

Wesley Memorial *magazine*

from Wesley Memorial Methodist Church, Oxford

Summer 2026



Image © Flamecreativekids coloured by Nana

Together in community

Dear Friends,

I write in the middle of the late June heatwave, and it has been a busy few months!

On the 17th May, Wesley Memorial hosted the second Oxford Circuit Celebration, *Anticipate: Sensing God*. It was a joy to bring members from across the Oxford Circuit together to reflect on how we sense the presence of God in diverse ways. The morning included two shorter acts of worship with two 'workshop' sessions in between. Activities this year included prayer stations, a scratch choir and worship band, Messy church activities, Knit and Stitch, learning BSL, Meditation, a quiet room, AV learning, Godly Play and Minecraft Church. These activities represented a breadth of all that is happening in the Circuit. We were also treated to a performance from Bladon Junior Church which is always a wonderful spectacle!

At the end of our time together we shared in Holy Communion which was followed by a picnic lunch in the Hall. It was good to welcome so many folks from all our Circuit churches, including the Punjabi congregation to share in this time. Anticipate has become a real highlight of the year for me as Superintendent of this Circuit, which is an exciting place to be. We were also pleased to welcome John Rose from the Northampton District Digital Team who made a video of the day which can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MGovjjPB3lw>



Knitting



Bladon Junior Church



A rainbow mosaic — one for each circuit church; & a prayer

Another highlight for me of the past few months has been the Church Weekend Break, held this year at the end of May half-term at Highgate House near Northampton. This year our theme was 'Belonging Together' where we reflected through sessions, worship, fun and fellowship on what it means to belong and not to belong. Throughout the weekend we shared in both joy and sadness (as we were very aware of the needs of much-loved friends not able to be with us). It was so good to have those with us who are newer to the congregation and some more established friends who came to their first church weekend. There was a real sense of togetherness across all generations which reflects something very special about the community at Wesley Memorial.

Throughout the sessions, I used reflections from *Bless the Unfinished Way: A Book of Reflections for the Sacred In-Between* by Jennifer Parnell, a Methodist Deacon. I'd like to finish this piece with a section of Jennifer's piece entitled 'A Table with No Corners.'

*There is a table in the heart of God, and it has no corners.
No head of the table. No seat of honour. No child's seat, because all are equal here.*

*No outsider's edge.
It is round, like the earth. Wide, like mercy. Worn, like love that has lasted.*

*At this table you are not asked to prove your worth.
You are not asked to explain your story.
You are simply invited to sit...*

*...Blessed are you who come uncertain.
Blessed are you who come late.
Blessed are you who come longing.*

There is room. There is bread. There is welcome.

May we continue to be a community that not only seeks to be welcoming but longs for the full inclusion and belonging of all God's precious children.

With prayers for you all across this summer,

Rev Miriam Moul
June 2026



Communion set out ready, with Last Supper group models

A birthday greeting to Miriam from Alison, who was not able to be there in person, Sunday 10 May 2026

Dear Miriam

On behalf of the whole congregation, I would like to extend our very best wishes to you on your significant birthday. I am sure that it would embarrass you if I were to describe all your many good qualities as a minister and as a friend, so I won't. Well, at least, not at length!!

We all know how compassionate, intelligent, hard-working and funny you are; how much preparation you put into making worship inspirational and accessible, and meetings collaborative and productive; how good you are with all ages of our congregation and how you support us all in prayer and join in our joys, sorrows and worries.

What we perhaps do not always acknowledge is that this must be tiring, often lonely and sometimes downright annoying! Thank you for all that you do for us, for being you, and for bearing with us.

For a good number in this congregation our 40th birthday is an increasingly distant memory and for others an inconceivable age away in the future. (That, by the way, is a sign of a very healthy congregation). Some might say that this is just a day like any other. I don't think that is the case for you, nor was it for me.

We are so glad that you will be taking some time off next month to explore the world as little part of your birthday celebrations. We hope you have a fantastic time, being you, and not being 'the minister'.

However, we also hope you come back! – refreshed, energised and ready to take up that role again. We will miss you, because your presence with us binds all of us together in a way that you possibly don't see, but changes us for the better. You could say, we are the ingredients, but you are our star baker!

Many happy returns Miriam. Please accept our gifts as a token of our love and gratitude...

With very best wishes

Alison
Senior Steward 2025-26

Editorial

As Miriam's letter tells us, two significant recent events in our church and circuit life focused on community and belonging.

We explore these thoughts in various articles, and if you find some of them are not quite to the point, we hope you will enjoy them nonetheless.

We are very blessed at Wesley Memorial to have so many people of all ages around us, and so many friends who have moved away, but still keep in touch. We know you enjoy receiving the magazine by e-mail. We greet you all most warmly! (Excuse the pun – it's 33c here in Oxford at the moment.)

Wishing you a peaceful and relaxing summer, and time to recharge your reserves of energy!

The Editorial Team



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PS If you are reading the printed edition and wish the photos were not black/white, go to our website where you can open the on-line version and see all the images in full colour!

<https://www.wesleymem.org.uk/resources/wesley-memorial-magazine.html>

Thank you to Kirsty

In September 2024, Kirsty Smith took up the appointment of Student Outreach Worker for the three city-centre free churches: Wesley Memorial Methodist, New Road Baptist and St Columba's URC.

It was a new post, a two-year experimental cooperation, with some logistical challenges. Kirsty managed to rotate her Sunday presence in the three churches week by week, and organised Wednesday evening activities for the students at the three venues in turn, by terms. When Bladon Junior Church presented their unmissable *Jesus Christ Superstar*, she took them out to see it!

She brought together each term a group of students to lead worship, so that each church had the delight of a student-led service once a year. She also linked with Student Christian Movement, establishing *SCM Oxford*, opening up a good support and resource.

Most of all, she has been a friend to many students, who, we know, have really appreciated having a person they can all on, especially in their first year.



