

ANNUAL MEETING



This year's Annual Meeting takes place on Saturday and Sunday, 25-26 July at the Radisson Blu hotel in Durham. We last met in the north-east three years ago, at New Silksworth, but this will be the first residential meeting in the area since 2007.

As has become traditional, there will be a get-together on the Friday evening, which will be a prayer and praise event from 7.30 pm to 9 pm, to be led by Jean Merton. Saturday evening will see a celebration service from 8 pm to 9.30 pm, with Lisa Green (our president-elect) as the guest speaker.



At last year's Annual Meeting, a Restructuring Group was set up, to consider the next steps after the decision in principle to merge the Independent Methodist Connexion and the Independent Methodist Association. At that stage, it was hoped to present the group's proposals to Annual Meeting 2026.

Work has been ongoing over the past twelve months, to define the areas which need to be considered, and agreement has been reached on around 80% of them. However, because restructuring, by definition, can raise uncertainties, the group feels that it should complete the remaining actions and then prepare to consult with the churches, presenting the proposal and receiving feedback. The draft proposals will be reviewed in the light of the feedback, with a view to making a full presentation and proposal at Annual Meeting 2027.

The planned timetable is to complete the work in July to September 2026, and interact with churches in small groups during October 2026 to March 2027. The proposal will be finalised in readiness for the April 2027 Connexional Committee, prior to the 2027 Annual Meeting in June. This approach ensures that the consultation period provides ample time to allow the churches to provide considered feedback. As was said at the start of this process, it is more important to achieve the right outcome than to be constrained by an artificial timescale.

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Independent Methodist Churches Statement of

Faith

THE SACRAMENTS

We believe that the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper are to be practised in obedience to the command of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We believe that in the observance of the Lord's supper, Christ is certainly and really present, though not bodily in the elements.

When used by believers with faith and prayer, the sacraments are, through the operation of the Holy Spirit, outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace.

When discussing the sacraments last time, we looked at the sacrament of baptism. This time, we will consider the Lord's Supper, also known as Holy Communion or the Eucharist. This is one area where beliefs and practices diverge between ourselves and, in particular, the Roman Catholic church. I mentioned last time that some denominations insist on using non-alcoholic wine and others say that the wine has to be alcoholic. The type of bread may vary (leavened or unleavened; 'proper' bread or wafers, often with embossed patterns), as might the method of serving - do people drink the wine from a single chalice or individual glasses, do they break fragments of bread from a loaf or a larger piece, even do the people (as opposed to the clergy) receive both the bread and the wine ('communion of both kinds') or just the bread? In particular, the last issue seems to have been a Catholic practice. And, as I asked last time, how much of this really matters?

Let's look at the historical background. Going back to Exodus 12, God gave the Israelites instructions for eating the Passover. The first Passover was to take place on the night the Israelites were at last allowed to leave Egypt. The food had to be eaten in haste, to be ready for a rapid departure. God then told them to commemorate the event every year thereafter, as the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and this is what took place at what we now call the Last Supper. The Jews, as they tended to do, made up all kinds of rules relating to the Passover meal - ritual questions asked by the youngest person present, a ceremony with three matzos, and drinking of four cups of wine at specific places in the ceremony. It is not clear how much of the present-day ceremony actually applied in Jesus' time. Nowadays, the sacrificial lamb is represented by a bone, rather than the serving of roast lamb, mainly because the destruction of the Temple in AD70 brought an end to the Passover sacrifice. However, the four symbolic cups of wine were in place by then, which might explain why the disciples fell asleep in Gethsemane - I always thought that Jesus was a little unfair in expecting his friends to stay awake at night, after so much drink.

All four Gospels give accounts of the Last Supper, and Matthew, Mark and Luke all record the breaking of bread and sharing of the cup. The disciples would have been used to the traditional ritual, and would have been surprised when Jesus diverted from the prescribed order. Just as the traditional Passover was a reminder to the Jews of how God delivered them from the Egyptians, Jesus initiated a new ceremony, as a reminder to his disciples - Do this in remembrance of me (Luke 22:19).

It seems that the early Christians commemorated the death of Jesus more frequently than the annual event that was the Passover. However, things started going wrong and Paul had to take the Corinthian church to task over their attitude. It appeared that the Corinthians had regular meals which were considered to be 'the Lord's Supper'. However, these meals had become an excuse for gluttony and drunkenness: ... as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk. Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? (1 Corinthians 11: 21-2).

Paul then reminded the Corinthians what the Lord's Supper was really about. For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you ...

