

Wesley Memorial *magazine*

from Wesley Memorial Methodist Church, Oxford

Spring 2025



Promises of Spring

Seeds of hope

Dear Friends,

I sit down to write this letter as we head towards the beginning of Lent, a season of reflection and repentance which culminates in a new hope and redemption as we celebrate Easter.

Our theme for this magazine, Seeds of Hope, feels pertinent to where we find ourselves as a Church community in this moment. There are signs of growth in our community, not just numerically but in other ways too. We have welcomed new members, our ministry amongst students is growing and flourishing, we are welcoming new families, our Junior Church is growing too. We are striving to be an inclusive community in all forms. We are working together, looking ahead and hoping together. Seeds have been sown across the years by many of you, the faithful disciples of this community, that are now beginning to come to fruition. I wonder how we might continue to grow together, to sow seeds in hope that one day they will flower, to leave behind a faithful inheritance for others, as our forebears did for us?

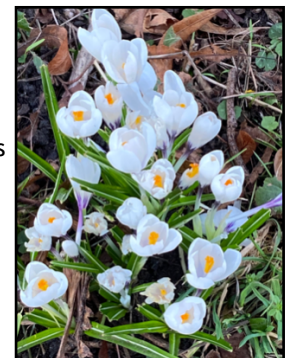


I have shared with you before that I am not a very good gardener. Generally, this is due to a lack of time but also, to be honest, a lack of inclination. I love to look at a beautiful garden and I love to have flowers in the house, but I am also impatient when it comes to gardening. Photographing beautiful flowers and trees is one of my favourite things to do yet when it comes to keeping plants alive I struggle. When I arrived in my first ministerial appointment in Dover, I was given a beautiful plant as a welcoming gift. I tried my very best to care for it, to nurture it, but despite all my energies and attention, within just a couple of weeks it had died. This image often springs to mind when I reflect on initiatives in the life of the Church. Sometimes we will try so hard to make something work, we will be faithful and hardworking and yet it still does not thrive. Other things will thrive, seemingly growing out of nowhere, without us

really seeming to understand how it came about. Thank goodness we are not in charge and God is!

In this season for our church community where new shoots appear to be springing up and seeds of hope beginning to germinate we should give thanks to God the Sower. In the parable of the sower, which many of us know so well, we see revealed the surprising generosity of God. As seeds fall on different kinds of soil, the parable tells us they are either eaten, blown away, wither and die or grow in abundance. The four patches of ground hold two things in common. Seeds and the sower. The sower sows the same seeds in all four areas with equal toil, hope and generosity. The sower does so without evaluation of the soil's quality or potential. There is no soil left unsown. No ground is declared undeserving of the sower's seeds. This is not about the quality of soil. It's about the quality of God, the divine sower. God simply wants to sow love in lives.

This parable is about God's faithfulness and not about farming or soil quality. In the sower's world wastefulness gives way to hope, inefficiency to love, and profitability to generosity. Every part of our lives has been sown with the seeds of God and we know what happens to seeds – they grow. Usually where we don't want them to. Things spring up out of cracks in concrete. Weeds flourish however much we try and pull them up.



We are also called to sow the seeds of God in the lives of others. So, what must we wishful sowers do? Prepare the ground as much as we can, but then trust in the generous mercy of God, and sometimes throw caution to the wind, and watch with delight as God accomplishes what we could never have dreamed of.

I conclude with a prayer written by the late Bishop Ken Untener as a reflection on the martyrdom of Archbishop Oscar Romero:

*We plant the seeds that one day will grow.
We water the seeds already planted, knowing that they
hold future promise.
We lay foundations that will need further development...
We cannot do everything and there is a sense of liberation
in realizing that.
This enables us to do something and to do it well.
It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along
the way,
an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the
rest.*

*We may never see the end results,
but that is the difference between the master builder and
the worker...
We are prophets of a future not our own.*

Friends, we may not always be there to see the fruit, but
we must plant and tend those seeds of hope, believing in
the future that lies in God's hands.

Rev Miriam Moul
February 2025

Whatever is your cup of tea

We are grateful to Alison and Mel for creating interesting
and informative displays in the cabinet between the Hall
and the John Wesley Room.

The latest display created by Alison has the theme,
*Whatever your cup of tea, there is something for you at
Wesley Memorial.*

As part of the creation of the display, I asked different
members of our Phab Club what Phab meant to them. Here
are some of their comments.

*Phab is somewhere you can...
...find something different every visit
...be one of the family
...meet people
...be challenged and start moving, and get on with life
a bit more
...enjoy friendship and different activities
...try new things
...come and have fun and make cups of tea
Phab is ...a friendly group ...a lifeline ...a support network
If someone's sad, you say something to make them happy.
It gave me confidence to be myself and not be judged.
It's a place where I can truly be me
It's the first place I was accepted for who I am*

Everyone has a different experience but there were lots of
similar comments which show just how important it is to
have this place where everyone feels accepted. A small word
of welcome can grow into an action that transforms lives.

Oxford Phab has been part of our activities at Wesley
Memorial for over 40 years. We meet on Friday evenings. It
would be lovely to see some new faces.

For more details or to find out when we are meeting please
look at the website:
<https://oxford-phab.wp.paladyn.org>

Mary Lines



Editorial

Faced with international crisis after crisis, uncertainty and anxiety, we certainly need some seeds of hope!

We offer you this issue of the magazine in Lent, hoping that you will feel less despondent, encouraged by these very varied reflections. Holy Week and the joy of Easter Day will surely follow.

With thanks to our contributors for beating the deadline – most of them! – and finding reasons for hope in these testing times.

