



South West Connections

South West Cumbria United Area

Charity Registration Number 1141404

Methodist and United Reformed Churches Working Together

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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

As I write this we are still in the middle of the grey days of February preparing to begin Lent. One Lent when our children were at Sunday Club, we created two characters by drawing round children and decorating them. One was called GUS and one TOM. GUS stood for Give Up Something and TOM Take On More. We discussed what each might mean during Lent – I wonder what they might mean to you. Do you traditionally give up something or take on new activities, prayer or study to help you focus in Lent?

In some churches we have plans afoot for knitting, making, reading, colouring, coming together to reflect on God's word, the journey to the cross and Easter, and I know that a walking pilgrimage has been planned for each of the Saturdays. I am a little nervous as I am in no way a skilled knitter as I begin the knitting project with groups. But I know that with the assistance of more able knitters we can work it out together, and as we share the reflections accompanying the knitting and our creative activities we will come to a different understanding than if we read them alone. Similarly, reading 'Tarry Awhile', the Archbishop of Canterbury's Lent book, alongside others and hearing each other's ideas, I know I will gain much more from the author's insights than if I read alone.

At our recent Covenant services, we were reminded of this crucial journeying together – and across Cumbria the Missional Partnership steering group of the URC is enjoying hearing the good news stories and the challenges from across the county. It is so helpful to share our joys and our difficulties in this way and sometimes learn something that may work in our own small corner, patterns that may help us create community, reach out to those on the edge and share God's story.

Last year on Maundy Thursday, the United Area gathered at Dalton Community Church and shared a meal based on the Passover meal alongside hearing stories from each church community, such a celebration of our shared lives of faith. This year we will share The Stations of the Cross – each church is bringing a poster that has been coloured and completed by their community with a story from that group. We will share a simple meal together with communion to retell and remember Christ's meal with his disciples, his gift to us – and re-member the churches of the United Area as the body of Christ in this place. I pray that whatever you choose to take on or give up this Lent, you may come closer to the God of love, who died on a cross and lived again so that all may have life, life in all its fullness.

God Bless

Rev'd Kate

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

REFLECTION

Placing the spotlight on 1 Corinthians 1:18

“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God”.

I guess that if we were to ask the average person in the street what are the first thoughts which come to mind in relation to Easter the response would be Easter eggs, new lambs, trees coming back to life and early spring flowers. The cross I suspect would possibly be well down the list if mentioned at all. The reality however is that the story of Easter is the message of the cross.

On the first Good Friday the cross of Christ physically divided the two thieves who were being crucified with him. One repented and professed Jesus Christ as Lord and was assured of eternal life, the other scorned and we can only assume died in sin. Paul in our text makes it plain that the cross, and in particular people's perception of what the message of the cross is, divides humanity into two groups as starkly as the final moments of the two thieves did 2000 years ago. There are no shades of grey.

The perception of the cross to those who are perishing is one of foolishness. The idea of an itinerant preacher rejected by his own race, nailed to a cross to atone for the sins of each one of us because we are unable to atone for them ourselves, seems totally absurd. 2000 years ago the Jews had anticipated a very different kind of Messiah, not one who couldn't save himself (Matt. 27:42). Sadly the same situation obtains today; some completely reject the message of the cross and the need to repent while others trust in their good works or religious practices and reject God's way of salvation through faith in Christ.

In contrast those who have committed their life to Christ understand it to be God's most powerful act. He wasn't outmatched by either the Jews or the Romans, the resurrection bears testimony to that and by definition to the limitless power of God combined with his limitless love to sacrifice his son for human sin. This means that eternal life is a gift to all who wish to accept it by repenting and committing their lives to Jesus.

On the first Good Friday one thief reached a crossroad in his life when he acknowledged Christ as the sinless son of God and by God's grace he had the assurance of eternal life. The other rejected the opportunity.

As Easter approaches I would encourage you to look at the cross and reflect on the power of God who gave Jesus to take the sins of the world upon himself so that we might have eternal life.

