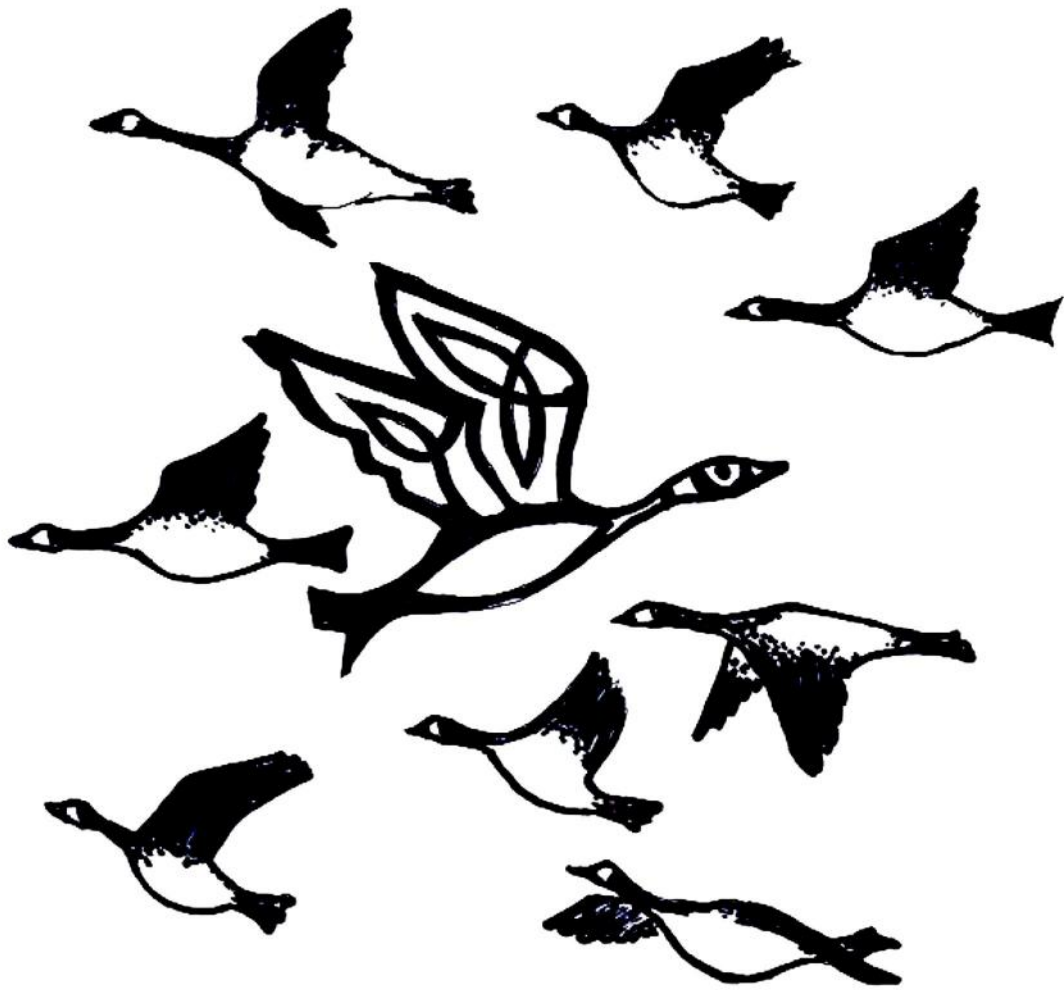


Wesley Memorial *news*

The magazine from Wesley Memorial Church, Oxford | Summer 2015



Nonconformity

Dear friends,

The story is told of the proud parents watching their soldier son taking part in the Trooping of the Colour ceremony on Horseguards' Parade in central London. As the massed battalions of guardsmen wheeled past, one parent was heard to remark to the other: 'Look, they're all out of step, except our Bill!' Was Bill a true nonconformist, a rugged individualist, or just a soldier with two left feet or a poor sense of timing?

This issue of *Wesley Memorial News* is exploring Nonconformity, and it has garnered a rich harvest of reflections and experiences. Methodists in the tradition of the Wesleys have sometimes stood aloof from historic Nonconformity, seeing it as too negative and too antagonistic to the Church of England, but it was a former minister of Wesley Memorial, Hugh Price Hughes, who inspired the formation of the Free Church Council and gave rise to the phrase 'the Nonconformist Conscience'. Mind you, that phrase was not coined as a compliment: it captured the contempt of *The Times* for Hughes' political lobbying to undermine the Irish Nationalist leader Charles Stewart Parnell, who was mixed up in a messy divorce case. For Hughes, what was morally wrong could not be politically right; for *The Times*, middle-class Methodist morality should be kept out of practical politics. And, going beyond the application of the 'Conscience' to particular causes, we may discern a paradox about freedom and conformity. As may be seen below, the champions of Nonconformity could be zealous in defence of their own codes of conduct, creating a sub-culture deeply unfriendly to dissent. One of the earliest official Methodist texts is entitled 'Rules of the Society of the People called Methodists'. Dating from 1743, it sets out the 'general rules' for those who wished to be part of the Methodist movement, requiring them to 'do no harm', to 'do good', and to 'attend upon all the ordinances of God'. If the Wesleys were champions of free grace, they were also advocates of 'walking by rule'. How might we resolve that apparent paradox?

Well, the Gospel urges us all to be non-conformists. 'Do not conform to this world,' writes Paul in Romans 12:2. J.B. Phillips' translation evokes the sense: 'Don't let the world squeeze you into its mould.' In the face of multitudinous pressures from family, friends and colleagues, from the media and the advertisers, and from our own deep-seated desire to be like everyone else, the friends of Jesus are encouraged not to conform, not to buy into the attitudes, priorities and values of society organised without God.

But Paul goes beyond opting out. 'Do not conform to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern the will of God...' The Christian life is a life re-directed, in response to the Gospel, in the power of the Spirit, in the strength of grace. We are renewed in the image of God, and empowered to follow the way of Jesus. In aligning ourselves with Christ - in conforming to the pattern of his life - we find freedom and fulfilment, holiness and happiness.

For the Wesleys, true Christian non-conformity in the face of a largely uncomprehending and unsympathetic world required the scaffolding of the 'general rules' and the structures of mutual accountability found in the society and class-meetings of early Methodism. The snag was that these structures could become a substitute for the Gospel, creating an in-crowd of self-satisfied saints. We are surely right to turn away from that, so long as we do not run into the opposite error of thinking that we have escaped from ecclesiastical tyranny when in fact we have simply allowed the world to squeeze us uncomplainingly into its comfortable mould.

So let's ask how we are to live faithfully, authentically and grace-fully as friends of Jesus, and how we are to be properly non-conformist, while encouraging people to find life's best and real meaning in a re-orientation to the God who loves each of us with an everlasting love.

Yours in Christ,



Editorial

Just look at that wild goose on the cover as it rises up to follow its own path! It is a gesture of bravery and beauty, a moment of uplift - a beginning, a becoming, a transfiguring. Suddenly this goose knows something about what sets it apart, and is able to turn, in courage and vulnerability, a new way. We are indebted to Mel McCulloch for such an evocative image, which speaks so suggestively to our theme of nonconformity, and provides a rich beginning to this issue of *Wesley Memorial News*.

Read on and you will be able to pursue your reflections on what it means to be different. We begin with some thoughts on Methodism's

nonconformity past and present, before inviting you to consider the many non-conformities of individual lives, whether that be through circumstance, personality or experience. But we also ponder the non-conformity of the Christian life, if such it be - bold distinctions can be spurred by faith in a world that may seem to be heading in the other direction, but how radical are we, actually, and in what ways?

But this is a bumper issue and there's much more than this! As ever, we say a huge thank you to our contributors, whose thoughtfulness and time has helped to create a scintillating issue.
Wesley Memorial News team

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Being a member of the awkward squad

For Methodists 'non-conformity' is all about not conforming to the Established Church, but since I am a member of the Church of England, as well as being a member of Wesley Memorial, there will be others in this congregation better qualified to explain exactly what it is they are not conforming to.

For Paul, in Romans, non-conformity meant not conforming to the world, so if we are to follow his advice we need to know what 'the world' means - and this is maybe the sort of non-conformity we ought to explore. All Christians are supposed to be 'in the world but not of the world', and this means that at times each of us may well be a member of the awkward squad. Do we go along with something at work of dubious morality, just to keep our job? Do we agree with everyone else just to be popular? I am sure you can think of plenty of examples.

