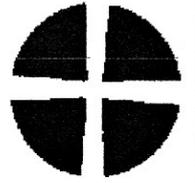


The Avenue Methodist Church



The Living Well Centre
at The Avenue
Methodist Church

Wincham Road, Sale, Cheshire M33 4PL

The Methodist Church
of Great Britain

Love, Serve,
Go & Grow

Newsletter



JANUARY and FEBRUARY 2019

Happy New Year!

MINISTER'S LETTER

New year, new start, same old story. That's either a good or not so good phrase! Some will read it negatively, others will read it positively. I say it as both because the way we interpret it tells us something about who we are and how we see the world.

Let me tell you some of the ways I reflect on the phrase:

New year - the date of January 1st is a significant date because it starts my new diary off and I have to keep remembering to write 2019 and not 2018! But that's all it is, a new date, my diary has 365 new dates in it and I treat them all the same.

New start - experience has taught me that whatever happened in the old year doesn't magically stop entering the new one, in accountancy terms, we carry over whatever happened previously. In my language that means that wherever possible I should take the daily steps necessary to reduce the negative carry over and increase the positive carry over.

Same old story - I am so mystified that in spite of who I am, God still loves me, I can't answer why, but the assurance I have means everything to me. As the year progresses and I mess up, God reminds me it's the same old story. It's as if God is saying, 'Richard, you're responsible for who you are, change yourself - but this time, why not allow my presence to be part of the change?'

I thank God that his side of things hasn't changed, he still loves me, he still wants the best for me and he hasn't given up on me.

Footprints across the years

One night I dreamed a dream. As I was walking along the beach with my Lord. Across the dark sky flashed scenes from my life. For each scene, I noticed two sets of footprints in the sand, one belonging to me and one to my Lord. After the last scene of my life flashed before me, I looked back at the footprints in the sand. I noticed that at many times along the path of my life, especially at the very lowest and saddest times, there was only one set of footprints. This really troubled me, so I asked the Lord about it. "Lord, you said once I decided to follow you, You'd walk with me all the way. But I noticed that during the saddest and most troublesome times of my life, there was only one set of footprints. I don't understand why, when I needed You the most, You would leave me." He whispered, "My precious child, I love you and will never leave you Never, ever, during your trials and testings. When you saw only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you."

New year, new start, same old story - thank God.

Grace and peace, Rev. Richard

New ideas for a New Year

Some changes to Celebrate

For some time now, we have had low numbers on Sunday mornings at Celebrate, so I am looking at doing something new, something we can invite the groups along to. We are looking at doing a form of **messy church** once a month on a Saturday afternoon, times to be confirmed. This **messy church** event will be different things each month, with details to follow.

Celebrate on a Sunday will only happen on the first Sunday of each month at 9:30am, Celebrate on the third Sunday is no longer happening, this is changing to the **messy church** event, keep a look out for details on Celebrates Facebook page or the notice board.

Nick Owen

The Avenue Methodist Church, Children and Family Worker
07800 506812

Nick's Newsletter

Christmas reflections

Nativity service

We were led by Mouse, a cheese eating, mystery solving rodent, who had discovered he had a new neighbour, a very noisy new neighbour. Mouse led us on a mystery solving adventure, she discovered new friends along the way including Donkey, sheep

I enjoyed seeing people of all ages dress up and take part in the service, with some surprises along the way we all found out why this new neighbour was so special.

Last year I remember talking to someone who dressed up as an innkeeper, we joked about the innkeeper not having a starring role and how he wasn't called up to the front of the scene, this year he came dressed as a wise man to make sure he was called up, his choice of outfit was extremely clever.

So much effort went into getting dressed up and wanting to be part of the story, it still makes me smile to see people do something a little different and dress up as a nativity character, thank you to all who came along to be part of our story.

What must it have been like, to be part of that scene all those years ago? One of my boys became sad at his school nativity to be playing a cow, wanting to be a bigger and more important role, would the innkeeper who gave Mary and Joseph the stable round the back ever have known the importance of the baby who was due to be born? In years to come when they retold the story, would they argue over playing the innkeepers role?

Christingle service

In the middle of a busy day while it was still light outside, the church was setting lights up and creating a beautiful scene ready for the All Age Christingle service. As the families arrived, they were treated to a handful of festive video clips and a song or two played by Stephen.

