

Connexion

The magazine
of the family of
Independent
Methodist
Churches

MAY/JUNE 2026
IN THIS ISSUE

This issue of the Connexion magazine appears between Easter and Pentecost. In Biblical times, this was the seven week period between the Feast of the Passover and the Feast of First Fruits or the Feast of Weeks. For Jesus' disciples, this was a time of turmoil, in which they had seen their Lord riding into Jerusalem in triumph, executed as a criminal and then resurrected, able to appear at (and disappear from) their gatherings at will. A time when, as Jesus had told them, they would grieve but then their grief would turn to joy. But, for this band of confused followers, how were they to get on with their lives now that Jesus was no longer with them 24-7?

In planning for the future, some of them initially got it wrong. John 21 records that eight of them had found their way back to Galilee (the sea of Tiberias), an 80 mile journey that would have taken them a few days at least, and Peter tried to return to his old trade as a fisherman. This was the occasion when Jesus cooked breakfast for the group and then restored Peter, still feeling distraught about his denial after Jesus' arrest. On a later occasion (we don't know exactly when), Jesus told his disciples to 'stay in the city until you



have been clothed with power from on high' (Luke 24:49). Sorry, lads, but you've got an 80 mile trek back to Jerusalem!

After Jesus' ascension, the disciples spent the next ten days in prayer, before the events of Acts 2 that we are familiar with unfolded. How must that time have been? The disciples must have been filled with anticipation, but anticipating what? Jesus coming again? Being clothed with power, whatever that meant? They had been keen to learn when Jesus would return and restore the Kingdom of Israel, but he sidestepped that



question completely. Instead, Jesus told them that they had work to do ("You will be my witnesses ..."), and this was the reason they would be clothed with power. Two thousand years later, we're still waiting for Jesus' return. Pretty well every generation of Bible-believing Christians has expected this in their lifetime, and for good reason. Jesus spoke about the 'faithful and wise manager' (Luke 12:42), who carried out his duties whether or not his master was present and was commended as a result. While we may look at the turmoil in the Middle East, for instance, and conclude that Jesus' return cannot be long delayed, we ought not take our eyes off the mission that Jesus has given us now. Let us continue to fulfil our calling, without becoming distracted.

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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.

This is an issue where we may diverge from certain Christian groupings, in particular the Roman Catholic church. Anyone brought up in the Catholic tradition will be aware of seven sacraments, although in practice no one person can experience all seven, the sacraments of marriage and holy orders being (in their way of doing things) mutually exclusive. In common with other Protestant denominations, Independent Methodists recognise just two sacraments, baptism and the Lord's supper (also known as Holy Communion or the Eucharist). Even so, practices differ, not just between denominations but between churches in the same denomination. There are Independent Methodist churches that only practice infant baptism, and others that will only perform believer's baptism (which can include young children, as long as they have consciously asked Jesus to be their Lord and Saviour). Some will offer both infant and adult baptism. There is also variety in the communion service, with some denominations insisting on using non-alcoholic wine and others saying that, just as in Biblical times, the wine has to be alcoholic (I suspect they didn't have the technology to remove the alcohol in those days). The type of bread, and the method of distributing the elements, will not always be the same. How much of this really matters?

The first part of this statement refers to practising the sacraments in obedience to Jesus' instructions. In this study, I will just consider baptism, leaving the Lord's Supper until next time. In Matthew 28:16-20, we read the Great Commission which Jesus gave to his disciples just before he was taken into heaven. Matthew 28:19 - Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. In those days, there was no dispute that baptism meant baptism by total immersion. This was the practice when a non-Jew wished to convert to Judaism, and John the Baptist preached repentance from sins, accompanied by baptism for the forgiveness of sins. When Jesus began his earthly ministry, he (or, as we are told in John 4:2, the disciples, acting under Jesus' authority) also baptised - John 3:23 identifies the location as 'Aenon near Salim, where there was plenty of water'. On the day of Pentecost, at the end of his sermon, Peter told the crowds to 'Repent and be baptised ... in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit' (Acts 2:38), and we see from elsewhere in Acts (e.g. 8:36-8, 9:18, 10:47-8, 16:33) that baptism followed immediately after conversion.