The big problem is that we can't always agree when we should be awkward and when we should graciously conform. Religious history is peppered with awkward squads, each convinced of its own truth, opposing each other - often with disastrous results. And even within a church, some members will feel dragooned into conformity - having to accept a new church policy here or project there with a measure of unease. In terms of Christian congregations, what is the answer to all this? It is surely to recognise that there is non-conformity in all of us. We have to listen and share our different non-conformities in a spirit of love and understanding. And sometimes, as the non-conformities clash across the floor of the Commons, we might think that listening and sharing in a spirit of love could be our gift to the world.

Don Manley

Nonconformity: a retrospect

We are so used to living in a society which is constitutionally tolerant of all faiths, and none, and in which vigorous political debate is encouraged, that it takes quite a feat of imagination to conjure a world in which it was expected that everyone would accept a common religious and political creed. Such, however, was the case in early modern Europe. Good citizenship required loyalty to the State (usually represented by a monarch) and to the Established Church. Nonconformity was a deviation, punishable by civil and religious penalties, as well as by social sanctions. The abolition of the monarchy and the Established Church in Britain during the Civil War led to a flourishing of different religious and political groups, but the return of Charles II in 1660 and the imposition of religious uniformity two years later brought exclusion for those who dissented from, or would not conform to, the liturgy, doctrines and discipline of the Church of England. 'Old Dissent' and 'Nonconformity' therefore trace their roots to 1662.

A generation later, in 1689, Protestant Nonconformists (Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Baptists and Quakers) were granted very grudging toleration and legal protection. Refusal to conform to the Church of England still entailed significant disadvantages: Nonconformists were excluded from Parliament and from the ancient universities; they were taxed for the upkeep of parish churches; the Established Church had a monopoly on marriages and burials. For the next two hundred years Nonconformists campaigned successfully for the removal of these civic disabilities, and then, less successfully, for the disestablishment of the Church in Ireland, Wales and England.

The eighteenth century Evangelical Revival strengthened 'Old Dissent', and brought new denominations into being, principally the various kinds of Methodist. The Wesley brothers were not sympathetic to Dissent, and consistently proclaimed their loyalty to the Church of England. Other Methodists were less concerned to stay within the Establishment. There was a gradual parting of the ways

during the nineteenth century, with stronger denominational identities and a growing separation between Methodism and a Church of England renewed by the Oxford Movement - which to most Methodists seemed far too close to Roman Catholicism. Methodists began to make common cause with Nonconformity, under a 'Free Church' banner. Some hoped for a Free Church (or even Methodist) majority in the country; others sought to use political influence to promote the social agenda of the so-called 'Nonconformist Conscience'.

The twentieth century saw shrinking numbers and waning influence across the Nonconformist denominations. At the same time, attempts were made to heal old wounds through ecumenical dialogue and co-operation. Local Free Church Councils merged into Churches Together groups, with a wider membership. Is there still a need for a Nonconformist or Free Church witness? If so, what shape might it take? Or is it the case that in multi-cultural and secular Britain, all Christians are nonconformists now?

Martin Wellings



Radical faith: the conformity of nonconformity

‘Ah, when to the heart of man
Was it ever less than a treason
To go with the drift of things,
To yield with a grace to reason,
And bow and accept the end
Of a love or a season?’

These words are taken from a poem of Robert Frost. The poem is entitled *Reluctance* but it could, I think, easily be entitled *Nonconformity*. Frost writes of a spirit within each of us that yearns for something different from the established truth, that stubbornly rebels against normal practice, and that defies convention and calls for the better alternative.

The nonconformist spirit runs through our Methodist identity. Methodists have always disagreed with the established principle of restricting Communion to the baptised, so we welcome all to receive the bread and wine. Methodists have been at the forefront of the great radical movements of the past three centuries: Wesley challenged the injustice of the slave trade, Methodists helped to establish the right to trade union membership, and Methodists were amongst the first working people elected to Parliament. In some cases, Methodists have been so adept at nonconformity that we have omitted to conform to our own structures and practices and the church has divided along sectarian lines. When the Methodist New Connexion was founded in 1797, for instance, its worshippers in Halifax were dismissed by the Wesleyans as so radically divergent that they branded them ‘Tom Paine Methodists.’

There is no doubt that nonconformity is an important part of our Methodism; it defines our heritage and inspires our future. It embodies the radicalism of a Christianity which seeks to expose injustice and build the Kingdom of love, joy, and fellowship on earth. But our radicalism depends on conformity, as much as it does the opposite. Nonconformity itself depends on conformity to certain values and standards of living, to certain principles and ways of looking at the world. We cannot seek to alter the balance of the status quo without some idea of why and how, and it is by conforming to mutually recognisable ideals that we can find the answer to those questions.

The thread of continuity between the Old and New Testaments rests on two pillars: we are called to welcome the stranger and love our neighbour. By doing so, we establish a good art of living in community with others. Conformity is thus a positive practice. By conforming to ancient truths, we can learn to live in harmony with diversity and we can challenge the assumptions and failings of our own time. Our nonconformist conscience is therefore shaped by the effort to conform and hold to old ideas, relating them to our own context.

As the political theorist Bernard Crick reminds us: ‘boredom with established truths is a great enemy of free men.’ When the worth of our basic conforming values, the things that hold us together as a church, and bring us closer to one another as human beings, are neglected or even forgotten, then we are far from our true mission. The Good News is not change for change’s sake, but change for the sake of what is right. And what is right but those principles which defined the prophetic ministries of both Moses and Jesus of Nazareth and which still have the potential to transform the world today.

So let us challenge the failings of the established present, yes. Let us build new foundations where they are needed, rightly. But let us also recognise our conformity to the best of yesterday, recognising that by doing so we can make tomorrow the best that it can be.

Having begun with verse, it is only appropriate to finish with verse too. After being sentenced to seven years’ transportation for defying anti-trade union laws, the great conforming nonconformist, and Methodist, George Loveless wrote of the timeless God who speaks through our struggles today, if we only hold on to the faith that unites us:

‘God is our guide! from field, from wave,
From plough, from anvil, and from loom;
We come, our country’s rights to save,
And speak a tyrant faction’s doom:
We raise the watch-word liberty;
We will, we will, we will be free!’

Rob Thompson

Nonconformity and Christian witness

On 31 August 2014, I retired as an Air Force Chaplain, having recognised that God was calling me back into the Methodist church to serve as a Presbyterian. Below is a reflection on some of my experiences and what may be encountered when attempting to sustain a Christian witness in a challenging environment.

The word *chaplain* comes from the Latin word for a cloak, and the word grew out of the story of St Martin meeting a man begging in the rain with no cloak. If St Martin had met the man's need by giving him his own cloak he would have shifted the problem to himself, so instead, he tore his own cloak in two and shared it, half for the beggar and half for himself. From the story the understanding of a chaplain has developed as someone who shares support with those in the storms of life, and offers spiritual help and direction in those difficult times.

For me, sharing the burden, in the presence and strength of God, is a perfect way of explaining my role now but even more so when I was called to serve in the context of military chaplaincy, for if I was to see someone struggling up the railway steps with a large heavy suitcase it is highly likely that I would rush to help them carry it. Pastorally and spiritually chaplaincy is about helping people to carry their bags.

My final posting was at RAF Brize Norton and here is a small window into that world:

'Her pain was tangible; it swept over her like waves on the shore. I held her as the tears of despair and anguish soaked into the fabric of my jacket. We had not met before this day yet there was an instant connection. Yes, we were about the same age and yes we were both female, but it was more than that; we were both mothers, our children roughly the same age. Our youngest were both

boys, a couple of years apart, and as we looked into each other's eyes we didn't need words to describe that unique and beautiful bond that is often present between mothers and their sons. The difference? My son was safe at school studying for his A-levels, and her precious boy was returning from Afghanistan in a wooden box. There are no words for such a moment, so I held her in my arms until the waves of sadness subsided a little and she could once more raise her head and look out of the window. We stood side by side, looking and waiting, my hand gently resting on her shoulder, just so she knew I was still there, a message that I would be strong for her, that I would walk with her in order to get her through the day, possibly the worst day of her life.'