Kirsty has decided to move on after two years and for various reasons, it is not possible at this point to make another appointment.

However, the good news is that three members of the group have undertaken to form a small committee to keep the work going in the three churches next academic year, with their incidental expenses funded jointly by the churches. We will happily give them our backing with student & church lunches and parties.

So a big Thank you to Kirsty with our very best wishes for the next venture! And happily not good-bye, as Kirsty is staying in Oxford, and at Wesley Memorial for the foreseeable future, to everyone's delight!

Minecraft at the Circuit day Anticipate!

Minecraft is a computer game which is very popular with many children and young people age about 6+. It is creative. As with Lego, blocks can be placed to build structures. Unlike Lego, you don't have to hunt for the right piece in a noisy jumbled box of bricks! The builds can become very impressive in a short amount of time. Building is done in a Minecraft "world" that has many of the features of the real world - oceans, mountains, flowers, animals etc. It is very easy to relate builds in Minecraft to our experiences in the real world.

There were a few planned tasks for *Anticipate!* that were designed to engage our senses. One was to build a rollercoaster, which engages senses of balance (not to mention dizziness and vertigo!). Another was to build a sensory garden with bees buzzing overhead.

Some children built a strong tower, and we were able to talk about feelings of safety and strength and how God is sometimes referred to as a rock, and what that might mean. Another built a water source at the top of a mountain and let it flow freely down. We talked about sensing God in flowing water and movement. Other children explored the Minecraft world in "survival" mode, which

means that, as in real life, their online characters must find food and shelter to survive.

We discussed where we might find God in such an environment. Suggestions were when we make bread, when we find useful resources (in this case, squid ink!), when we are able to defeat monsters and when we feel safe.

We had several rollercoasters. One took us up a mountain with spectacular views over creation. This led to a discussion of sensing God in nature, such as up a mountain or looking out over the ocean. The other rollercoaster took passengers through a sensory garden, again helping us appreciate nature and creation while on a bumpy journey! For children who love Minecraft, allowing them to use their creativity while they hear a Bible story and engage with a theme is a great way to help them learn. 'Blocks and Bricks: Church for Minecrafters and Builders' takes place on the 4th Sunday of the month at Kidlington Methodist Church. There is an alternative activity for parents and siblings who aren't so keen on the *Minecraft*! There are also resources for you to use independently at home at <https://kidlingtonmethodists.org.uk/worship/minecraft-church/>

Emma Huber



Rollercoaster on a mountain top!



A strong tower! Water is flowing down the mountain in the background.

Seeing beyond



The Elements of the Holy Communion Jacques Iselin
From the Methodist Modern Art Collection
© TMCP. Used with permission

The elements of the Holy Communion: bread and wine. In this case, a baguette and a cup to hold the wine. Both present, but both also half hidden, only part of what is going on. What else is in the painting? What else is part of holy communion?

Perhaps most obviously, the fish jumps out at us, its silvery grey colour contrasting with the yellows, oranges and reds elsewhere. The Greek for fish, *ICHTHUS*, became an acronym among early Christians meaning *Jesus Christ, God's Son, Saviour*, and thus a stylised fish came to represent Jesus and Christian allegiance. So here we have a representation of another (surely the very central!) element of communion: Jesus himself, still with us each time we celebrate communion.

But the way the fish is placed right next to the bread, I can't help but be reminded of the fish and bread from the

feeding of the five thousand. The fish and bread which started out as meagre and utterly inadequate, but became plentiful and abundant. During communion so often we are given just a tiny morsel of bread and only a small sip of wine or grape juice. And yet, what we celebrate is abundance – the abundance of the love of God, poured out for all. In communion a small meagre offering of bread and wine is transformed into the plentiful love of God, so strong that it could not be stopped even by violence or death, so ever-present that we can never be separated from it.

What of the coloured shapes cutting through the midst of the painting? Like shards of stained glass letting through light of different colours and reflecting it in different directions, they remind us of the many different ways in which people have seen, experienced and reflected on communion; be it an intense personal experience of love and mercy, an expression of community and fellowship that reaches across time and space, or a statement of radical inclusion in the face of societal or political exclusion. As many experiences as there are people and times they have received communion. Each person participating with their own perspective, their own context, their own relationship with God: yet another element of communion?

It isn't just what has been painted that tells us about the elements of communion, though. It is also how it has been painted. Thick blobs of paint, give the painting texture and body. When much of what happens in our Sunday services is cerebral, focussing on words and thoughts, confined to the insides of our heads, communion is one of the few things that gives our celebration of God's love body and substance. It is one of the few times we can engage our senses of touch and taste as we seek to encounter God, adding to the spiritual experience of being filled with the Spirit of God, a bodily experience.

Elsewhere are hints of many other things: ears of corn? Candles? A figure or angel? The elements of the Holy Communion? Bread and wine are just the start, it seems.

Vicky Davies Seeing Beyond

<https://seeingbeyond.org.uk>

According to Thomas

If I am remembered...

(and I don't expect to be remembered - people are more likely to remember my twin, who was altogether more memorable than me) but if I am remembered, I should like it to be for this: That I was the first who dared to say, "I'll die for you, Jesus."

It was that time when we'd just got back to the safety of Galilee and a message came that Jesus' friend Lazarus (who lived down south, near Jerusalem with all its dangers) – that Lazarus was at death's door. The others stood round looking nervous and urging caution. "Better safe than sorry," they said. But I took one look at his face and knew he was going to go anyway. "Come on, guys," I said, "let's go with him – and if it comes to it, let's die with him."

And it was **because** we went that we were witnesses to that fantastical, thrilling, terrifying scene, that moment of paralysis in time – the dead man walking, the blank and bandaged face unwrapped to sun and air. He never would tell me the detail of how he'd done it, though I asked him over and over. But he'd shown us in clear sight the one thing we most needed to see – that he was Lord not just of living but of dying too.