(1 Corinthians 11: 23a) - this was not Jewish tradition, but a direct revelation that Paul had received from the Lord, probably during his time in Arabia (Galatians 1:17). It is interesting that Paul reverses the order given in the Gospels, mentioning the bread first and then the wine, which has set the pattern for the communion service ever since. Whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord (1 Corinthians 11: 26-7). Paul is telling the church that this is a serious matter. Those who participate in the Lord's Supper are doing so, not just in memory of Jesus' atoning death, but identifying themselves with it. This is my body, **which is for you** (my emphasis), i.e. Jesus died for me personally, for you personally. When Paul says 'a man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup' (v.28), this is nothing to do with how good a person you are, and whether you need to put things right between you and a fellow-believer before you partake. If we know there are issues with other people, we should try to sort them out, but we shouldn't wait until an imminent communion service to do so. We are all sinners, albeit sinners saved by grace, and if you wait until you consider yourself worthy of taking communion, then you will never be ready. No, this is all about accepting by faith that Jesus died on the cross for me and for you. We should never take this lightly and, just as it says in the final section of this statement, our participation in the Lord's Supper is an outward sign that we have accepted Jesus' sacrifice for ourselves.

Jesus promised that 'when two or three come together in my name, there am I with them' (Matthew 18:20), so Jesus is present with us whenever we come together, and not just for the communion service. However, we need to understand what the middle bit of the statement is about. The Roman Catholic church developed the doctrine of transubstantiation, which means that the bread and the wine literally become the body and blood of the Lord when ingested. This is a literal interpretation of This is my body (Mark 14:22) and This is my blood of the covenant (Matthew 26:28). In my study about the Bible, I said that we needed to allow for idioms and picture language, and I gave the example of 'it's raining cats and dogs' as something not to be taken literally. There are examples of such language throughout the Bible. In Genesis 49, we read about Jacob blessing his sons, some of which are strange in the extreme if taken literally. Genesis 49:22 - Joseph is a fruitful vine ... whose branches climb over a wall - did he have his feet encased in soil, with grapes sprouting from every finger? At the other end of the Bible, Jude 12 - These men ... are clouds without rain ... - does this mean that they were floating in the sky, several thousand feet above the ground? No, these were pictures, given to illustrate traits in their characters or as prophecies about their future. Jesus himself used picture language, for instance when he described himself as the 'bread of life' (John 6:35). Some people suggest that, when Jesus said that he was the gate (John 10:9), he was referring to the practice where a shepherd would lie in the entrance to a sheep pen, so that anyone or any animal wanting to get to the sheep would first have to get past the shepherd. However, 'I am the light of the world' (John 8:12) - no one seriously believed that Jesus went round wearing a helmet with a miner's lamp on top, and even the Pharisees recognised that Jesus was making a spiritual statement rather than a literal one.

Finally, my question about different methods of taking communion - does it really matter? For some years, the East Lancashire Railway held a 'Forties weekend', when many people liked to dress up in clothes from that era and an actor playing Winston Churchill gave a 'we shall fight them on the beaches' speech. No one seemed bothered that the trains were all in the British Railways livery of the 1950s and 1960s, stretching historical authenticity a little. Going back to the communion service, the wine may or may not be alcoholic, the bread may or may not be leavened, but surely what does matter is that we are proclaiming the Lord's death and appropriating its blessings for ourselves. Anything else, to my mind at least, is a detail.

West Camel

West Camel Independent Methodist Church, in Somerset, is the newest member of the Connexion, having joined as recently as 2020, in the dark days of Covid. Methodism in the village started in the 19th century or even earlier, meeting in an upper room above a carpenter's shop. The thatched roof leaked when it rained, and when the congregation was large (the room could seat 80), props had to be placed beneath the floor to support it! In 1908, a purpose-built chapel was opened on what became the A303 Basingstoke to Honiton trunk road, but in those days was a narrow country lane. Eventually, the heavy traffic on the A303 (which by now was a dual carriageway) and the chapel's isolation from the main part of the village, led the fellowship to close the building in 2016.



They then entered into a sharing agreement with All Saints Church, whose history stretches back to the eleventh century AD, when a small timber church was founded on the site of a stone field cross. The subsequent decision to leave the Methodist Connexion and join the IMC was helped by not being tied to their own building, and the Independent Methodist Connexion already having a generic sharing arrangement with the Anglicans.



This picture is of the old Chapel

Currently around 30 people attend the church on a regular basis, many coming from the villages and towns round about. The Sunday service starts at 6 pm in summer and 4 pm in the winter months, the earlier start catering for those who prefer not to stay out late on the dark nights. The services are recorded, and can be listened to on the www.westcamelchurches.org.uk website.



The first Sunday in the month sees a united service including a full tea, and on the second and fourth Thursday evenings there is a Bible study on Zoom, which removes the necessity to travel late at night. The church also participates in united events such as holiday clubs and the village fair, where they will have a stall. Their prayer is for a breakthrough in West Camel village itself, as most of the congregation comes from further afield.

A couple of years ago, the church received a grant from the Connexion that enabled them to install a projector and screen in the All Saints building, to bless both congregations. As the church building is Grade 1 listed, the effect on the existing fabric had to be considered and an ingenious system was devised so that the screen is lifted into the ceiling area when not in use (see photos). The projector is hidden in a surround behind a balustrade close to the organ.

