

Wesley Memorial *magazine*

from Wesley Memorial Methodist Church, Oxford

Christmas 2023



Sharing the Good News!



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Thanks to Mel and Jo for agreeing to be part of the front cover photo, with the new outdoor banner

The new indoor poster

Editorial

Writing a Christmas issue editorial before we are even into Advent is slightly disorientating; and wishing everyone a peaceful and joyful season, when the tv news bulletins are crammed with images of death and destruction, is even more disheartening.

Nevertheless, we do hope you will enjoy reading our magazine that speaks of Good News, and sharing it; and that the Christmas season will bring you peace, comfort and joy, wherever and however you celebrate the Saviour's birth.

And in that spirit, we'd like to share with you some very good news from last summer. Here are Nia and Cecily in the porch of Wesley Memorial, with bridesmaids, smiling and happy after their wedding ceremony in our church. Warm congratulations to them, and to Miriam, whose first conducted wedding here was this wonderful event!

The Editorial Team



Wedding Photograph by BigDayProductions

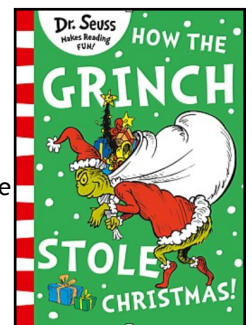
Dear Friends,

November 2023

As I write my first letter for the Wesley Memorial Magazine, I wish to say a heartfelt thank you. Thank you for the warmth of your welcome, for your love and support, for bearing with me in all the 'I don't knows' of a new ministerial appointment. I look forward to all that God has in store for us in the days to come as we seek to grow together, to share good news and to be 'open to God, open to all, and open to each other.'

I find it difficult to comprehend that Christmas is approaching so rapidly. On 30 October this year I walked into a meeting in a coffee shop and discovered that Christmas had come early. It seems that the earlier Christmas-themed things appear in our shops, the more anxiety is expressed about the need to get everything 'right'. Adverts show us the newest and shiniest gifts that we 'should' be investing in. Yet what does it mean to get Christmas right?

In Dr Seuss's book *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* there is a wonderful quote: "Then the Grinch thought of something he hadn't before! What if Christmas, he thought, doesn't come from a store. What if Christmas...perhaps...means a little bit more!" What all of us know deep down, but rarely acknowledge is that 'things', however clever, expensive, or innovative can only give a passing pleasure and transient joy.



It is, of course, good to celebrate Christmas and to give gifts. The heart of the Christmas story is that God gave us the greatest gift of all in the birth of Jesus. In Jesus, God gave us not what we wanted but what we need. Scripture bears witness that God in Christ stepped into the depths of our broken and messy world to bring us what we need; peace, reconciliation, forgiveness and hope. As I write, Israel is bombarding Gaza with non-stop strikes, Hamas is holding the hostages, war still rages in Ukraine, mass shootings and stories of institutional abuse are in the headlines, while here in the UK people struggle to feed themselves or heat their homes or find a safe roof over their heads. The world desperately still needs peace, reconciliation, forgiveness, and hope.

Growing up, Nativity plays were an interesting experience. While my friends were all being dressed up as angels, shepherds, wise men, Mary or Joseph, I was being prepared for my dazzling role as Villager number 11 or a sheep. I stood in the background looking surly, while my friends got to act out the Christmas story. What you fail to appreciate when you're 8 is the opportunity to look on in wonder, to be an eyewitness to the unfolding of the good news. All you think is, "That's not fair! Why does she get to be Mary and I have to wear this sack?" Even as adults, we become indifferent to the Christmas story because it holds few surprises for us; it becomes a story rather than a reality. In the hurry to get everything ready for Christmas, will we put enough focus on the greatest gift of them all – Jesus? The baby, born in humble surroundings, a refugee, God with us. Perhaps, these words from a modern Christmas hymn are worth reflecting upon:

*Jesus is the heart of Christmas, share him in each card you send.
Give each gift in love and friendship, share his gifts which have no end.
Jesus is the heart of Christmas, Lord and Saviour, Guide and Friend.*
(Marguerite Kendrick)

Siblings, in this joyful season may you, and those you love, be blessed by the greatest gift of them all, Jesus Christ.

Blessings,
Miriam Moul

What have I to do with you?

In the second year of their probationary period, Methodist ministers are required to complete a project called “The Gospel in Context”. Its aim is to help new ministers, as they move towards their ordination, to reflect on everything they have learned about their new location, their new role in ministry, and their new learning, and to look to the future. One way in which they do so is to ask: “so then: what does the Gospel of Jesus Christ have to say, to this place? To these people? To this time? To me, as I seek to lead God’s people, here and now?”