Looking at how light it still was I remember thinking will it be dark in time? However at 3:35 the sunlight started to fade, leaving the lights to shine in the church. We made up 100 Christingle's with fruit, sweets, cocktail sticks and a candle in the top. Standing around in a circle inside the church Dee lit one candle at four different points of the room, then passes the light lighting all the candles until all the candles were alight. Around 125 people attended to take time out over the Christmas preparations to be together and think about the real reason for the season.

After the service, we were treated to mince pies and chocolate rolls, thank you to Audrey and her super team of helpers for serving the festive refreshments.

Primary schools at the Avenue

Tyntesfield and Woodheys primary schools came over to hold their annual Christmas carol concert, the children were in fine voices and performed beautifully. It's great to see how much some have grown in confidence over the weeks and months being at school. I can't wait to see the show next year.

Toddlers Christmas raffle

Thank you to all who bought a raffle ticket for the toddler group funds, the total amount raised was an incredible £134. Well done everyone!

Nick

Dear Friends

I have long loved the old carol 'Jesus Christ the apple tree', while at the same time wondering what it was about. It arises in part from the old practice of wassailing, singing over the apple orchards to encourage them to be fruitful. But in time I discovered that its central theme is desire as it reflects on a single verse of the **Song of Songs**:

As an apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among young men. With great delight I sat in his shadow, and his fruit was sweet to my taste.

Song of Solomon 2:3 The beloved, the object of desire above all others, is Jesus Christ. Standing out among the trees of the wood, he is a thing of fruitfulness and beauty, of pleasure, rest and life. Above all, he is the object of the poet's desire.

The tree of life my soul hath seen, Laden with fruit and always green: The trees of nature fruitless be Compared with Christ the apple tree.

We can have desires for things trivial, and for things of great profundity. 'What do you want for Christmas?' We've all been asked, and I'm sure you've heard the story (whether true or not is unclear) about the radio station in Washington which phoned different ambassadors to ask them what they would most like for Christmas. The French ambassador replied that he hoped for peace on earth; the Russian, freedom for the world's people. When the call went to the British embassy the ambassador replied, "Well, that's very nice of you to ask. I'd quite like a box of crystallized fruit.

"For happiness I long have sought, and pleasure dearly I have bought: I missed of all; but now I see 'Tis found in Christ the apple tree.

Desire drives our consumer culture. Adverts whet our desire, and connect ordinary objects with values. "Do you want fun or popularity, sophistication or beauty or freedom?" they ask; "Then buy our make-up or car, our beer or our shampoo." Desire drives our politics too: desires connected with ideas of what it means to be British or European; desires for ourselves, and also to some extent desires for others.

'What do you want for Christmas?' The desire to sit in the shade of Jesus, to eat of his fruit, is a desire to compensate for all others, and outweighs them all.

I'm weary with my former toil, Here I will sit and rest awhile: Under the shadow I will be, Of Jesus Christ the apple tree.

My prayer for you this Christmas is that you will know again your heart's desire in Jesus Christ; that his presence as 'God with us' will be sufficient for you; that you might hasten with the shepherds to be with him; and that you might thrive in him.

This fruit doth make my soul to thrive, it keeps my dying faith alive; Which makes my soul in haste to be With Jesus Christ the apple tree.

Grace and peace to you this Christmas time.

Andrew Lunn

Chair of Manchester & Stockport Methodist District

Christmas 2018

The Avenue Church is a wonderful place to be in the run up to Christmas. There are so many activities going on that we can choose to go to, or not.

For me Christmas began with the 'Church Walking Group' Christmas meal at Wilmslow Garden Centre. Many of the group don't actually walk with the Walking Group but everyone is welcome. Pauline Carter is the wonderful person who organises this event and makes sure we all pre-pay and pre-book our food, and, just in case anyone should forget what they have ordered, Pauline has a list of our food orders. I'm not sure quite how many people were at the meal but we filled 3 long tables. The food was excellent and very well served by an "army" of waitresses. 2 courses or 3, crackers for all, and coffee if you wanted it. A very enjoyable meal with good company. Thank you, Pauline for all your hard work.