I am grateful to Geoff and Elizabeth Chapman for welcoming Sue and myself, and showing us round the building, when we made a slight (!) diversion on the way from Astley to Portsmouth Ferryport. If you would like to join in the Zoom Bible studies, get in touch via info@westcamelchurches.org.uk. I'm sure they would be delighted to send the link.



Connexional Committee 16th May 2026 - Barnoldswick

We were welcomed to Barnoldswick by Claud Thompson, who told us a little about the work the church is currently involved with, and we were invited to have a tour of the historic church building during the lunch break. We began with a time of prayer led by Lisa Green, using some of the material from Thy Kingdom Come. Highlights from the various reports are given below.

General Secretary's Report

The former Wallingfen Methodist Church (Newport, Brough on Humber) have asked to meet with Connexional Officers with a view to becoming a Mission Church. A meeting is to be arranged. Several officers will not be standing for re-election at Annual Meeting, as Marilyn Riding, Graham Edmondson and Dave Hughes have all expressed their wishes to stand down. Following the passing of Norman Prescott, the job description for Resource Centre Secretary is to be updated, as we still require someone in this role.

Administration Group

Booking forms have been sent out for Annual Meeting 2026, for which the NE Circuit are planning a Friday evening worship. Work is underway to confirm a venue for Annual Meeting 2027. It was agreed to change our HR provider to Bright HR for one year as a trial, with a view to continuing to use them after this period. As Chris Elsdon's contract has now finished for work on the Connexional Website, a user guide has been prepared for whoever will be making updates to the website in future. This has yet to be decided and possible solutions for ongoing support for our website and social media are being reviewed.

Ecumenical Officer Report

Bill Hampson attended the March Free Churches Group Meeting, held in London on Thursday, 26th. Marilyn and Lisa attended the recent CTE Enabling Group in place of Bill.

Church Support Group

The group continues to support our churches in numerous ways. Derek Barron and the church support team met with Colne members at Elisha House where they agreed to work together in the future. They, along with other Colne communities, also intend to keep the church open because it is so important to the town. Lisa and Marilyn are currently attending a Church Planting Course by Passion for Jesus and the Mobility Network, held at Roe Green church. On Easter Monday, a Fun Day was arranged at Northwood. This was a great time, with some people attending Northwood for the first time. Marilyn attended the Congregational Federation Church Support Group Meeting, and also met with Yvonne Campbell.

Education Organisers Report

A new student has started the Ministers Course, and our three other students continue their second and third year studies. They all remain very much in need of our prayers as they continue not only to study but also to serve their own churches. Following the increase in hours allocated to the AWE Academy, there are plans to revise the current Education Scheme, redesigning the current structure into a modular format that should be more attractive, enabling people to progress at their own pace in areas that interest them most or where they feel the need for further study. There are plans to promote the new scheme within our churches to encourage increased uptake, not only by those called into the Ministry but also to anyone wishing to further their own development. The February study weekend was attended for the first time by three people from the Wesleyan Reform Union. The October weekend takes place from the 2nd to the 4th and will be led by Dave Burke on the subject of mental health and the gospel. The Fellowship and Bible weekend was attended by 45 people and was a great time of blessing for those who attended.

Enabling Group

It was agreed that the numbers of votes cast at Annual Meeting will not be announced when reporting any elections. However, any nominee up for election will be able to enquire about and receive notification of the voting.

Finance Committee

The in-house Sage accounting system is being updated. When the accounts are available, they will be used to check against our system in preparation for producing the 2026 accounts. Work continues on separating the denomination's running costs from other costs, e.g., direct costs associated with supporting the churches, World Missions, Northwood, and conferences. In this way, we can understand and manage the reduction of the losses we are currently incurring. The planning spreadsheet will be available to all Officers, Trustees, and other interested parties. Drawing down on our investments to cover our ongoing deficits has taken place this year, but is no longer sustainable, and the Finance Committee will be submitting proposals for ways of reducing costs, involving officers from other committees.

Ministry Committee

As previously reported, 45 ministers have been asked to participate in a survey on preferred training for continuous professional development (CPD). To date, 30 replies have been received. One Long Service Certificate will be presented at Annual Meeting 2026. The Church Support Organiser has requested the transfer of Betty Edwards (not currently a member of an IM Church) and Fred Kearsley (Hindley Church) from the Accredited Ministers List to the Ministers Emeritus List, and it was also agreed that Martyn Parry be transferred from the Accredited Ministers List to the Ministers Emeritus List due to age and infirmity.

Northwood Centre

On Friday, 1st May, a meeting took place at the centre to discuss a reset of the Management Committee and the future running of Northwood. As a result of the meeting, there are two new members of the Management committee, with John Hughes joining as ex-officio. John is willing to be an emergency contact for the centre and take care of any maintenance issues where necessary.

World Missions Report

We have officially said goodbye to Daniel and Gail and wish them well in their new roles. L and P are now living in France, working with Arab and Muslim people there. L is also continuing to run her online counselling courses. We have now welcomed back David and Mary as Connexional missionaries, as they continue to work with the Thai people living in this country. They will be financially supported by the Connexion with £6,000 per year. Liz is continuing her work in Romania through the local church. This arrangement has required an update and formalisation of our policy, as discussed at the previous meeting. and agreed by Connexional Committee.