When I used to lead the team at The Queen’s Foundation working with probationers on this enquiry, I was always amazed at the sheer diversity of the answers and responses they were formulating. It was always a humbling, inspiring, renewing journey to take with them, and to rediscover the multitudinous ways in which Jesus continues to inform us, restore us, encourage us, challenge us, and urge us to mine the treasure of God’s Good News, wherever we live and work, and whatever the challenges we may feel the Church is facing.

The Christian faith is not a monolith: although those who profess it hold to some shared understandings and convictions about the God revealed in Christ, we also bring to the community of faith our own particular experiences of how that God, in Christ, speaks to us, enriches our lives, and sends us out with good news to share. That good news – the Christian Gospel – resonates in our world and in others’ lives with a variety of tones and accents and colours. Sometimes, it brings healing. Sometimes, it suggests a way through our human mess and muddle and folly. Sometimes, it rails against injustice and offers an alternative vision of God’s Kingdom of ‘shalom’, and the wholeness and integrity of Creation. Sometimes, it offers us the vision of Christ crucified and assures us in that of God’s boundless mercy, infinite love and unlimited forgiveness. Sometimes it holds up a clearer lens to enable us to see the truth of what is; and at other times it enables us to grasp and to embody the urgency of reconciliation. You could go on: because the Gospel we know in Jesus is of God, it meets us wherever we are, and offers us, whoever we are, newness of life. It is sufficient for all our needs, all our sin,



all our confusion, all our pain, all our longing for a better life, a better world.

Mark, in chapter 5 of his Gospel, tells us that Jesus meets a man ostracised by his community, marginalised and despised, suffering terribly from many afflictions, who greets him with the exclamation, “what have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?”. He fears that Jesus, like his fellow country people, will hate him, punish him, and further marginalise him. He has been given no reason to expect any Good News. But he is surprised by love. He is stunned by mercy. He receives his life back, and gains a purpose: Mark says that he becomes a simple evangelist, a witness to the goodness and grace which he has discovered is at the heart of God.

For Jesus, though, this isn’t a simple thing. His healing of the man provokes anger and fear from the locals, who see their carefully-ordered world challenged and undermined. It’s very hard for them to grasp the goodness of the Good News, even in the face of the testimony of the one who is healed and restored.

So: what have you to do with Jesus? What does Jesus have to do with you? How do you tell the story of what the Good News he brings and embodies means to you? What glimpses of God’s Kingdom inspire and undergird the ways you understand and live out your faith? Is it primarily a Gospel of healing and hope? Is it a story of challenge and dissent from the world’s unjust structures and divisive behaviours? You have a story to tell, and a witness to offer, that’s all yours.

The Revd Dr Jonathan Dean

Director of Learning for Ministry | The Connexional Team

Embracing Evangelism – for everyone

Over the last year or so we've put some time and energy into thinking about evangelism. And hopefully not only thinking about it! In the first half of this year we used the *Everyone an Evangelist* video course from the Methodist Connexional Team. It provided three full meetings at six week intervals; and as part of this process, six small pop-up groups gathered to follow the Church Army's *Faith Pictures* six week series.

It was fantastic that so many people joined the small groups, about 40 in all. There were many good openings for discussion and sharing, and it was really appreciated. Hopefully many of us now feel better able to speak about our faith, even if it lies outside our comfort zone!

Here are some nuggets from members, as we reflected in June on the experience:

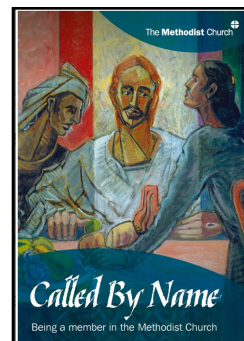
- ★ Evangelism doesn't have to be weird
- ★ It is possible to talk openly about your faith
- ★ Sometimes all it needs is a bit of time and forethought to turn a 'normal' church event into one that is intentional about evangelism
- ★ It doesn't have to be grand: small changes can make a big difference
- ★ The numbers of people involved speak to the value of our approach
- ★ There are opportunities for evangelism in everything we do
- ★ It's made me more aware of opportunities

Part of the project during the late spring/summer was to choose a few things the church already does and try to be more intentional about sharing faith through them. Two key events through which we did this were our Art Weeks exhibition of creativity, and the Junior Church's production of *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat*. (See our Summer Magazine, still available on our website.) *Joseph* was a great opportunity to bring in Junior Church families. We also took time to think about what we wrote in the show programme, and announced at the start of the

evening. We wanted everyone in the audience to feel fully welcomed in receiving a message about God, as well as enjoying a fun evening of catchy tunes.