And I should like to be remembered for this: as the one who dared challenge Jesus to explain himself. It was in that final week, when so much time was spent listening to him talk, and the talking got more and more cryptic: "You know where I am going, and how to get there" he said.

And James and John had that annoying dreamy glaze on their faces and all the others were nodding and trying to look intelligent – though I knew they didn't understand what he was on about any more than I did – and I was the only one who pushed back. "We don't know where you're going, Jesus, because you haven't told us! So how can we possibly know how to get there?"

He wouldn't tell us the detail, of course – no "Turn right here, then straight on up the hill". But he told us the one thing we most needed to hear: "I am the way".

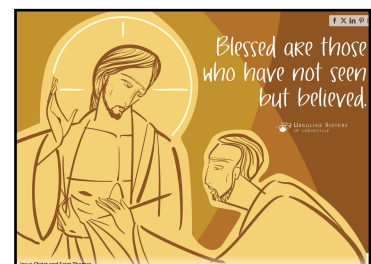
And I should like to be remembered for this: as the one who dared to demand proof. It was all tied up with the appalling, crashing disappointment of realising that I had missed him – that he'd shown his risen self to the others, but not to me – all because I was the only one who'd dared to leave that locked room of cowering men. And now they were all so cock-a-hoop...

In the bitterness of that moment I was not prepared to accept the second-hand certainty of other people. Instead I blurted out all my doubt and rage: "I won't believe it until I see him for myself – and touch the marks of the nails – and feel the wound in his side."

He came again. Came specially for me. Looked at me with that unique look – I could never quite tell whether he was gently teasing or deadly serious, or maybe both at once – and stretched out his hands and said, "Here you are, Thomas, feel for yourself." But I didn't need to, of course. The detail didn't matter anymore. I already knew – KNEW – that I was looking at the hands not just of Jesus (yes, alive again!) – but at the hands of God. And I became the first who dared to say it out loud, that declaration which could have got me stoned for blasphemy but was the one thing I most needed to say: "My Lord and my God".

So if I am remembered, not that I expect to be remembered – and, despite all my failings, as a follower of Jesus – I should like to be remembered as Daring Thomas.

Clare Matthews



Doubting Thomas: Clare's thoughts

We are told several times in John's gospel that the apostle Thomas was a twin. Whenever John mentions him, he adds that he was also called *Didymus*, the Greek word for twin — and the name Thomas means twin in Aramaic too. Was this just a nickname (*Twinnie*), or was it his actual name? Who was the other twin? A brother, or possibly a sister? And did this twin ever meet Jesus?

There's so much else about Thomas' back-story that would be fascinating to know. What was his occupation before he became a disciple? Legend suggests that, like Jesus, he was a carpenter — perhaps a fellow craftsman from Nazareth. He was later adopted by the church as the patron saint of architects and builders; his official symbol, a set square, reflects a desire to get the meaning of things properly straight in his mind.

And what happened to him in the end?

Longstanding tradition maintains that he travelled all the way to India where he spent some forty years preaching the good news of Christ's resurrection, and was eventually killed for his faith. Quite an impressive CV for a man routinely characterised as 'doubting Thomas'...

Despite all the unanswered questions, what we **do** have in John's gospel are Thomas' actual words. Unlike the other gospels where he's just a name in the list of apostles, John gives him a speaking role — and at several key points in the story, it's his voice that breaks through.

Clare Matthews: introduction to the monologue

Sharing worship at Oxford Synagogue

My husband Bob is from a Jewish heritage family. He was brought up in a secular home, but since the Hamas attacks on 7 October 2023 he has become much more interested in exploring his Jewish inheritance, and the religious practice of Judaism. One of my friends, Hannah, who recently completed her training as a rabbi, introduced us to Sybil, a retired rabbi, recently moved to Oxford, and Sybil invited us to join Sabbath worship at the Progressive synagogue in Richmond Road.

The first thing that struck us as we arrived was the level of security outside the synagogue. The synagogue is behind sturdy iron gates, and security guards were the first to welcome us. Sadly, the need for high levels of security is common for Jewish communities and has been for many years. That a religious community needs such security is both shocking and a stark reminder of the scars of antisemitism, a feature of life which, sadly, is not consigned to the past but very much a fact of the present.

Once inside, we were welcomed with the words "Shabbat Shalom". This means 'peaceful Sabbath', expressing the

desire that each worshipper might experience a day of peace and spiritual rest.

The synagogue is unusual, both in terms of its architecture, and also in the nature of its community. The roof is in the shape of a wave, conjuring up an image of the building as an ark for the Jewish community. If the architecture is striking, so is the make-up of the community. The building provides spaces for Orthodox, Masorti and Progressive forms of prayer. There is no rabbi, services being organised and led by volunteers.

We took part in the service held by the Progressive community. The room was simply set out, with the Ark holding the Torah scrolls at the front. The service was led by a number of volunteers, mainly women, and had elements that were both familiar and unfamiliar.

The most obviously unfamiliar aspect was the use of Hebrew. This included a reading from the Torah, followed by a translation in English. We were provided with a

prayer book that was reminiscent of our Methodist Service Book! Burgundy, and of a similar size, it set out different liturgies for different days and occasions. Prayers were in Hebrew and English, and you navigated the text from back to front. Clear instructions were given to ensure we knew where we were. Songs were sung, sometimes in Hebrew, sometimes in English, without accompaniment. There was something very moving about the sound of voices raised together in praise to God which put me in mind of the Taizé chants that we sometimes use in our worship.

The liturgy itself was surprisingly familiar. The focus on the Eternal God sat alongside prayers for forgiveness and requests for help in the coming days. The words of the Kaddish – a prayer praising God and affirming the faith - reminded me of the gathering prayer in the service of Holy Communion:

“Let God’s great name be blessed for ever and ever. Beyond all the praises, songs, and adorations that we can utter is the Holy One, the Blessed One, whom yet we glorify, honour, and exalt. And let us say: Amen. For us and for all Israel, may the blessing of peace and the promise of life come true, and let us say: Amen.”