A happy and blessed Easter from the editors!



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Unless

Rare seeds culled from old seed-heads
once discarded and all but forgotten
fall drily into the new soil
to crack, to break apart in darkness
and push up into a new future.
Unaccustomed moisture coaxes them
to embrace a life they never thought they'd have,
so long have they lain in their oblivion.
Someone once collected and treasured them,
sorting and classifying, storing them in drawers
turned dusty and distressed in an old shed or garage,
and they were actually thrown away
when their container was rediscovered as an antique to flog,
Trading the past for a quickly forgotten meal or holiday.
tossed on the compost heap and covered with disregarded peelings,
it turns out they were the real treasure,
their patina arising from stroking and handling life,
their provenance the biodiversity
that later generations wasted and plundered.
Creation herself has hidden away behind those dried-up husks,
poised for passion, for the chance to die into new birth,
to merge with the earth and suddenly reveal
a flower or fruit that we thought gone for ever,
priceless and uninsurable except by our continued care.

Joanna Tulloch

Knit and Stitch with us

The Knit and Stitch group meets every Tuesday morning from 10-12 at Wesley Memorial where we share various craft skills, and conversation over a hot drink and biscuits. Members have a wide range of experience and we are happy to offer tuition to beginners. We have supplies of yarn, needles and hooks for all to use. All are welcome!

We are usually busy making items for a variety of local charities and our most recent project was sending 23 tiny red hats for the Special Care Baby Unit at the John Radcliffe Hospital. These were requested so that staff could monitor any newborn baby needing particular attention. It was a joy to contribute to this scheme to help these precious infants survive their difficult start in life. We also make blankets for the maternity department at the hospital.

Our current project is making twiddle muffs for people living with dementia. We are continually making hats and scarves for the homeless community in Oxford and we have lap blankets and comfort shawls available for pastoral visitors to gift to anyone who they think would welcome something made with love and care.

If anyone would like to be involved with any of our projects but is unable to get to the sessions please contact me:

margaret.pargeter@wesleymem.org.uk



23 baby hats in red



The Knit and Stitch group at work

A prayer of French origin

I do not know how to pray.
I do not know what to say.
I do not have much time.
So?

This candle I light is:
- something of what I have
- something of my time
- something of myself
that I leave before the Lord.

This light that shines
stands for my prayer
that I continue to offer
even as I leave this place

*Found in the church of
St Mary with St Alban
Teddington*



The Grand Evening of music

Celebrating the new grand piano!

The grand event turned out to be all that was promised and a whole lot more. Such variety, such style, such an overflowing of talent – all brought together for the delight of an enthusiastic audience on a chilly Oxford evening..

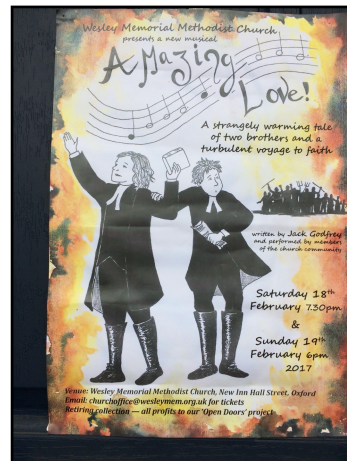
The choir opened the proceedings unannounced with two rousing numbers from *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*. Shelby Knighten as Joseph told us once again that ‘Any dream will do’, a pleasing reminder of the production of the show so professionally presented in 2023.



There followed a Bach *Fugue*, on the piano; two pieces on flute and piano, Shostakovitch and Gershwin; a Dvorak *Slavonic Dance* for piano duet, before Clare Morgan launched into her Susannah Wesley role. The song *Work, boys work* encourages young John and Charles Wesley along the right path, in Jack Godfrey’s musical *Amazing love*, which saw its première at Wesley Memorial in 2017.

More Gershwin on the piano was followed by two favourite worship songs from Rockfish, our church band: *My Lighthouse* and *Blessing and honour*, ending Part One.

Fortified by tea and coffee, and the odd biscuit, the audience returned to the Sanctuary for another round of impressive treats. We were carried away to Scotland by Keith Lambert on piano, with the popular *Farewell to Stromness*; then into Shropshire with Tom Ibbotson’s songs from the sad nostalgia of Butterworth’s cycle *A Shropshire Lad*. The choir gathered again for our very favourite Fauré anthem, the famous sacred *Cantique de Jean Racine*.



Nineteen-year-old Fauré composed this for the annual competition held in his music school, won first prize, and never looked back!

After these reflective numbers came a lively piano piece, *Sunsets in Savannah*, followed by Shelby’s singing again, this time *I love a piano*, with much clowning.

‘I know a fine way to treat a Steinway,’ sang he, lustily and longingly; and fell into an argument with accompanist John Cammack that the Yamaha ought to be replaced by a Steinway, to fit the song. The tension was at length resolved by an agreement to adapt the lyrics, so that Omaha would rhyme with Yamaha, and the Yamaha could stay! Irving Berlin would surely have loved it. *There’s music in you* (Rodgers and Hammerstein) nicely rounded off Shelby’s contribution to the evening.

The evening finished on a high note as soloists and audience threw themselves with gusto into the *Hippopotamus Song*, that well-loved party piece of Flanders and Swann, and a great way to raise the roof. We also raised over £660 for the Rose Hill Community Cupboard – a really excellent result for a project that gives vital help and hope to many, and is based in our Rose Hill church.

Many thanks to Kirstie Vreede, and to all who performed and helped organise. it was an amazing evening. And we look forward to more concerts featuring the Yamaha, the organ and all our talented players and singers!