At this stage, we need to understand what baptism is and what it is not. Baptism is not the removal of your sins. It is not your ticket to eternal life. It is something that we experience in obedience to God's command. 1 Peter 3:21 says that 'this water symbolises baptism that now saves you also - not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience towards God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ ...'. It may have been the very first time that Sue and I entered Astley church that Bob Ward was preaching on this subject, when he said that if baptism removed your sins, he could have stood on Cross Hillock with a hosepipe, washing away the sins of the world. No, it is your acceptance of Jesus as your Lord and Saviour that is important, and by being baptised we are making a visible, public commitment to God. If baptism was essential for salvation, the repentant thief on the cross next to Jesus would not have been saved - and, worse, Jesus would have been a liar by promising him paradise when

the thief could not qualify for it. As we've said before, it's belief in Jesus and acceptance of his Lordship that gives us eternal life, not good deeds, not living a moral life, not even baptism. We get baptised in obedience to Jesus and as a witness to others - because he has saved us, not in order to save us.

In Acts 19, we read about Paul's missionary journey to Ephesus, where he found a small group of disciples. Now these people knew nothing of the Holy Spirit, and Paul soon learnt that they were only aware of John's baptism. His response was that 'John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus. On hearing this, they were baptised into the name of the Lord Jesus.' (Acts 19:4-5). The bit that they had been missing was belief in the risen Jesus. That's why we refer to 'believer's baptism', because the act of baptism has to be preceded by belief in Jesus.

So what about those that have already been baptised (or christened) as an infant? The example of the Ephesian believers shows us that, even though they had already been baptised, that baptism had not been accompanied by faith in Jesus and they chose to be baptised a second time, in the light of what they now knew. This has to be a personal decision, and it is one on which I struggled when Sue decided that she wanted to be baptised, because she wanted me to be baptised as well. We both spoke with the elders and, when I was asked about me (I had no problems with Sue being baptised), I said that God hadn't specifically told me that I needed to be baptised. Their response was that 'God wouldn't tell me anything that went against his word'. Well, I couldn't argue with that! I do know of someone whose mother was upset that he was getting baptised, seeing it as an insult to the faith of his Christian parents. In those days, it was probably only the Baptist churches that exclusively practised believer's baptism. While many people, even today, will have their babies christened because it's the 'done thing', they had had their son christened in anticipation that he would in due course come to Jesus. However, in my case, my reluctance was just an excuse.

There is another issue that you may come across, and you should at least be aware of it. In Matthew 28:19, the apostles were told to '[baptise] them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. However, in Acts 2:38, Peter told his listeners to be baptised 'in the name of Jesus Christ'. Why the difference? Was Peter (and the others who carried out baptisms that we read about in Acts) disobedient? Does it matter? I suspect that the answer is that the original ending to Matthew's Gospel may have been lost. This was certainly a problem with Mark's Gospel, where many scholars believe verses 9 to 20 were added at a later date (the ending to v8 in Koine Greek is grammatically incorrect, which leads to the belief that the last page - or the last bit of the original scroll - went missing). Roger Price, one of the leaders at Chichester Christian Fellowship in the 1980s, revealed how he eventually concluded that, although he had been baptised in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, this was not the correct way to do it and so he was baptised a second time (he hadn't been as a child), into the name of Jesus. I don't know of anyone else for whom this was an issue, and it's something that must be between the believer and God. As I've already said, baptism is a sign of your belief and obedience, not a precursor to salvation.

The last part of our statement reads: 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. Now the Oxford English Dictionary defines grace as either 'smoothness and elegance of movement' or 'courteous good will'. This is not how the Bible sees it. God's grace is usually defined as undeserved favour, often expressed by the acronym God's Riches At Christ's Expense. So, when a believer is baptised, it is a one-off event for the believer that is an outward witness of our faith, both to God (1 Peter 3:21 again) and to those that are present - both believers and unbelievers. It is a sign to everyone of the work that Jesus has done, and is doing, to transform our lives.

(all scriptures taken from the New International Version)

Brian Rowney

Astley

I hadn't intended to cover Astley so soon in this series, however another spell in hospital and a series of appointments has restricted my availability for travelling further afield. Don't worry, I do intend to get round other churches in the near future. Meetings in Astley began in 1921 with a mission started by churches in the Leigh circuit. The first gatherings were held in the open air, before moving to an old army hut on the site of the present building. Even



though the hut was only up for ten years, some elderly residents still refer to the 'tin mission'. The present building was opened on Easter Sunday 1931. Surprisingly, the church retained its mission status until 1957, when it became a church in full union with the Connexion.

The site that was purchased just under a hundred years ago was rather larger than was needed for the church building itself. The field to the side of the building has, in the past, been used by our youth groups in summer, for circuit sports days, barbecues and firework displays. However, the fireworks had to stop when it was realised that a gas pipe ran under the area where the bonfire had been built! Nowadays, it is an unused resource, but we feel sure that the Lord has plans for it, so we have resisted offers to buy it for housing.