And from our Methodist Service Book: “Glory to God in the highest, and peace to God’s people on earth. Lord God, Heavenly King, almighty God and Father, we worship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your glory.”

Our friend, Sybil, read from the end of the book of *Exodus* (chapter 40), and then gave the address. The attention to a passage of scripture again felt familiar. Sybil’s theme was

the structure of *Exodus*, its movement from exile towards the successful construction of the Tabernacle, the place where God dwells with His people. As Sybil pointed out, there were a number of missteps along the way (the Golden Calf included!) that had to be overcome before attaining this happy outcome, and we should be mindful of this pattern in our own lives. We are not to be disheartened when things do not go according to plan, but keep working patiently towards the future God intends.

After the service we all joined with the Orthodox congregation for Kiddush (a blessing recited over wine to sanctify the Sabbath). The resonance with Communion was not far away, and the conversation and laughter reminded me very much of our after-service coffee!

Such resonances are as it should be: Jesus, after all, was an observant Jew, so of course we will have much in common. We left the service with a strong sense of Judaism as a living, vibrant faith. Sharing worship made me aware of just how much our two faiths have in common; it also challenged me to think about what makes me a Christian, and particularly what it means to believe in the Incarnation, that God was in Christ. I’m looking forward to future discussions with the new friends encountered there; and also with my husband as he continues to explore his connection to this faith. It is important that we get to know members of other faiths better, and, in an age which has its fair share of people intent on dividing us, we must find ways of offering support to each other during troubling times.

Bev Clack

Christian Aid Street Market



This year the annual Street Market raised a total of £2382.20 in just over 4 hours, and the grand total from Wesley Mem to Christian Aid, with various donations, exceeded £4000. Well done everyone!

Next year’s Street Market is booked for Saturday 8 May. Please save the date!

Starting Sunday with *Sunday*

The BBC's religious broadcasting has many treasures, not least *Thought for the Day* and *Choral Evensong*, but the wealth of the *Sunday programme* on Radio 4 remains largely undiscovered. A ten-past-seven Sunday morning start may not appeal to everyone, but each broadcast is also available on BBC Sounds.

For some 40 minutes, issues of faith are presented and explored in local, national and global contexts. Christian denominations and other faiths, particularly Judaism and Islam, are featured against the backdrop of a troubled world through reporting, testimony and interviews, as well as academic input.

The discussions are rigorous but conducted with courtesy. One does not encounter the grandstanding, sarcasm and premature interrupting that can characterise some current affairs programmes. The presenters change from week to week (for example, Emily Buchanon, Edward Stourton, Julie Etchingham, ...). Each has their own individual style as Chair, but they all keep calm and show patience, particularly if there is a risk of discussion becoming heated.

The wide range of issues discussed includes international conflicts, antisemitism, racism, assisted dying, child abuse, overseas aid, same-sex marriage, historical and modern slavery, the repatriation of religious artefacts, the weaponisation of holy texts by various faiths, and constitutional issues.

Faith journeys past and present are explored: the Quakers and Jane Austen on the one hand, a *Gladiators* TV contestant, a former Guantanamo Bay interrogator, a hairdresser moving into ministry and a gay Imam on the other. Incoming faith leaders are interviewed before their installation, most recently Richard Moth as the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Westminster and Sarah Mulally as the Archbishop of Canterbury.

The struggles of Christians in areas of conflict are frequently revisited, not least in Gaza and Lebanon. A recent interview with the Bishop of Cyprus, whose diocese

covers ten countries, reminded us that there are five million other Christians caught up in the conflict in the Gulf.

Constructive interfaith dialogue is often a feature; for example, a Jew and a Muslim in Sydney were interviewed together about "Standing together". When (for the first time in decades) the dates of Lent and Ramadan coincided, two friends – one Christian and one Muslim – discussed what they had learned from the other's season of preparation and abstinence.

One of the strengths of *Sunday* is the historical perspective it offers. An item on the 'Cambridge Sermon' of 1525 reminded us of the early stages of the Reformation before Henry VIII broke with Rome. The editors of *The Tablet* and the *Church Times* covered not only how their respective publications have developed since their origins in the mid-1800s, but also the contemporary challenges faced by similar publications. An application to UNESCO to obtain World Heritage Status for *Choral Evensong* was discussed. If the *Tango* enjoys this status, why not!

Stories featuring Methodists appear frequently. For example, we heard about a Methodist chaplain in the D-Day landings; or, more recently, a United Methodist minister in Minnesota protesting about the pressures of the ICE officers on her community.

I didn't know before that one reason for building Truro Cathedral was the need to boost the Anglican presence in Methodist Cornwall, nor that Methodism helped to shape Bishop Benson's Service of *Nine Lessons and Carols* which ended up in Cambridge via Canterbury!

The father of the actor Kenneth Williams was a Methodist with disapproving views of the world of the theatre. He could not have imagined that years later his son would be recorded reading the parable of the Prodigal Son – one of a BBC series of Bible readings by famous actors, now available in *Archive on 4* on BBC Sounds.

Alan Dobson

From the Weekend Break



Highgate House



Discussions in full swing



Building ramps in teams to send the toy car as far as possible!

What I learned in prison

I joined the Independent Monitoring Board (IMB) in 2012 knowing little about prisons; colleagues told me I would experience every emotion except boredom...

The IMB (imb.org.uk) is independent of the prison service. Board members are volunteers appointed by the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) to ensure that people in custody are treated fairly and humanely. IMB annual reports to the MoJ are public documents. The IMB is part of the UK's National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) (nationalpreventivemechanism.org.uk), an international commitment.