Safeguarding Report

There are currently no outstanding Safeguarding issues. Graham Edmondson will not be seeking re-election this year, and Marilyn Riding has expressed an interest in taking on the role of Safeguarding officer.

Restructuring Group Report

The group continues to meet bi-weekly, and have now defined the areas to be considered and agreed on around 80% of them. They are preparing to consult with the churches, presenting the proposal and then reviewing the proposal in light of any feedback. See the front page article for further details.

Alison Tipping, Medlock Valley Circuit Rep.

A year as President Elect

My year as President-Elect has been different to say the least. Without a President to shadow and a new General Secretary we have learnt to work together seeking God's will for our Connexion and the future. With the loss of a member of staff from the Resource Centre and two Connexional Officers, it has been a challenge to continue 'as normal' whilst in the middle of a restructure.

A truly positive thing is the change on Connexional Committee, the average age has got lower and we have a number of very skilled people who are still in employment - there is still room for more of course due to the lack of representatives for Liverpool and Warrington Circuits.

In May we were blessed to meet at our Barnoldswick Church which is a listed building and some of us had a tour.



We have the vacant officer posts due to the sad loss of our Finance and Resource Centre Secretaries, and also our Association Secretary, Safeguarding Officer and Church Support Officer stepping down. The Administration Secretary office is still vacant from last year. We are currently in the process of restructuring how our organisation works to support and provide for the Churches and as such we find ourselves on the cusp of a new thing. Something foremost in our minds is to pray without ceasing that what is proposed is of God.

The job description of President Elect is to attend Connexional Committee, Admin Group; to chair the Bible and Fellowship Conference and represent the Connexion when asked. The Conference held at Garstang Country Club was a lovely event with friends gathering from across the Connexion to listen to Anthony Billington talk about In His Steps: Discipleship and Mission in 1 Peter whilst sharing worship together. Whilst it is only one night, many enjoyed the chance to catch up with old friends whilst others found new friends and a sense of being together in one accord was felt. I have represented the Connexion at the Churches Together in England (CTE) Enabling Meeting which was held at the High Legh Conference Centre in Hereford with the Church Support Organiser, Marilyn Riding. Unfortunately, Bill Hampson, our Ecumenical Officer could not make it this time. The discussion was around Christian Nationality and we welcomed the Girls Brigade as new members of the CTE.

Earlier in the year myself and Shaun Newton, General Secretary were invited to St Paul's Cathedral for the Confirmation of Election of the new Archbishop of Canterbury Sarah Mullally. We were part of a large group of ecumenical visitors and the service was a mix of old and new with children and young people taking part in the service.

It has been a particularly sad year where I have attended the funerals of Jayne Handley from Atherton Church. Jayne had been a great part of my youth, as a regular youth leader at the Young People's Conferences where she was one of their Church's youth leaders and then for many years as a delegate at Annual Meetings. Very shortly after that was the funeral of Eric Platt from Cornerstone (Nelson) and then John Crabtree of Colne Church - a lovely man I came to know from preaching at Bethel Colne.

Unfortunately we then lost Alan Britton (Stockton Heath) and Norman Prescott (Lamberhead Green), both Connexional Officers who served God all their lives and our Churches for many years.



Something that I have tried to be involved with and encourage has been our congregations coming together in praise and prayer; supporting one another at weekly or monthly events; and talking to one another about moving forward together, discipleship and evangelism. One such time was on Easter Monday at Northwood where we had a lovely time together.

This year we have introduced prayers on Zoom the week before Connexional Meeting to focus on the Lord before doing His business. We look forward to more people joining us on Friday 17th July to pray for Annual Meeting and the decisions to be made there. The zoom link will be sent in the mailings and if your Church Secretary doesn't share it with you, please contact the Resource Centre so you can join us.



On Monday 1st June I had the privilege of being invited to the Houses of Parliament to attend the launch of the National Month of Prayer for Toddler Groups. The month of prayer is organised by 1277 - Make Them Count, which is a network to support church-based toddler groups. 1277 is the average number of days for birth to a child starting school.

The month of prayer originally started as a day, then a week and is now a month during June, which hopes to raise the profile of toddler groups with church leaders and attenders. It is estimated that between a third and a half of all children in this country, aged under three, regularly attend a church-run toddler group. It is the aim of 1277 to have a toddler group within walking distance of every small child in the country. Toddler groups aren't just somewhere for the child to play - children are learning how to interact with others, develop communication skills, gain resilience, grow in curiosity, develop language skills and motor skills and develop attention and listening skills - all which will help them as they start school.

This year's theme is Jesus the Good Shepherd - John 10 v14-16. Toddler groups throughout the country were encouraged to send a sheep - knitted, crocheted, paper, bought or crafted with cotton wool and add a tag to say where it came from. I sent our sheep in and was honoured to receive an invitation to attend the launch of NMOP at Parliament.