Being there when someone feels as if they have fallen into a deep, dark pit without any sign of a ladder, and sharing that experience is nothing new in military chaplaincy; it has been the premise on which it was first built. Famous characters such as 'Woodbine Willie' shared in the horrors of WW1 alongside the men and reminded them that they were loved and cared about. When it feels as though the odds are stacked against us, the first thing that we lose is often our sense of what it means to be human. War and

conflict can dehumanise, and the rigours of serving in today's military can often do exactly the same. Chaplains are a tangible reminder that human love can reach out beyond the direst of situations and enable us to feel valued and unique.

Jesus had a unique way of enabling people to know that they were loved and valued by God: he cut across convention and got his hands dirty alongside people struggling to make sense of the mess of life. I guess that is what chaplaincy is, non-judgemental 'presence' in and through the power of God.



The day I left RAF Honington because I had been posted to Brize Norton, the young man on the front gate shouted out at the top of his voice, 'but you can't leave Padre, you've saved my life!' As flattering as that sounds it was not about me as an individual but about the role of Chaplain or 'Padre' as all are affectionately known. As the Chaplain I had walked with that young man through some of the darkest moments of his life, moments that I would not wish anyone to have to experience. No matter the time of day,

or how often, he knew he could ask to see me and I would see him, giving him a listening ear, allowing him to sob into my shoulder and to pray for him and his situation. He felt valued, loved and accepted, knowing that he had a companion on 'his' journey.

May God bless you in the ministry to which he calls you.
*Rev (Sqn Ldr) Melanie Reed, pictured opposite, now a
Presbyter in the Witney and Faringdon Circuit*

Nonconformity in the homeless community

It cannot have escaped the notice of readers that this year marked the 800th year since the signing of the Magna Carta. Celebrations and eulogies abounded but, as a former historian, I found myself inevitably questioning the blanket positive coverage that the Charter has retrospectively received. Something the Magna Carta indubitably enshrined in the English psyche was the link between property and personhood. It set up a mentality that associates the extent to which one is capable of functioning in society with one's material situation. For all our self congratulation 800 years on, this mentality is one that persists and one that has a particularly devastating effect on the homeless community.

Aside from property, the great idol of our current age is undoubtedly freedom. It is ironic, but non-conformity is in many ways the new conformity; the whim of the individual is seen as paramount to the attaining of happiness. It is no coincidence that the vast majority of members of the homeless community have backgrounds in intensely conformist environments - the armed services, the care system and prison are all examples I encounter every day. Needless to say it is exceptionally difficult to conform to a society that prides freedom above all else when it is not something which one is used to. Support and care are rarely in place for people leaving these institutions, and the relentless assault of responsibility, choice and expectations often proves too much, leading to a life on the streets.

If our concepts of conformity to society's norms hinge on

property and freedom of choice and movement, then the homeless are doomed not to conform whether they like it or not. Add to this the fact that a high percentage of the community suffer from mental or physical illnesses and you have a community which, by its very nature, does not conform to the secular modern concepts of functionality. Our duty as Christians, as holders of a faith that has the mystery of the Incarnation at its centre, is to challenge those concepts and to reaffirm personhood regardless of property.

Sterling work is done to alleviate need by projects across Oxford, often directly or indirectly led by churches. But the way in which we can most admirably conform to the Gospel and challenge the presumptions of the world is to extend a love and incarnational respect to those we see struggling to conform to those worldly presumptions. It is not enough for us to simply state that the homeless community do not conform; we are called as Christians to challenge that whole structure of conformity, for it is undoubtedly a conformity of the World and not of God. My experience of engagement with this clever, funny, amazing community can be summed up in this advice. Stop and talk, and I can promise that some days you will laugh with the people you find and others you will cry with them; you will, in short, be affirming their personhood and they will affirm yours.

*Fergus Butler-Gallie, who has been working this spring as
Chaplain to the Homeless in Oxford, under the auspices of
Churches Together in Central Oxford*

A Methodist in the Church of England



Although I have always belonged to a non-conformist tradition, I would say my instincts as an individual are to conform. I hate being told off and am sometimes too worried about keeping to the rules. There was a time when John, at about 2 yrs old, was stuck on the top of a piece of soft play climbing equipment and I dithered about going up to help him because there was a sign saying, 'NO ADULTS'. I did kick off my shoes (because even if I was going to break one rule I may as well keep another...) and climb up but I still shake my head when I think my maternal instincts were in danger of being squashed by rule observation.

For two years I have worked as the Children and Young Families worker at St Michael's C of E Church, Cumnor. I've had a lot of fun but I know some people will have had to have been very patient with me because of my lack of an Anglican background. Since I spend most of my time in Junior church I haven't been able to pick up on how things 'should' be done and I think I can sometimes unconsciously push the boundaries. Early on a member of the congregation came up to me after I'd been involved in the service and said, 'you're not an Anglican are you? Don't worry, it's refreshing!' I don't know about that but I do

Embracing contradictions

Let me tell you a story of when I was growing up. I need you to close your eyes and imagine the warm sunshine of Spain, in the now-distant early 1990s, before the internet (culturally) had shrunk the world. It was when a happy childhood gave way to the more complex teenage years. I spent hours in my room, feeling different, on my own and thinking too much, but isn't that what most teenagers do?

Aged 22, while others were out and about having fun, I wrote a very serious poem against consumerism in our society. I felt like a fish out of water at big social gatherings. I hated buying shoes (and make up) and have never owned a pair of high heels. It took me another decade to embrace my contradictions, so instead of wasting my energies crashing against a wall, I could move forward, towards becoming the person I am.

I realise now that, growing up, I needed to listen to stories about women who didn't conform. This wouldn't have been easy for my grandma, mum and aunts, in very challenging times for women. So I found those stories through books and films, and stored them in my head, because I imagined one day I would have a daughter and I wanted to be able to tell her what I had learnt: that not conforming is fine, that it's

good to be the person you want to be, that nobody is better or worse than anyone else for being different. So I would read about

Katharine Hepburn, who wore slacks, had a non-conventional love life and lots of talent (and after whom our wonderful Katie is named). She owed no little of her outlook in life to Kit, her amazing mum who was a social campaigner and birth control pioneer and who stood her ground so her orphan sisters could get an education. And then it would be Maya Angelou's turn, and although I didn't always agree with her, I was always in awe of her talent and her strength, as she survived child abuse, poverty and prostitution to become a talented singer, dancer and writer.

I feel very much that everyone has a role to play to make the world more inclusive and a better place for everyone else. That there is no such a thing as normal. That it's very OK to bend rules or break traditions. If everyone came out of the same mould, the world wouldn't be such an interesting place.

Eva Oliver, pictured above with daughter Katie





know that I always forget about what order we process in, often sit in the congregation when I'm leading a service or giving the talk rather than in our special seats and still don't understand which Diocese is which. I'm not as impressed as I probably should be when people talk in hushed tones about Bishops and when a friend who was doing the Bible reading whispered 'what are the words to introduce the reading?' I had to hiss back, 'I have no idea!' Luckily St Michael's has a congregation made up of people from many different traditions from within and outside the C of E, and so seems to be able to cope with my ignorance!

There is something quite freeing about not really knowing the 'proper' way of doing things and so following my instinct instead of the rules. Everything that really matters to me seems to be the same and the differences feel like frosting rather than the solid and satisfying cake. We have our own frosting in the Methodist church too, the secret is to know what is really crucial to the recipe for church and what is just sprinkles applied because we like them, but not, if we're honest, absolutely necessary. When an issue did arise on Trinity Sunday and one of the lovely sidesmen was worrying about putting special coloured ribbons in the bible I was completely confused. Coloured ribbons? For a moment I almost felt cross. 'Why,' I thought, 'has Geoff (the vicar) never explained all this to me?' And then a quiet voice seemed to answer, 'because he didn't want you to know.'

I've heard it said that churches often expect people from outside to come straight in believing, behaving and then moving onto belonging, whereas Jesus turned it round to letting people belong first. Through the things I'm involved in (most of them messy with a liberal amount of chaos thrown in), I'm hoping to build relationships with children and families in Cumnor and to help people to feel welcome without having to conform to 'the way things should be done' - to belong, hopefully move on to believing and then maybe behave (but only where it matters!). Jesus was the best at not being held prisoner by rules, and he knew them all! I hope I can continue to learn from him.