The IMB does not make prison rules: it monitors whether they are applied fairly. Members have unrestricted access to prisons and their records. A prisoner may submit an 'application' to the IMB if he believes the prison's complaints system has not addressed properly an issue he has raised.

No two prisons are alike. The four categories range from 'Cat A' (high security) to 'Cat D' (open prison), but prisons within each vary greatly in their focus and population mix.

The prison system is overcrowded and many prisoners live in unsuitable environments. For example, many have to double up and share for over 20 hours a day a single cell (approx. 12' x 8') with bunkbeds and a toilet. They may have to eat their meals in the same space. Other facilities, such as showers, have become dilapidated after years of under-funding and delayed maintenance.

The rate of mental disorders among prisoners is about twice that in the general population. Behaviour can be unpredictable, even volatile, and many prisoners are at risk of self-harm. It is particularly upsetting for staff when a prisoner takes his own life despite multiple layers of vigilance and support. All deaths in custody (including those from natural causes) are investigated by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) as well as the Coroner's Court.

Drugs circulate within prisons despite airport-style security for everybody on entry and frequent cell searches. Drones that can pinpoint locations, deliver and be gone in seconds present the latest challenge to intercepting contraband.

I have witnessed threatening behaviour and sometimes violence, but also many acts of kindness, such as young prisoners supporting the social care of elderly men. And I particularly recall a pair of repeat offenders, worried about the state of mind of an anxious first-time offender, approaching me on his behalf.

Prisons are frequently understaffed and recruitment of officers has been extended beyond Europe, notably to Nigeria. When staffing is tight, safety and security are prioritised at the expense of education and other activities. Ironically, disruption and violence are less likely to occur in areas perceived by the media as 'soft'; and prisoners returning from purposeful activity are less likely to cause trouble back on the wing than those who have to remain in their cells.

A library staffed by women in a men's prison can be as peaceful as any in the community. When a museum curator gave an outreach presentation, twenty men listened attentively and handled with respect the artefacts she had brought. When dinosaurs were mentioned, one man said "I took my kids to see them" and recommended family visits after release. The 'Fine Cell Work' social enterprise in some 20 prisons, trains prisoners in skilled needlework to be undertaken in their cells, and some go on to apprenticeships in textiles. Their work is celebrated at an annual exhibition and sale in The Guildhall. Needlework has considerable therapeutic and rehabilitation value: in the words of one prisoner, "During the long hours at weekends, behind my door, I don't notice time passing".

Eighty per cent of offending is reoffending. Prisoners are less likely to reoffend if they have a job and proper accommodation on release. About a sixth of prisoners are

not housed on the night following release from custody. Only about a fifth are in employment six weeks after release. Maintaining contact with family is a positive influence on reducing reoffending, but distance and expense can be significant obstacles to relatives' ability to sustain visits.

Each prison has a chaplaincy to serve prisoners of all faiths and none. If the duty chaplain is not of the same faith, the prisoner is offered (say) a Bible or a Quran or a prayer mat, and referred to the appropriate colleague. Motivation to attend services is not always religious: some prisoners attend simply to spend more time out of cell and some hope to pass on contraband in the chapel. However, many do have a genuine commitment.

One prisoner had so many questions about the Old Testament that the Rabbi was approached by a Christian colleague for back-up! Another would move along the walkway singing hymns — we shared a verse in passing a couple of times. At one service he asked for an extra hymn and led us singing 'There is a Redeemer ...' from memory!

One Sunday I had to attend an incident and leave the final service of a chaplain who was retiring after 20 years. As I walked back, it was moving to hear the distant sound of his congregation beginning the last hymn: 'In Christ alone ...'

Another Sunday I wondered how prisoners might react to the reading of the Ten Commandments [appointed in the Lectionary], but everybody listened respectfully. Prisoners quite often have rather Old Testament notions of retribution. Some assert that sentences for very serious crimes should be more severe. Sex offenders have to be protected from possible attack by other prisoners.

Routine monitoring is mostly concerned with issues of decency in day-to-day living involving food, accommodation and healthcare. In addition, IMB members have particular responsibilities to monitor the treatment of prisoners placed on segregation or constant watch. Members also observe planned interventions, for example when a prisoner has barricaded his cell. In case use of force cannot be

avoided, officers have extra protective equipment, but their priority, here as elsewhere, is always to de-escalate the threatening situation.

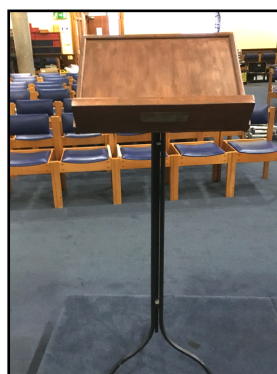
The IMB is on call for serious incidents, such as a prisoner climbing on the roof, and for which the prison service can deploy national resources. Serious incidents occur several times a year in some prisons, but very rarely in others. Where I have attended the scene of similar incidents, calm negotiation by staff has usually led to compliant behaviour and a peaceful surrender.

Over 14 years on rota I have experienced many emotions but certainly not boredom! I have at times been anxious, but never had to press an alarm bell or use my whistle. I have been impressed by the professionalism of staff working under great pressure, and seen a good sense of humour go a long way in tense situations. Although prison life is very different from the well-known sitcom, I have even met individuals who are somewhat reminiscent of certain characters in *Porridge*.

The Wesley Memorial preacher's lectern was restored in 2019 by prisoners using recycled wood. I met the men who carried out this work: I wonder where they are now.

Alan Dobson

Alan recently stood down from monitoring in a large 'Cat B' prison for adult men. The article also draws on published sources, including the IMB National Annual Report 2025. Any views expressed are personal ones. Some of the issues covered would be similar, but others quite different, in women's prisons and young offender institutions (YOI). Information about the IMB, including opportunities to volunteer, can be found on the website: <https://imb.org.uk>



The refurbished lectern 2019

Methodist Liaison Office for Jerusalem..