Bearing shame and scoffing rude,
In my place condemned he stood;
Sealed my pardon with his blood:
Alleluia! What a Saviour!
Philip Bliss (1838-1876)

Charlie Mills

COMMENT

When I first read Charlie's reflection I was forcibly struck by a thought, which I would like to share with you. This is not a reply to Charlie's message, but something that developed from it.

I'm sure that many of you, like me, have been blessed by having a Christian upbringing, beginning in Sunday School and then enjoying many years of church membership. We have the great advantage of being able to share freely in worship and fellowship, something denied to many people in the world. We have various ways of learning more about our faith, not least through listening to our ministers and local preachers.

So we are in the fortunate position of being able to make a considered decision about whether or not to follow Jesus. But I'm concerned about the people who have never had the opportunity to fully hear the gospel message. This applies to people in our own community, who can't be expected to take seriously something that has never been properly explained to them. And who bears the responsibility for explaining the gospel to the people around us? I think the answer is obvious.

Lilian Wood

If anyone has any thoughts to share about any of the contributions in South West Connections please feel free to send them to me.

CHAPTER AND VERSE

John 3 verse 16

When Lilian asked me to contribute, and I agreed, I began to wonder what my favourite verse was amongst so many. In the end I settled on probably the best-known verse in the Bible, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life”.

For me this verse has everything, it could probably be used as the shortest sermon imaginable.

It starts by reminding us that God loves us so much. Sometimes we lose touch with reality, especially in tough times.

It then states how much God loves us, by giving us his son, his only son, to die on the cross for all our sins.

Then comes the condition, it is not complicated or in small print. The condition is that we have to believe in Jesus.

I have fallen out with a few people when I have stated this in a sermon. The well-known saying is that God has no grandchildren (or nephews, nieces or in-laws). The belief has to be a personal one in which we commit ourselves to Jesus.

Some of us will be able to quote the time and the date that this took place. Others of us (me included) see it as a rolling project where we have grown in the faith. Whichever group you belong to doesn't matter, what matters is that you have made that commitment. If anybody reading this isn't sure whether they are committed – do it now.

The verse concludes with the reward, that we are promised eternal life. A promise that whatever good things we have now will be as nothing when compared to the good things on offer when we go to meet our maker.

When you think about what this verse says to us, you can surely see why I have chosen it to talk about.

Blessings

Bob Mantle

SPECIAL REPORT

3Generate: The Methodist Children and Youth Assembly

3Generate 2023 took place on the first full weekend of October, 6th-8th, at the NEC in Birmingham. With fond memories of attending MAYC (Methodist Association of Youth Clubs) London and provincial weekends back when I was a teenager, and glad to know there was still an opportunity for Methodist young people to meet together and realise there are more people out there like them, I decided to volunteer for the support team. With various roles available, this numbered over 200, with almost 1,300 young people (aged 4-23) and their leaders to support over the weekend.

The aim of the event is to create a space for this age group to develop their faith: inviting them to listen to God, each other and the world, and discern how they should respond as well as feeding back what they feel the wider church and society should be like. All within 5 of the centre's exhibition halls, there is a huge tented village where attendees and their leaders sleep (the youngest age group, 4-7, just came during the day on Saturday rather than staying over), another small one – as far away as possible! – for the volunteers to get some peace and quiet, a big catering/dining area and then the main events area. This is referred to as 'The Town' and had an inflatable chapel for prayer and reflection, a Town Hall for discussion and debate, an active zone for letting off some steam, an 'outdoors' zone (indoors) for connecting with nature, a global area, creative arts and a 'wilderness' area exploring this concept in the Bible and the overall story of God's plan for his people.

There were also plenty of opportunities for worship and some musical and theatrical performances in an arena nearby, and a space for leaders to grab a coffee and a break. I've still probably forgotten something! My own opportunities for seeing much of this in action were limited, as I'd signed up as a night steward, one of a small team keeping an eye on things – and trying to keep the noise down and everyone in their beds – while everyone else was asleep, so we then slept during the day. It seemed to be the natural place for a shift worker, and I found I had a nurse and a couple of street pastors (what Barrow called street angels) for company on the team. From what I did see, though, this is a very special and worthwhile event and I hope to be back in October 2024.