The Chrismon decorations were amazing. Richard had the brilliant idea of using Chrismons to decorate the Church this Christmas. The Activities & Events team contacted the groups who use the Church and, as usual, they all jumped to it and prepared amazing 2 and 3 D trees covered with Chrismons. We also this year had 2 craft sessions where members of the Church could come along and make Chrismons whilst having a chat and a coffee. We then had two coffee mornings when people could come and look round the Church displays and then sit in church enjoying refreshments.

Our Church Nativity was a joy to be part of. Seeing everyone dressed as a character from the Nativity was brilliant. We all slowly became part of the Nativity Scene at the front of the Church while Audrey and Holly narrated the story from a mouse's point of view. Thank you to Nick for organising this again.

The Monthly Matinee was again very well supported, (it seems that people are willing to pay money to come and sing for themselves!) However, we did also have a World Premier from Charlie who had composed lovely tunes to some of Robbie Burns poems, which Ken ably sang while Charlie accompanied. Audrey gave us amusing snippets from various books which kept us all very amused.

The Christmas Candle lit carol service was well attended and was lovely to be able to take part in. Traditional carols and Christmas Bible readings plus the Octagon Singers made a beautiful, calm, service. Ken sang "Holy Night" and had some of us in tears with his superb voice – the choir accompanied him wonderfully and also sang a carol by themselves (I was very proud of the Octagon Singers and the hard work they put in with very few rehearsals.)

The Christingle service was on Christmas Eve which over 120 people attended, many of whom I did not know. This service was planned and taken by Nick and Dee who did a brilliant job of combining video clips and traditional carols with the spoken word. The service culminated with the Christingles being lit as we stood around the Church. A very magical moment.

Christmas eventually arrived with a Service on Christmas day taken by Richard, which had one child riding round the church on his new bike while other children showed us their gifts.

We are able to celebrate the birth of Jesus in so many ways. I am so pleased that I belong to a Church where so much is happening both secular and spiritual

Cynthia

THE SUNDAY SCHOOL OF 600

Barry Myers

Running my finger along my bookshelves of Christian literature the other week I came across a copy of the Handbook for the 1970 Methodist Conference which was held in Manchester that year. Thumbing through the pages of information about the Manchester and Stockport District I came across the possible origin of the legendary and oft-repeated story about the size of the Sunday School at The Avenue Church from the time of its opening in 1963. Here is what was reported:

"When the ancillary buildings of the Avenue Church, Sale, were designed, provision was made for 200 children and young people. This seemed sufficient, since when the Sunday School opened in December 1963, there were 165 on the register. Within a year this had increased to 388 and expansion continued until by August 1966 the number on the roll was just short of 550. The School is still growing and now numbers 600. A feature of this phenomenal growth is the success in holding the Seniors and Young People, who actually form a greater proportion of the scholars now than when the School began. The number of teachers has grown in proportion and at present there is an enthusiastic staff of sixty-nine. Although accommodation is a headache, no child has been turned away!"

Headly days! The Handbook also included a note about The Avenue Church among "Ten Interesting Chapels" in the Manchester and Stockport District. It said:

"Wesley, the Avenue, Sale (1964) (*sic*), made possible by a remunerative commercial sale of the old chapel, reverts to the octagonal shape so popular with Wesley between 1760 and 1776. It is a fine well-conceived building which indicates both the limitations and possibilities of the octagon as a plan-form. The interior is conducive to worship but perhaps a central pulpit might have been more logical - as at Yarm, Heptonstall, and Arbroath. The architects were Halliday & Meacham."

Christmas tree festival at Stow on the Wold

We were visiting the Cotswold area in the lead up to Christmas visiting various National Trust properties that open their doors for the Christmas period. We stumbled across a Christmas tree festival at St Edward's church Stow on the Wold. We were welcomed inside and invited to look at all the decorated trees and also to vote for various categories. We could vote for the best in the children's category, the business category and the organisations category. Altogether there were 42 trees and the attention to detail was amazing.