Our Art Weeks Exhibition in May drew in many visitors and encouraged people to think about 'Special places and holy spaces'. A wide variety of people offered artwork to show and many interesting conversations followed, about both art and faith. As Rob Elliott mentioned in the summer magazine, people commented that they had walked straight past the church many times previously, but were glad that they had actually come in this time. The exhibition and the warm welcome had made that possible.

When sorting through my Dad's things after he died, I came across a little booklet, *Called by Name Being a member in the Methodist Church*. I found a post-it note of his on one page, where I read these helpful words:



Evangelism is not about collaring some reluctant person and demanding to know if they are 'saved'. It is simply about being willing to 'give a reason for the faith that is in us' at the right time – about telling our story, sharing our journey. Of course, if we never give the time to reflect on this with other supportive Christians, it is most unlikely that we shall have the confidence ... to share it with someone who might challenge what we say. To speak openly about the things that matter most to us is going to make us feel vulnerable. No-one ever suggested that the Christian life was going to be easy. But we can all be a 'means of grace' for others, we can all sometimes speak the Word of God by finding the right words at the right time. Someone has done that for us, or we wouldn't be here on this journey. Now it's our turn.

Let's keep trying to find ways to share it.

Jenny Ayres

Further reflections on *Everyone an Evangelist*

When I was asked to facilitate one of the *Everyone an Evangelist* groups, my initial reaction was “I can’t do that!” However, almost instantaneously, I knew that I would be doing it. Evidently, it was God’s plan. I did, however, check first with the organisers that it was OK that I do not believe the whole of the Bible as literal fact. I was reassured and therefore proceeded. Obstacles that could have stood in my way last winter did not appear until after the course was over.

Doubtless not all members of the various groups attended for the same reason. After talking with lots of different people at the large whole-group sessions, it was apparent to me that motivation varied from “I don’t really approve of evangelism but the church is doing this, so I’d better join in” to a passion to be more able to tell others about the “Good News of Jesus”. Most were somewhere in between. We discussed this within our group and Don mentioned the passage from Peter 3:15: “Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an account of the hope that is in you.” I personally find that very important.

I go to church because I believe in God and I want His Kingdom on Earth to thrive. I also need to meet with other Christian people, or indeed people who believe in the same God from other monotheistic faiths, because my immediate family members do not believe. Most of my work colleagues and friends do not believe either. Perhaps this is different for some other Wesley Memorial members, for whom the church is the hub of their social life.

Sadly, nowadays, most people in the UK do not believe in God. What’s more, considering for oneself whether God could be real or not isn’t generally seen as something worth expending energy on. God has become an irrelevance for many, despite the benefit for people of knowing God’s love being as strong as ever. Perhaps our relatively comfortable lifestyles and expectations of a lifespan of hopefully more than three score years and ten make us feel self-sufficient. A homeless person once told me, “All homeless people believe in God.”



I am glad that the Methodist Church produced the *Everyone an Evangelist* programme and I was very happy to be part of it. It is getting harder and harder to stand out as someone of faith. This contrasts with how it was during the times of both the Old and New Testaments. Jesus was probably not asked the question, “What makes you believe that God exists?” To me it’s harder to explain to others why I believe that God really exists than if I had to explain why I believe in God rather than, for example, Thor and Woden. It even contrasts with my student days in the 1980s, when we used to sit up late into the night discussing ‘the meaning of life’. My young adult sons tell me that matters of faith and morality are no longer main topics of student discussion.

I have to say that the *Faith Pictures* Church Army course, which the small groups used, was not universally popular. However, I did feel that it tried to address the main obstacles to sharing faith and encouraged us to make faith something naturally spoken about in ordinary conversation. Of course, one has to have a faith in order to want to share it and the course did not consider that at all. The mere fact of meeting together and discussing evangelism was valuable in itself and we each had something special to contribute. We developed a rapport and got to know each other better, which was lovely. Chris and Glenda Lane kindly sent me this paragraph to include:

“The small group discussions and activities were thought-provoking and helpful. A spin-off was the Lenten book *The Falling of Dusk* by Paul Dominiak, suggested by Don, and which we enjoyed reading. Dominiak quoted James Cone, a Black liberation theologian, who also featured in the annual John Wesley lecture at Lincoln College in May given by Dr Anthony Reddie, and which we attended.” Now that the course has finished, I cannot claim that it has

made a big difference to how I live out my faith. It did, however, remind me to be alert to how I can be more open about being a Christian in the right circumstances. Funnily enough, an opportunity came about a week before the first small group meeting. I was at a work training session with other doctors, most of whom I did not know. The tutor went around the room asking each of us in turn what we do to help us cope with the stresses of working in the NHS. I decided to say that my belief in God is a great strength. This was well received by the group and encouraged others to mention personal things too. One lady spoke of her Hindu practices and another of his Muslim faith. At the coffee break, I was approached by two women. One asked me which church I attended and it transpired that we had a mutual acquaintance from Wesley Memorial. The other expressed surprise that Wesley Memorial is a functioning church, as she had attended our premises for something like

a book fair and had not realised that a worshipping community existed here. None of these conversations would have happened at all if I had not been about to start hosting the group!