Karen Edmondson

Most merciful God,
 who by the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ
 delivered and saved the world:
 grant that by faith in him who suffered on the cross,
 we may triumph in the power of his victory:
 through Jesus Christ our Lord.
 Amen.

The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it. Psalm 24:1

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.

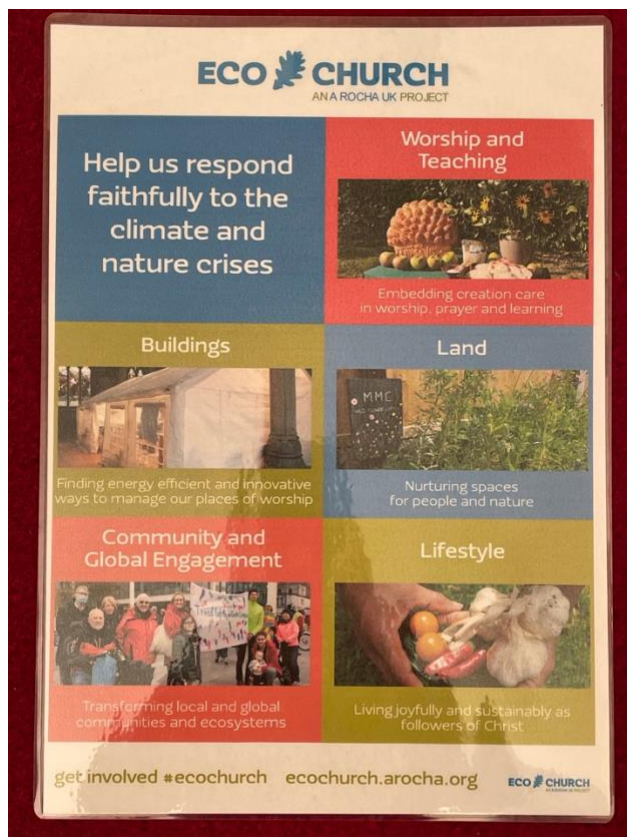
All our United Area churches are encouraged to care for the planet which God has entrusted to us and to work towards becoming Eco churches.

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

If your church is in the process of becoming an Eco church you may wish to display a poster to show everyone who visits the premises what is involved. You can find a variety of posters on the Eco church website.

Within the Lifestyle category we are encouraged to follow the principles of reduce, re-use and recycle. Sue Millard has produced a poster showing where you can take soft plastic to be recycled and what sort of bags and wrappers will be accepted. (A copy has been sent to every church.)

Please do consider collecting soft plastic if you don't do this already – it's so easy to do and it's amazing how much you can collect each week.



You can recycle all these soft plastics at

Biscuit and chocolate wrappers
Crisp packets and sweet bags
Plastic carrier bags
Baby, pet food, detergent and cleaning pouches
Cereal liners
Bread bags
Frozen food bags
Toilet roll wrapping
Cheese, fish and meat wrapping
Delivery bags
Salad, pasta, and rice bags
Multi-pack wrapping
Plastic film lids



Collect them in a bag
(Make sure they're clean)
Take them with you when you go shopping
Put them in the soft plastic recycling container

Congratulations to our Anglican friends in the **Diocese of Carlisle** on gaining a **Bronze Eco Award**.

This award recognises the Diocese's Net Zero Action plan, as well as the work of its environmental group which monitors action and progress. It comes just weeks after work was completed on the Diocese's first eco vicarage in Natland, near Kendal.

To gain Bronze 10% of churches must be registered under the Eco Church scheme and 5% must have gained an award. Currently in the Diocese 20% are registered, with 10% having already gained an award.

The Bronze award also takes account of the promotion of environmental issues in church schools and is a reflection of how eco issues are embedded in ministerial training.

MY CALLING

Hello, my name is Lisa Frankland and for approximately 30 years I was a primary school teacher. I am currently a local preacher on note. I would like to share my calling with you.