A message from the Rector read as follows;

"Welcome to St Edward's for the 8th Christmas tree festival which has now become a highlight in Stow's annual calendar of events. It is marvellous to see the creativity of so many in our community given expression in the decoration of these trees. As ever we owe a huge debt of gratitude to everyone who has given time and talent to bring the Festival to life and provide

the warm welcome and hospitality on offer. The light and joy of the trees points forward to the light and joy of Christmas. Soon we will gather in this space again to celebrate the birth of Jesus and the joy that God is truly with us. You are most welcome to join us then. For now, enjoy God's presence in the beauty of the trees and their setting in this place of prayer"

Christine

LONELINESS

Rev Dr John Taylor

(John began his ordained ministry as a probationer in the Sheffield, Carver Street, Circuit before coming to Partington in the Sale Circuit. He served as President of the Methodist Conference in Britain in 1997/ 1998)

(This article was inspired in part by the address of Professor Helen Stokes-Lampard to the annual Conference of the Royal College of General Practitioners a couple of years ago. In it she spoke of one of the contributing factors to illness, especially in the elderly, namely loneliness.)

It is true that now many old people live alone, having survived their partner or loved ones. They live solitary lives, never seeing another person from one week's end to another. They are isolated and alone. The result is that they appear at the doctor's surgery, often unnecessarily because they have no one else to talk to. What used to be the rôle of the priest has now moved to the local doctor. The art of visiting has been surrendered because ministers say that they do not have time to do it. They exercise their ministry on the telephone, the instrument for speedy communication if not for face to face encounter. I believe in this context that the rôle of Pastoral visitor is crucially important for maintaining links and offering the opportunity for in-depth conversation about things that really matter. One of the functions of the Church is to provide a place of meeting. Many elderly people in my understanding come to church because there they will have the chance to talk to other sentient human beings whose main problem may well be that they also live alone, at a distance from family members who visit rarely. It always seems strange to me that we are ready to pray for people in our prisons whilst neglecting our housebound Auntie!

Perhaps every Christian should have at least one isolated person whom they visit frequently, to help them overcome their loneliness. 'Those who have ears to hear, let them hear.' One day that lonely person may be you.

I have Helen's permission to begin the article in the way I have.

A HAPPY NEW YEAR to everyone and a very big thank you too!

A group of us - from all our Methodist Churches in Sale, (better known as Sale Circuit) turned up on a rather drizzly Saturday afternoon (1st December) to the Ashton-on-Mersey village Christmas Fair. The village looked lovely. It was closed off at both ends to traffic and instead, down the middle of the road, there were stalls selling all sorts of Christmas gifts, food and drink. The grey day didn't dampen our spirits as we climbed onto the side of a lorry, equipped with Carol sheets and our best singing voices to sing Carols to everyone attending the annual Christmas event. We sang all our favourite Christmas songs, (ably assisted by Kingsway Fellowship with their guitars), into microphones so everyone could hear! Richard and myself could be seen running in-between the stalls enthusiastically giving out carol sheets and Christmas leaflets. People stopped to listen and join in. The upbeat singing really got us into the Christmas spirit and I believe we might even have been recorded on Social Media too!

So, again a very big thank you to all who attended, not forgetting our friends at Kingsway, here's to next year!!

Every good wish for a happy and peaceful 2019.

Sue

ROTAS

Getting rid of the Rota - An article written by Lesley Crawley which describes a unique initiative at St Marks Church St Mark's Church in the Parish of Badshot Lea and Hale

THE WORD 'ROTA' CAN BARELY BE SAID without a sigh, and rotas are the butt of many jokes and quips. Indeed, rotas and church always seem to go together, but at St Mark's we ditched the rota.

St Mark's is a church where by 2011 the congregation had reduced to about eight people and included no families. Those who came were faithful and longed to reach out to the community around them. They were prepared for change. Over the next four years a great deal did change. The style of worship changed, the building changed. Families started coming and the congregation grew threefold, a third of the members of the congregation now being children, but what didn't change was that the same eight people were on all rotas.

It isn't that the new people didn't want the jobs - it is just that they weren't sure when they would be at church. So, we came up with the idea of cards, each with a job on them which adults or children could pick up when they arrived at church. These cards would say things like 'Tidy up the Church' 'Light the Candles' 'Take the Collection' 'Make the Coffee'. We have a book of intercessions that can be read from each Sunday. At each service there is a 'Host' who is one of the faithful regulars, who brings the milk and biscuits, offers advice, and gives the 'Chalice Assistant' and 'Sideperson' cards only to individuals authorised for those roles.

Here at St Mark's wonderful things have happened - the quality of reading and intercessions have improved with new and talented people picking up the cards and giving things a go. The Children feel much more involved in the life of the church and it is more fun. In addition, children seem to be dragging their parents along to get there in time to get their favourite card, meaning the service starts on time more regularly. Also, the grind of finding people to go on the rota has been removed.