We all have different personalities and skills, and we move in different circles. It can be as simple (or as difficult!) as trusting God and following his prompting — whether that be to speak up and say something about our faith, give practical help to someone in need or whether to keep quiet, as it isn't the right time. I find it helpful to remind myself that God is in charge and also that, as stated in the *Everyone an Evangelist* videos, the Church is behind us for encouragement and support when we are asked to step out of our comfort zones to share the Good News of Jesus.

Rosemary London

Sharing the Good News in the Meditation Group

To be open, that is all.
 To be quiet, and open.
 Not a fist, clenched
 and rigid,
 held against the chill,
 but soft and warm
 with fingers spreading
 outwards to receive.
 Not to cling desperately
 on to any thought
 that will hold us
 but to float
 gently on the whisper
 of the breath,
 letting go,
 letting be,
 just seeing where it will
 take us.
 To be open.
 That is all. All. All.

Joanna Tulloch

This poem expresses the spirit of the Meditation Group, which is welcoming to all. The group is very supportive and caring. There is a tangible strength to our meetings, multiplied by being together on Zoom. We learn from each other: insights, books, quotations. We are led into a shared silence, helped to deal with distractions, gently invited to give thanks and then, if willing, to share thoughts, experience, queries.

The group provides companionship in the tricky discipline of sitting still long enough to really listen to God. Sometimes this involves a visualisation of a place where we feel close to God. Once, when we met in Christ Church, Jim Godfrey took us to one of those places for him so that we could experience it for ourselves. We sat under an ancient tree and were easily enveloped by calm.

We usually chat as we gather, mostly on Zoom these days, and then we're led into a meditation via a short period of relaxation. There are suggestions to focus our thoughts: sometimes more generally on our breathing, sounds or

sensations; sometimes specifically on a familiar place, or on people or situations of concern to us individually. Mostly the theology behind the readings that guide us is broad and comfortable for us all.

Another example: We close our eyes and picture ourselves on a hillside overlooking a small seaside town. It's dusk and slowly the lights come on, one by one in the streets below. We can hear seagulls calling and people laughing, tinny music playing and distant traffic humming. It's peaceful... But God invites us to go down into the town to find Jesus there. For a moment we hesitate, content to stay where we are, but we're intrigued. What will we find?

Afterwards everyone is invited to comment on their experience, but only if they wish. We describe special moments and surprises we've had, or particular difficulties we've encountered. Occasionally one of us will challenge something in the text that they found unhelpful. All contributions are welcome, and we draw on each other's ideas and support to help us in future meditations. One's experiences can be significantly different on different occasions. Sometimes the meditation seems to drag, but sometimes we are surprised to be told at the end

***Faith Pictures* – leading a group**

When I was asked to lead one of the *Faith Pictures* groups about evangelism, my immediate thought was 'no'! I did however want to be in a group, as it wasn't something I knew very much about, and I was keen to learn. As I found out more, it seemed less daunting. Firstly, because some of the other leaders were wondering about it like me, and secondly the materials we were going to use were attractive and easy to use.

I saw the role of leader as more of a facilitator, enabling us all, including myself, to learn together week by week. We were blessed with a lovely group and Anne and David, who hosted, made us feel welcome and very safe.

As we went through the materials, we were gently encouraged to explore our faith and how we might share it.

how long a silence lasted. It can be beautifully peaceful, with a sense of being enfolded in the light and love of God. We sometimes aim to visualise Jesus as a person beside us and talk with him, and this can be particularly powerful. We might be surprised to find lines of hymns coming into our minds, bringing us the wisdom of past and present-day Christians.

When we finish, we gently come back to the present and what great riches of experience we share: a spiritual silent retreat this weekend; an overwhelming feeling of love and acceptance when seeing Rembrandt's Return of the Prodigal Son in St Petersburg; a dark night alone with a cat in Spain - God was there; a sense of awe and light on Lindisfarne as an eider duck swims by; the wonderful experience of walking the Camino de Santiago - an allegory of life; being overwhelmed spiritually by the beauty of the stained-glass windows and tree pillars in the Sagrada Familia Cathedral in Barcelona; a chance invitation to a tent in Didcot where the evangelist changed the person's life as they made a commitment to God. What treasures and what wonderful sharing of the good news. Thank you, Meditation Group!

