. I've found it really helpful especially on those days when I can't find the words to pray.

As I rejoin the United Area I pray that God will guide our work together and help us to discover and develop the hidden treasures in our churches and in the communities in which we live and worship. I look forward to being with you again and to supporting you in a new way as I work to serve God in this area.

With prayers,

Rev'd Hayley Edmondson

Walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us (Ephesians 5:2)

WEBSITES

United Area: <https://swcua.uk>

Regional: www.cumbriamethodistdistrict.org.uk
www.nwsynod.org.uk

National: www.methodist.org.uk
www.urb.org.uk

The next issue will be published in **December 2023**.

Please send all material to Lilian Wood,
89 Risedale Road, Barrow LA13 9QY.

Phone: 01229 825986

Email: lilian.wood4@gmail.com

Deadline for contributions: Sunday 5 November.

REFLECTION

Placing the spotlight on Exodus 3:14 I AM WHO I AM

In terms of The Times most popular baby names of 2023 I doubt if I AM will reach the top ten; however, there is an awful lot packed into these three letters. The scene is a conversation between God and Moses. God has selected Moses to lead the Israelites out of captivity in Egypt. Moses is not too enthusiastic about the idea, but God persists until Moses tacitly agrees and asks God, “Who shall I say has sent me?” and God replies I AM. In essence God is revealing that he is the living God who always was, always is and always will be. God reveals his identity to Moses to give him confidence and of course we know the end of the story – that Moses did lead God’s chosen people to the promised land.

The story however didn’t end there. There was more to come. God’s chosen people did fall into sin yet again and forgot God, but God in his great love didn’t forget them. Fast forward to the New Testament and we hear Jesus in John’s gospel revealing to his followers a series of seven metaphors each beginning I am – I am the bread of life; I am the true vine; I am the light of the world etc.

Any God-fearing Jew would immediately recall God’s word to Moses and make the link but so there is no doubt in their minds Jesus in John 8:58 says, “before Abraham (the father of the nation) was born I am.” Quite simply Jesus is saying in no uncertain terms that he is God.

In a multi-faith, post-Christian western culture it is easy to be influenced by the more superficial claims that Jesus was a good teacher, a great role model or a fantastic storyteller whose example of selflessness is unparalleled in this world and of course those statements describe him well, but they do not identify him. The Bible leaves us in no doubt that Jesus is I AM. He has always been, he always is, and he promises to always be.

At the heart of the Christian gospel is the invitation for each one of us to have a personal relationship with him. Three thousand years ago Moses hesitatingly took God at his word when he identified himself as I AM. Two thousand years ago God fully revealed himself in the person of Jesus who unequivocally identified himself as I AM and his followers had their lives transformed. Today he still invites people to have their lives transformed by identifying with him and walking every succeeding day with him as an integral part of their life.

Charlie Mills

CHAPTER AND VERSE

Proverbs 3:5,6

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.”

Part of the challenge of the Christian life, is to walk with Christ on a daily basis in all that we say, think and do. On the face of it, this doesn’t sound too difficult, but the reality is often harder than we expect. The modern day world in which we live, means that we can control almost every aspect of our lives. We live in a ‘what you want, when you want it’ culture where immediate gratification (and with it short term fulfilment) is always on offer, making the idea of putting your trust in God, an all-knowing, yet intangible being, a challenging concept today.

There are several things to consider in this proverb: ‘**Trust**’ is of course the first word to think about, closely followed by ‘**all**’ (your heart). Who else, but God, could you do this with? Secondly, learning to lean ‘**not**’ on your own understanding, but to put your faith in a higher being is an integral part of being a follower of Christ. And finally, to ‘**acknowledge**’ God in everything that you do – that is to accept the existence of God in your life and live it out in your words, thoughts and actions. While verse 5 is better known, verse 6 throws down the gauntlet and reminds us to be Christlike and live our lives in a manner that is becoming of God himself.

The proverb is advice given by Solomon to his son. In a dream, God asked him what he wanted most, and Solomon replied, “an understanding mind . . . able to discern between good and evil” (I Kings 3:9). Solomon’s wisdom was a quality bestowed upon him by God. We could do worse than follow Solomon’s example of where our sense of judgement and compassion comes from.

Lois Kavanagh

LEADERS OF WORSHIP AND PREACHERS

We are very pleased that Lisa Frankland has been given a note to preach and has begun training as a Local Preacher. Tim Jeffries remains On Trial as a Local Preacher; he has recently been concentrating on the Pioneering Course.

Yvonne Blackley

WORKING WITH OTHER CHURCHES

In the last issue of South West Connections we focused on the work of **Anna Chaplaincy**.