Mel McCulloch

Norms in student life

I am very fortunate as an undergraduate at Oxford that I am not called upon too often to conform: expectations far more often exist to be met in the academic sense rather than in those of personal belief. Although not an over-archingly Christian environment, the student community in Oxford does allow for much variety of belief and expression, even if the intellectual rigour one would expect in a university community leads to those beliefs being explored, tested, and also challenged. Expectations do exist; but, as is right, they are in the academic realm rather than in the personal.

There is, however, still a norm in Oxford life - no matter how accepting people are of the deviations therefrom. This norm doesn't necessarily expect one to be awake at 10.30 on a Sunday morning let alone in church at that time and in the issues of practical morality, the norm is not necessarily a Christian one. The decision with which Jesus confronts us is thus all the more pertinent: whether to conform to the way of the world or to conform to the more difficult standard of the unprecedented and colourfully-expressed morality which Jesus requests as a response to the grace and love of God.

One of the biggest decisions I have taken in not settling for the former is my decision not to drink alcohol, to the end that my own decisions may not deem me unaccountable for my actions at any time. The result of this is very often that I do live out a certain "non-conformity" among my friends. At events, from formal dinners in Hall to a party at a friend's room, I am very often alone in not drinking. But more than just being an exception for the sake thereof, this decision, as with many other decisions I have had to make each day between what the world expects and what God expects, has been one which rewards in other ways and not necessarily ways that the norm would recognise. Of course, I too often find myself ignoring the Lord's commands when I would be perfectly capable of following them. But I have found the quest after conformity to them perfectly possible in my Oxford experience even if it is not the same as conformity to the prevailing standards.

Charlie Clegg

Musings of an enthusiastic non-conformist

Non-conformity is important to me! I remember thinking from quite a young age that everyone else doing something was often not a good enough reason for me to do it. This played out in various ways as I was growing up - resisting the pressure to conform to what adolescent girls normally do by not wearing make-up and not shaving my legs; resisting the pressure to conform to what teenagers normally do by not drinking alcohol. In both cases I feel I can be truer to myself without these things and I'd rather spend my time and money elsewhere.

Being a Christian was quite non-conformist in itself, and played its part in the above decisions. Taking my faith quite seriously from early on made me just accept that I was going to be different from most of my friends and cohort, which in turn helped me to carry on being different in the other ways too. I got used to the idea that I didn't need other people's approval and that God valued me as I was, which was more important.

Incidentally, long before I knew that Methodism was known as a 'non-Conformist' strand of the Church, I valued the fact that it was a bit different, a breakaway movement, that was more to do with very meaningful and important values and less to do with keeping the established church going and conforming to tradition.

All this was very good training for adult life. I'm sometimes a bit taken aback at the notion that people feel compelled to act in a certain way because of peer pressure/ advertising/all-pervading consumerist values, that people feel they have no choice. All that teenage practice makes me confident that of course there's a choice, you just have to choose based on your own values and that might be different from what everyone else is choosing. Of course there's a choice!

In adulthood this has played out in different ways again. Simeon and I had quite a non-conformist wedding, where we consciously didn't do anything that was traditional unless we had a positive reason to. In particular we

rejected many of the things that are not equal for the man and the woman, so I didn't have an engagement ring, and I had a Best Woman instead of bridesmaids. We didn't use the traditional vows, and we didn't spend lots of money on aspects that weren't important to us - rather had an enormous, quite DIY wedding reception, mostly involving having fun with the people we love. The Best Man and Best Woman both gave speeches, as did Simeon and I, plus my dad and Simeon's mum. Oh, and as you've probably spotted, neither of us changed our name...

We don't often conform to traditional roles within marriage either and I'm relieved and thankful that we live in an age and a place where this isn't that difficult; you just have to make the relevant choices. So we both work part-time, we earn similar salaries, we both look after the children equally. Simeon is chief cook and shopper, I'm the main driver and gardener. Simeon believes in ironing in a way that I just don't. I actually feel very little pressure to conform to traditional gender roles in our marriage, but that may be partly to do with living in the rather wonderful liberal, progressive stronghold which is Oxford!

It gets a bit more complicated with parenting and I don't want to take over the whole magazine so will keep it brief! We are determined not to make Rowan, Jasper and Alice conform to gender stereotypes, and to allow them to make their own choices. We want to help them resist the pressure to want more stuff and consume resources without care. We will be keen to encourage them as they grow up not to bend to peer pressure but how far to push this will potentially be quite a hard decision, when they are the ones who'll need to live with the consequences of swimming against the crowd. I may need to accept that they are less willing to do that than I was! And what if they don't want to conform to *our* values? There may be all manner of challenges ahead, but for now I think what we can do is help them to gradually work out their values, to know they don't *have* to follow the crowd, and to know that we love them and God loves them whatever they do.

Jenny Ayres

An unusual hobby

One of the many delights of studying at Oxford is the wide variety of extracurricular activities on offer. Pretty much any interest you can think of is covered, from tiddlywinks to polar exploration, rock climbing to rock collecting. For me, though, the club that caught my eye was the Oxford University Gliding Club, based at Bicester airfield. When I first turned up there I didn't know a soul and found the 'new kid at school' situation much more scary than the prospect of flying. Everyone was friendly, however, and I soon got used to the routine on the airfield. The culture is one where everybody helps by doing the required jobs, to keep the costs low. So I spent all day bouncing around in Land Rovers, running errands, pushing gliders around, keeping logs and making tea until my turn to fly came round.

The pupil sits in the front of the glider with the instructor in the back. At first the instructor does everything but you quickly learn the essentials: flying straight and level, turning, launching, landing and circuit planning, until you are ready to go solo. I first flew solo on an Easter Monday, and there is nothing quite as exciting as bobbing around the sky by yourself. The launch takes you to about 1300ft but if you can find columns of rising air (thermals) you can gain height and stay airborne for many hours. It is wonderful to gently explore the area around the airfield; the world looks quite different from up there and every cloud offers the possibility of more lift and more time in the air.

I made some good friends at the airfield including Daniel Goodman. On 18 April 2015, Daniel and I were married at Wesley Memorial with many of our gliding friends present. My parents were pleased that we were marrying at Wesley Memorial. Dad had found the church to be a welcoming place when he worshipped there in the 1960s, also as a student at Jesus College, and things are no different now!

We had a small party the day before the wedding where some kindly friends came and helped us decorate the hall. We had a dinner afterwards and, while chatting to one of the gliding instructors, my father mentioned that he had spent time flying with the University Air Squadron at

Bicester. The outcome was that on the day after the wedding Dad went flying again from Bicester after a gap of 40 years.

The wedding was a magical time. It was very humbling to receive the kindness of so many people, and it reinforced for me how lucky I have been to spend time both at Bicester airfield/OUGC and at Wesley Memorial.

Evelyn Davies, pictured below with Daniel and her parents



Changing patterns

We've had pretty traditional roles so far in our marriage, but from September this year, Kirstie will be going back full-time hours at work (she has been either part-time or on maternity leave since the birth of Tomas, who is now four and a half). At the same time, Frank will be reducing his hours from full-time to just 50%, meaning that he will become the main childcarer in the family, looking after Aaron on the days when he is not at nursery, and Tomas before and after school. It's going to be interesting to see how it works - we're both looking forward to it!

Frank and Kirstie Vreede

A lifelong Methodist?

This has to start autobiographically. When I discovered the tiny diaries that my father kept at the end of the 1914-18 War, it was no surprise to see that, wherever he was, he attended a Methodist church twice every Sunday. My mother grew up in a village where her father was a Methodist local preacher. When my parents settled down together, the church provided a meeting place - social and cultural as well as religious - on most nights of the week. My mother met other Methodists for coffee and patronised the shops run by members of the congregation. The Methodist church was central to their lives, and you could say that they were entirely conformist in their nonconformity.

Life was less simple for me. My parents assumed that I would live happily in the nonconformist world that they had accepted. The miseries of Victorian Sundays for many is vividly caught by Dickens in his description of a middle-aged man returning alone to London after many years abroad, when the sound of church bells 'revived a long train of miserable Sundays' and he reflects, 'Heaven forgive me... and those who trained me. How I have hated this day.' So when I went up to Oxford in the late forties of the twentieth century, I sang for a while in the college choir and became a member of a church discussion group, because in those days Christianity still seemed an accepted, stimulating feature of student life. Eventually I became, and remain, a Methodist local preacher. But I cannot feel that I comfortably fit any longer into the assumptions that supported my parents. That tradition has come to an end. Many, perhaps most, of my friends and family do not share my religious beliefs; they are agnostics or, in some cases, atheists. I share their doubts about many of the premises on which some Christians seem to ground their faith. I find myself uncomfortably positioned between those who dismiss all religions and their moral systems as irrational or psychologically regressive and those for whom Christianity seems fixed and unchanging in ways that I cannot accept.