Members of the Meditation Group

We did this through watching the six videos, discussing the questions that were posed in the materials, and looking at a few key Bible verses. We also looked at a range of characters that appear in the Bible to see what they could teach us about sharing our faith. Each week took us a step further, with an invitation to practise what we had learned and felt comfortable with.

By the end of our time together, we all had a few tools that we could use. Since the group finished, I've tried to be a little braver at introducing something about church or faith into conversations with friends and with people I meet. Much to my surprise I've had positive responses, and it has been much easier than I could have imagined.

John Cammack



Another reflection

I hadn't expected to enjoy the *Faith Pictures* course so much. When I briefly looked at the course material before we started, I was surprised about how simple it seemed and yet we filled each of our sessions with conversation as we shared our faith journeys.

I loved our group and Rob led us sensitively, giving us space for sharing, letting our conversations meander, but also drawing us back to the point when needed! I really treasure my memories of that time, especially as Jim Godfrey was also in our group: his wise comments were always helpful.

Although the aim was to help us feel more confident in sharing our faith, I have found that I have actually become more aware of those moments where I have missed an opportunity! I feel cross with myself when I do, but maybe this is a first step on the path to becoming tuned in to naturally sharing my faith in everyday situations.

Mel McCulloch

Oxford Open Doors 2023

The Oxford Preservation Trust declares on its website: "A firm favourite in the Oxford calendar, we have been running Oxford Open Doors for 15 years, an annual weekend where places which are not usually open to the public open free to celebrate heritage and culture across all walks of the city's life! More than 120 doors are opening for you to explore this year!" We are 'a place' that is normally open to the public during the day. In fact I remember coming to Oxford in 1982, and very soon after, hearing from new friends at Wesley Memorial that we were planning to open the church during the week. At the time, this was unusual, but we have done it faithfully ever since.

So on Saturday 9 September this year, we made a special effort. We opened the doors at 10.00 and closed them at 4.30, as advertised in the Preservation Trust's handsome booklet, free to all interested weekend tourists. We were also on stand-by to sign in the Ride & Stride participants in the annual Fundraising event for Oxfordshire Historic

Sharing in Rainbow House

Every Wednesday morning, I come to Wesley Mem to work as a volunteer at Rainbow House, our 'under 5s' drop-in for parents, grandparents, nannies and childminders. It is one of my favourite weekly commitments and I believe it is an opportunity to show my faith in action. I enjoy getting to know the regular customers and welcoming new people each week. After nearly 40 years of operating, it is amazing how many grandparents say that they brought their children to Rainbow House and are now bringing their grandchildren! It is a great place for carers to meet up with friends and meet new people. We were delighted earlier this year that a couple of regulars contributed their art work to our Oxford Arts Week exhibition.

We hear many appreciative comments about the service we provide in the large hall: a space for the children to play on tricycles and the very popular Little Tikes car, a slide, a train set, books and other small toys. Mel brings her guitar and some small musical instruments in for a very popular singing time. Our co-ordinator, Christine, with her team of volunteer helpers, provides delicious freshly cooked meals at very reasonable prices, with an option of child portions. Drinks and a range of fruit and snacks are available, including homemade cakes baked by members of the congregation. The sale of refreshments is crucial to bringing in the funds that help us as a church to provide this service.

Rainbow House runs on Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays from 10.30 to 2.00 in school term time and relies on the volunteer staff. If you are interested in helping in any way or finding out more, please talk to committee members Kate, Lindsay or Gwyneth.

Janet Forsaith

Churches. An organ recital in the morning, a piano and flute duo after lunch, refreshments and the children's play corner brought people in. 552 appreciative folk in all!

Join us next September to facilitate this very worth-while event, full of possibilities for the evangelism that emerges naturally from encounters with a willing public!