However, you couldn't be a control freak and run this system. I never knew who is doing what or indeed whether anyone has picked up the cards at all. Also, the serving at the altar has become rather more funky, but not irreverent. Nevertheless, most weeks I am glad that bread and wine have arrived in some form at the altar for me to do something with.

This would need adapting for churches where the worship is rehearsed and beautifully choreographed, but I am delighted with the lack of a rota and would recommend it to any church that would like to include families more easily.

Why not give it a try!

Taken from the Magnet Magazine

Should we try this out for the New Year???

Thursday group annual Christmas meal 6/12/18

A group of 32 of us went to Wilmslow Garden centre for a Christmas meal. The food was delicious, the service very efficient and caring and we sat down at beautifully set out tables. Many took the chance to do some Christmas shopping and all enjoyed a very pleasant start to the Christmas period.

THE THREE ABRAHAMIC FAITHS

Source: adapted from G.E. Lessing, Nathan der Weise (1779)

Rev Dr John Taylor

(John began his ordained ministry as a probationer in the Sheffield, Carver Street, Circuit before coming to Partington in the Sale Circuit. He served as President of the Methodist Conference in Britain in 1997/1998)

Saladin, a wealthy Muslim, once approached Nathan the Wise, a Jewish scholar, to ask: "Which is the best, Judaism, Islam, or Christianity?" Nathan found himself in a predicament. If he answered 'Islam' his friend would want to know why he had not become a Muslim. If he answered 'Christianity' he would again lose his integrity. He thought for a moment and responded with a story.

"Once upon a time there was a king who possessed an amazing ring. Its power lay in the fact that it made a person beloved of God and others. For many generations the ring was passed down from parent to favourite child, until finally it came to a king who had three children all equally favoured. What was the King to do? He decided to fashion two more rings, identical in appearance to the original. He gave one to each child, each believing they had the original.

"But instead of harmony the three rings brought conflict. Each child believed they possessed the true ring and therefore the right to inherit the throne. The tension was escalated when the rings were examined and no difference was found." At this point Saladin interrupted. "But surely, you are not suggesting that Christianity, Islam and Judaism are the same? There are great differences between them?"

"You are right," replied Nathan, "but each of these religions is based on faith and belief, and who can prove that one is superior to the other? But let me continue with my tale, for it is nearly at an end."

"The quarrel amongst the three children became so great that they resorted to the law. The judge listened as each explained their case. He said: 'I have been asked to decide which of these rings is the true one', began the judge. 'As the original ring made its wearer beloved of God and other people I can only conclude that none of you have the original ring, for your rings have brought hatred and strife amongst you. None of you is loved by the others, so I must conclude that the original ring perished with your father and that all three of you possess counterfeits. Or it may be, that you father, was weary of the tyranny of a single ring, and made duplicates which he gave you. So let each of you prove his belief in his ring by conducting yourselves in a manner that befits those beloved of God and other people."

Lessing in his age, the eighteenth century, is making a plea for tolerance in the belief that the only way of demonstrating the truth of our religion is to live in such a way that it can be seen that we are beloved of God and other people. Do we live like that? Or are we always bickering? Who is the Judge?

How does the story work for you? Does toleration of Islam and Judaism take away our missionary imperative? Can tolerance be a part of our outreach strategy? If it can: Prove it.

John Taylor, Christian of the Methodist Variety.

The ASICS Greater Manchester Marathon

..... is going to be taking place on **Sunday 7th April in 2019.**

Road closures will be in place in the area in order to maintain the safety of the runners. The A56 will be closed between 09:00 and 14:30 as runners use the route from Timperley direction and then turn into Harboro Road.

CHRISTMAS GIVING

Valma Jeffries

These days it is impossible to go into any town and not be aware of the numbers of people who for many reasons are homeless and are having to beg for money, food or drink. It is up to all of us who are so much more fortunate to do what we can to help the plight of these people whether it is a kindly word, a drink or a sandwich.

The blue crate has been in the entrance of the Living Well Centre for a number of years and each week there are gifts put in which Andrew and I take for distribution by City Centre Ministries in the centre of Manchester. These gifts of food, some items of clothing, and blankets, sleeping bags etc and sometimes money are a vital part of this ministry.