A Choir member

Bringing hope

Bring Hope in 2025 - no experience necessary - 1000s of refugees need hope for a brighter future

[Advert by *Sponsor Refugees*, a project of *Citizens UK*, registered charity number 1107264]

Hope led Wesley Memorial to apply in 2022 through the Home Office's *Community Sponsorship* to resettle a refugee family in Oxford. *Hope* attracted 15 members to volunteer to be the support team. That hope was realised.

The family arrived on 23 March 2023. On 21 April 2023 Malcolm and I went to Italy for a two-week holiday. I was so tired that on arrival, I lay on the bed and declined to go anywhere. My exhaustion probably matched that of most team members. The task had seemed impossible and overwhelming. Day by day, we had filled the diary with appointments. The family were utterly exhausted by their move, and it seemed to have rained every day since their arrival. "No, we don't have monsoons in the UK," I told them.

Now in 2025 the team has voted with delight to continue supporting the family beyond the two-year point that was required by the Home Office.

We have learned much during the last two years. Learned about ourselves, and how to support refugees, through our British bureaucracy and their bewilderment. How to survive when Benefits won't pay up for 12 weeks. Why a Jobcentre coach required the father to miss his paid work to discuss "getting a job". Why Universal Credit requires the mother to attend the Jobcentre weekly, interrupting her English classes and school volunteering to discuss becoming a cleaner. Why Malcolm visiting alone, without notice, to deliver a stair gate, was a disaster because no man is permitted entry in the father's absence. How every home visit entails coffee or tea or juice, and cakes or a meal. Why Joseph appears in the Koran. These have been just some of our learning curves.

From the start we have had hope. The family are positive thinkers, especially the father. He expects to pass each English exam. He expects his Iraqi qualifications to be



recognised here. He expects he will find work and make friends. His qualifications are recognised, and he has found work to fit in with his English classes. He makes friends everywhere he goes. With his work delivering new cars all over the UK, he has learned to use public transport to return home. He delights in the chance conversations he has en route. People he has met have given him an electric bike, help to join a paramotoring club, many toys for the children, additional furniture.

The family's gifts to us are numerous: their welcome and delight in every visit and meal we share together. Their willingness to: 'go through the process' to develop a cv; apply for work; take responsibility for their children's progress at school; welcome friends to their home; maintain a close eye on the Universal Credit journal. Their joy at being here, living here, despite missing their family remaining in Iraq who are also currently on the UNHCR list to come to the UK. Already our family are planning for citizenship and housing in the future.

Now we celebrate the family's determination, grit, hope, sense of humour, and flexibility. We feel a sense of achievement that YES it was, and is, worthwhile. *Hope* has become faith, in our capacity to support such a family, and faith in the family to integrate and contribute to the community in Oxford. The whole enterprise has been bound up in love which has enabled our relationships to grow and flourish.

Gillian Dodds

Where beauty is more than skin deep

A new high street hair salon is offering spiritual makeovers to its clients



Reporter Anaïs Pedron finds out more.

“We want people who come here to feel the worth and the value that God has for them”, says Darren Middleton, (photo) as he combs through his client’s hair. “Everyone needs to feel loved, so we’ve re-imagined the concept of Church and community to create a space where faith, service and everyday life intersect in meaningful ways.”

Is this the first professional hair and nail salon in Britain to be faith-based? “Well, it’s certainly innovative,” replies Darren. “During my training as a hair stylist I found that the salon environment fostered deep and meaningful conversations that often surpassed those I’d had in traditional church settings. It brought me the opportunity to get alongside people, share the good news of God’s love and to tell them that God loves them. I thought to myself, ‘there’s something in this’, so I explored the idea further.”

PARTNERSHIPS

As part of the South West Peninsula Methodist District, which covers Cornwall, Devon, the Isles of Scilly and Somerset, and with financial support from the Methodist Church in Britain’s *New Places for New People* initiative, the salon, named **Rev7**, opened its doors for the first time in the autumn.

“We’re in Plymouth’s vibrant Mutley Plain area, at the heart of a diverse community,” says Darren. “We’re putting a focus on reaching out to vulnerable individuals and marginalised groups, and, when necessary, we can close the salon so that someone who needs a calm and quiet space, maybe because of emotional or mental health issues or vulnerability, can visit.”

The salon has already forged partnerships with local charities and other organisations in order to extend the connexion its reach. These include an agency that helps local homeless people, a charity that supports individuals recovering from substance abuse, and a Christian ministry that serves the city’s sex workers.

LOVED BY GOD

“If anybody needs to know they are valued and loved by God, it’s the women who are working on the streets,” says Darren. “We’ll be offering to journey with these women by providing opportunities to train in nail care and hairdressing. Equipping them with new skills means they will have alternative career options.”

“Everyone needs to feel loved, so we’ve re-imagined the concept of Church and community.” A spiritual component of the salon, dubbed ‘the fringe’, offers a space for clients to explore faith and to engage in deeper conversations about spirituality. This is designed to complement other mission work in the city, contributing to a network of support and exploration for people interested in the Christian faith.

Darren’s journey to becoming a hairdresser began unexpectedly during a sabbatical from his work as a Methodist presbyter following a challenging period in his life. “At that time, I needed to get my head out of church. A chance comment about hairdressing led me to enrol on a training course, where I discovered a new passion and an unexpected avenue for ministry.”

INCLUSIVITY

Rev7, designed to become financially self-sustaining through its business model, is overseen by a church steering group chaired by former MP Sir Gary Streeter, and includes experts from industry. Its seven core values of listening, learning, living, lifting, linking, loving and lavishing, guide the salon team's approach to their work and interactions with the clients.