I had a serious stroke nearly 10 years ago. After suffering from depression for a while and not feeling like I could share my feelings with friends or family I eventually spoke up to my doctor. My doctor told me most people die following a stroke like I had experienced. Immediately I felt that God had kept me alive for a reason; that reason was to help people. Initially I trained to become a counsellor. During the first Covid lockdown my mother became seriously ill and unfortunately passed away. I was also worried about my son at that time and found myself praying a lot. I felt it was time I returned to church. Having received a warm welcome at Hartington Street I realised that my role was supposed be in church.

I mentioned I wanted to train as a local preacher and people suggested being a worship leader first, which I tried. Recently the desire to become a local preacher has grown stronger and I mentioned my desire to Helen, our minister. This was my calling. I did question my reason for wanting to be a local preacher. Was it my selfish way of redeeming myself for losing my way in life and for not attending church? But I truly believe it is God's will that I use my skills from teaching to become an effective preacher.

Part of my training, alongside preaching, is accessing an online learning platform which has various modules to complete. The first module I looked at focused on calling. I found this module reassuring as other local preachers shared their calling. I learned that calling isn't all bells and whistles; it can be a voice in your head telling you what God wants you to do or just knowing it. I also learned that the difference between just doing a job that needs doing and a calling is passion. In my case the burning desire to preach and to do it well so that God's word is shared effectively to inspire others to live a life of faith.

Lisa Frankland

NEWS FROM RE:NEW

Well, Christmas has been and gone and what an amazing time we had. We appeared at the most Christmas events that we have ever done, so thanks to those who hosted us and those who supported us. Now though with Easter just around the corner, we will be appearing at a church near you with the Easter products. We have all the usual chocolate on offer and some new items too. After the huge success of the round ceramic decorations at Christmas we have some now that can be hung up and displayed all year round and also some nice boxed ceramic sets of coasters. Our Easter cards this year are in support of the Food Bank and Tear Fund. Please get in contact if you would like to place an order for any items.

The shop currently has five dedicated volunteers who come in on a weekly basis, but we do need more. If you or someone you know might be interested in helping out then please pray about it and get in contact. We currently have no volunteers on a Saturday and no volunteers in the afternoons apart from on a Thursday. If all you can offer is one afternoon a month that is totally awesome and would help a great deal. There are customers who come in and all they come in to do is to have a chat with someone as they live on their own; if they didn't come to the shops in town, they wouldn't speak to anyone all day – could you be a friend to that customer? The suggested hours we have for our volunteers' shifts are 10:00-12:00 and 1:00-3:00 but these are fully flexible to work around you.

Please continue to pray for our move onto the high street as the process moves forward. Pray that more volunteers will come forward, that we will be able to make new connections and that the group that come to use the meeting space or are formed out of the meeting place will be of help and benefit to those they are setting out to reach.

We are currently really short of stock in general but in particular men's wear. So gentlemen if you're having a sort out then please spare us a thought. Thank you.

Blessings to you all

Tim Jeffries

THY KINGDOM COME 9-19 MAY 2024

Thy Kingdom Come (TKC) is a global ecumenical prayer movement that invites Christians around the world to pray from Ascension to Pentecost for more people to come to know Jesus. Since it began in May 2016, God has grown TKC from a dream of possibility into a movement which unites more than a million Christians in prayer, in nearly 90% of countries worldwide, across 85 different denominations and traditions – so that friends and family, neighbours and colleagues might come to faith in Jesus Christ.

For more information see the website www.thykingdomcome.global

FOCUS ON HARTINGTON STREET

150 years ago this year a group of Primitive Methodist Christians, who had come to Barrow for work in the iron and steel works, made the bold decision to leave the upper room in Clive Street where they were holding services, and fulfil their vision to open "Bethel", a new church on land between Hartington Street and Keyes Street. It marked the beginning of a witness to Hindpool which continues today.