Thank you to all who regularly donate for this work in whatever way you are able. To tell you more about their work, the regular newsletters from Steve and Irene Brown can be found on the notice board and in the carousel.

You may be aware that there are other groups in the area who also do this type of work, such as Barnabus, who can secure benefits for homeless people because of their fixed office in the city centre. Andrew wrote an article about it in a recent magazine and he can answer any of your queries.

Please keep up the good work of helping others in any way you feel able.

It is not advisable to give money to homeless people but instead give the money whether very small amounts or more to organisations such as City Centre Ministries or Barnabus who can help people tackle the underlying problems of their homelessness.

Victorian Christmas

No era in history has influenced the way in which we celebrate Christmas, quite as much as the Victorians. During the nineteenth century people moved away outright revelry to a more ecclesiastical celebration. Rather than loud parties and dinners people leaned towards acts of forgiveness and charity to express their Christian faith at Christmas time.

Before Victoria's reign started in 1837 nobody in Britain had heard of Santa Claus or Christmas Crackers. No Christmas cards were sent and most people did not have holidays from work. The wealth and technologies generated by the industrial revolution of the Victorian era changed the face of Christmas forever. 2 men William Sandys and Davis Gilbert collected lots of old Christmas music from villages in England. Many of today's carols come from Victorian writers. Carols such as O Little town of Bethlehem, in the bleak midwinter, Good King Wenceslas and Silent night etc

Christmas carols began as a way to commemorate the birth of Jesus Christ. They have carried on throughout the centuries as a means to teach the public about the religious aspects of Christmas. This is why most of the songs that are traditional Christmas carols focus on the journey of Mary into Bethlehem, and the birth of Jesus.

Christmas cards started in 1843 by Sir Henry Cole a civil servant. As printing methods improved cards became more popular. The new post office offered a penny stamp and trains could carry more post across the country. Cards were produced in large numbers from 1860 and by 1870 the cost of sending a card had dropped to half a penny.

Crackers were invented by a Victorian sweet maker who wrapped sweets in paper that was covered in chemicals which made a small explosion when unwrapped. He called them fire cracker sweets and they were a huge success

USED POSTAGE STAMPS

Audrey Messenger

After over 50 years, I have decided that I am no longer going to collect used stamps for charity. During this time, The Beginners Department and myself have been well supported by our friends both inside and outside the Church, and have collected many thousands of stamps, thus raising much needed money for various charities.

I had been given a wooden posting box on which I stuck various different stamps, and each Sunday morning, the children eagerly brought their stamps to 'post', often sharing them with their friends so they could all have a turn.

I have vivid memories of the early days, coming home from nursery to find Mum sitting on the settee, surrounded by stamps, as she trimmed and sorted them into different categories and these were then packed into different bags ready to be delivered to Save the Children, who at that time, had an office in Manchester; then on a Saturday morning I would set off with two dustbin bags bursting with the stamps, to walk to Washway Road, to get the bus to St Peters Square, walk to their offices and climb several flights of stairs (the offices were based on the 4th floor) - hard work but well worth the effort as I was always welcomed very gratefully.

After their office closed, I made contact with Guide Dogs for the Blind; this was much easier, as one of their most ardent collectors lived near me. He had collected stamps from many parts of the world and proudly displayed on his hall wall, photographs of all the puppies bought with the money he had raised. When he retired, we continued to support Guide Dogs for the Blind, which meant 3 buses to the centre of Bolton, where I was again received with grateful thanks.

For the last 30 years, Ann Back has been quietly efficiently trimming and sorting hundreds of stamps for me to take to the Guide Dogs for the Blind until they stopped accepting them. I then discovered that the Messenger supported a different charity each year, and would accept stamps on their behalf.

I would like to thank the many friends of the Beginners, and myself, who have supported us faithfully over the years and enabled us to help many different groups.

POSTAGE STAMPS

Please now save your used postage stamps for the **National Kidney Federation** which supports Kidney patients in many ways. The Charity is run by patients for patients. Please leave you stamps in the box in the Hall foyer.

Many thanks.

For any further details, please see *Gill Davidson*

Dates for your diary

April 13th Concert at the Avenue (Halle Brass ensemble) at 7.30pm. There will be a varied programme, so make sure you reserve your ticket as soon as possible.