We are conscious of living in what Richard Holloway has called 'a post-traditional society'. Communal organisations like churches, political parties or unions are increasingly seen as barriers to personal freedom; officialdom seems to

deny individual potential; people are suspicious of politicians and less willing to vote. You can blame the change on mistrust of authority, the post-modern rejection of grand narratives, or a relativist denial of any possibility of attaining absolute truth. Instead, what has been relentlessly promulgated is an individualism which seems to promise an almost infinite range of do-it-yourself beliefs and moral options. As markets grow in power, so develops a sense that all choices are equally valid. Wealthy, educated people can 'try on' Buddhism or Confucianism as a life-style, same-sex couples can claim the right to 'give birth' to 'their' children, media assert that you can 'have it all', and token charitable giving can compensate for a greedy lifestyle.

It would be easy to argue - as many have - that God is dead, though I'd prefer to argue that it's the Church that is dying. In Britain today, fewer than eight per cent of the population attend worship. Nowadays rationalism and secularism seem to be irreversibly emptying the pews. Charles Darwin, as Richard Dawkins has expressed it, made it intellectually respectable to be an atheist, even though he would hardly have applied the term to himself. It has become increasingly easy to dismiss any faith in the supernatural world as primitive, neurotic or the simple projection of human need. However, the apparently demonstrable advance of science and the secularism or humanism that might come to replace religion were promulgated in terms that were just as dependent on faith. For example, recent criticism has viewed *The Origin of Species* as an imaginative narrative, working like the novel to convey an open 'form of imaginative history'. Thinkers simply assumed that religion would wither as reason and science advanced, and automatic progress would follow. That never quite seemed to happen. The old divisions, between Protestant and Catholic, say, or episcopal and non-episcopal, or established and nonconformist, have largely become an irrelevance. The great division in our world is no longer between Christians and non-Christians, but between fundamentalism and prejudice on the one hand and openness to argument and concern for individuals on the other.

Robert Protherough

Conforming to China

I have to admit it's been a pleasure over the last three years to watch myself shed some of my British skin and conform to Chinese ways. I get a certain satisfaction from knowing I'm doing things like the locals. I walk purposefully, staring straight ahead, weave in and out of cars and people, and push through when I'm the first to reach a gap - because that's just correct behaviour for the street. In restaurants I yell loudly for the waiter ("FUWUYUAN!") and say exactly what I want without wasting time on "please" and "thank you", formalities which are counter-productive and just plain wrong for the context. At home when friends come round I offer them hot water (girls rarely drink it cold) and I'm not surprised when they want it poured into their own plastic flask, already full of leaves, fruit and other mysterious things.

I know I've changed and I think I'll struggle to conform back to UK culture in some ways. The first summer I was home I got some funny looks as I freely invaded the personal space of other shoppers in the supermarket. I've noticed this year that it's getting harder for me to talk to Westerners who haven't had much China time; they ask so many questions and expect so many answers! But on the other hand, I am very much a product of British society, and some values that I hold deeply have only been strengthened by observing their opposites in China. I still believe, for example, that individuals have the power to influence their communities. I believe that honesty in academic and professional conduct

is of vital importance. I believe that every human life has value - value which derives from the fact that the one who made us thought we were worth dying for.

On the faith front, it's actually been easier for me to live out my life as a Christian in Xi'an than it was in the UK. Everyone here assumes that if you're Western you must be a Christian and nobody thinks the less of you for it. In Britain people carry a lot of baggage related to the Church; in China, for many ordinary people Christianity is unknown and interesting. In addition, Chinese culture is quite traditional and conservative - I threw out my strap tops in my first year - and young people especially are free of the cynicism that makes expressing yourself as a Christian difficult in England. Although the leadership is deeply wary of 'Western' religion and there are restrictions, for a foreign resident it's surprisingly simple to live a Jesus-centred life.

So I have to confess to some nervousness as I face leaving China this July and moving back to the UK 'for good', or at least for the time being. As many of you know from experience, the more time you spend in other countries, the less you fit into any one. The great thing is that I feel called to conform to a culture which is neither British, nor Chinese, nor any of the others but which features the best of them all, and I'm excited to move deeper into that kingdom wherever I happen to find myself.

Grace Riddell



A fair trade update

Fair trade is a sort of non-conformism - a determination to do things differently. It's a refusal to accept the unjust rules and entrenched practices that keep people locked in poverty, and a commitment to create an alternative, fairer system.

Fairtrade at St Michaels will be 12 years old this autumn, and continues to thrive despite the challenge of being tucked away in a basement. During these years we have seen the Fairtrade market grow by leaps and bounds from niche to mainstream. The range of Fairtrade products and the number of outlets in which they can be found have certainly increased beyond anything we could have dreamed when we first started a Traidcraft stall at Wesley Memorial in 1990 with a couple of cardboard boxes stored in the organ loft. Now all the major supermarkets and multi-nationals boast Fairtrade lines - representing both a triumph and a whole new set of challenges.

Since the shop opened in 2003, our total sales have added up to about £1.8 million. That's a lot of purchases from producer groups around the developing world, helping them to improve the quality of life for their families and communities. In addition, we've got into the habit of ploughing back most of our operating profit - what's left after the bills and rent and wages have been paid - into charitable projects. Over the years we've given away about £45,000, and are always cheered by the feedback indicating just how much practical difference our relatively small donations can make in other parts of the world.

At the shop's AGM in June we voted to give away another tranche of £10,000. Half of it has gone to support the development work of Traidcraft who have been pioneers and champions of Fairtrade for more than 35 years. The remaining £5,000 has been shared between five other charities and will be used to fund the following:

- In Palestine, 250 new olive saplings for the beleaguered farmers of the West Bank where so many of their ancestral trees have been destroyed.
- In Paraguay, access to tertiary education for young



people from the poorest rural communities.

- In India, a new hospice for the traditionally 'untouchable' Dalit people.
- In Nepal, a temporary 'pop up' school to replace one destroyed by the earthquake - keeping vulnerable children in education and safe from traffickers.
- Also in post-earthquake Nepal, assistance for fair trade producer groups facing the long haul of rebuilding shattered lives and businesses.

Two things have happened since the AGM to make it clear that this is no time for resting on laurels. Just a week after the climate change lobby of parliament (reported elsewhere in this issue), the shop was visited by a party of overseas producers who were touring the UK - some rice farmers from Malawi and tea-growers from the indigenous Adivasi tribes of South India. Both groups had fascinating stories to tell, but both also gave eye-witness reports of climate change; it's already an alarming reality in Malawi, and a rapidly approaching threat in India. It's the latest obstacle, perhaps the most daunting yet, confronting people whose whole lives have been beset by more hardship than we can begin to imagine. At least we can show solidarity by selling their Kilombero rice and Just Trade tea (they were excited to see it on the shop shelves!) - and by taking seriously ourselves the urgent need for action on climate change.

The following week we received an open letter from Traidcraft addressed to the churches, appealing for renewed support. They have sustained a trading loss for the fourth consecutive year, but urgently need to maintain their income through sales in order to continue with their trademark mission of 'more than just' fair trade. They write:

There are two general misconceptions. The first is that the Fairtrade battle is won... Unfortunately, injustice in trade and its resultant poverty is as much of a scandal now as it

was 35 years ago, and right now we're still doing everything we can to tackle it directly.

The second misconception is that Traidcraft and Fairtrade are the same. They are not. Traidcraft is an independent trading company with a linked development charity. We do not benefit from the sales of Fairtrade products in the supermarkets. Traidcraft trades with and supports the most vulnerable farmers and artisans (who could not cope with the demands or scale required by big businesses or the supermarkets) as well as running projects developing people's potential to trade their way out of poverty in their own countries. We also lobby big business and government for fundamental changes to the way trade works so that it benefits the poor. We believe this is the 'best of' fair trade.

But we urgently need help to keep doing it because despite the growth of total Fairtrade sales, we've seen Traidcraft sales significantly decline. Why? People are buying Fairtrade products from the supermarket and not from Traidcraft or its supporters. This means our original pioneering mission is now under serious threat...