Putting inclusivity at its heart, the salon has joined Transparent Presence, a transgender and non-binary support network, to show that it's a safe space for the transgender

community. A partnership with a local transport company also means that disabled people can access the premises.

"We're trying to lavish God's love on people in a practical way," says Darren. "Our conversations, interactions, relationship-building and trust are all vital in order for our community members, who may never step into a traditional church, to go forward and discover God's love for themselves."

Reprinted from the **Connexion Magazine** for the local church, with permission

Wednesday Prayers

The Wednesday Prayer service has been part of the rhythm of Wesley Memorial's week for decades! In the past we always tended to hold a small meeting of around three to seven people, gathered in the church Sanctuary by the Covenant prayer tapestry.

Since the need arose to use Zoom during the pandemic, we now run a hybrid gathering with some people in the Sanctuary and some online. Although we are still a small group, this facility has increased our numbers, and with two regulars joining us from the Netherlands!

Prayer requests are left on the prayer board by visitors to Open Church. It is good to be able to offer to include people in our prayers after listening to their issues and worries in Wednesday Coffee, Rainbow House, Open Church or in other areas of daily life. The prayer meeting usually lasts around 20 minutes and follows a very simple format, our intercessions being the main focus.

We don't list lots of names in our prayers of intercession on Sunday mornings, but Wednesday Prayers offers a space where we can hold people's individual prayer requests up to God, and, with their permission, include their names.



If you would like to ask for prayer for yourself or someone you know, contact Mel or the Church Office. You are also very welcome to join us for the Prayer meeting in person or on Zoom: the link can be shared on request.

Mel McCulloch

Seeds of hope at the Russian Orthodox Church



Last summer a group of friends and I visited St Nicholas Orthodox Church in Ferry Road, Marston. The church is dedicated to St Nicholas the Wonderworker. We were made very welcome, and treated to tea and biscuits and lively conversation at the end of the visit.

Father Stephen Platt kindly told us about the history of the church and answered our numerous questions. The first Orthodox place of worship in Oxford was initially in Bartlemas Chapel and then in Marston Street, established in 1941 by Archimandrite Nicholas (Charles Sidney Gibbs). In the 1960s another Orthodox church was established in Canterbury Road, combining both the Russian and Greek traditions. This church continued to operate for around 40 years until 2006 when there was an amicable split into 4 different Orthodox churches in Oxford, all of which continue to be well attended.

The current building dates from 1910 and was originally a Church of England Chapel of Ease. It later fell into disrepair and was bought in 2008. All the money for the purchase and decoration of the building (frescos, icons, carving of the iconostasis – but no statues) was raised from within the congregation. In addition to the icon of St Nicholas, an icon to St Frideswide is also prominent within the church. Father Stephen explained that many Orthodox believers from Eastern Europe are keen to adopt local saints.

Around 50% of the congregation are Russian speakers; the other 50% come from a variety of backgrounds and

nationalities. English is the common language – although sermons are live-translated into Russian, prayers are made in multiple languages and the singing is in Old Church Slavonic. There are both Russians and recent arrivals from Ukraine within the congregation, but the church is a ‘politics-free’ zone so there are remarkably few tensions, and all worship happily together.

Sunday services which include Holy Communion usually last for just over an hour and a half, and weekday services about an hour. The congregation usually stand for worship, but chairs are provided for those who would find it difficult to stand for that length of time. Services have changed very little over the centuries.

Several members of the church choir sang three pieces for us from an upper gallery. This was greatly appreciated by the group. Choirs play a fundamental role in services: they usually sing unaccompanied by instruments and are not visible to the congregation.

The website – www.stnicholas-oxford.org – has a moving statement about the war in Ukraine, and the church’s own efforts to provide “humanitarian and medical relief”. It ends with this promise:

Above all, we continue to pray ‘for the peace of the whole world, for the stability of the Holy Churches of God and for the union of all’.

Chris Cowley and Joanna Tulloch



Reaching out to students

I started my role as Ecumenical Student Outreach worker (across the three churches of Wesley Memorial, New Road Baptist Church, and St Columba's) back in September, and I can wholeheartedly say how wonderful it is to see Wesley Memorial so alive with students.

I started my journey at Wesley Memorial around four years ago, a little under halfway into my undergraduate degree. I remember instantly feeling at home and welcomed with open arms into an amazing community which has made

Photo: students at lunch 19 January



me feel so loved. Back then, as the church was reopening post-pandemic, I remember feeling a little outnumbered as an undergraduate, surrounded mostly by post-graduate students. Now it brings me so much joy to see the church expanding with so many new students, both undergraduates and postgraduates, as well as working young adults. While I only have a short experience of life at Wesley Memorial, I have had a number of people tell me that numbers are some of the highest we've seen in years, with regular attendance of around 20 students, even more for lunches!

Now, I wish I could say that was because I had made some dazzling adverts or had conversations with people before term started, but I cannot claim credit for this amazing development. The students found us! This makes me excited for our future, for what amazing delights and growth we can hope to see over the next few years and seeing what opportunities I can create with my role.

As I reflect on the past few months, I would like to share some of the highlights from this time. I started off running the first welfare event last term, attended by around 15 students. At just over the halfway point in term, I felt it

was important to provide a relaxing environment for students to unwind during term and shake off the 5th week blues (a term used by students to describe the exhaustion they can feel at that point in term). So students enjoyed homemade pizza (a huge 'Thank you' to Jo for this!) and spent the afternoon creating some beautiful Christmas cards, along with other crafts.

After the success of the first event, and with more time to plan, this term I have started running regular midweek events, alternating Bible Study and social evenings. Our first midweek event was a wide-ranging quiz – an opportunity for students to test their knowledge. It turned out to be a close competition!