A SUPERNUMERARY MINISTER WITH AN OPINION

Barry Myers

In January Peter Worrell and I attended the Thanksgiving Service for Rev Ieuan Johnston who died in December last year. Ieuan was a retired Methodist Minister, living in Congleton. He spent a part of his ministry in the Manchester and Stockport District and had a number of friends in Sale and at The Avenue Church where he once worshipped and had preached in the past. He submitted a number of articles for this Newsletter during his retirement years and a few times each year, sometimes together with Peter and Albert Graham, I was privileged to visit Ieuan in Congleton to share a meal and conversation.

Among those who offered excellent tributes during the service at Trinity Methodist Church in Congleton were his elder son, Mark, and the Minister at the church, Rev Derek Oldham. Derek recalled that when he was appointed as Minister at Trinity a few years ago Ieuan had introduced himself to him as "a supernumerary Minister with an opinion". I have no doubt that this introduction would have been offered by Ieuan with a twinkle in his eye! Derek confessed that Ieuan's opinions did not always coincide with his own but that such differences as existed provided a rich source of Christian fellowship and mutual learning. Such was my own experience during my long friendship with Ieuan. Although differences of opinion between us were rare, learning on my part was constant.

Ieuan was a tremendously influential person in my Christian life and faith journey for which I will always be so grateful. My memories of him go back to the late 1950s when he came to worship at Wesley Church in Sale while he was studying at the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology (UMIST). Although he was five years senior to most of the

members of our church youth club he shared many activities and Christian study times with us, and was much loved for his friendship - and mischievous sense of humour! Val was in the youth club at that time and after she and I married in 1966 we kept in touch by letter while he was serving in mission in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) with his first wife, Audrey, and children Mark and Paul.

When he returned from there to live in Timperley we soon renewed our friendship. An abiding memory for me of his Timperley days and his time teaching at Loreto College, Altrincham, is a performance which the college gave of Benjamin Britten's child-friendly opera "Noye's Fludde". Speaking from somewhere up in the rafters of the college hall, Ieuan provided the booming voice of God. Say no more!

Inevitably, apart from one or two meetings, chance or otherwise, and the annual exchange of Christmas cards and letters, we lost touch for a while after his ordination and during his years of travel in the ministry. Ieuan's wife, Audrey, sadly died in 1990 but it was a new delight, after his retirement to meet his second wife, Barbara, who he married in 1992 and to renew friendship with Ieuan after his move to Congleton to fulfil his new role as a supernumerary minister with an opinion! There were so many valuable and illuminating discussions which Val and I held with him and which I was privileged to continue after Val's death.

One such discussion concerned the Book of Job which, not uncommonly, I found difficult to understand and relate to my experience of the God of the Gospel message. Ieuan had recently led an act of worship centred on the book at nearby Brookhouse Green Church and let me have a copy of it. It was very helpful and shortly afterwards he gave me permission to use it as the basis for an act of worship with fellow Worship Leaders at The Avenue Church if the opportunity ever arose. The opportunity did arise last November as a follow on to some of Richard's explorations of stories in the Old Testament. The previous two weeks had been based on the Book of Ruth with a passing reference to Job. Our worship was well received I think and I was able in the introduction to give credit to the source of some of the material and especially Ieuan's conclusion which had so helped me.

My Christian life was very blessed by my friendship with Ieuan, not least in those last few years of occasional meetings together for lunch often in company with Albert Graham and Peter Worrell. Ieuan's positive Christian outlook and sense of humour in the face of the progressive debilitation which Parkinson's disease placed upon him and with which he struggled for so long, was inspirational. Thank you, Ieuan for your Christian life and witness, which was a blessing to so many

SHEEP AND GOATS

Rev Ieuan Johnston (2014)

This parable is found only in Matthew. He sets it in Jesus' last week on earth. It is clearly a parable about choice. It presumes that God will choose those who will enter the kingdom where there is eternal life and will by default choose those bound for the place of fire.

Many people - in and out of the church - feel uncomfortable with the idea of choice between good and bad, between heaven and hell. It can't be avoided. People are different, they respond differently to the same situations. Some see weakness and vulnerability as an opportunity for sadistic enjoyment, others see them as occasions to offer kindness and support often putting themselves into danger. There are many examples, for instance, child sex abuse contrasted with volunteers going to West Africa to offer help in the Ebola epidemic.