In recent times, a large part of our outreach has focused on children's ministry. Messy church occurs monthly on a Saturday afternoon and has been running for a number of years. Each session follows a theme or a particular Bible story. The sessions follow a structure of craft, story, short talk and children's worship songs followed by a hot meal shared together. This allows time for church members and the session leader to engage with parents and form lasting friendships. Between 40 and 50 children and adults attend messy church and this is our biggest worshipping congregation. Our newest venture is 'brick church'. This involves exploring a Bible story or parable through the medium of Lego! To date we have explored the Easter Story and Simeon and Anna in the Temple. For these services, we use the animated Bible and all those attending (adults included) create something out of Lego. The 'show and tell' aspect of this act of worship has proved to be a time of great sharing of testimony and faith and we plan to develop this in future worship.



Messy church art work



Over the years, we have always enjoyed a great friendship with our neighbours at the Salvation Army. Last year, our friends from the SA joined with us for 'alternative worship' on Good Friday and again for our Coronation Sunday service where we explored graffiti art. We are delighted to have welcomed the new Captains, Sarah and Matt, to our messy church team and continue the partnership we have with the Salvation Army.

Graffiti art on the theme King of Kings from the Coronation Sunday service

We try to make giving a priority at HSt and to prioritise key times of the year such as Harvest, Christmas and Lent. The Christian Blind Mission (CBM) and Tearfund is where we have focused our efforts most recently. The CBM became our charity of choice because church members had benefited from cataract operations so we decided to fund cataract operations in the developing world. If the Sunday school are leading an initiative, we select a charity focusing on children. Our Treasurer does a great job of finding charities where the government/anonymous benefactors double your donation. Last Christmas, we were able to quadruple our giving with such a scheme.

Perhaps one of the things people have done consistently over the years at HSt is to pray. The knit and natter community weave prayer into their sessions and pray together weekly and the church has an active body of 'prayers' who work unnoticed behind the scenes. Over the years many prayers have been answered – most recently, a set of twins joined the church family! But, in all sincerity, members pray often and the support of the HSt prayer team is unparalleled. To that end, the future direction of HSt is very much in God's hands. This year will mark 150 years of witness. We will celebrate all that has gone before, but we will also bring before God the future direction of the witness of our church and we look forward with anticipation to the plans He has for us!

FROM OUR CHURCHES

Trinity

As expected, the Christmas season was busy. Advent groups were attended, both in person and virtually, we ran our usual Christmas card greetings, where people send their greetings, not with cards, but via a notice on our board, and email, and attended a number of special services. We had a very enjoyable morning at Victoria Infants School where we were able to share the story of a Christingle with well over fifty children. They were delighted that they could take home their finished Christingles.

Victoria Infants School came to us on December 17th when we had a joint service with the Baptist Church, and children from the school presented the Nativity story to a large congregation. We're very lucky to have such a good relationship with the school. Our evening service that day was a candlelit carol service.

The new year has seen a slight change to our Coffee Mornings on the third Saturday each month. We're having a Bring and Buy stall, so if you have anything you no longer need – anything at all, toys, plants, toiletries, cakes, ornaments, tools, etc – bring it along, and enjoy a coffee at the same time. You never know, you might pick up a bargain!

Sue Millard

Vickerstown

Our annual Christmas card appeal for 'All We Can' raised £190 which has gone to various developing countries to fund the usual eclectic mix of bees, toilets, clean water, education and support projects! We also had a lovely display of cards. It was good to welcome our uniformed organisations to an Advent church parade service with Helen, thinking about light, with the children all getting involved.

Sadly we said farewell to two of our members in January after they died a couple of days apart in December. May Austin had been a faithful member at Trinity for many years before coming to Vickerstown a few years ago when she moved to Walney – she was already a regular attender at our coffee mornings. Gillian Ogilvie represented Vickerstown occasionally at Area meetings and was a very active member of the congregation right up until her last few months, a frequent (and excellent) reader during worship and instrumental in our prayer group, 'Prayer & Praise' services and pastoral support networks. They are both missed and we continue to hold their families in our prayers.

Karen Edmondson

Hartington Street

The Facebook virtual advent calendar got off the ground on the 1st Sunday in Advent and Rebekah faithfully posted a 'virtual door' to be opened every day until Christmas morning. Each year we try to reach a wider audience and share the message of Jesus' birth.