One of the highlights so far has been the Bible Study led by Sorrel, one of the students from St Columba's, in which they led us through Psalm 19 using collaging and crafts as a way to explore the imagery in the text. We had some wonderful creations!

Sparked by conversation with the students, plans are coming together for a student-led service at Wesley Memorial on 23rd February. It has been wonderful to see the students come together to create something special. In the next academic year, it is my goal to facilitate a termly student-led service hosted by each church in turn.

As I look to the future, I am filled with ideas and goals that I would love to see come to fruition, including a friendly space to relax during Trinity Term, which can be a stressful time. By offering spaces for students to work outside of libraries and hosting welfare walks around Oxford, I hope to facilitate moments where students can unwind and take breaks from their busy schedules. I am also looking into ways to celebrate the students' achievements during the year and on completing a year of studies.

I look forward to continuing to give back to this community that has made and continues to make me feel so at home, and seeing how we can grow.

Kirsty Smith, Ecumenical Student Outreach worker

Another way to Santiago: the Camino Inglés

As a lecturer in Spanish Studies, I had long held an interest in the Camino de Santiago. The first of my four pilgrimages took place in 1995 when I joined the route at Ponferrada in northern Spain, some 208km from Santiago, 100km being the distance required to earn a *Compostela* (Certificate). This was a truly ecumenical pilgrimage as my wife was Anglican, her brother and sister-in-law were Methodists and myself Roman Catholic. At that time, in order to get the *Compostela*, you were interviewed as to your origins and motivations by the local Archbishop who delighted us by inviting us all to receive communion at the Pilgrim Mass the following day!

*Where the saints have trod before us,
I bring myself to you;
Where the host of witnesses surround us,
May there be peace between me and God.*

My wife and I returned with two friends to walk the full 790km Camino Francés in 2013 and then the 117km Camino Finisterre the following year. Eleven years later, and now 85 years old, I could hardly imagine myself undertaking another such long walk, until my son Paul, who lives in Durham, drew my attention to the Camino Inglés, which starts almost at his doorstep! This seemed an opportunity not to miss – returning once more to the spiritual and physical challenges of being a pilgrim while bonding with my son to whom I hoped to pass on my enthusiasm for all that the Camino entails.

In the 12th century, Bishop Godric of Finchale Priory, an outpost of nearby Durham Cathedral, is believed to have been one of the first to make a pilgrimage from the north east of England down to the south coast and sail across to Galicia in the north-west of Spain, to visit the tomb of St James. Thanks to the tremendous efforts of Keith Taylor (Chair of the Friends of the Finchale Camino) and his counterpart in Galicia, Cristóbal Ramírez (Journalist and President of the Local Councils of the Camino Inglés), the ancient Camino Inglés is being revitalised.

Currently the route has been way-marked from Finchale, via Durham and Bishop Auckland, to Escomb Saxon Church.

Meanwhile, research continues to trace it to York and onwards to Reading and the south coast. The Spanish section from the ports of El Ferrol and A Coruña is already well established. Having decided to start from the latter which is 75km from Santiago, we needed to walk at least 25km in the UK to achieve the 100km required to merit the *Compostela*.

Two days walking took us some 30km just beyond Bishop Auckland. We had our pilgrim passports (*credenciales*) stamped at both Durham Cathedral and Bishop Auckland before flying to Santiago and taking transport to A Coruña. As it should only take a further five days to reach Santiago, this is probably the most convenient route for busy people and is one of the least travelled Caminos.

Here are a few highlights of the Spanish section.

Day 1 A Coruña to Cambre 22km

A beautiful coastal walk with a deviation to visit the Church of St James containing the stone vessel brought from Jerusalem and allegedly used at Cana by Jesus to turn water into wine. Perhaps the real miracle was to find a church open as we were disappointed to find all the others closed. (Lack of clergy, security issues?).

Day 2 Sigüenza to Abegondo 15km

We visited a very pleasant modern shelter (*albergue* / *refugio*) for pilgrims. It displayed a moving poem in English as well as a leaflet about the Camino Inglés. We also followed a tradition of creating “a hill of stones”, laying pebbles signed by family members. This gave us the opportunity to pause for prayerful thoughts for each of them.

Day 3 Bruma to A Calle 14km

Walking along quiet country lanes and narrow paths with the pleasant aroma of eucalyptus trees provided plenty of opportunity for quiet reflection. We passed a gigantic statue of St James but no open churches or cafés. We did meet a few other pilgrims, mainly young Spaniards and Italians, as well as a delightful older French couple. They said they were very familiar with Newcastle as they avidly watched *Vera* on TV!

Day 4 A Calle to Sigueiro 15km

We enjoyed walking through a delightful park on the outskirts of the town, but then experienced a culture shock to find ourselves once more amid the hassle and bustle of urban life. Our host for the evening was the only “grumpy” we met. However, on discovering I was 85, he was overcome with emotion as his father had died a few days previously at the same age. He appreciated our expressions of condolence in Spanish and we regretted being so judgmental.

Day 5 Sigueiro to Santiago 14km

We were surprised by the numerous “Buen Camino” greetings from local people who must have welcomed countless pilgrims to their city. Eventually, overwhelmed by a mixture of feelings, we entered the square in front of the Cathedral. As I’d hoped, there seemed no doubt that Paul had fully embraced the spirit of the Camino and would be returning as a Pilgrim. Once composed, we made our way to pay our first visit to the Cathedral, visit the shrine of St James and give the bust of “Jimmy” the traditional hug! We then had the pleasure of meeting Cristóbal Ramírez, the inspiring promoter of the Camino Inglés in Galicia, who kindly escorted us to the Pilgrim Office where we received our *Compostela* certificates.