The criterion for choice used in the story is interesting. It isn't belief in a particular theological statement, a device used very often in the turbulent history of Christianity. Such activity created much division and pain and achieved very little of substance. The sole criterion here is compassionate love given freely without any sense of calculation.

There is a small detail which might be significant. In most agricultural environs it is obvious what is a goat and what is a sheep. But in some countries the only difference is that goat tails point upwards and sheep tails hang downwards. They are often in a mixed flock and very dirty so they look very much alike. Visitors seeing them for the first time would find it very difficult to know which were sheep and which were goats.

This might be indicating that the outward differences between the genuine and the impostor might be quite small. It is when we see genuine love set against display love that we can see which is which. The sheep demonstrate their love in countless encounters with ordinary people and will be placed at the king's right hand side. Those who only love when they think it will be noticed are the goats and in the story they are bound for the furnaces.

Quite a challenge there to our sense of judgement and to the genuineness of our love.

ERIC SLOMAN

Richard Sloman, the son of Eric and Monica Sloman has written to let us know that his father, Eric, died on Christmas Eve very peacefully at a nursing home in Garstang. His mother, Monica, died a few years earlier. Both Eric and Monica attended The Avenue Church in its early years before moving to Southport in 1965. Richard writes:

“We had a lovely few months with Dad over the summer and are grateful that he passed away without pain or medication. There may still be a few folk at The Avenue who remember Dad, and if so, may like to know of his passing. We were so pleased that Mum and Dad came to the 50th Anniversary celebrations of the Church, back in September 2103.”

Pancake day: It is an event that has been successful over the years and fun for all ages. Would members like this traditional celebration to continue in our Church? I should like to hear your views. Please speak to me or anyone on the A&E committee by 11 February.

Jill Fielding

gmfielding60@hotmail.com

Messy church will be starting on Saturday 26th January at 4pm on a Lego theme. Please come along and build something with your friends and family

Welcome group

This group is still meeting and discussing all the different aspects of welcome from paint colours, design, lighting, security, signage, noticeboards, general information and how we use the space we have. We are trying to put ourselves in the position of someone new to the building. Is it obvious where the entrance is?

JESUS CHRIST

He brought a
message of
love and peace.

Many disagreed with His teachings
and His influence. To make Him cease
they nailed him
way up high
left for three
days dead to lie
Even now we
Remember
His sacrifice
His Victory!

David Hunsperger

Lord:

In the midst of Winter, when the days are cold and wind can pierce remind us of the warmth of your love.

In the midst of Winter, when days are short, dawn comes late, and dusk arrives early remind us that in the darkness your light still shines.

In the midst of Winter, when the flowers of spring still lie hidden in the earth, when leaves are off the trees, and the world can seem bleak remind us that Easter is but a short time away.

And when in our lives we feel as if we are experiencing a season of winter, reach out to us with the power of your resurrection so that we may feel the warmth of your love and see your light that alone can take away the darkness of our soul.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to this latest newsletter. We do appreciate them and as we look forward to the next newsletter which will be due out around Easter time we can reflect on the words above. We will again be looking forward to receiving your articles about life at The Avenue and also other items and thoughts that you wish to share with us.

The Avenue Methodist Church exists to worship God in a relevant way; deepen and strengthen our spiritual life; offer Christian salvation, fellowship and service within the wider community.

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Submission of contributions

Articles should not exceed the equivalent of two pages of A5 (approximately 800 words). Shorter articles are preferred. Ready typed or word processed pages are welcomed—they can be scanned to save re-typing. Computer files sent by email to the church as Microsoft Word documents (.DOC), or in text (.TXT) or rich text format (.RTF) are best if you have Internet access. Unfortunately illustrations in the form of your own drawings or photographs cannot be used at present. Please send to cashton.03@hotmail.co.uk

We extend a warm welcome to all who wish to worship God in this place. We are very pleased to welcome young children into worship. A small play area is available at the back of the church for use at any point if wished. Please ask any steward for information about facilities provided for young people, including the *Beginners* who meet every Sunday morning. Celebrate is at 9.30am on the first Sunday in the month led by Nick and Dee

WORSHIP IN January and February: Please see the Plan

The deadline for submission of articles for the next issue of the Newsletter is 20th Feb