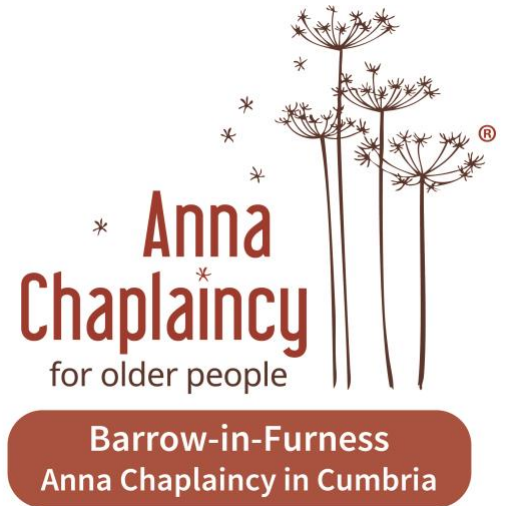
This is an ecumenical, community-based organisation that supports the spiritual needs of older people.

There are two Anna Chaplains in Barrow, Babs Lowes and Janis Preston. They are supported by a team of Anna Friends, Dementia Enablers and other volunteers.

Their work includes:

leading worship in care homes and preparing craft packs for them, singing therapy at Abbey View, Furness General Hospital, Vintage Thursday at St Paul's, and the dementia-friendly tea service at Holy Family.

Members of some of our United Area churches work within the Anna Chaplaincy team as Dementia Enablers and volunteers.



Earlier in the year the **Anna Chaplaincy Barrow** team organised a **Holiday at Home** event, which took place over 4 days at 4 different churches.

This was an ambitious undertaking, which could not have taken place without a great deal of work by the ecumenical organising team and members of the host churches: St Paul's Church of England, Emmanuel Community Church, Holy Family Roman Catholic Church and Spring Mount independent church.

The aim was to provide company and enjoyment for people who lived alone and were unlikely to have a holiday.

A wide range of activities was arranged for those attending, including:

Card-making and watching classic comedy film clips

Chair-based exercises, hand massage, nail painting and table-top games

A presentation on Barrow in the past, singing by schoolchildren and a demonstration of Indian dancing

Making party hats and mocktails in preparation for a final afternoon party, with 60s style food and a singalong session

Worship and 'thoughts for the day'

These events were thoroughly enjoyed by guests and volunteers alike, as shown in this selection from the comments received:

"A great day had by all. Lovely food and good company, with singing and a bit of dancing at Spring Mount."

"It was a brilliant day at Holy Family, because of the children's singing and all the helpful children. And finding out that you could visit the archives at the library."

"Had a great day! After Chair Exercise and a lovely lunch in the afternoon we had hand massage and nails done. It was a lovely day!"

"Was quite nervous at first but once I was sat around everyone I instantly felt calm and loved talking to different people. I felt part of a family."



St Bernard's pupils at Holy Family



Dancers from the Kerala community

To the Lord your God belong the heavens the earth and everything in it. Deuteronomy 10:14

Eco Church is an award scheme run by A Rocha UK for churches in England and Wales who want to demonstrate that the gospel is good news for God's earth.

All our United Area churches are encouraged to care for the planet which God has entrusted to us and to work towards becoming Eco churches.

The information about how to do this is given on the website: <https://ecochurch.arocha.org.uk>

The first step is to take the Eco Survey, which has 5 sections: Worship and Teaching, Buildings, Land, Community and Global Engagement, and Lifestyle.

Congratulations to Ramsden Street, who have gained a bronze award. Here they tell us how they achieved this:

Ramsden Street United Reformed Church are now officially on our eco journey and would like to thank everyone who has supported us and contributed to this. A special thank you to Kate for her encouragement and help in submitting our eco church application form to A Rocha UK. The form was all completed online and we are now proud to have achieved our bronze award. The certificate is on display in our community room.

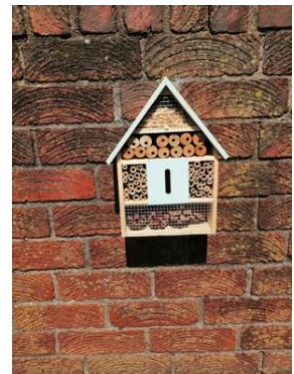
A coffee morning was held on the 16th June to finish planting our planters and put up some bunting to celebrate our success. Our courtyard now has a planter and hanging baskets (thank you Nigel and Reg), a bird house and feeder and a bug hotel, to see if we can encourage the wildlife in our area. This has all helped towards our award. As we live in an urban area we do not have any green space, but we have used the outdoor space we have to try to encourage bugs, birds and butterflies and all the plants are planted in peat free compost.