The event was held in the Jubilee Room at Parliament. The airport-style security was tight, naturally, and I arrived early but there was a café where you get a drink, a small shop and toilets. I then made my way into Parliament and found I was in Westminster Hall. I was directed to the Jubilee room which was a small room off Westminster Hall. There



were about 40 toddler group leaders from all parts of the country and about 250 sheep, which all had to go through security individually!

The afternoon began with refreshments - cake, fruit and biscuits and a who's who bingo game but I must admit trying to juggle a plate, drink and paper and pen meant that not many names got filled in. Before the event all those invited had to send two interesting facts about their group and these facts were on the bingo game. The facts are interesting, especially those similar to ours.

It was surprising how many groups have been running a long time – longer than us and we have done 33 years.

Also how many have volunteers who are in their 80's, and we have two!

Jo Gordon, CEO of Daniel's Den, a Toddler group network in Brent, and founder member of 1277 Make Them Count opened the afternoon and shared her memories of growing up on a sheep farm in Yorkshire. Jo linked those memories to 'Jesus, the Good Shepherd'. Stephen Timms MP, who had been a very helpful facilitator of these launch events, was unable to speak at the event because as a Government minister he had to attend a meeting, but did drop in briefly towards the end to collect a sheep for his office.



However, Sarah Smith, who is MP for Hyndburn (Accrington) and a Christian, did speak. When she was elected as an MP in 2024, she had a 4-month-old son! She spoke from personal experience of the lifeline that Toddler groups have offered her as a mum of young children and prayed for the event. In fact, Helen, the leader of the Little Fishes group that Sarah's young son attends when in her constituency, was at the event.

Joan Herbert from Folkestone offered a word of encouragement. There was then an opportunity to network with others, to chat about our groups and chose a sheep and pray for the group it had come from. We were encouraged to choose a sheep or two to take away and I choose one from St George's church in Chadderton, Oldham. For the second sheep, I swapped sheep with Denise from Refresh Parent & Toddler group at Crawley Baptist Church, West Sussex. So, Denise has our sheep and we have hers. Unfortunately, it has lost an eye but Denise's church are praying for a new vision for their children's work so it seemed appropriate.

Bishop Guli Francis-Dehqani, Bishop of Chelmsford, came from the House of Lords to express gratitude and pray a prayer of blessing as the event came to an end. It was a wonderful afternoon of celebration, encouragement and inspiration.
Elizabeth Barron (Roman Road, Failsworth)

Church News

Easington Lane

We held our latest Outreach event on 14th May, inviting our local Brass Band (Houghton Brass) to perform a Musical concert in the main part of our church. It was very well attended including people from our local community, and feedback from everyone was excellent. We will endeavour to hold further events throughout the year enabling us to promote our church in the local community.

Ian Grey, Easington Lane



Cliviger

Penny meets the Bunny Hoppers

When Penny the Squirrel visited Mount Zion Little Stars in Cliviger, it was to thank the youngsters for a Bunny Hop session which raised £411.87 for the work of Pendleside Hospice.

"It was amazing to know that the toddlers from this church were able to raise so much for the hospice," said Leah Hooper, the community engagement officer. "It will go towards helping the many people with palliative or palliative end of life illnesses for whom the hospice cares."

Janet Kershaw, who runs the Little Stars group at the church, said:



Penny and Leah thank Janet (second left) and some of the braver youngsters

"We can accommodate up to 30 children and lots took part in the Bunny hop which was in aid of the Hospice, a charity which is very special to us as one of our church members and dear friend was in there before she died last year. It was lovely to get a visit from Penny the Squirrel - even though some of the children were a little in awe of such a towering figure. They did enjoy the Bunny Hop around the church some weeks ago and we appreciated donations from parents, friends and members of the church."

80 songs for birthday celebration

Alan Scholes, of Mount Zion Church, Cliviger, celebrated his 80th birthday on Saturday, June 20 with a four-hour celebration of 80 songs in aid of the Village Hall restoration scheme. The four-hour session saw him rattle through 80 popular songs, old and new, accompanied for some of the time by members of the ukulele band based at the church, and for one session joined by his wife, Pauline, and others for a series of childrens' songs - used in the days when he and his team led assemblies in local schools.

As mentioned in the November/December 2025 Connexion, Alan started the ukulele group in the church some years ago and they meet weekly as well as entertaining many local groups. Ten years ago, he celebrated his 70th birthday with a selection of 70 hymns and songs.

Alan regularly leads worship at Cliviger, where he spent many years as a church leader and now acts as chairman of the trustees. He said: "The celebration day went very well and we raised £550 for the village hall on the day, which was wonderful."

Dave Hall, Cliviger



Bethel, Newtown

"Sir, we would see Jesus!" - Church weekend at Thornleigh Christian Hotel, Grange-over- Sands.