The Sunday service is at 10.30, which is shared on Zoom for those unable to be with us. There is a time for refreshments and fellowship afterwards, and once a month there is a shared fellowship lunch - 'bring your food, eat everyone else's'.



In the 1980s and 1990s, there was a thriving youth work with groups for 7-11, 11-16 and older teenagers, as well as a playgroup which flourished until increasing bureaucracy resulted in the decision to close the work. In its place, a Parent and Toddler Group was started, and this continues to meet on Tuesday mornings. Other outreach activities consist of a fortnightly Crafts-hare group, encompassing activities as diverse as painting, knitting, crochet, card-making,

railway and bus model building; a weekly Singalong group and a Thursday morning Bible study on Zoom. There is a Fellowship breakfast (on the first Saturday of the month, generally), where we welcome visitors from other churches and often have a speaker from our group. Depending on who is available to do the cooking, the breakfast will either be a Full English or a continental buffet. We also host two outside groups, both of which have a Christian ethos.



The prize-winning Astley Youth Band approached us just after lockdown, when their previous home was no longer available, and now hold four sessions for a wide range of ages. On Monday mornings, the Astley Unlimited Choir is followed by Astley Unlimited Band, while Thursday evenings see the Astley Training Band and then the Astley Youth Band itself.

We also have a local breast-feeding support group that uses the building on Thursdays, a contact that was made through our relationship with Astley Youth Band.

For the past year, we have welcomed a Filipino-majority church that holds services on Sunday afternoons. Lord Jesus Our Redeemer, is an international denomination that began in the Philippines some 25 years ago and has about twenty churches across the world, ministering through and to ex-pat Filipinos. Their Statement of Faith is closely aligned to that of the Independent Methodists, and the presence of the local LJOR



church has been a real blessing over the past twelve months. Both IM and LJOR services are open to all, and several times the building has been decorated to mark some special event (it helps that we've never had pews to get in the way). The LJOR congregation has also introduced us to the delights of Filipino cuisine, in both quality and quantity!

The Arabah

Kate Pye attended Astley church for a few years, but has since moved back to Norfolk where she lives with her parents. She regularly joins our services via Zoom, and has made us a banner which is displayed at the front of the main hall. Here, in her own words, is the story behind it. If I were to give my banner a title it would be 'the Arabah'. The Arabah is a desert or wilderness area in Israel and is mentioned in both of the main scriptures the banner is based on.

Isaiah 35 1-7 NASB1995. The wilderness and the desert will be glad, and the Arabah will rejoice and blossom; like the crocus It will blossom profusely and rejoice with rejoicing and shout of joy. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They will see the glory of the Lord, the majesty of our God. Encourage the exhausted, and strengthen the feeble. Say to those with anxious heart, "Take courage, fear not. Behold, your God will come with vengeance; The recompense of God will come, but He will save you." Then the eyes of the blind will be opened and the ears of the deaf will be unstopped. Then the lame will leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute will shout for joy. For waters will break forth in the wilderness and streams in the Arabah. The scorched land will become a pool and the thirsty ground springs of water; In the haunt of jackals, its resting place, grass becomes reeds and rushes.

Ezekiel 47 7-12 NASB 1995. Behold, on the bank of the river there were very many trees on the one side and on the other. Then he said to me, "These waters go out toward the eastern region and go down into the Arabah; then they go toward the sea, being made to flow into the sea, and the waters of the sea become fresh. It will come about that every living creature which swarms in every place where the river goes, will live. And there will be very many fish, for these waters go there and the others become fresh; so everything will live where the river goes. And it will come about that fishermen will stand beside it; from Engedi to Eneglaim there will be a place for the spreading of nets. Their fish will be according to their kinds, like the fish of the Great Sea, very many. But its swamps and marshes will not become fresh; they will be left for salt. By the river on its bank, on one side and on the other, will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will



not wither and their fruit will not fail. They will bear every month because their water flows from the sanctuary, and their fruit will be for food and their leaves for healing."

I especially like the Amplified translation of Isaiah 35 v 7 AMPC where it says: And the burning sand and the mirage shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water; in the haunt of jackals, where they lay resting, shall be grass with reeds and rushes. My sister helped me with the design of the banner and the text. Initially I told her I would like a rainbow in the sky but I accepted her point that it would make it too busy and detract from the image as a whole. I was however left with the feeling that I wanted a rainbow so when I was doing the fish in the river I made them in colours and the shape of a rainbow; I also (if I counted correctly!) put 153 fish in the river to parallel the miraculous catch in chapter 21 of John's Gospel.