We have made some changes indoors too; we use eco-friendly cleaning products and as we always have, we continue to recycle. Our electricity is from 100% green energy. Our tea, coffee and sugar are all Fairtrade.

We remember to worship and pray too for our environment and try to be good custodians of this wonderful world in which we live, that God gave us.

We think also of our neighbours around the world, who often live in poverty and experience the most negative impact of climate change despite this being caused by more wealthy nations.

Our journey has begun and will continue as we explore more environmentally friendly, energy saving options for our building ... silver award next!



Congratulations are due to **Dalton Community Church**, who have also gained the Bronze Eco Church Award

FROM THE AREA TRUSTEES

May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace.

Dear brothers and sisters, we can't help but thank God for you, because your faith is flourishing and your love for one another is growing (2 Thessalonians 1:2,3).

Welcome to the start of another year!!

We welcome Hayley Edmondson as a probationer minister in South West Cumbria United Area and the South Lakes Methodist circuit, with pastoral responsibility for Millom, Broughton, Kirkby and Ulverston Methodist churches. She will be splitting her time between the two circuits.

Kate Hunt continues as minister with pastoral charge for Dalton and Askam and Ramsden St churches and picks up further responsibilities across the URC Cumbria Missional Partnership.

And we say a formal farewell to Dave Edmondson, who has faithfully served in the Area for 2 years. Dave was asked to hold pastoral care of Dalton Community Church and Askam Methodist Church for 2 years from August 2021, and continued to offer support and guidance (particularly on Methodist systems and processes) to Kate when she arrived in August 2022. He has been a valued member of the Area trustees meeting, offering wisdom and advice, and has been an absolute star in offering to fill appointments on the plan. I know his preaching and piano playing have been much appreciated across the Area churches, as well as his support for other events and training. Dave will still be around, though we should appreciate that he has been asked to hold pastoral care for churches in South Lakes circuit, and he feels this is the primary call on his time at this moment. I'm sure you'll join me in wishing Dave all the best for the next stage of his ministry, and we continue to hold him and his family in our prayers.

I'd like to say a big thank you to our local preachers, too, at this time – as well as filling the Sunday services, our preachers also contribute to the weekly Worship at Home sheets, the online gathering that is Pause and Pray, and the content and editing of the monthly Service on the Screen, as well as offering services in local care homes and other midweek services, Bible studies and prayer meetings. They all work extremely hard, and we are grateful for all they do, alongside ecumenical colleagues and retired ministers who also support us.

Our Area trustees went through a process of Renewed Beginnings this time last year, and during the year this is being rolled out to all the Area churches. This is a process of appreciating all that we are doing for the Kingdom of God, and listening for God's guidance for the future.

May God's grace be with you all (Hebrews 13:25).

*Rev Dr Helen Hooley
Superintendent and lead minister, South West Cumbria United Area*

NEWS FROM RE:NEW

Well, it's that time of year again where I start talking about Christmas. The pre-orders have started arriving and I can tell you that there are some beautiful cards this year. Not only do we have our regular supply but we also have cards supporting the foodbank. The order forms will be out soon so you'll be able to have your first look. Unfortunately, I'm unable to get the photos of the foodbank cards in the order form so you will have to come in and see them in person. We also have Methodist and URC 2024 diaries in this year so please let me know if you would like one.

If your church is doing a Christmas fayre or coffee morning this year and you would like to support our shop by holding a stall then please get in contact. I've already got 4 booked in (Trinity, Beacon Hill, Dalton and Grange-over-Sands) so don't miss your opportunity. If you would also be willing to run the stall at your event then please let us know as well. Last year we had three in one morning and we managed it but any help would be amazing.

We have some new ranges of greetings cards in the shop now including specific ages which we have been asked for on occasion.

Please continue to pray for the future of the shop and the direction in which we are going, and please consider coming to join our amazing team of volunteers. Even if all you can do is a morning a month any help would be gratefully appreciated.

We are currently really short of ladies clothing in particular, so ladies if you're having a clear out then please spare us a thought.