Oswald Chambers once wrote: "Every time you preach, every time you pray, every time you testify, look God in the face first". Taking the incident described in John 12: 21 where Greek visitors to the Passover celebration in Jerusalem asked to meet and assess integrity in the face of Jesus, our party of thirty-five considered how great artists had envisioned our Saviour's presence. Three classic paintings revealed the story of Jesus.

The paintings were selected from Margaret Cooling's book 'Jesus Through Art'. She cleverly, and Spirit-led, blended Art and R.E. into one curriculum target. Both subjects had been marginalised by the National Curriculum for Primary children. We acknowledged the power of creativity in response to Jesus's life, beginning with Bezalel and Oholiab, referred to three times in Exodus. They were responsible for the beautiful ark of the Covenant, with its colour, symbolism, wood carving and metal work engraving.



The group went on to explore children's art, with a particular focus on a child who saw Jesus. 'Heaven is for Real', the book and, subsequently, a film, described the four year old boy's experience of Heaven during a life threatening operation. He later recognised Jesus in a painting by an eight year old girl who had also seen the face of Jesus on another occasion.

The church weekend began with a 'hat competition' and there was such creativity in hats designed to illustrate particular hymns. A quiz, related to second lines of hymns was followed by a 'Goodnight Gathering with Fereshteh'. For her life story, see the May/June 2026 Connexion.

After Saturday's time together and the quest for the appearance of Jesus and different aspects of His life, we had free time to enjoy Grange and relax. In the evening, 'Fellowship and Fun' included 'Bethel Playtime', a reminder of the church's playgroup activities from days gone by, the beautiful harbour song by Hannah and Michael and who could forget Brian Mills as Tommy Cooper with the tricks?

The Sunday service, led by Chris Ormerod, featured references to the inspirational hymns of old. Chris used the 'Old 100' tune with the words from Psalm 100. Again, hymn writers like John Newton and Fanny Crosby drew upon creative responses to the life of Jesus and a neat link to the 'hat competition' was made. We were informed that, before his conversion, John Newton, slave trader, was proud that he could swear for five minutes without repeating himself. On a much more sensitive note, blind Fanny Crosby lost a baby early in her pregnancy and used her grief in the hymn 'Safe in the Hands of Jesus'. During the sacrament, we looked at William Holman Hunt's 'Scapegoat' as a reminder of the sacrifice of the Lord.



We were extremely grateful to the staff at Thornleigh. It was a blessed weekend and we can confirm that a 'Christian disciple' is one who perpetually looks in the face of God'. (Chambers).

David Moulson, Bethel (Newtown)



South Hetton

On Sunday 3rd May, President Martyn Banks welcomed Julie Rutter into membership of our Church. Julie, who has worshipped with us for several years, has attended and regularly played a part in our Sunday services. Following the vows of membership, affirming her devotion to God and the Church, Julie was congratulated and given a warm welcome by the elders, members and friends of the Church. We thank God for guiding Julie into our Church and we ask a blessing on her worship.

Deborah Klincke, South Hetton

In the Joy of the Lord

Easington Lane: Margaret Grey (3rd October 1939 – 17th February 2026)

Being the Daughter of her Lord and King is a title Margaret was joyful to claim all the days of her life. Many within our Connexion will have countless memories of Margaret, including her hospitality, her determination and her solid faithfulness throughout her Christian journey. She has influenced and encouraged the lives of many over the years with her servant-like nature.

Margaret's life was not always easy, but she would be the first to state that God always got her through every trial and challenge. At the tender age of 13, having attended the Sunday school and youth club, Margaret dedicated her life to Jesus, promising to serve Him using the gifts and the talents she had been blessed with.

By the age of 15, Margaret became a dedicated and loyal worker within every part of the Church. She held various positions throughout her life, including Sunday School Teacher, Treasurer, Church Visitor, President of the Women's Auxiliary and Vice-President within the Church. Margaret also attended our Bible Studies, Prayer Meetings and played her part within our outreach activities. Her commitment and passion for spreading the gospel cannot be denied.

During her youth group days, interactions with a young man named Jack sealed their future. They married on August 9th in 1959 and began their life as a couple. As well as a busy home life, with her children, Ian and Janet, Margaret was involved in Circuit and Connexion life, particularly with the Young People's work within the circuit. She loved attending business meetings and was a regular attendee of Annual Meeting. Nothing held Margaret back from worshipping, she would attend every event or service she could, so much was her love for her Lord.

Within our Church, Margaret was the one many of us turned to with our worries or concerns because we knew she would keep our confidence. We could count on her to be faithful in her prayers for our situations and she would be the one asking if we were OK, even when her own health was failing. Although the sorrow of Margaret no longer being with us remains painful, we are comforted to know that the Lord has welcomed Margaret into His presence with those words we all long to hear, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant".

Margaret was so sure of her eternal future because of her unwavering faith in the Lord. That hope and peace that Margaret held was conveyed during the service of thanksgiving that was held in church on March 9th. As was Margaret's wish, a collection of her favourite hymns was played and sung, and a gospel message was given challenging everyone to look at their own eternal futures and their relationship with Jesus.