We held a Christingle service for the second time and were pleased to welcome one of our messy church families to share with us. We had a great time assembling the Christingle, wrestling with oranges and learning about what each aspect of the Christingle represents.

This year the storeroom of a Chinese takeaway served as the stable for the nativity and there was indeed a "delivery" in Bethlehem that night! In case you were wondering, we did dance and this year the 3 Kings led the cast in a dance to S Club 7's *Reach for the Stars*. Mark spoke to us about accepting the 'delivery' of the infant King and what it means to know Jesus.

The messy church Christmas party proved to be a very lively well attended event. We had an afternoon of party games, craft and shared fellowship together over a Christmas dinner.

On Christmas Eve the Sunday morning congregation were delighted to worship jointly with members of the Salvation Army, the toddler group and the messy church congregation. Together, as one big community, we turned the church into a cinema and watched *The Star*, an animated version of the nativity. On Christmas morning we celebrated Jesus' birth with all age worship, and a short programme of carols played by HST Brass was received favourably over tea and Christmas cake.

Finally, we held our second Lego church in January where we learned about Simeon and Anna seeing Jesus as a baby in the Temple. We built things to symbolise times when we had everlasting faith like Simeon, or to represent an 'Anna moment' where we had been so blessed by God, we had worshipped Him immediately.

Lois Kavanagh

Beacon Hill

As usual, instead of sending each other Christmas cards we sent one card to the church family and made a donation to All We Can, the Methodist relief and development organisation; we raised £260. Our family carol service was led by the uniformed organisations, and at that service we collected £106 for the homeless shelter.

Our Advent groups were attended once again by two of our friends from Ramsden Street. Each week the group was led by two or three different people, which meant that meetings were more varied than usual, particularly when it came to the craft activities.

We have recently updated our sound system and installed a 75" television screen in the old pulpit at the front of the church. This can be operated from the current pulpit and is a great addition to the quality of worship. It will also be useful when we host Methodist District Synod at the end of April.

Lilian Wood

Ramsden Street

A very good relationship continues to develop between our Church and Greengate Junior School. We have enjoyed the children reading their favourite books to us; singing at our Friday coffee morning in December; the children and adults choir singing at our Christingle service when we had to find extra chairs to accommodate everyone; and we were invited to go along to the school nativity service – which was delightful.

We raised enough money at our Harvest service to twin all three of our toilets (South Sudan, Mozambique and Uganda).

Soup lunches have been held on the fourth Friday of each month following our coffee morning and prayers for our community.

Anne Stevenson

Askam

Following the recent storms, Askam Methodist have had repairs carried out to the ceiling in the chapel which was damaged by water ingress from a missing slate. The roof has been repaired and the damage inside made good but we will need some quite major redecorations as a result. We hope to have these in hand in this current year. Many thanks to our Area Property Trustee, Charlie Mills, and Hudson & Johnson for swift action. Also thanks to Liz and Jeff Gaskell for their hard work and the loan of the dehumidifier. We are still awaiting completion of the electrical safety inspection and have had a new electricity smart meter fitted. The engineer tidied up the area and after this work and the clean up after the ceiling damage the vestry/office has been given a much needed spruce up thanks to Margaret and Alan.

Alan Mason

Kirkby

At the end of November we held our yearly event of making a Christmas Decoration for the door. On December 30th we had Carols round the Village Christmas Tree. This year there were 30 plus. It grows each year – great.

In January we held our Covenant Service with Hayley. Also with Hayley, Mary, Jacky and Beryl joined with others from Millom Methodists to do the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion training. It was a really interesting day and great to catch up with friends from Millom. We also held our usual Coffee & Company and Craft & Chat.

I am now knitting Twiddlemuffs for Cartmel Grange Nursing Home as my husband is now in there. They are so pleased as they haven't had any since Covid. They would also like blankets. So get your needles out and you may also be able to help a home near you.

Beryl Hollowell

WEBSITES

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

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

National: www.methodist.org.uk
www.urc.org.uk

The next issue will be published in **June 2024**.

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Deadline for contributions: Sunday 5 May.