Thanks and blessings

Tim Jeffries

FOCUS ON VICKERSTOWN METHODIST CHURCH



This is a good time to focus on Vickerstown, as we celebrated the 25th anniversary of the formal opening of our ‘new’ building on June 13th this year. The current church building stands on roughly the same land footprint as the old wooden Sunday school hut, at the end of Warren Street on the left. The original church building was built around the same time as much of the original housing on Vickerstown, developed as accommodation for the workers of the shipyard (then owned by Vickers) in the very early 1900s. There has been a worshipping Methodist community on the site since 1905, so we also had centenary celebrations in 2005 marked with an exhibition, a concert from the British Methodist Youth Choir and a very large cake! When the much larger old building became too

expensive to heat and maintain, developing dry rot among other problems, it was sold and the current building was developed next door – much easier to look after, considerably warmer and more flexible in its use, as well as much better suited to the current size of congregation (averaging out at around 12-14 on a Sunday morning). A block of 6 flats now stands where the old building was, retaining the old church tower facing onto the Promenade and an overall resemblance to the architecture of the original church, as it is in a conservation area. The current building is less visible, separated from the Promenade by a steep banking and our lovely garden, so we have installed a large wooden cross, sign and noticeboard on the banking so the church’s presence can be seen from the Promenade. We try to keep the vegetation on the bank under control, though getting at it is a challenge!

Having the outside area, as well as a view over the channel from the large windows all down that side of the main room, was part of our motivation for joining the Eco-Congregation scheme (now Eco-Church) in its fairly early stages. We have held an award since 2010, though we still sit at Bronze level – as other churches in the Area catch us up, perhaps this will spur us on towards a Silver award. The garden allows us to host the Area Bonfire and to join in with national efforts like the Garden Birdwatch and Big Butterfly Count; it is also used by our Uniformed Organisations at times and people are always drawn to the windows to look out: a lovely list of birds they had spotted during the day was left for us once by polling station staff after a particularly quiet election day! All the flowers and greenery for this lovely Easter Cross from 2021 came from our own garden and pictures of various flowers as the seasons passed featured in printed updates to the congregation sent out during Covid lockdowns. We also like to use tubs and hanging baskets to brighten up the street side of the church.



Vickerstown is a Fairtrade Church, a status we renewed during this year’s Fairtrade Fortnight, with a stall at every coffee morning, Fairtrade tea, coffee and sugar in the kitchen and an additional focus at one coffee morning every year – in 2022 we even had the Mayor of Barrow with us (in red at the back, in front of the range of Fairtrade Easter eggs we had from Re:new).

We hold coffee mornings roughly once a month, Food & Fellowship gatherings every other month – on the even-numbered months, so we can have pancakes in February! – and Bible Study once a fortnight. It has been good to welcome a few new members over the last year or two.

The church prayer group meets in members’ homes every other week and leads our service twice a quarter – which is very much appreciated. Rainbows and Brownies meet weekly in term time, and the building serves as the local polling station and also as a children’s party venue on a regular basis. We would love to see the premises used more during the week and by the community.



FROM OUR CHURCHES

Trinity

Our monthly coffee mornings continue, and are enjoyed by all who attend. In May we supported Christian Aid in a number of ways. We had envelopes available in church for people to use, did a little (but very successful) House to House collecting, some less successful deliver only collecting, had an e-envelope, a Just Giving page supporting a sponsored walk, and a social evening with pie and peas, a quiz, and some other fun and games, including two short videos showing why we were raising the money. We raised over £1400 for Christian Aid during May.

Our most exciting news is that we now have an outside noticeboard facing Abbey Rd. The Community Payback Team put it up for us. They were very efficient (in spite of the rain), and we would recommend any church to use their services. We're pleased to have something showing passersby that we're still a functioning congregation, and that they're welcome to come to our services and other activities.

Sue Millard

Vickerstown

Our main event at Vickerstown in the last few months was the 25th anniversary, on June 13th, of the opening of what I still think of as our 'new' church building – it's probably about time we stopped calling it that! We gathered for a shared meal, one of our regular 'Food & Fellowship' events, and put out scrapbooks documenting the fundraising and building process, the building plans and photographs and newspaper clippings featuring church members and friends over the past 25 years. Some people look much the same; the one who was 3 in the picture we had and is now 18 had unsurprisingly changed rather more... We kept these out for the Area meeting held at Vickerstown later that week, allowing a few different people to take a look, and a celebration service with Helen the following Sunday followed by a buffet lunch and church meeting.

At our Bible study gatherings we have been looking at the book of Daniel since Easter, chapter by chapter, and after the more familiar accounts of the fiery furnace, Belshazzar's feast and the lion's den we are now into the second half, which has had some interesting parallels to Revelation which was the focus of our services throughout July (our choice of Bible month). Also in July, at the AGM of the joint Walney Churches Scout group, several of the Beavers and Cubs were presented with their Chief Scout's Bronze and Silver awards, the highest available to their sections and a great achievement representing a lot of effort from the young people and their leaders.