Kate Dobson

A Report from the Mission Group

Our efforts in evangelism are inextricably linked to our wish to be as inclusive and welcoming a church as possible. With this dual approach in mind, the Mission Group has been prompting some useful additions to our Sunday and weekday offerings:

- ★ Stewards have worked on enhancing the welcome they give at the start of services, speaking to all beyond the faithful regulars and visitors.
- ★ The printed order of service now includes a word of welcome, and copies are left in the vestibule for casual visitors during worship
- ★ There are business cards around the building with details of our Sunday service, for all to pick up
- ★ Mel and Joanna have created a beautiful poster, proclaiming our inclusive welcome, now on display in our main halls and spaces. (See page 2)
- ★ We have an excellent colourful new banner up on the railings outside, highlighting that we are a lively and inclusive church (45 likes on FaceBook)
- ★ Our website banner now displays the Inclusive Church logo www.wesleymem.org.uk
- ★ We are using social media to share our news on Facebook, Instagram and X (Twitter)

Looking forward we hope to be able to:

- ★ Make more use of the church vestibule and the seats at the back of the sanctuary to encourage

Sunday morning passers-by to linger for longer

- ★ Encourage all our preachers to think through how our services come across to complete outsiders - eg by helping newcomers to understand how and why we do certain things
- ★ Publicise widely Wesley Mem's 'Christian niche' in Oxford, to students and the wider community
- ★ Encourage a wider group of people beyond the regular congregation to come to *The Advent Calendar* (Junior Church Christmas service, 10 December); the Candlelit Carol service (17 December); and the Wednesday Coffee carol service (20 December)
- ★ Run a short course for small groups next year
- ★ Be active in Oxford Pride Festival, June 2024

We are also hoping to film or record mini faith-stories for the church website, with individuals saying, for example, why you go to church, or what faith means to you, or what you like about Wesley Memorial. It's a good challenge to each of us to encapsulate something about our faith and express it out loud! Displayed on the website, they could be a great invitation for others to think about faith and/or come to Wesley Memorial. Watch this space.

Jenny Ayres, for the Mission Group



Three of our friends from Woodstock Methodists, on the Ride & Stride.



John on piano and Liz on flute, 9 September

An Appeal from Citizens Advice, Oxford

CITIZENS ADVICE IN OXFORD WISHES TO RECRUIT MORE VOLUNTEERS TO JOIN ITS TEAM MAKING A POSITIVE DIFFERENCE FOR ALL THOSE THAT NEED US IN THE CITY

Citizens Advice believes everyone deserves access to independent, free advice to help them deal with life's problems and challenges. We need more volunteers in Oxford who can help us do that. No prior knowledge is required – all training is provided

We are all aware of the increasing difficulties that many people are facing at the moment. Volunteers can make a real difference. Volunteers are at heart of how we deliver the Citizens Advice service, whether it's:

- helping people online, over the phone, or in person
- raising funds
- researching and campaigning for policy change
- helping the service to run smoothly in our admin and customer service roles
- acting in a trustee role

Volunteers are vital to the work we do; helping people access the information and giving the advice they need to move forward with their lives.

Citizens Advice volunteers come from all walks of life and choose to volunteer for a variety of reasons. Our volunteers include students, people getting back into work after career breaks, people with part-time jobs, carers, and people who've retired. We are able to support volunteers who want to do their role partly, or completely, from home.

Every volunteer gets something different from their volunteering experience, including the opportunity to:

- make a positive difference to people's lives
- improve self- esteem, confidence and wellbeing
- gain invaluable work experience
- receive high quality training and develop new skills
- use existing skills and knowledge to benefit the local community
- meet new people from a range of backgrounds
- feel valued and part of a team
- change the way things work for the better



Moving into paid employment? Citizens Advice provides training, skills and experience that is valued by many employers. Many volunteers who leave local Citizens Advice go on to paid employment, including with the Citizens Advice service, as well as other organisations. If you're looking to get back into work, or considering a career with Citizens Advice, volunteering is a great place to start.

Please don't hesitate to contact us at our office at Wesley Memorial, OX2 2DH.

We do look forward to hearing from you.

More information about volunteering is available on the national Citizens Advice website:

<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/support-us/volunteering/>

Wesley Memorial welcomes the Albisani family

At this time when Israel and Palestine are in the news daily, it is striking that our family's grandmother, Jahada, had a grandfather who was a fisherman on the Sea of Galilee. The whole family had left in 1948 and settled in Iraq. There they had indefinite leave to remain until 2008 when those rights were removed and they became refugees overnight. When the family arrived at about 2.30 pm on 23 March 2023, they were very tired having been travelling since 2.00 that morning from Baghdad via Istanbul to London Heathrow. We greeted them with a banner created by Junior Church. It was the first day of Ramadan and so the adults had had no food and had to wait for sunset to eat. On reaching their new home in Oxford at about 5.00 pm, we had to explain every appliance in the house, including how to switch lights on and off, open and close windows, and go through the tenancy agreement, which they signed the following day. Syrian refugee friends brought them a meal on their first night.