Day 6 Santiago de Compostela

We spent a leisurely morning exploring the narrow streets and museums of the city before returning to the Cathedral for the midday Pilgrim Mass. The famous *botafumeira* (censer) was out of order, which may have disappointed many, nevertheless the church was full of worshippers. As I headed out of my pew to receive communion, I tripped over the base of one of the towering columns and crashed onto the stone floor. I didn’t make it to communion as I was stretchered out of the cathedral to the ambulance which took me to the local hospital. Despite my being diagnosed with a hair-line fracture of my left femur, Paul and I managed to leave Santiago the following day and, with wonderful passenger assistance, arrived back to Newcastle as scheduled. I then spent five days in the Royal Victoria Hospital where I eventually received communion from the Vicar of our local church – a fitting ecumenical end to a joyful pilgrimage.

*Although I may have travelled all the roads,
if from today I cannot recognize God,
the God of Jesus of Nazareth
as the one God of my life
I have arrived nowhere.*

Peter Donaghy

Peter Donaghy featured in an item about the Finchale (pronounced Fincal) pilgrimage on the BBC’s *Songs of Praise* programme of 18 August 2024 (still available on BBC iPlayer). Peter is the author of various guidebooks about the North-East, including *Northumbria Church Walks*.



Marker stone at Finchale



Peter and Paul at Santiago Cathedral

325AD-2025AD – the 1,700th Anniversary of the Council of Nicaea

Historical Context

In 312AD the Emperor Constantine “converted” to Christianity. Christianity was but one of many religions and frequently faced savage persecution. Constantine oversaw a rapid process whereby Christianity arose to increasing prominence, eventually becoming the official religion of the Roman Empire. The church, however, was in a mess. It had a serious problem establishing who Jesus actually was, and the nature of his relationship to God the Father and God the Holy Spirit.

The Issues at Stake

Various theological views existed. Arius (256-336) was a ‘subordinationist’. God was absolutely ONE, without any possibility of change. Jesus was not a pre-existing being, but (like everything and everyone else) was created by God and was below God the Father. Arius famously remarked of Jesus that, “there was a time when he was not.” Jesus was a mere man, albeit probably the greatest ever.

Although the majority populist stance, one problem with ‘subordinationism’ was that the Bible narratives didn’t support it. Jesus had a habit of saying things like, “before Abraham was, I am” (John 8:58) and, “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30).

Arius and others pursued their views hotly in an age when the empire was already facing numerous moral and administrative dangers. It was a sort of irreconcilable “theological Brexit”, causing great harm.

The Council of Nicaea, 325AD

Constantine, exasperated, sought to unify the church under a coherent body of doctrine. He convened the first ever ecumenical council of the church at Nicaea, where some 300 bishops assembled to resolve the tensions.

Arius was successfully opposed by the brilliant 27-year-old Athanasius from Alexandria. Between May and August 325, the council agreed that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was

“of one being” (*homoousios*) with God the Father, not created but “eternally begotten” of the Father. So it is that first year Theology students have lots to write essays about and later Christians can joyfully sing at Christmas:

God of God

Light of light

Lo! He abhors not the Virgin’s womb

Very God,

Begotten, not created.

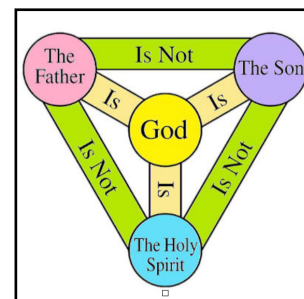
O Come let us adore him, Christ the Lord.

How very Nicene – Arius could never have sung those words!

Philip Willson



Icon from the Mégalo Metéoron Monastery in Greece, representing the Council of Nicaea, with the condemned Arius in the bottom of the icon.



“The Trinity” is not a Biblical phrase, but the Council of Nicaea helped to make sense of the Biblical narratives so that the persons of God could be understood as one being, yet distinct

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven. Ecclesiastes 3, v1.

October 2024 marked the end of the morning congregation at Cowley Road Methodist Church, 120 years after the church first opened. Although the decision to cease to meet as a congregation felt the right one, it was of course not an easy one to make. However the congregation was faithful but small, and the building large and needing time and money spent on it. Worse still, in September 2023 there were incidents involving a disturbed person entering the building during worship and threatening violence. Under the guidance of the District Safeguarding Team, the congregation stopped meeting in person for a few weeks, and then could only resume worship if the front doors were locked once the service began. Worry for the safety of the congregation also meant that neither the Toddler Group nor our monthly Coffee, Cake and Company event could be held again. We felt perhaps a bit like the frightened disciples after Jesus' crucifixion, hiding behind locked doors. Change was needed and the congregation decided to move on.

We were very grateful to Miriam, our Minister, and to Libby, our Community Chaplain and Outreach Worker, for their leadership, guidance and care at that difficult period in the church's history. On 22 September 2024, the congregation met together for the final time at 10.30 am for a moving service of Holy Communion. Then on 13 October there was a wonderful service of celebration as we were joined by friends from the Punjabi congregation, the Circuit, other churches in East Oxford, and the wider community. The building was full and the front doors unlocked at last.

It isn't the end of the story though. Funds from the Toddler group, including sale of its toys, were donated to Rainbow House, the Oxford Baby Bank and to churches in the Circuit for their work with children. The Rose Hill Community Cupboard benefited from the church's Benevolent Fund. We were delighted to find new homes in the Circuit for our *Singing the Faith* CDs and most of the hymn books which had been donated by individual members of the Cowley Road congregation. Cowley Road's 'knitvity' set, a feature of Christmas for so many years, has found a new home at



Wesley Memorial and old hymn book numbers repurposed into gifts for visitors, complete with a verse on the back.