As a Church we give thanks to God for Margaret, her life, her witness and her service in the life of our Church, community and further afield.



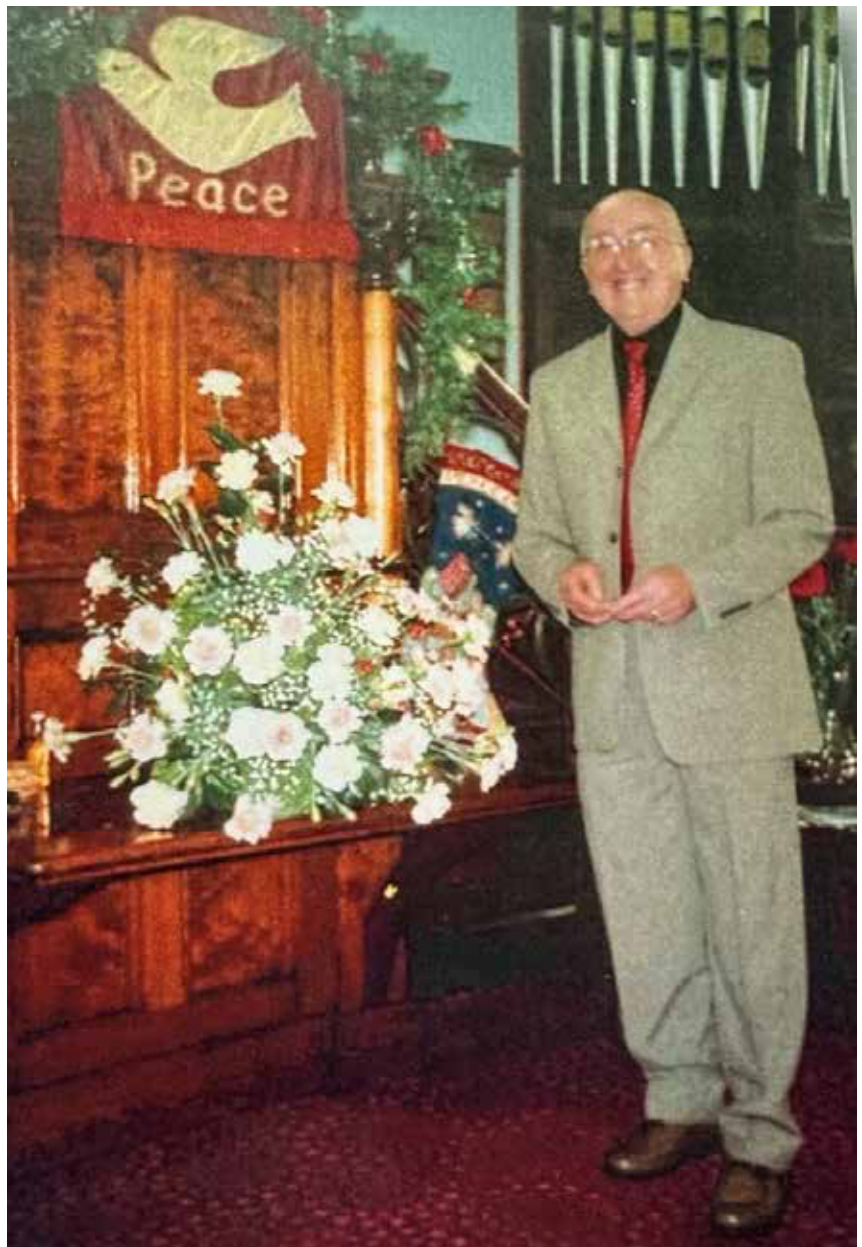
Norman passed away peacefully to go to Glory, on 19th March, at Wigan Infirmary with his family around him. Beloved husband of Rita for 16 years and Lilian for 44 years, Norman was a loving father to Andrew and father in law to Louise. He was grandad to Hannah, Adam and Daniel, great grandad to Jordan, Jack, Chloe, Freddie and Sam and great great grandad to Issac.

His funeral was held at Lamberhead Green on the 16th April, Pauline Smith leading the service so well, and it was standing room only as friends and family packed the church to say goodbye (for now) to a well loved and respected man. A fitting tribute was read by his granddaughter Hannah and a letter of appreciation from Lamberhead Green Primary School, where he was a governor, was read by Adam, his grandson.

Andrew Rigby read Psalm 23, and Kathy Pringle read one of Norman's favourite Bible passages from John 14 v 1-6.

Rita said a few words about her late husband, Norman, in a personal tribute.

Norman worked faithfully as a minister for many years, took on many roles and positions in the Connexion, where he served on numerous committees and groups. Many will have never known the Connexion without Norman. It has been said that he has been present within the work and witness of the Connexion of Churches since the year dot! As Young People's secretary, he was involved in the weekends arranged in Blackpool when many young people came to faith in Jesus.