There were so many policies and information summaries we had to prepare. We had policies for safeguarding and complaints, a code of conduct and information sheets on education, and introducing each of the 12 volunteers in the core group via photos and descriptions. Our Welcome Pack, translated into Arabic, ran to 39 pages including describing us, Oxford, emergency services and important contact numbers as well as the neighbourhood in which they live. The 'Day Planner' schedule for the family occupied them from morning until evening every day for the first 10 days. There were appointments to register with the GP, the dentist, the Job Centre, and to visit the children's school the local mosque. Hours were spent applying for benefits, opening bank accounts, completing forms for council tax, applying for utilities and bus passes. The family were given a cultural awareness course. At the end of two weeks, the family were utterly exhausted, but looking forward to the children starting school.

We employed two interpreters, Abdullah and Niveen. Both provided excellent service full time initially and then on an ad hoc basis. Until May, almost all conversations involved one or both interpreters.

Grace Samkange and Janet Forsaith are our safeguarding officers and have worked tirelessly to attend training, obtain DBS certification for us all, and maintain regular visits to the family.

Nour, aged 9, and Wasim, now aged 6, started school in the summer term and were incredibly excited. Wasim had never attended school before. Not speaking any English was an immediate barrier, and although the school was very welcoming it was a shock to Nour. Adam, now aged 2, began pre-school nursery in September. Kate Dobson arranged all the school places, via the County Council, and attended the initial visit with Janet Forsaith.

Carolyn Clements volunteered to furnish the house in January this year and having compiled a list of furniture offered, negotiated deliveries, bought furnishings and prepared a welcoming home. She also arranged a group from Wesley Memorial to tidy the garden and plant bulbs.

The parents enrolled in English classes at the EMBS community college in Cowley, attending 3 to 4 sessions a week. The children's father Ehab had previously studied English to just above GCSE level in his youth and so had some basic knowledge. His wife Marwa had expected to pick it up in 2 or 3 months and has been very disappointed by the reality of learning another language. Learning English isn't easy alongside taking children to school, shopping, cooking and attending appointments for benefits and the Job Centre. Jahada has some classes online and at home to develop her knowledge of English, which she had learned years ago. We have been fortunate to have Lawrie Coupland leading the ESOL team and a number of others who volunteered to tutor the adults at home.

Initially our focus was upon the family being settled in to live here, but the income from the Benefits' claims was not received until early July. It was quite shocking to realise that even with a Citizens Advice volunteer spending hours supporting Heather Davies with the Benefits claims, the family would have had almost no money for the first four months without the Wesley Memorial Project's fundraising.

Now the focus has shifted to improving their English, providing extra home lessons for all, and preparing the adults for paid employment and voluntary work. The family are fully engaged and wanting to integrate and work as soon as possible. Ehab has already had work experience with two different organisations. He is mentored by two members of our team, Wendy Spray and our friend Kate Harris, who have helped him devise his cv and apply for work. They continue to visit fortnightly.

We have learned a great deal about their cultural background. Rooted in their extended family, it has been hard for them to be separated, especially at times of birthdays and Eid. During the summer, relatives visited them from Sweden, Wales and Malvern, all squeezing together on their living room floor. They were delighted to have a 'full house' for a while.

Ehab was very interested in paragliding before leaving Iraq and had built up many contacts, and a store of videos. He has many followers on Facebook and is extending his posts now to include short clips about life in England. He is very enterprising and has a good sense of humour. In Iraq, both Marwa and Jahada loved to embroider, and when they have more time, it is a pastime they would like to return to. They enjoy cooking and entertaining family and members of the team. Impromptu meals or coffee and cake are commonplace. The children entertain us with gymnastics and their latest drawings. We are fortunate to have such an engaging and delightful family.

The Home Office arranged a post-arrival support meeting with the team and separately a meeting with the family. Happily we both reported positively. A second meeting was scheduled for early November, and went well.

The family have visited the Pitt Rivers museum, Cotswold Wildlife Park, had a picnic with the volunteer team in a local park and enjoyed a day trip to London during half term. They are looking forward to learning more about our culture and are appreciative of the support from Wesley Mem. Ehab tells us that at college others studying have no support and it has made him realise how fortunate they are.

Grateful thanks to all at Wesley Memorial who have helped us bring this great plan to fruition. We hope other families will receive similar support and know that they too are welcome in this land.

Gillian Dodds, Project leader



Welcome to the UK: Heathrow, March 2023



Picnic in the park with the group



Boating on the Thames!