At the shop we purchase stock from about seventy different Fairtrade suppliers, but we consistently buy more from Traidcraft than any of the other sixty-nine because we believe that it plays a unique and vital role in the ongoing campaign for justice and righteousness in world trade. So please, please, if you have the chance and the choice, continue to buy Traidcraft products preferentially and - if you don't already - come and buy them from Fairtrade at St Michaels. Exert your non-conformism!

Clare Matthews

The shop is in the basement of St Michael at the North Gate on Cornmarket Street (across the courtyard and down the stairs). Open Monday to Saturday 10am to 5pm.

www.fairtradeatstmichaels.co.uk

Christian Aid Street Market

On Saturday May 16th, at the end of Christian Aid Week, we opened the doors as usual - it was time for our annual fundraising effort for Christian Aid's general fund.

A fine day greeted us, no rain forecast, and every chance of keeping the goods outside on our forecourts for maximum sales! We were also very fortunate to have many capable helpers from Wesley Memorial, and our friends from Cowley Road with their particular merchandise. The team effort was fantastic.



The grand total of £1314 showed a splendid increase of almost £300 on 2014's figure.

This year's Christian Aid Week focus was on help for women in rural Ethiopia towards buying cows which give them an income but also much higher status in the local community. As each animal costs £150, notionally we could be helping to completely transform the lives of nine families. Not bad for a day's work! Thank you all for the support.

Kate Dobson

Book review:

I Think It's God Calling by Katy Magdalene Price (BRF, 2015)

In *I Think It's God Calling*, Katy Price gives an honest account of her journey from atheism to ordination. She writes of her calling as a 'malady', something relentless and uneasy, but also likens it to an impassioned following, 'a bit like this: you meet someone on a train and fall in love and never see them again. You know nothing about them; you have no reason to think it would work... and yet...'. She relates with companionable humour and sharp insight the many non-conformities of this path.

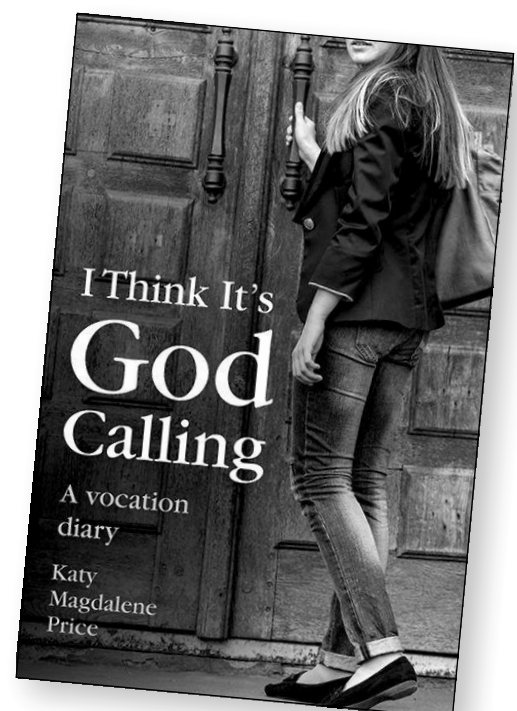
Most of the book, developed from a blog, concerns Katy's experience of 'The Process', a lengthy journey of exploration in which the Church weighs her sense of 'calling'. These are stretching and confusing times, where the models of achievement and self-development laid down in her studies at Cambridge and in the CV-dominated recruitment processes of the professional world collide with the rather different concepts of identity and purpose she encounters on her way to becoming a Priest. She is aware of having far less control, feeling her 'qualifications' to lose the currency they have carried previously, and yet she is acutely conscious that she is being 'tested', in some far less transparent, often baffling and uncomfortably personal way. A leitmotif of her path is the paradox of 'everything and nothing': 'for God to be everything in us, in ourselves we must be nothing'. As her search for her vocation pulls against the grain of her everyday working life, Katy does feel a misfit, although her non-conformity in this respect is thoroughly formational: it is part of a dynamic process, as her relationship with what she is leaving evolves in step with her movement towards something new.

Yet if, on the one hand, Katy grows away from some engrained professional values and assumptions, on the other hand she finds herself always a bit too young or too female or too fashionable, perhaps just too 'secular', for the world of the Church. She does not find it easy quickly to belong in an organisation that seems to operate so very differently from the sectors she has previously inhabited; nor does she

placidly suffer what she calls the Church's idiosyncratic brand of 'nice sexism', a kind of terribly polite but utterly unquestioned chauvinism that means whenever she tries to talk about her vocation she is asked if her husband is a vicar. Katy takes at times an uncompromising stance on Anglican Church practice, and reviews would suggest this non-conformist thread of the book has ruffled some feathers.

I Think It's God Calling suggests that there may be something endemic for many of us, as individuals who think and grow, about not fitting. Katy never, fully, fits. When she accepts her first curacy she writes: 'I am still not quite sure what God has brought me here for or whether I've been worth the effort. All I know is that any God who can put up with me this far is in it for the long haul.' The cheerful informality of this book belies its deep and humble strength. It is an inspiring account of enduring faith and unique transformation: 'I wanted an easy life. What God has given me is life itself'.

Fiona Macdonald



Reflections on six weeks at Wesley Memorial

Until now I have been relatively unfamiliar with Oxford as a city and it has been an exciting experience learning about the specific dynamics of church life in Oxford city centre. Car-parking and traffic congestion significantly impact on accessing the city centre, although there are vast numbers of buses to use. The city centre population is predominantly a transient student one with the result that Wesley Memorial Church is a gathered community. The church is very fortunate in that it has its own Minister and two lay-workers, although these are all shared with a nearby church.

With ever increasing circuit and connexional assessments, there is a pressure on the earning ability of the premises, which require intensive management on a micro basis (e.g. caretaking and cleaning) but also on a macro scale (e.g. managing room bookings, invoicing and maintenance). These are just some of the factors which are at play in the life of the Methodist Church in central Oxford.

I think a vital question to ask is 'In the light of Scripture, Experience, Reason and Tradition, what is God calling the body of Christ in Oxford to be?' There is no quick, easy or certain answer to this question. I therefore venture to suggest three ideas which might enable this process to begin. There is no reason why they could not happen simultaneously.

The first idea is that as a church we need to be making informed decisions about God's work. The society we live in today is diverse and complex. For too long we have made decisions about what we do, based purely on what we think we know, from inside the church. With finite resources (financial and otherwise) it is imperative we make informed decisions which are scrutinized and stress tested. In order to do this we need to properly identify and understand who our communities are and their actual needs - and how this differs from perceived needs. We also need to know what work is currently being undertaken by other churches, other agencies and where the gaps are. Once we have an understanding of the community we serve we can begin to make knowledgeable decisions about God's work - the *Missio Dei*.

Secondly, corporately and individually we need to bring the work and life of the body of Christ to God in prayer, not just for ten minutes on a Sunday, but in a sustained manner as part of the ongoing life of the Church. Since becoming a student presbyter, I have tried really hard to develop and grow my prayer life. I think it was Gandhi who said that prayer isn't just about presenting a list of requests to God but about the longing of the soul. What do our souls long for? One of the things I have been longing for during my placement is to be able to 'speak of God' with someone who is unchurched but has contact with church. Without any warning, an opportunity was presented one Wednesday afternoon at Rose Hill Methodist Church. I could not and did not plan for that to happen. I believe the opportunity was brought about by the Holy Spirit. I continue to give thanks to God for that moment and pray for the person I spoke with. What do our souls long for at Wesley Memorial? Do we offer them to God regularly enough?

The third idea revolves around the Bible. My parents paid for me to have a private education and I am now convinced that they got poor value for money. Unfortunately I was taught Religious Studies almost as history, not as the account of the relationship between God and creation and how redemption came in the form of Jesus Christ - God on earth. This has prompted me to review my understanding of the Bible. There is so much we lose from the Bible in translation, in applying a 21st century lens to text written 2,000-3,000 years ago and in narrow and weak exegesis. As a matter of urgency we need to reclaim the Bible and then share the good news.

I hope the above ideas will prompt further discussion and conversation so that as the body of Christ we can discern God's claim upon our lives.