He was part of the IMTAKS (Independent Methodist Teen Age KlubS) group and the fruit from that work is still evident in many lives today.

Later, he served on the Ministry Committee for many years, and was also an assessor on the Ministers Education Scheme, assessing New Testament studies as well as the Independent Methodist Statements of Faith and Practice. He organised the Scripture Examination that was used by many Sunday Schools in the Connexion. As Resource Centre Secretary, Norman was heavily involved in the activities of the Resource Centre (and the Bookroom before that), working alongside Andrew Rigby and being an essential member of the Administration Group. He was responsible for the running of Annual Meeting, presenting the Credentials Report, and was present to welcome people and catch up with friends old and new.

As well as being a minister in his own church, Lamberhead Green, Norman was secretary of Wigan Circuit for many years arranging different events through the years including Christmas Carol services, preaching plans and young people's activities. It was a sad day for him when, through circumstances beyond anyone's control, the time came for the members of Lamberhead Green to decide the Fellowship would close.

Norman has left all the Independent Methodist Connexion of Churches a tremendous legacy. He has shown the way to be faithful to God and His people. A life laid down in service to His Lord and Master. He was kind, well liked, knowledgeable and a stickler for what was right and proper.....he always gave his best.

An avid reader and watcher of sports, he had watched Wigan Athletic with his son Andrew for over 50 years.

Norman will be missed by family and friends.

We are thankful for his full life and the 'Good and Faithful Servant' has now gone to Glory and his eternal rest.

As was said at his funeral, quoting Billy Graham,

"You will have read that Norman Prescott has died. Don't believe a word of it.

Norman is more alive than we are today, he has simply changed his address".

Thank you & God bless



Saturday 19th September 2026 10am - 5pm
The Edge, Wigan, WN3 5AB

Each year the Playtime Conference brings together church toddler group leaders and volunteers to celebrate the laughter, the mishaps, and the unseen ministry that happens every week in your group.

In 2026, we'll be exploring how we can be bearers of light and how your work can illuminate the lives of those around us.

If you're a passionate toddler group leader, team member, or even hoping to initiate one soon, the Playtime National Conference is for you!

A flavour of the day:

- A fantastic choice of workshops packed with fresh and creative ideas for your group
- A great line-up of guest speakers providing encouragement and insight
- Unique opportunities to network with other toddler group leaders from across the UK
- Time to worship, share and pray together
- Lunch and refreshments included
- An exhibition zone and shop filled with resources
- A chance to renew your vision and feel recharged.



To book tickets call 029 2081 0800 or book online via this QR code

**EVENING
PRAYER**
Online

Zoom Prayer Evening for Annual Meeting on Friday 17th July led by Pauline Smith our Education Organiser. The link will be sent closer to the date in our mailings or contact the Resource Centre for link.

Please join us praying for the business to be discussed, for those nominated and that the unfulfilled offices are filled, for the fellowship of the delegates and visitors attending.

Connexional Contacts

General Secretary
Shaun Newton
general.secretary
@imchurches.org.uk

Financial Administrator
finance
@imchurches.org.uk

Safeguarding Officer
Graham Edmondson
safeguarding
@imchurches.org.uk

Business Department
Registered Office
and Resource Centre
Fleet Street, Pemberton,
Wigan WN5 0DS
01942 223526
resource.centre
@imchurches.org.uk

Association Manager
Laura Pendlebury
01942 223526
laura
@imchurches.org.uk

All Officers' Addresses
can be found in the Directory
which is obtainable from the
Resource Centre.

All articles for the magazine
should be sent to the
Resource Centre postal
address or via email to
magazine@imchurches.org.uk

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L and P have now been in France for about two months. They have found their move a great upheaval. However, they praise the Lord for His leading and provision. Their vision is to see there a healthy and resilient church with part-leadership by locals, so that North African communities in the area might be drawn to the Lord by His shining servants. They have already found a cross-cultural church nearby and have been able to participate in several outreach activities, such as a bookstall in the market, a children's club for North African children and a weekly prayer meeting with others who have a heart to share the gospel with Muslims in the city. Please pray for all of these openings.

David and Mary Robinson rejoice in a number of new starts/changes in their ministry with Thai believers and seekers. A request was received from some Thai restaurant workers in Billericay for help to study the Bible. As a result, David and Mary and the existing Colchester fellowship group met with them and have set up a new monthly Bible study session for them. Four areas of administration have now been shared out among members of the committee, which lightens the workload for David. Much work is underway for the Annual Camp at the end of July. Please pray for all these matters and also for continuing travelling mercies for David and Mary, as they pay their regular visits to the various fellowship groups.

Liz Greenhalgh is expecting to be very busy over the summer months. In Romania school holidays begin in June and cover about two months, so there are lots of things to be organised. There are holiday camps and other activities for the various church groups of young people, so there are practical arrangements to be made, as well as preparing age-appropriate Bible teaching sessions. In addition there are the activities laid on for the needy Roma children and their families from the wider community. Please pray for Liz as she undertakes all these commitments together with her fellow workers.