..recognised for support of Bethlehem School

The work of the Methodist Liaison Office in Jerusalem has been recognised with a plaque acknowledging their support for the Hope School in Bethlehem. The plaque was presented by the Director of the school, Mr Saba, and the Mayor of Beit Jala.

The inscription on the plaque reads ‘In sincere appreciation of your outstanding support to Hope School. Your generosity, dedication and commitment have greatly contributed to the growth and success of our students and school community’.

David Hardman, Methodist Liaison Officer, Jerusalem, commented, “As you enter Hope School, a sign reads ‘God is Love’, a message that is lived out daily by the staff and governors alike, welcoming pupils, parents and visitors into a community shaped by compassion and care.

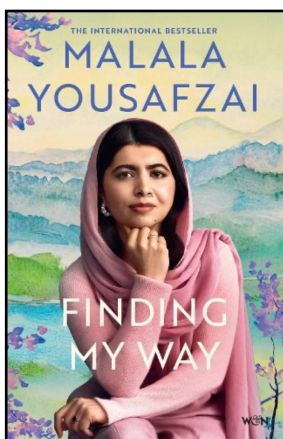
“The Methodist Liaison Office is honoured to support this vital work through visits, fundraising and sharing the school’s story. We are deeply grateful for this recognition and look forward to strengthening our partnership in the years ahead.”



Often known as a ‘second chance’ school, Hope School ensures that children from Beit Jala, a district of Bethlehem, can access education regardless of past experiences, family circumstances or the challenges of living under occupation.

The Hope School was established as a community-led response to the growing need for inclusive education and care for children with intellectual and developmental disabilities in the Bethlehem area. The school creates a safe, supportive environment where children who were often marginalised can access specialised education, therapy. Hope School plays a vital role in promoting dignity, independence and social participation.

Reprinted from <https://www.methodist.org.uk/>



Malala’s recently released story of her life and struggles to date takes us through her relatively unhappy four years at school in Birmingham — she wasn’t ‘cool’ — to her undergraduate days in Oxford, through lockdown and beyond, to her marriage with Asser Malik (of the Pakistan Cricket Board).

This very readable memoir shows us a young woman who wanted to avoid the limelight, the photographers, the fame, and just be ordinary. As the *New York Times* had it: “A remarkably intimate and insistently human chronicle of a moral authority’s coming of age.” And much more.

Recommended!

Kate Dobson

The JustMoney Movement

Money makes the world go round, says the song. It certainly plays a pivotal role in our society, and reflects our values and priorities. We can make decisions about our own money – how we bank, save, and spend – that contribute to the kind of world we want to live in. Policies and practices about money – for example in the tax system, the finance sector, or the corporate economy – can be shaped in ways that serve people and planet too.

For the last three years, I've been a trustee of a small charity that has a vision of a world where money is used to shape a fairer, greener future, and which seeks to draw together Christians and churches as part of a broader movement for change in our economic and financial systems. Previously known as the Ecumenical Council for Corporate Responsibility (ECCR), the charity was relaunched in November 2022 as the JustMoney Movement. In September, I will take over as its chair.

Its activities include grassroots education and campaigning, advocacy, and thought leadership. It runs the *Money Makes Change* hub, a place for Christians to explore ethical issues



around money. It leads campaigns for tax justice and challenges the activities of large corporations through raising questions at their AGMs. It seeks to bring a distinctive Christian voice on wider issues of money and economics, believing that our understanding and use of money flows from our faith and is part of our witness. After all, Jesus told more parables about money than any other subject.

We have just launched a campaign, 'Challenge Amazon', to encourage Christians to shop more ethically, avoid Amazon over its tax practices and other harmful impacts, and support global efforts to reform rules governing large corporations.

If you'd like to find out more, get involved, support our work, access the resources, or sign up for regular updates, visit www.justmoney.org.uk – or come and chat to me!

Simeon Mitchell

Oxford Poverty Action Trust

OxPAT makes your small change count

I was aware of OxPAT years ago, when they used to have collecting boxes in M&S and at Oxford Rail Station. Some of the boxes have vanished, and I was unsure what had become of the charity, until an appeal went out to Night Shelter (OWNS) volunteers for new trustees. This seemed a good cause to support, so I offered, and using my Wesley Mem DBS check, found myself in a short time approved as an OxPAT trustee.

Their website makes clear the purpose, and processes:

"Our objective

Our objective is to give the public an alternative to giving money directly to beggars. Giving money through OxPAT ensures that the money is spent on things that will help individuals in need.

How we operate

OxPAT is administered by a Committee and a Board of

Trustees, both composed entirely of volunteers.

How we raise money

Most of Oxpat's income comes from private donations made by members of the public. Many supporters pay money to OxPAT via a regular standing order...

Individuals make charitable donations to OxPAT from time to time by cheque.

There are a few collecting boxes in shops and offices. If you would like to make a donation, please visit our [donate now](#) page where you can download forms for standing orders and gift aid. Over £750,000 has been collected and distributed since the organisation was launched, and the total is growing all the time."

It's good to know that there is viable alternative to giving money to those begging on the streets, and that the 'core agencies' to which OxPAT makes regular grants include The Gatehouse, and Aspire.

Kate Dobson

500 years of Tyndale

2026 is the quincentenary of William Tyndale's masterpiece, the 1526 English New Testament.