Every blessing - Shalom

Chris Hardy, a student minister who spent six weeks on placement at Wesley Memorial in May and June 2015

‘For the love of...’ Climate change lobby of parliament

Politicians can't deliver on the ambition without the public saying 'we need you to do this'. Amber Rudd, Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change

They came from all over the country. Surfers and cyclists, beekeepers and bird watchers, grandparents and school children, faith groups and community groups and supporters of the 100-plus charities and organizations that make up the Climate Coalition. They came with banners and bunting (and lots of red Christian Aid T-shirts) proclaiming all the things they had come ‘for the love of ’ - everything from chalk streams to chocolate, from beaches to Bangladesh. About 9,000 people, all homing in on Westminster to lobby their newly elected MPs for the love of our beautiful, fragile, endangered planet.

And thirteen came from Wesley Memorial. For most of us, it was a direct response to the challenge issued in Paul Spray's service some months earlier, when June 17th had sounded safely remote in the future. But the day duly arrived and the sun shone and we were chauffeured down to London in the luxury of the new PHAB minibus - an experience which left us speechless with admiration for the calm competence with which Mary manoeuvred the giant vehicle through the centre of London, negotiating Hyde Park Corner without turning a hair and delivering us safely to a very satisfactory parking spot by the London Eye.

At that point our group divided into East and West, depending on our parliamentary constituency. The Oxford



East group went off to an ecumenical service in the Emmanuel Centre just up the road from Westminster (one of two simultaneous acts of worship) - where the huge semi-circular sanctuary was packed, where the President of the Methodist Conference read a lesson and the Bishop of Salisbury preached, where a worship band led roof-raising singing and children reassembled a giant broken heart, and where the alarming reality of climate change was addressed within the transforming context of Christian hope.

Meanwhile the group from Oxford West and Abingdon went straight to the House of Commons where our MP Nicola Blackwood had booked a time and a room to meet us. After the rigours of airport-style security at the entrance, the first view of the inside of the Palace of Westminster is a breath-taking experience both for its sheer visual impact and its historical resonances. So many ghosts of illustrious people and momentous events! (I hoped that on our way out we would be able to linger and take in the detail of it all, but we were speedily moved along by a policeman who mistook our lingering for loitering.)

We joined other residents of our constituency to make up a roomful of more than thirty people, some of whom were clearly seasoned activists - a formidable and articulate group who immediately set about organizing an ad hoc agenda to ensure that we made best use of the time available. It made me realize that facing the electorate must be a daunting and at times scary experience for MPs! But I was impressed with Nicola Blackwood's handling of the session; she listened carefully, gave thoughtful and informed replies, and promised to follow up personally the few questions she was unable to answer on the spot. On international issues, she agreed to try and keep up the pressure on our government to lead the way for a fair global deal at the Paris Climate Change summit in December. On the domestic front, she called for a much simpler scheme than the notoriously complicated Green Deal to make it easier for the general public to change their energy consumption patterns. Not everyone will have been happy with all her answers, of course. Although she stressed the

government's commitment to switching to renewable energy, she said we must be realistic about the 'need to keep the lights on' during the transition period; in her view, gas is the best option as a transition fuel, being less environmentally harmful than coal or oil, so she expressed qualified support for fracking as a means of maintaining adequate gas supplies.

Jenny asked Nicola how we can help her to represent us effectively. She replied that it's useful to have a contact list of experts in various fields within the constituency who can be called on at short notice for reliable information and specialized knowledge. Later that same afternoon she herself was elected to chair the Parliamentary Select Committee on Science and Technology - so all you Wesley Memorial scientists and engineers and sustainable technology gurus, take note! A real chance for some input!

Andrew Smith met his Oxford East group in Old Palace Yard; with around fifty people, this had the distinction of being the biggest group of the day. Children from various Oxford primary schools displayed bunting with each flag saying what they rated most precious in the world (one boy had decided on crocodiles) and presented letters from classmates. Andrew was impressive in knowing the detail of climate change and in his own commitment to tackling it - he apparently hasn't taken a long-haul flight for ten years. He declared himself personally against fracking, against the expansion of Heathrow and in favour of more affordable rail travel. His particular request to his constituents was for topics to raise as Parliamentary Questions, whereby he can help keep up the pressure on the government.

It was, by its nature, bound to be something of a fragmented day, with everyone divided up into constituency groups and with different activities scattered around different venues. Because of the timing and indoor location of our MP session, it was difficult for the West group to get a true impression of the numbers involved. Most of the 330 MPs lobbied that day came outside to meet their constituents, some of them transported in style on bicycle rickshaws.



When I saw the pictures posted online afterwards, I realised with mild regret that we had missed out on the full impact of the crowds and the carnival atmosphere by the river when the mass lobby was in full swing. But we got a taste of it at the final rally in Millbank in the late afternoon sunshine, with music and speeches and general good humour in abundance. And Jenny, who had peeled off earlier in quest of her Christian Aid flock, reported walking over Lambeth Bridge and passing 'group after group of lobbyists, some animatedly talking to their MPs, others patiently waiting for theirs to show up. It was an amazing array of people and organisations and colours and bunting and all in such an outstanding cause - protecting our planet and the poorest people who live on it. Let's hope the message got through loud and clear to the new government.'

And that, of course, was the point of the day - to leave our newly elected MPs in no doubt about the strength of public concern on this issue and the urgency with which it needs to be tackled. To make it clear that we want them to grasp the opportunity of the Paris conference later this year to forge binding global agreements aimed at a safer, cleaner, more sustainable world. To put pressure on them to lead by example here in the UK, accelerating the transition to carbon-free energy. To put pressure on ourselves to make changes in our own life-styles even when it takes effort and feels inconvenient. To express our solidarity with the poorest people of the world who stand to suffer most from the damage which we in the developed countries have done most to cause.

And besides all that, we had a Grand Day Out!

Clare Matthews

Introducing the JWS committee for 2015-16

The John Wesley Society, or JWS, is the student society for Methodists in Oxford. The JWS committee appointments run from Trinity term in one year until the following. So that you know who we are, this is a brief introduction. We would like to thank everyone for their continued support. We can always be contacted on committee@johnwesleysociety.org.uk

President: Nicola Dinsdale

Nicola is in her third year reading Engineering Science at Brasenose College, and can be contacted on president@johnwesleysociety.org.uk



General Members:

Imogen Rhodes

Imogen is in her second year reading Physics at Jesus College.



Secretary: Madalena Leao

Madalena is in her third year reading PPE at Hertford College.



Eleanor Mitchell

Eleanor is in her second year reading Biochemistry at St Anne's College.



Treasurer: Matthew Greaves

Matthew is in his third year reading Maths at Trinity College.



Eleanor Gravenor

Eleanor is in her second year reading Music at Exeter College.



Ecumenical Rep: Charlie Clegg

Charlie is in his third year reading Theology at St John's College.



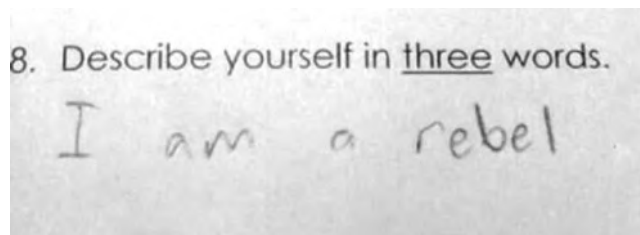
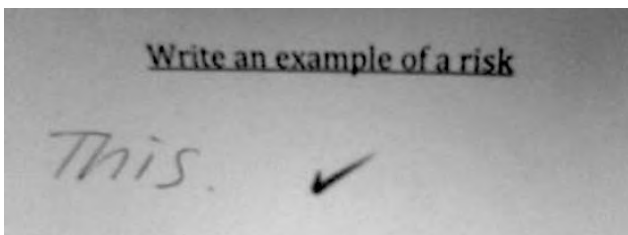
Allison Bryan

Allison is studying Isotope Geochemistry at St Cross College.



Two non-conformist replies to exam questions

(courtesy of DaveP at edugeek.net)



A postcard from Lincolnshire...

Dear friends,

I write from the “White House” - our lovely new home which in my mind is every bit as grand as its better-known American namesake. Today we have had another unseasonably cold day, possibly proving my mother in law’s viewpoint that it is “cold up north”... actually I think it’s cold down south too... but I stand to be corrected.

Our move is momentous for me, and I can’t quite decide if I have left home - or moved home - our location being within a mile of my parents, and the place that I knew well as home growing up. The sense of leaving however is painfully fresh - and most poignant of all is the *au revoirs* that we have made at Wesley Memorial. A big thank you to John and Mary for hosting such a wonderful party, and to those who gave us the beautiful rose and so many cards and well wishes.