But most importantly, members of the congregation who were carrying a heavy burden in keeping things going in a difficult time, have found themselves relieved of their responsibilities and able to become spiritually refreshed. The majority of members transferred to Wesley Memorial and as well as having a reputation for sitting near the front in church, can already be found helping to serve tea after worship, reading the lesson or even preaching the sermon. The *Quest Fellowship* group has continued to meet and it is great to be able to offer it to Wesley Memorial more widely. Having started in the 1980s as an evening meeting at church, it later became an afternoon house group. When the pandemic struck in 2020, Quest moved to its present format on Zoom on Monday evenings, where we can currently be found wrestling with the book of *Revelation*.

Jan Boylan



Service of celebration 13 October 2024

The Magic of Rainbow House

If you have ever sat in Rainbow House, or wandered by on a morning, you will have seen the tiny children immersed in the enchantment of Rainbow House. Plenty of space to move around, lots of wheeled toys to scoot on, small toys to play with, even a Brio railway, nursery rhymes sung by Mel, and playmates: so much fun, so much to enjoy. Small wonder that some little people rebel when it is time to leave! And if you have passed by the Atrium and seen queues of people with babies in buggies, you will know the magnetic attraction of Rainbow House for the town's parents and carers for children.

The Rainbow House formula has remained the same over the 40 years of our happy existence: with the toys and the play area, we offer a warm welcome, generous opening hours, refreshments at good prices, and seating for carers to relax into, to take their time to chat with friends, have lunch, and generally chill out. In the 1980s we were inspired to create a place where small children and babies were really welcome, and mothers could breast-feed without embarrassment, and change children in a child-friendly toilet. At that time, commercial cafés did not care. They have caught up now, with high chairs, changing spaces and colouring books, but we were there first! And if you were any part of the 40 years of success, THANK YOU!

In 2017, after we (the church) finished the refurbishment of the Hall, Derek Rawson asked customers to support our applications for grants to complete our Open Doors project with (anonymous) comments on their experiences:

Could you please say in a few words ... what you like about Rainbow House ...?

Many of the returns moved us more than we expected. One young woman wrote:

Friendly staff and a relaxed atmosphere. A great place to come when you're in town for lunch with the kids. I used to come as a child 30 years ago and it's so lovely it's still going.

Customers from the '80s and '90s bring their grandchildren; children from those times bring their own children, and find to their delight that it has not changed.

Others have expressed their appreciation for the haven they have just found, and the relief at being welcomed in a strange city. (Doing their best with English when it's not their first language):

Rainbow House make life less lonely, it helped me to make friends in this new city...

Rainbow House is the best playgroup [sic] in Oxford. The hall is great, fresh, light and friendly space to spend time with your child... Much praise from Denmark.

It's really outstanding! ... The visit of Oxford would not be that great without Rainbow House. Evelyne from Austria.

And a warm farewell from Spain this December:

Now we are travelling back to Spain, but we will not forget our mornings here. We will miss you! ¡Gracias y hasta la vista!

New parents readily admitted the warmth of the support they felt:

Rainbow House felt like a sanctuary when I visited in the first fragile weeks after giving birth. It's lovely to have a friendly welcoming place where I can feed the baby...

Rainbow House has been a lifeline with both my children...

It's a lovely place where to play and relax with my baby and meet other parents.

Even the food we prepare, and the child-friendly menu, merit a mention in many of the despatches:

... you can buy delicious food and snacks here for pennies.

... My daughter loves it here ... and I love that I can have lunch for us both.

Thank you for the lovely cake.

...we love your apple cake ❤️.

And some comments left more recently:

...it has been noticeable how my child has developed socially by being here.

...my mum used to bring me here when I was a baby.

I like how many different nationalities come along.

... my child gets really excited to know that he/she is coming to Rainbow House.

So this is the magic of Rainbow House, for the children and for their adult carers. It remains a truly solid work of outreach into the community, sailing calmly through the troubled waters of present-day life in Oxford, offering invaluable support to adults in ways that are felt, but cannot be measured.

And what does it cost? Is it self-supporting?

The reality is that Rainbow House makes some profit on the sales from our popular menu, but never enough to cover all the cost of a salary, and the church's bills in energy we consume in the Hall and kitchen, or the rent we might pay if we were an external hirer.

So, in our 40th anniversary year, we are still saying "We care about you and your children; we welcome you to enjoy hospitality with us". And to this end, we look for donations however large or small to assist the church in maintaining Rainbow House's work in a time of rising costs. As one customer described us:

This is an invaluable place for children and their parents; an essential part of the community and a safe haven for children and their parents.

Watch out for our 40th birthday celebrations in May!

Kate Dobson Chair of Rainbow House

War Horse

I went to see War Horse at the New Theatre in Oxford in December. I have been a fan of Michael Morpurgo's work for many years and loved reading his stories to my class when I was teaching. This production portrays the horrors of World War1, graphically but sensitively, with haunting music throughout. It was hard not to be moved by the story and tears flowed. Today, 'The War Horse Memorial' in Ascot is a permanent tribute to the millions of horses, donkeys, and mules that died in World War I.

Michael Morpurgo and his wife, both teachers, set up a charity in 1976. In his own words in 2016:



Oxford Mail report of our first birthday in 1986



Lucy cutting the 20th birthday cake

We thought that what children needed most were wonderful and memorable experiences that would really help them find out about the world around them and find out more about themselves too. So we set up a charity called 'Farms for City Children', moved to Iddesleigh, bought a big house called Nethercott where the children could stay, made a partnership with a farming family we had got to know and invited our first city children down to the farm.