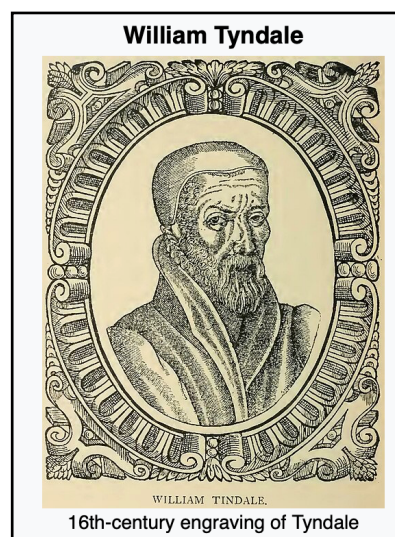
William Tyndale was born in the early 1490s in Gloucestershire. He loved the Scriptures and became a priest. After 1516, when Greek manuscripts had been published on the new-fangled European printing presses, it became possible to translate from the original Greek. Tyndale was likely inspired by Martin Luther who did just that and published the New Testament in German in 1522. So, around that time, Tyndale started to translate the New Testament into English from Greek.

He famously said to a priest who challenged him: "If God spares my life, I will cause the boy who driveth the plough to know more of the Scriptures than thou dost". Tyndale wanted the Bible in a normal language, to make it relevant for everyday faith to everyone, not just the educated priests and monks. At that time there was an old law that it was only legal to translate the Bible if it was authorised by a bishop, so he went to ask the Bishop of London. He did not get this support, so he continued his work in Germany.

One verse

I have always liked the story of Zacchaeus, even though I am tall and have never had to climb a tree to see what is going on. One day I was reading the story in Luke 19.1-10 to my daughter. Afterwards she looked puzzled and asked, "Do sycamore trees really grow in the Holy Land?" It was a good question, and it sent me off to do some research. The sycamore, as we know it, is a type of maple that does not grow natively in the Middle East. Zacchaeus lived in Jericho, on the West Bank of the Jordan. In Deuteronomy 34.3 Jericho is called the 'city of palms', and it is often very hot there. So, if you wanted to stop and listen to someone speak, you would naturally gather in the shade beneath the canopy of one of its many trees.

The Greek word συκόμορος (sūkomoros), which English Bibles turned into 'sycamore', was actually the term used



City of Worms

Tyndale completed the New Testament in Cologne in 1525, but it was not fully published until 1526, when it was printed in the city of Worms on the Rhine. Thousands of copies were smuggled up the river and across the North Sea into England, where they were eagerly bought and read. Later, Tyndale had also learnt Hebrew and started to translate the Old Testament. He moved to the great printing centre of Antwerp. This was dangerous work because in Antwerp, Protestant opinions were considered heretical and punishable by death. Tyndale never finished his work. He was betrayed and executed for heresy in 1536.

for the wild fig. The wild fig has a sturdy trunk, a broad canopy giving plenty of shade, and low, wide-spreading branches that are ideal for sitting on. Suddenly the story of Zacchaeus makes much more sense when you can picture the right tree!

Curious to see how others had handled this, I looked at different Bible versions. In his Revised New Testament of 1534, William Tyndale had already faced this issue. When Zacchaeus wants to see Jesus: "He ran before, and ascended up, into a wild fig tree, to see him: for he should come that same way". (Luke 19.4, modern-spelling edition). For me, this shows the genius of Tyndale: five centuries ago, he had already got it right!

Neil Rees, Digital Publishing and Translation Advisor
Both items reprinted from *Word in Action*, BIBLE SOCIETY, SUMMER 2026, with permission

The Revd Leslie Marsh leaves Oxford

We are going to miss Leslie now he's moved to the great cathedral city of Hereford. He has been with us in Oxford for many years, ever since he sat down – Methodist code for retirement – as an 'itinerant' minister.

In Leslie's case, 'itinerant' barely covers it! From his first appointment in Brough on the banks of the Humber, he went to Stoke-on-Trent, followed by Bolton; then Cumbria; back south to the Black Country in Cradley Heath, a big jump to Frome in Somerset, and back to Stoke. His versatility led to his being in charge of drama, and even managing a theatre in Bolton; and he promoted performances of the Methodist musical *Ride, Ride* across the Connexion. You can fill in the details of all these years by reading Leslie's little autobiography, *It shouldn't happen to a Methodist Minister*. (Copies from Leslie) Finally Oxford. Lesley busied himself with Bible study groups, writing his short books, and hopping off to Dubai to spend the winter with his daughter Joanna. (On the left of the photo)



Leslie with his daughters Joanna and Louise, at his coffee party, to which we were all invited on 1st May

Au revoir, dear Leslie, we shall miss your enigmatic smile, the twinkle behind it and your soft-spoken words. But we will be with you, and you with us in spirit, and in the enduring fellowship of the family of Methodism!

Kate Dobson

Peter Ward Jones 1944 - 2026

Peter Ward Jones was a very distinguished organist and harpsichordist who occasionally came to play on Sunday at Wesley Memorial. He was also a musicologist and well-known writer.

As the Oxford Professor Emerita of Music wrote: "He was a fine example of expertise as both scholar and practitioner, the latter particularly focusing on keyboard performance (organ and harpsichord) and choral directorship." He had in fact been conductor of the Oxford Harmonic Society (now Choir) in the 1970s, and had always maintained a close interest in and relationship with the choir, even until his last illness.

Until his retirement in 2009, he had been for forty years the Music Librarian of the Bodleian. During that time, he produced in 1989 a catalogue of the Mendelssohn collection already housed in the library; and later was able to add to the collection significant purchases such as the manuscript (MS) full score of *Lobgesang*, MS scores of

Elijah, and in 2002, the final working MS of the *Fingal's Cave Overture*. In 1997 he published his



translation of *The Mendelssohns on Honeymoon: The 1837 Diary of Felix and Cécile Mendelssohn Bartholdy*. He was finally glad to have lived to see his magnum opus, *British Choral Singing: A History from Medieval Times to the Present Day*, published and in print!

As a person, he was quite shy, and modest, but with firm opinions. Shortly before he died, he told me he had planned his funeral: there would be NO funeral hymns, beautiful music, his friend Professor Diarmaid McCulloch would give the tribute, and the last item would be the choir (of St Giles church) singing the great last chorale from Bach's *St John Passion*. It was a marvellously fitting final moment!