I would like to thank Wesley Memorial, for being the church that welcomed me when I was a stranger and a student in Oxford some 27 years ago. For members of choir, who encouraged me to stay, and to members of the newly formed “Open End” who provided the space for me to explore my growing faith, and doubts, in equal measure. To Philip Beuzeval and so many members of the congregation for helping me in so many ways to learn of God’s grace and who supported me in my confirmation, and then later as I tried to express my faith in words as well as deeds in becoming a Local Preacher. For being a church which has held me through some difficult times, and celebrated with me - especially when John and I married.

Wesley Memorial was the place where I learnt of the power and influence of God at work in a community - one that loves, gives, gives again, and forgives. I enjoyed participating in various fundraising efforts, musicals, weekend breaks, barn dances, church parties, cricket and rounder matches, walks; the opportunity to come together, especially where food was involved, seemed to abound! I served as Steward, and think I still hold the record for youngest ever Senior Steward (I am sure it is high time a 21 year old stepped up to the mark and beat me!).

I realise of course that home is where your heart is - and that when we follow God’s call it is not always the most obvious location that wins out! So Wesley Memorial will continue to be a home for me - but I bring greetings from Bottesford Methodists who have a new “youngster” in their midst.

All good postcards should include the lines “having a lovely time” and “wish you were here” - and both sentiments seem most apposite here. I look forward to seeing you all again soon... and this lady would love to welcome visitors to the “White House” (contact details with Church Office).

Yours in Christ and with much love

Marion Hingley-Hickson (née Taylor)



This cross was created in the Sunday morning worship when the Meditation Group had a weekend away at Lindors in May. *Picture by Jo Godfrey.*

Open Doors update

With any building project you have expectations about the order in which events will occur. You decide what you want to do, ask an architect to work out how your vision can be achieved, you seek professional estimates and then invite tenders from contractors to carry out the work. Our Open Doors project conformed to this timetable even though we had modified our approach to implement the project in Phases.

We received four tenders on 12 June but only on the basis of undertaking the whole project. Even the lowest tender was considerably more than we had anticipated and so we are now looking at alternative ways of achieving our objective by discussing with our design team and two contractors what we might achieve for the sum of money we have available. The special meeting of Church Council on 29 June confirmed this approach and also agreed in principle to releasing, if necessary, some of our endowments (£100,000 maximum) to be used for improving our premises. When a contract sum has been agreed, the steering group will bring a proposal to church council advising what can be achieved for the sum of money we have available that will deliver a building which is fit for purpose and complete and how such a proposal will be funded. Part of the funding strategy will involve a further appeal to our congregation in the autumn and also a request for a loan from the Oxford Circuit to assist with cash flow whilst the appeal is in progress.

As at the end of May, our fundraising total had reached just under £700,000 with £13,000 having been raised on top of this for Christian Aid. Note that this sum includes £141,000 that we have already spent on professional fees, planning and surveys. We are continuing to apply to external organisations for grants.



Despite the current uncertainty, we have cause for celebration. The Grow Your Tenner campaign through

localgiving.com has provided £2,775 and Joanna Tulloch's book sales have reached £1,200. We held a Donor's Lunch on 18 March to which we invited our external funders for Phase One (the stairlift) to visit us and enable them to see how their money was being spent. This gave us an opportunity to continue a dialogue with our funders enabling us to seek further grants in due course. In May, we received £10,000 from St Michael's and All Saints Charities specifically towards Phase Three (The John Wesley Room and the Blue kitchen). We expect to hear the outcome in August of our application to WREN Recycling for £50,000 towards Phase Two.

One lesson we have learnt from our Open Doors project so far is that it has not conformed to our planned timetable. However, we hope and pray that over the next two months a way forward will be achieved.

Derek Rawson

Heard it on the grapevine...

Births

Joshua Tabor, 16 March 2015

George Bishop, 3 May 2015

Baptisms

George Frederick Given Hopgood, 5 July 2015

Annabel Lottie Rose Hopgood, 5 July 2015

Weddings

Daniel Goodman and Evelyn Davies, 18 April 2015

Matthew Lockwood and Sarah Brown, 24 May 2015

New Members

Raymond and Hazel James, by
reinstatement

Deaths

Anita Segar, July 2015



Church Council report

The Church Council has met five times since the last magazine:

- In March, at an Extraordinary Church Council Meeting, members discussed progress with the Open Doors Project, which Derek Rawson reports on opposite.
- On 3rd June, the Minister introduced a discussion based around 'Our Calling', and a list of challenges identified by a recent review commissioned by the Finance & Property Committee. Suggestions were collected, and these were shared with the AGM on 7th June. They were then developed by a small group, and brought back to the Council on 13th July.
- The AGM, held on 7th June, was well attended. Members heard presentations from our partners, Rainbow House, Christian Aid and PHAB. John Cammack gave a financial report. Derek Rawson updated the meeting on Open Doors and Rob Thompson spoke about heritage. The meeting appointed 7 new stewards and 7 members to Church Council. Full Minutes can be found on the website.
- On 29th June, a second Extraordinary Church Council Meeting met to make further decisions on the Open Doors project.
- The regular Church Council Meeting on 13th July received reports from various groups, and discussed questions about the future resourcing of the church.

Janet Forsaith, Church Council Secretary



Introducing Adam Stevenson

The Revd Adam Stevenson will become a part-time minister at Wesley Memorial in September. Here he introduces himself.

I have been working in the Circuit for the last five years and now I am looking forward to the new challenge of City Centre ministry alongside continuing with my more rural churches of Chalgrave, Great Milton and Watlington. I moved recently to Watlington and it's great to be in the countryside, not least for me, but also for Hector. Hector is my black Cocker-Spaniel, who will turn 5 in October - I hope you'll get to meet him too.

After university (Theology at Bangor) I settled in London, first working for Sainsbury's and then soon afterwards for the Methodist Connexional Team at Methodist Church House. While there I worked in Personnel as well as Legal and Constitutional Affairs - where I learnt a lot about the Church and how things work, which built upon my knowledge as a young adult in Circuit in Nottingham, where I had been a Steward and Local Preacher. I left Methodist Church House to train at Wesley House and after two years was stationed here in the Oxford Circuit. The rest, as they say, is history.

Although ministry is particularly busy I still find time to do one or two other things in my spare time. I sing with Benson Choral Society, which is great fun and their repertoire often includes religious music. I am also interested in ecclesiastical embroidery both in terms of its history and doing goldwork myself. I walk the dog - often now in the Chilterns - and cook and entertain when I can. I particularly like cooking as when you're doing it you cannot really concentrate on anything else! I collect 'Shorter' pottery, and like to add to my growing library whenever I can.

I hope that gives a potted history and some background interest. I look forward to sharing with you more in ministry together.

Adam Stevenson





Wesley Memorial Church

New Inn Hall Street, Oxford OX1 2DH

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Children's, families' & outreach worker:
Janice Smith

Pastoral, community & development worker:
Rob Thompson

Church manager: *Nikos Paplomatas*

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Contributions, letters, questions, pictures, book reviews and any other suitable items for publication are always welcome. Please pass them to the editorial team by hand or by email, stating if you are unwilling for them to appear on the church website. Articles may be edited. Articles express the views of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of Wesley Memorial Church or the Methodist Church.

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*Deadline for the next issue:
16 October 2015*

Dates for the diary

Saturday 12 September	Oxfordshire Historic Churches' Trust Ride & Stride
Monday 14 September, 7.30pm	Circuit Meeting at Lime Walk
Tuesday 15 September, 7.30pm	Finance and Property Committee
Thursday 17 September, 8.00pm	Worship Action Group
Tuesday 22 September, 7.30pm	Faith in Action Group, at New Road Baptist Church
Sunday 4 October	Harvest Festival
Sunday 11 October	Oxford University First Week
Sunday 18 October, 10.30am	Guest preacher: Revd Helen Cameron, new Assistant Secretary of the Methodist Conference
Monday 19 October, 7.30pm	Pastoral Committee
Wednesday 21 October	Day of Prayer
Tuesday 3 November, 7.30pm	Finance and Property Committee
Thursday 17 December, 5.30pm	Carols for the City
Sunday 20 December, 6.30pm	Carol Service

WESLEY MEMBRAIN

I AM A
NONCONFORMIST



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NONCONFORMISTS!