In those forty years, 90,000 children had benefited from their thoughtful generosity.

Janet Forsaith

Babies and toddlers

At our last Mission Group meeting, we spent a bit of time thinking about babies. Specifically, the point that while we have a fantastically thriving Junior Church and 'Fizzy' (older children's) group, we don't have very many babies and toddlers in our congregation. So we are thinking about the possibility of restarting a crèche. It's a classic chicken-and-egg situation — you could argue there's no point in setting up a crèche if we rarely have a crèche customer. But we can't encourage young families to come along if we don't have any provision for them.

We think we have come up with a solution. When a parent arrives with a baby or toddler, we will let them know they have several options. They are both welcome to stay in the service. If they would like a private space for breast-feeding, we can provide that. If their toddler would enjoy playing in the John Wesley Room while Junior Church is happening, it's an option. And if they would like more of a 'classic' crèche provision, where they take their child to a separate room in the company of a church volunteer, we would like to be able to offer that. The wonders of technology mean that we don't need to set up speakers or screen for parents to follow the service — anyone can do this anywhere on their mobile phone now, so that makes things a little easier!

We are going to outline the options above on a little leaflet for parents, and set up a rota of standby volunteers who could be called upon to offer that crèche provision IF it is requested. Most Sundays, it may not be needed. But we will



A crèche photo from the past!

know we are ready, as and when babies and toddlers arrive. We may need to look at a fuller crèche provision in due course. But let's start with this and see what happens.

If you would be willing to be a standby crèche volunteer, please email Jo on officeATwesleymem.org.uk. If 8-10 people offer, then each would be on standby once every couple of months. Please note you do not have to be a woman! You do not have to be a parent, or be in a particular age bracket! You just need to be friendly and welcoming, willing to chat, comfortable with babies/toddlers and happy to do a DBS check.

It goes without saying that this links in nicely with the magazine theme of hope. All sorts of things give me hope when I look at our growing congregation, our inclusive welcome, and our vibrant work with children and teenagers. What would give me even more hope is if we can build on this by ensuring babies and toddlers are provided for. We want new parents to feel that Wesley Mem is a place where their children can grow in faith and love - as many children have done before. I ***hope*** we can make it happen!

Jenny Ayres on behalf of the Mission Group

The Nutcracker — relaxed!

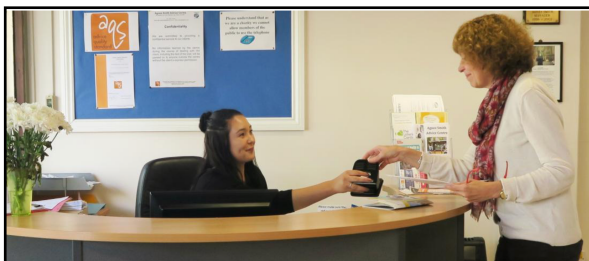
In January, I went to see a matinée performance of *The Nutcracker* at the Coliseum in London. I had seen a documentary about this new production and was intrigued that the performance was described as 'relaxed'. Not sure what to expect, I was a little nervous about what this would entail. I needn't have worried! A relaxed performance is intended to make the theatre experience more enjoyable for everyone. This includes an option to leave and re-enter the auditorium as needed with a 'chill-out space' for

people needing a break, a live streaming of the performance in a separate, less crowded space, ear-defenders on request and reduced sound levels and lighting levels. Before the performance started, one of the cast gave a visual outline of the plot to help people prepare for the show. I was delighted to experience this performance and was impressed by the attention to detail to enable inclusion of everyone of any age and diversity. The performance itself was outstanding and thoroughly enjoyable.

Janet Forsaith

The Agnes Smith Advice Centre

96 Blackbird Leys Road OX4 6HS



You may never have heard of this extraordinary organisation unless you live in Blackbird Leys, in which case you almost certainly will have, and may well have consulted them.. This independent advice centre, located in the heart of the community, has been delivering free and impartial advice for over 40 years. Debt, welfare benefits, housing and crisis support are the most common reasons why clients get in touch.

The figures for how 1,790 clients were helped in 2023-24 are amazing:

Debts written off	£885,384
Welfare benefit gains	£2,654,342
Grants for clients in emergency	£368,204
Total financial gain for clients	£3,907,930
Success rate at appeal tribunal	89%
Households supported to stay in their own homes	107

To make all this happen, an incredibly dedicated group of staff work extremely hard and with great skill, with volunteers who support them in the day-to-day work. It costs over £250,000 each year to run the Advice Centre and it's a battle each year to raise that money. If anyone is looking for an organisation to support that is extremely effective in tackling poverty and the cost of living crisis, and bringing about a fairer share of resources in Oxford, then the Agnes Smith Advice Centre is the one. Three of us at Wesley Mem are involved: Grace Samkange, Gillian Dodds and myself. If you would like to know more, feel free to ask us or look on the website <https://agnessmith.co.uk/>

Wendy Spray

Key quotes from the clients:

"I had someone that helped me. Never really had that in my life."

"I knew my rights, they were clarified for me what I could do and what I couldn't do"

"I felt as if I have been abused mentally by the system, there's nowhere to get the proper help that you need, but they helped me with the forms, I found them alright."

Wesley Memorial Church

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Children's, families' & outreach worker: Mel McCulloch

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Contributions, letters, questions, pictures, book reviews and any other items suitable 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. Please include photos separately, and check that anyone displayed in a photo is happy to be included in the publication.

All items may be edited by the team.

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