Kate Dobson

Geoff Pargeter

Memories of Geoff

Geoff was born at 31 Crescent Road, Cowley the youngest of 3 boys. The family worshipped at Temple Cowley URC, and he was a member of the Sunday school, youth club and then the Templar Players drama group. Leaving school at 16, he was apprenticed as a bookseller to B.H.Blackwell and remained there for the whole of his working life, retiring on his 60th birthday.

At 18, he followed his brothers into the RAF to do his 2 years National Service which he considered a waste of time! The only good things to come out of it, he felt, were that during his time at Bridgnorth he managed to achieve 2 extra 'O' levels, and he acquired his wonderful friendships with Bill Frindall (who became a renowned cricket commentator), Cliff Morgan (who was a future Welsh international rugby player) and Norman White whom he met at his last posting at Benson. We kept in touch with Norman and went to visit him when he retired to live in Venice (by train of course).

Returning from National Service, he became leader of the church youth club and the 45th Oxford Cub Pack, a role he continued for 25 years, also being district cub leader for 4 of those years. This dedicated service was recognised by the Scout Association, who awarded him the Medal of Merit at a surprise presentation by the District Commissioner. It had to be a surprise because as everyone knew, Geoff would a) not consider that he had done anything special; and b) would probably have refused it – particularly if he had known about the ceremony, as he always hated being in the limelight.

During this time, we had married in 1964 and were living on the Cowley Road, sharing the house with Geoff's father, Dennis. It had been the family home since 1951. Our two daughters arrived in 1970 and 1972; and in 1974 we were able to buy the house next door, enabling us to have more space. And give Grandpa more peace, whilst still keeping the family unit together.

As the girls grew and our lives became more centred in East



Oxford, we felt that the time was right to also become part of the worshipping community there, and we found a welcome at Cowley Road Methodist Church. We soon became Sunday school teachers and, of course, Geoff took over running the youth club as his time at Cowley ended.

In his early twenties he played scrum-half for Oxford City Rugby Club's 5th team, but soon his interest was confined to watching the sport at the University ground on Iffley Road, and an annual trip to Twickenham to watch the Oxford & Cambridge Varsity match with his father, uncle and elder brother. "A good day out", they all agreed.

His other major hobbies, which he pursued purely for his own pleasure, included stamp-collecting and train-spotting which had begun in his school days and he enjoyed both of these activities right up until lockdown in 2020. It was all steam in his teenage years and when we discovered the railway preservation scene and Didcot Railway Centre right on our doorstep, he was able to live the dream again. We were all dragged into volunteering – firstly in catering and then when the girls moved onto their own activities, I helped in the gift shop and Geoff became co-sales officer for the Oxford group sales stand, alongside our good friend Graham. Over the next 30 plus years Geoff volunteered in many areas on site, digging holes, filling them in, whatever manual task was needed. He considered himself 'a doer' in the background, not a front runner, and he very much enjoyed being a part of the Didcot camaraderie. He would be deeply touched to know that his name is to be engraved on a plaque, which will be installed on the Memorial Board by Didcot Halt station platform.

Even as the girls developed their own characters and chose different career paths, music ran through every element of our family life. Playing, singing, watching live events were

all, and still are, incredibly important to us. Going to a 'Proms' concert became an annual outing and hearing the Widor *Toccata* played on the Albert Hall organ reduced him to tears, hence that choice for today's funeral. Alison's acting career enabled him to combine a train journey with seeing her appear on stage; and sharing Kay's gigs, hearing her own song compositions, often in a pub, a definite bonus! He showed his immense pride in them both by pronouncing to all present: "That's my daughter performing".

He also enjoyed being in the concert audience when I sang with Headington Singers. He was very much a home bird, not liking to stay away for long, but we did enjoy trips to North Wales where there are lots of steam trains and when Eurostar began operations, we had lots of short stays in Paris and Brussels. We fell in love with the Impressionist art movement after we saw Monet's *Water Lilies* in Paris and went on to enjoy many more major art exhibitions, often with friends.

Geoff struggled greatly during lockdown with his lack of freedom but found comfort in our garden and the support of family and his friends. By the end of that period, it was becoming obvious that there were more serious symptoms of memory loss than just ageing and Geoff was diagnosed

with early-stage dementia in September 2021. During the next three and a half years, Geoff's condition continued to decline as the disease took more of a hold. By Feb 2025 it became apparent that even with the incredible help and support of our daughters, sons-in-law, friends, *Home Instead* care-workers and *Dementia Oxfordshire*, I could no longer maintain the level of care at home that Geoff not only needed but deserved. With their support and expert advice, I had to make the hardest and most difficult decision of our 60-year marriage, that Geoff should move into Marston Court care home, to be looked after by experts in dementia care.

He moved into a beautiful first-floor corner room there, with lovely views, and it was always filled with light and his beloved classical music. He was surrounded by pictures of everything he loved, and for the next 13 months he was able to live as fulfilling a life as possible, all due to the care and encouragement of every single member of staff. We can't thank them enough for everything they did for Geoff and for also including us, his family, in that care.

For now though, we take comfort and pride that in so many of the messages, cards, calls and emails the same phrase has been used for Geoff: "What a LOVELY man he was".

Margaret Pargeter

Tributes to Malcolm McCulloch and Kupperaj Raju will follow in the next issue of the magazine.



The Weekend Break group photo taken at Highgate House after Sunday worship

Wesley Memorial Church

New Inn Hall Street, Oxford OX1 2DH

Web: www.wesleymem.org.uk



Superintendent Minister: The Revd Miriam Moul

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

Church manager: Nikos Paplomatas

Church & circuit administrator: Jo Godfrey

Services: Sunday worship 10.30 am

Wednesday prayers 12.30 pm

Office open: Monday to Thursday

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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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