The writing on it "Our GOD is an Awesome GOD" is well known to all of us as a song, but as far as I know, cannot be found written exactly like that in any translation of the Bible. I prayed about what text to use a lot and this seemed right, I particularly like it as it conveys praise but also hope so no matter where you are at spiritually or how you are feeling it has something to say. - Kate Pye (Astley)



Christian Aid Week 2026

10th – 16th May

A string of Public Holidays, cherry blossom, better weather (we hope), blooming daffodils (the late ones) and oh yes, my birthday. All of this means that the month of May has come round again.

There is of course another event associated with with May - Christian Aid Week.

The annual challenge is there for us all. Last year I requested feedback from our churches as follows: -

All churches who will be organising or contributing to various Christian Aid Week events and activities are encouraged to send a short report so we can all share and celebrate together how IM Churches are responding to the challenge of the following verses of scripture ...

Matthew 25v37-40 : "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

I'll let you guess how many reports I received.

During a recent visit to the NE Circuit I had the opportunity to make a short presentation concerning the origins of Christian Aid and the Independent Methodist denomination's involvement in that. If you wish to receive a copy of the presentation (available in PDF and PPT format) and an associated video, please make contact via the details below :

Geoffrey S Matthews - Christian Aid Representative
Independent Methodist Churches
Telephone : 07568 589569
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**Send love and hope
this Christian Aid Week.**

caweek.org

In the Joy of the Lord

Stockton Heath: Alan Britton (14th September 1947 – 7th March 2026)

It is with deep sorrow that we announce the passing of our dear friend and family member, Alan Britton. Alan had been a committed and faithful servant of Stockton Heath church for over 30 years having moved there with his family in 1989. An elder for many of those years, Alan was an enthusiastic member of the leadership team with a passion to see the gospel shared in the local community and especially with children and young people. Alan led many holiday bible clubs (with his wacky trousers and boundless energy especially for the action songs), helped to run a Friday night youth club which impacted the lives of so many of the churches young people and community, led Sunday school groups, served on working parties, wrote many of the Christmas drama presentations, helped organise church weekends, led services and was a regular preacher both at Stockton Heath and across Warrington. Alan loved the church at Stockton Heath, which became an extended part of his family especially through the tragedies of Alan losing his first wife (Hilary) in 2000 and his second wife (Jan) in 2013 and were a great support to him as his health began to struggle in recent years. Beyond Stockton Heath church, Alan served for over 20 years as a trustee of Warrington Youth for Christ and latterly as finance secretary of the Connexion, both roles he continued to fulfil right up to his passing.

Outside of church life, Alan had been an accountant at Warrington wire weavers, N. Greening Ltd and then Screen Systems where he became Managing Director before then going on to work in the furniture industry and continued to work in the catering industry right up to his passing. He enjoyed a long stint as a radio presenter at Warrington Hospital Radio, even including interviews with Sir Cliff Richard and Cliff Barrows of Billy Graham fame. Alan was a massive sports fan having played Rugby League and Cricket as a younger man. A Warrington Wolves and Manchester United supporter he thoroughly enjoyed watching many sports from his armchair in later life.

It was so lovely to see so many representatives from churches and organisations across Warrington and the wider Connexion at a packed service of celebration for Alan's life held on 1st April. Alan's life was a full one,



and he will be missed by all his family, friends, the Stockton Heath church family, and the wider Connexion. We are however reassured with the wonderful truth of Scripture, that Alan's recent health challenges are now finally over and he is at rest with the Saviour he served all his life.

For the next few months, until Annual Meeting, Alan's work will be taken over by the rest of the Finance Committee. This will include processing grant applications and providing general advice and support. Any queries, applications etc. should be sent to the Finance Committee via the Resource Centre and Laura will pass them on to the team.

Most people will also be aware that Norman Prescott, our long-standing Resource Centre Secretary, has recently passed away. A full tribute will appear in a future magazine.

This edition of the Connexion magazine includes an appeal for assistance in a number of areas. Some of these tasks came under Norman's remit, and ideally would need to be taken on by someone able to spend time at the Resource Centre. However, those such as minute-taking for Connexional Committee and Annual Meeting, could be taken on by anyone within the Connexion as long as they were able to travel to the meeting location.

Please contact Shaun Newton for further details.

Thank you & God bless

Bethel (Newtown)

'Some teaching and ideas did not match my understanding of love, compassion and justice.' - Fereshteh Parsa, March, 2026.