Karen Edmondson

Beacon Hill

In June we were visited by Mike Hardie, our new rep for The Leprosy Mission. He gave a very interesting and inspiring presentation during our morning service, after which we had a collection for TLM. The following Saturday afternoon saw a fundraising event with the theme of butterflies, with a quiz and wordsearch and appropriate food, including a wonderful butterfly-shaped cake. Donations on the day, with other contributions from people who were unable to attend, added up to a total of £356 for the work of The Leprosy Mission.

In July we renewed our Fairtrade church status, having first been recognised as a Fairtrade church in 2013.

At the end of July we had the second in a series of meetings on the theme Renewed Beginnings, to review our vision for the life and work of the church.

Lilian Wood

Ramsden Street

We were pleased to welcome the children from Greengate school when they came to sing for us at our coffee morning. As always the children were delightful and Kate taught us all a new song which included sign language too. The children chatted with us and they enjoyed juice and jaffa cakes before they had to return to school.

It was lovely to have the children from Greengate school visit us again with their reading books on June 6th. We enjoyed listening to them read their stories and chatting with them afterwards over refreshments.

The children invited us to join them for the school's garden party on Friday 7th July to celebrate 150 years of Greengate Junior School. Several of us went along and enjoyed looking at old photographs and listening to the choir sing for us.

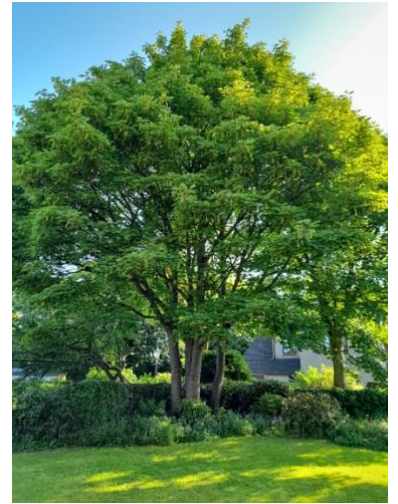
We held a summer social evening on Friday 21st July when we had fun doing quizzes, playing beetle and enjoying refreshments.

Anne Stevenson

Askam

Following the work outside our church that saw the felling of three overgrown sycamore trees, and the replacement with a maple, we are fortunate to have a volunteer, through his employer, who is helping keep our garden tidy alongside our neighbour who mows the lawn for us. We have also carried out work inside the church and are in the process of changing our lightbulbs to LED. The long life energy saving bulbs that were guaranteed ten years were installed almost twenty years ago, but the new LED bulbs should provide quicker and even more efficient lighting. The electrician is also carrying out an assessment of the wiring and removing the three phase supply that was originally installed to service the old storage heating system that was taken out many years ago; he is also fitting new emergency lighting and replacing the exterior lighting from halogen to LED.

Rev Kate Hunt has been taking us through the process of becoming an Eco church and we hope that these changes will be a good start.



Our Sisterhood programme for the coming year is in the process of being sorted with an exciting list of speakers. Margaret and Dorothy are pleased that some of our newer members are enthusiastic helpers. Visitors and new members are very welcome – it is not essential that you reside in the village!

Our chair based Exercise Class continues on Thursdays from 10 to 11 am. It is a half hour workout with a cuppa and chat afterwards. Everyone is welcome.

Kirkby

Each month we continue to hold our twice monthly get togethers, both 10am – 11.30am:

1st Wednesday Coffee and Company, 3rd Wednesday Craft and Chat.

In May we held a Coffee Morning with Plants, Cakes etc which was well supported, and then in June we took part in a United Service with the other denominations in the Community. It was held in the Community Centre the Sunday after the Kirkby Fair.

July was a quiet month as some members were away on holiday.

Beryl Hollowell

Millom

Millom hosted the Knitted Bible for a few weeks in August, with the Baptists having the New Testament. It was lovely to see, even if not as many as we would have liked came to see it.

Lucy has held a very successful craft session every Friday during the holidays, for which we give our thanks. She is also taking and planning a number of services, on different themes.

Our coffee mornings continue and grow on a Thursday morning.

We wish to thank Kate for all her hard work this year; we will still see her, and welcome Hayley.

We are a small church with reducing membership, but we are being used by and for the community, which can only be a good thing.

Liz Watson

Lord, when it is so easy to criticise, help me to encourage;
 when it is so easy to grumble, help me to be thankful;
 when it is so easy to hold back, help me to volunteer;
 when it is so easy to complain, help me to appreciate;
 when it is so easy to hold a grudge, help me to forgive;
 when it is so easy to put down, help me to build up;
 when it is so easy to be negative, help me to be positive;
 when it is so easy to be despondent, help me to be hopeful;
 and give me the will and strength to do all these things.
 Amen.