Libby in Malaysia

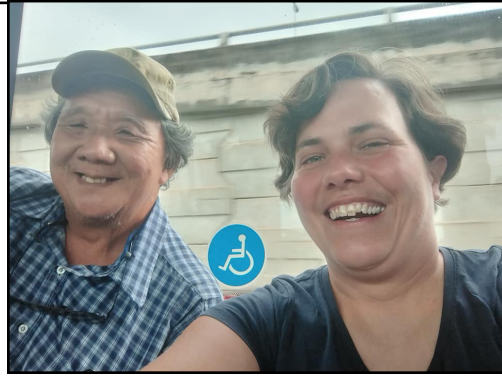
Earlier in the year, you may remember that I had the opportunity to travel to Palestine with Cliff College, and learn about mission and ministry in the Holy Land – a place where peace is fragile, conflicts escalate quickly, and death is all too ubiquitous. A very difficult place to be, particularly now, with all that its people are facing. It seems that this year is one of travel for me, and, more recently, I had the blessing to be able to return to the lands where I was born and raised, but this time for a holiday, or so I thought.

Another Muslim country, Malaysia is a somewhat different country. It is markedly a peaceful and relatively friendly place to be, and safe. As a solo female traveller going to some more remote locations, I was aware that God was with me in all I did and in all my encounters. Not only was I blessed by several travelling mercies, but I was met with warmth, generosity, and hospitality at almost every turn. Lots of small things went wrong on the trip, but that presented the opportunity for lots of things to go right, and to be dependent on the care and support of strangers in all kinds of different places and in all manner of different ways.

But one of the things I was most struck by on my travels was how abundant the opportunities for sharing the good news is with so many people I met. Both people of faith, and those without, Christians and followers of other religions, they were keen to hear about the hope I have as a Christian and the insights I've gained as a chaplain in Oxford.

There was the young guy who taught me how to catch fish with my bare hands who then told me about a deep-seated phobia he had and asked for advice about how he could begin to process some of his childhood trauma (things he had never told anyone else).

There was the young mum who was facing a midlife crisis, but who had a deep-seated faith, and approached me every night over dinner to ask for advice about how to deepen her faith and her prayer life, then shared the most amazing stories with me about direct answers to prayer. (Miracles!)



There was the older Malaysian man who is a guide at one of the national parks he visited, and a senior pastor of a remote indigenous community in his spare time, who told me about the amazing outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the indigenous communities across Borneo. (Stories very similar to some of those we read associated with John Wesley).

Then there was the older spiritualist Peranakan (Straits Malay) man who clicked with me upon first meeting, and spent a while talking about the divine and the things he's witnessed in his life, but didn't quite know how to explain in a way that a westerner would understand and believe. I found him the most fascinating, as, by law, Malays aren't allowed to be Christian, or they might (until a few months ago) have been given the death penalty.

And so many other countless stories besides. I don't think a single day went by on my trip without having a God encounter with someone I met at the shop/ bus/ restaurant/ tourist centre/ ... I didn't go out seeking these encounters, but they just evolved around me. (If I'm honest, I just wanted a holiday and 'break' from chaplaincy for a few weeks while I travelled, immersed myself in nature, and enjoyed favourite foods from my childhood that you can't get in England.

But I've come to see that something truly special can happen when you put yourself at the mercy of God, and listen to the still, small voice within. We don't need to go out of our way to share the Gospel – we just need to be attentive to the moments when God is pulling people together for a particular purpose at a specific time, and see what God is working out in our midst, and sometimes, through us.

Libby Hawkness-Smith



Jim Godfrey 1963-2023

On Saturday 21st October 2023, more than 250 of Jim's family members, friends and colleagues came together at Wesley Memorial to celebrate his life. We heard moving tributes and memories from those close to him. It was a very beautiful service.

Jim is greatly missed and our love and prayers continue to be with his whole family.

Janet Forsaith

Wesley Memorial Church



New Inn Hall Street, Oxford OX1 2DH

Minister: The Revd Miriam Moul
Children's, families' & outreach worker: Mel McCulloch
Church manager: Nikos Paplomatas

Services: Sunday worship 10.30 am
Wednesday prayers 12.30 pm

Tel: 01865 243216
Web: www.wesleymem.org.uk
email: officeAToxfordmethodists.org.uk

Wesley Memorial Magazine editorial and production team:
Janet Forsaith, Alan Dobson, Kate Dobson, Joanna Tulloch

Our email: magazineATwesleymem.org.uk

Contributions, letters, questions, pictures, book reviews and any other suitable items for publication are always welcome. Please email them to the editorial team, stating if you are also willing for them to appear on the church website. All items may be edited by the team.

Articles express the views of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of Wesley Memorial Church nor of the Methodist Church as a whole.



Jim's regular cartoon strip, *Wesley Membrain*, entertained us on this Magazine back page for many years.
Much missed!