Malcolm Muggeridge, journalist and social historian, once wrote, "The Jesus who emerges from the Gospels is the man who tells me the ways of God and, I also think, who explains to God the ways of man."

On Sunday, 1st March, the Bethel, Newtown community were so blessed by the testimony and baptism of Fereshteh Parsa. This lovely lady, from Iran, described her journey from darkness into light. Use was made of John, chapter 3 verses 1 to 5 by our minister, Pauline Smith, who drew parallels between Fereshteh



and Nicodemus, a Jewish teacher who asked for a real understanding of faith in God, challenging the orthodoxy and culture to which he was born and trained. Fereshteh was faithful to the culture and majority religion in Iran, loving intensive prayer as she grew, but something wasn't right. Where was the love, compassion and justice? With the help of her husband, Mohsen, she began to investigate the Christian experience of life, with the public demonstration of Christ's arrival in her heart as seen in her baptismal joy.

Fereshteh paid tribute to dear friends from Manchester and her new Christian family at Bethel, both of whom had clearly influenced her growth in faith. She said, "What touched me most was the love I saw in people's lives. I saw hearts that were changed. I saw hope, I saw faith that gave strength and peace." She went on to describe her sharing of her new faith with Mohsen and then declared dramatically, "Only one week later, something unexpected happened. I was diagnosed with cancer! My world suddenly felt dark! I was shocked. I was afraid. I asked myself, did I choose the wrong path? But, very soon, faith rose in my heart. I said to God, I trust you.....and today I stand here healed."

God carried her through fear and she, Mohsen and their delightful children, Pariya and Saman, have settled so well into the church community.

Yes Mr Muggeridge, in this example, Jesus could have explained, to his Father, the ways of man with the often confused cultures and religious observance without love, for Fereshteh can now say, with true light-filled conviction:

"God gave me strength when I was weak.

God gave me peace when I was afraid.

God lifted me when I felt I could not stand.

God gave me new life in my body and in my spirit." David Moulson



Easter Sunday is always filled with celebrations and joy, but this year was particularly special for South Hetton church. Our President, Martyn Banks led the monthly prayer service followed by our Easter Praise service where we welcomed three new members into our Church. Una Shankland, Claire Heslop (a former Sunday School scholar), and her Mam, Ann Wilkinson have all been active initially in our social activities before joining us regularly in worship. Following their vows of membership, affirming their devotion to God and the Church, they were greeted with applause and warm welcomes by the elders, members and friends of the Church.
Deborah Klincke, South Hetton



L. and P. have now completed their move to France and are in the process of settling in. Their mission focus is:

- To support and help to build up existing North African fellowships. The vision is to encourage a healthy, resilient and reproducing church with participatory local leadership so that the North African communities around them might be led to the Lord by the lives of His servants.
- To mentor and encourage a younger generation of missionaries who are sensing a call to ministry with North Africans.

Meanwhile L. is also continuing her online coaching and counselling work.

Please pray for them as they adapt to this new chapter in their life and service.

Liz Greenhalgh reports an increase in the numbers of young people in the youth group. Many come from a difficult background but want to follow the Lord. Liz hopes to be able to run a Youth Alpha course again soon. The after-school programme is continuing to thrive with a dedicated group of helpers and the encouragement that so many of the children are becoming more confident and making real progress. The food canteen is still proving a blessing and a lifeline for the most needy. A regular meeting is held for the attendees where the gospel is shared. They also held their annual clothing project earlier this year where 150 local people are able to choose items from clothing donated by helpers in the Netherlands. Please pray that more neighbours of the church will come in - and come to know the Lord.



David and Mary Robinson reflect on mixed outcomes for the various fellowship groups in the Network of Thai believers. Some are thriving and growing; some keep going, even when numbers reduce; others have sadly come to an end. Particular prayer is needed at this time for the small groups in Carlisle, Colchester, Canterbury and Oxford. Progress is often affected when leading members either return to Thailand or move elsewhere. The Spring Fellowship Weekend took place in Manchester at the end of April. The attendees enjoyed good Bible ministry and real encouragement from the Lord.

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I came to faith
at a Young
People's
Conference ...



 Independent Methodist Churches
Christians in the Community

... so I thank God
for all those who
serve in and for
our churches

Would you be willing to serve within the life of our Connexion?

The roles that we particularly need help with include:

Administration

Resource Centre Support

Minute Taking

Magazine Printing and Dispatch

Event Management

Finance

Book Keeping

Web, Digital and IT

Webmaster

MS Office Administration

**To find out more about these roles, please contact:
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